

**Critique of the Enneagram Model of Behavior and
Some Contrasts with the Biblical DISC Model
by Ken Voges, Biblical DISC® Author**

Over the years, it has been my practice to maintain accountability relationships with two or three men who have solid Christian families and wives that love them unconditionally. When one of these brothers calls and the conversation starts with a 911 appeal, “I have made a mistake again”, we quickly agree to get together at their favorite “watering hole”. As you might guess, I have made my own 911 calls with these guys.

About a month ago, I got one of these messages from Jeff, who I've known for more than 30 years. Jeff is a very successful oilman, cattle rancher and an “empty nester” with a lovely wife and four great kids. The youngest, a millennial, was excited about a new behavioral model called the Enneagram. Jeff asked me whether I was familiar with the model and if I had an opinion on it. The Enneagram was new to me but I was curious, so I agreed to critique the book his daughter had recommended, “*The Road Back to You*” by Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile.

I asked, “What do you want to know?” Jeff answered, “What’s positive, disappointing or missing? All sides...the good, the bad and the ugly.”

This wasn't the first time Jeff and I had collaborated. We have worked together in business ventures, non-profits and as elders in our church. He has seen and experienced how, as a professional consultant, teacher and author I use a behavioral tool call DISC. Because of our mutual respect and friendship, I was happy to lend my thirty years of experience to evaluating the Enneagram model. The following are the observations I shared with him of Cron and Stabile's book, including additional materials on the Enneagram.

Half Truth Points in the Book

- Defines behavior of each style within levels: Healthy, Average, Unhealthy
- Comprehensive in defining unique sins of each of the nine behavioral styles
- Primary focus of the book is on self-discovery and self-help
- It suggests that love is the key to making relationships work

Disappointing Points

For each numbered style, the authors offer ten personalized, individual suggestions in achieving a healthy profile. In addition, the authors suggest that each numbered style has a “deadly sin” associated with it. The book further suggests that hope for victory over each style's deadly sin is the responsibility of each individual. The authors clarify the process of addressing each defined sin:

Learning to manage your deadly sin rather than allowing it to manage you is one of the goals of the

*Enneagram.*¹ In another book, *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*, the idea of “deadly sins” is defined as *just a passion, which is neither bad nor evil. It is just “missing the mark”*². It appears these redefined terms and ideas regarding sin are the cornerstone definitions of the Enneagram model.

An argument can be made that the Enneagram redefinition of each behavioral style's "deadly sin" is a modern day form of Gnosticism. The Apostle John addressed the issue when it became a problem in the first century church, which to the believer still applies today. It reads...

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us of our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atonement sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."
1 John 1:8-2:2 (NIV)

It is my opinion that God defines sin and what steps are required for repentance, atonement, reconciliation and restoration. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus paid the price for our sins and is the way toward salvation. No mention of that option is present in the book about the Enneagram.

Regarding Jesus, I could find only one mention of him in the book. It focused mainly on defining Martha's behavioral style in soliciting Jesus' support to demand that Mary help with supper.

A better story would have been when the three met again in John 11:20-33 over the death of Lazarus, the sisters' brother. Both sisters made the same comment to Jesus, "*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*" Both were affirmed by Jesus but in very different ways. With Martha, the task-oriented one, Jesus assured her that he was about to take action and that her brother would be raised from the dead. With Mary, the sensitive, feeling one, he simply wept with empathy. Both had needs and both individual needs were met by Jesus based on who they were.

Furthermore, *The Road Back to You* also offers a definition of love by Thomas Merton, "*The beginning of love is the will to let those we love be perfectly themselves, not to twist them to fit our own image.*"¹⁵ I can think of no better examples of unique and different expressions of love than the ones recorded in John 11 of Jesus toward Martha and Mary.

Missing Points

Included in the love chapter is a definition of compassion by a Buddhist monk.

*"When our hearts are small, our understanding and compassion are limited, and we suffer. We can't accept or tolerate others and their shortcomings, and we demand that they change. But when our hearts expand, these same things don't make us suffer anymore. We have a lot of understanding and compassion and can embrace others. We accept others as they are, and then they have a chance to transform."*¹⁶

Although the words are profound and challenging, I believe Paul's definition of love and compassion are worthy of being mentioned. For the record it reads as follows:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. I Corinthians 13:4-7 (NIV)

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit in any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Philippians 2:1-4 (NASB)

I have no issues with allowing others to be who they are. My challenge is what appropriate action I should take in loving others who are different from me. I believe the answer is in the response Jesus gave to the Pharisee in response to the question, "What is the most important commandment?"

37 Jesus replied:" 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Matthew 22:37-40 (NIV)

The second commandment, "love your neighbor as yourself", simply means meeting the needs of anyone you meet by discerning what is their unique need. If a behavioral model is to be complete, it will include a definition of each individual's needs and offer strategies to meet them. However, the desire to meet the needs of others comes from one's values system. The values system Jesus mentions assumes that one must have a personal relationship with the Lord and the love shown to others flows from Him.

If in fact Jesus is God and his words are true, his interactions with biblical characters are the perfect example of how to love the different behavioral styles, as does God the Father.

The case studies are as follows:

<u>Biblical Characters</u>	<u>Biblical Case Study</u>	<u>Enneagram numbers</u>
Paul (D/C) & Jesus	Acts 9:1-20	#8, or #3?
Peter (I/D) & Jesus	John 21:1-22	#7, or #4?
Abraham (S/I) & God	Genesis.12-22	#2, or #9 ?, #5 ?
Moses (C/S/d) & God	Exodus 3-4	#1, or #6 ?

I would offer that including biblical relationship models, using key biblical characters with the Creator God of the Bible or Jesus, as examples, would have improved the book.

The Biblical DISC[™] Assessment includes the 3 Rs model: *How to Respond to, Relate to and Reinforce* each behavioral style. It also includes an exercise template so that each individual is given the opportunity to write a paragraph describing how to best love them based on the models found in matching biblical case studies.

Finally, I believe the most profound statement by the authors in *The Road Back to You* is: *“All models are wrong, but some are useful. That’s how I see the Enneagram. It is not infallible or inerrant. It is not the be-all and end-all of Christian spirituality. At best, it is an imprecise model of personality...but it is very useful”.*⁵

I would agree that the Enneagram is an imprecise model of personality as is DISC, Myers Briggs or any other behavioral model presently available. I believe each model should pass through the filter of the one document that claims to be inspired...the Holy Bible. I have found Scripture to be *very useful* in understanding the relational and personal side of God’s love for man through his son, Jesus Christ. Without this rudder, each model will eventually become more complex and “miss the mark.”

For the record, I have read three Enneagram books and reviewed two others. The book *The Road Back to You* has limited information involving biblical characters and biblical case studies, and I submit it is very weak in the inclusion of scripture or scriptural references. From a believer’s perspective, the book, *Self to Lose Self to Find*, by Marilyn Vancil is far superior in including biblical principles, but again limited in showing the personal, relational side of God and his son Jesus.

I believe the Apostle Paul hits the mark when he offers the importance of God’s Word in maintaining a healthy life style:

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” II Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV)

Finally, I believe the Enneagram model is extremely comprehensive in describing human behavior but without a compass for defining how to love and accept others. I believe the “*how*” stories are best modeled by a Creator God and His son Jesus Christ as told in the Bible. I find the Enneagram materials totally lacking with this message in its present form. A different book linking biblical relationship case studies might improve the Enneagram models. However, the bigger question remains, is it even possible to link the Enneagram with biblical relational stories? I have my doubts.

I trust my words are a fair summary and critique of the Enneagram model of behavior.

Ken Voges

1. *The Road Back to You*, Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile, InterVarsity Press, 2016, p 31
2. *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*, Don Richard Riso Russ Hudson, Bantam Books, 1999, p 23.
3. *The Road Back to You*, Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile, InterVarsity Press, 2016, p 227
4. Ibid, page 228
5. Ibid, page 20

Critique of the Enneagram Model of Behavior in
The SACRED ENNEAGRAM
Finding Your Unique Path to Spiritual Growth

This is the fourth book I have read on the subject of the Enneagram model. Three, *The Road Back to You*, *Self to Lose Self to Find* and the recent one you gave me, *The SCARED ENNEAGRAM*, all attempt to integrate biblical principles with the nine Enneagram profiles.

Half-Truth Points

- Defines behavior of each of nine styles within levels: Positive and Negative traits
- Defines unique sins (*passions*) of each of the nine behavioral styles
- Primary focus of the books are on self-discovery and self-help
- Supports the concept that love is the key to making relationships work

Missing Point of *The SACRED ENNEAGRAM*

The Enneagram model has as one of its cornerstone concepts that each of the nine types has a unique negative sin potential. Each of the three books mentioned attempts to address the subject by relabeling the sin category (Deadly Sin, Root Sin or Passion) but retain the *specific traits* of the nine styles. Example: Type Five's "Deadly Sin" is *Avarice*. In the book, *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*, the idea of "deadly sins" is defined as *just a passion, which is neither bad nor evil. It is just "missing the mark"*. It appears that Christopher Heuertz, the author of *The SACRED ENNEAGRAM*, has adopted this redefined definition and appears to be the new cornerstone of the current Enneagram dogma.

Again, an argument can be made that the Enneagram redefinition of each behavioral style's "sin" is a modern day form of Gnosticism. I stand with the Apostle John's position when the issue became a problem in the first century church, which I believe still applies today. It reads...

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us of our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.
1 John 1:8-2:2 (NIV)

It is my opinion that God defines sin and what steps are required for repentance, atonement, reconciliation and restoration with my Creator God. Not man. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus paid the price for my sins by his death on the cross. It is his shed blood and sacrificial death that addresses my sin issue and has the power to atone, reconcile and restore my relationship with my Creator. I do not see this position made clear in *The SACRED ENNEAGRAM*, which presents a major problem in supporting this model theologically.

Enneagram's Incongruences with Four Basic Behavioral Models

Most of the validated behavioral models currently available today begin with four basic styles. The DISC model is no different *but* what makes it unique are the *clustering* of behavioral traits on four continuums. No other behavioral model does this. This is important in that it is possible to categorize behavioral styles into 16 *blends* of Classical Patterns. Also, because of the four behavioral continuums, trait descriptions of biblical characters can also be cross-referenced to one of the 16 Classical Patterns. This includes blends that *do not* naturally seem congruent; i.e., D/C or I/C styles.

In the book *The SACRED ENNEAGRAM*, it suggests that behavioral Enneagram wings (blends) are only valid with numbers next to the primary number; i.e. 8 styles (DISC High Ds) can only be valid with a 7 style (High I) or 9 style (High S). On page 61, the author states: *"At nearly every workshop I teach, I hear someone suggest that they are a 'Seven' with a Four wing' or a 'Two with a Nine wing.' (both impossible, as these types do not live next to each other on the circle, and both lead to confusion, not clarity, about type)."*¹ Therefore, in the Enneagram model, an 8 style with a 1 wing style is not a valid profile and impossible. I disagree.

In the DISC model, each of the 16 Classical Patterns have 9 categories (strengths, goals, fears, over extension of strengths [sin issues] etc.) defined with specific traits in 30 page booklets. I was able to read, study and finally cross-reference scripture passages to the D/C (8/1) blend in each category with the Apostle Paul. (See the attached cross-reference). Although naturally incongruent, this style has a unique strength and gift of discerning the inaccuracy in thinking by implementing a superior action plan. In Paul's case, he was able to see that salvation was centered in "grace" and not in "works" or in keeping the law. Paul's letter to the Galatians highlights this gift and places the focus on the significance of Jesus' death on the cross with the doctrine of "grace" over "works". Also, most of Paul's letters deal with problems and strategies in correcting false doctrine. What a gift!

Warnings of Father Mitch Pacwa on the Enneagram

Jeff, when I first accepted your challenge to compare the DISC model with the Enneagram model, I did my best with limited understanding but quickly had some reservations. I had a colleague, Professor Nancy Reece, who I highly respect warn me about issues within the Enneagram model. She suggested I review the work of Mitch Pacwa, S.J. I was able to get a copy of his book, *Catholics and the New Age*. Two chapters are dedicated to the background of the Enneagram and its links to the occult. Father Pacwa shares his firsthand experiences and disillusionment with the Enneagram as a Jesuit seminarian. As for his background, Father Pacwa was professor of Sacred Scripture at Loyola University in Chicago for many years. Among his many gifts, Father Pacwa spoke 13 languages and hosted a television series on the Eternal Word Television Network. Next are Father Pacwa's thoughts on the merits of the Enneagram. I will let you decide for yourself on its value to you in understanding yourself and others.

The following are Father Pacwa's conclusions:

"I have many criticisms of the teachers of the Enneagram and some of them are quite serious. I do not exclude the possibility of using some form of nine personality types, if indeed their existence can be proven. I suspect that the Enneagram is untrue, but is believed by adherents who have faith in its allegedly ancient mysticism.

The mixture of so many non-Christian elements in the Enneagram system raises the need to be very careful about accepting it wholeheartedly. St. Paul instructs us, 'Test everything; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil' (1 Thess 5:20-12). When we test the Enneagram, we use the gospel of Jesus Christ as the norm by which we judge it. We do not use the Enneagram to test the truth of the gospel. The Enneagram is a mixed bag and does not bestow eternal life. Only Jesus our Lord does."²

Jeff, I would agree with Father Pacwa. The Holy Scriptures must be our benchmark and filter in determining whether outside information has value. When it *does not*, one must be careful. I have done my best to offer you a fair critique of the Enneagram model. I believe it to be a model of half-truths and dangerous when used inaccurately and dogmatically. I look forward to getting together again to discuss how to better love each other. With that, I remain as always...

In His Grace,

Ken.

1. *The SACRED ENNEAGRAM*, Christopher L Heuertz, Zondervan, 2017, p 61
2. *Catholics And The New Age*, Mitch Pacwa, S.J., Charis, 1992, p 124.

**Cross Referencing:
Enneagram Profiles, DISC Blends & Biblical Characters**

Enneagram Profiles	DISC Blends	Biblical Models
#8	Primary D	Solomon, Rahab
#8/7	D/I	Joshua, Sarah
#8/7	D=I	Apollos, Lydia*
#8/1 ?	D/C low s	Apostle Paul
#7	Primary I	Aaron
#7/8	I/D	Peter, Rebekah
#7/2 ?	I/S	Barnabas, Abigail
#7/1/4?	I/C	David, Miriam*
#2 or 9	Primary S	Isaac, Dorcas*
#9/7 ?	S/I	Abraham, Hannah
#5,1,8 ?	S/C/d midline	Jacob, Anna*
#8,2,3 ?	S/D	Nehemiah, Martha
#1	Primary C/low d	Luke, Esther
#1/2/8 ?	C/S/d midline	Moses, Naomi*
#1/2/7?	C/S/I	Elijah, Ruth
#1/2/6?	C/S/low d	Apostle John, Mary

*Tendencies indicate a pattern, but not enough scriptural content to be confident.
? Enneagram types that do not live next to each are considered impossible and not valid.

1. More complete cross-references of DISC and biblical characters can be found in the on-line Biblical DISC™ assessment by Lead Like Jesus, 2016 and *Understanding How Others Misunderstand You*, by Ken Voges and Ron Braund, Moody Press, 1990.
2. Imperfect cross references were based on the information provided in the book, *The Road Back to You* by Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile, InterVarsity Press, 2016 and *An Evangelical Guide to the Enneagram* by John Starke, Christianity Today, October 2016
3. For a more in depth critic of the Enneagram, I recommend the following article: *Enneagram: The Road Back to You, Or to Somewhere Else?* By Kevin DeYoung, February 1, 2018; www.thegospelcoalition.org

Fear of the Lord vs. Fear of man

“The remarkable thing about God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else.” Oswald Chambers

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. Proverbs 9:10 (NIV)

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding.” Psalm 111:10 (NIV)

“Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for; through the fear of the Lord evil is avoided. Proverbs 16:6 (NIV)

And he (the Lord) said to the human race, "The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding." Job 28:28 (NIV)

“No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear.”
Edmund Burke

DISC Biblical Character “Fear” Case Studies

- High D - Want: Being in control; being the influence point
Fear: Loss of control, not being able to influence decisions
Biblical stories: Paul, Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2;
Jesus’ High D - 3 R response: Acts 9:3-19
- High I - Want: Social recognition; being publicly affirmed
Fear: Loss of social acceptance, rejection in public
Biblical stories: Peter – Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75
Jesus’ High I - 3 R response: John 21:1-18
- High S - Want: Harmony; security of having family close by
Fear: Disharmony, change which involves separation from family
Biblical stories: Abraham - Acts 7:2-3; Genesis 11:31-32, 12:1-4
God’s High S - 3 R response: Genesis 11:32; 12:1-4; 13:14-18
- High C - Want: Logical validation of data, reassurance of support
Fear: Surprises that are illogical requests, criticism of work
Biblical stories: Moses – Exodus 3:5-11 13; 4:1,10,13
God’s High C - 3 R response: Exodus 3:12-21; 4:2-9,11-12,14-17

Three R's of DISC Relationships

CONSCIENTIOUS (C)

HOW TO RESPOND TO A HIGH C

- Be specific and accurate
- Make allowance for initial responses to be cautious and/or negative
- Allow freedom to ask questions

HOW TO RELATE TO A HIGH C

- Answer questions in a patient and persistent manner
- Mix accurate data with assurances
- Allow time to validate information

HOW TO REINFORCE THE HIGH C

- Provide a step-by-step approach
- Provide reassurances of support
- Give permission to validate information with third party

DOMINANCE (D)

HOW TO RESPOND TO A HIGH D

- Be firm and direct
- Focus on actions and goals
- Confront to get his/her attention

HOW TO RELATE TO A HIGH D

- Be brief and to the point
- Explain "How to achieve goals" using logic with an action plan
- Allow time to consider your ideas

HOW TO REINFORCE THE HIGH D

- Repeat the plan of action, focusing on goals, objectives, and results
- Give bottom line instructions
- Get out of his/her way

STEADINESS (S)

HOW TO RESPOND TO A HIGH S

- Be non-threatening and patient
- Allow time to process and adjust to change
- Make allowances for family or team

HOW TO RELATE TO A HIGH S

- Use friendly tones when instructing
- Give personal, nonverbal acceptance and assurances
- Allow time to process information

HOW TO REINFORCE THE HIGH S

- Repeat any instructions
- Provide hands-on reinforcement
- Be patient in allowing time to take ownership

INFLUENCING (I)

HOW TO RESPOND TO A HIGH I

- Be friendly and positive
- Allow for informal dialogue
- Allow time for stimulating and fun activities

HOW TO RELATE TO A HIGH I

- Use friendly voice tones
- Allow time for them to verbalize their feelings
- Help them transfer talk to an action plan

HOW TO REINFORCE THE HIGH I

- Offer positive encouragement and incentives for taking on tasks
- Help them organize an action plan
- Communicate positive recognition