

SUZANNE  
STABILE

AUTHOR OF *The Path Between Us*

*The*

JOURNEY  
TOWARD  
WHOLENESS

ENNEAGRAM WISDOM  
FOR STRESS, BALANCE,  
AND TRANSFORMATION



InterVarsity Press  
ivpress.com

Taken from *The Journey Toward Wholeness* by Suzanne Stabile.  
Copyright © 2022 by Suzanne Stabile. Published by InterVarsity Press,  
Downers Grove, IL. [www.ivpress.com](http://www.ivpress.com).

## INTRODUCTION

# TOWARD A BALANCED LIFE

*The journey to happiness involves finding the courage to go down into ourselves and take responsibility for what's there: all of it.*

RICHARD ROHR

The first time I taught the full content you encounter in these pages was at a workshop in Dallas during the summer of 2019. In the months leading up to that event, I became fascinated with some reading I'd done on the accelerating pace of change and the effect it was having on all of us. I was particularly concerned with technology, climate change, and the realities of globalization, and how, in each of those realms, what had worked in the past was no longer relevant. Which meant that the present was tumultuous. And the future, unknown.

I had been saying for a while that there was anger and anxiety everywhere, falling on all of us, unbidden and unnamed. It seemed to have no focus; it was everywhere in daily life—in families and churches and politics and workplaces and communities. People in places where I was teaching around the country were talking about an erosion of their sense of security and stability. Things felt more

chaotic in my own life than usual, and there was an obvious change in some of the things I'd always been able to count on.

The more I read, the more it sounded like what we were and are experiencing is *liminality*, an existential state that I describe as being “betwixt and between.” In other words, it’s not where we’re going and it’s not where we’ve been. Having taught the wisdom of the Enneagram for twenty-five years, I was certain it could help us navigate such uncertain times. I just needed some space to clarify how it would be helpful and what parts of it I should teach in relation to liminal space.

So on the first evening of that event in Dallas, I confessed to a room of three hundred people that I was feeling a lack of peace, and that answers to my questions felt inadequate. But I had no idea how much uncertainty we would be facing only nine months later when the coronavirus pandemic hit.

Since then, and as I write this, people around the world have experienced the uncertainty of liminality even more acutely and for a prolonged time. We spent months wondering if and when the surges of infection would recede. We waited anxiously for a vaccine, and then just as anxiously sat in our cars in very long lines, waiting to be vaccinated or to receive distributions from food banks, wondering if there would be enough for all of us. Even as infection rates improved, no one knew what the future would hold for any of us and we wondered if we could even hope for a return to “normal.”

### LIVING IN LIMINAL TIMES

The pandemic era is not the first or last liminal time, but it is ours and it is especially acute. Living life during a betwixt and between season—on the threshold that separates what *was* from what *will be*—is a balancing act that few are prepared for since our usual ways of managing life no longer work.

We don't like it when the world around us seems out of control, but let's face it: control is an illusion. It is my favorite illusion, but that doesn't make it real.

The truth is that nothing new happens as long as we are inside our self-constructed comfort zone. More importantly, nothing creative comes from business as usual. Every moment—even, dare I say, a liminal moment—is full of potential if we have the desire and the courage to walk toward it. And the Enneagram is an extraordinarily helpful tool to help us do that.

While liminal space is challenging, it may paradoxically be the best, if not the only, teachable space. We can no longer locate a single cause for anxiety and discomfort, and we can't fall back on our usual explanations or habits or assumptions. Nor can we discern the meaning of the unrest, anxiety, anger, shame, and *dis*-ease we feel. So we have to seek new ways of seeing and making meaning, of letting the uncertainty teach us.

Everyone responds to the discomfort and stress of a liminal time according to their personality type, often with unfortunate results. If we are risk takers by nature, we are anxious to quickly move forward toward a future of our own making. The move is often hasty and lacks the pieces of the past that have value. If we are risk averse, our nature is to “go back to the way things used to be,” unaware that there is no such place and that we will have to find the comfort we seek somewhere along the path that lies before us. For those who are present to but confused about what could be accomplished while on the threshold, doing whatever is right in front of us alleviates our cares and woes, but only momentarily.

## FINDING BALANCE

I've been told more than once that it's important to live a balanced life. I've been to workshops where speakers taught how to achieve

greater balance. I've read books on the topic. I've heard sermons preached about it, and I've visited monasteries where they're actually pretty good at it, though they might not say they were. As it turns out, living a balanced life is not that easy.

Sometimes when I know something *should* be done, I question whether I'm up to the task and then reach for the nearest excuse. Until about ten years ago, I had pretty much given up on achieving any kind of balance for my life. My excuse was that I'm just not well equipped for a balanced life. But as it turns out, that isn't true.

It isn't true for me, and it isn't true for you either.

In fact, Enneagram wisdom suggests two things: First, the key to living—in liminal time or any time—is balance. Second, we all have exactly what we need to find that balance. And that's what this book is all about.

Every moment is full of potential if we have the desire and the courage to walk toward it.

Perhaps you've studied the Enneagram enough to know what your motivations are. You may know which of your wings came first, what triad you belong to, and the sin or passion associated with your number. All of that is very helpful. But this book is about the

three Centers of Intelligence: *thinking*, *feeling*, and *doing*. It is generally and universally accepted by the world's philosophies and religions that human beings are born with these three native intelligences. Enneagram wisdom teaches us that these intelligences are simply three different ways of meeting the world.

We all have a different combination of these three qualities: one is dominant, one supports the dominant, and one is repressed. These Centers of Intelligence, as the Enneagram names them, are our natural resources, and if we can learn to use each one for its intended purpose, the result will be a more balanced approach to life.

The nine numbers of the Enneagram are divided among three ways, known as triads. Your triad is determined by your first response when you encounter information or situations—with either feeling, thinking, or doing. That is, when you take in information from the environment, do you respond initially with *What do I feel?*, *What do I think?*, or *What will I do?* It's an intuitive, automatic move and it identifies what is known as your *dominant center*. You don't need to try to change this response, but you do need to understand how it affects what you do next.



The other two centers are present, but one is supporting the dominant center, and one is repressed or unused. As you'll discover, if you aren't aware that there is more than the dominant center, you end up seeing only one-third of what's happening. And that is the beginning of losing your balance, which will only be exacerbated as you continually try to understand and make sense of your life while using only one of your natural resources.

This is really important because your responses are how you make sense of things, and how you make sense of things determines your worldview. Your worldview determines the choices you make, and your choices have the power to contribute peace and goodness to a world that is in need of both.

### TRIADS AND THE DOMINANT CENTER OF INTELLIGENCE

We'll begin by exploring each of the three triads and the way each number in that triad uses its dominant Center of Intelligence. The

challenge we all face is learning to manage our dominant center because if we don't, it will end up managing us.

In all three triads, when the dominant Center of Intelligence is unmanaged, there is a lack of balance. But as you'll see, you can learn to manage your dominant center. There are things you can do to be more aware of its limitations and choices you can make that will help you in learning to use it for its intended purpose.

But first, a caution: you will have no success in an effort to manage your dominant center unless you wrap your arms around

Enneagram wisdom teaches us that the key to living—in liminal times or any time—is balance.

the whole of who you are and then do the personal and spiritual work that allows excess feeling, thinking, and doing to fall away. Teresa of Avila, a Spanish Carmelite nun who lived in the Middle Ages, was a theologian of the contemplative life,

and her words have much to offer to all of us who are on this journey toward wholeness. As she said in her best-known work, *The Interior Castle*, “The feeling remains that God is on the journey.” Teresa emphasized the importance of being able to draw near to one's self, all of one's self. In fact, she said, without this embrace of the self, there can be no growth.

### *Managing Your Dominant Center*

The dominant center for Twos, Threes, and Fours is *feeling*. They are all about love, empathy, connection, loss, and pain. But the reality is that emotions are not made, they are allowed. And no emotion is final. For these heart people, anxiety and activity crowd out emotions. And when that happens, emotions can be expressed in unhealthy ways.

The result is often fragmentation in relationships, which is the last thing they want.

The dominant center for Fives, Sixes, and Sevens is *thinking*. They are rational—they choose reasoning over emotions and judgment over reacting. They all struggle with fear, which in Fives is underexpressed, in Sixes is overexpressed, and in Sevens is reframed as a positive. Both feeling and doing for them can be compromised. Their dysfunctional responses to fear limit productive thinking, so they settle instead for lazy thinking, which fails to produce the result they hope for.

The dominant center for Eights, Nines, and Ones is *doing*. People who make up the Doing Center are all somewhat preoccupied with control and less likely to acknowledge feeling or think about what they are doing. They intuitively convert varying emotions into anger, which is why it is sometimes referred to as the Anger Triad—they attempt to manage anger while engaging in activity as a response to the events in their lives. They hold their ground rather than adapt. And they all have some boundary issues.

### **STANCES AND THE REPRESSED CENTER OF INTELLIGENCE**

Although Enneagram *triads* are determined by which of the Centers of Intelligence—thinking, feeling, or doing—is dominant, Enneagram *stances* are determined by which center is repressed. By repressed, I mean underused or ignored. The numbers in the Withdrawing Stance (Fours, Fives, and Nines) repress doing in part because they aren't comfortable connecting with the world. It's not that these numbers don't do anything. The problem is they often don't do what needs to be done.

The numbers in the Aggressive Stance (Threes, Sevens, and Eights) repress feeling. They have an unconscious desire to reshape people and situations. It's not that they don't have feelings and emotions, but they avoid them when they can. And when they can't, they express their feelings indirectly. And the numbers in the Dependent Stance (Ones, Twos, and Sixes) repress thinking. It's not that they don't think—they all would tell you that they think all the time. The question is what they are thinking about. The Thinking Center is underdeveloped in these numbers, so they think nonproductively.

Along with managing your dominant center, the key to wholeness and balance is learning to access and *bring up* your repressed center. In the wisdom of the Enneagram, we bring up our

**Be intentional about what is yours to do, and after that let go.**

repressed center, the center that we least prefer, when we are able to consciously draw on it. For me as a Two, that has meant learning to balance feeling—my dominant

center—with thinking so that I consider more than my emotions in my choices and decisions. I have learned well that living a balanced life will forever be illusive if we don't learn to appropriately use the repressed center.

In the second section of the book, we explore each of the three stances and each number in detail. For now, here's a brief overview. The first step toward balance is for each number to accept that their dominant center needs to be managed. The second step is to recognize, and then own, that they are either thinking, feeling, or doing repressed, and then follow that recognition with working to bring up that center. These two steps help us to find more peace and experience less pain, both for ourselves and for those with whom we are in relationship. That's how we begin the work toward achieving balance. It takes effort to choose to do that, but it's well worth it.

## THE CHALLENGE OF SOUL WORK

As we commit to this journey, please keep in mind that this is a process. We are making some space for lifelong work, so any thought of reaching a destination is a misunderstanding of the depth of Enneagram wisdom. But along the way, every effort will be met with growth that is worth the work.

Over the years of teaching, leading retreats and workshops, and offering spiritual direction, my husband, Joe, and I have learned that we need to set the table for people to do spiritual work. They can't just come in off the street from the traffic and the noise and the hurry of the world and start reflecting on their lives in a meaningful way. Spiritual leaders have always known that. That's the reason many of the great cathedrals of the world have a labyrinth set into the floor stones in the nave: so all who enter can walk it as a form of meditation, transitioning from the secular to the sacred.

I would encourage you to take time to create a space that can be a home for spiritual practices, including this challenge of deep Enneagram work. Joe and I are blessed with enough room in our home to create a space for prayer and meditation. But when our children were small and we were living in parsonages, we had to settle for a chair. The space is not nearly as important as what you do—and do not do—when you're in it. You might want a small table with a candle and a prayer book of your choosing. Depending on your Enneagram number, you might add a journal and some meaningful objects that represent where you've been and where you hope to go on your journey toward balance and wholeness.

Having some knowledge about your dominant and repressed centers will be very helpful as you try to discern which spiritual practices might be best for you at any point along the way. Your spiritual journey is greatly affected by the spiritual disciplines that

you practice. If you choose only disciplines that are based in your dominant center, you lose an opportunity for both growth and balance. It's a challenge to choose disciplines and practices that rely heavily on your repressed center, but that is your growing edge, and it helps orient you toward using the centers in a more balanced way.

Soul work is also best done in the context of community, as we do at the Micah Center, our ministry home in Dallas. We all need companions for the journey because it feels risky to make a commitment to awareness and self-observation. When you add spiritual practices such as centering prayer, journaling, days set apart for solitude or silence, fasting (not just from food), reading authors you don't agree with, volunteer work, and prayer—to mention just a few—it seems hard, ominous, and intimidating. To be sure, you will have to risk being in process, and you will also have to take a chance on being broken in some ways, only to be more enlightened and healed in others. Big things happen one day at a time, and you might miss the nuance of that if you travel alone. It's a courageous journey, so be kind to yourself and your companions, and celebrate every success along the way, no matter how small.

It's my hope that after you read this book, you will want to meet with a friend, or gather with a group of friends, who are committed to doing some deeply personal and potentially transformative work toward wholeness. For that reason, I wrote *The Journey Toward Wholeness Study Guide*, which includes six sessions that offer direction as you try to incorporate what you learn here into your everyday life.

I have one final piece of advice as you begin this book: be intentional about what is yours to do, and after that let go.

Henri Nouwen is one of my spiritual heroes. I'm drawn to him in part because he was a Two, but also because when I read from his work about spiritual growth and faithfulness, I feel like I can

do it. Of the many stories he shared with friends and readers, one of my favorites is about his relationship with the Flying Rodleights. They were a troupe of trapeze artists from South Africa that Henri met in Freiburg, Germany. He wrote that he was “raptured” by their performance. The next day, he returned to see them again, and after the show introduced himself as a great fan.

In the days that followed, they invited him to watch them practice and gave him free tickets. They asked him to dinner and then suggested that he travel with them for a week. He immediately agreed. On that trip, Henri was talking with the leader of the troupe (also named Rodleigh) about flying:

Rodleigh said, “As a flyer, I must have complete trust in my catcher. The public might think that I am the great star of the trapeze, but the real star is Joe, my catcher. He has to be there for me with split-second precision and grab me out of the air as I come to him on the long jump. The secret,” Rodleigh continued, “is that the flyer does nothing and the catcher does everything. When I fly to Joe, I have simply to stretch out my arms and hands and wait for him to catch me and pull me safely over the apron behind the catchbar.”

A flyer must fly, and a catcher must catch, and the flyer must trust, with outstretched arms, that his catcher will be there for him.

The truth about a serious journey under the tutelage of Enneagram wisdom is that you will make changes that lead to transformation. Some of the people in your life will be very happy for you, but others will remind you of the “old you” that they counted on and honestly preferred. As it turns out, people don’t love you for your essence, which is your truest self found beneath your personality. They know and love you for your personality.

On the other hand, you will have a chance for moments of loving and honoring yourself from a deep place in your soul that is the very best of you. But you'll never get there if you can't let go, trusting that life will catch you and celebrate with you the gifts of a more balanced way of living your days.