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FORTY DAYS ON
BEING A SEVEN



ENNEAGRAM DAILY REFLECTIONS



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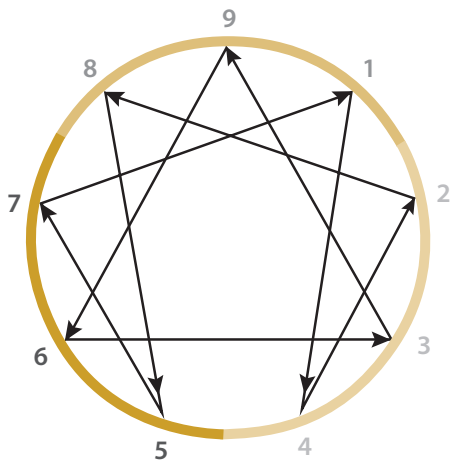


WELCOME TO ENNEAGRAM DAILY REFLECTIONS

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.

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 different faith beliefs. 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.

ON BEING A SEVEN



Several years ago, I encountered the Enneagram test for the first time like I was sitting in the back row in high school—disinterested to say the least. Test? Lame. What is this, a horoscope? Lame. *Another* personality test? I hate tests and I dislike being put into boxes.

But fine, whatever, I'll do it. I'll appease you by taking this multiple-choice test, but in my mind it will have zero stakes. Will I pass? How do I succeed? There are nine types? Why nine? I'm a Seven? Cool. Whatever. What's for lunch?

A year later, our leadership team decided to take the test again. *Not again!* I thought to myself.

"It will help us know each other's strengths and weaknesses better!"

"It will give us common language!"

Fine. I relented.

We sat on the front porch of a ranch in Dripping Springs, Texas. This time we delved into each type more deeply. I tried to remember my test result from the previous year. Because I cared so little, I couldn't recall it.

The presenter started to give examples of famous people from each type. Type One, the Perfectionist? Nope. Type Two, Helper? Nah. Type Three, Achiever? Negative. Type Four, the Romantic? Ohhh, I want to be a romantic.

The presenter listed off a few names—Bob Dylan, Alan Watts, Leonard Cohen, and *Thomas freaking Merton*? Please, please, please let me be a Four.

I missed the explanation of the next few numbers trying to do the mental Pilates needed to cram my obviously non-Four existence into a Romantic Four box. Am I melancholy? Once a decade, perhaps. That probably counts. Do I ruminate on my feelings? What are feelings?

The presenter then came to the Seven, the Optimist. The description started with everything I find embarrassing. Sevens are hyper-positive! Sevens are childlike! They love to party and avoid pain! They are easily distracted! They will text with lots of exclamation points! Because they go through life seeking more exclamation! My eyes rolled to the back of my head so far they came right back around like a scene from *The Exorcist*.

As the presenter listed off famous Sevens, I felt a resistance building to this demonic number. “Famous Sevens are . . . Miley Cyrus! Charlie Sheen! Britney Spears!” *Noooo!* That’s it. No matter what anyone says, *I am not a Seven!* I had decided right then and there. Anything but a Seven. So back to the Four . . .

Later that year, I got a text message on a Wednesday afternoon. I felt the buzz in my back left pocket. I reached

for my phone and saw it was from my friend Chris, whom I hadn't seen in years. "Wanna hang with Father Richard Rohr for three days in Santa Fe?" he asked.

I didn't ask for more details or the price or even the dates and responded, "Hell, yeah! I'm on my way!" (In hindsight, perhaps the most textbook Seven response possible.)

Chris texted back, "Umm . . . I meant in six months."

Oh. I'll start walking then.

Six months later, we spent a weekend in a beautiful hotel in downtown Santa Fe with one of my living man crushes. On the second day, Rohr spent the morning teaching us the Enneagram. Hearing the description from someone I respected deeply finally gave me the courage to accept the embarrassing parts of myself. Fine. I'm a Seven.

After the session, there was a coffee break. People stretched and grabbed drinks, and I wandered over to my man crush to make small talk. Rohr looked at me with kind eyes and asked, "So, Gideon, what type do you think you might be?"

I smiled, finally accepting my Enneagram fate, and confidently said, "I believe I'm a Seven, Richard."

He turned and looked at me like he was deep in thought. "Hmmm," he said. "Really? You don't feel like a Seven to me."

Immediately I was thrown into an existential crisis. Richard Rohr doesn't think I'm a Seven! *Who am I?*

These days I've come to accept that I am a Seven—but an Asian Seven. Consider me a Seven with the triple repression of Chinese stoicism mixed with a fundamentalist

upbringing and a Canadian apology for my existence. I'm so sorry I'm a Seven, eh?

I've also learned the following truths about myself through the Enneagram:

- Even though I don't look like I have anxiety and can project confidence in the world, my anxiety is like a low-grade fever that affects most of my decisions.
- My hyper-positivity is a protector that has shielded me from half of my reality.
- I like options and can live in the gray pretty well except under stress. Under stress, everything becomes black and white.
- When I am not stressed, I can delve into an interest in a deep way. I read more when I'm not stressed. I can sit with a poem for an entire day when I'm relaxed.
- My addiction to being liked is exhausting. It started with some early childhood wounds that I'm now learning to nurture as an adult.
- I have a hard time liking myself and so need the external world to validate me (and by external world I mean everyone I ever meet. Seriously. Makes me want to nap).
- Adventure and exploration are my happy place.
- I bring a lightness to a situation that is a gift.
- My openness to options looks like me changing my mind a lot. That stresses people out.

A few years later I was with Richard Rohr again (full disclosure: Sevens like to name-drop. I get super annoyed when other Sevens do it and then catch myself doing the same thing. *Grrrrrr*), this time at his office in Albuquerque. We had finished a day together and I found him sitting in his office. He could see the spark of mischief in my eyes.

“May I ask a favor, Richard?”

“Sure, Gideon. What does the Seven in you need?”

“Could we take a Boomerang for my Instagram story?”

“I don’t know what those words mean, Gideon. But whatever will make the Seven in you happy.”

“Oh, this will, Richard. OK, let’s hold hands, and don’t smile. On the count of three hold up the peace sign. Ready? One . . . two . . . three.”



The Scriptures talk about God knowing us so intimately that God knows the number of hairs on our head. That’s deeply intimate because that number changes every day. God has always known the parts of myself that embarrass me. I’m trying to allow myself to be loved into loving even those parts.

Whether you are a Seven or you want to explore how to better love a Seven in your life, I invite you to come along with me on a journey into the life of a Seven. At the end of each reading you’ll find an invitation to reflect or pray or pick up a new spiritual practice as well.

Ready? One . . . two . . . three.

WHERE ARE YOU FROM?



I'VE ALWAYS BEEN FASCINATED by Jesus' statement of homelessness in Luke 9:58, where he says, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." Perhaps Jesus is inviting us to find home within. If we can be at home anywhere, we can be at home everywhere.

I've actually been searching for home all my life. I was born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and by the time I was twenty-five, "home" had been eight different cities. Then I landed in Austin, Texas, and I've been here for twenty years now.

At the end of a recent eight-week jaunt around the country, my family cheered when we pulled our camper onto our street. We hugged and high-fived. We were hugging and high-fiving for a sense of home. For the neighbors we've seen grow up and move off to college. For the coffee shop, bar, and restaurant owners who built this neighborhood together with us. For our friends and acquaintances. Whoops and hollers. We were finally home.

Occasionally, however, I am reminded that I'm still not

completely at home in Austin. This happens to me about once a year.

A few months ago I was sitting at a bodega in my neighborhood called Quickie Pickie. I was enjoying a Topo Chico while finishing some work at a table on the patio. I noticed in my peripheral vision a man staring at me. After a few minutes he was still staring, so I glanced over and we made eye contact. I smiled and looked back at my MacBook. Another few minutes and he was still looking at me, so I smiled and waved. He took that as a sign to get up and come over to my table. He introduced himself as Gary and asked me the question all people of color love to be asked: “Where are you from?”

With an internal eye roll I responded, “I’ve lived in Austin for twenty years. I think I can say Austin is home.”

“Where are you from, though?”

“Well, I moved here from Detroit.”

“I mean, where are you *really* from?”

“I lived in Chicago before that.”

“Seriously, where are you *from* from?”

“OK, you got me. I’m from Canada.”

He then proceeded to tell me a long story about his trip to Japan and his Japanese friend. I listened to his entire way-too-long story because I’m polite and Canadian. At the end I said, “Cool story. I’m not Japanese and I’ve never been to Japan.”

He walked away confused.

As a Seven who's done chasing and moving, I've continued to ask questions about home. I've realized that as I've moved and traveled around the world, I've been running from asking myself who I am. Sevens will visit any other place rather than be at home with themselves.

So what *does* it mean to be at home with myself? For me it means exploring underlying questions such as: What does it look like for a Chinese Canadian to be at home in Austin? When did I start to assimilate and externalize my sense of home? What's the appropriate amount of space for a Chinese Canadian man to take up in the world? Why do I apologize so compulsively—am I apologizing for my existence? How can I be at home with the paradox that I'm not that important *and* I am the glory of God?

What does it mean for you to be home with yourself?

What other questions emerge as you consider that question?

RE-NURTURE



THEY SAY SEVENS' CORE WOUND is the fact that nurturing was withdrawn from them too early in life. I think about this often and how it has shaped me as an adult.

My father (an Enneagram Eight) has shared many stories of how he learned to fight for his life. So it's only natural that he would love me by challenging me to do the same. When I was five years old we lived in Paramaribo, Suriname. Every Monday we went to a fancy resort where the expats clustered. It was there that my father taught me how to swim.

Not long ago he asked my own teenage boys, "Want to hear how I taught your dad to swim?"

"Uh, sure."

"We were at this nice pool we went to every week. Your dad always refused to go into the deeper water."

"Because he was five years old, right?" my boys replied.

"Well, he needed to be more brave."

"But wasn't he just five?"

"He was ready. Your dad was having too much fun in the shallow end. He was ready for deeper water. So I asked, 'Hey, Gideon, would you like a Coke?' He said, 'Yeah! I love Coke!'"

“Dad was drinking Coke at five? No wonder you’re so short, Dad. Ha-ha.”

I couldn’t help but grin. It gives me great joy when my boys feel safe enough to talk trash to me.

“So your dad got up out of the water and we were walking along the side of the pool to the bar. As soon as we got to the deepest part of the pool, I elbowed him in! He landed face first. He started flailing. He cried for help. And I didn’t help him! I knew he could do it. He splashed his way back to the edge of the pool. And now he can swim!”

“Man, that story’s messed up. Do you remember that, Dad?”

“For some reason I don’t. Seems like that memory’s been blocked.”

“Sorry, Dad. I’m glad you didn’t teach us to swim like that.”

My father finished his story proudly: “Your dad’s such a strong swimmer now.”

I love my dad. I’m impressed with how he survived and thrived through many hardships. And when I find myself in over my head, I know how to look ahead and survive. Yet I also learned to avoid pain in my life because I’m too ready to be shoved into things at any moment without warning. In many ways this is my Seven origin story. I am resilient and slow to my emotion in equal parts.

Read this verse: “Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from

heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:10-11).

Now rewrite the last sentence: “(your name), you are my child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

Say this statement slowly. Savor the words. Notice what comes up as you place the words gently on your heart. Write out any insights you notice. Repeat the statement slowly three more times. Each time allow yourself to linger on a different insight.