

Thoughts on Love Maturity in Temperament

Sanguine – Social	Choleric – Volitional
Melancholy – Inward Rational	Phlegmatic – Functional

Getting under my own skin:

Brief thoughts on the melancholy temperament by Jim Leffel

Every human being is a unique person, an image-bearer of God. Every life is a wondrous plan of God. Christians have a basis for recognizing and celebrating the dignity and value of all people. Along with our individual uniqueness, we also recognize that God has crafted people from a shared essence, or nature. That nature includes personality—involving rational, social, moral, volitional, and functional aspects. *Temperament* refers to inclinations people have toward certain God-given aspects of personality. These differences are part of God's design. We should be thankful for our temperamental distinctives. To disparage them is to dishonor God. The complementarity of these temperamental differences provides a fuller expression of God's image among us. We must therefore value both our own temperament and others too.

In a fallen world, human personality is distorted. The strengths characteristic of our temperaments typically become the most forceful opposition to our sanctification. So it is crucial to develop a basic understanding of temperament, so that we can both discern where the battle lines are drawn in our flesh, and cultivate a positive vision for our sanctification.

Since all of the temperaments are expressions of the same human nature, we will find that they are different responses to the drives and needs shared by everyone. This is a valuable point, because it is tempting to think of the temperaments in isolation, as though they are four different kinds of people. In reality, temperamental differences are a matter of *degree*, not a categorical distinction.

The following thoughts concern the melancholy temperament

The sanguine and melancholy temperaments are strongly relational in motivation. Sanguines are adept at forming many relationships, building very broadly. Melancholy people value depth in relationships, tending to build within a smaller circle. On the "love defects" continuum, melancholies are usually tribal. The *inwardness* and sensitivity characteristic of melancholy places great emphasis on meaningful interpersonal communication, discernment, insight, and creativity.

Unfortunately, the inwardness of the melancholy in a fallen world has become destructively autonomous. Sensitivity turns to the self in the form of *introspection*. Introspection drives melancholies to withdraw into their own thought life, losing vital connection with others. This is why they often feel lonely and isolated, misunderstood and unappreciated. Melancholies will tend to develop a distorted impression in the social sphere, not able to transcend their own self-imposed isolation. They, more than any other temperament, are easily offended, prone to bitterness and resentments. Melancholies will tend to nurse perceived offenses over a long period of time, refusing to forgive or restore relationships. This habit is perhaps the most destructive aspect of melancholy flesh-life. The unforgiving heart simply can not see social reality for what it is. They forever take on the role of victim, struggling against the abuses of a cruel world. Commonly, melancholies truly believe that no one likes them. They believe they are capable of discerning the malevolent motivations of others toward them. The fundamental lack of trust in others turns into a self-fulfilling prophecy as the melancholy become further isolated. Isolation turns to alienation and cynicism. For this reason, melancholies typically fight difficult battles with depression.

Essential to the transformation of the melancholy temperament is overcoming relational passivity. Melancholies tend to be observers in life, convinced that they are somehow "different" than others. This self-absorbed perspective can not be changed through appeal to reason, because its roots are grounded in life long emotional patterns. Melancholies must be challenged to act, to take initiative in relationship. This is a risky venture for introverted melancholies. But feelings of isolation change only as they develop a measure of interpersonal success. In counseling the melancholy, they should be encouraged to act in two directions. First, to express *gratitude* for the significant people in their lives. They should be thankful for specific contributions others have made to them. Melancholy's will make little progress in life unless they directly address their judgmental perception of others' motives. Through gratitude, a perspective begins to change—resentment begins to thaw, being replaced by a sense of appreciation for other people. Second, the melancholy needs to overcome their brooding and social inhibitions, actively seeking to make others feel welcome, accepted, loved—the very things they desire. Turning

sensitivity outward liberates the melancholy from the persistent feelings of isolation.

Like the choleric, people with the melancholy temperament have a strong *inner locus of motivation*. That's why they tend toward innovation and vision, often caring little for the status quo. Unlike the goal-centered activism of the choleric, melancholy self-motivation is inward, in the direction of ideas and artistic creativity. The melancholy is often successful in academics, at home in the pursuit of truth and beauty. Because of their reflective nature, the melancholy can offer deep insight into the human condition, reflected by their tendency toward artistic and intellectual accomplishments. Spiritual gifts of knowledge, discernment, wisdom, and prophecy, are often associated with the melancholy temperament.

This positive aspect of melancholy has been profoundly corrupted by the fall. The autonomously reflective melancholy nature skews insight into self and others. Consequently, the melancholy's develops 20/20 vision for what's wrong, but chronic myopia in seeing solutions. Christian work with melancholies can be frustrating because they may be fatalists and nay-sayers, unable to juggle the ambiguities of real life with the neatness of ideas in their inner world—paralysis by analysis. Since melancholies are at home in the world of ideas and draw emotional energy from them, they tend toward *arrogance*, having little patience for the allegedly more impulsive sanguine or the crass pragmatism of choleric. Melancholies are usually *defensive* or touchy for two reasons. First, they are emotionally committed to their ideas—to critique their ideas is to call their value as people into question. Second, the native insecurity of an inwardly-centered person makes them particularly attuned to any hint of disapproval.

Melancholies must come to terms with their thought life. The self-assured confidence and emotional comfort most melancholies find in their world of ideas must be open to change. This requires *humility*, one of the most difficult virtues for melancholies to develop. Melancholies must value and seek out the views of others different from themselves, allowing their conceptions to be corrected by an outside perspective. Being grounded in reality, a high priority for melancholies, simply can not occur in a vacuum. Melancholies need to trust others' judgment and learn to enthusiastically support it. The tendency toward chronic negativity in melancholy thought life has to be addressed for what it is the pernicious sin of unbelief! The life of faith and spiritual growth comes from a positive vision. Melancholies need to learn how to think creatively in a positive, solutions-oriented direction. Those who work with melancholies should challenge negative judgments with the call to provide a more hopeful, godly assessment of the situation (Philippians 4:8).

When a melancholy person comes to terms with their flesh life, and consciously and regularly turns it over to God's sanctifying hand, they will begin to experience the depth and fullness of their temperament. Of course, melancholies will always struggle with the things discussed in this brief reflection. Freedom from the flesh is gradual. But, as with people of all temperaments, it is crucial to value how God has chosen to make us, and to have a dynamic vision for how he chooses to use us to shape the contour of eternity.

The following thoughts concern the sanguine temperament.

The sanguine is by nature relational and emotionally warm and inviting. There is an immediate response to the surrounding circumstances, as well as restless activity. Sanguine people are direct and naïve and many times think while speaking. They are open-hearted, talkative, warm, with a quick temper. Because sanguines live in the present, it is difficult for them to set goals or consider implications of spontaneous choices. On the "love defects" continuum, sanguines are generally diffuse. Because they depend so much on acceptance from others, their tendency will be to lie and compromise. Also, because of the diffuse nature they find it difficult to think deeply about people or problems, or to concentrate on one thing at a time. Stimulation is enjoyed and boredom is feared.

In conflict, sanguine people tend to avoid or accommodate because of the difficulty of thinking through a problem and fear of being rejected. This leads to many broken relationships, with others feeling rejected or forgotten. They are seen as undependable and untrustworthy.

Sanguines have to come to terms with their diffuseness and unfaithfulness. Their dependence on acceptance and having to be active at all times has to be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit through self-imposed discipline and accountability to others. Deep friendships with the other temperaments will serve to help the sanguine become more purposeful, thoughtful, and calm. The sanguine will need to see their anger as a sin against God and learn to serve others sacrificially regardless of perceived "inconveniences." God will put the sanguine in circumstances where they can make choices to say "no" when there is no time to complete the project, as well as confess when they have lied to get out of a problem or manipulated others to get what they wanted.

Areas that a sanguine will need to submit to grow spiritually are:

1. Set aside regular times to read, study and reflect.
2. Place yourself in areas where you can be trained to do some task that will train the will and subdue self-indulgence.
3. Give others first place rather than desiring personal attention.
4. Listen carefully to what others are saying.
5. Refuse to compromise God's standards for the sake of acceptance.
6. Be faithful to commitments.

When the sanguine nature becomes submissive to God's Spirit, they are truly a pleasure to know and work with in the Body of Christ. They are exciting, and can lighten the atmosphere of any room. Their sanctified passion is for unity and have many ideas that can build teamwork within the Body of Christ. When the mind is trained, the sanguine can be an exciting teacher who motivates and encourages people to follow God.

Thoughts on the choleric temperament.

The WILL is the predominant feature of the Choleric, for either good or evil. This strong will-power is a natural qualification for building a fine character with strong decisions and follow-through action.

Weaknesses:

1. Anger. Anger is the greatest sin, which is instantaneous and destructive.
 - (a) Directed towards oneself for incompetence, failure, hurtful words and actions, etc.
 - (b) Directed towards others for unfaithfulness in work or relationships, inconsistency, manipulation, needless failure, useless activity.
2. Domineering. The choleric through domineering forces others to do his will and fit into his plan. If they don't, he finds a way to eliminate them or work around them to accomplish his agenda.
3. Self-confidence. The choleric is goal-oriented, and so self-confident that he tries to accomplish the agenda by aggressive persistence without reference to the effect on himself or others, and without sober reflection on its merit or value.
4. Lack of empathy. The choleric lacks sensitivity towards weaknesses of others, especially in areas of laziness, irresponsibility, self-developed depression, illness, which is psychosomatic, overly experience-oriented decisions, etc.
5. Impatient. The choleric wants the agenda done immediately, no second thoughts or loitering. Idleness or useless waste of time is maddening. The choleric becomes impatient when an official purposely prolongs or hinders scheduled activity or programs.

Strengths:

1. Active and decisive. Activity is will-driven, pre-meditated and planned. His whole being concentrates on what needs to be done. He is clear and confident and strong in his decisions.
2. Practical. He sees at once what is the right means to reach his goal and moves decisively towards it. He does not live in an imaginary "what if" world, but in active reality.
3. Discerning – of other people, their strengths and weaknesses, knows how to motivate them, to use their strengths and avoid their weaknesses. The choleric evaluates situations and handles them efficiently. Never daunted by bad circumstances nor frightened by dangers – the choleric is risk-taking and adventures are exciting and challenging.
4. Quick thinking. The choleric takes a definite stand because he sees at once what is right and wrong, what needs to be done (more through practiced intuition than deep thinking). His whole being

- concentrates on what needs to be done at that moment in a clear, confident action with no waste of time or energy.
5. Resolution. The choleric's strong will carries him through to complete the action he has decided to take, despite hindrances. He will not give up no matter what his mood or who opposes him.

How to win a choleric and redirect his fallen strong will:

1. Train him from babyhood onward to submit to authority. Consistency is the "key" and loving discipline. Cruelty and strong discipline only make his will stronger and fills him with bitterness and the desire for revenge. Loving discipline applied consistently convinces him to submit to authority now, and later to God.
2. Agape' love (unconditional and unlimited) applied to a choleric's strong will eventually convinces him to trust you, and then God. He knows he's a terrible sinner and is honest enough to realize he cannot change himself or hide his sins, so he expects others to hate him. When they continue to love him in spite of his anger, impatience, etc. that melts his defenses and opens his heart. Cholerics are very emotional and want to love and be loved, they just don't think anyone will want to love them as sinful as they are.
3. Forgiveness is crucial! When a choleric actually believes and accepts Christ's total forgiveness, and discovers it is for past, present and future sins he is undone! He feels Christ's love and capitulates to Him for life, even eventually collapsing his strong will into Christ's loving will and care. He feels safe at last, not needing to protect himself and look out for his future.
4. A choleric whose life is committed to Christ is an active disciple, not working for himself but for God's glory – reaching others and untiringly discipling them.
5. A committed choleric is a "real" every day, all day, Christian who wants to be actively used in the Body of Christ. He will never be satisfied with easy inactivity and comfort. The Body of Christ needs to use him, not be threatened by his strong personality; otherwise he will feel impelled to go outside the church to minister (which is a tragedy for him.) The Body of Christ needs to help the Holy Spirit control his bossiness and impetuous activity, and help him discover his gifts. He needs to use those gifts under the authority of the church leaders as they teach him to pray and seek the Holy Spirit's will and guidance. Then he will become a key player and a team member of the Body of Christ for all his life.
6. Grace. Cholerics love grace. They need God's forgiving love more than any other temperament and they function best in a love-trust relationship.