

THE ENNEAGRAM
Pacific Unitarian Church
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The goal of exploring the Enneagram in the context of a church service can be multiple.

First, who aren't interested in their self. No, I'm not kidding. I mean we are all interesting and complex creatures and getting underneath the unique ways each of us look at the world is fascinating and essential to the spiritual journey. If we are paying attention, we are mysteries to first and foremost ourselves. And the paradox is, we need to get outside ourselves in order to understand our inner selves.

Some of the spiritual journey has to be validating, but some of it has to twist us, shock us out of our paradigms. Core to any growth and transformation is the effort to look at ourselves a little from a different perspective. Knowing the sources that motivate us is clarifying, revelatory even. The Enneagram attempts to do that.

Truth is, I could have chosen the Myers Briggs test or any other personality test. I could have handed you *What Color Is Your Parachute*. I picked the Enneagram because it has deep mysterious religious roots, and August is the time I set aside for alternative themed services.

Origins of the Enneagram

The Enneagram is most connected to the Sufi order that began about a thousand years ago. However, some speculation has parts of it extending back to ancient Babylonian times 2500 years ago. *Ennea* is the Greek word for the number nine and since Enneagram is translatable to a nine diagram, it's a little Greek in origin too. Anyway, it's old, and given that it is a psychological tool, that makes it at least a little more interesting to me.

When the Enneagram was in the hands of medieval Christians, and yes it was, ". . . the chief use of this tool was to have a means to understand which of the seven deadly sins we were most subject to the temptation of."

Interestingly, the Enneagram does not make it into popular use here in the West until the twentieth century. It came into use as a tool in Russia and Europe about the time of World War One. Today, the Enneagram is mostly used as one of many, many different rubrics to evaluate ourselves.

After being used for several decades in Catholic retreats and seminars, the nine-type personality tool has increased its use even in evangelical circles. Since 2016, evangelical publishers have released at least three full length books on the Enneagram. *Christianity Today* has been a frequent advocate of the Enneagram. Additionally, the Enneagram test came into popular use in the U.S. with Catholic spiritualist Richard Rohr and psychiatrist Claudio Naranjo.

In Christian terms, the Enneagram is the means by which God showed people their blindspots and helped them overcome weaknesses in personality, and restoring their essential selves. I don't necessarily believe that, I like to think of it as a touchstone, an excuse, one might say, for a conversation and focus on your personality and the challenge that that wisdom brings. I invite you not to first ask, as good UUs are wont to do, where it is not perfect, I encourage you to have some fun with it and explore it for usefulness.

The Enneagram teaches that there are nine different personality styles in the world, one of which we naturally gravitate toward and adopt in childhood. Some think these styles develop as our means of coping and feeling safe as kids. Each type or number has a distinct way of seeing the world and an underlying motivation that powerfully influences how that type thinks, feels and behaves. These personality types could, as Riso the test designer describes them, be named the likely fixations of our egos.

I don't know that I buy all that, but they are at least ways of being in the world.

In the worst-case scenario, having taken this test and thought through this tool, you will identify qualities about yourself that probably feel more persistent than others, but likely feel a little foggy and frustrated that greater clarity has not been delivered.

In the best-case scenario you will feel that you have been discovered and see yourself in a way that you find surprisingly transformative.

Over time the categories labels have shifted a little. For example, what once was "The Thinker" is now "The Artist," and the category once labeled the "Status Seeker" is now dubbed the "Motivator." Likewise, the "Generalist" has shifted to becoming the "Enthusiast." I don't know the motivation for those changes. Among the nine personality types in the Enneagram live three major groupings. They are described in different ways as Thinking, Feeling, and Instinctive.

Again, thematic, or presumed about this framework, is the belief that an awareness of our inner states is essential so that we can move beyond the simple base instincts and reactions of our personality types. Again, thematic to this test is the premise that greater self-understanding is a prelude to personal growth and that transcending our ego is the gate to every spiritual path.

The Enneagram certainly is not magical, nor mostly does it claim to be. What it does do, though, is help point a finger at why others—or for that matter we—keep repeating the same forms of behavior again and again.

When you think about the Enneagram and what it reveals, think about the areas that are your oases and/or deserts of skills and propensities. The philosopher Soren Kirkegaard says we should be subjective and generous to others and objective and harsh about ourselves. I love moral advice that has a little teeth to it, and I think the Enneagram can build courage and generosity in each direction.

One of the nice things about this test is that it focuses in on normal human behavior. Whereas most of the psychological research has been at least a little biased by the search for the illness, or the what's wrong, the Enneagram is more asking what is and what happens psychologically—and in a way historically—when people like us spiral upwards towards our potential and/or downwards toward our frailties. That to me is the most interesting part.

Even if the authors like astrologists suggest that one's number is pretty fixed, the authors working with the theory that your Enneagram type developed in childhood does stick, and do argue that this test is the fundamentally best typology, and allowing for some tinkering, its wisdom has an absolute eternal quality to it. Since I am not too inclined to accept such bold claims, but a curious glutton for exposing them, here we are.

The Enneagram can become a little bit of a common language between people in group therapy or in a relationship together. It is true that the idea of cramming people into types feels odious, and at times is, taken with some flexibility, it can also be fun.

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For example, the passion or sin of "Ones," which are Reformers or Perfectionists, is Anger.

The Perfectionist or The Reformer (The One)

Perfectionists are realistic, conscientious, and principled. They strive to live up to their high ideals.

The Shadow or Challenge of the Perfectionist or Reformer is ...

In being constantly disappointed with myself or others when my expectations are not met,
and being upset or angry because others aren't trying as hard as I am.

For "Helpers/Two" the great threat is too much pride.

The Helper (the Two)

Helpers are warm, concerned, nurturing, and sensitive to other people's needs.

The Shadow or Challenge of the Helper is ...

Being upset that others don't tune in to me as much as I tune in to them.
And, not being able to say no.

For the Achiever, also called the Performer, the chief propensity to be careful about is deceit.

The Achiever or Performers (the Three)

Achievers are energetic, optimistic, self-assured, and goal oriented.

The Shadow or Challenge of the Achiever or Performer is ...

Having to put up with inefficiency and incompetence.
The fear of not being or not being seen as successful,
and always being "on." It's exhausting.

I was not originally going to share them all, but while we are here, here goes...

The Individualist or Romantic (the Four)

Romantics have sensitive feelings and are warm and perceptive.

The Shadow or Challenge of the Individualist or Romantic is ...

The constant feeling that they don't fit in,
along with the frequent sense that they are missing something that other people have.
Romantics when not grounded can risk attaching themselves to
idealized teachers, heroes, artists, etc.

For Fives (Investigators or Observers) it is avarice.

Investigators or Observers (the Five)

Observers have a need for knowledge and are introverted, curious, analytical, and insightful.

The Shadow or Challenge of the Investigator/Observer is ...

Being slow to put their knowledge and insights out in the world.
Feeling bad when they act defensive or behave like a know-it-all

For Six's Loyalists, whose chief personality type or instinct I believe my Mom was, is fear.

Loyalist (the Six)

Loyalists are responsible, trustworthy, and value loyalty to family, friends, groups, and causes.
Their personalities range broadly from reserved to outspoken and confrontative.

The Shadow or Challenge of the Loyalist is ...

The constant push and pull involved in trying to make up my mind, and procrastinating
because frequently Sixes have little confidence in themselves.

With Sevens or Enthusiasts, gluttony is noted as a potential shadow to their gifts.

Enthusiast or Generalist (the Seven)

Adventurers are energetic, lively, and optimistic. They want to contribute to the world.

The Shadow or Challenge of the Enthusiast/Generalist is ...

In always feeling like they do not have enough time to do all the things they want.
Enthusiasts also struggle to complete the things I start

For Eights, or Challengers, lust is the shadow of all that good energy.

Challengers (the Eight)

Asserters are direct, self-reliant, self-confident, and protective.

The Shadow or Challenge of the Challenge is, ...

Overwhelming people with my bluntness; scaring them away when I don't intend to
And, being restless and impatient with others' incompetence

For the Nines, those like me who are Peacemakers, sloth is the great downside for our desire to move things along and keep things smooth.

Peacemakers (the Nine)

Peacemakers are receptive, good-natured, and supportive.
They seek union with others and the world around them.

The Shadow or Challenge of the Peacemaker is ...

Being judged and misunderstood for being placid and/or indecisive.
And, being critical of themselves for lacking initiative and discipline.

Seeing ourselves with some objectivity does not mean that we/you should love yourself any less than you do, or for that matter any more. There is after all, repeated in all the literature, no one better "type." The chief thing the Enneagram does potentially offer is a way we can see our own real gifts, and pay appropriate attention to the potential pitfalls our very character brings.