



THE *Artist* AND THE
Minstrel

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The Artist and the Minstrel

The artist awoke in the wee hours of the morning as usual. He pulled himself out of bed, into the delivery truck, and settled in for the drive to work. It was dark. Wisps of snow blew across the northern Indiana highway. The artist's vocation was a baker. But under his baker's hat lived the heart and soul of an artist. For while his display case was full of donuts, pies, and éclairs, his craft was wedding cakes. His art was on display every weekend of the year in reception halls throughout the tri-state area. The baker was an artist.

The artist had a daughter. She grew up in a small town with an innocence of time and place that is largely forgotten now. Bouncing along ancient sidewalks on her bicycle, sharing a soda with a kindly neighbor, and running errands for her mother reflect a unique point in time for small-town America. Her conformity to the expectations of childhood left her gift largely undiscovered.

The daughter had inherited the unique and powerful artist gift. She carried the gift to college where she pursued a fine arts degree. But something not totally unexpected happened along the way. The artist ran into a roadblock. She discovered that artists don't like canned assignments and working under a deadline. Artists don't perform well under the cut and dried college semester system that requires grade point averages and systematic course work. As most artists do, she dropped out.

Encouraged by her father to pursue the upward mobility that was largely unavailable to his generation, she decided to complete a degree in something. So she chose the most creative and artistic science available to her: she graduated college with a degree in geology. To the general public, a geologist is first and foremost a scientist, but to those of us in the profession who marvel at a well drawn geologic map of Yellowstone Park, or the beauty of a road cut through a structurally-complex geologic feature, the practice of geology is to experience art at nature's best.

While in college, the artist met a young man from similar stock. He too had grown up in a small Indiana farming community and found his way to college as a mathematics major. Realizing he was too shy to teach and not seeing much else for a math major to do, he switched to geology as a course of study. His plan was to become a prospector; a loner. He would head to the Brooks Range of northern Alaska and look for gold. He would live in a log cabin and only come "outside" once in a while to visit his mother.

The young man did not have the artist gift. His path to geology was that of a scientist. Because of his personality, the scientist was alone. He was aloof and afraid at the same time, and he was lonely. He hid his loneliness under a hearty laugh and a quick joke. Despite the hamstring of his shy personality, the young man was a very optimistic person. He saw the good in everyone he met, sometimes to his own hurt, and generally celebrated where he had been while looking forward to better times. The artist was alone due to her giftedness. Alone is what artists do. When these two students met, the artist made the first move. She captured and captivated the young man and before long the two became one and were married.

As is often the case, the first few weeks, months, and years of marriage included what some might refer to as a "bait and switch." The young man found that the artist gift with its creativity and thirst for adventure that attracted him to her also included a melancholic downside. Why was the artist so rarely happy? The artist discovered she had not married a down-to-earth scientist at all. Best she could tell, she had married a minstrel. You know, that Middle Ages type who always had a song in his head and a skip in his step and lived above the day-to-day duties expected of him. His spontaneity and joy that excited her early on was now a challenge to moving their marriage and family life forward. Did this fellow have a lick of common sense?

Time passed. The couple settled into the busyness that is family life. Disagreements became more of a normal occurrence, but were quickly buried under the to-do list for the week ahead. Their marriage which had begun with a love that was naïve but powerful and genuine, was in trouble. As a testimony to their deep and abiding love, they kept their vows of commitment to each other. But their personality differences with the artist's driving passion and the minstrel's streak of laziness almost proved too much. They literally woke up one morning and looked at each other, silently asking, "Are you my friend or enemy?"

Does this story have a familiar ring to you? Many of us have found ourselves in this exact situation. As you have probably surmised by now, this is our story. My wife, Rhonda, is an artist. I am a minstrel. Several years ago, Rhonda was reading to our children from a history book. As the book described various types of medieval characters, she came to the minstrel description. One of our kids immediately reacted, "That sounds just like Daddy!" The outburst was both insightful and accurate. I've been known as the minstrel ever since. (At least I wasn't identified as the court jester!)

For the remainder of this story, I would like to describe what happened when the artist and the minstrel began to understand what made them so different. And more importantly, what happened when they made a commitment to look for and bring out the best of their different personalities. Our hope is that the story of the artist and the minstrel will be a source of encouragement to you. It is a story that transformed our marriage and how we looked at each other. I can honestly say the enemies we used to wake up next to have disappeared.

The artist

Are you an artist? Are you married to one? It is dangerous to paint any personality type with too broad a brush, and we all have unique nuances that separate us from the catalog of classified personalities. But there are lessons to learn from these generalizations.

As a rule, most personality types can be separated into one of four categories which have come to be known by various names and descriptions. In short, we view the personality types as project-oriented vs. people-oriented, and fast vs. deliberate. In a former time, these personality types were called the four temperaments: Choleric, Sanguine, Phlegmatic, and Melancholy. In modern times, many systems have been devised to say basically the same thing. The well known DISC system used in many work settings can be summarized as Dominance (fast and project-oriented), Influence (fast and people-oriented), Steadiness (deliberate and people-oriented), and Conscientiousness (deliberate and project-oriented).

The person who is project-oriented and fast is labeled a *Choleric*, or a 'D' in the DISC system. These strong-willed, hard chargers like accepting challenges, taking action, and getting immediate results. The fast person who is people-oriented is a *Sanguine*, or an 'I' in the DISC system. This person likes participating on teams, sharing ideas, and energizing and entertaining others. You might recognize them in your workplace as the ones who are eager to organize a birthday party for your co-workers. The *Phlegmatic*, or 'S' personality is people-oriented and deliberate. They like working behind the scenes, performing in a consistent manner, and being good listeners. Although it is the 'D' types who assume they are going to the top of the corporate ladder, the 'S' type is the most common personality for corporate CEOs. Deliberate and people-oriented wins the management race. The fourth class of personality type is the *Melancholy* (not exactly as we use the word today), or 'C' personality type. This is the deliberate, project-oriented personality. These folks are sticklers for quality. They like to plan ahead, employ systematic approaches, and check for accuracy. The adventurous side of 'C' types might deliberately run their car out of gas to check the exact capacity of their car's fuel tank.

As we laugh about some of the idiosyncrasies of these personality types, we run the danger of thinking our type is somehow superior as we turn a blind eye to our own shortcomings. We look down

on other personalities as having signs of laziness, selfishness, or perfectionism. In the workplace this can be disruptive. In a marriage, it can be deadly.

The artist I married is the deliberate, project-oriented type. While we use the term “project-oriented” to understand the classification system, this does not mean these folks do not care about people. A crowded get-together may not be their first choice on how to spend an evening, but the project person can be very engaging and warm, and their creativity has a way of drawing people who are fascinated by them and their projects. In fact, it is exactly their love for the people close to them that drives them to put their project focus to work in trying to “fix” the people they care about. “Because I care about you, I want to help you fix your personality, your quirks, your foibles.” Artists tend to underestimate the frailty of the human condition and assume your situation would improve if you just knew the right thing to do. While we may accuse them of demanding perfection in others, they are hardest on themselves. Hence, the word melancholy in the fullest of its meanings often applies to the artist.

The artist I married is a genius in her work, but she doesn’t celebrate it much. The project-oriented person only celebrates when the project (decorating a house, raising a child, landscaping a garden, growing a marriage) is complete. But in an ironic twist, the artist rarely labels the project finished. The artist does not accept mediocre work. Therefore, there is always one more “brushstroke” to add to the “painting” to make it more complete. One of the things I used to tell my wife was, “Anything worth doing is worth doing poorly.” She understood that to be an excuse for my mediocre work around the house. But its translation for the artists we know is, “Anything worth doing is worth doing even if I can’t do it perfectly.” If I wait until I can be sure of success before I make the effort, I may never try some worthwhile things, or additionally, if I wait to celebrate until perfection is achieved, I will not recognize a cause for rejoicing in the baby steps along the way.

The minstrel

The minstrel my wife married is mostly a Phlegmatic with a little learned Sanguine thrown in. He is people-oriented but usually pretty slow about the whole business. The minstrel is often late to work and this habit is impossible for the artist to understand. But it looks something like this. The minstrel doesn’t get up as early as he planned for reasons known only to himself. Before leaving the house, he visits too long with his wife, as this people-oriented person is probably trying to convince her to agree with him on some minor issue. Even though he doesn’t have time, he needs to stop for gas. He noticed the need for gas last evening, but procrastinators never act on the first notice. He runs into a traffic jam on the freeway, putting him further behind. Despite the fact that traffic is bad four out of five days a week, the minstrel stubbornly refuses to plan for that likelihood. His optimistic nature flies in the face of common sense and he thinks today there will be no traffic problems.

The minstrel my wife married is always looking for a reason to celebrate. The minstrel breaks into song at the half-way point of a job being done. Who celebrates when half the job is left to do? The minstrel does. The minstrel rewards the effort more than the result, even when the effort could have been better. Artists are more interested in the outcome than the process. Minstrels want everyone to be happy during the process. Minstrels don’t offer a “fix” to people’s shortcomings because, to the detriment of themselves as well as the person in question, they see the good in people even when it is not there.

So, what happens when these two personalities face off in the daily task of family life? What specific challenges do their differences bring to their marriage? Let’s explore how an artist and minstrel separately approach the common areas of conflict in marriage.

Common areas of conflict

Our first challenge is the fundamental area of setting goals. The artist seeks tangible goals. As a project-oriented person, she works well with goals, breaking them down into manageable steps. As an artist, she has a view of what the finished product should look like from a kitchen design to a child growing into adulthood. She recognizes the small steps in the right direction that will be necessary to reach the goal. The minstrel agrees with the artist on the need for goals. In fact, the minstrel likes to embrace big goals. This was one of the ironies that stumped us when our marriage first ran into the rocks. How can two people with basically the same goals for their children and marriage, have such fundamentally different views on how to get there? We soon learned the role our personalities play in defining our preferred approach.

At a personality level, the minstrel embraces big goals but hasn't a clue what steps are required to get there. I have to admit this lack of common sense is sometimes the laziness of not wanting to work on the in-between steps. The goal-oriented artist wants to plan ahead, breaking things up into daily and weekly goals to accomplish hopes and dreams for the upcoming year. The minstrel has more of a "live for today" attitude which is refreshing and spontaneous to some extent, but can also lead to inaction on the necessary course.

A similar area of conflict is decision making. Rhonda likes to make decisions. I haven't made a decision in 6 weeks. Rhonda likes to make decisions based on facts. I like to make decisions based on feelings. Rhonda likes to make decisions based on searching out information. I like to make decisions based on consensus. What does everyone involved think? Rhonda likes to take the lead in making decisions. I'm content to follow. Our different approach to decision making affects both the big and small decisions on our marriage.

For example, here is a situation that really emphasized our differences early on in our marriage. When are the kids going to bed? As a project person, Rhonda wants to make a decision based on knowledge. What would be the best bedtime for the children's health and well being, our alone time as a couple, and Rhonda's sanity? As a people person, I am more interested in building consensus, keeping everyone happy, and avoiding conflict, so bedtime had a tendency to slip later and later. It is embarrassing to say looking back how long it took me to see the value of better sleep habits. Our junior high kids were asking, "What's wrong with this picture? We are going to bed earlier than when we were little." I told them it was a health issue.

One of the most common areas of conflict in marriage is money. I do not want to discount the effect of our upbringing and nurturing environment on our approach to money or any of these areas of conflict, but again, our experience has been that our personality differences are the primary stressors on our marriage and the pocketbook is no exception. In fact, the differences between the project and people persons can be very stark.

The artist or project person wants to spend the money on their art, their projects. Artists have big plans and big plans usually require big money. Artists want to remodel, landscape, and decorate. (HGTV, by the way, is like pouring gasoline on the artist's fire for projects.) The person without the artist bent, the minstrel in this case, sees the desire of the artist for projects as just that: a desire. And desires are choices, and choices that are unnecessary can be said "no" to. What the minstrel in me was slow to recognize is that the desire to create is not some selfish extension of the artist's privileged childhood or some peripheral extravagance. The desire to create is literally a "need to create." The artist was created to create. When we squelch the artist in our wife or husband, we are in essence denying who they really are.

Artists who struggle with the financial limitations that we all face can place a huge stress on their marriage. Driving the family into debt while insisting on their projects cannot be rationalized by their "need to create." The wise artist sees value in saving up for the projects she has in mind. This is where the live-for-today minstrel often throws up a roadblock. His lack of planning for the future sends

the available cash to the spend-for-today fun category and there just never seems to be enough left at the end of the month to earmark for upcoming projects. The projects to be saved for are not all creative home projects. They include saving for college, saving for weddings, saving for retirement, and saving for repairs. (A quirk about minstrels and repairs is that they live under the illusion that nothing mechanical is ever going to break. Their optimistic nature is shocked when a car needs repairing or a 20-year-old washing machine needs to be replaced.)

When a minstrel finds himself in a financial bind (often due to his own lack of planning), he is quick to announce to the family, "We can only spend money on the necessities for the next 6 months." In essence, he is saying to his artist spouse, "Put your personality on hold and, by the way, the things I determine are necessities are where the money will be going." The minstrel expects his artist wife to buy into his plan as they rally the family together to get back on a solid financial footing. Because she has seen this movie before, she fears the 6 months will turn into 6 years. But out of respect or fear, or maybe not even knowing what is gnawing at her, she silently tries to comply.

Finally, let's touch on one more area of potential conflict. The topic is parenting. Again, I do not want to minimize the influence of our own parents on our parenting style, but as I have said before, our personalities are the elephants in the room. The artist and the minstrel have all kinds of agreement on the big goals. We want to raise children who become mature, independent adults. We want our adult children to contribute to society, to practice habits of integrity, loyalty, and compassion. We want to have healthy family relationships that cause us to embrace our family identity and enjoy each other's company.

The artist sees the finished product in her mind and is used to placing the inanimate objects where they best serve the decorative purpose. With children, this can lead to an authoritative approach: if I can make my kids do A, B, and C, they will turn out like D. The project person often takes an if-then, black and white approach to parenting. While parental control is a crucial factor in successful child training, too much of a project-oriented approach has the potential to damage the relationship.

The minstrel takes a people-oriented approach to child training. I can be my child's friend and authority figure at the same time. I believe developing a relationship with my child is more important than establishing rules of control. The compassion the minstrel brings to the parenting equation, which is a significant blessing, is also his biggest liability. Because he wants to believe the best about everybody, especially his kids, and wants everyone to be happy and buy into his plan, the minstrel can be very slow to recognize behavior issues that need to be addressed. He can also miss common sense issues of expecting more maturity as his children get older, and assigning greater responsibility as they prepare for adulthood.

The resolution

Fifteen years and five children into our marriage, we were hit with a tidal wave. Our personality differences had driven a wedge into our marriage that threatened, if not its life, certainly its health. What Rhonda and I discovered and purposed to do revolutionized our marriage. We offer our experience to you in the hope that you can realize a greater health and positive direction in your own marriage.

Our first sign of hope in our recovering marriage was to recognize our personality differences and to go a step further. We consciously chose to not only identify our personalities, but to celebrate and embrace what they bring to the table in our marriage. Did you hear that? We celebrated and embraced each other's personalities, gifts, talents, and bents. In short, we accepted each other's default mode. We did not rank one of our personalities as better than the other. One bent is not wrong and the other right. We are just different. And we soon learned that our differences can blend to make us strong.

What does this look like in the challenging areas of marriage that we have been talking about? Here are some practical ways we have embraced what we both have to offer in terms of resolving our conflicts and moving forward together. In the areas of setting goals, I have become a devoted fan of Rhonda's ability to see the road ahead. We set family goals together as she helps me appreciate the small steps necessary to arrive at the place we both desire. She has helped me understand that reaching milestones requires scheduling, and rarely are goals reached by seat-of-the-pants thinking. Her goal setting example is great for our children to observe and learn.

For her part, Rhonda consciously looks for the plus side of my spontaneity rather than the frustration factor it used to be. My schedule is not tightly wound. I always have time for her and our children. We have time for interruptions where often our best teaching and service occur. She sees the value of leaving some duties undone to focus on relationships.

Our decision making as a couple has vastly improved. Rhonda sees that my desire for her and our kids' happiness drives my decision thinking. My goal to build consensus leads to affirming our children. It also builds family unity and ownership in family decisions. On the flip side, just like our goal setting, Rhonda's project approach to decision making pushes us to well-thought-out and often quicker decisions. This keeps our family moving forward in a direction we both want to see.

What about the money? Are we making progress? We now work together on a monthly spending plan. By tracking our spending, Rhonda is better able to plan when projects are a possibility. It also helps her see areas where she can affect our spending patterns to free up money for projects. It has helped her work alongside me to right the fiscal ship when her project plans are financially unattainable. Our spending plan has brought some reality therapy to the artist's "if they can conceive it, they can achieve it" approach to finances.

For my part, I now recognize that Rhonda's desire to take on projects is part of who she is. It is part of her essence as a person. I demonstrate love to Rhonda when I help us achieve financial goals that leave room for her creativity to flourish. For over 20 years, our dream of building a house was on hold. Rhonda's patience as she collected magazine clippings of room arrangements and house plans was extraordinary. We waited to build until we could afford the home that was in the artist's mind. The result is a beautiful expression of Rhonda's creativity. I often told her in the building process, "If you can think of it and we can afford it, go for it. To limit your creativity now would be like giving Van Gogh half a color palette to work with." I couldn't have said that early in our marriage. I would have been questioning her creative decisions with, "Is that really necessary? Does it really need to be that special?" You know the drill.

We have also come together in our approach to child training. Combining the project and people strengths of the two of us has sharpened our focus for the good of our children. We have learned to balance the message to our children. We convey to them that we love them. You may think this is naturally understood by your child, but it needs to be said and demonstrated over and over. The message your children need to hear is, "I love you. I love you more than you can know. You can never lose my love. I would choose you over all others. I love you."

An equally important message for your children to hear is, "I am in charge. I am in control. I demonstrate my love by taking charge. I lead because I am the mature one." This balance of love and control places your children in an affirming environment that will serve them well. It will also give them the confidence to give themselves away in loving relationships.

We also have come up with code words when the downside of our personalities gets in the way of our parenting goals. One of our kids would come to me at 8:00 P.M. on a Thursday evening and ask, "Can we go to a movie?" A ridiculous question on a school night, right? Not if your father is a minstrel and you try to sway him with how well you have done all week on your school work and how diligent you will be tomorrow. Rhonda would look over the top of her glasses and silently say, "This is a good time to NOT be the minstrel."

Or maybe it was a house cleaning Saturday. After 2 hours of work by five kids and two adults, the place looked good. But the artist always sees one more thing to be done and literally could extend the work all day. I would have to remind Rhonda, "This would be a good time for the artist to call it a day." By using the words minstrel and artist at appropriate times, we remind ourselves to come back to the balance we seek in our marriage.

Embracing the strengths that we each bring to the table in our parenting has raised the joy factor in our family. We celebrate small victories in our family as they happen. If we wait to celebrate until all the work is done, the victory may pass without applause. We seek the balance between developing a relationship with our child and establishing rules of control.

Something to talk about

Good communication in marriage is the launch pad for our new found commitment to embracing our differences. My number one goal now in our communication as a couple is to understand my wife, not prove my opinion. And we will arrive at a beautiful place of oneness in our marriage if we go through the hard conversations that improve our understanding of each other. Demanding my point of view builds walls. Looking out for the benefit of the other melts conflict. Remember good communication only happens when the listener understands the words of the speaker as the speaker intended them to be understood.

Let me give you an example. It's Friday evening. Rhonda and I agree that we should spend our Saturday working on the landscaping. The flower beds need to be weeded, raked out, and have a general good clean up. Saturday morning arrives. The artist sees the finished project in her mind and knows the diligence it will take to get there, so she is early out in the garage gathering the tools. The minstrel decides to sleep a little later. After all, he has been going against his nature all week rising early for the drive to work and enjoys the little extra sleep. When he does get up, the minstrel decides to make pancakes for breakfast, something he thinks everyone will enjoy on a Saturday morning. He can't understand the artist's frustration when he tries to deliver her some pancakes in the back yard. He thought he was doing her a favor.

Before going out to join his wife, the minstrel gets a call that one of the kids who was at an overnighter needs to be picked up. He runs the errand and on the way home remembers he was going to get a haircut today. So he drops junior off and goes back to the barber shop. After looking for some lunch, playing a game with one of the kids, and checking the college football scores, the minstrel emerges from the house ready to join the artist in her work. For some reason the artist blows up and the afternoon's work is done in silence. Why is the artist never happy?

Good communication only happens when the listener understands the words of the speaker as the speaker intended them to be understood. When Rhonda suggested we work in the yard tomorrow, she was saying, "Let's focus on the landscaping tomorrow. That means we rise early, work diligently, and make it the number one goal above all others until the job is complete." What I heard her say was, "Tomorrow, when we have some free time, when we are not doing anything else, let's go outside and work on the landscaping." The listener did not understand the words of the speaker as they were intended to be understood. We often blame this lack of understanding on laziness, stubbornness, or just plain not listening. But this misunderstanding is also colored by our personality.

We have found that the best way to communicate with understanding is to set some ground rules. First, view your communication as an opportunity to serve rather than manipulate. Speak respectfully. Our goal is to improve the situation, not reject the other's thoughts. Second, focus on each other. The physical act of looking at each other may sound trite but is crucial. Remove the distractions of television or other things going on. Next, agree to accept each other's feelings. What to us may seem an innocent response or come-back can send the message of rejecting our spouse's

feelings when we are quick to defend, attack, or correct. We accept feelings when we seek clarification and reflect back what we think we are hearing. Don't speak in anger. Anger is a destructive force that can be compared to driving under the influence. It impairs our decision making and leads to comments we regret.

Finally, allow the other person to change. Don't make assumptions about what your spouse is going to say or think. Leave out words like always and never. The biggest crises we face in marriage happen when we lose the expectation of change in ourselves and our spouse. When the hope of change is gone, it starts us on a downward slide of losing not only our expectation of change, but also our own desire to change and we are left with the six deadliest words in marriage, "That's just the way I am." (Or said about our spouse, "You always...you never...you will never change.") When we give up on change, we may think our marriage is simply standing still, but in reality, it is flying down the road in reverse.

Free to love

I have often attempted to tell my wife that I am sorry for the "bait and switch" I put her through. But she is always more than gracious with my apologies. She says, "Your personality is nothing you have to apologize for. Besides, even if I didn't identify you as a minstrel by name, I knew very clearly what I was getting into." Upon hearing this, I inquired, "If you were aware of how severe our personality differences were, why did you agree to go through with the marriage?" She replied, "I said 'Yes' because you were the most genuine person I had ever met and our love was deep. I also believed it would only take me a week or two to change you. That was my mistake."

Can change happen? The hope for change is one of the expectations that fuels improvement in our marriage. Yes, change happens. Of course, there are aspects of our personality framework that will never change. We cannot deny a fundamental side of who we are. But we can minimize the negative traits of our personalities by recognizing where they get in the way of growth. And we can focus on the strengths that our gifts bring to the relationship. Recognizing the howling winds that our personality differences sent swirling through our marriage was the first step to change in our relationship.

The most crucial step, however, to true change for us came in the hearing, recognizing, and embracing the gospel message of Jesus Christ. This message, so misunderstood in today's caricature version, is literally good news for hurting people. The gospel message as demonstrated and proclaimed by Jesus Christ is a message of love, hope, and forgiveness. When I embrace this message, I am set free from the power of selfishness that formerly ruled my life and made me a prisoner of my personality.

In our natural frame of mind, we are all about our own self-development, our own selfish ambition. Marriage taken to the highest level of satisfaction is not based on selfish ambition at all. It is built on love and humility. Not a love that only emphasizes the physical, or a humility of groveling or being subservient. True love and true humility are words of strength for they can only be understood and practiced when we have conquered our last enemy: ourselves! Can we be set free from the limitations of ourselves?

When we hear the word freedom, we often think in terms of politics. As part of a democracy, we are a free people. Or we equate freedom with a suspension of the rules. Teenagers are keen on gaining their freedom by having the house rules lifted as they get older. Or we think in terms of morality, wishing we could act any way we please free from the ethics of our society, religion, or peers. Can this be true freedom?

The message of Jesus Christ teaches us that true freedom does not equal autonomy. Complete freedom in terms of total autonomy from any master, motivation, or influence is not an option for us in the human race as much as we like to think it is. We are all servants of something or someone. In our natural state, we are servants of our selfish nature. Just as cows eat grass because it is part of their nature, we commit acts of selfishness and harm because it is part of our sin nature. No one had to teach

us how to lie to smooth out a problem and stay out of trouble. It is part of our nature. No one has to teach a child to jump into the pool just after being told it is time for adult swim. It is in our nature.

That all changes, however, when we embrace the Christian message and become followers of Jesus Christ. We are no longer servants of our sin nature, but take on a new nature and a new master, Jesus Christ. Let's face it. Our own selfish nature is our worst enemy. And true freedom, the freedom offered by Jesus Christ when we embrace His message, is the power to live above our old nature. We have literally been set free from ourselves. True freedom is the power to love, to cherish, to protect, and to live in ways that are altruistic and morally beautiful.

Epilogue

I hesitate to call this the end of the story. The artist and the minstrel are still on the path to healing. But as any good minstrel will tell you, the progress so far is cause for celebration. In fact, those who see only the recovery side of our story may think we have lived a fairy tale existence. Of course, that is not true. We have experienced our share of chronic illness, financial setbacks, recalcitrant children, nagging sins, regrets, and personality challenges that threatened the very life of our marriage. But at the same time, we have found something that appears to be unique in this world: a family that has remained loyal to each other and truly enjoys each other's company. A family that feels the loss when someone is missing. A family that knows the joy that comes from following God's path, even when we did it stumbling and incomplete.

People say, "Well Jay, you just have a cheerful personality so it is obviously easier for you." While there is some truth to that, it is actually a small part of the puzzle. The bigger piece is dedicating ourselves, you and us, to recognizing the personality threats that challenge us. Embrace what you each bring to your marriage in the strengths of your personality. Admit and minimize the negative aspects of your personality. Commit yourselves to bring out the best of what you both have to contribute to your success in marriage, parenting, communication, oneness, finances, and decision making.

Sometimes, when I look at the world around me, I think maybe we have had a fairy tale existence. I prefer to call it being rescued, delivered, and blessed by the God we serve. And the beauty of it is that we are a witness that it is attainable. It doesn't only live in the world of storybooks. It lives in the place you call home.

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If you would like to continue the conversation about personality differences in marriage, please send us a note at: jayandrondalehman@att.net

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