THE ROAD BACK TO YOU

AN ENNEAGRAM JOURNEY TO SELF-DISCOVERY

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and

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IVP Books

An imprint of InterVarsity Press

Downers Grove, Illinois
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WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A NINE

1. I'll do almost anything to avoid conflict.
2. I'm not a self-starter.
3. Sometimes I get lost in doing trivial tasks, while things that really need to get done get put off.
4. I'm happy to go along with what others want to do.
5. I tend to procrastinate.
6. People seem to want me to be more decisive.
7. When I get distracted and go off task I give my attention to whatever is happening right in front of me.
8. I often choose the path of least resistance.
9. I find routines at work and home comforting, and I feel unsettled when something throws them off.
10. Others see me as more peaceful than I really am.
11. I have a hard time getting started, but once I do I really get things done.
12. I'm a "what you see is what you get" person.
13. I don't think of myself as being very important.
14. People think I'm a good listener even though I find it hard to pay attention in a long conversation.
15. I don't like to take work home with me.
16. Sometimes I tune out and think about the past.
17. I don't enjoy big social gatherings as much as a quiet evening at home with the ones I love.
18. Being outdoors is very soothing for me.
19. I am often quietly stubborn when people put demands on me.
20. It would feel selfish to spend a whole day doing whatever I want to do.
TYPE NINE

THE PEACEMAKER

You cannot find peace by avoiding life.

VIRGINIA WOOLF

Healthy Nines are natural mediators. They see and value the perspective of other people and can harmonize what seem to be irreconcilable points of view. They are unselfish, flexible and inclusive. These Nines are seldom attached to their own way of seeing and doing things. They’ve learned to make decisions based on the right priorities. They are inspiring, self-actualized people.

Average Nines, while they come off as sweet and easygoing, are stubborn and out of touch with their anger. These Nines overlook themselves. Though they generally feel unimportant, they occasionally wake up and realize they have to work on investing in themselves. They are willing to stand up for justice on behalf of others but would not likely risk doing much to stand up for themselves. They don’t ask for much though they appreciate what others do for them.

Unhealthy Nines have trouble making decisions and become overly dependent. To dull feelings of sadness and anger they engage in numbing behaviors. Struggling to maintain the illusion that all is well, they can vacillate between acquiescence and open hostility.
In my early twenties I had a firsthand experience with someone who suffered from a sleep disorder. One night I was awakened by what sounded like the voice of a little child faintly singing downstairs in our kitchen. This was distressing. I had recently seen Wes Craven's film *Nightmare on Elm Street*, which featured a choir of creepy little kids who sang “One, Two, Freddy’s Coming for You” every time he was about to carve up his next victim. Like Job, I felt “the terrors of the thick darkness.”

Armed with a candlestick lamp, I snuck downstairs only to discover my sleepwalking housemate in the living room in his boxers mindlessly dancing in place while singing Madonna’s “Like a Virgin.” If we’d had smartphones back then I could have captured that moment, posted it on YouTube, and it would have gone viral—Gangnam style.

That memory still makes me laugh, but somnambulism, the medical term for sleepwalking, can actually be quite dangerous. Some people while sleepwalking have climbed 140-foot cranes, driven cars, walked out third-story windows and even murdered their in-laws. Heck, I think there are entire countries being run by people who are sleepwalking. But I digress.

Great Christian teachers have long used sleepwalking as a metaphor to describe the human spiritual condition. When our personalities are on autopilot they lull us into a half-sleeping state in which we find ourselves trapped in the same habitual, repetitious patterns of mindless reactivity we’ve been caught up in since childhood. It’s predictable to the point of hypnotic. Nines suffer from a more aggressive form of somnambulism than other numbers. If they’re not careful they can sleepwalk through life.

John Waters and Ronna Phifer-Ritchie are spot on when they say Nines are the “sweethearts of the Enneagram.” My wife, Anne, and my daughter Maddie are both Nines. I adore them. When Nines are
spiritually mature they are chill, easygoing people who know how to relax and go with the flow of life. Adaptable and even-tempered, they don’t sweat the small stuff like so many of us do. They’re Gore-Tex, not Velcro. The least controlling number on the Enneagram, Nines allow life to unfold naturally, and they offer others the freedom and space to grow in their own time and way. They are quick to love, slow to judge and rarely ask to be recognized for the effort they put into caring for other people. They’re free and easy, down-to-earth, practical people who are eminently likable. Honestly, I can’t say enough good about Nines who are doing or have done their work. But Nines are also no strangers to the principle of inertia. They know from experience that a body in motion stays in motion, and a body at rest stays at rest. When overwhelmed with too many things to do, too many decisions to make or the upsetting prospect of change, Nines can slow to a crawl. If they come to a full stop they know it might take a lot of energy to get themselves going again. As Suzanne likes to say, “Nines start off slow . . . and then they taper off.” More about these foibles as we go.

THE NINE’S DEADLY SIN
The deadly sin of Nines is sloth, a word we usually associate with physical laziness. The sloth of Nines, however, is spiritual in nature. Average Nines are disconnected from the passion and motivational drive necessary to rise up and live their “one wild and precious life.” Immature Nines don’t fully connect to the fire in the belly they need to chase after their God-given life and, as a result, fail to become their own person. But tapping into those fiery passions and instinctual drives would upset the inner peace and equilibrium the Nine treasures above almost everything else. And now we’re closer to the truth. For Nines, sloth has to do with their desire to not be
overly bothered by life. They literally don’t want life to get to them. Remember, Nines are in the Anger or Gut Triad. You can’t lay claim to your life unless you have guts, unless you have access to your animating instinctual fire. But Nines are slothful when it comes to fully paying attention to their own lives, figuring out what they want in life, chasing their dreams, addressing their own needs, developing their own gifts and pursuing their calling. They cling to and protect their “Hakuna Matata” inner harmony. They ask little of life and hope life returns the favor. If Eights are too in touch with their gut instincts and overexpress their anger, Nines are out of touch with their gut and underexpress their anger. Nines are out of touch with the good side of anger, the part that inspires, drives change, moves things along and gives them courage to stand up for themselves. When you’re unplugged from this side of anger, you become lethargic and dreamy.

This failure to risk fully engaging with life stems in part from the Nines’ need to avoid conflict at all costs.

Nines fear that expressing their preferences or asserting their agenda will put important relationships at risk and upset the calm surface of their inner sea. What if their priorities and wants compete with the agenda of someone they care about and this difference leads to conflict and relational disconnection? What if asserting their own opinions, needs and desires creates disharmony between them and the people they love? Nines so value feeling comfortable and tranquil, maintaining the status quo, and preserving connections with others that they set aside their own viewpoints and aspirations to merge with those of others. This doesn’t seem like a big deal for Peacemakers, who often grew up feeling like neither their presence nor priorities matter much to others. A Nine thinks, Why rock the boat when
nothing I say or do ever seems to make much of a difference in the world anyway? Wouldn’t it be easier and more comfortable not to assert my priorities and take the path of least resistance? As you can imagine there is often a hint of resignation in the air around Nines. Sadly, they pay a price for their “go along to get along” philosophy of life and not pursuing a life worthy of their gifts and spirit. They fall asleep to their lives.

To cope with having countless things to do and not knowing where to start, to avoid the backlog of unanswered questions and postponed decisions crying out for their attention, to keep their anger out of view, and to buoy a low self-esteem, Nines have unhealthy coping strategies. They will often turn to food, sex, drinking, exercise, shopping, the reassuring comfort of habits and routines, performing mindless busywork, or vegging out on the couch and watching TV to numb out and ignore their feelings, wants and desires. What Nines fail to realize is that numbing out is a bogus form of relaxation, a cheap imitation of the genuine peace for which they long.

But Nines should take heart: they are more courageous and resourceful than they know. Remember, on the Enneagram any number’s blight is merely a distortion of that number’s blessing. All of us have work to do. So, as Aslan the lion cries at the end of the Narnia Chronicles, “Further up and further in!”

ALL ABOUT NINES OR PEACE MAKERS

Nines share several common traits that characterize them as a group, like self-forgetting, difficulty making decisions and a tendency to be easily distracted. While not all Nines exhibit every single trait, many Nines will recognize themselves in what follows. (Or, at least, their friends and family members will immediately diagnose these traits in their beloved Nines, while the Nines will agree with what they say because maintaining harmony by agreeing with others is exactly how Nines operate.)
Self-forgetting and merging. Nines self-forget. All three numbers in the Anger Triad are self-forgetting. Eights forget rest and self-care, Ones forget to kick back and have fun more often, and Nines forget their opinions, preferences and priorities. Instead they merge with the feelings, viewpoints and pursuits of others and in so doing they erase themselves. To avoid kicking up a hornet's nest in their relationships, unevolved Nines neglect their soul's summons to identify, name and assert what they want in life and to go hard after it. In fact, they can merge so deeply with the life program and identity of another that they eventually mistake the other's feelings, opinions, successes and aspirations for their own.

Perched at the summit of the Enneagram, Nines enjoy an unobstructed view of the world. From this vantage point they not only have the benefit of seeing the world the way every other number sees it, but they also naturally incorporate into themselves a measure of the core characteristic strengths associated with every type. As Riso and Hudson observe, Nines can embody the idealism of Ones, the kindness of Twos, the attractiveness of Threes, the creativity of Fours, the intellectual horsepower of Fives, the loyalty of Sixes, the optimism and adventurousness of Sevens, and the strength of Eights. Unfortunately, from this privileged position Nines tend to see the world from the viewpoint of every number but their own. Or as Riso and Hudson put it, "The only type the Nine is not like is the Nine itself."

Because they can see through the eyes of every other number and are therefore unclear about who they are and what they want, Nines drop their healthy boundaries to fuse with a more assertive partner, whom they idealize and from whom they hope to glean a sense of identity and purpose. But after a while they don't know where they end and the other person begins. People will sometimes experience or describe Nines as blurry, passive, in "soft focus" or lacking a distinct self. Because they feel unimportant and as if
they're not special enough to matter or change anything, Nines are conspicuously inconspicuous. Their diffuse energy can give others the impression that they're everywhere and nowhere at the same time. They can walk in and out of rooms barely being noticed. As Enneagram teacher Lynette Sheppard writes, “Being with a Nine can feel like falling into a big, comfortable space.”

Average Nines have less stamina and energy than any other number on the Enneagram. They can take off like a rocket on a project, but then halfway into flight they succumb to inertia and “mission drift” and plummet back to the earth. There are often a lot of unfinished projects in a Nine’s wake—half-caulked bathtubs, partially mown lawns, nearly organized garages. They may feel exhausted, and with good reason: Nines are smack in the middle of the Anger or Gut Triad. As you’ve learned, their neighbors the Challengers externalize their anger and—sorry for the spoiler—their other neighbors, the Ones, internalize it. To avoid conflict and inner turmoil, Nines fall asleep to their anger. This doesn't mean it disappears, only that they have to work hard to contain it and keep it out of their own view. This is a toilsome, soul-wearying enterprise.

Unlike Eights and Ones, Nines also have to erect and maintain not one but two boundaries—the first to defend their peaceful center from being negatively affected by the outer world, and the second to defend their serene interior against being unsettled by upsetting thoughts and feelings arising from within. It takes effort to ignore your anger and hold up two boundaries. It diverts energy that Nines could otherwise dedicate to more fully engaging with life and developing themselves. No wonder they feel inexplicably tired so much of the time. So tired that when they’re not actively performing a task and they momentarily sit down to take a break, Nines will sometimes literally doze off.
Sometimes you’ll spot a Nine staring detachedly into the middle distance as if they’ve checked out and fallen into a dreamy trancelike state. They have. When Nines feel overwhelmed—like when a conflict threatens to arise or people are telling them what to do—or sometimes for no discernible reason at all, they tune out and withdraw into a place in their mind that Enneagram teachers call the Nine’s “inner sanctum.” At these moments Nines uncouple from their anger and life energy and ignore the call to take action on something. Nines tell Suzanne and me that while in their inner sanctum they replay past events or conversations and what they wish they’d said or done differently. If anxiety is the cause of their retreat to the inner sanctum, they’ll think, Why am I upset right now? Is this my fault or someone else’s? Or at times they simply retreat to reconnect to or recover their comforting, albeit illusionary, sense of interior peace. If Nines fall too deeply into this hazy trance, they become increasingly absent-minded and less productive, which only causes more problems for them in their relationships.

Because they sometimes lack drive and focus, average Nines often become jacks-of-all-trades but masters of none. They are generalists who, because they know a little bit about everything, can find something to talk about with everybody. Conversations with Nines are delightful as long as they don’t switch over to cruise control. You’ll know a Nine has done this when, after asking them how their day went, they launch into a long, drawn-out story containing more details and detours than you ever thought possible. It’s this tendency to verbally meander at times that explains why some Enneagram teachers use the term epic saga to describe the Nine’s talk style.

Ambivalence and decision making. Remember how each number on the Enneagram diagram is connected to two others by arrowed lines, indicating how the numbers dynamically interact with each other? Positioned at the top of the Enneagram, Nine has
one foot in Three and the other in Six. Though we haven't covered either of those numbers yet, Threes are the most conformist or compliant of all the numbers while Sixes are the most nonconformist or anti-authoritarian of all the numbers. What this means for Nines is big-time ambivalence. Nines frequently feel torn between wanting to please others and wanting to defy them. When faced with having to take a stand or make a decision, Nines will smile and look calm on the outside, but inside they will feel overwhelmed by what to do: Do I think this is a good idea or not? Do I want to do this or don't I? Do I say yes to this person's request or do I say no and risk disconnection? To avoid disconnection, their conformist side will want to say yes to keep everyone happy, while their nonconformist side will feel like flipping them off for once again having to neuter their own feelings and desires to adapt.

Because there are so many angles from which to examine an issue, so many factors to take into consideration, and so many pros and cons to fret over, Nines often never get around to deciding. They sit on the fence and agonize over what to do while waiting for someone else to make the decision or for the situation to naturally work itself out on its own. All this fence sitting leads to procrastination, which can drive the rest of the world crazy. Though you may not pick up on it at first, the more you pressure a Nine to make a decision or do something the more they quietly dig their heels in and resist. Nines can and do make decisions, but given their ambivalent nature it can take them a long time. That there's a stockpile of unresolved questions and pending decisions already taking up real estate in their minds doesn't help speed the process along either.

If on a Friday afternoon I text Anne saying, "Where do you want to go for dinner tonight?" she will respond, "I don't know, where do you want to go?" This text always comes so quickly I'm convinced she has it preprogrammed into her phone. Remember, as a Nine Anne doesn't want to assert her preferences for fear they will create
conflict or arouse unpleasant feelings between us. She wants to know what I want so she can adapt and merge with my desires, skirting potential disagreement. It’s the telltale response of a Nine.

This exchange also reveals how hard it is for Nines to make choices when they’re faced with unlimited possibilities. It’s easier for Nines to know what they don’t want than what they do want, so people who love a Nine would do well to offer them a limited set of options from which to select. If I send Anne a text saying, “Would you like to go out for Thai, Indian or Chinese tonight?” there will be a three-minute pause followed by a text saying, “Thai,” with a thumbs-up emoji.

People who want to help a Nine should realize how important it is not to rob them of whatever choice they do make. I’m not as big a fan of Thai food as Anne is, so halfway to the restaurant I might think, Anne probably doesn’t care one way or another where we go for dinner, whereas I really want Chinese. If I tell her I want to go to Jolly Panda she’ll happily agree.

And I’m right, she will. But because I love Anne and I know she’s working on the challenges of her Nine-ness, I want her decision to stand, and to let her lead. Nines already feel that their preferences and presence matter less than other people’s. The last thing they need is for you and I to cosign that BS.

Let’s look at one last aspect of Nines’ ambivalence. Maybe because they’re perched on the crown of the Enneagram where they can catch a glimpse of everyone’s perspective, Nines can see all points of view. And they all seem equally valid. Their ability to see two sides to everything makes them natural mediators—and the kind of person everyone assumes is on their side. Suzanne’s husband, Joe, a Methodist pastor, often sees couples for marriage counseling. Sometimes a woman in the congregation will sidle up to Suzanne at coffee hour on Sunday and whisper something like, “I’m so glad my husband and I are meeting with Joe. He understands where I’m coming from and who needs fixing in our marriage.”
Fifteen minutes later the husband of the woman will take Suzanne aside and say, “I’m so grateful Joe’s counseling us. Finally someone sees what I’ve been saying all along and knows I’m not crazy.”

Picking up a pattern? Nines are so good at seeing and identifying with every viewpoint that people often walk away from them feeling the Nine not only understood them but also agreed with them, even though the Nine never actually came out and said so. Because they’re so empathetic and able to recognize the merits of different perspectives, healthy Nines can often reconcile seemingly irreconcilable points of view. But this capacity to see both sides to everything can also create problems. Suzanne and I sometimes compare notes and laugh about the challenges of raising kids with people who see two sides to everything. When you catch your kids doing something wrong, do you send them to their room saying, “You just wait until your [insert other parent here] comes home and hears what you did”? Whenever Suzanne or I said that to our kids when they were growing up, they just nodded their heads and grinned slyly. They knew what would happen when that parent came home. First, Anne or Joe would listen to our side of the story and then go upstairs to talk to whichever of our kids was in trouble. Fifteen minutes later Joe or Anne would come back downstairs with the child peering out from behind them and say something like, “You know, the kid has a point.” Understand that seeing and acknowledging both points of view is the average Nine’s way of not having to take a stand and experience conflict or disconnection.

A task for growing Nines is to discern and declare which of two viewpoints is correct from their point of view.

Sad, Nines will sometimes abandon their own opinion and defer to someone else’s, either because they’re uncertain or simply because they want to blend in and get along with them. Nines have to learn

“Peace is the only battle worth raising.”

*ALBERT CAMUS*
how to identify, give voice to and stick to their own point of view regardless of how much pressure they feel to change it in the moment to appease others.

A related challenge is the conundrum of prioritizing some tasks over others. Since all undertakings seem equally important to Nines, it's hard for them to decide what to tackle first. Every Monday morning when Suzanne's husband, Joe, walks into the office, his secretary hands him a list of what he needs to accomplish that week in order of importance. Joe is a supersmart guy who leads the oldest deeded church in Dallas. But without a list he'll just do the next thing that presents itself to him. Some Nines will resent it and go all subtly stubborn on you if you insist they start using a list, but without one they pose a threat to the civilian population at-large.

Although Nines seem to tread in ambivalence, there are times when they know exactly what they have to do and they do it, regardless of the controversy or conflict it will cause or how much it will cost them personally. At these moments Nines are acting on the basis of conviction. In the literature of the Enneagram this is called "right action."

We might be wrong, but Suzanne and I think Bill Clinton is a Nine. Between November 1995 and January 1996, President Clinton and then-Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich locked horns in an epic battle over cuts to the federal budget that resulted in two unprecedented shutdowns of the government. During the contentious, high-stakes negotiations between the White House and members of the Republican-controlled Congress, Clinton staffers worried the president would either acquiesce to Gingrich's demands or make so many compromises that he would irreparably hurt himself politically. Clinton hated conflict. At times he had trouble making and sticking to decisions, and more than once during his political career he had acquiesced to political rivals for the sake of making peace. But one night, after Gingrich had refused to accept the last of many deal offers, Clinton looked at him and
said, "You know, Newt, I can't do what you want me to do. I don't believe it's right for the country. And it may cost me the election, but I can't do it." In the staring contest between Gingrich and Clinton over the government shutdown, Gingrich blinked first. A few days later Republicans agreed to reopen the government without a budget deal. Clinton won the next election. Many historians say making and sticking to that decision is what clinched Clinton's election to a second term.

White House staffers who were present when this exchange occurred say they knew they had witnessed something extraordinary take place inside Clinton. He exercised right action. Do you see how such action is the opposite of sloth? I have a feeling, though, that if Hillary asked Bill where he wanted to go to dinner to celebrate the outcome of his meeting with Newt, he probably would have shrugged and said, "I don't know, where do you want to go?"

Watershed moments of this magnitude will only present themselves a handful of times in a Nine's life, but as they work on themselves they can begin to take similarly bold actions in smaller matters. They can find the courage to initiate an uncomfortable conversation, go back to grad school to earn the degree and pursue the career they've always wanted, or refuse to bow to pressure from colleagues who want them to change position on a business matter.

**Passive-aggression.** Remember how I said when you first begin working with the Enneagram it can be painful? How all of us can feel exposed and ashamed when we discover the dark side of our type? This can be particularly true for Nines, who often overattach to and enjoy their reputation for being the good guy or the nice girl. If you're a Nine, keep in mind as you read the next few paragraphs that, as with every number, your curse is the flip side of your blessing; none of us are getting out of this book without feeling stung once or twice, and we're going to talk about what's beautiful about you before this is over. So . . .
People often ask Suzanne or me, “How can people who are so kind and friendly reside in the Anger Triad?” Despite their reputation for being sweet and accommodating, Nines aren’t always sticking daisies into rifle barrels. Nines can be as angry as Eights, but you wouldn’t know it given their affable and pleasant exterior. Nines are loaded with unresolved anger, but they’re afraid the experience of letting it out will prove too overwhelming, so they fall asleep to it. Though they’re out of touch with it, Nines harbor resentments going back to childhood or more recently for having sacrificed their own agenda or dreams to support yours or the kids’. Because they don’t know when or how to say no to people, they feel angry that others seem to take advantage of their seeming inability to set boundaries in relationships. If that weren’t enough, they feel annoyed when people tell them to wake up and start doing more than the minimum to get by. All this pressure upsets their inner calm!

Nines don’t forget real or perceived slights, but because they’re conflict avoidant they will rarely express their anger openly. Sure, every now and then Nines will blow their top, but most will maintain their almost Buddha-like calm and leak their ire indirectly.

If you do something to make a Nine angry on Monday morning, they often won’t feel it until Tuesday afternoon. Come Tuesday night you’ll know they have their hackles up with you over something when you ask whether they fulfilled their promise to pick up your dress from the dry cleaner for your important business trip tomorrow and in a nearly repentant tone of voice they say, “Oh dear, I forgot.” Remember, for a Nine who lacks self-knowledge this is not necessarily conscious behavior. They’re just humming along in the trance of their Nine-ness.

“Trying to make her angry is like trying to find a corner on a bowling ball.”

CRAIG McLAY
Stubbornness is the Nine's go-to passive-aggressive behavior, particularly when they feel like they're being pressured into agreeing to a plan or doing something they don't want to do. But they have other arrows in their quiver of passive-aggressive actions they can choose from when they want to indirectly express their anger over something or take control of a situation, such as avoidance, procrastination, stonewalling, tuning out, giving the silent treatment or not performing tasks that are clearly theirs to do, among other things. When a Nine's partner finally gets frustrated and demands, "Is something wrong?" the Nine might insist, "I don't know what you mean." Sadly, their passive-aggressive behaviors end up making others angrier, which only creates more conflict and problems for the Nine than if they'd just come out and said they were mad in the first place.

Because Anne knows I'm a stickler about being on time for things, she generally tries to be ready to leave, especially when it's really important for us to be punctual. From time to time, however, she pulls the equivalent of a longshoreman's union work slowdown. This forces me to stand at the bottom of the stairs looking at my watch and yelling for her to hurry up because we're going to miss the beginning of a movie or insult our dinner hosts.

Now that I'm familiar with how Nines operate, I know her slowing down to a snail's pace means that Anne's angry with me about something but doesn't want to spark an argument by telling me directly. She wants me to figure out why she's upset and fix the problem without her having to get involved. So now when this happens I go upstairs and say, "Okay, spit it out," to which she'll say, "Life was so much better before you knew the Enneagram."

**Prioritizing and distractions.** When faced with having to wake up and address their own priorities, Nines will sometimes focus on inessential tasks and leave the more essential ones until last. This is a baffling but effective defensive maneuver on the part of the Nine
to turn their attention away from identifying their own life priorities, having to feel their anger and acting on their own behalf.

One Sunday afternoon I asked Anne, who teaches middle school history, whether she wanted to go to the gym, but she declined, saying her parent-teacher comments were due the next day and she hadn't started them yet. When I arrived home a few hours later I was surprised to find Anne polishing silverware. I didn't even know we owned silverware.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

“I found our wedding silver in the back of the corner hutch in the dining room and told Maddie she could have it. It was so tarnished I thought I'd polish it for her.”

“What about your comments?” I asked. “Aren’t they due tomorrow?”

“Fine,” Anne said, abandoning the gravy boat. “I was just trying to do something helpful.”

Nines are easily pulled away by distractions. Everyone else's priorities are more important than theirs, and such distractions are a great way to self-forget and avoid the pain of not knowing what you want in life. But wait—the human mind is marvelously creative—there’s always more.

One night Anne and I invited my mom to join us for dinner at 6 p.m. At 3 p.m. Anne announced she was going to make a quick run to the grocery store to buy ingredients for the meal. At 5:00 she still hadn't returned, so I called her cell.

“Where are you? My mom's coming in sixty minutes. Have you been to the grocery store yet?”

Silence.

“Not yet. I was on my way there but Sue was out on her front lawn when I drove past her house so I stopped to say hello, and while we were talking

“You know if we were sitting on the front porch talking and a horse walked by, my dad would just get on it and ride off.”

NATALIE GOLDBERG
the chain on one of her kids’ bikes fell off and she didn’t know how to put it back on so I helped her. After I left I realized I had grease on my blouse so I stopped at CVS to buy some stain remover, and I remembered I had a prescription in my purse for Maddie’s eye drops so I got that filled, and then when I was finally on my way to Whole Foods I drove past Bed, Bath, and Beyond and saw a banner up advertising a bedding sale, and Aidan will need new sheets and pillows for school in September, and I had a bunch of 20 percent off coupons in my purse so I ran inside and bought some, but now I’m almost to the grocery store and I’ll be home in twenty minutes.”

Do you see what happened? When a Nine gets sidetracked by a nonessential task or activity (e.g., stopping to chat with a friend), they can forget the Big Picture (e.g., in two hours Mama is coming for dinner). No longer seeing or feeling the urgency of the Big Picture, the Nine can no longer assign value to or prioritize tasks (e.g., buying food for hungry Mama now). Without said Big Picture (Mama ETA only sixty minutes), the Nine’s attention loses focus and becomes diffused. Every task now seems to take on equal importance, so the Nine ends up doing whatever presents itself to them in the moment.

We all need friends or a partner who can ask us questions that wake us out of the trance of our particular number. “Are you still on task?” is a good question to pose to a Nine who appears to be busily doing everything and nothing at the same time.

NINES AS CHILDREN
I’ve never met a kid more easygoing, with a sweeter spirit and a preternatural talent for sensing the needs of others, than my daughter Maddie. Back when I was leading a start-up church Anne and I often entertained groups of people in our home. Four or five years old at the time, Maddie would walk into a room of adults and pick someone’s lap to crawl into and curl up in a ball and fall asleep
like a cat. When it came to making people feel peaceful, this kid was better than a Xanax and two glasses of wine. You could literally see a palpable wave of calm and relief fall over whomever Maddie picked to receive this special treatment.

One day a friend asked Anne, “Have you ever noticed when Maddie’s looking around to decide whose lap she’s going to curl up in that she always picks someone who’s going through a divorce, a serious health issue or some other big life crisis?” We’d never made the connection before, but our friend was absolutely right. I think Maddie’s gut told her who in the room most needed the peace and reassurance that everything was going to be okay. Her presence still communicates that today. Maddie lives in California and wants to be a therapist. She doesn’t have her degree yet, but if I were you I’d make an appointment now. She’s going to be busy.

Many, many Nines tell Suzanne and me they grew up in homes where they either were, or perceived themselves to be, overlooked and where their preferences, opinions or feelings were of less importance than those of others. The wounding message Nines heard is “Your wants, opinions, desires and presence don’t matter much.” My Maddie is not only a Nine but a middle child wedged between an older sister and younger brother who are both assertive numbers on the Enneagram. It saddens me, but I suspect Maddie sometimes felt like the classic lost child. I wish Anne and I had been familiar with the Enneagram when our kids were little. I would have known how important it was to make sure Maddie felt seen and important. Thankfully, she knows it now.

Nines as kids are very easy to be with. They’re not always the first ones to jump into activities or shoot their hand up to answer a question in class, but they bring harmony and cheer wherever they go. As kids Nines feel very uncomfortable when there’s conflict between parents and other family members, so they’ll try to play the role of mediator while looking for a place to stand where they won’t
be forced to choose a side. If people are uncompromising and can’t broker a peaceful solution, a child Nine may feel angry, but their anger is usually overlooked or ignored so they either keep it to themselves, mentally check out or hightail it out of the room. Often when my son Aidan and daughter Cailey got into a fight in the car, Maddie would put her head against the window and fall asleep to escape the conflict.

These little beauties feel like their ideas and feelings aren’t valued, so they learn the art of merging very early in life. While they would prefer not being the center of attention for too much or too long, they long for us to notice and honor their presence. Like all kids they are looking for a place and a way to feel like they belong.

**NINES IN RELATIONSHIPS**

Mature Nines make wonderful partners, parents and friends. Loyal and kind, they will go above and beyond the call of duty to support you. They’re fun, flexible and don’t complain much. They love life’s simple pleasures. If you give them the choice between getting dressed up and going to a black-tie gala or snuggling on the couch with you and the kids for pizza and a movie, they’ll pick the latter. Nines always have their special place in the home where they can retreat to be quiet and engage in an activity that enhances their experience of peacefulness.

A healthy Nine is someone who has woken up and found their voice or come into their own. They know they’re important enough to invest in and that they matter in the lives of their family, friends and coworkers. A healthy Nine is spiritually inspiring. They’re receptive to the world, yet not so open or lacking in boundaries that they lose their sense of self-definition.

Nines who are asleep get in trouble in relationships when conflict arises (and when doesn’t it?) and they refuse to acknowledge and resolve it. Denial is a big defense mechanism for them. They don’t
want to face anything that will unsettle their harmony, so they tell their inner orchestra to play louder while their ship is sinking. They might ignore the obvious signs that something’s wrong, minimize the problems, or suggest a simple repair that only reveals how out of touch they are with the magnitude of the issue and how determined they are to avoid the unpleasantness of dealing with it. Because they want to avoid conflict and painful conversations, others have to hold Nines’ feet to the fire to address serious problems in relationships. Their desire to skirt conflict and fuse with another person is so strong that Nines will cling to relationships long past their expiration dates.

Nines are not initiators, but they’re thrilled when others reach out to them. They have a wonderful ability to reconnect with people whom they haven’t run into in a long time. Even after years of not seeing a person, they can pick up the conversation as if it had only been yesterday when they last saw you.

Here’s what I’ve learned being married to a Nine and parenting a Nine: what feels like a minor tiff to you feels like the Battle of the Bulge to them. What you hear as a fractional increase in the volume of your voice a Nine hears as yelling.

It’s important that before I share my thoughts or feelings about something I ask Anne or Maddie what theirs are. This not only honors them, it lessens the possibility they will merge with mine and perhaps agree to do something they don’t want to do.

NINES AT WORK

Position available for even-keeled, reliable, enthusiastic team player to work in harmonious environment. Approachable and diplomatic, this person must be able to get along with a wide range of people. Those who enjoy stirring up controversies or playing office politics need not apply.
If this want ad were to appear on LinkedIn there would be a mile-long queue of Nines clamoring to get an interview. It might even occasion an outbreak of violence among this usually peaceful population.

Healthy Nines are great workers and colleagues. Some have partners who believe in them and dedicate their lives to help them live into their potential (e.g., Nancy Reagan, Hillary Clinton). Supportive, nonjudgmental and inclusive, they build bridges and bring people together in a spirit of cooperation. Many Nines tell Suzanne and me they aren’t particularly ambitious, though some are. They don’t covet the corner office or need a big expense account. If they have a good job with reasonable pay and perks, they’re content to stay where they are. Because they’re able to see multiple points of view, Nines can solve problems and put together deals where everyone wins.

Nines draw their energy and derive a sense of identity from the group, so they would rather merge with the team and share the credit for a success than go out of their way to shine the spotlight on themselves to advance their career. They like a little recognition but mostly fly under the radar so as not to draw too much attention to themselves. What if their accomplishments at work lead to a change in duties or being assigned more work? When an opportunity for advancement comes up, Nines might pursue it—but only when they’re ready. For the most part Nines aren’t high-energy people, and they don’t like feeling controlled or pressured to perform.

Creatures of habit, Nines appreciate structure, predictability and routine in the workplace. Nines don’t like to bring work home, and they definitely don’t like interruptions on weekends or vacation.

Nines make wonderful counselors, teachers, clergy and public relations executives. “Being a teacher is perfect for me,” my wife Anne says. “I work best when I know there’s a set pattern and rhythm to my life. I like knowing which classes I teach on what days, when semesters begin and end, when vacations are, and what the
head of school expects of me. Most of all I have great relationships with my colleagues and I love the kids.”

Unfortunately it’s as easy to take advantage of Nines in the workplace as it is in relationships. They’re too accommodating. To avoid rocking the boat they say yes when they want to say no and often regret it later.

Nines tend to sell themselves short at work. They have considerable skills but undervalue them. Though capable of holding positions at the highest levels in the professional world, most Nines gravitate toward middle management where they can avoid the kind of conflicts and stress associated with leadership such as making unpopular decisions, supervising employees or having to fire people.

**WINGS**

*Nines with an Eight wing (9w8).* This is one of the most complex combinations on the Enneagram, given the Eight’s need to go against power and the Nine’s need to avoid conflict. Eights are energized by anger, while Nines avoid it at all costs. Talk about a walking contradiction! These two numbers bring a new twist to the “opposites attract” cliché, but it is also a powerful place within the system. More energized, confident, stubborn, outgoing and inner-directed than the 9w1s, 9w8s have more access to anger and express it more openly if they or others are threatened. (Suzanne’s daughter Jenny is a 9w8. She says, “Mom, I’m in so much trouble. My Eight wing just did a bunch of stuff it’s going to take three weeks for my Nine wing to clean up.”) Remember that this uptick in confidence and periodic aggression is relative to how other Nines behave, not to other numbers who have way more access to their anger and can express it more openly.

“It’s better to keep peace than to have to make peace.”

*UNKNOWN*
Though they will sometimes change their minds, 9w8s find it much easier to be clear and direct about things that are important to them. Although the Eight wing doesn't make it more likely that they will act on their own behalf, they are energetic in acting on behalf of the underdog and the common good. These Nines tend to be more confrontational than other Nines, but they are also quick to be conciliatory.

*Nines with a One wing (9w1).* Nines with a One wing (the Perfectionist) have a strong sense of the difference between right and wrong. One energy helps these Nines stay a little more focused, so they are able to accomplish more, which enhances their confidence. The 9w1s are more critical, orderly, introverted and passive-aggressive than other Nines. Because of their concern about matters of right and wrong they're apt to be involved in peacemaking efforts or other social justice causes. These Nines are principled and modest as leaders, and people want to follow them because of their integrity and steadfastness.

**STRESS AND SECURITY**

*Stress.* In stress Nines start to act like unhealthy Sixes (the Loyalists). They become overcommitted, worried, rigid, wary of others and anxious, even though they don't know why. These Nines become more self-doubting, which makes decision making even more difficult than usual. Interestingly, they also become reactive—a big departure for a number that is rarely, if ever, quick to react.

*Security.* When Nines are feeling comfortable and safe in the world they move to the positive side of Three (the Performer), where they are more goal-oriented, decisive, self-confident and in touch with their life's agenda. Flourishing Nines struggle less with inertia, take command of their lives and believe their presence in the world matters. More importantly, Nines connected to the positive side of Three can experience and enjoy genuine peace and harmony.
SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

The Nine’s weakness for merging is the dark side of an enviable spiritual gift. But in my mind the spiritual advantages of being a Nine more than make up for the work they have to do in their lives. If the goal of the spiritual life is the realization of union with God, then healthy Nines’ ability to merge gives them a spiritual leg up on the rest of us. When it comes to attaining a unitive knowledge of God and becoming “one with Christ,” healthy Nines almost always cross the finish line first. They’re natural contemplatives.

Nines are open and receptive in every way. Even as kids, they seem to possess an innate awareness of the sacramental dimension of the world. They have a profound awareness of the interconnectedness of all things in creation. Lovers of the outdoors, they pick up on the presence of God in the natural world and how everything expresses God’s glory. Because they value being over doing, Nines know how to rest in God’s love and share themselves more generously than the rest of us. And because Nines are able to see both sides to everything, they’re comfortable with paradox and mystery, which comes in handy when it comes to dealing with a religion that includes a virgin birth and a God who is both Three and One at the same time. If you’re a Nine, be encouraged: when healthy, your capacity for merging can place you in the same league as other great Nine spiritual leaders like Pope Francis and the Dalai Lama.

But Nines resist the unsafe nature of real spiritual transformation. If you’re a Peacemaker, your greatest motivation in life has been to avoid conflict and experience inner harmony, but what looks like peace is really just your desire to be unaffected by life. Spiritually, the absence of conflict is not the presence of peace, which requires work and risk. If nothing else, Nines should hear these words: Wake up and say yes to the adventure of your own life!

Nines are as important and as deserving of becoming their own person as everybody else is. It’s their birthright. Waking up will
involve reclaiming personal authority and responsibility for their life. It will mean finding and resurrecting their own thoughts, passions, opinions, dreams, ambitions and desires. This will be scary. They’ll have to stop hiding and drafting behind other people. If Nines love themselves as much as they love other people, they will allow themselves to go on this adventure of becoming their own person. Paradoxically, the road to peace and harmony is littered with conflict and disharmony. Scrupulously avoid anything that promises a life of peace and tranquility without conflict or pain. Whatever it is will probably end you up in rehab.

Nines don’t like to admit it, but they’re angry. I get it. I’d be angry too if I repeatedly felt overlooked. They’re angry for the sacrifices they’ve made to keep the peace and hold relationships together, but when they get the urge to stand up for themselves or act on their own behalf, they don’t do it. Nines are afraid if they let their stored anger out it’s going to hurt or kill someone, but that’s not true. It might lead to conflict, which you can survive, but not homicide. Nines need to know that when they discover right action and move toward it, a feeling of self-worth will emerge in them. And others will notice and cheer them on as well. When this happens, they can stand and build on it so they don’t have to slip away from themselves ever again.

The healing message Nines need to hear is “We see you and your life matters.” God didn’t invite you to this party to live someone else’s life. We need you here!

**TEN PATHS TO TRANSFORMATION FOR NINES**

1. Journal on the question “What is my calling or life’s program? Am I pursuing it or postponing it to keep the peace?”
2. Ask someone to help you find a task-management or to-do system to help you stay on task. There are lots of great apps out there just for this purpose.
3. Practice saying no when someone asks you to do something you don't want to.

4. Be aware of the numbing strategies you use to avoid having to deal with life, whether that's a glass of wine or shopping or Girl Scout cookies.

5. Don't be afraid to have opinions and express them. You can start with small things and build up to important ones.

6. Resist the urge to fall back on passive-aggressive behaviors like procrastination and avoidance. If you feel angry, be honest and open.

7. Understand how important and unique your voice is. People deserve to hear what you think, not have their own views mirrored back to them.

8. Remember that what feels like intense, terrible conflict to you might just be a typical disagreement for someone else. Take a breath and engage.

9. Realize that your tendency to merge with others can be a beautiful gift if directed toward God. Other types envy this spiritual advantage you have. But don't fuse with another person and miss out on the chance to become your own person.

10. When you feel paralyzed in the face of a decision, consult someone who won't tell you what to do but rather will help you tease out what you want to do—then do it!
WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A ONE

1. People have told me I can be overly critical and judgmental.
2. I beat myself up when I make mistakes.
3. I don't feel comfortable when I try to relax. There is too much to be done.
4. I don't like it when people ignore or break the rules, like when the person in the fast lane at the grocery store has more items than allowed.
5. Details are important to me.
6. I often find that I'm comparing myself to others.
7. If I say I'll do it, I'll do it.
8. It is hard for me to let go of resentment.
9. I think it is my responsibility to leave the world better than I found it.
10. I have a lot of self-discipline.
11. I try to be careful and thoughtful about how I spend money.
12. It seems to me that things are either right or wrong.
13. I spend a lot of time thinking about how I could be a better person.
14. Forgiveness is hard for me.
15. I notice immediately when things are wrong or out of place.
16. I worry a lot.
17. I am really disappointed when other people don’t do their part.
18. I like routine and don’t readily embrace change.
19. I do my best when working on a project, and I wish others would do the same, so I wouldn’t have to redo their work.
20. I often feel like I try harder than others to do things correctly.
Perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor, 
the enemy of the people.

ANNE LAMOTT

Healthy Ones are committed to a life of service and integrity. They are balanced and responsible and able to forgive themselves and others for being imperfect. They are principled but patient with the processes that slowly but surely make the world a better place.

Average Ones have judging and comparing minds that naturally spot errors and imperfections. They struggle to accept that imperfection is inevitable while fearing the tyranny of that critical voice in their head.

Unhealthy Ones fixate on small imperfections. These Ones are obsessed with micromanaging what they can. Asserting control over something or someone is their only relief.

When the teacher turned off the lights and turned on the projector I yawned, folded my arms to form a pillow on my desktop, and lay the side of my face down. As a seventh grader, I had no idea how Gregory
Peck's depiction of Atticus Finch, a widowed father and attorney tasked with defending a falsely accused black man in a small southern town in the 1930s, would silently plant a seed in my heart.

In *To Kill a Mockingbird* Atticus Finch wears a sensible, perfectly pressed seersucker suit with a pocket watch attached to a chain that he keeps in his vest pocket. He is the exemplar of a wise, measured and attentive father who treats his children with kindness and respect. He's an idealist, a reformer who feels a sacred duty to uphold the law and to make the world a more decent place for everyone. Imbued with a clear sense of right and wrong, he cannot turn a blind eye to injustice, and he isn't afraid to take a stand even if it costs him.

When his daughter Scout asks why he would bother defending his client Tom Robinson in a case he has no chance of winning and for which townspeople will revile him, Atticus tells her, "Before I can live with other folks I've got to live with myself. The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience."

Despite Atticus's brilliant and impassioned closing argument, Tom Robinson is found guilty by an all-white jury and led away. Downcast, Atticus packs up his briefcase and then slowly begins making his way down the aisle to exit the courtroom. As he does, those seated in the "colored balcony" stand one by one in a gesture of respect for him. When the elderly Reverend Sykes looks down and realizes Scout has neither noticed nor understood the symbolic gravity of the black community's getting to their feet to honor her father, he whispers down to her, "Miss Jean Louise? Miss Jean Louise, stand up. Your father's passin."

That scene pierced me. Atticus Finch represented everything I wanted in a father but knew I'd never have as the son of a deeply troubled alcoholic. "With him, life was routine; without him, life was unbearable," Scout said about her father. I would have said the reverse about mine. Twenty years later, after my son was born, I came across an antique pocket watch that stirred my memory of
Atticus Finch. I bought it hoping that, when I looked at it, it would remind me of the kind of father I wanted to be.

That's the effect that Ones like Atticus can have on people. Sometimes their example inspires others to be better, to fight injustice, to embrace high ideals. But the One's commitment to living an exemplary life can quickly degenerate into a rigid perfectionism that can be tortuous both for Ones and for others.

**THE ONE'S DEADLY SIN**

Ones walk a thin line. When they're healthy, like Atticus, they inspire us with their concern for fairness and their desire to restore the world to wholeness. But when they tip toward average or unhealthy they can quickly get in their own way.

From the time they get up to the time they lie down, Ones perceive a world rife with errors and feel a bounden duty to correct it. There's no shortage of work to be done. Someone squeezed the toothpaste tube from the middle, the school secretary misspelled two words in the PTA newsletter, one of the kids didn't fold and hang their bath towel correctly, there's a fresh scratch on the car door, and the neighbors left for work leaving their trashcans at the foot of the driveway without the lids on.

What kind of person does that sort of thing?

Ones need to be perfect. They chase perfection because they have this vague, unsettling feeling that if they make a mistake someone is going to jump out to blame, criticize or punish them. They compulsively strive to fix all that's broken in the world, but the work is never finished. *Irritated* doesn't begin to capture how this makes Ones feel at times. That others appear less concerned and interested in joining their crusade to put this world
Aright infuriates them even more. *Why don’t people care as much as I do? Do I have to do everything myself? It’s not fair.*

*Anger* is the deadly sin of Ones, but *resentment* is truer to their experience.

Ones believe the world judges people who don't follow the rules, control their emotions, behave appropriately and keep their basic animal instincts in check. For Ones, anger tops the list of feelings “good” people shouldn't express, so they bury the anger they feel about the imperfections they see in the environment, in others and in themselves. Ones are among the three numbers in the Anger Triad (8, 9, 1). Unlike Eights, who externalize their anger, or Nines, who fall asleep to it, Ones stuff their anger until it sits right below the surface, where it expresses itself to everyone as smoldering resentment.

But something else is fueling Ones' anger and indignation. Everywhere they look, people are having a grand old time indulging their desires or breaking the “rules” and not getting caught and punished for it, while Ones feel obligated to forgo doing what they want to do in order to do what they should do, namely, order our disordered world. To add insult to injury, they not only end up doing their share but they have to pick up the slack for all the jerks down at the beach drinking beer and playing volleyball when they have fun things they’d like to do as well.

Several years ago on *SNL* Dana Carvey played a character named Enid Strict, otherwise known as The Church Lady, who hosts a talk show called *Church Chat*. It's an over-the-top but iconic portrayal of One personality when it's in full bloom. If they're not careful, average Ones can adopt a similar Puritan-like attitude toward the world or, as Mark Twain put it, become “good in the worst sense of the word.”

**ALL ABOUT ONES OR PERFECTIONISTS**

Walter is a tax attorney with a prestigious Wall Street accounting firm. When he comes home from work he likes the house to be
clean, the kids to be bathed, dinner to be on the table and the world to be rightly ordered. I doubt Walter has ever come right out and told his wife Alice that these are his expectations, but it's not hard to pick it up in the air when Walter's around.

One night Walter comes home from work and the house is clean, the kids are bathed, and dinner is on the table. Now you'd think Walter would put his briefcase down and say something nice like, "Wow, this is awesome!" But the first thing Walter does is point at the couch and say, "The cushions are out of place."

Now, if I came home and said that to my wife Anne, she'd say, "Really? Let me show you where I can place those cushions."

In defense of Ones, that's just how they see. Wherever they go, errors and mistakes jump out at them and yell, "Fix me!" And they just can't leave it alone. They'll either say something or rearrange the cushions when you're not looking. What's important for us to learn as we study the Enneagram is that we can't change the way we see, only what we do with what we see. Walter has done a lot of work on himself since that unfortunate episode with Alice. If he did something like that today he'd immediately apologize. "I've got to keep working on that," he'd say, laughing. God bless Walter. The Enneagram has helped him come a long way.

**Ones have high expectations of others and themselves.** For average Ones, controlling their behavior and emotions is a priority. When an "uncivilized" impulse or unacceptable feeling arises, Ones will automatically push it down and bring up its opposite to negate it. In psychology this defense is called reaction formation. An example might be Ones who, when they hear your singing voice, will unconsciously stop their envy from rising to the level of conscious awareness and replace it with enthusiastic praise. At one level this is admirable, but because it is motivated by a self-interested need to not feel bad, the Ones' thin-lipped smile and kind words can feel forced.
Ones running on cruise control are mercilessly hard on themselves. Some demand perfection be maintained in only one corner of their lives (e.g., the yard, their boat, their office) while others apply it across the board. The house has to be immaculate, the bills paid on time. Thank-you notes need to be written and posted the same day gifts are received. Ones have to keep hard copies of tax returns for five years to avoid being in violation of IRS rules. Let’s not even discuss the agony a poor One endures when they discover their credit score has dipped below 800.

They also impose their high standards on others. “Every Monday I would send our poor minister an email with a list of ‘suggestions’ to help her improve on what I didn’t think worked at the previous morning’s worship service,” a now self-aware One shared at one of our Enneagram workshops. “I recommended better ways she could lead worship songs, tighten up her sermon, or shorten the Communion lines. I always ended with a reminder to begin the service at precisely 10 a.m. unless she wanted people to continue arriving late. Things are different now. My wife says she is proud of how I’m working toward being ‘less helpful,’” he said, laughing.

If you suspect someone’s a One but you’re not sure, watch how they react when they open a dishwasher someone else has loaded. If they cluck their tongue and start reloading it while muttering something like, “Good night, why can’t people do this correctly?” then there’s a better than fifty-fifty chance they’re a One. Sometimes a One won’t let you finish stacking the dishwasher before they jump in to “help.” They’ll lean on the counter while you’re loading it and say “eh-eh” when you place a mug where they think a bowl should go.

Most people can’t endure being judged and harassed for too long by someone who has pinned a star to their shirt and elected themselves the kitchen sheriff. Eventually the harangued throw their hands in the air and storm out of the kitchen saying, “Is nothing ever good enough for you?”
I get it. As far as I’m concerned, if all the dishes fit and a little water hits most of them, who cares if they’re perfectly arranged? What most people don’t understand is that Ones don’t think they’re being critical. In their mind they’re trying to help you! They think they’re improving you! Doesn’t everyone want to improve themselves like they do?

Not all Ones are fixated on flaws in the environment. Some Ones I know couldn’t care less whether their house is a mess or when they see someone not picking up after their dog. Their need to be good and improve things expresses itself through their concern and commitment to addressing social ills. The activist and legendary consumer protector Ralph Nader is a One. You don’t want to mess with that dude or any One who gets involved with efforts to put an end to wrongs like sex trafficking, corrupt politicians or companies polluting the environment. One of the reason Ones are attracted to supporting righteous causes is because it’s not only okay but appropriate to openly express anger about injustice without feeling like you’re being a bad girl or boy.

Because they believe they occupy the superior moral, ethical and spiritual high ground, Ones believe their way is the only right way of seeing and doing things and therefore feel justified in being judgmental and critical of others. They’re usually not trying to come off that way, though. “People tell me my voice and body language come off as shaming and judgmental even when I’m consciously trying to sound kind,” my friend Janet says. That the One’s talk style is preaching doesn’t help. No one likes to feel like someone is talking down to them.

All of us have a reproachful voice that gets triggered from time to time when we do something stupid and then goes away. As a rule Ones have a merciless inner critic; unlike ours, it never goes away. It’s punishing. It’s relentless. Why do you always put your foot in your mouth? What kind of parent forgets to pack his kid’s lunch in her school bag? How do you expect to make a sale when you can’t even tie a proper knot in your tie? Get down and give me fifty!
Heck, sometimes a One’s inner critic will blame them for screwing up things they weren’t even involved with or responsible for. After years of programming it’s hard for Ones to shut off that cruel voice. Ones caught in the trance of their personality believe not only that their belittling inner critic speaks ex cathedra but that it actually has their best interests at heart. How would I have progressed this far in life without that voice harshly reminding me of what I was doing wrong or to prevent me from lowering my standards? If it weren’t for my inner critic always pointing out my deficiencies, how would I know how to live beyond reproach? Think of how many more mistakes I would have made without it!

**Ones are terrified of making a mistake.** Ones work themselves way too hard, and because there’s so much to get done they don’t often relax or let themselves have fun. As a result, they become pressure cookers whose regulator valves can’t keep up with the buildup of resentment they feel toward the imperfections they see everywhere; the resentment they harbor toward themselves and others for failing to adhere to their high standards and for not helping out; and their outsized fear of making mistakes or acting inappropriately. It’s quite a surprise when a normally very controlled and tightly buttoned-up One blows a valve. When it happens someone almost always gets burned.

No matter how you look at it, the One’s crusade to perfect the world is a fool’s errand. There’s always an unmade bed in it somewhere. Until they begin a spiritual journey they’ll never know a minute’s peace.

Given the stream of negative self-commentary their inner critic levels at them all day, Ones don’t receive criticism well. Would you express gratitude to a fellow writer who pointed out your failure to

> "What is this self inside us, this silent observer, Severe and speechless critic, who can terrorize us?"  
> **T. S. ELIOT**
insert a comma after an introductory phrase if the finger-wagging carper living in your head had already been comparing your grammar to fetid effluvium from the moment you started work at 3:00 a.m.? Please, people, one mugging at a time.

Though very sensitive to criticism themselves, Ones are shocked when you tell them you feel like they're being harshly critical of you. Seriously? You're only being given a thimble-sized sample of the bitter self-recrimination they drink from every day.

Ones can be critical and judgmental of other people. The unaware One will criticize people for failing to live up to their standard of perfection and also because misery loves company. It brings Ones a sense of relief if they can catch and criticize someone else for doing something incorrectly or behaving improperly because it levels the playing field: Thank goodness! Someone besides me is deficient. Of course, taking pleasure in someone else's shortcomings is a kooky way to tie the score, but it beats feeling like you're the only one who ever makes mistakes on the field. That's a lonely position.

**Ones get the job done.** So those are some of the challenges that come with Ones. But can you imagine a world without them? If it weren't for Steve Jobs's uncompromising passion for creating flawlessly designed products, there would be no Apple. If it weren't for high-minded leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela who couldn't abide injustice, India and South Africa might still be under the oppressive yoke of European colonialism. If it weren't for spiritual teachers like Richard Rohr, we wouldn't have as clear a picture of the loving heart of God.

Since Ones live in a world riddled with mistakes, they keep a running list of things that need doing. Some are so thoughtful and generous that they make lists of things for you to do as well. Come Saturday morning the spouse of a One can expect to find a honey-do list on the kitchen counter long enough to keep them busy for an entire summer and into deer-hunting season.
Many Ones value etiquette (for example, think of Martha Stewart) and know how to host a great dinner party. Their homes are normally spotless and thoughtfully decorated. Because they want you to have a perfect time, they'll cook a beautiful meal and they'll be prepared to introduce great topics for table conversation. Recently someone told me that while sitting vigil at his mother’s deathbed she repeatedly asked him if the house was tidy and if he was using the good china to serve coffee to the family members who were gathered downstairs awaiting news of her passing. Talk about a good host.

Ones want to be good people. They always want to do the right thing. How would you react if you were sitting in a bus station when a mentally ill person walked in and announced, “I’m homeless, I haven’t eaten for days, and I need help”? Regardless of what anyone else would do or what they themselves would want to do, Ones would believe it was their responsibility to make sure the person received proper care. Why? That’s the correct, responsible and right thing to do. We should all expect this of ourselves.

Ones believe that every task should be done in a systematic and correct fashion. When they read the directions to assemble a recently purchased grill—and those directions say not to do anything until you make sure you have all the necessary parts—Ones actually set out all the screws, nuts and bolts and count them. Then they double-check.

If by chance one of the four plastic cups that fit on the end of each leg is missing, Ones will say to their spouse, “We can’t put this thing together tonight. We’re short one piece.”

Now, if the spouse is a Nine he or she might say, “Don’t worry about it; we can get a pack of matches and put it under that leg to keep the grill level.”

True Ones will respond firmly, “Not on my watch,” and then will call the 800 number to ask for the missing black cap to be shipped ASAP so every step will have been followed correctly. The reason
Ones won’t settle for a jerry-rigged grill is they know that every time they look at it the only thing they’ll see is that one missing black leg cap. (Ones break out in hives at our house. We’ve got packs of matches keeping the place level on the foundation.)

**ONES AS CHILDREN**
Growing up, Ones try to be model kids. They know the rules and follow them to the letter. They spend lots of energy comparing themselves to other kids, so a conversation during the ride home from school will include a little bit about themselves, but it will mostly be about comparing themselves to other children and their successes, failures and mishaps. Think of eleven-year-old Hermione Granger getting on the train to Hogwarts and immediately comparing notes about what spells the other kids could do and whether they had read *Hogwarts: A History*. This comparing and judging mind remains with Ones their entire lives.

That inner critic makes its presence known early, so Ones are hard on themselves. They sometimes shy away from sports or other group activities where they may not excel, since perfection is the goal at a very early age. They ask lots of questions about whether they’re doing things right, and they take responsibility for things that aren’t their fault. It’s hard for children to figure out right from wrong, but these kids sure try.

While Ones aren’t great multitaskers (it’s hard to do more than one thing perfectly at a time), they don’t usually mind when they are asked to pick up toys, straighten their bed or tie their shoes. Neatness and order are comforting to Ones even when they’re small. It makes them feel safe and less anxious.

Have you seen or read Marie Kondo’s book *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*? Whoa. Starting when the professional organizer...
was five years old, she would browse longingly through magazines showing perfect meals and lovely interior design. So she started reorganizing her family's belongings at home and the teacher's things at school, skipping recess in order to rearrange the bookshelves in her classroom. All the while she would complain about the school's poor storage methods. "If only there was an S-hook, it would be so much easier to use," she would sigh. I'll bet you dinner at my favorite rib house in Nashville that Marie Kondo is a One.

Listen, it's hard being a perfectionist. So hard, in fact, that someone wrote and published an children's book titled *Nobody's Perfect: A Story for Children About Perfectionism* to help these little people before their inner critic permanently sets up shop in their heads. The wounding message little Ones pick up is that they have to be "good" and do things "right." Mistakes are unacceptable. People and things are either perfect or wrong. Period.

One kids need to be told that making mistakes is normal, that they can be imperfect and loved at the same time. They can develop into the healthy side of One more naturally if they are given the healing message that mistakes are just part of the process of learning and growing up. If you’re parenting a One, make sure you correct them when no one else is around so as not to shame them in front of others. These kids may seem confident all the time, but they are more thin-skinned than you might think.

**ONES IN RELATIONSHIPS**

To form intimate relationships or deep friendships, Ones first have to overcome the difficulty they have making themselves vulnerable to others. Author Brené Brown calls perfectionism a "20-ton shield" we use to defend ourselves against being hurt. Unfortunately, what perfectionism really does is defend us against connecting with others.

For Ones, putting down the shield will require relinquishing their need to keep their emotions tightly buttoned up all the time.
They'll also need to acknowledge their fear of making mistakes, their sensitivity to criticism, and their concern about saying or doing the wrong things. It takes a lot of courage for Ones to be this transparent, but they can do it.

I once heard Helen Palmer say something to the effect that Ones don't throw a lot of hugs around or gush "I love you" every five minutes, but that doesn't mean they don't. Ones say I love you by being responsible and doing what's expected of them to make the world a better, more secure place for you. They will make sure you always get your annual physical. They'll make life work on a budget, and every meal they cook for you will be the right portion size, and contain the right combination of proteins, fats and carbohydrates.

What, you wanted more hugs? Remember how, after that hurricane, yours was the only house in the neighborhood with power and heat because years earlier your One dad bought a backup generator and regularly checked to make sure it was properly serviced and fueled? Sounds like a hug to me.

**ONES AT WORK**

No one cares more about details than Ones, so there are certain career paths we want them to pursue.

I flew from Los Angeles to Sydney, Australia, last year on an Airbus A380, the largest plane in the world. I'm usually not a nervous flyer, but the size of this plane spooked me. How could something so huge possibly get off the ground, let alone stay in the air for sixteen hours?

Prior to departure the co-captain took a stroll through the cabin welcoming passengers aboard, and he happened to notice I had a book about the Enneagram on my lap.

"My wife's into the Enneagram," he said, pointing at the book. "She says I'm a One, whatever that means."
“It means I have nothing to be nervous about,” I said, breathing a sigh of relief.

Because they believe that tasks should be carried out methodically and that it’s important to follow procedures and protocols, you not only want Ones to pilot your plane, you also want them to be the engineer who designs the brake system on your car, the pharmacist who fills your prescriptions, the programmer writing the code for your company’s new website, the architect drawing up plans for your dream house, the accountant preparing your taxes and the editor combing through your latest book. And though I pray you never need one, you for sure want your cardiologist or neurosurgeon to be a One as well. Ones make top-notch lawyers, judges, politicians, military personnel, law enforcement officers and, of course, teachers.

Industrious, reliable and well organized, Ones thrive in structured environments where they know what the deadlines are and who is responsible for what tasks. Because they’re afraid of making mistakes, Ones need regular feedback and encouragement. They so appreciate clear guidelines they might take the 800-page HR manual home on the first day at their new job and read it from cover to cover. They won’t argue when they’re docked a day’s wages for showing up late to a job site so long as everyone else who showed up late receives the same penalty.

Ones are great at sizing up what’s not working inside a company or organization and devising new systems and procedures to get it running right again. A major state university hired a One friend of mine to overhaul its health and benefits department. In three years she transformed it from the most poorly run office on campus into a department that was so efficient other universities sent their benefits people to model their own departments after its example.

But there can also be problems with Ones in the workplace, like their tendency to procrastinate. It’s not a good sign if you spy a One tapping the eraser end of a pencil on her knee while staring blankly
into a dark computer screen. Though they’re self-disciplined and driven to succeed, some Ones can put off starting or completing a project for fear they won’t do it perfectly. The occasional bout of procrastination, compounded by their hesitation to make quick decisions for fear of making a mistake, can slow things down for a whole team. This same fear of making mistakes will lead Ones to check and recheck their work forever, so others might have to encourage them to let it go and move on to the next task.

Ones typically have trouble adapting to change, resent being interrupted when working on a project and globalize problems; they think if one part of the business is tanking, then the whole business is going under. If they discover a flaw in a business plan, they worry the whole plan is flawed and might need a major or complete overhaul.

Because they’re afraid of criticism or failure Ones will quickly disavow responsibility when something goes wrong. It’s not unusual to hear a One say, “It wasn’t my fault” or “Don’t blame me; I didn’t do it.”

As leaders, Ones work hard to support people who work for them, particularly those who demonstrate a real desire to improve. At times, however, Ones can be controlling, rigid and stingy with praise even when it’s deserved. They also can have difficulty delegating because of concern that a task won’t be done correctly unless they do it themselves. Some Ones will annoy their coworkers to no end by redoing all sorts of tasks they think others have failed to do right the first time. Ones who extend their barrage of self-criticism to their colleagues are not generally the most popular people at the water cooler.

Finally, Ones at work—just like Ones in other areas of life—struggle with naming and owning their anger. If you work with a One, you need to know that when they start ranting with a disproportionate amount of angry energy about something, like the jerk who took their parking space, that’s probably not what they’re angry about. Their anger is about a tiff they had with their spouse that morning that they’ve worked hard to stuff and not acknowledge all
day, and now it's leaking out sideways. If you listen, gently ask clarifying questions and give them enough space, Ones will eventually be able to trace a line back to what it is that actually made them angry. They need a little help to figure out what's really going on with them.

But here's one of the things I love about Ones. When healthy they are deeply committed to helping others become their absolute best. They no longer seek to perfect the other person but to help them self-actualize without shaming or scolding. My friend Melanie, an Episcopal priest and mature One, says, "In all the work I have done, I have always enjoyed every opportunity I have had to build people up by affirming their hard work and talents. This is one of the greatest gifts in my ministry. Jesus calls us to share in God's mission. Paul calls us to share in building up the church. As a minister this invites me into the delight and joy of encouraging people to bring their best to God and to work with people to discern what gifts of the spirit God has given him for the realization of the kingdom." I can't tell you how helpful it would have been if I'd had a spiritually well-put-together One mentor me when I was a young man.

That said, if you want someone who is efficient, ethical, meticulous, reliable and does the work of two people, then hire a One!

**WINGS**

**Ones with a Two wing (1w2).** Ones with a Two wing are more extroverted, warm, helpful and empathetic on the high side of Two, but they can be more critical and controlling on the low side of Two. They are effective in problem solving for both individuals and groups. They are generous in their response to church, education, community, government and family. Ones with a Two wing talk too much and try to accomplish too many tasks in a day.

Ones with a Two wing tend to have a more rapid pace of speech, and because of it they quickly transition from teaching to preaching. Under the influence of Two, Ones will more readily sense other
people’s needs. Unlike Twos, however, they don’t feel an irrepresible urge to meet those needs.

**Ones with a Nine wing (1w9).** Ones with a Nine wing tend to be more introverted, detached and relaxed. More idealistic and objective, they are often more circumspect, thinking before they speak to avoid saying something wrong or erroneous. They will pause before finishing a thought. Ones with a Nine wing are outwardly more calm and mull over decisions for a long time—this wing exacerbates rather than helps the One with procrastination.

The laid-back, easygoing stance of 1w9s helps in building and maintaining relationships. Without the influence of the Nine, Ones tend to have too many expectations for others, so when they feel let down, the result is often resentment.

**STRESS AND SECURITY**

**Stress.** In stress Ones instinctively take on the not-so-great qualities we’d expect to see in unhealthy Fours (the Individualists). Their inner critic begins working overtime, and their need to perfect the world goes into overdrive. They become more resentful of others having fun, more sensitive to criticism, and depressed. In this space they long to be free of obligations and responsibilities, lose confidence, and feel unlovable.

**Security.** In security Ones take on the great qualities we associate with healthy Sevens (the Enthusiasts), where they’re more self-accepting, spontaneous, fun, open to trying new things and being both/and rather than either/or. Here the voice of their inner critic gets quieter, they’re not as hard on themselves, and they shift their attention from what’s wrong about the world to what’s good and right about it. This move to Seven in security often happens

“**The thing that is really hard and really amazing is giving up on being perfect and beginning the work of becoming yourself.**

Anna Quindlen
when Ones are away from home and feel less responsible for improving or fixing things. Ones can become entirely different people when they go somewhere for a week of fun in the sun.

SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

If you're a One, you believe the only way you'll know peace on the inside is if you perfect everything on the outside. It's not true. That tranquility only comes when you surrender your compulsive need for perfection and stop stifling your emotions, particularly your anger. Don't hide your true self behind that veneer of perceived perfection. **A person does not need to be perfect to be good.** That's worth repeating several times a day until it gets deep down into your marrow.

"And now that you don't have to be perfect, you can be good."

**JOHN STEINBECK**

Ones' journey toward wholeness will have to include befriending their inner critic. As our One friend Richard Rohr says, “What you resist, persists”—which in this case means that Ones shouldn't bother telling their inner critic to shut up as it only gives it more power. Many Ones say it helps to give the critic a funny name so when it goes on the attack they can say something to it like, “Cruella, thanks for helping me navigate the world as a kid, but as an adult I don't need your help anymore.” Or Ones might simply laugh and tell Nurse Ratched to turn down the volume.

Ones do well to remember there's more than one right way of doing things. Serenity means live and let live. Life isn't always either-or, black or white, right or left. Brené Brown sums up the healing message Ones need to hear: “You're imperfect, and you're wired for struggle, but you are worthy of love and belonging.” It's so often quoted it's threadbare, but I can't resist mentioning the chorus to Leonard Cohen's song “Anthem”; it was written for Ones:

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That’s how the light gets in.

TEN PATHS TO TRANSFORMATION FOR ONES

1. To awaken self-compassion, try to capture in a journal the typical things your inner critic says to you and then read them aloud.

2. When your inner critic activates, smile and tell it you hear it and appreciate how it’s trying to help you improve or avoid making mistakes, but you’re taking a new path to self-acceptance in life.

3. Resist the urge to give other people to-do lists or to redo their tasks if you think they haven’t met your standards. Instead, catch the people you love doing things right—and tell them how much you appreciate them for it.

4. When you are ready to dive right in to correct an injustice or right a wrong, first ask yourself whether the passion you feel for that issue is really misplaced anger about something else.

5. Let your Seven and Nine friends help you learn how to relax and have fun. The work will still be there tomorrow.

6. If you find yourself procrastinating, think about the reason why. Are you reluctant to get going on a task or project because you’re afraid you won’t be able to accomplish it perfectly?

7. Pick up a hobby you enjoy but are not especially good at doing—and just do it for the love of it.

8. Forgive yourself and others for mistakes. Everyone makes them.

9. See whether you can catch yourself measuring yourself against others to see who does a better job, works harder or meets your definition of success.

10. Be aware of how you receive criticism from others, and try to accept it without being defensive.
WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A TWO

1. When it comes to taking care of others, I don't know how or when to say no.
2. I am a great listener, and I remember the stories that make up people's lives.
3. I am anxious to overcome misunderstandings in a relationship.
4. I feel drawn to influential or powerful people.
5. People think I'm psychic because I usually know what other people need or want.
6. Even people I don't know well share deep stuff about their lives with me.
7. It seems like people who love me should already know what I need.
8. I need to be acknowledged and appreciated for my contributions.
9. I'm more comfortable giving than receiving.
10. I like my home to feel like a safe and welcoming place for family and others.
11. I care a great deal about what people think of me.
12. I want other people to think I love everyone, even though I don't.
13. I like it when the people who love me do something unexpected for me.
14. Lots of people ask me for help, and it makes me feel valuable.
15. When people ask me what I need, I have no idea how to answer.
16. When I'm tired I often feel like people take me for granted.
17. People say my emotions can feel over-the-top.
18. I feel angry and conflicted when my needs conflict with others'.
19. Sometimes it is hard for me to watch movies because I find it almost unbearable to see people suffer.
20. I worry a lot about being forgiven when I make mistakes.
**TYPE TWO**

**THE HELPER**

*I want you to be happy,
but I want to be the reason.*

UNKNOWN

*Healthy Twos* can often name their own needs and feelings without fear of losing relationships. They are generous in their efforts to love well and care for others. These happy, secure Twos also have appropriate boundaries, knowing what is theirs to do and what is not. They create a comfortable, safe space for others and are often considered to be a friend to many. Loving and lovable, they adapt well to changing circumstances and are aware of the true self that exists beyond their relationships.

*Average Twos* are convinced that the expression of their own needs and feelings will automatically threaten the stability of their relationships. They are generous people, but they often consciously or subconsciously expect something in return for their efforts. They have poor boundaries and generally only know themselves in relation to other people. They are attracted to powerful people, whom they expect to define them, and they'll use flattery to pull them in.
**Unhealthy Twos** are codependent. In their desire to be loved they will accept almost any substitute: appreciation, neediness, companionship and purely utilitarian relationships. These Twos are insecure, manipulative and often play the role of the martyr. They don’t give so much as invest, trying to earn love by meeting others’ needs—but always expecting a high return on that investment.

After seminary I accepted a job at a congregational church in Greenwich, Connecticut. To get to know the community I went to a luncheon for local clergy where I met Jim, a Baptist minister from a neighboring town. Both Jim and I were young, new dads and secretly beginning to wonder whether deciding to go into ministry was like deciding to get a tattoo when you’re drunk—something we should have thought through a little more carefully. Desperate for support, Jim and I agreed to meet once a month for breakfast at a diner to debrief the previous day’s worship services and talk about the victories and vicissitudes of serving churches. We became fast friends.

One Monday Jim and I pulled into the parking lot of the diner for our standing breakfast appointment at the same time. To my surprise he was driving a brand-new Chevy Suburban. I chuckled as I watched him try to finesse it into a space. It was more like watching someone dock a Carnival cruise ship than park a car.

“That’s a nice ride for an associate pastor,” I said to Jim as he climbed out and hit the lock button on his key fob. “Did you get a raise?”

“It’s a long story,” he sighed, shaking his head.

“I can’t wait to hear it,” I said, holding open the diner door for him.

Over coffee and Greek omelets Jim told me how he and his wife Karen became “proud” owners of a Suburban. The story involved a successful middle-aged realtor named Gloria who was a beloved and active member of his congregation. Chatty, warm
and unconscionably cheerful, Gloria knew how to make everyone feel like they were her best friend. She hosted a popular Bible study for high school girls, who she encouraged to stop by her home or call at any hour if they needed a shoulder to cry on. She volunteered for everything from teaching Vacation Bible School to coaching the local softball team.

A few weeks earlier Jim had been driving his twin girls to preschool in his old Nissan Sentra when Gloria pulled up in the lane adjacent to him at a red light. When she realized Jim was in the car next to hers she honked and waved at him, made funny faces and blew kisses at the girls. When the light turned green Jim waved goodbye to Gloria and drove off. As he did he glanced in his side view mirror and caught a glimpse of Gloria eyeing his car with the kind of expression one normally reserves for looking at a box of abandoned puppies.

To be fair, Gloria had reason to be concerned about the structural integrity of Jim's car. Jim's ten-year-old Sentra was a testimony to the power of duct tape and prayer. The car's body was dented and dinged from bumper to bumper, and the muffler, affixed to the car's undercarriage with a coat hanger, roared like the engine of an F-15.

The following Sunday, Jim and his family arrived home from church to find Gloria in their driveway. She was clapping her hands and bouncing on her toes like a sugar-jacked college cheerleader next to a brand-new Chevy Suburban with a giant red bow on the hood. Jim and Karen wondered whether they were at the right house or had taken a wrong turn and accidentally driven onto the set of The Price Is Right. They were still unbuckling their seat belts when Gloria rushed at them, jabbering so fast it sounded like she was speaking in tongues. She hugged Jim when he got out of the car and told him he was the best associate pastor the church had ever had. Wiping away tears, she ran to the other side of the car, threw her arms around Karen, and gushed on and on about how she was the model of a pastor's wife.
Soon the twins were out of their car seats and dancing around the new Suburban like Israelites around the golden calf while Gloria explained how seeing Jim at the stoplight in his old Sentra had broken her heart and made her anxious for his family's safety. She just knew they needed a new car but probably couldn't afford to buy one on a pastor's salary, so she felt moved to buy one for them.

Jim and Karen were speechless; something about this transaction gave them the "uh-oh" feeling. They tried to find words both to express their gratitude and to voice their concern about accepting such an extravagant gift, but Gloria wouldn't take no for an answer.

"Jim, I'm blessed to be a blessing," she said, pressing the keys to the new car into his palm.

"I know Gloria meant well," Jim said to me. "But that car's cursed. The rest of the pastors at church are grumbling because no one's ever given them a car. Karen won't drive it because she can't see over the steering wheel, and it eats more gas than an aircraft carrier."

"Can't you tell Gloria it's not working out and return it?" I said.

Jim shook his head. "Are you kidding? Every time I see her she asks if we still love the Suburban and if she can do anything else to help us."

I've got a strong hunch Gloria is a Two on the Enneagram.

**THE TWO'S DEADLY SIN**

Twos are some of the most caring, kind, supportive, upbeat and tenderhearted people on God's green earth. Three of my closest friends are Twos (one of which is my coauthor, Suzanne), and together they radiate enough love and generosity of spirit to heat a metropolex. Twos are the first responders in a crisis and the last to leave a dinner party if there are still dishes to wash. In Enneagram-speak they're called the Helpers.
If you suspect you might be a Two, then sit down, grab a box of Kleenex, light a scented candle, and take a few deep breaths before you read the next few paragraphs. Of all the numbers on the Enneagram, Twos are the most sensitive to criticism, so you’ll have to take my word for it when I say this ends well.

Twos, Threes and Fours compose the Feeling or Heart Triad and represent the most emotion-oriented, relationship-centered and image-conscious numbers on the Enneagram. All three of these types believe they can’t be loved for who they are, so each projects a false image they believe will win the approval of others.

Twos need to be needed. They rely on other people needing them to bolster their fluctuating self-worth. Presenting a cheerful, likable image and helping others is their strategy for earning love. For Twos, words of appreciation border on the intoxicating. Expressions of gratitude like “What would I do without you?” or “You’re a lifesaver!” make a Two feel good—I’m talking “Justin Bieber just retweeted me” good.

Pride is the deadly sin of the Two, which sounds nonsensical because Twos appear to be more selfless than self-inflated. But pride lingers in the shadows of Twos’ hearts. It reveals itself in the way they focus all their attention and energy on meeting the needs of others while at the same time giving the impression they have no needs of their own. The sin of pride comes into play in the way Twos believe other people are more needy than they are and that they alone know best what others require. They relish in the myth of their own indispensability.

Twos are indiscriminate caregivers. They foist their assistance and advice on those they deem to be weaker, less experienced and less capable of managing their lives than they are—people who would otherwise be lost without them. It’s hard not to pat yourself on the

FAMOUS TWOS
Mother Teresa
Archbishop Desmond Tutu
Princess Diana
back when you have an almost supernatural gift for detecting what others need and a seemingly unlimited supply of time, energy, treasure and talent to rescue them. Twos love to jump on their white horse to save the day when others require their assistance, but they can’t imagine asking someone to lend them a hand when the situation is reversed. Twos rarely ask for help, at least not directly, and they don’t know how to receive it when it’s offered. It makes sense to Twos that others have to rely on them, but for them to rely on others? Never in a million years. Not to put too fine a point on it, but Twos suffer from an inflated view of their own power, independence and value to others. What lies beneath that pride? Terror. Twos fear that acknowledging their wants will end in humiliation and that directly asking someone to fulfill their needs will lead to rejection. What if the person refuses me? they ask. How would I survive the shame and humiliation? It would only confirm what I’ve known all along: I’m unworthy of love.

Though they’re not always conscious of it, the help unevolved Twos provide others comes with strings attached. They want something in return: love, appreciation, attention, and the unspoken promise of future emotional and material support. Their giving is calculated and manipulative. Twos think if they can wrest appreciation and approval, and evoke a feeling of indebtedness in others, then others will sense when they require help and provide for their needs without their having to ask for it. Unconsciously they’re drawing up a kind of quid pro quo arrangement: “I’ll be there for you as long as you promise to be there for me without my having to acknowledge or ask you for help.”

Twos believe they live in a world in which you have to be needed before you can be loved, and where you have to give to get. And because they don’t believe you’d keep them around if they ever failed to render you service, Twos find it hard to put a cap on the time and energy they’ll devote to taking care of you. It’s a wonder to behold when you see an immature Two behind the wheel of the Love Train. Once it leaves the station it’s all but impossible to stop it.
ALL ABOUT TWOS OR HELPERS

Twos have an amazing way of making other people feel safe and comfortable. The moment you walk into my pal Suzanne’s home you feel like you’ve landed on an island of calm in a crazy world. It’s filled with giant cushioned chairs, bowls of mini Godiva chocolates, votive candles, sacred art hanging on the walls, and Henri Nouwen and Mary Oliver books thoughtfully placed on side tables for guests to read at their leisure. It feels like a cross between the Ritz-Carlton and a Catholic retreat center. Twos accept you just as you are; they aren’t judgmental, and they create a space both physically and emotionally in which people can speak from their hearts and experience.

On the other hand, as Richard Rohr says, “Twos are always on the make.” That’s because Twos live in a tit-for-tat world. Whether through charm, flattery, crafting a likable image or bald-faced people-pleasing, Twos are always trying to seduce or entice people because they don’t believe others will be there for them when they need it unless they keep up this cheerful and fawning exterior.

Average Twos are unaware that there are unstated expectations and ulterior motives behind their helping behaviors. They see the acts of service they perform for us as generous and unselfish, not based on the unspoken assumption we will reciprocate. They don’t wake up in the morning and say to themselves, Gee, my friend Janet is swamped at work. To earn her expressions of approval and affection, and to ensure that she’s there for me when I need her, I’m going to leave a casserole and a bag of Hershey’s Kisses on her doorstep. It’s not until the following week when the tables are turned and the now-overworked Two is seething with resentment because neither Janet nor any of the other ingrates she’s helped in the past brought her a casserole that the Two’s true motives are revealed. When Twos get healthy, however, they can recognize what’s happening and compassionately say to themselves, “Oh no, I did it again. I expected that to come back in kind and it didn’t! I need to keep working on that.”
When Twos walk into a room full of people, their attention immediately goes to “How are you doing? What do you need? What are you feeling?” and, most importantly, “What do you want?” They are so attuned and responsive to other people’s pain you’d sometimes think they’re psychic. This is an example of how what’s best about your number is also what’s worst about your number. It’s great to have the gift of being attuned to other people’s needs and helping them. But it’s never good when a Two or any other number leverages their superpower to manipulate people to give them what they want.

Because their self-worth depends on the response they receive from others, Twos always end up giving away too much power to other people. When my Two friend Michael was first married, he wanted to express his appreciation to his wife, Amy, for working two jobs to keep them financially afloat while he was in grad school. So while she was still at the office Michael cleaned the house, set up a card table with candles and a pot of her favorite herbal tea, and stuck Post-Its all over the house with love messages written on them. Disttracted and tired when she arrived home, Amy (who is not a Two) walked right past the table without noticing it. A full two hours went by before she saw it and said, “Are those flowers for me?” By then it was too late. Michael had already worked up a head of steam and was oozing resentment. He had spent hours putting together this surprise, and his miserable wife hadn’t even noticed. The night ended with their having an enormous fight over Amy’s lack of appreciation for Michael. “The next day I realized I hadn’t just wanted Amy’s appreciation. I had wanted her to fall at my feet and venerate me as though I were the patron saint of selfless giving. Later in our marriage I realized how my self-esteem was tied to the way Amy and others responded to my being a Helper. That’s a lot of power to give away.”

Twos are always on the lookout for signs of whether other people appreciate them. My friend Reynolds, a Two, is a brilliant author and speaker. He once told me that for him, public speaking
is a nightmare. “I would always lock in on the crowd’s response,” he said. “Whenever I was in front of a group of people I felt like I had a 3-by-5 card taped to my forehead with the words ‘Do you love me yet?’ written on it. Inevitably my helper antennae would pick up the negative signals emanating from the one vaguely unhappy-looking audience member, and I would do everything but stand on my head to please them. When nothing I did elicited that all-important look of approval and appreciation, I would leave feeling like a failure.”

Twos are afraid people will ditch them once they can stand on their own two feet. Suzanne is the mother of four great kids who adore her. From the day they were born she has enjoyed a close relationship with all of them, but for the longest time she was sure they wouldn’t want to hang out with her once they were grown and married. She had always thought, Once they’re done needing me, they’ll be gone. What Twos don’t know is that people don’t have to need them every second of the day to still want them in their lives.

Twos can walk into a party and intuit which couple had a fight on the way over, who would rather be home watching baseball and which person is anxious about losing her job. They can sense what other people are feeling without asking for a show of hands. The talk style of the Two is help and advice. So much as hint that you need something and an immature Two will chime in with “helpful” suggestions (or their plan to help you). The problem is that not everybody at the party wants a Helper getting all up in their business. Twos have to learn how to practice discernment. Before they leap into action like a Labrador retriever galumphing into the ocean to rescue a drowning child, they have to ask themselves, Is this mine to do? If someone is actually drowning, dive in to help him. Otherwise, opt for restraint.

Average Twos tell Suzanne and me they have the ability to sense and then fulfill the needs of others. The key word here is sense. You
don't have to tell Twos what you require; they just know. The problem is they assume everyone has the same ability to sense other people's inner life as well. This can lead to arguments that begin with someone throwing his hands up in the air and saying, "I'm not a mind reader. How was I supposed to know what you wanted?" and end with the Two storming out of a room yelling over her shoulder, "I'm tired of having to tell you what I need when you should just know!"

For a Two, feeling out of gas is frightening because their self-worth relies on the continual supply of gratitude and appreciation they get from others for taking care of them. If they're spent, they won't be able to give, and then what use are they? At this point a burnt-out Two might have an outburst because they feel taken for granted. When it happens it's like watching a satellite burning on re-entry into the atmosphere.

Suzanne is a consummate Two. As a speaker and a pastor's wife, she gets lots of opportunities to be a Helper—maybe too many. This is what it sounds like when she comes home feeling fed up and fried and walks into the kitchen, where Joe is cleaning up.

"How are you?" Joe asks.

"Done."

"Done with what?"

"Everything. Nobody appreciates me. People count on me to give, give, give, and they don't even thank me. Now everyone's doing wonderfully and I'm spent. In fact, everyone I do things for is feeling so great right now I bet they're probably having a party and forgot to invite me." For the next few hours Suzanne will slam doors, hand Joe her church membership resignation because the leaders of the church have not once thanked her for teaching thousands of Sunday school classes, or threaten to get their kids on a conference call to ask why they never once expressed their gratitude for all the years she woke up early to press their school clothes. At their best, Twos are warm and generous, and at their worst they're resentful martyrs.
TWOS AS CHILDREN

Kids who compulsively want to please everyone are probably Twos. As kids Twos are usually sociable and have close friendships, but because they're worried that no one is going to want them they will try to buy or maintain love by giving away a favorite toy or their lunch.

Unusually sensitive, these kids wear their hearts on their sleeves. Sometime there's a hint of sadness about them because they don't see themselves as lovable. Once they learn that being helpful can earn a smile and praise they'll be the first to volunteer to help their soccer coach put away the equipment after practice or to ask their teacher whether they would like them to pass out supplies. In time these kids can adopt the role of the people-pleaser and overestimate its value to the overall operating of the family, school or sports team. As children, they can be independent early on because they see their own needs as problems to avoid.

Somewhere these kids picked up the wounding message that having or expressing their own needs will lead to humiliation and rejection. They're aware of everyone's feelings and try to adapt their behavior and image to what others want. Never assume that just because Two children know your needs that they also know their own. If a Two hits a rough patch and you ask them what they need, they'll most likely say they don't know. Press them and they might become frustrated or emotional. Twos spend so much time and energy focusing on the needs of others that they lose touch with their own. By the time they reach adulthood that is the pattern of their lives.

TWOS IN RELATIONSHIPS

If you're fortunate enough to have a Two in your life then you know relationships mean everything to them. I mean everything. Of all the numbers on the Enneagram, Twos are the most interpersonal. Warm and tactile, they easily move toward other people. For example, Suzanne can't walk past someone she knows without
touching them on the arm, patting them on the back, or stopping to take their face into her hands so she can look them in the eye and say something like, “Now, you know I love you, right?”

But it’s important for Twos to know we love them as well. They feel things deeply, and it’s easy for them to express emotions. What you might not know is that most of the feelings Twos have are not their own. Twos feel what you’re feeling. It doesn’t take long for the children of a Two to figure out that Mom or Dad feels their feelings more than their own. But once they do, it’s like they’re playing poker with house money.

All three of the numbers in the Heart or Feeling Triad are hunting for a sense of personal identity. One way Twos attempt to establish identity is by identifying and seeing themselves through the lens of their relationships. So rather than introducing themselves by their own name, they focus on their relationship to people you might know. It’s always, “Hi, I’m Amy’s husband” or “I’m Jack’s mother.” Twos need to learn how to individuate, to become their own person.

For Twos, this journey often begins in midlife when, after years of putting everyone else’s needs ahead of their own, they become exhausted. One day they wake up and realize, I can’t go on giving this much. I need to take better care of myself. This is a difficult but necessary passage for Twos, as well as for the people who have grown accustomed to the way they put others first and pressure them to go back to the good old days when the unaware Two put everyone else’s interests ahead of their own. When the time comes, it’s important for others to encourage Twos to become their own people who care for themselves appropriately.

**TWOS AT WORK**

In professional life, Twos often play second in command, but this doesn’t feel demeaning to them. They know sergeants run armies, not generals, so they’re more than happy to be the power behind
the throne. When I was in elementary school, the principal’s secretary was a kind, energetic and warmhearted woman named Miss Parker. Miss Parker sat in the main office, where she answered the endless stream of phone calls, calmed overcaffeinated irate mothers, let us take fistfuls of M&M’s from a bowl on her desk when we received good test grades, made sure the students with peanut allergies brought their EpiPens to school, encouraged frazzled teachers, and at 3:00 put on an orange vest and monitored after-school pickup. If you needed love, lunch money or an emergency organ transplant at my elementary school, you went to Miss Parker. I’m sure the principal was a good guy, but I don’t even remember his name.

Twos are intuitive people with highly developed interpersonal skills who need to work in positions where there’s a lot of people contact. Twos build community. They know who’s doing well around the office and who isn’t. They remember people’s birthdays and the names of everyone’s kids. First to get the inside scoop, they know the backstory to everyone’s divorce, whose kid needs rehab, and who’s pregnant before anyone else does (even the father). As leaders they know how to recruit the right people to accomplish a task and use encouragement and praise to inspire and motivate them. They’re empathic, optimistic, and—because they’re image conscious—they know how to make an organization shine in the eyes of the outside world.

Supervisors need to have the freedom to provide constructive feedback when their employees need it. People who supervise Twos, however, should keep in mind that too much criticism or harsh words will crush them. Twos aren’t as interested as other types in climbing the ladder—or if they are, they keep their desire...
for recognition and attention outside their awareness because admitting they want it makes them vulnerable to disappointment.

Contrary to popular belief, there are plenty of male Twos in the world. After thirty-five years of working on Wall Street, my friend Jamie founded an organization and yearly conference that brings promising young leaders together with older accomplished leaders in the hope that they will form friendships and mentor one another. His Two personality shows itself in his passion for connecting people with one another and coaching younger folks on the ways they can avoid the pitfalls commonly associated with early career success.

**WINGS**

*Twos with a One wing (2w1).* Twos with a One wing (2w1) are concerned about doing things properly. They want to be seen as dependable and responsible. With a One wing these Helpers are more critical of themselves, more controlling and more prone to guilt. These Twos have clearer boundaries and are more aware of their emotional needs but have more trouble expressing them. They are less trusting and expect a bit more in return for their efforts.

*Twos with a Three wing (2w3).* Twos with a Three wing (2w3) are more ambitious, image-conscious and competitive. Extroverted and sometimes seductive like the Three (the Performer), they are more concerned about relationships and connections than Twos with a One wing. These Twos are more confident, so they achieve more; being seen as successful is a close second to being known as loving and generous. In this space Twos with a strong self-image can shape-shift like Threes to become whatever is called for to achieve the desired results.

**STRESS AND SECURITY**

*Stress.* Twos in stress take on the characteristic behaviors of an unhealthy Eight, where they become demanding and controlling, either directly or manipulatively. They blame other people for what
makes them unhappy and can be surprisingly aggressive and vengeful about past wrongs.

**Security.** When they’re feeling secure Twos move to the healthy side of Four, where they’re okay with not having to pretend they love everybody. These Twos have some understanding of the need for self-care and can focus inward, where they invest in themselves by doing creative things, which brings them joy. This is the place Twos can imagine feeling good about themselves when they aren’t helping someone else.

**SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION**

As is the case with every number, what’s great about Twos is what’s not so great about Twos. When people give too much, help for the wrong reasons, or serve others for selfish reasons rather than because they’re called by God, their giving becomes calculating, controlling and manipulative. If you’re a Helper, this chapter has likely been a difficult read for you.

Twos have long been afraid that people will reject them once they discover the Twos have needs and unattended sorrows of their own. Twos live in service to the lie that the only way to win love is through hiding the screwed-up, vulnerable people they really are behind the appearance and activity of a cheerful, selfless helper. Like all numbers in the Feeling Triad, they believe that if they show their true selves to the world, it will lead to rejection. The healing message for Twos is “You’re wanted.” Twos’ needs matter, and they can begin now to learn how to directly express their real feelings and desires without undue fear of humiliation or rejection.

All Twos have to learn the difference between self-interested and altruistic giving. Self-interested giving expects payback, whereas altruistic giving comes without any strings attached. As the saying goes, “When you give and expect a return, that’s an investment. When you give and don’t expect anything back, that’s love.”
Thankfully, with a little self-knowledge and self-awareness, Twos can learn to give to others free of charge. If you’re a Two that means you give exactly what’s yours to give—nothing more and nothing less. If your friend Isabelle is buried at work and you babysit her kids but she doesn’t reciprocate when you’re in a similar crisis, then it won’t matter to you because you had no expectation she would. As my twelve-step sponsor reminds me, “Expectations are resentments waiting to happen.”

Think back to my friend Jim from the beginning of this chapter. He didn’t want, need or ask for Gloria’s help. In fact, her “help” turned out to be anything but. How differently that story would have ended if a more self-aware version of Gloria had gone to Jim and said something like, “Jim, the other day at the stoplight I noticed your car looked like it might be on its last legs. For some reason God has given me more money than I need, and I’d be happy to sit down with you and Karen to see if there’s a way I can help. No pressure, just let me know if you need a hand.”

It’s a hackneyed story, but Twos might find it helpful to read the story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10. The account begins with the words “As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him” (v. 38). Isn’t it interesting that it was both Martha and Mary’s home but only Martha gets credit for inviting Jesus and the disciples to come visit them? Was Mary inhospitable? Or of the two sisters was it only Martha who felt compelled to meet the needs of Jesus and the disciples?

When Jesus and his friends arrive, Martha does what any good Two would do, which is set to work making sure everyone is comfortable and has what they need. She has probably already washed Jesus’ feet, and now she’s running around to the point of distraction making dinner while her good-for-nothing sister Mary is chilling at Jesus’ feet. Martha starts feeling jealous and resentful. Everyone
else is in the living room throwing back olives and laughing while she's working her butt off in the kitchen cooking a lamb.

Martha gets angry because as usual she is doing all the heavy lifting and says to Jesus, “Are you just going to let her sit here while I do all the work? Tell her to help me.” I’m not sure, but I think this is the only place in the Bible where someone actually orders God to do something. Like I said, hell hath no fury like an overworked Two who is feeling unappreciated.

Jesus knows what’s really going on and replies, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her” (vv. 41-42).

For Twos the lesson is simple: sometimes you think you are serving God or other people when you’re actually not. Sometimes all the doing and caretaking is not what God is calling you to do. The Bible never tells us that Martha asked Jesus what he wanted; she took it on herself to make a big to-do. Maybe God simply wants Twos—and all of us—to relax in his presence.

If Twos are going to learn how to attend to their own needs as much as they pay attention to the needs of other people, they have to work on their soul in solitude. If they try to do this work in community they’ll be tempted to help those around them grow spiritually rather than focus on their own development. In this situation Twos’ tendency to drop everything to help people in crisis is more a defense against facing their own needs and feelings than an act of service. In their time with God they might ask themselves, Who am I when no one needs me?

**TEN PATHS TO TRANSFORMATION FOR TWOS**

1. Rather than hinting at your needs or leaving it to others to figure them out, try telling them directly.
2. Internally take a deep breath and start over when you catch yourself trying too hard to present a likable image or flattering others to win their approval.

3. Don’t reflexively say yes to everything. When someone asks for your help, say you’ll get back to them with an answer once you’ve had time to think about it. Or just experiment with saying the word no. It’s a complete sentence.

4. When the urge to rescue or help overwhelms you, ask yourself, *Is this mine to do?* If you’re not sure, talk it over with a trusted friend.

5. When you realize you’ve fallen back into the typical behaviors of your number, gently ask yourself, *What would I have to feel if I wasn’t flattering or meeting this person’s needs right now?*

6. Whenever possible, perform acts of anonymous service.

7. Twos toggle back and forth between having overly inflated and overly deflated views of themselves and their value to others. Remind yourself you’re neither the best nor the worst. Just you.

8. Don’t push away feelings of resentment or entitlement when they arise. Instead, view them as invitations to look inwardly with kindness and ask, *What most needs attention in my life right now?*

9. Don't beat yourself up when you catch yourself moving too aggressively toward others or overwhelming them with your emotions. Congratulate yourself for spotting it, and dial it back.

10. Two or three times a day, ask yourself, *What am I feeling right now?* and *What do I need right now?* Don’t worry if you can’t supply an answer. It takes time to develop self-care muscles.


4 TYPE NINE: THE PEACEMAKER


"one wild and precious life": Mary Oliver, New and Selected Poems (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).


"The only type the Nine is not like": Ibid.

69-71 This section draws from Eli Jaxon-Bear, From Fixation to Freedom: The Enneagram of Liberation (Bolinas, CA: Leela Foundation, 2001).


When a Nine gets sidetracked: Jaxon-Bear, From Fixation to Freedom.

5 TYPE ONE: THE PERFECTIONIST

"Before I can live with other folks": Harper Lee, To Kill a Mockingbird (Franklin Center, PA: Franklin Library, 1977).

"Miss Jean Louise?": Ibid.

"With him, life was routine": Ibid.

"good in the worst sense of the word": commonly attributed to Mark Twain.


6 TYPE TWO: THE HELPER

If Twos are going to learn how to attend to their own needs: Helen Palmer, *The Enneagram: Exploring the Nine Psychological Types and Their Inter-Relationships in Love and Life* (Sounds True Audio Learning Course, 2005), 8 CDs or audio download, www.soundstrue.com/store/the-enneagram-3534.html.

7 TYPE THREE: THE PERFORMER


8 TYPE FOUR: THE ROMANTIC


"detach without withdrawing": Ibid.

avoid saying things to them like, "Why can't you write copy like Andrew does?": Ibid.