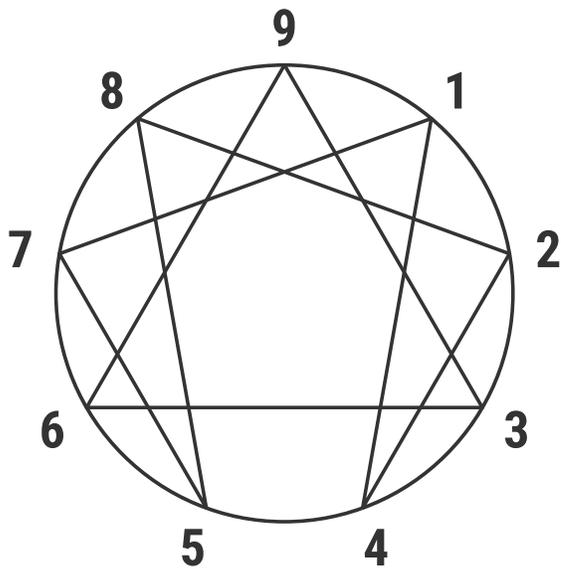




FaithLink

Connecting Faith and Life

Enneagram by Jill M. Johnson



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Over the past several years, the Enneagram has risen in prominence as a self-discovery tool. What is the Enneagram? What are its origins, and why has it become so popular? How can it be used as a resource for Christian spiritual growth?

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Just Another Personality Test?

The Enneagram is an ancient model of personality types that dates back a thousand years or more. Elements of it can be found in the wisdom teachings of several different cultures. Eventually, this model made its way into the Catholic Jesuit community in the 1960s, where it became a useful tool for spiritual direction. Father Richard Rohr learned about it from the Jesuits and was one of the first English-language authors to publish a book about it. In the following years, a growing number of teachers, both religious and secular, have written books expanding on their understanding of the Enneagram.

It's possible that you're skeptical, either about the Enneagram specifically or about personality systems in general. That's certainly understandable! No one wants to be put in a box and reduced to a number, color, or set of letters. We're all complex individuals and want to be viewed as such. When I first heard of the Enneagram, I felt the same way. However, over the past several years, as I've taken the time to investigate this tool, I've found that it has helped me understand myself and others with a clarity that has honestly surprised me.

In the July 4, 2016, episode of their podcast *The Road Back to You: Looking at Life Through the Lens of the Enneagram*, authors Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile describe the Enneagram this way: It is "nine ways of seeing, nine ways of being, [and] nine ways of responding to what you see." In this episode, titled "Discover the Enneagram!" Cron and Stabile say that by looking

at life through the lens of this tool, you will have more compassion for yourself and others and better understand why each type behaves, thinks, and feels the way they do. The authors further explain that the Enneagram, unlike other popular personality typologies, accounts for our spiritual dimensions, along with “the fluidity and dynamism of the human personality.”

REFLECT:

- What are your initial thoughts on personality typologies? Are you skeptical of them? Why or why not?
- If you already have knowledge about the Enneagram, share some of what you have learned.

What Is the Enneagram?

The Enneagram model is represented by a drawing that might look odd at first glance. In Greek, *ennea* means nine, and *gram* means points or figure. Each of the nine points on the circle represents a distinct personality type. Although you might find parts of yourself in all types, one of them will likely stand out to you as the one you connect to the most. This is your basic personality type.

The lines on the inside of the circle show how types connect to one another. For example, I’m a One. When I’m feeling stressed, I pick up aspects of the Four type. When I’m in a place of growth, I become more like a Seven. In addition, since my emotions and outlook vary daily like a normal human, I might embody a more healthy version of a One on one day and a less healthy version the next. Nevertheless, I’ll always be a One, even as other traits about me change.

Each type comes with a thorough description but can be summarized with a word or two. In his book *The Sacred Enneagram*, Christopher Heuertz lists some of the more traditional titles for each type:

- One: Reformer/Perfectionist
- Two: Helper/Giver
- Three: Achiever/Performer
- Four: Individualist/Artist/Romantic

- Five: Investigator/Thinker/Observer
- Six: Loyalist/Devil’s Advocate
- Seven: Enthusiast/Dreamer
- Eight: Challenger/Confronter
- Nine: Peacemaker/Mediator

Each type also belongs to an Intelligence Center that highlights your most “accessible emotional response,” explains Heuertz. For instance, Eights, Nines, and Ones fit in the Body (instinctive or gut) Center, while Twos, Threes, and Fours make up the Heart (feeling or emotion) Center. Lastly, Fives, Sixes, and Sevens comprise the Head (mind, thinking, or rational) Center.

It’s important to avoid placing yourself in a type just based on the title. Enneagram teachers encourage those new to this system to take a test as a starting point (see “Helpful Links”) and then spend some time reading about and discussing it with others. The Enneagram isn’t something that can be easily absorbed in one sitting or even in several weeks. It often takes months or longer to understand your type and why you fit there.

REFLECT:

- Review the nine types listed above. Do any of these jump out at you as possible descriptors of yourself? Share your thoughts.
- Discuss the concept of Intelligence Centers. Do any of these strike you as your primary emotional response? Share your thoughts.

Spiritual Reflection

As I mentioned earlier, I’m a One, someone who “strives for principled excellence as a moral duty,” as described by Heuertz. Ones can be critical and judgmental, but at their best they’re great teachers who are compassionate and serene. They have a fierce inner critic who strives for perfection. Yes, I’m the writer who beats myself up if I turn in a manuscript with even a small mistake.

Fortunately, the Enneagram gives me permission to be gentle with myself and provides valuable insights into how to do that. For example, as

someone who falls in the Body Intelligence Center, contemplative practices such as stillness and rest support my spiritual growth by focusing on the weaknesses associated with my type.

The Enneagram also helps me relate better to family and coworkers. I have a son who is a Seven—that fun-loving person who’s always planning for the next adventure. When I observe him becoming critical and demanding (like Ones), I realize he’s feeling stressed. My daughter and husband are Fours—introspective artists who become more organized and goal-oriented (like Ones) when at the top of their game. As I recognize these patterns, I can offer more grace for stressed behavior and encouragement of growth.

Heuertz writes, “The Enneagram invites us to deeper self-awareness as a doorway to spiritual growth.” While it illustrates how we get lost, it also offers “a sacred map for our souls” that points us home and uncovers our true identity as children of God, he says.

REFLECT:

- Discuss the term *sacred map*. In what ways do self-discovery tools foster spiritual growth? If you think they aren’t necessary, explain why.
- What does the term *true identity* mean to you? Do you think you have a “false identity”? How do these terms relate to the Christian traditions of sin and repentance?

Enneagram Illustrations

Stories and anecdotes can help us as we try to absorb new information. For instance, in their podcast *The Road Back to You*, Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile offer several illustrations to help listeners understand the value of exploring our Enneagram type and of understanding the other types as well. Stabile tells the story of a friend of hers who teaches visually impaired children. An optician in their area made special glasses for all of the parents of these children that allowed the parents to see what their own children could and couldn’t see. It moved these parents from sympathy to empathy. Stabile points out that in a similar way, the Enneagram can help us understand how others view the world.

Cron expands on this point with a story from his driver, who is in a 12-step program. “Sometimes I feel like we’re all in the same theater, looking at the same screen, watching a different movie,” his driver said. Some wise words to show we don’t all view the world in the same way.

In his book *The Sacred Enneagram*, Christopher Heuertz offers an analogy about a house to explain the difference between temperaments, like extroversion or introversion, and Enneagram types. “Our Enneagram type is the home we are likely born in and will most definitely die in,” he argues. Our temperament—for example, your Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator® inventory results—represents the room you stay in most often; and our talents—for example, your StrengthsFinder® results—represent the way we decorate that room.

REFLECT:

- Do any of these illustrations help you understand the Enneagram better? Explain your answer.
- If you know your MBTI® or StrengthsFinder® results, share how that knowledge has been helpful to you.

Our Diverse Gifts

While we all make up the body of Christ, Scripture also affirms our individuality. Some of us are a hand and some of us an eye, but every part is needed to make the whole (**1 Corinthians 12:12-27**). The body of Christ metaphor is expanded upon in **Ephesians 4**, which reminds us that love is the catalyst for growth. “The body makes itself grow in that it builds itself up with love as each does its part” (**verse 16**). In this passage, we’re reminded once again of the importance of spiritual formation: “God’s goal is for us to become mature adults—to be fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ” (**verse 13**).

We’re reminded in **Romans 12** and in **1 Corinthians 12** that each child of God has a spiritual gift. Your best gift might be teaching, exhortation, leadership, wisdom, administration, faith, or any one of hundreds of other possibilities. However, in order to understand your giftedness and offer it to others, some introspection and self-awareness are needed.

An interesting comparison to the nine Enneagram types are the other “nines” found in Scripture. In **Galatians 5:22-23**, nine fruits of the Spirit are listed (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control). In **Matthew 5:3-12**, there are nine Beatitudes. “Happy are people who show mercy, because they will receive mercy,” Jesus says in **verse 7**, another reminder of our call to show and receive compassion.

REFLECT:

- Share what you consider to be your best spiritual gift and how you use it to build up the body of Christ.
- What is your definition of a spiritually mature adult?

Spiritual Wrestling

In **Romans 7:15-20**, Paul shares some of his own internal confusion: “I don’t know what I’m doing, because I don’t do what I want to do. Instead, I do the thing that I hate” (**verse 15**). Even though we know what’s right and good, we often fail to act correctly and feel powerless to change. Paul goes on to explain that the law puts us in bondage to sin but delivers good news: “So now there isn’t any condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death” (**Romans 8:1-2**).

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “Therefore, if the Son makes you free, you really will be free” (**John 8:36**). So if we have this promise, why then do we not feel completely free? Why do we continue in patterns of behavior that are unhealthy? Enneagram teachers Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile suggest that if Paul knew his Enneagram type, he would at least know *why* he doesn’t “do what [he wants] to do.”

Tools such as the Enneagram can help us understand how brokenness expresses itself in our lives and point us toward paths that lead to healing and freedom. However, as Christians, we believe it’s the power of the Holy Spirit that binds up our wounds, even as other modern psychological tools provide support in that sanctification process. “So let’s press on to maturity,” writes the author of **Hebrews 6:1**.

REFLECT:

- What is your understanding of sanctification as taught by John Wesley?
- Discuss examples of psychological tools or typologies that have helped you mature as a follower of Christ.

Helpful Links

- Take an online test as a starting point to find your type:
 - » The Enneagram Institute's Riso-Hudson Enneagram Type Indicator (RHETI) test (cost is \$12): <https://tests.enneagraminstitute.com/>
 - » A free sample RHETI test can be found here: <http://www.9types.com/rheti/index.php>
 - » EnneaApp (free) can be taken on a mobile device: <https://www.enneaapp.com/find-your-type/>
 - » Another free assessment offered by the authors of *The Road Back to You*: <http://exploreyourtype.com/details>
- Popular books on the Enneagram:
 - » *The Road Back to You*, by Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile (<http://tiny.cc/lp0nzy>)
 - » *The Sacred Enneagram*, by Christopher L. Heuertz (<http://tiny.cc/nr0nzy>)
 - » *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective*, by Richard Rohr and Andreas Ebert (<http://tiny.cc/ct0nzy>)
- Singer-songwriter Ryan O'Neal explores each Enneagram type through song: <http://tiny.cc/kxeozy>
- You can follow Your Enneagram Coach (Beth McCord) on Instagram to get Christian insights: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BliKhgdA8tW/?hl=en>
- Read detailed descriptions about each of the nine Enneagram types: <https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/type-descriptions/>

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Next Week in FaithLink

Connecting Faith and Life

Boycotts

by Rebekah Jordan Gienapp

For more than a hundred years, boycotts have been used as a way to effect change. What makes a boycott succeed or fail? How have boycotts changed in the age of social media? How can Christians discern whether to participate in a boycott?

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Opening Prayer

Creator God, you knew us before we were born and see us as beloved children created in your image, separated only by the brokenness and pain of this world. As we discuss this spiritual growth tool today, help us to be open to areas where we can grow. Thank you for your grace and immeasurable love that surround every aspect of our sanctification process. Amen.

Leader Helps

- Have several Bibles on hand (or encourage participants to use smartphone Bible apps) and a markerboard and markers for writing lists or responses to reflection questions.
- Open the session with the provided prayer or one of your own. Invite participants to take a moment to take a few deep breaths in and out. Spend a few moments in silence before praying.
- Remind the group that people have different perspectives and to honor these differences by treating one another with respect as you explore this topic together.
- Read or review highlights of each section of this issue. Use the *REFLECT* questions to stimulate discussion.
- If you have time for a Bible study, ask a participant to read aloud Galatians 5:22-23; then write each fruit on the markerboard. Give each participant a piece of paper and pen. Ask participants to rank each fruit starting with the one that's most easy for them to express and ending with the one that's most difficult. Spend a few moments in silent prayer or reflection; then ask participants to pick one fruit to try to express to others in an intentional way this week.
- Close the session with the provided prayer or one of your own.

Teaching Alternatives

Use this time to discover and discuss your Enneagram types. Ask participants to take one of the tests listed under "Helpful Links" before you meet, or set aside some time during your meeting time. Have the Enneagram diagram and a short description of each type available (either printed or on a digital screen) to aid in discussion.

Remind your group that the results are just a starting point, and to truly understand your results, it's best to spend some time reading about the Enneagram or working with a trained coach.

Closing Prayer

Compassionate and forgiving God, you want nothing more than for us to come home, come running into your loving and welcoming arms where we belong. As we walk through this week, open our eyes to those times we are leaning into our true selves and times when we are leaning into a false mask or identity. You declared your creation as good. Give us the courage to live into that calling; in Christ's name. Amen.