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FORTY DAYS ON  
BEING A FOUR



ENNEAGRAM DAILY REFLECTIONS

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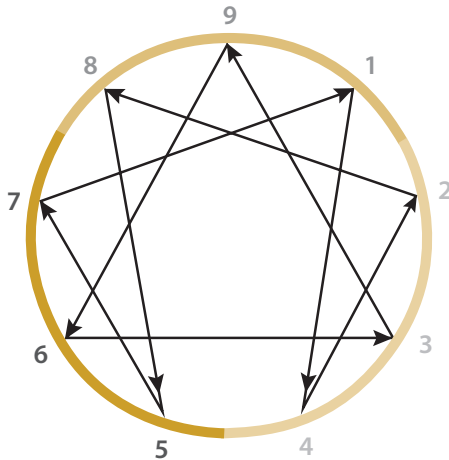


# WELCOME TO ENNEAGRAM DAILY REFLECTIONS

*Suzanne Stabile*



The Enneagram is about nine ways of seeing. The reflections in this series are written from each of those nine ways of seeing. You have a rare opportunity, while reading and thinking about the experiences shared by each author, to expand your understanding of how they see themselves and how they experience others.



I've committed to teaching the Enneagram, in part, because I believe every person wants at least these two things: to belong, and to live a life that has meaning. And I'm sure that learning and working with the Enneagram has the potential to help all of us with both.

Belonging is complicated. We all want it, but few of us really understand it. The Enneagram identifies—with more accuracy than any other wisdom tool I know—why we can achieve belonging more easily with some people than with others. And it teaches us to find our place in situations and groups without having to displace someone else. (I'm actually convinced that it's the answer to world peace, but some have suggested that I could be exaggerating just a bit.)

If our lives are to have meaning beyond ourselves, we will have to develop the capacity to understand, value, and respect people who see the world differently than we do. We will have to learn to name our own gifts and identify our weaknesses, and the Enneagram reveals both at the same time.

The idea that we are all pretty much alike is shattered by the end of an introductory Enneagram workshop or after reading the last page of a good primer. But for those who are teachable and open to receiving Enneagram wisdom about each of the nine personality types, the shock is accompanied by a beautiful and unexpected gift: they find that they have more compassion for themselves and more grace for others and it's a guarantee.

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The authors in this series, representing the nine Enneagram types, have used that compassion to move toward a greater understanding of themselves and others whose lives intersect with theirs in big and small ways. They write from experiences that reflect racial and cultural differences, and they have been influenced by their personal faith commitments. In working with spiritual directors, therapists, and pastors they identified many of their own habits and fears, behaviors and motivations, gifts and challenges. And they courageously talked with those who are close to them about how they are seen and experienced in relationship.

As you begin reading, I think it will be helpful for you to be generous with yourself. Reflect on your own life—where you’ve been and where you’re going. And I hope you will consider the difference between change and transformation. *Change* is when we take on something new. *Transformation* occurs when something old falls away, usually beyond our control. When we see a movie, read a book, or perhaps hear a sermon that we believe “changed our lives,” it will seldom, if ever, become transformative. It’s a good thing and we may have learned a valuable life lesson, but that’s not transformation. Transformation occurs when you have an experience that changes the way you understand life and its mysteries.

When my dad died, I immediately looked for the leather journal I had given to him years before with the request that

he fill it with stories and things he wanted me to know. He had only written on one page:

*Anything I have achieved or accomplished  
in my life is because of the gift of your mother  
as my wife. You should get to know her.*

I thought I knew her, but I followed his advice, and it was one of the most transformative experiences of my life.

From a place of vulnerability and generosity, each author in this series invites us to walk with them for forty days on their journeys toward transformation. I hope you will not limit your reading to only your number. Read about your spouse or a friend. Consider reading about the type you suspect represents your parents or your siblings. You might even want to read about someone you have little affection for but are willing to try to understand.

You can never change *how* you see, but you can change what you *do* with how you see.

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## ON BEING A FOUR



**W**elcome to *Forty Days on Being a Four*. I'm so glad you're here! You may have picked up this book because you recently discovered you are, indeed, a Four. Or maybe you were browsing online for resources on the Enneagram, and this book popped up among the other brilliant authors in the Enneagram Daily Reflections series. You might be reading this because you struggle with the Fours in your life, or you are in close relationship with a Four. Maybe you wanted to read an Enneagram book written by a woman or a person of color.

While I don't promise to explain all the dimensions of being a Four, I hope my personal reflections on family upbringing, cultural and ethnic identity, faith, justice, and spirituality will weave together universal themes of what Fours experience at our core while being shaped by our environments.

For six years I thought I was an Enneagram Two. I don't remember the exact moment when I realized I was a Four. It was more of a "trying on" than a lightbulb moment. I think

many of us are mistyped by others (or by a test!), or we mistype ourselves depending on our contexts.

Part of my journey was leaving two faith communities that had shaped my acceptance of patriarchy and white supremacy. When I entered a new context where my womanhood and culture were celebrated and valued, I experienced the freedom of my true self, which matched the qualities of a Four.

I read and reread the Four descriptors in a variety of Enneagram books, devouring the content. I soon realized that the motivations of the Four reflected who I had been my whole life up to this point yet had not had permission to fully be. Examples ranged from small distinctions, such as my constant need to shape the “mood” or aesthetic of my home and workspace by lighting candles or rearranging decor (Fours see and cultivate beauty around us), to deeper issues, such as feeling like I’d never belonged anywhere (Fours grow up feeling like we are flawed). I also recognized my toxic, self-indulgent tendencies to escape the pressures of life and my way of moving toward the unhealthy patterns of a Two when I am in stress, among other patterns.

I have been on a journey of living into my Fourness for five years now, and it has been a tremendous road toward liberation and healing. At the same time, living into my true nature as a Four has come with costs. I pleased many more people as a Two and have lost friendships along the way as I became more true to my Fourness—reclaiming my needs,

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understanding my boundaries, and more fully living into my identity. It has also changed the way I relate to God. I no longer feel an overbearing pressure to “work for God” but instead have been leaning into enjoying God, resting in God, seeking God in both the sacred and secular.

When I first heard about the Enneagram, I found little to no literature written from the perspective of people of color. In the Enneagram trainings and workshops I attended, the nuances and realities experienced by people of color in our upbringing and spiritual formation were rarely represented. Our stories and voices seemed to be washed out and overgeneralized by dominant culture voices in the Enneagram conversation. Please hear me—being a Four as a person of color doesn’t make my core motivations different from my fellow Fours in dominant culture, but when we hear a singular cultural narrative about how Fours function, or how Fours came to be who they are, we ultimately dismiss or erase stories that could validate the experiences of Fours in underrepresented communities.

As a Four who is a Korean American woman, there are some things I am born in to but also some things I became as a result of my environment and experience (to really dive into this subject, see Micky ScottBey Jones’s perspective in the *Sojourners* piece “The Enneagram Is Not Just for White People”). For example, since I come from a collectivistic culture, my “individualist” tendencies look different. I didn’t have the freedom to explore this core

aspect of myself due to cultural expectations that I would care more for my family than my own needs. It was normal for me to suppress my desires in order to honor my parents, family, and community.

Many people use the Enneagram as a way to self-actualize and become enlightened. However, this is an incomplete way of understanding the Enneagram. Yes, it is a powerful tool that sheds light on our personal growth, sense of purpose, and identity. However, the Enneagram was created *in* community and is *for* community. It is a tool that brings greater understanding, empathy, compassion, and grace to oneself and one's neighbor. We study our numbers, motivations, and behavioral patterns in order to better understand others and create a more compassionate world.

The Four tag line, “The Need to Be Special,” should have been obvious to me. When I was younger I dreamed of being “the first Korean American superstar,” but I never knew how to unpack that core motivation of needing to be special. I did not understand that my need to stand out came from somewhere. I now know why Mister Rogers’s song “You Are Special” meant so much to me. As I have matured in my faith and self-awareness, I’ve realized that I am special, not because I do something to prove or show my specialness, but simply because I exist as God’s beloved child.

This same reality is true for you too. I hope reading *Forty Days on Being a Four* brings you back to this truth over and over again: you are God’s beloved. You are special.

## ALL THE FEELS

**“CHRISTINE, HOW ARE YOU FEELING?”**

For years, this question has been difficult for me to answer. The more accurate question for a Four might be, “What *aren’t* you feeling?”

As a Four, I store a complex universe of emotions in my inner being. When asked, “How are you doing?” I can grab my prevailing emotion and tell you how I’m doing from that emotion’s point of view (joy, elation, sadness, grief, confusion—you name it!), but at any given time I live and breathe a kaleidoscope of living, feeling, conflicting emotions.

Many times Fours are labeled as “emotionally intense” or “too much,” but for us it is just simply how we are. We’re comfortable with liminality and in-between spaces. When Fours are healthy, our emotional state doesn’t occupy anyone else’s experience—instead, the multitude of emotions we carry gives us the ability to carry conflicting or contradictory emotions for others. Fours have an incredible capacity to hold space for others in paradoxical and transcendental moments. We are often invited into sacred moments (for example, the death of a loved one, the birth of a

baby, transitional seasons in career, relational conflict, and so on) to help others steward these deep emotions fully.

In Luke 7:36-50, an unnamed woman comes to find Jesus. Jesus is dining at a Pharisee's home when the woman falls to the floor, begins to cry, and kisses his feet. She then pulls out a jar of expensive perfume to pour onto Jesus' feet, anointing and worshiping him in uninhibited adoration. While the Pharisees and disciples treat her with disdain because of her reputation and actions, Jesus responds with affection and esteem for her.

I love this story. Maybe it's because I like to think this unnamed woman was a Four—her creative expression in love, her unending desire to be known, her emotional rawness and intensity, and her authentic, unique way of showing up to Jesus. People misunderstood, devalued, and questioned her. The Gospel writer does not even give her name. But Jesus knew her. He dignified her and received her worship, heralding her as a faithful example for the disciples to follow.

**Can you identify with the woman in this story? In what ways have you been misunderstood, devalued, or questioned by others?**

**Bring your weariness and exhaustion to Jesus, trusting that you can be uninhibited and unfiltered in his presence. Take some time to hear Jesus saying to you as he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”**

## CAN YOU UNDERSTAND ME?



**TWO YEARS AGO**, Sandra Oh became the first-ever Asian to be nominated for an Emmy Award as Lead Actress in a Drama Series. Oh's visibility and representation produced a groundswell of joy and pride among Asians. We rallied together to celebrate and giddily reveled in the movement as it flowed across the nation. It felt for a moment that our contributions as Asian Americans, our personhood, our stories, and our work were being seen and valued on one of the greatest platforms in the world. For me, a Korean woman like Oh, this moment felt even more specifically and directly meaningful.

Oh said something during the awards season that struck me. As she sat next to her mom at the Emmys ceremony, she said, "It's an honor just to be Asian."

*It's an honor just to be Asian.*

As a Four, one of my core longings and motivations is to be understood. However, my journey as a person of color living out two cultural identities compounds this innate

longing. As an Asian American in this country, there are two dominant narratives our community is constantly pushing up against. We are perceived as either the *perpetual foreigner* or the *model minority*. A *perpetual* or *forever* foreigner is someone who does not belong in America, could never be born here, and does not have the right to call the United States their home. An example of this is being asked at the grocery store, “Can you speak English? *Can you understand me?*” The term *model minority* is a myth constructed by white supremacy to pit Asians against other racial groups, claiming that we naturally succeed and have somehow overcome racism through diligence and hard work. These two themes often leave us feeling generalized, diminished, and invisible.

For the majority of my life, I tried to respond to these walls of invisibility by assimilating into dominant contexts and muting my Koreanness. What I didn’t realize was that in my efforts to live this way, I was not only perpetuating my people’s invisibility—I was actively erasing myself, my family, and my people. My Four core need to be understood could never be met by a society resolute on diminishing and erasing my people’s history and humanity.

Along my Enneagram journey, I found great comfort in the story of Hagar in the Scriptures. Hagar is an enslaved Egyptian woman who is victimized, marginalized, and deeply misunderstood. In her dual oppression, she is not *seen* in her context. Hagar is impregnated by her owner,

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Abram, and subsequently experiences the devastating loss of her home and community. In Genesis 16, Hagar flees into the desert, and in this moment of great vulnerability, God pursues her. God seeks to understand her and asks, “Where have you come from, and where are you going?” As Hagar engages God, she becomes the first person in the Bible to name God. She calls out to God as “El Roi, the God who sees me.”

In my longing as a Four to be understood, I wonder to myself how I, like Hagar, can be set free from societal narratives that claim I can be only a model minority or a perpetual foreigner. Instead of yielding to these portrayals by the dominant culture, how can I show up fully in the unique way I’ve been created? God is the God who sees, but I am also a part of making God visible to the world.

As a Korean American woman, my story is connected to generations of ancestors before me who also resisted narratives meant to perpetuate self-hatred in people of color. My story is woven into the fabric of my Asian American sisters, mothers, daughters, and grandmothers who reclaimed their dignity in the face of oppression. I no longer see my Koreanness as something to be hidden, diminished, or erased but am learning to stand fully on the sacred and holy ground of being an Asian American woman. I bear the extraordinary image of God, and in choosing to embrace where I’ve come from and where I am going, I can’t help but feel these same words: “It’s an honor just to be Asian.”

Reflect on your story and the intersectional identities you hold. What does it mean to you that God is El Roi, the God who sees you?

If you are a Four and experience a desire to be understood, what does it mean that you make God visible to the world?

Take some time to respond to the question that God asks Hagar: “Where have you come from, and where are you going?”