

Better Together



Honoring and Respecting Personalities in Marriage

Deb & Bruce Potts

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| INTRODUCTION..... | 3 |
| ADAM AND EVE THROUGH THE LENS OF PERSONALITY | 4 |
| FIVE WAYS TO BE BETTER TOGETHER..... | 11 |
| SOCIAL OR EXTRAVERSION | 13 |
| CHANGE OR OPENNESS | 15 |
| ORGANIZED OR CONSCIENTIOUSNESS..... | 17 |
| PLEASING OR AGREEABLENESS | 19 |
| EMOTIONALLY UNSTEADY OR NEUROTICISM..... | 21 |
| ADAM AND EVE AFTER A “BETTER TOGETHER” WORKSHOP..... | 23 |
| NEXT STEPS | 26 |
| ABOUT THE AUTHORS | 27 |

INTRODUCTION

Bruce and I have been married for over forty years, and we're perfectly matched. Yes, that's right! We are totally opposite in *every* possible way!

Most of the time we get along well. But we noticed it was during times of stress that we struggled with our differences. Sometimes it was small issues and annoyances, and other times it was major page-turning life events. In any shape or size, stress can bring out the worst in us!

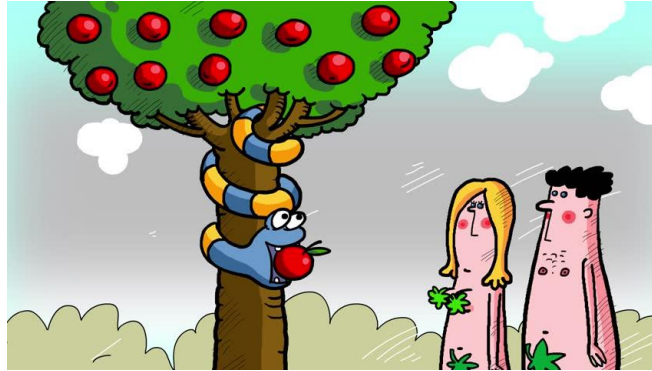
Maybe you are like us. Maybe you thought you and your partner had so much in common. But then you start living together and you discover you are nothing alike. You've discovered that opposites attract but you have no idea how to navigate your differences. If so, you're in the right place. We created this short eBook to help you learn to honor and respect each other's differences, and become better together, especially when your life turns a page.

Let's start at the beginning, with the story of the Bible's first couple, Adam and Eve. We know God created them for each other, and yet they were different from one another in significant ways. One day, their life turned a page. They were challenged by the creature in the garden but they didn't become better together. They let the new, stressful situation divide them. They each did their own thing without working together and we've all been suffering the consequences ever since.

We've taken some liberties with this well-known Bible account and woven a story loosely based on the facts that will draw you into the mindsets of the first couple on that fateful day. You can find the original story in the book of Genesis, chapter 2:15-24 and chapter 3:1-13.

Following that account, we will share five compelling personality traits, called the Big Five, that significantly impact marriages. We will give you the opportunity to evaluate where you and your partner are in these areas and give you practical, achievable steps you can take today to become better together. *Especially* when your life turns a page!

ADAM AND EVE THROUGH THE LENS OF PERSONALITY



Birdsong reached the man's ears before his eyes opened. The melodies rose and fell, echoing all around him. The sounds made him happy and he felt the corners of his mouth turn up slightly. Taking a deep breath, he inhaled the aroma of something enticing. He wasn't ready to open his eyes, but focused on each part of his body as it lay on the soft, warm earth. He experimented with wriggling his fingers and toes. Shifting slightly, he flexed his leg muscles. He moved his feet in circles and felt tiny tickles of soft grass on his toes. Alternately lifting his shoulders then releasing them onto the contoured earth felt good under his bare back.

"You're awake." The deep voice spoke softly above and to his right. The man turned his head in that direction and opened his eyes ever so slightly. He saw only soft green grass gently swaying in the breeze.

The deep voice spoke again. "Are you ready to sit up?"

He raised his fully opened eyes upward and around to his left. He saw trees, grass, bushes, but no person. "Where are you?"

"You can't see me but I'm Father. You are my son. You are Adam."

"Adam. I like that. Hello Father. Where am I?" Adam sat up and looked around. In every direction there were lush green plants and trees. He saw birds flitting here and there and small animals scurrying around the trees. He heard the sound of gurgling water.

"You are in My garden. This is where you will live. Are you ready to stand up? We can take a walk and I'll show you around."

Adam jumped to his feet and flexed his muscular arms. As Adam walked, he looked right and left at the flourishing garden. Father pointed out the different trees and told him about the fruit and how to tell when each fruit was ripe and ready to eat.

It wasn't long before his stomach started growling. Maybe it was all this talk about eating fruit? "Father, is there some fruit I can eat now?"

Father laughed. “I expected you to say that. Look up at the tree in front of you, it’s got ripe fruit. Pick some and taste it.”

Adam saw a short, full tree with light green fruit hanging off virtually every stem. He carefully selected one of the round fruits and took a big bite from it. He chewed the fruit and swallowed. The taste was unlike anything he could describe. It set his taste buds alive, wanting more. He finished the fruit, then picked another and devoured it.

Finally, Adam had his fill. “Thank you, Father. That was amazing. I feel strong and ready for what’s next.”

“Great, that’s what my fruit does for you. It’s to make you strong and healthy but it’s also tasty and beautiful to look at. I created it that way, so you would receive every kind of enjoyment from it.”

Adam reached the center of the garden, and he came to a stop in front of a gigantic tree. His jaw hung open. He craned his neck to see the top branches. They reached high into the heavens, but the fruit grew low enough along the branches that were within his reach. The trunk of the tree was so large that Adam couldn’t reach his arms around it. “Awesome tree.”

“This, my son, is the Tree of Life. Isn’t it magnificent? You can eat freely of this tree in any season. Every month it will have different fruit. Each one is a different color and flavor. But this isn’t the only tree that will give you fruit. Every tree we’ve seen so far is for you. Each one has different fruit and gives you different nutrients. Some are just for fun, for you to enjoy. Just because.”

Adam looked around at the wide variety of trees in the garden and he felt his heart beat a little faster. All this was for him? How could that be? As Adam panned his surroundings, he saw a small, crooked tree with spiny branches. Its leaves looked withered and spotted, but the fruit was a beautiful shiny red color.

“Father, what is that tree good for?”

“I like it that you noticed the one tree that is different from the rest. That is the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. That is the only tree in this garden whose fruit I forbid you to eat. You are never to eat that fruit, Adam. If you do, you will most certainly die because of your disobedience. You will be separated from Me and banished from this garden.”

Adam’s heart hammered. How could he survive without Father? “I would never eat that fruit, Father. The tree looks scary and horrible. I’m sure the fruit tastes bad too. Don’t worry about me disobeying You. I want to be with You forever!” Adam turned away from the crooked tree. “How can I ever thank You, Father? I have everything here I could ever want. Is there anything I can do for you?”

“Well, there is something I’m going to ask you to do while you live here. You will be the caretaker of the garden. Don’t worry, I will tell you what needs to be done. Each season there will be different kinds of work to do. Your work is very important, to ensure the trees grow strong and their fruit is good for you.”

“I can do that. It sounds like interesting work. I’m glad You will give me the rules so I can follow them. You will see how perfectly I will accomplish everything. I’ll keep track of everything and make sure I don’t forget anything. I’ll record every detail so I can monitor my success.”

Adam heard a chuckle from above him. “Sounds good, Adam. You’re so dependable and organized. I do have another job for you, not an ongoing job like keeping the garden. It’s a special one-off kind of job. Are you interested?”

“Sure, anything. What is it?” Adam clapped in his excitement at being able to do something special for Father.

“I’m going to bring each kind of animal to you. There are a lot of them. And I want you to give names to each kind of animal. Some will be flying animals, some will be living on the ground. What do you think?”

“I’m on it. Bring them on.”

Eager to please Father, Adam worked for hours carefully observing each pair of animals brought to him. He paid attention to their reproductive organs, to the type of food they ate, and how they moved around. Classifying them according to their kinds, he noticed that each animal and bird had a mate. The mates were the same kinds, but they had significant differences. When they had offspring, some of them stayed together and took care of the young ones. He saw how they supported each other, and he could imagine how nice it was for each animal to have someone like them, someone who would be by their side throughout life.

Adam looked around when he was finished and even though he knew he did a great job, he felt empty. He wondered if it would ever be possible for him to have offspring. If so, how would that happen? He didn’t see a creature who looked like him, who he wanted to be with forever.

As Adam sat deep in thought, he heard the Father’s voice. “Well done, my son. It looks like you’ve completed your assignment. I’m proud of you.”

“Thank you, Father. I did my best. But, I noticed something ...”

“Yes, what did you notice?”

“Well, I don’t want to be ungrateful, but I noticed that there is no one like me. Did you plan for me to have offspring? Is there someone for me, who is like me and yet different? I’m not sure how to describe how I feel, but it’s not a good feeling.”

Adam heard his Father’s deep voice rumble with a sympathetic *aww*. “Adam you have discovered a Truth. It is not good for you to be alone. I’m glad you noticed your need and came to me with it. I am going to make you a helper, someone who is like you but different. Someone who will balance you, who is a counterpart to you. This person will be suitable for you as none of the animals were. This person will complement you and the two of you will grow to be One.”

Adam suddenly felt sleepy. He looked down at the soft, enticing grass. Just a little nap and he would be ready for the next adventure. He sprawled out and closed his eyes...

...“Adam, wake up.”

Hearing his Father’s voice, Adam felt like he had just laid down a few minutes ago, and yet it was hard to open his eyes. He felt groggy. Sitting up, he stretched and yawned. As he did, his eyes caught something flesh colored on his left. His head swiveled and he did a double-take. Adam leapt to his feet, heart

pounding. It was a new creature! It lay there sleeping right next to where he had lain. He was sure it wasn't there before when he was naming the animals. He would have noticed, wouldn't he?

"Adam, I see you have noticed your helper. She's like you, but different. She will balance you. You and she will be able to produce offspring together." Father's voice sounded happy.

"Whoa, Father! Is this what you meant when you said you were going to make me a helper? She's amazing!" Adam's eyes took in all the details of his new companion. She was like him, but different. Parts of her body were the same and some were very different. She had long golden hair, which ended in slight curls. He reached his hand up to his own dark kinky hair and ran his fingers over it. She had a nose and a mouth like his. Her chin and her ears resembled his. But below her shoulders, her body had curves that his didn't. Her legs were more shapely than his. As he observed her, she stirred and her eyes snapped open. She looked right at him. He backed away a little bit.

"Hello." Her voice was softer than his, and its pitch was higher.

Adam moved back toward her. He suddenly felt shy. "Hello. I'm Adam. Father made you for me, to be my companion. I will call you Eve. Can I help you up?" He reached his hand out to help her off the ground.

Eve took his hand and jumped up. She twirled around and smiled broadly. "Woohoo! I feel so amazing!" The words tumbled out of her mouth faster than Adam could follow them. As she spoke she ran from tree to tree, exclaiming over all she saw and touched. "Look at the beautiful trees! And that fruit, I'm hungry!" She reached up to the nearest tree and grabbed some fruit. She spoke while she chewed, with juice running down her face. "Mmm, it's delectable! Look at those tiny animals running up the trees! And look at the creatures in the sky. I love hearing their sounds. Do you think they talk to each other like we do? What do we call this place, anyway? It's magical." She finished her litany of questions and suddenly stood still, her eyes on Adam. "Hey, you aren't bad yourself." She sauntered up to him and reached up to touch his hair, his eyelids, his nose and then traced his mouth with her finger. A warm stirring started inside him. She was different from any of the animals he had named. She was more like him and yet different. In a very good way.

"Um, we call this place the garden. Everything here is for us to enjoy. We can eat the fruit from any of the trees except that crooked one with the wilted leaves, over there." Adam swung his arm around to point to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But Eve was already gone, climbing a nearby tree to grab a high-hanging spiny pink fruit.

She turned her head in the general direction of Adam's hand. "Uh-huh. Got it. Look at this sweet pink fruit! What should we call this? Do you want one, I will throw it down to you." She dangled from the tree, ready to toss the fruit Adam's way.

"No, that's ok. I think that fruit isn't ripe enough yet. Father told me sometimes we have to wait for the fruit to ripen to get the best flavor. Besides, shouldn't you get down from the tree? You might fall."

"Silly, I'm not going to fall! Look at me!" Eve swung herself toward a lower branch and caught it just in time. She jumped to the ground with her pink treasure still in her fist. She took a big bite from the fruit and her face contorted. "Ooh, it's sour." She spit it out on the ground and threw the rest of it far into the woods.



Eve wandered through the garden, everywhere she looked it was the same old garden. She had already tasted every fruit. They were all good, but a girl can get bored with the same fruit every live long day. She looked up at the gorgeous sunrise. It would be hours until the cool of the day when Father would walk with them. Adam was off cataloguing his trees. Again. He took his job so seriously.

She looked around and found him, hammering a small, pointed implement on a large slate. He kept track of each tree's output and every season he tried to beat the yield a little bit more. She did her best to saunter up to him, swaying her hips in a way that was sure to get his attention.

"Hey babe. What do you say we take a dip in the river? It's going to be a hot one today." She batted her eyes at Adam.

He barely looked up. "Hmm. Maybe later? I've got to finish reporting on this tree. It's the end of the month already. Can it wait?" Adam looked up at her for a quick moment, squinting in the sunlight. Beads of sweat clung to his forehead.

Eve sighed. "Yeah, sure. Ok. I'm going for a walk."

She turned and wandered around, stopping here and there to pick a flower and weave it into her hair. *Why do I even try to make myself pretty? He never notices.* She saw the Tree of Life ahead of her and noticed that the new fruit was just beginning to bud. She knew it wouldn't be ripe yet for a few days. *I hate to wait for fruit to ripen.*

Her eyes turned to that crooked tree, the one Adam had pointed out to her. What did he call it? Oh yes, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. What was the rule about it? She frowned, trying to remember. Something about not eating the fruit and maybe not even touching it? Rules weren't for free spirits like her. She tossed her hair. Approaching the crooked tree, she felt a deep excitement bubbling up inside of her. It was dark here, the leaves didn't look healthy, but the fruit was an amazing shade of deep red. The sun seemed to disappear behind a cloud and a chilly breeze lifted her hair.

"It'sss a beautiful day, isssn't it?"

Eve heard the voice and looked around but she didn't see anyone. "I don't see you, where are you?" Stooping, she looked under the tree, to her right and left.

"I'm up here. In the tree."

Eve raised her eyes to the top of the tree. There, winding itself around the branches was the most beautiful creature she had ever seen. He was long and slender and his body was covered with a rainbow of shiny scales. Every imaginable hue was rippling and glowing as he slithered. When the creature moved the light played off his body in a mesmerizing way.

"Oh, there you are. I'm Eve. Who are you?"

“I know who you are. I’ve been watching you. No wonder you’re bored, living in thissss ssspectacular garden but not being able to eat any of itsss lusciousss fruit.”

A little shiver went up Eve’s spine and shook her head at this. “No, actually you’ve got it wrong. We can eat any of the fruit here. Except for the fruit from this tree.” She pointed to the tree, but then pulled away. “Father said we shouldn’t eat this fruit or even touch it or else we will die.”

The creature slithered closer to Eve, his upper body swinging in the air near her nose. “Oh sssweetie! You sssurely will not die! Father knowsss that the minute you eat thisss fruit, you will have greater awarenesss, you will be like the Father. You will have wisssdom like He doesss, and you will know the difference between good and evil.” He nudged a ripe, juicy piece of the red fruit with his nose.

Eve noticed that the fruit was beautiful. It looked ripe, and Father said to wait for the fruit to ripen before eating it. And wouldn’t it be great to be as wise as Father was? He knew so many things. She wanted to know lots of things too. Maybe then she wouldn’t be so bored all the time. If eating the fruit meant she could have a new friend, then she was in. She felt her hand reaching out for the fruit, almost of its own volition. *What could it hurt? The creature said I wouldn’t die.*

Just then she heard a rustle behind her. She turned and saw Adam approaching. He said nothing but stopped just behind her. She hesitated, her hand itching to reach out and grab the fruit. Should she? What was so wrong about something so good looking? It was just a little piece of fruit in a garden loaded with fruit.

Eve turned back to the creature and lifted her hand, palm up, for the fruit. She grasped it and brought it to her mouth. Taking a big bite, she tasted its tangy, juicy pulp.

“Mmm.” She rolled her eyes as she swallowed the first bite. Turning toward Adam, she held the fruit out to him. “You need to try this. It’s amazing.”



Adam saw the deep red juice running down Eve’s face. He saw the look of ecstasy on her face as she chewed the delicacy. He remembered what Father had told him, that if they ate this fruit they would certainly die. He knew he should have stopped her, but Eve didn’t listen to him, ever. It did no good to tell her the rules. Half the time she didn’t listen, the other half she couldn’t remember. And she loved breaking rules.

Father said we would certainly die if we ate this fruit. But Eve wasn’t dead. Here she was alive as ever, chewing that wonderful fruit. Maybe she knew what she was doing? Maybe the shiny creature was right. Maybe Father didn’t know everything.

Reaching his hand out, he took the fruit from Eve. He smelled it—it smelled amazing. Not like any other fruit from the garden. He stuck his tongue out to lick it. It tasted tart and sweet at the same time. He opened his mouth and took a small bite. It was crispy and juicy. So far so good. He put his hand over his heart. Not dead yet...

The afternoon breeze kicked up, just like it always did at this time of the day. Adam realized it was time for their daily walk with Father in the garden. Usually, he looked forward to this time. Only today felt different. He felt exposed. He noticed Eve holding her hands over parts of her body and he was compelled to do the same. What was happening?

“Eve, quick, let’s hide behind this bush. Father is coming!”

They each dove behind a flowering bush nearby. Adam panted, his heart hammering as he listened for Father to come closer.

“Adam, Eve, where are you?” Adam felt a lump in his throat at the sound of his loving Father’s voice. He knew he had to answer.

“Father, I heard you coming and I was afraid because I’m naked. Eve and I are hiding.” Adam and Eve raised their heads up above the bush, but kept their bodies hidden. Adam couldn’t look up. He couldn’t look at Eve. He kept his eyes on his own feet.

There was a moment of silence. Then Adam heard the low soft voice of Father.

“Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten fruit from the tree I commanded you not to eat?”

Adam started shaking. He knew he made a horrible mistake. Father was right, as he always was. Suddenly, Adam felt rage at Eve. It was all her fault after all. She was the one who gave it to him. She made the choice to eat the fruit without even asking him.

“The woman who you gave to be with me, *she* gave me fruit from the tree and I ate it.” Adam pointed his thumb at Eve, then turned to scowl at her.

Father addressed Eve in a slow, controlled voice. “What is this you have done?”

Eve scowled back at Adam, then looked down. In a low voice she answered Father. “I ate the fruit because the creature lied to me. I didn’t know any better.”



FIVE WAYS TO BE BETTER TOGETHER

God created Eve for Adam, to be a partner, to complement him. It makes sense that they had some major differences. Adam was the dependable, organized, diligent partner. He took his job and his rules seriously. Eve was more fun-loving and carefree. The serpent was cunning, and he knew which one of the spouses to approach. He probably assumed Adam would never talk to a stranger, and he saw Eve's boredom and maybe her naivete and cashed in on it. Adam was there the whole time, and he knew eating the fruit was forbidden but he didn't stop Eve. Was he a conflict-avoider?

God knew exactly what went down, but He asked Adam and Eve questions. He gave them the opportunity to confess their failures and ask for forgiveness. I wonder where we would be today if they had? But Adam and Eve both responded like so many of us when we get caught. We blame someone else.

Is your partner very different from you? Those differences are often the reason we are attracted to each other in the first place. But once we start living together and experience stressful situations, our initial attraction can wilt and annoyance blossoms in its place. Sometimes we wonder if we married the wrong person.

It seems like it would be easy to get along better if our partners were just like us, right? In our marriage mentoring program, the couples take a marriage assessment called Prepare/Enrich. When we meet with a couple and give them the results of their marriage assessment, they're very interested to see the pages about personality differences. They often wonder if their differences mean they are incompatible.

One research paper on personality and marital satisfaction¹ shows that 66% of people marry someone completely different from themselves. This same research paper also concludes that marital happiness has no correlation to personality traits at all. Whether your partner is different from you or similar to you, you can still have a happy marriage. That's great news!

Dr. John Gottman is a well-known marriage psychologist. He says that 69% of our disagreements in marriage are perpetual. Personality is one of those perpetual disagreements. We won't succeed in changing the other person to be like us, but for some reason we keep trying! Dr. Gottman says we need to learn to live with personality differences and that happy couples use humor to deal with their diversity.

Let's switch gears now and talk about five different character traits that are important to marriage. These are measured in the Prepare/Enrich assessment. These traits are sometimes called the Big Five. They represent five major factors of personality that are all very important to the inner workings of a relationship.

¹ https://research.prepare-enrich.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/personality_and_couple_satisfaction.pdf

Social (or Extraversion) measures a preference for social settings and the behavior of a person socially. People who score high in Social seek the company of others, they often have high energy and can make conversation easily with strangers. They tend to draw attention to themselves and are generally enthusiastic. Those who score low in Social have lower energy, are quieter and less exuberant. They are not necessarily shy, or dislike people, but they need more time alone. Those high in Social are energized by being with people, and those low in Social are energized by being alone.

Change (or Openness) measures openness to change, flexibility, and interest in new experiences. This trait distinguishes between imaginative and creative people and those who are more conventional and realistic. Those who score high in Change tend to be more creative and aware of their feelings. They are more intellectually curious and appreciative of art and beauty. Those scoring low in Change are more likely to hold traditional beliefs and prefer the plain and obvious rather than the complex and ambiguous. They prefer familiarity over novelty.

Organized (or Conscientiousness) measures organization of daily life and persistence in pursuing goals. This trait is associated with how we control, regulate, and direct our impulses. Those scoring high in Organized prefer planned activities and are considered conscientious. Those scoring low in Organized are less able to achieve goals, are more impulsive and pay less attention to details.

Pleasing (or Agreeableness) measures how cooperative versus competitive one is. Those scoring high in Pleasing are considerate of others, and generally have an optimistic view of human nature, believing people to be basically good. They value social harmony. Those scoring low in pleasing are often suspicious and antagonistic. They can tend to be skeptical of others and are more unlikely to extend themselves for other people.

Emotional instability (or Neuroticism) measures an individual's emotions and mentality. Scoring low in emotional instability means you don't often experience negative emotions. They are more easy-going. Those who score high in emotional instability are vulnerable to stress and anxiety and have a tendency to experience negative feelings.

Now it's Your Turn!

The rest of this chapter is designed to help you and your partner find practical, doable steps to be better together based on understanding and respecting each other's big five traits. Go to <https://www.truity.com/test/big-five-personality-test> and take the free big five test. Ask your partner to take it too. You will get scores in each of the five areas, provided as a percentage. On the next pages, there is a place for you and your partner to record your scores. Then find practical ideas for improving your relationship, whether you are both low, both high, or if you differ.

SOCIAL OR EXTRAVERSION

This trait reflects preference for and behavior in social settings

Write your and your partner's initials above the chart

according to your score at <https://www.truity.com/test/big-five-personality-test>.

Your Big Five Score: _____

Your Partner's Big Five Score: _____

| Low (<10) | Average (Higher 50-90) | | High (>90) |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| | (Lower 10-50) | | |
| Overly suspicious of others | Makes Friends Cautiously | Makes friends easily | Naive about unsafe people |
| Won't participate | Low-key | Sociable | Risky behavior |
| Prefers isolation | Prefers a quiet evening | Prefers a party | Has to have a party |
| Withdrawn and remote | Energized by being alone | Energized by social situations | Excessively needy |
| Passive | Lower energy | Higher energy | Hyperactive |

SOCIAL OR EXTRAVERSION

Do you and your partner differ or are you the same?

Review the positives and negatives, then follow the practical advice.

| If Both Partners Score Low... | If Partners Differ... | If Both Partners Score High... |
|---|---|--|
| + Enjoy quiet, relaxing time alone | + Opposites attract! | + Potential to have lots of fun |
| + Agree when to say no to social gatherings | - Each may feel their needs aren't met | + People like to be with them |
| - May become isolated and cut off | - Difficulty understanding the other | - May be overly busy and committed |
| - May feel isolated from each other | | - May neglect couple time |
| ...Do this | ...Do this | ...Do this |
| | Need to communicate about social events | |
| Avoid too much isolation | Differences will be greater when stressed | Schedule time alone as a couple |
| Find ways to connect to each other | Check with spouse before saying yes or no | Find ways to connect to each other emotionally |

CHANGE OR OPENNESS

This trait reflects openness to change, flexibility, interest in new experiences

Write your initials and your partner's initials above the chart

according to your score at <https://www.truity.com/test/big-five-personality-test>.

Your Big Five Score: _____

Your Partner's Big Five Score: _____

| Low (<10) | (Lower 10-50) | Average (Higher 50-90) | High (>90) |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Stuck in the routine | Prefers routine | Prefers variety | Always "reinventing the wheel" |
| Inflexible | Likes what is familiar | Flexible | Easily distracted |
| Unadaptable | Down to earth | Adaptable | Going every which way |
| Closed to new experiences | Less open to new ideas/experiences | Broad range of interests | Too many new ideas/experiences |
| "The way it's always been done" | Conventional | Unconventional | "Out there" |

CHANGE OR OPENNESS

Do you and your partner differ or are you the same?

Review the positives and negatives, then follow the practical advice below.

| If Both Partners Score Low... | If Partners Differ... | If Both Partners Score High... |
|--|---|---|
| + Both are practical and conventional | + Opposites attract! | + Both are flexible and open to experiences |
| + Neither rocks the boat or creates problems | - Each may feel their needs aren't met | + Both enjoy variety |
| - Relationship may become routine or boring | - Difficulty understanding each other | - Too much change means chaos and stress |
| ...Do this | ...Do this | ...Do this |
| Challenge yourselves to try new things | Rely on the flexible spouse in stressful situations | Establish routine where needed |
| Plan for inevitable change together | Communicate before agreeing to new things | Decrease stress and too much change |
| Start by changing small things | Don't criticize or try to change the other! | Learn to say no where needed |

ORGANIZED OR CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

This trait reflects organization of daily life and persistence in pursuing goals.

Write your initials and your partner's initials above the chart

according to your score at <https://www.truity.com/test/big-five-personality-test>

Your Big Five Score: _____

Your Partner's Big Five Score: _____

| Low (<10) | Average (Higher 50-90) | | High (>90) |
|---------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | (Lower 10-50) | (Higher 50-90) | |
| Disorganized | Easygoing | Orderly | Obsessive about organization |
| Careless and Sloppy | "wing it" | Self-disciplined | Workaholic |
| Aimless | Constantly readjusts goals | Perseveres to achieve goals | Won't adjust goals when failing |
| Impulsive | Spontaneous | Planner | Won't Change Plans |

ORGANIZED OR CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

Do you and your partner differ or are you the same?

Review the positives and negatives, then follow the practical advice below.

| If Both Partners Score Low... | If Partners Differ... | If Both Partners Score High... |
|--|--|--|
| + Very relaxed about plans | + Opposites attract! | + Likely to meet a lot of goals as a couple |
| + Comfortable with certain levels of chaos | - Each may feel their needs aren't met | - Overly driven to achieve goals |
| - Can get behind on routine tasks (finances) | - Difficulty understanding each other | - May put tasks over relationships |
| - Not as likely to achieve many goals | | - Highly challenged with unplanned stress |
| ...Do This | ...Do This | ...Do This |
| | Balance – avoid perfectionism and sloppiness | |
| Get outside help with organizing, finances etc | More organized one handles details | Encourage each other to stop & 'smell roses' |
| Work together on goals | Don't let organized one be the 'parent' | Set relationship goals |

PLEASING OR AGREEABLENESS

This trait reflects how cooperative versus competitive one is with others

Write your initials and your partner's initials above the chart

according to your score at <https://www.truity.com/test/big-five-personality-test>

Your Big Five Score: _____

Your Partner's Big Five Score: _____

| Low (<10) | Average (Higher 50-90) | | High (>90) |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Argues about the littlest things | Competitive | Considerate | Sacrifices to please others |
| Combative | Thrives on opposition | Apologizes quickly | Compromises to avoid conflict |
| Uncooperative | Can stand up for themselves | Cooperative | Push-over |
| Cutthroat | Values Success | Values getting along with others | Can't ask for what they need |
| Suspicious about most people | People are basically bad | People are basically good | Naïve about unsafe people |

PLEASING OR AGREEABLENESS

Do you and your partner differ or are you the same?

Review the positives and negatives, then follow the practical advice below.

| If Both Spouses Score Low... | If Spouses Differ... | If Both Spouses Score High... |
|--|---|--|
| + Both are competitive | + Opposites attract! | + Each is respectful & considerate |
| + Both are assertive and straightforward | - Each may feel dominated by the other | + Each values cooperation over competition |
| - Conflict may be high – no one backs down | -Difficulty understanding the other | - Reluctance in sharing negative emotions |
| - May seem harsh and unforgiving to partner | | - May lack true intimacy |
| ...Do This | ...Do This | ...Do This |
| Work on communication and conflict resolution skills | Trusting one-learn to share feelings honestly | Work on communication and conflict resolution skills |
| Keep small issues from getting too big | Assertive one-learn good listening skills | Don't avoid conflict, work through it |

EMOTIONALLY UNSTEADY OR NEUROTICISM

This trait reflects how a person reacts to stress

Write your initials and your partner's initials on the curve

according to your score at <https://www.truity.com/test/big-five-personality-test>

Your Big Five Score: _____

Your Partner's Big Five Score: _____

| Low (<10) | Average (Higher 50-90) | | High (>90) |
|------------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Doesn't take stress seriously | Stressors are minor passing annoyances | Generally able to cope with stress | Easily upset by minor stress |
| Emotionally flat in new situations | Calm in new situations | Quick to react to new situations | Retreats from/avoids new situations |
| Unfeeling or unflappable | Resilient | Delicate | Normally fragile, anxious, depressed |

EMOTIONALLY UNSTEADY OR NEUROTICISM

Do you and your partner differ or are you the same?

Review the positives and negatives, then follow the practical advice below.

| If Both Partners Score Low... | If Partners Differ... | If Both Partners Score High... |
|---|--|--|
| + Both are calm and collected | + In times of stress the more emotionally stable partner can take control and help the other feel less frustrated. | + Each can relate to the other's anxiety, etc. |
| + They can cope with challenges life presents without a great deal of stress | -The more stable partner may experience occasional challenges | + Each can guard the other against triggers |
| -At times they can appear unfeeling or unflappable | -The less stable partner may wonder why their partner doesn't feel the same way | -Each one's moods can impact the relationship |
| -They may have trouble relating to other family members who are different from them | | |
| ...Do This | ...Do This | ...Do This |
| They can benefit from practicing good communication skills. | Remember to work with one another's differences rather than attempting to change each other | They will do well to be mindful of how much change and stress the other can handle. |
| | Flexibility, problem solving, and communication are key skills to help them deal with stress as a couple. | They can benefit from being good listeners and supportive companions in times of stress. |

ADAM AND EVE AFTER A “BETTER TOGETHER” WORKSHOP...

Let's imagine we could roll back time and Adam and Eve got a do-over. Before meeting the creature, they attended a Better Together workshop and took the Big Five test. After discussing their differences, they practiced honoring and respecting each other's differences.

What would their encounter with the creature look like now?



Eve wandered through the garden, everywhere she looked it was the same familiar, stunning garden. She had already tasted every fruit. They were all amazing, she could never get bored with all the variety and abundance that was available to her. She looked up at the gorgeous sunrise. It would be hours until the cool of the day when Father would walk with them. Adam was off cataloguing his trees. He took his job so seriously.

She looked around and found him, hammering a small, pointed implement on a large slate. He kept track of each tree's output and every season he tried to beat the yield a little bit more. He made her so proud, working hard to make sure she had a wide variety of good food. What had she done to deserve a mate like Adam? She sauntered up to him, swaying her hips in a way that was sure to get his attention.

“Hey babe. What do you say we take a dip in the river? It's going to be a hot one today.” She batted her eyes at Adam.

He stopped what he was doing and looked up. “Hmm. That sounds enticing. Give me a few more minutes. I've got to finish recording the yield for these trees. It's the end of the month already.” He winked at her. “Can't wait to join you.”

Eve giggled. “Ok. Is there anything I can do to help speed up the process?”

“Sure is. I would love it if you would climb up that tallest one and give me an estimate of how much ripe fruit you see. You are so much better at climbing trees and estimating than I am. I get lost in the details and can't make up my mind.”

“Absolutely! I'll have estimates for you in no time.” Eve quickly selected a tall tree with good climbing branches. Her physical prowess and delight in being up high were perfect attributes for this assignment. She reached the top of the tree and began calling out rough estimates of ripe fruit to Adam. He could hardly keep up with her as he pounded away on his slate.

Finally she descended the tree and brushed her hands off. “All done. I’m going to head over to the river while you’re finishing up. Ok?”

Adam got up and gave Eve a big hug. “Thanks! You saved me so much time. Father will be pleased. I’ll see you in a little bit.”

She headed off, stopping here and there to pick a flower and weave it into her hair. *He always notices when I fix my hair a new way.* She saw the Tree of Life ahead of her and noticed that the new fruit was just beginning to bud. She knew it wouldn’t be ripe yet for a few days. *I’m looking forward to the new fruit this month. How exciting that every month there’s something new to enjoy.* She hummed a little tune as she ambled on the soft grass.

Her eyes turned to that crooked tree, the one Adam had pointed out to her. What did he call it? Oh yes, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. What was the rule about it? She frowned, trying to remember. She pictured Adam’s sweet face clouding up when he warned her against this tree. Oh yes, there was only one rule, don’t eat this fruit. So easy to remember. She was glad her husband helped her remember the details. Approaching the crooked tree, she felt a deep trepidation bubbling up inside of her. It was dark here, the leaves didn’t look healthy, but the fruit was an amazing shade of deep red. The sun seemed to disappear behind a cloud and a chilly breeze lifted her hair.

“It’sss a beautiful day, isssn’t it?”

Eve heard the voice and looked around but she didn’t see anyone. “I don’t see you, where are you?” Stooping, she looked under the tree, to her right and left.

“I’m up here. In the tree.”

Eve raised her eyes to the top of the tree. There, winding itself around the branches was the most beautiful creature she had ever seen. He was long and slender and his body was covered with a rainbow of shiny scales. Every imaginable hue was rippling and glowing as he slithered. When the creature moved the light played off his body in a mesmerizing way.

“Oh, there you are. I’m Eve. Who are you?”

“I know who you are. I’ve been watching you. You mussst be bored, living in thiss ssspectacular garden but not being able to eat any of its lusciousss fruit.”

A little shiver went up Eve’s spine and she shook her head at this. “No, actually you’ve got it wrong. We can eat any of the fruit here. Except for the fruit from this tree.” She pointed to the tree, but then pulled away. “Father said we can eat any fruit but this one. He said if we ate this fruit we would die.”

The creature slithered closer to Eve, his upper body swinging in the air near her nose. “Oh sssweetie! You sssurely will not die! Father knowsss that the minute you eat thiss fruit, you will have greater awarenesss, you will be like the Father. You will have wissdom like He doesss, and you will know the difference between good and evil.” He nudged a ripe, juicy piece of the red fruit with his nose.

Eve noticed that the fruit was beautiful. It looked ripe, and Father said to wait for the fruit to ripen before eating it. But all the fruit in the garden was beautiful and good to eat. Remembering Adam’s warning about

this tree, she decided to ask Adam what he thought. *I bet the creature is lying to me. He said I wouldn't die, but Adam told me I would.*

Just then she heard a rustle behind her. She turned and saw Adam approaching. He shook his head no and reached his hand toward her. She didn't hesitate a second. She reached her hand out to her wonderful mate, they clasped hands and walked away.



NEXT STEPS

We hope this eBook provided some practical, doable steps for you and your partner to grow better together. The steps aren't really that complex or hard to understand. But we find that some couples still struggle to follow them because of their mindset. Sometimes, years of conflict can create patterns of disharmony in a couple. As we mentor couples, we find that those who have the right mindset are guaranteed to succeed in improving their marriage, no matter how ingrained the patterns are.

What is the right attitude? There are many places in the Bible that give us clues. Let's take a look at a couple of them.

"Therefore become imitators of God [copy Him and follow His example], as well-beloved children [imitate their father]; and walk continually in love [that is, value one another—practice empathy and compassion, unselfishly seeking the best for others], just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God [slain for you, so that it became] a sweet fragrance." Ephesians 5:1-2 AMPC

Becoming an imitator of God sounds like a monumental task. But if we start by embracing and receiving God's love ourselves, we will learn how to love others in unselfish ways. Spend time alone with God, listen to His voice, and receive His unconditional love for you. Once we are secure in God's love for us, it's much easier to extend that love to our spouse. God encourages us to value one another, to honor and respect other people even if they are very different from us. *Especially* if they are different from us!

"be constantly renewed in the spirit of your mind [having a fresh mental and spiritual attitude], and put on the new nature (the regenerate self) created in God's image, [Godlike] in true righteousness and holiness." Ephesians 4:23-24 AMPC.

The old self is the part of me that wants to stay the way I am, to make other people accommodate me, to be selfish, and to be in control, not listening to God and not loving other people. The new self is the Holy Spirit in me, helping me to grow to be more like Jesus, to love other people sacrificially. We begin this process of change when we make a commitment to follow Jesus. The process is a long one, we don't perfectly change, but have many ups and downs. And we won't reach our goal of being like Jesus until we are in Heaven. But we can make progress during our lifetime, and each time we advance in being renewed, our marriage can improve.

INVITE: Your partner's input and ideas even if they conflict with your own. Ask them how they would feel if things changed.

REFLECT: How could I lean towards my partner, adjust a little to move out of the extremes of my personality traits?

REMEMBER: Our best traits – our gifts – can become our worst faults when we take them to the extreme and exaggerate them!

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Our story began in 1976, when we charged into marriage naively thinking we were in the driver's seat of life. By God's grace, he wooed us and called us to follow him after eighteen years of doing it on our own. Our greatest joy is sharing the wisdom God has given us about forgiveness, healing, and destiny, especially as it applies to marriage.

We're the proud parents of two married children and two amazing grandsons. We are living in Act II, aka retirement. Act II is where all the redemption, resolution, and especially the good ending happens. To keep us moving in Act II, we set a goal to hike ten miles in every state. We've completed thirty-five states so far.

We lead the Marriage Mentor team at the Orion, Michigan campus of Kensington Church. We train other mentors, serve couples in crisis, and nurture a space where marriages can thrive in community.

Deb has been an inspirational Christian speaker since 2006. She's the author of *Making Peace with Prickly People: Transforming Relationships by Loving God, Self, and Others*. It includes a personality assessment and a downloadable study guide for small groups.

Deb also published *Mindful: Meditate & Color Your Way to Life-Giving Relationships*. It's a thirty-day devotional and companion to the above book.

Bruce has an undergraduate degree in Industrial Administration and an MBA from Wharton. He worked for forty-seven years in technology and start-up companies, primarily in the field of robotics. He spent a little more than half of that time as CEO and the rest as CFO. As a result, Bruce has extensive experience in public speaking.

For upcoming works and information on speaking engagements, visit <http://marriagementoring.info/>.