

## **A Conversation with Beth McCord, Founder of Your Enneagram Coach, Speaker, Coach, and Teacher**

**Q. Thank you so much for making time to talk to us! Let's start with something very basic: What is the Enneagram System?**

**A.** Enneagram is a personality tool of self-discovery. It helps you understand why you think, feel, and behave differently, based on your Core Motivations. There are nine personalities, and each one has distinct Core Motivations within four categories. The first is your Core Fear: That's what you're running away from or trying to prevent from happening. The second is your Core Desire. This is what you're striving for and hoping to obtain. Third, you have a Core Weakness. Some teachers might call it the passion or deadly sin, but I call it the Core Weakness because it's the thorn in your side—the thing that's constantly tripping you up. And then you have a Core Longing—a message your heart longs to hear and experience.

Those four Core Motivations are the driving force behind *WHY* you think, feel, and behave in particular ways. By understanding your Core Motivations, you can understand why you do what you do and also navigate your internal life in the best direction for your personality type. Enneagram knowledge helps you to understand when you veer off course and the common pitfall that you might experience once again if you don't correct your course. Using these helpful insights make it easier to stay on a healthier path, which ensures you will experience more transformation and growth.

**Q. When did you discover Enneagram—and what hooked you?**

**A.** I can remember even back to my junior year of high school when I was introduced to the Myers-Briggs system in my psychology class. I was so intrigued by it. I took a seminary class when my husband was at seminary and was reintroduced to Myers-Briggs, and again, I was intrigued. The professor sat me and my husband Jeff down and said, "Well, here's your personality, Jeff, and here's your personality, Beth. I can see that you'd have interactions like this and like that." It was amazing how accurate he was and we listened intently to his advice.

A year or two later, we were introduced to the Enneagram, and I dove headlong into it. I already had a lot of curiosity about people. My Enneagram type—Type nine—actually reinforces that: I'm a people mediator. We nines don't know ourselves very well. We have constantly merged with everyone else, tried to make everyone else happy, to keep the peace. So what happens is we develop internal fog, which makes it really hard to understand ourselves.

The Enneagram clearly explained what was happening in my inner world with great vocabulary and insight. I could finally discuss what was happening. I had words that I could take to Jeff or other people—words that brought a lot of clarity or healing in relationships and interactions.

Nines love to mediate or bring peace and harmony, so I found myself using this tool that helped me understand everyone around me on a much deeper level.

**Q. That must have been life-changing, really.**

**A.** Yes. You know when you're driving, and there's a really thick fog, so you're going super slow because you can't see that far ahead of you? The Enneagram made it possible for me to reach my destination faster and enjoy the journey more. I gained clarity. I stopped feeling so sluggish. Before, I'd wanted to give up in certain areas, which would mean not experiencing life in the fullest way possible.

So yes, it was a very life-changing moment. It continues to be—it's not just a one-and-done thing.

**Q. Enneagram is not an inherently Christian system, correct?**

**A.** Correct. We actually don't know how long ago the Enneagram was developed. Its symbol has been used for thousands of years for various reasons. Modern-day Enneagram really gained traction in the 70s and even more so in the 80s as books began to be published.

Every teacher teaches through his or her own worldview, which is why you see Catholic mystics, New Age adherents, and Protestant followers. At Your Enneagram Coach, our worldview is Christian and we have removed, or redefined, all aspects of the Enneagram that do not align with a Biblical worldview. Our goal, as laid out in our mission statement, seeks to focus people's attention upon the person and work of Jesus Christ.

**Q. Why is it helpful to view and apply this system through a Christian lens? What changes for you or for all of us when we do that?**

**A.** That's a great question. The Enneagram tool is great for bringing clarity, but it can't be the actual transformation. Think of the Enneagram as an x-ray. An x-ray shows what's not broken and what is broken, but that's all it can do. It can't actually do the fixing.

As Christians, we believe the only source of fixing or transformation is Jesus Christ through his life, death, and resurrection, which is applied to us through the Holy Spirit, which he has given to us. So it's great to have that x-ray, but then we need the actual healer—the doctor who can mend us and put us together. Then, we need the Holy Spirit as well to do the continual work inside of us.

Often, humans focus on the outward behaviors—what we see on the outside. We put on a lot of personas or shapeshift, trying to look better or do better. But that isn't what God cares about. He cares about our heart—our heart's motivations, why we do what we do. The Enneagram is a tool that reveals why we do what we do.

Enneagram will also show you pretty clearly if you're healthy, struggling, or even unhealthy. At Your Enneagram Coach, we help you see that when you know, believe, and trust your identity in Christ, you are set free. You are his most cherished and beloved child. You become a citizen of heaven, even though you're still here on Earth.

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When we believe that is true, our true, healthy personality traits will pour out. But when we start to forget our true identity with Christ and try to control what's happening, we see consequences. We stumble. We can even start to harm others. It is as though we are living as orphans, even though we are still His beloved children. When we believe we're alone and have to fix and control life, we see ramifications.

At its healthiest, each personality is the most amazing person. At their worst, they're really the worst. It doesn't matter what Enneagram type you are. The "worst" looks different for everyone, as does the healthy.

Ultimately, we use Enneagram through a Christian perspective because we can read all day long about what we are like and why, but we can't change on our own. It's the life, death, and resurrection of Christ that does the actual transforming at a core level.

**Q. What does a great Enneagram coach do?**

**A.** Coaching is really about focusing on where people are and helping them get to their desired destination. A lot of people think it might be like counseling, but it is different. Counselors take you where you are today, and together, you look backward. They listen to what happened in your past, your childhood, and anywhere in between then and now. They use therapeutic modalities to help heal past wounds or traumas.

Coaches listen to where you are now and help you move forward toward a goal. First, we help you understand your Enneagram type by listening and guiding. We don't assign types. We help you discover your Type by asking the right questions. Then, we help you explore your Type. We break down your personality into bite-sized lessons so you can learn, stretch, and grow without becoming overwhelmed.

The Enneagram is a complex system with lots of layers. I break down the system, so it's easy to understand. I want people to see what gets them off of their best path and what keeps them on track. This takes shape in your everyday life: You gain insights—aha moments.

As your Enneagram coach, we want to help you become the person God created you to be.

**Q. Without naming names, can you tell us a story about witnessing this kind of change in someone's life who you have coached?**

**A.** Absolutely. I have coached a pastor and his wife who live in New Jersey. They are a powerhouse couple. She is a type three, and he is a type eight. They're both assertive types: They get things done. They have their own individual struggles. Sometimes I work with couples together, and sometimes we work individually. These two were doing well together, so we worked individually. They were struggling on their own, not together.

As a type three, she felt this constant need to achieve—to accomplish, be the best, look the best. She was running ragged. A lot of it was rooted in her past, from parents who wanted her to excel.

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We broke that down, and she began to feel so much more freedom, knowing that she is loved right where she already is as a beloved child of God. It's not her accomplishments or appearance. It's not about being the best mom or the best pastor's wife. She began to fully understand that she, even in her despair, Christ sees her and came to take care of her right where she's at. He loved and redeemed her. That gave her all the freedom in the world.

It's a daily struggle. But now she knows what's going on and why. She has set boundaries in her life to help keep her from slipping back into some of her typical patterns.

Her husband is a type eight and a senior pastor. He's a go-getter with lots of ideas. He wants everyone to excel—to be their best so they can have the best church. But he began to see that his approach can sometimes deflate other people.

We helped him see that Type eights are like snowplows. Some people would call them bulldozers, but I disagree. I think they're like the big snowplows in the North. No one is going anywhere until the eights get there and clear the path.

But that also means they need to be at their healthiest. Eights are driven, and when they see what needs to happen, they just go. If there is something or someone in the way, they just plow over them. When they're healthy, they'll say, "Hey, get off the road. I'm coming."

We helped him see everyone around him so that he could begin being more mindful of how his intensity and passion can feel like he's plowing over people. He's made his team feel more safe and protected now, and it is as though he's plowing a path before them, not running over them.

Now, this husband and wife can work alongside each other with new understanding, encouraging each other and supporting one another.

**Q. It's so important to remember that there are strengths and weaknesses for every Type—one Type shouldn't be more desirable than another.**

**A.** Yes, very much. We just talked about an eight being like a snowplow, but my Type—again, I'm a Type nine—when I'm at my worst, I almost get into a catatonic state where I just check out. I'm numb and will go along with whatever anybody else says. I have no opinions or desires. I withdraw.

That's a very different unhealthiness, but it's just as unhealthy. A nine can be just as devastating to a group or family as any other type.

**Q. You and your husband's relationship has gained a lot from the use of Enneagram, correct? You wrote a book together entitled *Coming Up: Using the Enneagram to Create a Thriving Gospel-Centered Marriage*. Could you explain why Enneagram is so helpful when it comes to our relationships—especially marriage?**

**A.** Jeff and I got married at 20. We had two kids by 25. You can imagine the bumpy road: You're still just trying to figure yourself out at that point, let alone all these other people in your life. We asked ourselves, "Why is this so difficult sometimes?"

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We created a course called Coming Up. In it, we explain the dynamic between individuals—they could be in a marriage, or it could be parent-child, siblings, a work relationship, or something else. To do it, we use a diagram called the Dance. Typically, when you have two people, you have two personality types. They're usually different, although they could be the same.

For example, we'll take my husband Jeff and me. Jeff is a six, and I am a nine. As a six, his fears are fear itself, going without security, getting no support, and being blamed, targeted, or abandoned. He wants security, guidance, and support.

When he is facing something intense or challenging, he wants to talk about it. As a nine, I fear conflict or tension. I just want peace and harmony. I'll negate myself and go along to get along.

So, this is what happens: He starts to try to talk about something hard, and I withdraw because of the tension. So then, he feels abandoned, which is one of his core fears. So he gets more intense. He grows anxious. He needs security and the certainty that we are okay. As he gets more intense, he activates my core fear: tension and conflict. So I start to shut down even more. Around and around, our dynamics go.

After learning about this, we have emerged stronger. Now, when I see him starting to feel anxious, more intense, and passionate, I can say, "Hey, I can see this is really affecting you. I feel the need to shut down or get away. Can you give me like 15 minutes? We can talk about this later. But we are okay."

This helps secure him. He knows I am not going to abandon or divorce him. He knows he just needs to give me space and that we'll come back later. The result is us actually speaking each other's language, and we both feel cared for and understood. It doesn't work perfectly every time, but at least we're trying to love the person the way they need to be loved instead of the way we need to be loved, which is what we usually do.

**Q. What is the most important thing you want people to understand about this process?**

**A.** I just want people to see there's hope—that transformation is possible. Transformation is never a one-time, 100 percent-finished experience. We are always on the path to heaven with our struggles. But there is progress. There is hope. There is always a new day right before us. Having that path of growth can set you free.

I also want people to realize that growth is hard. In order to transform, you're going to need to move in a direction that makes everything inside of you say, "Whoa, don't do that!" But once you do it, you realize it's amazing. That doesn't mean it isn't hard, but while it's difficult, you're also experiencing liberation and joy. That's why so many people don't experience growth—that tension stops them. We have to be willing to be uncomfortable.

This awareness can change everything. Another example from my family: My daughter is a two, and my son and husband are both sixes. My daughter and husband love to get into debates. For me, as a nine, that's conflict. To them, it's fun. It stresses me out! They're having a blast. There

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are times I need to recognize they're okay and just step aside and let them enjoy who they are. Then there are days when it's just too much for me, and I can ask them to talk about something else and return to the heavy topics later, or I can remove myself from the space.

By understanding them and allowing them to understand me better, we can have more open conversations where real reconciliation and growth can occur.

Enneagram is really like an internal GPS. You have your current location, which is your main Enneagram type. Each Enneagram type has a healthiest destination, but there are times we veer off course and get mired in common pitfalls. The Enneagram helps us set up rumble strips like we have on highways that warn us when we start veering too far off course.

**Q. The way you emphasize self-acceptance is so important. You point out that growth is hard and Enneagram is a tool for it—a tool for our aspirations—but it is also a tool for some healthy self-acceptance and understanding that the way you process the world isn't wrong just because it isn't like other people.**

**A.** Exactly. Think of Pinterest. It's a great tool, but when you misuse it, you start to think you have to have to imitate the photos you see there to create the perfect house, to make the perfect meals, or to be the perfect mom. First of all, that's wrong. Secondly, it's impossible.

Enneagram is the same thing. There are nine Types, and all Types at their healthiest are amazing. You've been created as your Type. I want people to focus on themselves—not in a selfish way, but in a healthy way, working to be who God created you to be. Remember, God created us all to be the body of Christ. Everybody should not be the heart or the head or the fingers. We're all different parts. When we stay in our lanes and develop ourselves, we will bless other people in ways we never thought was possible.

### **About Beth McCord**

Beth McCord wants you to know that an authentic life that blesses others is possible. The founder of Your Enneagram Coach, Beth is an in-demand speaker, author, coach, and teacher with almost two decades of experience empowering others with tools of self-knowledge to create lasting change, build stronger relationships, and pursue purpose. By applying a Christian lens to Enneagram, Beth makes Enneagram accessible and transformational for everyone through one-on-one coaching, events, workshops, and more. Beth and her husband, Jeff, are the parents of two adult children and live just outside of Nashville, TN.

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