

Is There Benefit to Personality Type Testing in Biblical Counseling?

By John Woodward

A counselee may inquire about the use of personality testing. Some of us have taken and used various profile instruments.

The most common personality categories are based **four classic** “humors” of the Greco-Roman era:

- sanguine (optimistic leader-like)
- choleric (bad-tempered or irritable)
- melancholic (analytical and quiet)
- phlegmatic (relaxed and peaceful)

The **D.I.S.C.** model uses the terms for the four basic temperaments

- Dominance
- Inducement
- Submission
- Compliance

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator uses these four categories to specify 16 personality types. [1]

The National Christian Counselors Association uses a 5 personality test —the **Arno Profile**. [2]

The **Enneagram** test categorizes nine personality types: Perfectionist, Helper, Achiever, Individualist, Investigator, Loyalist, Enthusiast, Challenger, Peacemaker. [3]

These kind of instruments are intended to measure psychological preferences in how people perceive the world and make decisions.

In Exchanged Life Counseling we want to keep in mind that psychology is primarily used in a *diagnostic way*. We call this use *contextualization*. [4]

How should one use the *self-understanding* that may be derived from such personality categories? This depends on the aspect of “self” that is under consideration. [5] Since these assessments do not refer to sin versus righteousness, or flesh versus Spirit, how should they be used? (Gal. 5:16,17).

A. *Self* as "flesh"

Self may refer to the old programming from who we used to be in Adam—the flesh (Rom. 7:18). Some of the traits may be useful to help the counselee recognize how his/her unique version of “flesh” has been conditioned. In this context it aids in recognizing what would be personally involved in *denying self* and taking up the Cross (Luke 9:23).

B. *Self* as personhood

Self sometimes refers to God-given *personhood* as expressed in through our unique personality. Matthew 22:39 refers to the command: "Love your neighbor as you love *yourself*." But for these traits to be infused with love and goodness, we need to abide in Christ, for without His live-giving ability we can do nothing spiritually virtuous (John 15:5).

What guidelines relate to the use of personality inventories in biblical counseling?

1. Although personality data may be useful to understand our traits and tendencies, as believers our *essential identity* is not based on personality, but on *who we are in Christ*. God bases our ultimate identity in our new human *spirit* (the “new man”), not our *soul* (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:24).[3]

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus [essential identity] for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them [practical manifestation]” (Eph. 2:10).

2. For decades biblical counseling ministries, including GFI, have used the Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis to help individuals and couples recognize their psychological symptoms and relational tendencies (during a particular season of life). Although this is a secular instrument, it is to be used in a diagnostic capacity and related to the process of Christ-centered change.[6]

3. Relevant, helpful insights in how we relate to ourselves and others can also be derived from the discovery and deployment of *spiritual gifts* (1 Cor. 12-14). Many have found practical value in the perspective of the *motivational gifts* of Romans 12:6,7:

“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; or ministry, *let us use it* in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”

This model was expounded by Don Fortune and Katie Fortune, Dr. Charles Stanley, Dr. Bobby Mullins, and others. Hans and Elly Timmermans include the seven motivational gifts teaching in their Exchanged Life discipling in Malawi, Africa. [7]

So, in whatever capacity you use personality testing in your life and ministry, remember to keep it in context and interpret the results in light of your identity in Christ and the necessity of Abiding in Him.

-John Woodward

[1] <https://www.discprofile.com/what-is-disc>

[2] <https://www.ncca.org/about>

[3] For example: Bill and Kristi Gaultiere, Healthy Feelings, Thriving Faith: Growing Emotionally and Spiritually Through the Enneagram (soulshepherding.org)

[4] See [Psychology / Contextualization PDF](#) and *The Role of Psychology* in the Exchanged Life Counseling (and Solomon School)Lecture Series.

[5] See [Sorting Your Self Out](#) at GraceNotebook.com

[6] See [TJTA.com](#)
[GFI TJTA notes](#)

Here is a video of John Woodward giving an explanation of a counselee's TJTA profile:

<https://vimeo.com/656674236>

[7] See <https://iblp.org/what-are-seven-motivational-gifts/>
Charles Stanley's notes https://elcmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/fba_spiritualgifts_notes_update.pdf

Don and Katie Fortune, Discover Your God-Given Gifts.

Bobby Mullins, *Channel of Blessing*.

www.DCIalawi.com