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FORTY DAYS ON
BEING A EIGHT



ENNEAGRAM DAILY REFLECTIONS

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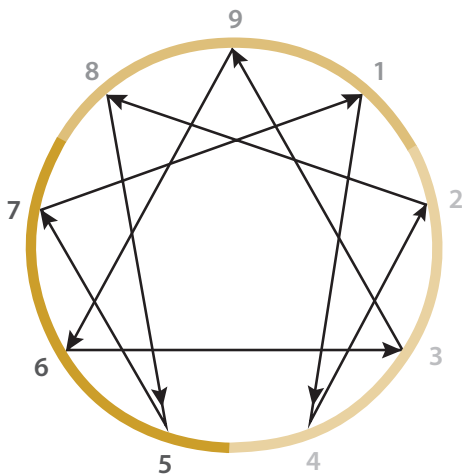
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WELCOME TO ENNEAGRAM DAILY REFLECTIONS

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 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.

ON BEING AN EIGHT



*F*ósforito!

The explosion happened so quickly there was no stopping it. My mother used to call me “tiny match” when she saw this fire exploding from me. Words and sounds came out of my mouth that to this day I don’t recall. I’m pretty sure there were actual flames coming out from my body.

I could hear my mother’s voice telling me to respond *con calma*, but I could not bring myself to pause.

I had just turned thirty and had been seeing my spiritual director, Marilyn Stewart, for a few years. She believed that you should enter the Enneagram journey once two things happened: one, you were mature enough to deal with the patterns of darkness in your life and, two, you had hit a major leadership crisis. These two indicators would most help you find your Enneagram type. This explosion—a confrontation with a colleague—began my Enneagram journey.

Marilyn was a national spiritual director with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF), and she and her husband, Doug, trained and offered direction to the team of spiritual

directors with IVCF. She was a white Anglican woman who had spent years in ministry in Latin America. For more than a decade Marilyn saw me through ministry transitions, seminary, marriage, miscarriage, infertility, glass ceilings, and the systemic oppression I experienced both as a Latina in evangelicalism and as a pastor in a disenfranchised community.

The day of the explosion, Marilyn smiled, let out a chuckle, and said, “Well, Sandrita, it’s time to do some Enneagram work.”

The next time I had a three-day retreat scheduled, she sent me off with a journal, my Bible, a watch, and an audio set of lectures on the Enneagram. She said, “Do not guess your type until you have listened all the way through the circle. Do *not* take a test online. Do not ask anyone what they think you are. This is a spiritual pilgrimage.”

She talked about the process like it was a sacred rite of passage. Like I was going on a journey to find a mirror that would show me myself for the first time. My whole self. My ugly self. My beautiful self. My dangerous self.

That weekend I listened. I cried when I remembered the pain I had experienced because of certain types’ dysfunction and the joy I felt when they were healthy. I laughed when I heard about the antics of other types, as if I could see their behavior in the distance. Then I cried and laughed at the same time—that thing you do when you are simultaneously overjoyed and ashamed. Instead of observing from afar, I

felt I was being examined from within. I had found my type.

I am an Eight.

I am an Eight with a strong Seven wing.

I am a Latina Eight.

I am an intuitive feeler Eight.

I am an Eight with a knack for saying the thing everyone thinks.

I cried and thought, *Oh my, that's me*. I laughed and thought, *Yes! That's me*. I had found the mirror that exposed my whole self, and I felt relieved.

Marilyn met me when I had completed the listening process. She was not surprised to learn that I was an Eight, given my passion for justice, relentless truth telling, and, most of all, my intensity and energy level.

Finding your Enneagram type is like finding your superpower—and your kryptonite. I love being an Eight. It worked for me, and it worked for the organizations I led . . . until it didn't. I hit a wall. Like an overused tool, my Eightness became ineffective and I had to relearn some things.

We live in a world where we curate our image. We crop, filter, edit, and enhance ourselves, so that much of what people see is our false self—the person we *want* them to see. Problem is, show someone an angle of yourself long enough and you begin to believe that it's actually you.

The Enneagram journey has been one of seeing myself without filters. Learning to embrace the parts of who I am that are unique.

With increased confidence in God's love for me and God's presence in me, I have been able to confront the wounded parts and broken patterns that need attention. This has meant rejecting the lie that I am too much. Too strong. Too assertive. It has meant paying attention when my gut reacts and then naming my triggers. It has meant accepting that there are not many who can take the blows and choose the risks I do. By accepting God's grace and presence in places of pain, I have been able to admit weakness instead of portraying strength as a way of holding people at a distance.

A guiding passage for freedom in my inner life has been 2 Corinthians 12:9-10:

[The Lord] said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Strength is not found in ignoring the thorns in our flesh. It is not found in pretending we don't feel pain or sadness. It is precisely in our weakness that God's power comes through. It is in that place of grace that I am reminded I can move mountains and start revolutions as long as I am rooted in and fueled by the power of God's Spirit. My ability to admit the need becomes the invitation to receive

that power. Thus speaking truth to power from power.



My Enneagram journey as a Latina has been complicated since there are so few Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) voices represented in the Enneagram world. I've had to use my acquired skills of interpretation and contextualization to arrive at helpful material. We are embodied humans who interpret life from our cultural location. You may not ever hear an author say, "As an affluent and educated white man, I experience . . .," but the reality is that they're speaking from that location.

Our ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic experiences shape how we interact with God and others. We carry collective cultural values as well as racialized experiences. Therefore there have been many times when I have disagreed with materials that describe the experience of the Eight. I have heard things like, "Eights don't care what others think." If you are an underrepresented, underpaid Latina who comes from a community that values hospitality and you work in an institution where challenging the status quo can cost you your job, you will care what people think.

This is the "Enneagram so white" critique that has kept many BIPOC folks from warming up to the tool. I'm thankful that InterVarsity Press has invited many of us to speak to these realities along the way. I hope it blesses you to consider how your own cultural location affects you.

I pray that you allow yourself the space to name and receive how your collective values and embodied humanity have shaped how you view yourself, God, and the world. Maybe spend a moment even before getting into the devotional to create a list or drawing of all the factors that have shaped you. That can be the first page of your journal as you show up before your Creator.

My prayer is that I do not waste your time. I know how we Eights feel about that. Coming from a communal Latina heritage and having a personality that centers on relationships, I have often found it hard to distinguish the development of self-awareness from narcissism. I thought, *Why spend so much time down a rabbit hole of self-focus and self-actualization when the world is hurting and people are just trying to get their basic needs of safety met?*

But I discovered that by seeing myself and identifying my own longings and laments, I have been able to develop empathy for others. In finding myself, my heart has expanded to love others. We do the work of healing for ourselves so that our healing invites others to their own healing.

Whether you are an Eight, have an Eight wing, or are in a close relationship with an Eight, you are invited on this journey. My hope is that in this daily pause you make for God, you will find more power and rest.

May we love others and rebuild a just world.

STOP. NO, REALLY—STOP



HAS ANYONE EVER SAID you have an exhausting amount of energy? Do they tell you they need a nap after hearing about your schedule? Well, welcome to the life of an Eight! Who has time to think about how exhausted they are? Who has the luxury of taking a nap? There are things to get done and a world to save. We can rest afterward. The problem is that we don't rest!

Rest is salvation for the Eight.

It only took me a decade to figure that out, but I'm finally discovering the sacred rhythms that work for me. In our family we practice a weekly Sabbath, a monthly retreat day, and two three-day silent retreats a year, usually in July and January. These have been a spiritual, mental, and physical salvation.

During one of my January retreats, as I was entering into reflection on my Enneagram number (as I always do), I came across the SNAP concept in the book *The Road Back to You* by Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile. SNAP stands for “stop, notice, ask, pivot”—the tools that help us

become healthy in our type. When I got to the section on the Eight, I read, “Stop. Literally stop. If possible, put down whatever you are doing. Breathe.”

At first, I laughed aloud—a lot—and I almost rolled onto the ground laughing. Then I began to cry—a lot—like I was on the ground on my face because I realized I was so tired. As Eights, we have more energy than any other number, but when we are empty, we hit the wall both physically and emotionally.

Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God.” But for those of us who are driven by the desire to make things right in the world, it is difficult to hear that invitation. If we are going to feel the weight of that truth, we must reflect on the reality of God’s strength.

Sometimes I look at the activists, entrepreneurs, and leaders in my circle of friends and notice that many of us have adapted to patterns we never wanted for ourselves. Men in these circles particularly often seem to be disconnected from their need to rest from work. There is always one more phone call, client meeting, student request, or project. Engendered expectations around family and home life give them a pass to continue until physical or relational crisis hits.

I remember a repeated conversation I had with an Asian leader I coached in which I always asked him the same question: “How is your schedule working out for your health and the health of your family?”

I fall into those same patterns, but as a woman, engendered expectations compel me to at least seek balance, even if I don't attain it.

Stop. No, really, truly, stop. Breathe. If you can, still your body and find your center with both feet on the ground. Take a five-second breath in and a five-second breath out. Be still.

What invitation does God have for you today? What truth does God want you to know about the Holy Spirit's work in you and in the world?