

Holy Relations: Compatibility or Complementarity?
Song of Solomon 8:1-7, 1st Samuel 18:1-4, Luke 10:38-42
January 28, 2007

*Grow old along with me
The best is yet to be
When our time has come
We will be as one
God bless our love
God bless our love*

*Grow old along with me
Two branches of one tree
Face the setting sun
When the day is done
God bless our love
God bless our love
(John Lennon)*

These words were inspired by the poetry of Robert Browning's poem and placed to music by the late John Lennon. They express the heart song of every mature lover. In the human spirit God places a longing for lifetime love – to find our one true love with whom we can walk toward the horizon of eternity. Rabbi ----- says that the Sabbath reminds that time is eternity in disguise, that holy living is about relishing time, not about gaining space. The story of the Bible documents the history in time of God's lifetime longing for us. I believe that each of us seeks that love of a lifetime.

My goal in this sermon series *Holy Relations* is to equip you spiritually with gaining or keeping that love of a lifetime. We have started with partnered love. Today we will continue that discussion by examining the question, "Do I seek compatibility or complementarity?" Next week we will look at loving communications.

The compatibility question is an important one. Compatibility covers many dimensions in relationships – values, activities, spirituality and personality. It is incontrovertible that most of us seek shared values in a long-term relationship. We seek

harmony on values toward money, society, raising children, and honoring our parents. We also want common activities we can share – the arts, sporting and recreation, travel, social activities. In a perfect relationship I think we would also prefer spiritual compatibility. We want to worship and pray to a common God. We want to reflect together on the ultimate questions of life and seek comfort together in times of happiness and sadness. At the same time however there is a romantic notion that opposites attract. There is a notion that wholeness can be found in relationships that complete us. We might want to find a partner with differing gifts and interests that can cover all the tasks required to run a home. About this there is no consensus.

The focus of my sermon today will be on the question of compatibility versus complementarity in personality. In the relationship counseling I have done I have developed a kind of tool kit for each couple to use together. I have used various methods to gauge the degree to which couples are compatible or complementary in their personalities. The conclusion I have drawn is that couples with similar and differing personalities can both be successful in growing old together. The main difference is the degree of work that has to be done to maintain the relationship. Like motor oil lubricates your engine, differing grades are required depending on the mechanics of the engine and differing work is required depending on how hot or rocky your relationship runs over time. Complementary personalities take more work in communication; compatible personalities take less work.

In preparing for this sermon I turned to that sacred modern text – the worldwide web. I used my modern concordance – the google search. The answers to my search on the string “love compatibility” turned up some interesting hits. Seventy-five percent of

my hits involved astrological answers. It's the old bar question, "Baby, what's your sign?" The next highest scoring tool was name affinity. In other words these are sites that simply ask you to key in the name of your ideal beloved and it will define your love profile. Sisters and brothers, surely God's plan for lasting love involves more than movements in the galaxy or names our parents picked out of a baby book! I have three sacred texts I want to read to you that inform us on this subject. I want to start with the Song of Solomon. How many went home after last week's sermon and read this love poetry to each other? I read from chapter 8, verses 1 through 7. The woman is the speaker here longing that her lover was so compatible that they were literally twins nursing from the same mother. The speaker is obviously an outdoors girl and I have nothing to say about her pomegranates. But notice the way this passage closes: that love is as strong as death, jealousy as severe as the grave, and that passionate love is an unquenchable flame. Although this is poetry it is also classified as wisdom literature. Opposites may attract in passionate love, but sparks over time can cause fire. Relationships of opposites can be filled with friction. Be prepared for the hard work of working through conflict. More about that next week on love communications.

Let me next read from 1st Samuel 18:1-4, a story of compatibility. This begins the story of love between future King David and Jonathan, the son of King Saul. David and Jonathan became one in spirit and he loved him as himself. One translation says that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David. Their soul was shared. We don't know if that was an erotic love or not. But it was a deeply felt and a committed friendship based upon compatibility. It was also a kind of love at first sight, as we see in this text. Jonathan put his love on the line to be David's advocate before Saul, his father who

became insane with jealousy, and tried several times to murder David. Whether platonic or romantic, the love between David and Jonathan marks an example of friendship and loyalty rigorously tested and born in compatibility.

My gospel passage is a familiar one from Luke – the story of Mary and Martha from Luke 10 that I read to you now. Mary and Martha were sisters. Their brother was the famous Lazarus, who Jesus raised. Jesus is coming to their house and Martha scurries about in preparation. She is cooking up a storm and making the home perfect for Jesus' arrival. She expects her sister to do the same. But Mary is all about the one-on-one encounter with Jesus, of sitting at the master's feet. Martha is task and deadline oriented. Martha is direct. She is all about living out love in service. Service can ultimately tire and lose its purpose if it is not rooted in the presence of God. Mary is people-oriented and is completely caught up in the moment. She is unconcerned with the practical matters of preparing the home. She is the one who receives the “good portion” of spiritual nourishment.

I'd like to use Martha and Mary as prototypes for assessing personality using three tools that I have used in couples counseling. The first two are personality assessment tools with which you may be familiar – the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (a short form of Myers-Briggs) and the Birkman method. How many of you have had a Myers-Briggs? Myers Briggs or the Keirsey Temperament Sorter looks at four dimensions of personality. It looks at extraversion versus introversion or the degree to which you refuel your batteries through people interaction (extravert) or solitude (introvert). The next dimension is sensor versus intuitive. Sensors are pragmatic people who want to live life in concrete reality. Intuitives live in the world of ideas, philosophy

and theology. The third dimension is thinkers versus feelers. In the dance of life, thinkers lead with their heads; feelers lead with their hearts. Studies show a gender bias that 60% of women are feelers and 60% of men are thinkers. The last dimension is judge versus perceiver. Judges are organized, structured, good time managers. They drive toward closure in life and want to make decisions quickly and move on. Perceivers are laid back, get lost in the moment, rarely worry about time, and like to keep options open until the last moment. Now the composite of all these factors yields a four-letter code that describes your personality. Let me imagine about Martha and Mary on these scales. Martha is an ISTJ. She finds her energy in solitary housework. She is a no-nonsense person who deals with the practical realities of preparing nutritious meals that fill the stomach. Martha leads with her head. She is logical and rarely shows her emotions. Most of all she is a judge. Driven by order and deadlines, she must have the food on the table and all the preparations done on time. Martha believes in a command and control organization and Jesus is the boss who she escalates all complaints.

Mary is an ENFP. She is recharged by face-to-face interactions with people. If this were a dinner party she would spend the entire evening in lively conversations with all her friends. And someone who is not a friend is simply someone she has not met. She is also an intuitive who loves to spend the day at the feet of the Rabbi, discussing ultimate reality. She is a feeler – creative, emotional, who wears her heart on her sleeve and wants you too also. Lastly she is perceiver. It's dinnertime? I really didn't know. I am late for everything anyway. Who really cares what time it is or how the house looks. And don't ask Mary to make a decision, because she doesn't like to be pressured this way.

Each of you has a personality profile. If you are in a partnered relationship, know your partner's profile and understand your differences. If your differences are many, you may be called complementary in your relationship. Things may be great for you, but you probably have to work hard to understand each other and resolve differences. If your profile is similar, you're going to have it a bit easier because you just think and act alike. The danger lies in assuming what the other person is thinking or feeling. Because you are similar, you may fall into the trap of just knowing what's going on in the other person's heart or head. That can marginalize your partner and doesn't foster communications. This is a great tool for couples.

The Birkman (authored by Roger Birkman) method is another good tool for assessing your compatibility. It is a bit more comprehensive in that it looks not only at personality but also motivation, that is interests. It can predict how your partner will react under calm and stress and where her or his real interests lie. One of its reports is called the lifestyle grid. It has four color-coded quadrants in which your style is placed – red, yellow, green and blue. Martha is red and Mary is blue, two oppositional styles. Martha is a “doer” and Mary is a “visionary.” Martha wants to get things done now and Mary wants to vision and plan. Mary could care less about implementation. The other two colors are green and yellow. Greens are communicators and promoters. Yellows are administrators. Greens love to sell, persuade and compete. They are the life of the party. Yellows analyze, measure and report. They are usually quite good with numbers and details.

When I counsel couples who are getting married or in a long-term relationship I tell them that there are four areas of potential conflict that cause break-ups: sex, money,

family conflict and communications problems. I want to close with a tool that helps you assess the family baggage that you bring into a relationship. All of us bring a set of expectations and norms that are embedded in our conscious and unconscious thoughts. A genogram can get those down on paper. A genogram is a map of your family tree. On this map you plot three generations (or more) of your family – your grandparents generation, parents (including aunts and uncles) and your generation (brothers, sisters, and cousins). Who we are is determined by many factors such as genetics and environmental factors. The genogram looks at all of these. Write these down and discuss with your partner to explore the blessings and the wounds within your family. These will come out in often frustrating ways in your relationship anyway. Better to communicate directly about them so you can deal with wounds passed on to you.

The writer of Genesis says that the two shall become as one. Samuel wrote that David's soul was knit to Jonathan's. John Lennon wrote that we are two branches of one tree. God has ordered our lives so that we can have whole and holy relationships. Let us cooperate with God's amazing gift of another person with whom we can grow old.

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