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PEOPLE ARE DIFFERENT

It is 7:30 A.M. Sunday morning in the Johnson household. The family begins its weekly routine of getting ready for church. Each member understands that getting to Sunday school on time requires leaving the house by 9:00 A.M., but how they respond to that information differs a good deal.

Dad hops right out of bed, does his exercises, showers, dresses, and goes directly downstairs, where he sits peacefully, sipping a cup of coffee as he reads the morning paper.

Jack, the teenage son, doesn't stir. He lies in bed, getting that last minute of shut-eye from staying up late on Saturday night. When Dad shouts upstairs for him to get up and get dressed so that the family can leave for church on time, he mumbles that he will be ready when it's time.

His sister, Suzie, is already up. Soon she has her bed made and is busily fixing her hair and putting on the outfit she picked out the night before.

In the master bedroom, Mom is having a tough time deciding what to wear. Add to this the fact that on Saturday she said she would make a nice breakfast for the family—but now she realizes she won't have time for that. She knows, too, that Dad is downstairs expecting her at any minute to come down to prepare the bacon and eggs she promised. She hollers, "I don't think I'm going to be able to fix breakfast. Can you guys get something on your own? Then we can go out for a nice lunch

after church. Will that be OK?" Without waiting for an answer, she goes back to the task of trying to look her best.

It is now 9:05 A.M. Dad and Suzie are already in the car and have backed it out of the garage and halfway down the driveway. Jack yells, "Mom, they're in the car. We better go." He pulls on his shoes as he heads out the door. Mom is right behind him, but she has to run back into the house to get her Bible. Now they are on their way. It is 9:09 A.M.

There is a strained silence in the car. Finally the quiet is broken. "Is everything all right?" Mom asks.

After a few moments, Dad says matter-of-factly, "I hate walking into our Sunday school class late every week. Don't you think that just once you could be ready to leave on time?"

Mom responds, "The class doesn't begin on time anyway, so why should we be there early?"

Then Suzie says softly from the backseat, "But my class begins on time and I go in late every Sunday. I would rather not go at all than to have to be late. Everyone looks at me, and I don't like that."

Finally Jack speaks up. "Hey, I like it just the way we're doing it. You only need to be there for the last fifteen minutes. I don't like hearing that Sunday school teacher go on and on anyway." As he speaks the car pulls into the church parking lot. So begins another worship experience for the Johnson family.

WE ARE ALL DIFFERENT

Maybe you can identify with the Johnsons. Maybe your family, too, gets upset because different individuals in the family fail to meet the expectations of the others or because different individuals fail to respond to a situation the way the others wish they would.

Each member of the Johnson family had his own routine for getting ready to leave for church. No one deliberately set out to upset the others. But the way each person responded to the task made it likely that a tense environment rather than a loving one would develop.

It didn't have to be that way. Yes, people do respond in completely different ways to similar situations. No two people and their reactions are exactly alike. And yes, though we are distinctive, we have predictable ways of responding. Conflicts do indeed develop when the natural preferences of one person clash with the natural preferences of the other. But that does not mean that conflict will necessarily result when individuals with different preferences are together. No, we can improve our awareness and acceptance of differences, and we can learn to respond to others in a positive rather than a negative way. It is the chief message of this book to show how this can be done.

But before we deal with the specifics of learning how to respond to others in a loving way, we need to understand some basic facts about perception, motivation, needs, and values.

PERCEPTUAL DIFFERENCES

Colors. Suppose you were color blind and could only distinguish objects in terms of black or white. On the other hand, your partner had functional eyesight and had no trouble distinguishing colors. Let's imagine the two of you were shopping for a new car, and the salesperson directed you to a bright red sports car. From your color-blind perspective, the car would look black, not red. Your partner, however, would see the car in its true color, bright red. Which of you would be right? In terms of perspective, both of you. You would "see" the car as black. Your partner, whose eyes could distinguish red from black, would "see" it as being red, its actual color. Here the difference in perception would be tied to a difference in physiology. Your eyes would be physically unable to make a distinction your partner's eyes could.

A glass. Some perception-based differences are based on projection, the attributing of one's own ideas, feelings, and attitudes to external sources. Consider figure 1. How would you describe the glass? Give your initial, spontaneous reaction.

    ———   The glass is half full.

    ———   The glass is half empty.

    ———   The glass is either half full or half empty.
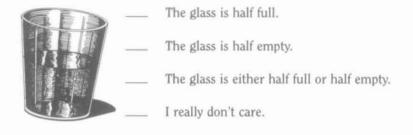
    ———   I really don't care.

Figure 1

Some people see the glass in terms of fullness and some see it in terms of emptiness, but strictly speaking, even though it could be said that they are projecting onto the glass an inner assessment of things, there is no "wrong" response to the question. For what is being asked for in this instance is a person's *initial* response to the glass. All four responses can be normal within a group. In fact, the danger to the personality lies in denying people the right to an honest, candid reaction to what they see.

Yet because there is such a tremendous pressure in modern American culture to see things in terms of fullness—the presumed "positive" response—when a group of Christian psychologists was asked to give its response to the picture 100 percent chose the "half full" response.

A report card. A similar kind of projection occurs with report cards. How would you assess the report card in figure 2? Give your *initial* response. When this report card was shown to forty-four middle class high school students and they were asked to give their initial response to it, the results were most interesting. More than 85 percent noticed the B in biology. This response was revealing and somewhat bothersome. Were the students reflecting as their own response a performance requirement their parents had for them, or were they simply reacting to the fact that one grade was different from the others? A follow-up seemed in order.

ENGLISH......A
MATH..........A
HISTORY.......A
PHYSICS.....A
BIOLOGY......B
P.E..............A

_____ It is an excellent report card.

_____ If it were my report card or that of my child I would call the television networks and schedule a press conference.

_____ There are five A's.

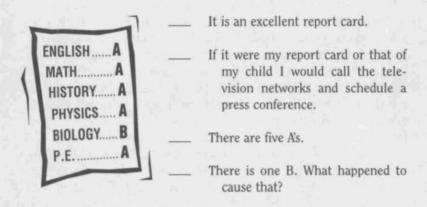_____ There is one B. What happened to cause that?

Figure 2

In the follow-up, the students were asked to express how they would feel if they brought the report card home to their parents. They could check off more than one response. The questionnaire and the results:

Record how you would feel if you brought the following report card home.

15   1. Personally, I could bring this report card home and know that I would be encouraged by my parents.

13   2. My parents would want to know why I made a B in biology.

9   3. I would expect a reward from my parents if I brought this report card home.

14   4. I would be comfortable with this or any report card if I knew it was my best and I know my parents feel the same.

5   5. I would personally see this report card as a failure.

10   6. I would call NBC news and schedule a press conference.

It was good to know that fifteen students believed they would be encouraged by their parents and that fourteen felt it did not matter what their grades were if they gave their best effort. It was good to know also that nineteen students felt free to check the humorous options, ten creative souls considering the press conference an appropriate response to the report card and nine young capitalists opting for a reward. It was disheartening to see that thirteen students believed they would have to explain the B, and that five actually considered themselves failures.

The five who considered themselves failures were not necessarily surprising, however. Students who expect perfection judge themselves critically when they do not achieve it. For them, the reaction they had to the report card was normal, though if feelings of failure persisted and were not dealt with, their reaction could lead to problematic behavior.

A mother in one of our seminars came up after a session with tears in her eyes. "One of my children is just like that," she said. "She cannot stand making anything less than A's! If she doesn't have a perfect report card, she makes life miserable for everyone around her. How can I change her?"

Our response: "You cannot change your child. You can accept her and seek to understand what motivates her." All children are partially motivated by their personality styles. A parent needs to realize the uniqueness of his child's behavioral style and seek to guide him within that style.

A picture. In his book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*[1] Steven Covey uses a famous picture to illustrate the power of perception. Take a few moments to look at figure 3. Now turn and look at figure 4. Do you see a woman? How old would you say she is? Doesn't she seem fashionable and intriguing?

What if you were told that you are mistaken—that the woman in the illustration is really quite old and sad looking and that she has a large nose and a grim face? Would you agree?

1. Steven R. Covey, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), p. 127.

Figure 3

Look at the picture again. Can you see this woman that we say exists? If you cannot see the old woman, you are in a position to believe or not believe that what we are describing is accurate. Until you actually see the old woman you must trust that our description is true.

Turn now to the end of the chapter and look at figure 5. It should be easy to see the old woman we have been describing. Keep looking until she becomes clear. We advise that you not read further in the chapter until you can see images of both the young woman and the old woman.

If you are like most people, this experience graphically reinforces the idea that prior conditioning influences how we perceive events. If we had shown you the older woman first, you would have had difficulty seeing the younger woman, for your perspective would have been affected by the first picture. There is a parallel in the realm of behavior. You will have difficulty understanding another person's behavior until you understand the needs that shape his frame of reference. The combined effect of our unique personalities (needs) and character (values) affects our personal perceptions. Until we experience life the way another person does, it is difficult to relate to the way he behaves.

MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCES

I (Ron) once had the opportunity of conducting a team-building training session with the University of Alabama football coaching staff in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. The offensive and defensive coaches were in the conference room adjoining the office of the head coach. During the introduction for the day's training, I made the following statement: "It is impossible for a coach to motivate his players to perform up to their potential." Needless to say, the head coach looked up with an expression that said, *What in the world are you talking about?* After all, mounted on the wall behind him was a portrait of one of the greatest motivators in all of football coaching history, Paul "Bear" Bryant. Some explanation of the seemingly absurd statement was necessary.

I pointed out that for a football player to be motivated to play his best he needs to accept personal responsibility for taking specific actions—but that it is also the responsibility of the coach to create an environment where those actions are likely to take place. To sum it up:

1. You cannot motivate other people.
2. However, all people are motivated.
3. People become motivated to action for their own reasons—not the reasons others have for them.
4. The very best a motivator can do is to create a healthy environment that allows others to motivate themselves into action.

Too often we assume the responsibility for creating change in others, when in fact true change can only come from within each individual. A football coach cannot motivate his players, but he can understand the motivational environment the different players on his team will respond to.

Bear Bryant knew how to do this. He was a master at taking players with different degrees of talent and bringing out their best effort. He would take an average player and understand what would motivate him to perform at an improved level. He would take a good player and encourage him to work on the skills he needed to bring his performance to an exceptional level. The combined improvement of his individual players created consistent winners as a team. How did coach Bryant motivate his players? Was it through speeches or some form of intimidation? No. It was because he took the time to understand the needs of each player on his football squad. Then he would work with his assistant coaches to create the environment needed to make his players want to make the effort required to improve the level of their performance. My statement wasn't so absurd after all!

More will be said about environments later in this book, but for now it is useful to mention that Bryant's attention to environments has application to marriages and to raising children. Psychologist Larry Crabb writes, "During literally thousands of hours spent trying to keep couples together, it has occurred to me more than once that if husbands would more

strongly involve themselves with their wives and if wives would quit trying to change their husbands, most marriages would really improve."[2] A husband's spending more time with his wife may be the very environment she needs to be motivated to change in the ways her husband desires. A wife's refraining from giving the little advice he so dislikes may be the very environment he needs to change in the way she desires.

Put another way, marriage and family therapists can testify that efforts to change a partner's behavior consistently create resistance and resentment, whereas efforts to create the environment that makes the partner *want* to change open up the possibility of change and growth. Similarly, parents who try to change their children without understanding the distinctive perspectives and motivations of their children will end up frustrated at the same time their children struggle with feelings of discouragement and failure.

NEEDS VERSUS VALUES

Because differences in perception, motivation, and needs sometimes get mixed up in our thinking with differences in values, it is useful to distinguish between *needs* and *values*. Personal needs are basic to our existence. They can be divided into three levels: physical, relational, and spiritual. Physical needs relate to our survival in terms of food, sleep, shelter, and security. Relational needs involve a deep desire to belong and to experience affection and love. Spiritual needs consist of a drive for fulfillment and purpose. These needs are ones every person must address if he is to be healthy.

Personal values are the standards that guide one's life. They have to do with the beliefs that influence the choices a person makes. These values are clustered together into an organized way of thinking. The clothes a person wears, the place he lives, the politician he votes for, the work he chooses, the church he attends—all these are influenced by a clustering of values.

2. Lawrence J. Crabb, Jr., *Understanding People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), p. 18.

Figure 4

Needs-motivated behavior has to do with *how* a person acts. It has to do with what is most natural and easy for an individual to do. One person might have a need for being involved with a variety of social activities. Another person might prefer to spend time alone rather than with other people. Two different people with different kinds of needs. Neither involves a choice of right or wrong, just a difference.

Values-motivated behavior has to do with *why* a person does something. Values are standards of right and wrong and meaningfulness. Values-motivated behavior is tied to the ethical internal guidance system that influences the choices a person makes.

Not all people have the same values. However, few persons would actively disagree with these values statements:

"Honesty is the best policy."

"If at first you don't succeed, try, try again."

"Anything is possible through faith, commitment, and action."

But it is more difficult to arrive at a consensus with these values statements:

"Walk the straight and narrow."

"Live and let live."

"I'll do it my way."

"Let your conscience be your guide."

Different opinions about those beliefs might raise a values conflict.

Values have to do with "oughtness." They have moral and ethical weight. You can make discriminations on the basis of values that would be entirely inappropriate when merely needs were in question. This point is an important one in this book because people often interpret needs-based differences as having values-based significance. A person with a different personality style gets judged as wrong or inferior, when in fact all that is involved is a stylistic personality difference.

Needs-based problems need to be dealt with differently than values-based problems. Suppose a worker fails to meet an assignment deadline despite working hard and giving it his best effort. This is a needs-based problem. But if the worker's su-

pervisor sees it as a values-based problem, a conflict between the worker and his supervisor will immediately develop. Resolving the problem may require only minor adjustments in the work schedule. On the other hand, suppose a Christian education director alters his Sunday attendance report to the pastor in order to give the impression that an attendance goal has been met. This is a values-based problem, and not to recognize it as such is to fail to respond adequately to an ethical dilemma. There will necessarily be a conflict between the pastor and the Christian education director, and it will be a difficult conflict to resolve. The job of the education director may well be in jeopardy.

At times a person's values conflict with his needs. Let's say a person believes in the importance of spending quality time with family. This is thought of as a value. Then he is invited to a golf outing with friends on a day he has promised to spend with family. He is faced with a choice between his desire to participate in the golf outing and the value he places on spending time with his family and living up to his promises. The golf activity represents a legitimate *need* for social interaction and physical activity, but it conflicts with *values* he also considers important.

This book is about understanding the basic differences in our needs-based behavior as opposed to differences in our values-based behavior. It focuses on the common differences in our behavioral styles that relate to personality rather than to character. We believe it is important to understand our differences in needs first before we address and integrate our differences in values.

PERSONALITY DIFFERENCE IS BY DESIGN

Personality differences are influenced by both heredity and environment. The influence of heredity is evident in many ways. According to *U.S. News and World Report*, "Scientists are turning up impressive evidence that heredity has a greater influence on one's personality and behavior than either one's up-

bringing or the most crushing social pressure."[3] The article goes on to observe that "new results from studies of identical twins are leading many scientists to conclude that genes not only control such physical characteristics as eye color and height, but also profoundly influence human behavior and personality."[4]

James Dobson has a similar view. In *Parenting Isn't for Cowards* he says, "It is my supposition that these temperaments are pre-packaged before birth and do not have to be cultivated or encouraged."[5] In Dobson's opinion, genetics plays a significant role in determining a person's temperament. From birth a child has a set of needs that is unique to his makeup.

Corroboration of this position can be found in the evidence of simple common sense. Any mother of more than one child will tell you that her children were behaviorally different from birth. From the very first, the second or third child showed a distinctive personality style. A university psychologist who studied how parents mold a child's character and ability had this to say: "Every parent of one child is an environmentalist, and every parent of more than one becomes a geneticist."[6]

Although genetics plays a major role in the formation of personality traits, the environment present during the development of the child from infancy through adolescence is also critical for healthy adjustment. Responsible parents help prepare their children to face life by being in harmony with their unique behavioral styles.

In Proverbs 22:6 Solomon observes, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." Though this verse is usually interpreted to refer to teaching a child a specific body of moral absolutes, it may also refer to training a child in harmony with his natural bent ("the *way* he should *naturally* go"), or, to put it another way, it may refer to

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3. "How Genes Shape Personality," *U.S. News & World Report*, April 13, 1987, p. 58.
4. Ibid.
5. James C. Dobson, *Parenting Isn't for Cowards* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1987), p. 24.
6. "How Genes Shape Personality," p. 59.

creating a healthy and understanding environment in which the child can mature in accordance with his individual personality profile, or temperament. Training of this kind, it is asserted, is the type of training most likely to help a child develop into a responsible adult.

The Bible tells us that each person is unique physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and that God shaped the integral parts of us all.

> O Lord, you have searched me and you know me.
> You know when I sit and when I rise;
>   you perceive my thoughts from afar.
> You discern my going out and my lying down;
>   you are familiar with all my ways.
>
>   .   .   .   .
> For you created my inmost being;
>   you knit me together in my mother's womb.
> I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
>   your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

> (Psalm 139:1-3, 13-14)

The psalmist who wrote this beautiful text, King David, recognized that God is intimately acquainted with all aspects of our development. Verse 13 of the psalm strongly suggests that God's personal involvement in the creation of man has to do with more than just his physical makeup.

In his letter to the Galatians, the apostle Paul proclaims that even while he was in his mother's womb God set him apart to reach the Gentiles. God was aware of Paul's personality before his conversion and knew that his particular behavioral style would be useful in completing the mission designated for him: "God . . . set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, [and] was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles" (Galatians 1:15-16). When one studies Paul's personality traits, it is clear that he was indeed ideal for the ministry God called him to fulfill. He was a creative, dominant individual well-suited to proclaim the doctrine of grace to a new group of people, the Gentiles, and to show in

an aggressive way that salvation is not obtained through works. He was exactly the type of person who could effectively debate those who opposed the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith.

Paul's dominant style was present in his early life also. Before his conversion to Christianity, he was a strong and aggressive persecutor of the church and committed to ending its existence. Only after his encounter with Jesus Christ on the Damascus road did he use that same "driver" style as an effective builder of the church. Paul's personality profile, both before and after his conversion, did not really change . . . only his motivation and capacity for growth.

A LOOK AHEAD

As you can see, our differences are complex. Each person has a distinctive set of needs and values. Each has a distinctive perception of the world, a distinctive set of motivations, and a distinctive personality structure. That is how God intended it to be.

The purpose of this book is to help the reader
    know his own personality style
    know how to grow and mature within that style
    know how to be understanding of persons whose styles
        differ from his
    know how to create environments in which persons
        whose styles differ from his can flourish.

We want to provide our readers with a common language for explaining needs-based behavior so that they can learn more about themselves and how others see them. The next chapter of this book introduces that common language for relating to different styles of behavior and gives biblical examples of individuals who illustrate those styles.

Figure 5