



# KNOWING YOURSELF

SO YOU CAN LOVE YOUR SPOUSE BETTER



MONTHLY MARRIAGE WORKSHOP  
MONTH 4

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## THE 'WHY'

This month's theme is all about self-awareness. The more we chat with other married couples, the more we have realized that self-awareness (and all that entails) is one of the sorely lacking spots in a lot of relationships. People don't know they act a certain way, live a certain way, and behave a certain way a lot of times due to specific factors of their upbringing, their family of origin, things that have been done against them, how they are wired, or as methods of self-protection. One of the most productive elements in our marriage has been doing the deep work of self-searching and self-assessment, with Jesus by our side guiding us through the process, and then bringing that to our spouse. One incredibly helpful tool that has helped us in our journey is the Enneagram, which is something we will explore below.

## THE 'HOW'

After doing this month's action plan, you will walk away with:

1. Tools and helpful tips to use when conflict arises, or when you are needing help communicating.
2. A deeper understanding of each other and how the other person is wired.
3. Helpful language and frameworks to work through the common problems where self-awareness is stalled or blocked.

# WEEK 1

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR STORY

If you had to write a one page summary of your life, would you be able to? Would you be able to do it without skipping any parts or able to write something that you felt did your life justice? Understanding our own story is one of the most helpful tools any marriage can have. Because when you know your account, you can share it and allow your spouse to understand you better, which causes empathy and a deeper connection of love.

For this week's homework, each of you will write down your story in a page or two. And try your best to write it with the context of life-shaping moments or factors. For example, for Jeff, his story mainly revolves around being raised by a single mom, who struggled with mental illness, and the poverty they were in. Why? Because those were the most shaping and defining moments of his childhood and early teenage years. It's why he is incredibly resilient (nothing we go through seems even close to as bad as things when he was growing up) and optimistic about everything. It's why he fights so hard for our family (because he saw how hard it was not to have a dad around). It's also why he has to work at self-awareness and introspection in some seasons because it doesn't come naturally to kids who have endured some form of childhood trauma, because the body's natural response is to shut off or block out, and he knows which enables him to push into it deeper. Below are a few questions to get you guys started.

What was your childhood like growing up? (Don't just do a summary of your youth, but describe the overall feel of it-- was it hard, comfortable, full of play and joy?)

What were the few most significant moments you can remember that shaped you the most?

After you have written and read your stories to each other, go a step further and take the love style quiz for free at <https://howwelove.com/love-style-quiz/>. This will take you through a very short questionnaire and will tell you which love style you are, which is not to be confused with a love language. This will show you how your childhood shaped the way you love, and that coincides with how you love your spouse. It's helpful to register so you can combine your test and your spouse's test. It will pop out valuable insight into your core patterns together as a married couple because of how you grew up. We know it will be an invaluable time with lots of light bulb moments. There may be times where you feel like the therapists who authored the test have listened to your conversations and arguments.

# WEEK 2

## FINDING YOUR NUMBER

If I'm honest (this is Jeff speaking here this week) I'm enormously skeptical of personality tests. I always have been. They never seemed to connect, and I always thought they were excuses to stay a certain way and not grow. Now, that is true for some, but when Alyssa and I came across the Enneagram, we noticed it was different than previous other tests. For a few reasons. First, it seems to be anchored a lot more in believing that humans are deeply spiritual beings. When I dig into the Enneagram more, I'm brought more to the feet of Jesus and in a relationship with Him. Secondly, when you take the test it gives you a number (1-9, since there are nine different personalities), but it says what you are like as that number in a healthy way, and this is what your number looks like when unhealthy. That part alone has been the most significant help to Alyssa and me, knowing how we can help guard each other against the darker sides of our personalities has been so lifegiving.

So for this week, I want you guys to spend the entire week digging into finding your number. Below are two fantastic resources that will help us finish the second half of the month off strong and let this sink into our marriage for the better. Disclaimer: the test is a helpful starting point. The first time I took it I was actually a different number. The cool part about the enneagram is it actually takes work to really find your number, since it takes some soul searching. You probably won't know it in five minutes. That's where I think the podcast comes in, as a helpful guide to really breakdown the numbers. Also if you're like me you will identify in some ways with many of the numbers. That's fine and normal. What you are trying to find is your core number - the one that defines your motivations and feelings and ways of seeing the world, not just behaviors.

The test is here: <https://www.exploreyourtype.com/details>

Listen to the podcast here that describes the numbers and goes into more detail:

<http://www.theliturgyists.com/podcast/2016/8/23/the-enneagram-episode-37>

## QUESTIONS TO ASK THIS WEEK:

Were you surprised by your number?

What were things about your number you thought ‘yes that’s me.’

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What were things about your number you thought ‘that doesn’t seem to resonate.’

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What did you think about the ‘unhealthy’ part of your number?

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# WEEK 3

## DIGGING IN

*One of the most transformative voices in our life has been David Brenner. He’s a phenomenal leader and writer. For this week I thought we’d put one of our favorite excerpts from him that will help you distill the Enneagram even more, especially with the prayerful exercise at the end.*

One tool that many people have found helpful in identifying basic sin tendencies is an ancient approach to understanding personality called the Enneagram (pronounced “any-a-gram”). Unlike classifications of personality that are based on traits, the organizing principle of the Enneagram is more in-depth and less attractive. It zeroes in on the fatal flaw, or primary sin, of each of nine personality types. No one should work with the Enneagram if what they seek is flattery. But no one should fail to do so if what they find is in-depth knowledge of self.

Our sinfulness is never simply reducible to one temptation. But the assumption behind the Enneagram is that underlying everything we do is one major temptation that is particular to us. And until we see it for what it is, we will inevitably give in to this temptation and live in bondage to it. The core sins identified by the Enneagram are each associated with a core

need. The needs are basic human needs, such as a need for love, for security or for perfection. The sin consists in making these something of ultimate value—that is, making them into God.

- Ones need to be perfect and, discovering that neither they nor anything else in their world is perfect, are tempted by self-righteous anger. A good biblical example of this type is Paul.
- Twos need to be loved and needed, and their competence in making this happen sets them up for pride. Martha is a good biblical example of a Two.
- Threes need to be successful and are tempted to deceit, as they do whatever they have to do to avoid failure and appear in the best possible light. Jacob illustrates this type.
- Fours need to be special and are tempted toward envy, escapist fantasy and a compromise of authenticity. Joseph, the Old Testament patriarch, illustrates this type.
- Fives need knowledge, long for fulfillment, and are tempted by greed, stinginess and critical detachment. Thomas, the so-called doubting disciple, fits this pattern.
- Sixes need security and are tempted by fear, self-doubt and cowardice. Timothy is a good example of a Six.
- Sevens need to avoid pain and are tempted by gluttony and intemperance. Solomon is a biblical example of this type.
- Eights need power, self-reliance and opportunities to be against something and are tempted by lust, arrogance and the desire to possess and control others. King Saul is a good illustration of an Eight.
- Nines need to maintain emotional peace and avoid initiative and are tempted by laziness, comfortable illusions and being overly accommodating. Jonah illustrates this type.

I discovered the Enneagram in 1988, during a period of some intense personal spiritual work. As often happens, the first type I identified as I sought to find myself within the system was wrong. Unable to face deeper truths about myself, I identified with several superficial traits that were true of me—but not my deepest truth. In the language of the Enneagram, I first thought I was a Five. The core sin of this type is greed, and I was able to see how, despite massive denial of this, I was in fact significantly motivated by greed. Many aspects of the personality style of Fives also fit quite well for me. These are people who tend to live in their head, observing life with detachment, objectivity and insight. With a voracious hunger for knowledge, their quest to understand the world and themselves is relentless. However, at times it keeps them from both intimacy with others and genuine and deep knowing of themselves. All this fits me. But by identifying with this type I was also protecting myself

from a more painful encounter with my deepest sin tendencies. Another type where I felt a good fit was a One. At this point in my life I was just beginning to understand and face my anger, and anger is the root sin of Ones. I could also identify with the core temptation to perfection and to doing the right thing for the wrong reason. Clearly there was some of the moralist in me, even if I was working hard to keep it under control. And I could identify with the tendency to become overly serious, dutiful and responsible. It seemed like a relatively good fit.

I also felt I saw a good deal of myself in the Two—people whose root sin is pride and whose core temptation is to flattery and helpfulness that is ultimately more self-serving than they recognize. Needing others to like them, Twos are tempted to manipulate others into needing them in some way or another. In general, they control others by pleasing them. Many of these things seemed like a reasonably good fit for me.

But although we all fit all nine types to some extent or another, “reasonably good fits” always mean that you have not yet been able to truly face the depths of your illusions and basic sin. Continued prayerful reflection on what I was learning about myself from the Enneagram slowly suggested that where I really fit was with Type three. As is always the case when one finds one’s true type within the Enneagram, this was initially accompanied by a horrifying sense of humiliation. How could I dare name my basic sin as deceit? How willing I suddenly was to own any of the other eight basic sins! How profoundly exposed I suddenly felt!

Threes are not necessarily liars. It is simply that out of our profound fear of failure we tend to be good at putting the best possible spin on things. Consequently we are never quite as healthy, competent, successful or whatever else we value as we appear. This is the core of our deception. We also worship at the shrine of efficiency, and we usually do pretty well at measuring up against this rather arbitrary self-established criterion of success. Appearances count for threes. We don’t so much tell lies as we tend to live them. Ouch! I knew I had found my type—my basic sin pattern. The truth is that none of these types is worse or more sinful than another. And none is more beyond redemption than another. While our basic personality type and core sinful temptation appears to remain constant over a lifetime, there is no question that we can move toward greater freedom and wholeness within the framework of who we are. This is the process of spiritual transformation. Spiritual transformation, not self-knowledge, is the goal of Christian spirituality. With God’s help we need to break through our illusions and see ourselves as we truly are in relation to God. A complete knowing of our self in relation to God includes knowing three things: our self as deeply loved (dealt with in chapter three), our self as deeply sinful (the focus of this chapter), and our self as in a process of being redeemed and restored (which will be explored in chapter six). Facing these deep truths about ourselves makes it possible for us to accept and know ourselves as we are accepted and known by God.

## REFLECTION

Genuinely knowing yourself as you are known by God can be quite frightening. But if God knows you and still loves you deeply, there is hope that you can do the same! Genuine self-knowledge is available to all who (1) genuinely desire it, (2) are willing to prayerfully reflect on their experience and (3) have the courage to meet themselves and God in solitude. If your self-knowledge is limited, prayerfully reflect on which of these three prerequisites is most deficient. If you hunger to know yourself more deeply, continue the daily prayer review suggested in chapter two. Also, watch for times when you can be alone with yourself and God. Often these times are already in the rhythm of your week but are filled with distractions to protect you from solitude. Some people have music on whenever they are alone. Others turn to their computer, television or their phone in ways that serve the same soul-numbing purposes. The possibilities for avoiding solitude are endless. After prayerful reflection to identify the things you use to avoid solitude, covenant with God and yourself to set aside some time to simply be still with God in the depths of yourself. Don't give yourself any agenda for this time other than sitting with God in silence.

Begin with a simple prayer asking God to help you be still. Don't feel you need to fill your time with words or thoughts; just remain still and believe that you are in God's presence whether you sense it or not.

At the end of the time—not during it—write your experience in your journal. Note your thoughts, reactions and feelings and then give them up to God. The point is not analysis but identification and release. Note them for what they are and then give them to God. Self-knowledge is God's gift, not the result of your introspection. Remember, this is not self-therapy. It is spending time with God and allowing God to meet you and help you know yourself as you are known.

There is no substitute for meeting God in your depths if you really desire this knowing. Praying that you might see yourself as God sees you takes courage. But if done with the deep assurance that the self you seek to know is already known and deeply loved by God, it is absolutely possible. And remember, it is in the depths of yourself that God waits to meet you with transforming love.

# WEEK 4

## HOW YOUR ENNEAGRAM NUMBERS AFFECT EACH OTHER

Now that we are in week 4, here's where the rubber meets the road! How your number and type and your self-awareness affect your marriage not just yourself, is where some breakthroughs start to show.

For example (this is Jeff talking this week) Alyssa and I had years of doing the same cycle of conflict. I'd want to hash it out, talk about every little detail, and treat our arguments more like forensic cases (I like to concentrate on the 'facts' of the conflict and talk about how we can both grow or get better). But to Alyssa, whenever I kicked into this gear, she'd want to crawl into a hole. She'd want to close off and run away. AND guess what? When she did that my brain told me "oh she just isn't understanding where I'm coming from, maybe I should talk somewhere." Talk about a never-ending cycle!

And now knowing the Enneagram and ourselves, Alyssa is a classic 9 (peacemaker or mediator), and I'm a classic 8 (challenger).

But here's where it's been helpful. When I spent time understanding Alyssa's wiring, I can now serve her more in that and connect on her terms. And same to her for me. For example, I'm extremely logical (to a fault sometimes), but that's a vital characteristic of an 8. We have a hard time processing something without all the facts and understanding the merits and logic of the problem. So Alyssa knows now in an argument if she can help me understand something it will be hugely beneficial. But before she felt like that was too aggressive.

Or with me to Alyssa, I've realized one of the most helpful things I can do is give her space and boundaries to let her think. She feels overwhelmed when I start bulldozing her with ideas, thoughts, facts, etc. So I think about how I'm saying things and give space for things to breathe now when we are communicating about something serious. And we've noticed night and day difference!

So here's a fun exercise to end the month on.

Go to one of these two sites (or both):

<https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/the-enneagram-type-combinations/>

<http://drdaviddaniels.com/relationships-intimacy/enneagram-types-in-relationship/>

Find you two in the matrix (for example Alyssa and I clicked on the 8-9). Then dive into the content under that matrix and spend some time reading it together. Then answer the questions below.

**QUESTIONS TO ASK THIS WEEK:**

What parts of your relationship matrix stood out as true the most?

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What parts maybe didn't resonate?

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What surprised you?

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What do you think is your guys greatest strength as a couple in your two numbers?

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What do you think is your guys greatest weakness as a couple in your two numbers?

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I hope this month was a blessing to you all. I know the content in this month transformed our marriage deeply the more we dug into it. But please remember this very much can be a lengthy process. Self-awareness and sitting at the feet of Jesus asking Him who you are should take a lifetime. It's not just a formula or a number or a type, but these tools can be immensely helpful. So don't be alarmed if you feel like this month felt more significant than a month. It is. So feel free to informally come back to this month a few times a year to check in and ask each other pointed questions. But ultimately never stop sitting at Jesus' feet, in His word, understanding Him and yourself better, because when you are in a properly aligned and good spot with the Lord, it will have a profound impact on your marriage.

**Jeff + Alyssa**

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