

# Voices: You are not your personality: Why the Enneagram matters

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You are not your personality.

In "[The problem with personality assessments](#)," Daniel Harris is right about that. Your personality is not who you truly are, but it is who you have become, whether you like it or not, and whether or not you know it.

The funny thing is, once you figure out your Enneagram number, you'll never forget how it shapes you, and everyone else will see how those characteristics have shaped you on your faith journey.

We are all born with natural inclinations and then other traits have been nurtured in us, for better or worse. You don't have to look at your friend group for long to notice some of them always tend to have an opinion, always seem to answer first, are among the loudest and offer to lead more quickly than anyone else. And then there are those who just don't function that way. They are always quiet, slow to respond and reluctant to expend the energy to lead or speak up.

Try as you might, some of those things will never change. The quiet, reluctant thinker will never be the loud, engaged leader. And yet, as Harris writes, who they are is truly a child of God, made in God's image, and redeemed in Christ.

However, the work of creation, redemption and transformation are journeys and not merely destinations in the Christian life.

# A tool worth considering

To understand your journey, to have compassion for yourself and others, to understand God's compassion and grace for you and to really allow these to take hold requires some reflection, prayer and discernment. That is all the [Enneagram](#) claims to offer.

The Enneagram is not really even a personality tool. It points to nine different ways of being in the world, nine ways of seeing the world around us and nine sins that prevent us from being all that God has created us to be, but it does not claim to be an assessment that names your identity.

In fact, Enneagram teachers claim that the assessment tests are faulty and your true identity is not in your number. However, knowing your number is a remarkable tool for helping you to be formed in the way of Christ that reflects not your personality type or your number but the unique creation God has made you to be.

The Enneagram is really just one tool for considering who God is making you to be and discerning how God is at work in your life. It is a really good one, but, with it being so trendy right now, we have to be cautious about how it is used. It is too easy to turn it into a party trick rather than a spiritual resource for discerning how God continues to be at work in our lives.

## 'Self-awareness matters'

As a person with a Type Three personality, I know that I am formed more fully in Christ's likeness when I am attuned to my feelings and the feelings of others. The Enneagram helped me learn that, and it has made me a better husband, father, minister and social worker.

My colleague and dear friend who has a Type Six personality helps me

realize that about myself. Likewise, I help him see the ways he can really trust himself and God's work within him more fully when making decisions. He has learned to speak what he knows to be true with more confidence as a leader formed in Christ. He is naturally more reluctant but is learning to step out. I am naturally, well, never reluctant, and I am learning to slow down and connect. This is Enneagram discernment.

Might we have learned this otherwise? Perhaps.

But I have been trained as a minister, and I have been seeking to be faithful to Christ for five decades. The enneagram helped me realize some things about my habitual patterns, deep underlying motivations and fears and a few other relational hang-ups in just a few months. It provided a mirror so that I could see some things in my life I just didn't want to pay attention to.

We all have those traits that get us in trouble over and over again, but they are not the same for all of us. The Bible points out some wisdom about these, but self-awareness matters in ministry. You have to learn your own habits and hang-ups, and you have to walk with Christ in your own way for him to redeem these.

## **Why use the Enneagram?**

As Harris suggested, we should take hold of Scripture for it helps us see who we are. But we have to have eyes to see and ears to hear. And there is so much to see and hear in who we are and how we are made. There is also so much to see and hear in how we struggle on life's journey.

In Romans 7, the apostle Paul said he didn't understand his actions. He asked why he always did the very things he did not want to do. Suzanne Stabile teaches that it's likely because of his Enneagram type. Whatever our number, there are plenty of things we do that we do not want to do and other things we do not want to do that we keep doing.

Your Enneagram type can be your guide as you ask similar questions. It will teach you something about yourself that everyone around you likely already knows, that you may know without wanting to admit it, and that God is using to shape you if you would pay attention to it.

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