

Dear Face,

The other night, at a friend's wedding, I got pretty drunk and started talking about the Enneagram with a group of people... again. Why do I always have to bring it up?

After the cake-cutting, I went outside to the back patio for some air and to find a not-too-chatty friend to stand next to while I try to compartmentalize the dump trunk of emotions that were piling up and spilling over inside of me. What was I thinking? Going to a wedding with another recently divorced person, on the same day as my wedding anniversary? I'm not even one year out from taking off my ring. Obviously, a terrible decision. Daniel and I had already gotten into some type of fight earlier in the evening, so I was being tactfully elusive with our interactions.

All the same, only a few minutes after stepping outside, Daniel spotted me and walked over to where I was standing and chatting with Elijah (another divorced friend with a masterclass of issues with Evangelicalism, more on that later). Then it was the three of us, a tribe of broken, failed evangelicals sipping our Makers Mark, and popping edibles when I brought up the Enneagram personality test.

We all agreed that personality assessments functioned as a shared language of self-expression that felt familiar to our Christian heritage. It ostensibly replaced our background in religious, evangelical jargon concerning calling and spiritual gifts with a more palatable and less controversial understanding of people and their identity. It felt like a universal truth that didn't inherently exclude, reject, or force individuals to abandon logic for faith.

Like us, Daniel and Elijah had become too frustrated with the Evangelical church's restrictive, unintelligent troupes to stay in it. As we talked about the test, what drew us to it was the presupposed foundation that everyone was unique and had a purpose in life. What is released for us was the restrictive Christian paradigm of relying on a middle man; i.e., pastor, small group leader, or mentor. For Elijah, who had been a teacher and pastor, he didn't believe anyone should have to first be granted access to the Evangelical club before they can understand that their life has intrinsic value and a unique purpose.

I don't know how I brought the Enneagram up. I might have mentioned that *Sleeping At Last* had come out with an album with a compilation of songs for each Enneagram personality type. I could have also mentioned that Donald Miller had recently released a series on his podcast about Enneagram types in the workplace. It doesn't matter. What matters is that while trying to manage my slurry of feelings, Daniel's ex-sister in law and her husband came over to join our group. Why the hell they would do that is beyond me. It was very clear to those involved that Daniel's ex was not a fan of me and very much suspected that I was a major player in the undoing of their marriage. But still, we were in a small midwest city, and politeness rules all social interactions.

Jason and Laura came over and pick up on our Enneagram chat. Not surprisingly they too had taken the test, knew their personality type, and are big fans of it. Why do Evangelicals love personality tests? What is it really that draws us towards written pages that tell us who we are, give us a direction in life, and extends to us grace for our flaws... oh, yeah, that's why we like them. It's scripture without the inconsistencies, unresolved historical contradictions, and a savior who mysteriously raises from the dead. It's a form of truth we can all embrace and not have to apologize for in public.

Well, I guess I got into it with Jason, because a few days later I was having a drink with one of his close friends and the wedding came up. "So, you and Jason chatted about the Enneagram, huh?" Joel asked. "He said you seemed very passionate about it and pretty emotional."

Fuck Jason. I don't even want to get into the "emotional" comment, that's a whole other topic on white men shaming women for visibly expressing feelings, which is somehow inappropriate and burdensome to them. But "passionate about the Enneagram?" I got a smidge defensive. I wouldn't go that far. I like it and I think it is a helpful resource for understanding the particularities of your personality and guides you in better understanding your strengths and weaknesses.

For example, after the wedding, Daniel and I ended up in a loud, dramatic fight on the front lawn (again, not a total surprise given our emotional baggage and whiskey consumption). Had anyone not familiar with the Enneagram overheard us arguing, they would have been very confused. We fought over whether we should be together – he is an 8, and I'm a 3 – a classic Avril Lavigne-in-your thirties sort of fight.

After each of our divorces, we both worked to recognize ways our personality and the personality of our partners contributed to the failure of our relationship. It was helpful and in a lot of ways gave me closure. Now, as Daniel and I both searched for a deeper, more satisfying relationship, we leaned on what we felt was true about who we were. So fine, Jason. I guess I “feel strongly” about personality tests. But not in a fanatical- these types should be canonized sort of way. Only, in the way that better understanding who I am outside of my evangelical upbringing, during a time in my life when much of what I thought to be true got upended, has been really comforting. It's been a meaningful tool in processing loss and uncertainty, and I don't think I'm the only one who could use that.

Love,

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Dear Face,

Oh my god, why did you do that? I knew you were going to that wedding but on your anniversary?! Rough. Not what I would have advised. Also, fuck Jason. I totally understand why you would get “passionate” about the Enneagram, not that I have actually taken that one, you told me I’m a 7, right? I’ll look that up right away, I’m sure you’re correct. You always knew exactly what I would come out as when I took a personality test. You even diagnosed me correctly earlier this year when you said I was losing my “F” and becoming a “T”, though you also said I was becoming less fun and should really loosen up..that was rude and I cried in the car for a while after I dropped you off but you were right. I went home and took the Meyers-Briggs again and came out an ENTJ. When did I lose my “F”?!

Also, I’m not sure why we believe in these things so much. Whenever I bring them up in “mixed” company, i.e. mostly dudes who were not raised in the church, there is always that guy that is like, “that test is bogus and totally unreliable.” Unreliable, not scientific? I don’t even understand what they mean by that. I take them, I read the results and the description and I feel like someone is exposing the very core of my innermost being. How can that be wrong? I feel it is right, isn’t that the only thing that it is supposed to do? I’m not expecting it to give me career advice or whether or not I should marry someone. Just using it to find some comfort in the fact that there are things that come naturally to me and somethings that don’t. Is that it? Is that why we use them? Is this an ear not a hand kind of situation? Like we are all parts of the body and if you know you’re an 8 just be the best damn 8 you can be and stop trying so hard to be a 7..I bet Jason is an INTJ, an INTJ would totally be like that.

It reminds me of this post I saw on my Facebook feed by an old YWAM friend about how Jesus-believing folks shouldn’t get so wrapped up in what their Enneagram (because, obviously, people were) is:

“For my Christian friends living life by their Enneagram # I respectfully submit this information for your discernment. This is a good watch about it’s origins and purpose. Let’s define ourselves by who God is and has called us to be, not by a #.”

More than any other group I think that Evangelicals love these types of tests because we are so inwardly focused. We spend so much time trying to be better, to get closer to the light, constantly searching out sin or impure intentions that we develop this hunger for something that is affirming about who we are, not just critical.

We are also a group of people with roles and functions — worship leader, youth pastor, apostle, prophet, etc. The desire to be sorted and slotted is strong, so much easier to fit into “the body” if you can tell them what you are and be placed accordingly. At least, I always felt that way. When dad would have us take those tests it felt like we could finally be unique, seen for something in particular. It also felt like I could finally get a pass for being “emotional.” Fuck

Jason. That's just who I am Dad! An ENFJ is supposed to be that way. But unlike those guys who don't want to be categorized or throw shade on the science behind these tests, I never felt they were constricting. They were the opposite, they freed me from castigating myself for not being something that I wasn't. Is there a particular personality type that doesn't like personality tests? I bet there is.

In fact, whenever T and I get into big fights I often stay up for hours researching why the fuck INTJs are the way they are and how come they are so difficult some times. It helps me have compassion for him, it's not his fault he's an introvert, he was just made that way;) HAHAAHA. But in all honesty, it has helped me to be supportive of him and accept things that just don't make sense to me because I am not built that way. Why does he need so much time alone? Why does he hate it so much when I cry in public? Ya know classic INTJ proclivities.

I'm sorry that the wedding was hard. I don't think there was any way it wasn't going to be hard. It is going to take a long time before you start to feel better. In the meantime, I'd maybe stay away from mixing booze, edibles, and weddings. That's like an intermediate-advanced recovery activity.

Love,  
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