

Christians and the Enneagram
by Dr. Ron Kastens

In recent years, the Enneagram has grown in popularity, both inside and outside of the church. While many Christians have found this tool to support their spiritual growth, others have questioned whether the Enneagram is appropriate for Christians to use, and some fear it is perhaps even dangerous. Twice, I have been asked whether Christians should/can use the Enneagram and offer an overview of my thoughts. While not exhaustive, I address the prominent concerns.

What is the Enneagram? The Enneagram is a personality typology, similar in some ways to Myers-Briggs and the DISC profile. The Enneagram is a modern tool with very ancient roots. It is just a tool that helps us see ourselves as we are but also who we can be... and it helps provide a path toward growth and development. When used appropriately and used well, the Enneagram can help us grow into the likeness of Jesus.

The Enneagram is about personal growth. Each of us has blind spots. There are things about us that are hard to see. As much as I may want to grow as a man, husband, father, employee, boss, etc., if something is in my blind spot, I cannot work on it. I cannot grow beyond where I am.

Is the name and symbol evil? On first look, some express an aversion to the Enneagram because it sounds like “pentagram” which carries association with the occult. The symbol itself is not dissimilar to others with occult association. More could be written regarding the pentagram and the occult, but for our purposes, the Enneagram is not related to the pentagram in symbol or content. More generally, I caution anyone from embracing or rejecting an idea, symbol, or approach simply because it reminds them of something else. Instead, learn about the idea, symbol, or approach for what it is, on its own merits. We should not reject something just because it is unfamiliar or strange to us.

Did the Enneagram originate from the occult? The Enneagram was not created by any one person, group, or belief system, or at a specific point in time. Rather, numerous people throughout history and representing various cultures, backgrounds, and belief systems have contributed to the contemporary Enneagram. In fact, new theories, approaches, and applications are still in process. Some have found historical influences going back as far as Pythagoras and Plato. There are also connections to the desert fathers and mothers of the fourth century (early Christian monks), specifically regarding their thinking and teaching related to the eight vices common among human beings. Aspects of the Enneagram are also evident in historical Judaism and Sufism. However, and to reiterate, no single group or person can emphatically state, “We invented, discovered, or produced the Enneagram.” Marilyn Vancil aptly states, “The Enneagram is an accumulation of ancient spiritual teachings and current psychological research.”¹

Some (Christian) critics point to more recent theorists and teachers of the Enneagram, such as George Gurdjieff, Oscar Ichazo, and Claudio Naranjo. To my understanding, these men were not Christians. They were building upon wisdom handed down from other people, even Christians. These men gathered the best wisdom they could find on human personality and then contributed their own learning. They did not create the Enneagram, but they did contribute significantly to it. Since then, still others have continued to contribute to the Enneagram we have today.

¹ Vancil, Marilyn. *Self to Lose, Self to Find* (New York: Convergent Books, 2020), xviii.

A valid question is, “So what if non-Christians contributed to the Enneagram?” In a variety of fields, Christians use wisdom and understanding that has been accumulated down through time, from a variety of people, who were in different places spiritually. This is true in disciplines such as medicine, psychology, counseling, sociology, etc. Even missionaries and pastors use wisdom gleaned from “secular” sources to enhance their promotion of the gospel. All truth is God’s truth. With discernment we take the best wisdom in those fields and use it well. We ignore faulty information, including that which contradicts our faith. In these fields we do not ignore wisdom simply because some contributors through the years were not Christians. Why should we do this with the Enneagram?

Vancil writes “[the Enneagram] is not a proprietary system owned by any one person or belief and is open for varied uses and interpretation.”² The Enneagram is not a religious tool, tied to any particular religion. It is simply a tool used by different people, in different settings, and for different purposes. Both meditation and music are examples of tools that can be found in various religious traditions. They are used differently and for different purposes, but they are the same basic tools. We do not refuse the benefits of these tools simply because people who are not Christians also use them. Rather, we use them for purposes that honor, and connect us to, Christ. A person who is a faithful follower of Jesus can use the Enneagram as a tool in a way that honors Christ and helps people grow as disciples of Jesus.

Do non-Christians teach the Enneagram? Yes. Some people who teach the Enneagram are not Christians. My learning about the Enneagram has included a variety of teachers representing different perspectives and backgrounds. Some include a clearly biblical approach to their teaching and others do not. The same is true in the various fields mentioned above. It is my responsibility to be discerning and glean helpful Enneagram information when I find it and discard anything that does not line up with an orthodox understanding of the Bible. I can learn solid truth about the Enneagram from someone who is not a Christian. I can learn truth about the Enneagram from someone who believes differently than I do about aspects of the Christian faith. Everything they write and teach does not have to line up with my faith for me to learn things from them about the Enneagram.

As Christians, we should be discerning with all information we take in. Just because a book is published by a Christian publisher does not mean it contains sound, orthodox teaching. Just because I have read a particular author before – and he/she was doctrinally sound – does not mean I blindly read his/her new material. I must be thoughtful and careful about everything I read, using what is good and true, while rejecting what is not. All truth is God’s truth but we must use our intelligence and be discerning.

Conclusion

The Enneagram is spiritually neutral. It is a tool used by many people from a variety of faith traditions. I believe the Enneagram is most helpful when framed with the truth of Scripture that we are saved by the grace of God through Jesus and spiritually formed by the Holy Spirit as we partner with him through spiritual disciplines. When used appropriately and well, the wisdom of Enneagram is a great benefit to our growth into the likeness of Jesus and greatly increases our love and compassion for others.

² Vancil, xviii.