

Fun with Birth Order ☺ (10/27/13)

“Know this: The LORD himself is God; he himself has made us, and we are his; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture” (Psalm 100:2).

God created us, and that includes our birth order. And yet with birth order it's helpful to avoid extremes—to neither put too much weight in it (a prescriptive starting point that often leads to labeling or putting people in a box) nor too little (jettisoning its importance altogether). It can be helpful in identifying general tendencies or characteristics that hopefully will lead to more compassion and humility.

Birth Order Tends to Impact:

- Your personality and how you see yourself
- Role in the family
- Career
- Marriage
- Parenting style
- Role in the church

Mitigating factors:

- Adoption/Blended families
- “Gap” children
- “Problem” children/“Star” children
- Sexism/Favorites
- Traumatic experiences (death in the family, loss of job, etc.)
- Separation/divorce
- Abuse (emotional, physical, sexual)
- Addictions/Disorders (social, personality, mental, physical)
- Predominant atmosphere of the home (sad/mad/glad/scared)
- Differences in personality types

From the book *Birth Order & You* by Ronald Richardson and Lois Richardson:

Birth Order Leaves a Lasting Mark:

“Your birth order and sex determine in large part how other people in your family react to you and treat you. That, in turn, influences what you think about yourself and how you react to and treat others inside and outside the family... Your family is your classroom for learning how to behave in the world. In the family, you learn how males and females act; how youngest or oldest children act; how different sexes and ages relate to each other. Whether or not it was an enjoyable lesson or a happy home for you, you usually learn your role so well (and so unconsciously) that you live it out the rest of your life without even knowing you've been in ‘school’” (12).

The “Shiny Exterior” and the “Dark Underbelly”:

Oldest Children:

- “The oldest child—the first child—is like a first love. The relationship between the first child and parents can never be duplicated... It is the focus of the parent’s dreams and hopes... As adults, oldest children can be nurturing and protective of others and they are often able to handle responsibility well and assume leadership roles. More than half of the presidents of the United States have been oldest male children, and 21 of the first 23 American astronauts were oldest or only children” (42, 48-49).

- “‘Oldests’ often have trouble turning down requests and over commit themselves rather than disappoint someone... They often resent how much they have to do and how little time they have for themselves, but they aren’t able to stop. If anything goes, it is usually their relationships, which get sacrificed to the higher goal of achievement and success... Many oldest children have unhappy marriages” (50-53).

Youngest Children:

- “Youngest children who have been treated well as children are usually the most sociable, easygoing, and popular of the birth orders... they often go into the creative arts... and are often the most athletic in the family” (98, 100-101).
- “Youngest children are more likely than others to be undisciplined in their personal life, procrastinate continually, and be late for or miss appointments... When youngest children are married to each other, they may appear irresponsible to others, as they don’t take homemaking and childrearing too seriously. They are more interested in having fun themselves and often do. They can be having such a good time that they get into debt or lose their jobs” (94, 96).

Middle Children:

- “They are sensitive to being left out or slighted as an adult. This particular sensitivity is often one part of the mix that makes them good negotiators for arriving at fair settlements... They have had to learn to live in peace with the very different personalities of the youngest and oldest of their siblings and as a result they may be quite adept at dealing with all kinds of people” (139, 141).
- “In their attempts to feel important, middle children may become competitive, though they may not compete head-on with the rest of the family. If they belong to a family of achievers, they might choose to become self destructive... They are susceptible to becoming the ‘lost’ sibling. If they have not been successful in carving out an identity within the family, they may withdraw and disappear, emotionally or even physically” (140, 143).

Only Children:

- “Accustomed to having parents’ continual approval, encouragement, and sympathy... often high achievers... usually good to work with and tend to work well under authority, perceiving it as benevolent.” Tend to not be as competitive or envious as those who grow up with siblings (166, 171).
- Often entitled and stubborn—tend to avoid the effort involved in working with others in order to “just do it myself.” Male “onlies” tend to be more prone to divorce, as parents tend to depend on their wives to take nearly sole responsibility of their children, and have the hardest time dealing with the death of their mother. Female “onlies”, if pampered too much as children, tend to be fragile and can be easily “rattled,” and tend to have a more difficult time with the noise and mess involved in child rearing (166-181).

Helpful websites/articles:

<http://www.webmd.com/parenting/rm-quiz-birth-order>

<http://www.parents.com/baby/development/social/birth-order-and-personality/>

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201305/elusive-birth-order-effect-and-what-it-means-you>

For next week...

- Myers-Briggs homepage: <http://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/>
- If you don’t know your Myers-Briggs personality type, here’s a site with a brief but helpful online Myers-Briggs test: <http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp#questionnaire>

Fun with Myers-Briggs Personality Types ☺ (11/3/13)

“Know this: The LORD himself is God; he himself has made us, and we are his; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture” (Psalm 100:2).

God created us, and that includes our personality type—and as with birth order it’s helpful to avoid extremes—to neither put too much weight in it (a prescriptive starting point that often leads to labeling or putting people in a box) nor too little (jettisoning its importance altogether).

Based on personality type theories by Carl Jung (1875-1961), the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) was initially developed during World War II and published in 1962 by Katharine Briggs and her daughter, Isabel Briggs Myers. In the MBTI there are four continuums—Extrovert/Introvert (E/I), Sensing/Intuitive (S/N), Thinking/Feeling (T/F), and Judging/Perceiving (J/P)—and sixteen “personality types” (ENTP, ISFJ, etc). It can be helpful understanding how God “wired” you, and give you insight into why you tend to approach life the way you do, why you tend to “click” with some people more than others, how you can better connect with others, what type of career and work environments may be best suited for you, and even what kind of church (and role in that church) may fit best.

Often people suffer from “wounded personalities” in the contexts of families, school, work environments and the church (“there must be something wrong with me”) and need understanding/healing in these areas. Being aware of the often marked differences in personality types can also help you let others (or yourself) off the hook and be open to receiving God’s grace in areas where you find operating outside of your comfort zone.

Helpful Websites:

- Myers-Briggs homepage: <http://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/>
- If you don’t know your Myers-Briggs personality type, here’s a site with a brief but helpful online test: <http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp#questionnaire>

Extravert/Introvert (E/I)—how you tend to relate to the world:

Extraverts tend to focus on the outer world, be action oriented, seek breadth of knowledge and influence, often prefer more frequent interaction, and recharge/get their energy from spending time with people. Extraverted types learn best by talking and interacting with others. By interacting with the physical world, extraverts can process and make sense of new information.

Introverts tend to focus on the inner world, are thought oriented, seek depth of knowledge and influence, prefer more substantial interaction, and recharge/get their energy from spending time alone. They often prefer quiet reflection and privacy. Information processing occurs for introverts as they explore ideas and concepts internally.

Sometimes extroverts view introverts as snobby, stand-offish, or antisocial; while introverts may see extroverts as shallow and having to be the center of attention.

Sensing/Intuitive (S/N)—how you tend to gather and process information:

Individuals who prefer *sensing* are more likely to trust information that is in the present, tangible, and concrete—that is, information that can be understood by the five senses. They tend to distrust hunches

which seem to come “out of nowhere,” and prefer details and facts— the meaning is in the data. Sensing types enjoy a learning environment in which the material is presented in a detailed and sequential manner.

Those who prefer *intuition* tend to trust information that is more abstract or theoretical, that can be associated with other information (either remembered or discovered by seeking a wider context or pattern). They may be more interested in future possibilities. For them, the meaning is in the underlying theory and principles which are manifested in the data. Intuitive types prefer a learning atmosphere in which emphasis is placed on meaning and associations. Insight is valued higher than careful observation, and pattern recognition occurs naturally.

Sometimes sensing types consider intuitive types as blind to what is supposedly obvious; while intuitive types may consider sensing types as blind to underlying realities.

Thinking/Feeling (T/F)—how you tend to make decisions:

Those who prefer *thinking* tend to decide things from a more detached standpoint, and tend to make decisions by what seems reasonable, logical, causal, consistent, and matching a given set of rules, on what “makes sense.” Thinking types desire objective truth and logical principles and are natural at deductive reasoning. Thinkers usually have trouble interacting with people who are inconsistent or illogical, tend to give very direct feedback to others, and are concerned with the truth and view it as more important than being tactful.

Those who prefer *feeling* tend to make decisions by associating or empathizing with the situation, looking at it “from the inside,” and weighing the situation to achieve, on balance, the greatest harmony, consensus and fit, considering the needs of the people involved. They also tend to make decisions based on what “feels right.” Feeling types place an emphasis on issues and causes that can be personalized while they consider other people's motives.

Sometimes thinkers see feelers as “clueless” while feelers see thinkers as “heartless.”

Judging/Perceiving (J/P)—your attitude about structure:

Judging types like to “have matters settled” whereas perceiving types prefer to “keep your options open.” Judging types will thrive when information is organized and structured, and they will be motivated to complete assignments to gain closure. Perceiving types will flourish in a flexible learning environment in which they are stimulated by new and exciting ideas.

Judging types may prefer a starting point of “let’s go” while the preferred starting point for perceiving types may be “let’s talk.”

Helpful Books:

Please Understand Me: Character & Temperament Types, by David Keirsey and Marilyn Bates.

Why Can't I Be Me? by Mark Pearson.

Prayer and Temperament, by Chester Michael and Marie Norrisey.

Descriptions of the Sixteen Different Personality Types (from the Myers Briggs website)

ISTJ

Quiet, serious, earn success by thoroughness and dependability. Practical, matter-of-fact, realistic, and responsible. Decide logically what should be done and work toward it steadily, regardless of distractions. Take pleasure in making everything orderly and organized – their work, their home, their life. Value traditions and loyalty.

ISFJ

Quiet, friendly, responsible, and conscientious. Committed and steady in meeting their obligations. Thorough, painstaking, and accurate. Loyal, considerate, notice and remember specifics about people who are important to them, concerned with how others feel. Strive to create an orderly and harmonious environment at work and at home.

INFJ

Seek meaning and connection in ideas, relationships, and material possessions. Want to understand what motivates people and are insightful about others. Conscientious and committed to their firm values. Develop a clear vision about how best to serve the common good. Organized and decisive in implementing their vision.

INTJ

Have original minds and great drive for implementing their ideas and achieving their goals. Quickly see patterns in external events and develop long-range explanatory perspectives. When committed, organize a job and carry it through. Skeptical and independent, have high standards of competence and performance – for themselves and others.

ISTP

Tolerant and flexible, quiet observers until a problem appears, then act quickly to find workable solutions. Analyze what makes things work and readily get through large amounts of data to isolate the core of practical problems. Interested in cause and effect, organize facts using logical principles, value efficiency.

ISFP

Quiet, friendly, sensitive, and kind. Enjoy the present moment, what's going on around them. Like to have their own space and to work within their own time frame. Loyal and committed to their values and to people who are important to them. Dislike disagreements and conflicts, do not force their opinions or values on others.

INFP

Idealistic, loyal to their values and to people who are important to them. Want an external life that is congruent with their values. Curious, quick to see possibilities, can be catalysts for implementing ideas. Seek to understand people and to help them fulfill their potential. Adaptable, flexible, and accepting unless a value is threatened.

INTP

Seek to develop logical explanations for everything that interests them. Theoretical and abstract, interested more in ideas than in social interaction. Quiet, contained, flexible, and adaptable. Have unusual ability to focus in depth to solve problems in their area of interest. Skeptical, sometimes critical, always analytical.

ESTP

Flexible and tolerant, they take a pragmatic approach focused on immediate results. Theories and conceptual explanations bore them – they want to act energetically to solve the problem. Focus on the here-and-now, spontaneous, enjoy each moment that they can be active with others. Enjoy material comforts and style. Learn best through doing.

ESFP

Outgoing, friendly, and accepting. Exuberant lovers of life, people, and material comforts. Enjoy working with others to make things happen. Bring common sense and a realistic approach to their work, and make work fun. Flexible and spontaneous, adapt readily to new people and environments. Learn best by trying a new skill with other people.

ENFP

Warmly enthusiastic and imaginative. See life as full of possibilities. Make connections between events and information very quickly, and confidently proceed based on the patterns they see. Want a lot of affirmation from others, and readily give appreciation and support. Spontaneous and flexible, often rely on their ability to improvise and their verbal fluency.

ENTP

Quick, ingenious, stimulating, alert, and outspoken. Resourceful in solving new and challenging problems. Adept at generating conceptual possibilities and then analyzing them strategically. Good at reading other people. Bored by routine, will seldom do the same thing the same way, apt to turn to one new interest after another.

ESTJ

Practical, realistic, matter-of-fact. Decisive, quickly move to implement decisions. Organize projects and people to get things done, focus on getting results in the most efficient way possible. Take care of routine details. Have a clear set of logical standards, systematically follow them and want others to also. Forceful in implementing their plans.

ESFJ

Warmhearted, conscientious, and cooperative. Want harmony in their environment, work with determination to establish it. Like to work with others to complete tasks accurately and on time. Loyal, follow through even in small matters. Notice what others need in their day-by-day lives and try to provide it. Want to be appreciated for who they are and for what they contribute.

ENFJ

Warm, empathetic, responsive, and responsible. Highly attuned to the emotions, needs, and motivations of others. Find potential in everyone, want to help others fulfill their potential. May act as catalysts for individual and group growth. Loyal, responsive to praise and criticism. Sociable, facilitate others in a group, and provide inspiring leadership.

ENTJ

Frank, decisive, assume leadership readily. Quickly see illogical and inefficient procedures and policies, develop and implement comprehensive systems to solve organizational problems. Enjoy long-term planning and goal setting. Usually well informed, well read, enjoy expanding their knowledge and passing it on to others. Forceful in presenting their ideas.

Wounded Personalities (11/10/13)

“Know this: The LORD himself is God; he himself has made us, and we are his; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture” (Psalm 100:2).

“I am the Lord that healeth thee” (Exodus 15:26, KJV).

You were created by God with a given personality that He gave you as a gift. In his helpful book, *Why Can't I Be Me?* Mark Pearson defines one's personality as “one's unique mental and emotional disposition, that special way of expressing oneself to others and orienting oneself, outwardly and inwardly, to the world. In other words, personality is how you express your essential being” (p. 21). According to the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator (MBTI) there are four continuums that help us understand our personalities:

Extrovert/Introvert (E/I):

Extrovert—Outgoing, likes the world of people and action
Introvert—Quiet, likes the inner world

Sensing/Intuitive (S/N):

Sensing—Literal, likes data, details, precision, gathers/processes information based on the senses
Intuitive—Imaginative, sees the big picture, gathers/processes information based on intuition

Thinking/Feeling (T/F):

Thinking—Dispassionate, makes decisions based on the rules, what “makes sense”
Feeling—Compassionate, makes decisions based on the heart, what “feels right”

Judging/Perceiving (J/P):

Judging—Predictable, likes structure, order, plans, closure
Perceiving—Flexible, likes spontaneity and informality, keeping options open

Personalities are sometimes wounded, especially when “One is not allowed to own or express their true personality (and is) ridiculed regularly for it” (p. 17). Sometimes someone with a dominant personality wants to form others in their own image, even if they have very different personalities. This often occurs within these contexts:

Marriage/Relationships—You can probably think of examples in which either the husband or wife has a very dominant personality and over time the other one, whose personality has been wounded, either becomes “mousy,” “goes nuclear”, or develops obsessions and/or addictive/self-destructive behaviors.

Parents/Kids—Children whose personalities radically differ from their parents can have their personalities wounded if ridiculed, labeled, etc. or if their siblings who are more like their parents are treated much more favorably.

Clergy & Churches//Christians—Personalities can be wounded when clergy try to form churches into their own image (or churches try to return the favor), or when churches try to mold Christians into their own image, etc. In some cases those who have been “burned” flee the church.

Other groups—at school, work, in bands, on sports teams, etc.

From *Why Can't I Be Me?* by Mark Pearson:

A wounded personality can lead someone “To become inhibited, unsure of identity, feel uncomfortable in broad areas of daily living” (p.17).

In families where differences in personality are not recognized or appreciated...“A person’s individuality is seen as a negative. It is often deemed odd or put down as a sign of rebelliousness—or at least a lack of conformity to certain standards that are deemed important. Sometimes this lack of acceptance is shown through meanness and may take the form of deliberate emotional mistreatment. It can be wrapped up in the evil of pathological behavior. Rejecting a person on the basis of personality is often indicative of a great insecurity or desire for control or power on the part of the person doing the rejecting” (p. 22-23).

“In still other families, it is not meanness but misplaced love that is the basis for rejecting... This is one of the pitfalls of so-called legalistic Christianity, with its humanly devised list of rules, regulations, and taboos. Like the Pharisees of biblical times, legalistic Christians are so concerned with obedience that they forget grace. In their desire to obey God they often play God with those committed to their charge. In homes where respectability and reputation are given excessive priority, young people may be forced into a straitjacket of proper behavior so as to make the right impression on others. Sadly, so many grow up learning to wear a mask—presenting themselves to others on the basis of the expectations of others—that they lose awareness of what they themselves are really like” (p. 23).

Common “expressions of hurt”:

Trying to be someone you aren’t—“As a wounded person you may try to be the opposite of who you are. Instead of staying true to yourself while learning to be sensitive in your relationships with others, you might find yourself trying to become what others have pressured you to be” (p. 70).

Withdrawing/isolating oneself, shutting down emotionally—often accompanied by self-destructive/addictive behaviors and/or obsessive behaviors.

Healing for wounded personalities comes from acceptance and grace:

Acceptance—You were created in God’s image, your personality is a gift from God, and God accepts you—“Eternal God, Heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us...” (*Book of Common Prayer*, 365).

“Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Romans 15:7).

Grace—“What is grace? Grace is love that seeks you out when you have nothing to give in return. Grace is love coming at you that has nothing to do with you. Grace is being loved when you are unlovable. It is being loved when you are the opposite of lovable... Grace is irrational in the sense that it has nothing to do with weights or measures... Grace is one-way love...One-way love lifts up. One-way love cures. One-way love transforms” (Paul Zahl in *Grace in Practice*, p. 36-37).

“My message, unchanged for more than fifty years, is this: *God loves you unconditionally, as you are and not as you should be, because nobody is as they should be.* It is the message of *grace*” (Brennan Manning, in *All is Grace*, p. 192).

Personality Types in the Church ☺ (11/17/13)

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ” (I Corinthians 12:12).

*“It is a most invaluable part of that blessed ‘liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free,’ that in his worship different forms and usages may without offence be allowed, provided the substance of the Faith be kept entire”
(from the Preface of *The Book of Common Prayer*).*

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) identifies four personality type continuums:

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From the book, *Prayer and Temperament*, by Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrisey:

Paul, James, John and Peter:

“St. Paul was of the NF (Intuitive-Feeling) temperament and was continually peeking around the corner to envision new insights about the Kingdom of God. It was through St. Paul that Christianity shed most of the oppressive shackles of Mosaic Law. St. James, the brother of the Lord, had an SJ (Sensing-Judging) temperament and constantly exhorted the Christians to the duty of implementing their faith into action in every part of their lives. St. James was the conservative, law and order man, who insisted that Christianity keep at least some of the basic Mosaic law regulations. St. John, the Beloved Disciple, was an NT (Intuitive-Thinking) temperament. He gave a fresh synthesis of existing ideas which formed Christian theology during the first century. St. John, as the contemplative, was the forerunner of the mystic tradition. St. Peter, the SP (Sensing-Perceiving) temperament, a man of action, had the responsibility for maintaining peace among the opposing theological schools” (p. 21-22).

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John:

“Matthew (SJ) emphasizes continuity with the past by pointing out again and again how Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Mark (SP) is very action-oriented, giving only a minimum of the teachings of Jesus. Luke (NF) is very person-oriented and shows Jesus’ great compassion for sinners, women, and outcasts. John (NT) puts a great emphasis on the importance of truth and knowledge and is the most mystical and contemplative of the four evangelists” (p. 22).

How various personality types tend to operate in the life of the church:

Extravert/Introvert—Extraverts enjoy praying vocally in groups; introverts prefer praying quietly alone. Extraverts enjoy worship that is high energy, involves lots of interaction with those around them, and has some informality. Introverts enjoy worship that is quiet and private, and would rather not have too much interaction with those around them during the service. Extraverts tend to like Bible Study that is interactive with lots of discussion, while introverts tend to like either private Bible Study or if in a group, more of a lecture format. As far as ministry goes, extraverts tend to enjoy serving with others on a team, while introverts enjoy more individual ministry (or in an individual role on a team).

Sensing/Intuitive—Sensing types tend to like literal facts theologically and enjoy to-the-point and straightforward preaching/teaching, find prayer lists/specific prayer requests helpful rather than confining, enjoy worship that is simple and to the point, Bible study that is “practical” (read it, believe it, do it), and prefer ministry that meets specific, hands-on needs. Intuitive types tend to enjoy theological speculation and imaginative preaching/teaching, prayer that is “Spirit-led” and not confined to a list, worship that is more ornate and inspiring, Bible Study that opens up the multi-layered symbolism and interpretations of the Bible, and ministry that goes past meeting hands-on needs to reach the heart.

Thinking/Feeling—Thinkers tend to resonate more with the transcendence of God and points of doctrine and ethics in Bible Study and preaching/teaching, hymns that emphasize the attributes of God (“Immortal, invisible, God only wise...”), sharing their faith with apologetics, and ministry that meets circumstantial needs. Feelers tend to resonate more with the immanence of God and the action of God in our daily lives in Bible Study and preaching/teaching, hymns that emphasize the presence of God with us (“What a friend we have in Jesus...”), sharing their faith with personal testimony, and ministry that meets emotional needs.

Judging/Perceiving—Judging types prefer structure and routine in worship, prayer, Bible Study, and preaching/teaching. Regarding ministry they prefer planned and scheduled activity that is proactive. Perceiving types prefer flexibility and enjoy trying new things in order to avoid getting stuck in a rut, and variety in worship, prayer, Bible Study, and preaching/teaching. Regarding ministry they enjoy spur of the moment activity, are almost always available for unplanned ministry opportunities, being reactive to the needs of the community as they emerge.

Why being aware of how different personality types tend to engage in the church is helpful:

- 1) You can enjoy engaging in the church in ways that are natural for you with no guilt (or having to justify yourself) or pressure to try and be someone you’re not in order to fit in at church.
- 2) You can let off the hook other Christians who see things radically different from you, remembering that we are each individual members of the Body of Christ and that we all need one another.

And yet...at times God may call you to do something that is out of your comfort zone or require you to function in a way that is not natural for you (although in and of itself that is not a litmus test for a call from God)—which may help us rely even more on the grace of God in our areas of weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Recommended books:

Prayer and Temperament, by Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrissey
Why Can't I Be Me? by Mark Pearson