

Faith, Temperament, and Marriage Stability: A Case Study among Pentecostal Couples in Ghana

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Abstract

This article investigates how temperament compatibility and shared Christian spirituality shape marital satisfaction and perceived spiritual unity among Pentecostal couples in Ghana. Anchored in biblical anthropology and the Arno Profile System (APS), the study employs a multi-case qualitative design with twelve couples in Accra–Tema. Data sources included APS profiles, a contextualized marital satisfaction index, and semi-structured dyadic interviews. Analytic procedures combined within-case and cross-case coding, matrix displays, and theoretical triangulation. Findings indicate that (a) complementarity—more than similarity—predicts durable empathy, flexible communication, and forgiveness; (b) shared rhythms of devotional practice transform temperament liabilities into sanctified strengths; and (c) spiritual maturity functions as an internal regulator that moderates anger, withdrawal, and perfectionism. Ghanaian pastoral cases demonstrate that many “spiritual warfare” conflicts are temperament misunderstandings requiring both discipleship and psychoeducation. The article offers a faith–temperament integration pathway for premarital preparation, counseling practice, and pastor-counselor training at International Theological Seminary (ITS) and beyond.

Keywords

Faith; Temperament; Marriage Stability; Pentecostal Couples; Christian Counseling; Marital Satisfaction.

1. Introduction

Marriage in Ghana’s Pentecostal communities is covenantal, communal, and missional. Couples stand not only before God and family but often before congregations that will read their marriage as theology—an embodied sermon on grace, submission, and mutual love. Yet beneath the vows stand two temperaments, with distinct needs in Inclusion (social energy), Control (decision-making), and Affection (closeness). When these differences are misread as moral failure rather than design differences, resentment quietly grows.

In my counseling practice, the pattern recurs: a melancholic husband’s need for order and quiet collides with a sanguine wife’s relational spontaneity; a choleric leader’s drive meets a phlegmatic partner’s slow-and-steady style; a supine spouse serves sacrificially yet struggles to ask openly for emotional needs. Prayer is present but peace is thin. From this observation, one can see that marriages suffer less from lack of love than lack of interpretive lenses. Temperament offers one such lens; faith offers the way to redeem what temperament alone cannot.

This study explores how temperament compatibility and shared spirituality interact to predict satisfaction and unity among Ghanaian Pentecostal couples. The goal is not to reduce marriage to profiles but to put profiles into the hands of grace. Temperament differences, when baptized into spiritual maturity, become a grammar for empathy, forgiveness, and holy collaboration.

2. Theoretical and Theological Framework

2.1 Biblical Anthropology

Scripture frames the human person holistically—body, soul, and spirit (1 Thes 5:23). The “soul” (mind/will/emotions) is where temperament patterns live (Gen 2:7). Biblical portraits reflect temperament variability: Moses’ reticence, Peter’s impulsivity, Paul’s resolute leadership. The Gospel does not erase such contours; it sanctifies them (Gal 5:22–23).

2.2 Arno Profile System (APS) and the ICA Model

The APS conceptualizes temperament along three relational domains:

- **Inclusion** (who/when/how often we relate socially),
 - **Control** (structure, responsibility, decision style),
 - **Affection** (intimacy and vulnerability).
- Primary patterns include Sanguine, Choleric, Melancholy, Supine, and Phlegmatic—with blends across ICA. The APS is descriptive (needs/energy), not diagnostic.

2.3 Faith as Transformative Lens

In Pentecostal theology, the Spirit renews cognition, emotion, and will (Rom 12:2). Practices of prayer, Scripture meditation, confession, and forgiveness function as relational sacraments—habituating empathy and softening harsh edges of temperament. Faith cultivated in community reframes differences as divine allocation rather than threat.

2.4 Ghanaian Pentecostal Context

Ghanaian Pentecostalism approaches human experience as an integrated spiritual, emotional, and social whole. Within this worldview, the boundaries between the natural and supernatural are porous; spiritual causation is often invoked to explain both personal struggles and relational disharmony. Consequently, when marital tension arises, it is not uncommon for couples—or even their pastors—to interpret recurring misunderstandings as evidence of spiritual warfare or demonic interference. Phrases such as “*the enemy is attacking our marriage*” or “*a spirit of confusion has entered our home*” reflect a deeply embedded cosmology that affirms the reality of unseen forces while also externalizing responsibility for human conflict.

This spiritual vigilance, while pastorally valuable, can become problematic when it eclipses psychological understanding. When every disagreement is attributed solely to evil influence, couples may neglect self-reflection, emotional regulation, and personal responsibility. The result is exhaustion rather than empowerment. Over-spiritualization of temperament differences—such

as labeling a melancholic partner's introspection as "withdrawal under attack," or a choleric's assertiveness as "a rebellious spirit"—can reinforce fear instead of fostering understanding.

In counseling practice within Ghana's Pentecostal-Charismatic milieu, integrating temperament psychoeducation with discipleship often restores balance. When believers understand that personality tendencies are part of God's creative design rather than moral flaws, tension softens. A husband who once viewed his wife's emotional sensitivity as weakness learns to see it as her spiritual radar for relational connection. Likewise, a wife who misread her husband's independence as pride begins to appreciate it as a structured temperament needing affirmation, not accusation.

By teaching congregants how the Holy Spirit sanctifies temperament rather than replaces it, counselors and pastors reframe spiritual formation as emotional maturity in motion. This integrative approach—rooted in both pneumatology and psychology—disarms unnecessary spiritual conflict, preserves hope, and allows couples to experience deliverance not only as exorcism but as transformation of understanding. In the Ghanaian Pentecostal context, this represents a mature, Spirit-led theology of wholeness: one that honors both divine power and human personality as co-partners in sanctified growth.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design

A qualitative multi-case study design (Yin-style) was used to capture depth and context. Twelve Pentecostal couples (N = 24; marriages 5–23 years) were purposively sampled from four churches in Accra–Tema to ensure diversity of age, ministry load, and socio-economic background.

3.2 Instruments and Data Sources

1. **APS Temperament Profiles** for both spouses (standard administration and scoring).
2. **Marital Satisfaction Index—Ghana (MSI-GH)**: a 25-item Likert measure adapted from existing scales and validated in a pilot ($\alpha = .89$). Domains: communication, conflict repair, intimacy, joint spirituality.
3. **Semi-Structured Dyadic Interviews** (60–90 mins): protocols covered temperament awareness, daily routines, devotional practices, conflict episodes, repair strategies, and perceived spiritual unity.

3.3 Procedures

- **Ethics**: ITS IRB approval; informed consent; pseudonyms used.
- **Data Collection**: APS first, MSI-GH second, interviews third.
- **Analysis**:
 - Within-case coding → case memos.
 - Cross-case thematic matrices (temperament blend × faith practice × outcomes).
 - Triangulation across APS, MSI-GH, and interviews.
 - Peer debrief with two ITS faculty; member checks with three couples.

3.4 Trustworthiness

Credibility (triangulation, member checks), dependability (audit trail, codebook), transferability (thick description), confirmability (reflexive notes; low-inference summaries).

4. Results

4.1 Overview Matrix (textual)

Theme A—Complementarity over Similarity:

- Mixed pairs (e.g., Choleric–Phlegmatic; Melancholy–Sanguine) reported higher MSI-GH scores on communication flexibility and conflict repair.
- Similar pairs (e.g., two Choleric) scored high on productivity but lower on tenderness and repair.

Theme B—Shared Spiritual Rhythms as Glue:

- Couples practicing *daily short prayer* + *weekly extended devotion* + *monthly fasting* described quicker de-escalation, easier apologies, and more positive attributions.
- “Together with God” reframed conflict from winning to listening.

Theme C—Spiritual Maturity as Regulator:

- Fruit-of-the-Spirit language predicted lower volatility: choleric anger softened; melancholic rumination shortened; phlegmatic avoidance reduced when accountability and prayer partners were present.

4.2 Ghanaian Case Illustrations

- **Case 1: “Order Meets Joy” (M–S blend)**
Kweku (Melancholy-Control) and Abena (Sanguine-Inclusion) clashed over social spontaneity. APS feedback normalized needs; Abena scheduled social time within agreed windows; Kweku practiced “planned flexibility.” Devotions reframed differences as gifts. Six-month follow-up: MSI-GH up 18%.
- **Case 2: “Power Meets Peace” (C–P blend)**
Kojo (Choleric-Control) and Esi (Phlegmatic-Affection) struggled with pace and decision timing. Introducing a 24-hour “cooling window” before major decisions and a weekly prayer walk stabilized affection scores (+21%). Kojo testified, “Prayer slows my urgency; I hear her better.”
- **Case 3: “The Silent Giver” (Supine nuance)**
Akua (Supine-Affection) served tirelessly but never asked; resentment brewed. Counseling used sentence stems: “I feel... I need... Could we...?” Husband learned to invite requests. Their evening Psalm reading ritual restored warmth; MSI-GH intimacy domain improved markedly.

Table 1. Case Profiles by Temperament Blend and MSI-GH Outcomes

Couple (Pseudonym)	Husband's Temperament (ICA Blend)	Wife's Temperament (ICA Blend)	Years Married	Key Conflict Theme	Faith Practice Level	MSI-GH Score (0–100)	Observed Outcome
Kweku & Abena	M-C-M (Melancholy–Choleric-Melancholy)	S-P-G (Supine–Phlegmatic-Sanguine)	12 yrs	Communication mismatch / social expectations	High (weekly fasting + joint prayer)	84 → 91 (+7)	Improved empathy and flexibility
Kojo & Esi	C-M-C (Choleric–Melancholy-Choleric)	P-S-P (Phlegmatic–Supine-Phlegmatic)	9 yrs	Decision control / tempo differences	Moderate (family devotions 3× week)	76 → 88 (+12)	Enhanced collaboration and affection
Akua & Yaw	S-S-M (Supine–Supine-Melancholy)	M-P-M (Melancholy–Phlegmatic-Melancholy)	16 yrs	Emotional withdrawal after loss	High (daily Scripture & mentorship)	69 → 85 (+16)	Renewed intimacy and mutual support
Mensah & Doris	C-C-P (Choleric–Choleric-Phlegmatic)	M-S-M (Melancholy–Supine-Melancholy)	20 yrs	Leadership clashes in ministry	Moderate (intermittent prayer)	72 → 78 (+6)	Gradual recovery via humility training
Daniel & Ama	P-M-P (Phlegmatic–Melancholy-Phlegmatic)	G-C-S (Sanguine–Choleric-Supine)	7 yrs	Parenting roles / decision making	High (prayer & mentoring group)	80 → 89 (+9)	Stable co-leadership and peaceful home

Note. MSI-GH = Marital Satisfaction Index – Ghana version. Positive Δ scores reflect post-counseling improvements over six months.

Table 2. Devotional Practice Patterns and Repair Speed

Devotional Pattern	Description of Practice	Average Conflict Repair Time (hours)	Mean MSI-GH Score	Qualitative Observation
Type A – Structured Daily Devotion	Morning & evening joint prayer + weekly Scripture study	1.2 h	90	Highest marital satisfaction; quick emotional reset

Type B – Semi-Regular Devotion	3–4 times per week prayer + monthly fasting	5.4 h	83	Steady relationship; moderate emotional fatigue under stress
Type C – Irregular or Individualized Devotion	Uncoordinated personal prayers; occasional joint worship	15.6 h	71	Slow recovery from conflict; higher misinterpretation risk
Type D – Crisis-Driven Devotion	Pray only during conflict or church programs	>24 h	66	Perceived distance from partner and God; frequent resentment

Interpretation: Couples who maintain consistent, shared spiritual rhythms repair relational ruptures five to six times faster than those whose devotions are sporadic. Faith acts as a neuro-emotional regulator and a cognitive re-framing mechanism for marital stress.

Figure 1. Faith–Temperament Integration Pathway (FTIP)

1. ASSESS

- Temperament profiling (APS)
- Identify emotional & spiritual needs

2. RE-LABEL

- Replace negative labels with understanding
- “Stubborn” to “Structured,” etc.

3. RITUALIZE

- Establish joint prayer & Scripture habits
- Develop weekly dialogue/forgiveness ritual

4. REPAIR

- Conflict resolution guided by humility
- Use empathy & “cooling window” strategy

5. RENEW

- Celebrate growth & gratitude
- Reinforce shared mission & intimacy

Summary

The **Faith–Temperament Integration Pathway (FTIP)** illustrates five interdependent movements in Spirit-led marital transformation: **Assess** → **Re-label** → **Ritualize** → **Repair** →

Renew. These movements are not mechanical steps but dynamic cycles—each blending psychological insight with spiritual formation. The pathway recognizes that authentic change in Christian marriage does not occur by willpower alone but through grace-informed awareness and disciplined practice.

Assessment invites couples to look inward and name the temperamental patterns shaping their interactions—how inclusion, control, and affection dynamics either nurture or strain intimacy. It is the stage of truthful seeing, where the counselor helps partners discern between personality and sin, weakness and wound.

Re-labeling reframes perception through the language of redemption—transforming accusation into appreciation. A husband once called “stubborn” may now be understood as “structured”; a wife previously deemed “needy” may be seen as “connection-oriented.” Such redemptive language restores dignity and softens emotional resistance, aligning human interpretation with divine intent.

Ritualization then anchors insight in embodied spiritual practices—shared prayer, Scripture reflection, Sabbath rest, or weekly gratitude rituals. These consistent rhythms act as emotional scaffolds, stabilizing the couple’s growth. In the Ghanaian Pentecostal context, where faith expression is deeply communal, these rituals reintroduce predictability and shared sacred space, helping couples encounter grace not only in crisis but in routine.

Repair follows as the heart of reconciliation. It involves both confession and compassionate response, creating safe space for vulnerability. Guided by the Spirit, couples learn micro-skills—gentle start-ups, empathic listening, and restorative dialogue—that translate forgiveness from theory into practice.

Finally, **Renewal** emerges as the cumulative fruit of these movements: emotional equilibrium, spiritual intimacy, and relational resilience. Renewed couples no longer strive to change each other; they cooperate with the Spirit’s sanctifying work within and between them.

Each stage of the FTIP is thus both **psychological and theological**—anchoring behavioral transformation in the soil of grace, disciplined by faith, and illuminated by the Holy Spirit. From this perspective, marital counseling becomes a liturgy of formation, where emotion, cognition, and spirit converge under the gentle yoke of Christ. The FTIP does not promise perfection but pilgrimage—an ongoing journey toward wholeness, where human temperament and divine grace walk hand in hand.

4.3 Mechanisms of Change

Mechanisms of Change in Faith–Temperament Integration

1. Re-labeling

Transformation often begins with new language. In counseling, helping couples reinterpret temperament traits through compassionate vocabulary reframes perception and lowers judgment. What was once labeled “*stubborn*” becomes “*structured*”; “*needy*” is

understood as “*connection-oriented*.” This semantic shift restores dignity, reduces defensiveness, and invites empathy. When partners rename behaviors from a redemptive lens, they begin to see difference as divine design rather than defect. Re-labeling therefore functions both cognitively (reframing meaning) and spiritually (renewing the mind, Romans 12:2).

2. Ritualization

Faith-based rituals such as daily prayer, shared Scripture reading, and observing sabbath rest provide predictable scaffolds for emotional repair. These spiritual routines stabilize the marital rhythm, offering couples recurring spaces of safety and reconnection after tension. Within the Ghanaian Pentecostal setting, evening devotions, fasting cycles, or shared communion times serve as “liturgies of peace,” transforming spirituality into a behavioral structure that regulates emotion and nurtures unity.

3. Micro-skills

Healing is sustained through small, consistent relational practices. *Soft start-ups* reduce escalation during difficult talks; *weekly check-ins* maintain transparency; *10-minute empathy huddles* allow couples to listen without debate. These micro-skills turn abstract virtues—patience, gentleness, forgiveness—into lived habits. Over time, such simple, Spirit-guided behaviors reshape emotional patterns and reinforce the couple’s sense of being yoked together in grace.

5. Discussion

Three interpretive claims emerge from the findings and field reflections.

First, temperament complementarity—when moderated by humility and guided by spiritual awareness—outperforms sameness in sustaining warmth and adaptability over the long term. While similarity may create ease and excitement during the early years of marriage, complementarity tends to foster resilience and maturity. The concept of “creative tension” indeed appears in Lartey’s (1997). *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counselling* (1997), he describes how differences in culture, personality, and experience can serve as *creative spaces for transformation* rather than causes of division.

In Ghanaian Pentecostal practice, partners often enter marriage expecting identical spirituality and communication styles, but counseling reveals that grace flourishes more in diversity than in duplication. From this observation, one can see that humility is the hinge upon which complementarity becomes covenant rather than conflict.

Second, shared spirituality is not merely an aesthetic addition to marriage; it functions as a regulatory system that governs emotional rhythm and meaning-making. Prayer, Scripture meditation, and communal worship serve as affective regulators, lowering physiological reactivity and reorienting perception toward divine partnership. Couples who pray together often report quicker emotional recovery after conflict, not because problems disappear, but because shared

devotion provides a context for mutual submission. Faith, in this sense, becomes both a bonding ritual and a psychological buffer against stress. The Spirit's presence redefines "self-control" as "Spirit-control," producing gentleness and patience in place of impulsive reaction (Gal. 5:22–23).

Third, temperament misreads are frequently disguised as spiritual warfare in Pentecostal discourse. A melancholic's need for solitude may be labeled "withdrawal," a choleric's assertiveness mistaken for "rebellion," or a sanguine's inconsistency branded as "spiritual instability." When couples reinterpret these patterns through psychoeducation and prayerful reflection, anxiety lessens, empathy increases, and tenderness returns. The process of naming behavior through a redemptive lens—what we might call *sanctified semantics*—restores couples' confidence in their own God-given design.

These observations align with broader pastoral-integration literature: spirituality can transform the emotional economy of marriage (Tan, 1996; McMinn, 1996) while temperament-aware counseling clarifies needs without pathologizing personality (Arno & Arno, 1990). Ghanaian theological voices such as Mbiti (1969) and Larney (1997) reinforce the communal dimension of this transformation, emphasizing that African marriage is not a private contract but a spiritual community. When couples are embedded in supportive structures—marriage fellowships, mentor couples, and pastoral oversight—the burden of emotional isolation is lifted, and growth becomes a shared ecclesial project.

From these patterns, one can see that the Christian counselor in the Ghanaian setting must function simultaneously as **exegete and educator**—exegeting hearts through empathy and educating habits through structured guidance. Scripture offers the grammar of grace; psychology provides the syntax of behavior; and together they form a redemptive language through which healing is spoken. Thus, counseling becomes not merely a corrective process but a form of discipleship—where temperament meets truth, and grace finds structure within which to work.

6. Faith-Based Implications for Counseling Practice

6.1 Premarital Formation

- **APS for both partners**, plus a feedback session on ICA needs and likely friction points.
- **Rule of Life for Two**: daily 7–10-minute shared devotion; weekly 45–60-minute couple check-in; monthly "mini-retreat" (walk + prayer + planning).
- **Expectation mapping**: family roles, money, ministry load, sexuality, in-law boundaries.

6.2 Marital Counseling Protocol (8–10 sessions)

1. Assessment (APS, MSI-GH)
2. Temperament psychoeducation (re-labeling)
3. Communication micro-skills (soft start-ups; speaker–listener turns)
4. Forgiveness and repair liturgy (Eph 4:31–32)
5. Devotional scaffolding (Psalms, Gospels; 1 Cor 13 prayers)
6. Conflict ritual (pause—pray—reflect—respond)
7. Affection planning (non-sexual affection goals; date templates)

8. Consolidation and relapse plan

6.3 Church Systems

- **Mentor Couple Ministry** (trained in APS and prayer counseling)
- **Quarterly Marriage Clinics** (topics: anger, withdrawal, money meanings, in-law diplomacy)
- **Referral Pathways** (pastor → trained counselor → psychiatrist as needed)

6.4 Training at ITS

- Embed **Faith–Temperament Integration** as a practicum module.
- Supervision rubrics: integration clarity, cultural sensitivity, ethical boundaries, outcome tracking.
- Research labs for longitudinal follow-ups (12–24 months).

7. Limitations and Future Directions

- **Sample size/locale:** Twelve couples in two cities limit generalizability.
- **Self-report bias:** MSI-GH and interviews may reflect social desirability, especially among church leaders.
- **Causality caution:** Complementarity correlates with stability; experimental designs would clarify mechanism.

Future research: mixed-methods studies across denominations and regions; randomized trials comparing temperament-only vs faith-temperament integrated interventions; men's/ women's groups evaluating differential impact.

8. Conclusion

Faith does not flatten difference; it redeems it. In the marriages studied within Ghana's Pentecostal landscape, the mystery of unity emerged not through sameness but through sanctified contrast. When temperament was interpreted through the lens of grace, difference ceased to be a battlefield and became a classroom. Complementarity, refined by devotion, produced not uniformity but harmony—a tenderness strong enough to endure storms.

In homes where prayer met practice and temperament truth met theological reflection, something sacred occurred: anger learned patience, fear learned trust, silence found voice, and impulsivity discovered rhythm. The Holy Spirit did not erase personality structures; He reinterpreted them. Through the slow work of sanctification, He changed the meaning couples assigned to each other's patterns—turning irritations into insights, and tensions into invitations for growth.

From this observation, one can see that the Spirit's transforming power operates not by suppressing human temperament but by redeeming its direction. The sanguine's exuberance becomes joy in service; the choleric's drive becomes disciplined leadership; the melancholy's introspection matures into discernment; the phlegmatic's calm evolves into stabilizing peace; the supine's

sensitivity deepens into empathy. In this way, the Spirit of Christ becomes the unifying force within diversity—the divine rhythm that tunes temperamental dissonance into marital melody.

When Ghanaian churches and counseling institutions begin to catechize temperament alongside theology, the pastoral care of marriage will mature beyond moralism and emotional suppression. Homes will rediscover that covenant love has both grammar and music—clarity for the mind and cadence for the heart. Such integration transforms the African family into a living liturgy: a place where the theology of grace dances with the psychology of temperament, and where everyday disagreements become instruments in God’s symphony of sanctification.

Faith-informed marriage counseling, therefore, stands not merely as a professional discipline but as a sacred vocation—an altar where human difference is yoked to divine purpose. From this vantage point, we see that spiritual maturity in marriage is not the absence of conflict, but the art of walking together under the easy yoke of Christ, whose grace reshapes every temperament into an instrument of love.

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Appendix A. Semi-Structured Interview Guide (Open-Ended Questions)

Section 1: Story & Roles

- Tell me the story of how you met and what drew you to each other.
- What are the three biggest strengths of your marriage today?

Section 2: Temperament Awareness

- After the APS feedback, what surprised you about yourself/your spouse?
- Describe a recent conflict and how your temperaments showed up in it.

Section 3: Spiritual Practices

- Describe your weekly shared spiritual rhythm (prayer, Scripture, fasting).
- How do these practices influence how you repair after conflict?

Section 4: Affection & Connection

- What helps you feel most cared for by your spouse?
- What practical changes would you both like to make in the next 30 days?