



Episode 10 Transcript

Enneagram Reflections from THREE Authors of Color? Yes, Please!

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

enneagram, people, authors of color, nines, book, life, daily reflections, Marlena Graves, Sean Palmer, Gideon Tsang, threes, writing, speak, sevens, grew, world, peace, authors, called, read, color, culture, number, Black, Puerto Rican, Chinese

SPEAKERS

Marlena Graves, Ed Gilbreath, Gideon Tsang, Maila Kim, Sean Palmer, Suzanne Stabile

Maila 00:05

Welcome to The Every Voice Now Podcast, where we bring voices of color into the spotlight. I'm Maila Kim,

Ed 00:11

And I'm Ed Gilbreath. In every episode, you'll hear from authors of color as they share about the inspiring stories that led to the making of their books, as well as the challenges they had to endure and overcome along the way.

Maila 00:30

Hey, Ed!

Ed 00:31

Maila Kim, how are you doing?

Maila 00:33

I am doing good. But if I'm completely honest, I have some mixed feelings going on today. Because this is the last episode of season one.

Ed 00:43

I know how you feel. I feel the same way. And I guess all good things must come to an end. But at least we have this last episode to share with our listeners to end the season. And it's a great one.

Maila 00:54



We have not just one, and not just two, but we have three different authors to hear from, and they are all writers of our Enneagram Daily Reflections series.

Ed 01:08

And we also have a special guest for our Behind the Books segment. The amazing Suzanne Stabile, the enneagram godmother herself. So we will be learning a lot about the enneagram on this episode.

Maila 01:18

Speaking of the enneagram, Ed, do you know your number?

Ed 01:21

You know, you're not supposed to ask that right?

Maila 01:24

Do you want to tell me anyway?

Ed 01:25

Well, last I heard I'm a nine. But I don't know how I feel about the peacekeeping thing. I don't I'm not sure.

Maila 01:31

Why is that because you're a troublemaker?

Ed 01:34

Well, I'll let you decide.

Maila 01:37

I affirm that statement.

Ed 01:40

I'm not gonna ask you your number, but any tea to spill there?

Maila 01:44

I'm pretty sure I'm a three and being able to speak with Sean Palmer, I really resonated with a lot of what he shared as a three so I'm pretty sure I'm a three.

Ed 01:53



Well we're gonna find out a lot about your personality today, then I guess.

Maila 01:56

Yeah, we are gonna get to talk about topics such as Where did the enneagram come from? Are we even allowed to use it? Is it even Christian? So we're gonna talk about that on this episode. And then next season, we'll pick up the conversation again with even more authors of color in this series. So that's something to look forward to in season two.

Ed 02:15

For now, let's dive into this episode, this supersize season finale. We hope you all enjoy these conversations with Sean Palmer, Marlena Graves and Gideon Tsang, from IVP's Enneagram Daily Reflections series.

Maila 02:41

So we are excited to welcome Sean Palmer, author of *Forty Days on Being a Three* to The Every Voice Now Podcast today. Welcome, Sean.

Sean Palmer 02:49

Hi, thanks for having me. I'm excited to be here.

Maila 02:51

We're so excited to have you here. As an enneagram three myself, I'm biased. This is probably the most exciting interview I will be part of. So, before we even start talking about the enneagram, can you tell us a little bit about your personal backstory, so where you grew up, share with our listeners, your family origin.

Sean Palmer 03:09

I said in my very first book *Unarmed Empire*, I think it's chapter two begins, telling the story of Steve Martin movie *The Jerk*. And at the beginning of that movie, Steve Martin narrates and says, "I was born a poor black child in Mississippi." And I've always loved that line because I was born a poor, black child in Mississippi. So 1974 I was born in Jackson, Mississippi, we moved I think I was in sixth or seventh grade. We moved to Atlanta, Georgia, and I grew up in Stone Mountain, graduated from Stone Mountain High School, Stone Mountain was an armory for the Confederacy during the Civil War. Martin Luther King Jr. mentioned Stone Mountain in his *I Have a Dream* speech. When I went to college in Abilene, Texas. That's how I ended up in Texas at Abilene Christian University. I was raised in nondenominational denomination called Churches of Christ.



Maila 04:01

Can you tell us a little bit about what you currently do in Houston?

Sean Palmer 04:04

I am teaching pastor at Ecclesia Houston, which is here in Houston, multisite church. So it's just been kind of one of those long journeys of ministry, I started in youth ministry, and then worked into kind of an associate position and started preaching. And we've been back in Houston, about three and a half now.

Maila 04:22

So let's talk a little bit more about your ethnic identity journey. Can you share with us your relationship between your ethnic identity and your journey as a writer?

Sean Palmer 04:30

I was not ever a big reader when I was a kid when I was an adolescent, growing up, but I liked the books that I liked. And in high school, I started reading and when I say big reader, I say that in contrast to my daughters, who just are voracious readers who burn through books and always have, and I've always been a slow reader, but I always knew that I wanted to write. No one ever told me that I was any good. I had zero encouragement. Even in eighth grade, I was chairman of this little after school group, we did three publications a year, and I had some illustrations in that. And I read some things, and never any encouragement. Even in college, I went to college, I would think I turned in something really profound and great, and I get a C, and I would still argue, people, I am a C-plus writer. And if I work really, really hard, I can be a B writer. But that didn't change it. And then blogging came along. And I said, I'm going to just start a blog. So I started out, when I started out doing the blog, I said, I'm gonna do five days a week, and then it started kind of pick up steam. And obviously, the more you do anything, the better you get, and this whole thing was to write a book. But then the idea comes about, what's this book gonna be about? And the central driving force of my life has always been the church, and I had these lingering aromas in my life, about the church of my youth. And it was the most racially diverse place that I've ever been in my life, that vision really captured me. And it's one of the things that I've never been able to reproduce, or I've never seen anywhere else in all of my life. So that has been, you know, 40 years ago, now. I ended up spending a good bit of my life, the rest of my adolescence, in predominantly white churches and spaces. And so it's always been kind of a driver within me to recapture that vision and that experience that I had as a little boy, and I remember very clearly the language of that church, that it was always brother so and so and sister, so it's very familial, because I am this hybrid creation of historically black churches, but being raised in those really crucial years of junior high in high school in white churches, like one of the places that I feel like I can serve the kingdom best is merging the horizons and serving as



a translator for some of those people now, and when you look at the headlines, I don't know that there's been a better time a more needed time for people to serve in those spaces. Because of my backstory, I have access to thinking and people in places that not everybody has access to. And I want to leverage that for the kingdom.

Ed 07:21

Let's talk about the enneagram. Where does that come in? When and how did you discover this tool called the enneagram?

Sean Palmer 07:30

I knew it was this thing that was out there that a lot of people, particularly progressive Christians at that time, 15 years ago, were really into, but it didn't, you know, stay on my horizon. And then I don't know, maybe eight years ago, nine years ago, I was teaching out for a week I was teaching at Pepperdine University for an event they have there and Ian Cron was also presenting out there. And I had just finished Ian's book *Jesus, the CIA and Me*. And we connected because we had a couple of mutual friends and he didn't have anything to do one night, neither did I. And I said, well, let's go have, let's go have dinner. And so we kind of hit it off, talked a little bit. We had a great conversation then that went nowhere and I got a call from a mutual friend of mine and Ian's, and he says Ian wants to know if you're interested in coming to this retreat type thing in Greenwich, Connecticut next year. And I didn't know what it was about. I was like, I like Ian, I like you like, it sounds like a cool group of people. And the night before everything gets started, we're gonna have like a reception just to get to know you thing. And I sit down next to this couple that I had no idea who they were, they were the the oldest people in the room, because all of the attendees, I think, at that time, were in their late, mid to late 30s, early 40s, maybe. And I sit down next to this couple. And this woman introduces herself to me, and she goes, Hi, my name is Suzanne, this is my husband, Joe. And so we kind of kicked around and we talked about, you know, what you do with those things, mutual connections that you know, but I still had no clue, no clue at all, who she was after that night, just just a lady who was there. And she, the next morning, Ian gets up, I look on the schedule for the whole of the next day, the schedule just says, enneagram work, that's all it says. Suzanne gets up and teaches the next day. And I tell people I had the best introduction to the enneagram that anyone possibly ever could. Because I was in this room with just 30 of the most remarkable people that I've ever met that truly that weekend changed the course of my life, just from the standpoint of relationships that were made and just getting like this, the the access to the teaching in that kind of community. And you know, I think probably in the room where I sit right now, there somewhere near 30 enneagram books. But that's how my journey started.

Ed 10:09



And now you're a contributor to this great series of enneagram devotionals from IVP, which is amazing. And you are, let's go here now, you're a number three, and you write about being a three. So give our listeners a quick rundown about the aspects of being an enneagram three, just what does that mean?

Sean Palmer 10:31

So threes are called the achiever, typically in the enneagram world, and so we are motivated, and I will remind people when we're talking about enneagram, we're talking about motivation, not behavior. We are motivated chiefly by a fear of failure, but it comes across more acutely, as a drive to succeed, and a drive to look successful. We are in the feeling triad, which means that we receive we take in the world through the lens of feelings. We take in a lot of information from verbal cues, visual cues from people about how they're feeling. But we don't use feelings to make decisions or to move forward because we are in the aggressive stance, which means that we are feeling repressed. So we are both feeling dominant and feeling repressed. Threes tend to be hard working, they tend to find themselves in leadership positions, because they project confidence and are motivated by accomplishment. Threes often leave out feelings in terms of their own feelings. So they're disassociated from their own feelings, because they don't believe fundamentally that feelings matter in this decision making process, or they don't matter for what we are going to do.

Maila 11:48

Moving ahead, I want to ask when you found out that you are in enneagram three, what was your reaction to it? Were you excited? Like I'm a three? Or were you, I don't know, was that hard to take in? What was that experience like?

Sean Palmer 12:02

Well, it's a little bit of both. So threes have a great fear of being exposed, that someone's going to see past the image into vulnerability. And so there's part of it that when you hear your number presented, and you go, oh, that's me. There's quickly arises a worry, like have other people known this and not told me or I've not been successful, and shielding that from people. But aggressive numbers, three sevens and eights tend to like their numbers when they hear it. Right? So where other numbers, cower in the corner, when they hear their number presented, threes tend to like their number. And threes tend to think when they hear their number, of course, why isn't everyone like this? Like, or wouldn't the world be better if everyone was like this? And because we're in a, we're Americans, it's a very three culture. Every successories, every motivational poster, those are all centered on three, every every advertising, getting you to buy a planner or something like that, threes came up with that. And this is why Forty Days of Being a Three is a really important book for the enneagram discussion, as are all the books in



the Enneagram Daily Reflections line, because everyone presents the enneagram when they're doing the entire circle, when they're going around the circle from their number. Right? And so I have been in a room where an eight presented something like know your number, and they are so incredibly sympathetic to eights. And they'll spend like an hour talking about eights and like 15 minutes talking about fives, right? And they're relating things back to their number, and we all do this, right. And so when threes are typically presented, there's a reason why people say threes kind of hang their head when they hear their number or feel bad. That's because they take a lot of criticism from the people presenting because there actually is, I believe, a lot of cultural resentment about things that are very natural to threes. Because we do live in a three culture. Everybody just projects their own resentments of their boss or you know, someone who's encouraging them to to move faster or lose weight or to you know, whatever they're on to like, oh, it's been the threes who've been doing this to me the whole time. And so to hear your number from someone who is that number, and to say this is a problem this this aspect of our compulsions is a genuine problem. But this is a genuine beauty. If you're if you're starting a new project in life that you're nervous about, the first person you need to tell that to is a three because she will cheerlead you like no one else. They will believe in you like no one else. And that's the beauty of the Enneagram Daily Reflections series, I think is that people get to learn about their number from someone who is that number.

Ed 15:14

That's sort of connected to a question I had for you about being a three. I'm just curious, how has it shaped your ministry? Or how you approach ministry,

Sean Palmer 15:24

Threes have to deal with the fact that most of us are really good at a few things. But are we doing it because we're doing it for virtuous reasons for a greater good, for the kingdom of God? Are we really just wanting to show off? But the best thing that can happen to you is failure. So you asked me how I got to know the enneagram. And I've had many conversations with people about this, like I had an incredibly huge public failure in my denomination, about four years before, five years before I came to know the enneagram. And just about everyone that I know that teaches the enneagram he knows it really well who have dialogue with about my own story has told me, you would not have been receptive to the enneagram if it had happened before a major failure. And so I'm a big believer. I'm a big believer in the the teaching virtuousness of failure, though, I really would prefer to never fail again.

Maila 16:29



That's good. Well, let's talk about the enneagram. And its intersection with your identity, your ethnic identity. So I'm curious, are there ways that the enneagram has helped you understand your ethnic background or vice versa? What's that relationship been like?

Sean Palmer 16:46

I think the enneagram has helped me understand in terms of race and identity, I don't know that I was born at three or I was made a three. So you know, I tell the story in one of my books about my my dad, that kind of the punchline, the ultimate story is that my dad was the when he was a boy was a paper boy for Medgar Evers and was his paper boy when he was assassinated by Byron De La Beckwith in Mississippi and Medgar Evers was a civil rights leader. And so, my dad grew up as a child of the civil rights movement. But he instilled in both me and my older brother, Richard, the one thing that we have in common, more than anything else is that we work, we work, work, work, work, work, work, I think every black male of my age has heard, you're going to have to work twice as hard. To get half as much right to go half as far you have to be twice as good. And all those things played as tapes in my mind for throughout my life, to be received as competent you had to commit to being successful. So one of the things for good or for ill, that growing up African American in the south, was this drive to overcome and succeed and to bulldoze your way through obstacles, which requires setting feelings aside. And so if Shawn Palmer is born in Jackson, Mississippi, and I'm Caucasian, do I end up in enneagram three in the same way? I don't know. But I know that definitely where I was raised when I was raised, had a huge effect on creating that sort of inner drive to accomplish and achieve.

Maila 18:39

Yeah, that's really interesting. Your environment, your father, learning how those things could even have shaped you. That's really interesting. And can you speak on even being an enneagram three as a black man? How do you think that's different from being an enneagram three as a white man and Asian woman? How is it unique to your experience? So to begin with, everyone code switches. So I was on a call last week, for instance, about the same time there were about 15 of us, and it was all African American pastors in predominantly white churches. And when we talk together, the tenor of the conversation is completely different. The language, the diction of the conversation is very different, versus who I am like when I go to work, which, our church staff is extraordinarily diverse. But when you're a three, what threes do, is they are code switching all the time. So what might happen, you know, like, Ed in a executive team meeting, for instance, sounds different than Ed at the barbecue at mom's house. Right?

Ed 19:55

You're reading my mail here.



Maila 19:59

But threes are doing that all the time. That's probably like the closest I can get, for ethnic minorities, is that I don't know if code switching helps me be a better three. Or if being a three helped me better to code switch. But it's all sort of in there together and minority populations are having to code switch all of the time, we know how to function and succeed now in majority white spaces. And I think one of the things that our white friends and neighbors people who love very much need to know is that unless the dynamics change, like you're only getting part of us in this engagement. That's not always bad; when people complain to me all the time, well, I just don't feel like I can bring my full self to this. And I was like, that's fine. Like, we don't need your full self. If you hire an Uber driver, you just need them to drive. I don't need to know your whole., and that's a very three thing to say. Like why do we, why do we need all this? Yeah, I think there's an interplay there that I've yet to untangle. But one of the great things about the Enneagram Daily Reflections book that I've heard from people who know me, is they said, like, I am so glad that you wrote this book, because you are the most three, three, that I know, and are the most healthiest three, that I don't know if that's right on the healthy part. But I am probably in the best way, typical of what an enneagram three is. And I don't think that's a bad thing. That's what people get shocked at. I'm not trying to get out of being a three. The Enneagram Daily devotionals, this series, one thing that's unique about it is how many people of color are part of authoring this series. And I think that was a very intentional decision. And so I'm curious, what does it mean to you that you are one of the few black authors writing about the enneagram currently on the market, I believe. What does that mean to you?

Sean Palmer 22:05

Yeah, I think it's really great. And I'm not the only person, I actually received a question about this on Twitter last night, because someone was like, I'm really interested in the enneagram. But when I look at sort of top tier enneagram material, it's all coming from one cultural and racial perspective, and someone tagged me in their question. And so I was like, super excited, right? IVP has done this really great job of bringing a bunch of different voices together. I'm honored by that to be in that company of people. And they're just amazing, folks. I think truly, like of all the people, all nine numbers, I bring the least to the table as a fully functioning human being. Because they're all really great people.

Ed 22:49

That's not

Maila 22:50

You can't say that as a three.



Ed 22:51

Yeah, that's what I was thinking, that's not a three thing to say!

Sean Palmer 22:56

No, like I'm genuinely honored to be in that company of people, because I like and respect what they do and who they are so much. But it is a space, I think because of, you know, the institutions in America are what the institutions are. And they have been dominated by Caucasian majority culture for so long, that it takes a deliberate effort for people to say, you know what, there are other people. And I asked this question at the beginning, too. Because not that they're going to say like this is a this is an African Americans take on being an enneagram three, like my book's not an African American's take on being an enneagram three, right. But it does show up. And like when they did the audiobook, they said, Well, you can audition to read the book. Well, I was so excited, do I get to read it. And they said, well, you get to audition, I was just really too busy to put together an audition tape. But I said, well, I'm not going to be able to do that. But I do want a person of color to read it. And it was so incredibly great. They honored that they found an incredible reader for that book. I think that was really a boon to the enneagram discussion, as this series will be. Because it will highlight for people, no, this might show up differently in your context, and my theory of the enneagram, and I feel like I've just started to tell people I've read enough, I've studied enough, I've talked enough, I've written enough now that I can have my own theories, I don't have to quote people anymore, is that we're all seeking to be loved. And to be loved on a deep level. And the enneagram helps explain that. So it shows up differently in different contexts and in different cultures. And there are different hurdles. Like someone was telling me, a couple years ago, that if you were to explain the enneagram to a lot of inner city kids who grew up, because the inner cities actually aren't that aren't as bad as people think they are in terms of crime and violence. But if you were to explain the enneagram to kids who lived in a gang land culture, almost all the boys would identify as eights. And that's because they feel like they have to survive, but they're not. But if you're a four, imagine being a four, on the enneagram. And having to identify as an eight just to survive, how exhausting that would be, how terrifying that would be day to day. And so the more voices who can give articulation to all of that, I think it's just better for the enneagram discussion. And so I'm honored to be a part of it, I think it's going to help deepen that discussion. And not in a way that wears itself on the sleeve. I've gotten a lot of feedback from the book. And I've not gotten anything from anyone saying, I'm white, and I couldn't connect with this as a three. Because the motivation, the heart of it is the same.

Ed 25:56



Wrapping up a little bit. Could you tell us a little bit about what's ahead for you beyond this current enneagram installment? What's next?

Maila 26:03

Yeah, that's a great question. And it all depends on when I'm able to get out of the house again. But in January 2022, I have another project with IVP, called Speaking by the Numbers: Enneagram Wisdom for Pastors, Teachers, and Communicators. And that's pretty daunting task, because it's just something that's never been done before. And I will probably get as much wrong as I get right in that in that book. But it'll be, I think, an aid to the discussion, and especially helping communicators and teachers. So we've got that going on. And then we'll see kind of after that, I'm looking at some different projects. My family owns a significant parcel of land outside of Jackson, Mississippi. And we've had that land since post-Civil War. And I want to tell the story of how did we get it? And what's the what's the, what's been the fallout of the blessing really, of having that land? And kind of doing the importance of place for people? Yeah. And what happens when we lose place? And we lose, and do we lose family in place. And so this summer, I'll start working on that and maybe look to see if someone wants to publish it at some point. Thank you, Sean, so much for your time and being on our show today. We're so excited to have you on.

Sean Palmer 27:24

Thank you. Thanks for having me. I enjoyed it.

Maila 27:26

Well, we need to take a quick break. But when we return, we'll talk with our next Enneagram Daily Reflections author Marlena Graves. So stay tuned and thanks for listening to the Every Voice Now Podcast.

Ed 27:41

Welcome back to The Every Voice Now Podcast. I'm Ed Gilbreath. And with us today is our guest Marlena Graves, author of The Way Up Is Down and the new Forty Days of Being a Nine which actually comes out February 23. And later in the show, we will share how you can receive a special discount on Marlena's books as well as all of the books in the Enneagram Daily Reflections series that we are talking about in this episode. So welcome, Marlena. It's great to have you here.

Marlena Graves 29:05

Oh, it's so good to be back with you all. I feel like I'm with some long lost friends.



Ed 29:10

So yes, yes. So let's start by having you tell us a little bit about your personal backstory where you grew up, share a little bit with our listeners about your family origin and what you're doing now.

Marlena Graves 29:20

Okay, so I was born in Puerto Rico, my mom's side of the family, I'm biracial. My mom's side of the family was from there. My first language was Spanish. You know, I learned English watching Sesame Street, being around my dad, my dad's white. We lived there just only a few years. And he was in the military. So we moved to California for a little bit, not long. And then back to Northwestern Pennsylvania, where my dad grew up. And I did go back to Puerto Rico for one year when I was in fourth grade. I grew up in a bilingual household. Spanish was the language of the house, but then also English in school, and so my abuelita, she couldn't really speak that much English at all. So if I wanted to communicate with her, then I'd speak Spanish. And I say abuelita because as in a lot of communal cultures, my grandparents would, on my mom's side, would kind of do a tour of family members, they'd stayed with us most of the time, or across the street from us. Even my abuela was my roommate for many years. I have two brothers and a sister. So there was four kids in my family. I am the second, we spent most of the time in northwestern Pennsylvania, like I said, where my dad grew up. So it was like in northern Appalachia, and we used to joke we were the only Puerto Ricans or Spanish people on the census and the whole county, almost the whole county, you know, I think there was maybe one other person with the last name Figueroa, you know, that I'd like wave to, but I mean, in the whole school, and I think there might have been a couple of African Americans. On one hand, you could count the people of color in my school. And so I mean, I tell people, Puerto Ricans come in all shapes and shades and sizes. My brother's darker than me, my younger brother is darker than me, I'm probably the lightest one in my family. I am often white passing, people think I'm Italian or something. But I've had things said to me because of where I'm from. And I've had, you know, my older brother, especially, be harassed by Border Patrol agents at the Canadian border and other places, thinking that he's Middle Eastern.

Ed 31:23

Tell us a little bit about the relationship between your ethnic identity and your journey as a writer, how those two intertwine.

Marlena Graves 31:30

I think that the longer I write, and the older I get, and the more I learned, the more I understand it. I was like, I didn't understand why. I didn't always quite get jokes in like white jokes. I know, it's might be funny. I remember when I was in seminary, I told one of my friends, in all



seriousness, you know, I'm just telling you this because we're good friends, explain this joke to me, if I don't get it, you know, can you explain these things? But I learned that I see, you know, I didn't say I grew up poor, but I did. I feel like I see the world from the ground up, maybe instead of from the top, looking down that perspective. So I think that affects my writing, and maybe how I come at the enneagram. That's probably what affects my writing, I think.

Ed 32:15

Well, speaking of the enneagram, let's talk a little bit about that. How that came into your radar?

Maila 32:21

I first heard of it, it was about 2010. Around that time, you know, I've had people tell me unsolicited, oh, you're a four? Oh, maybe you're a two or maybe a one. I really had to learn more about it and figure out okay, what am I and the thing is, nines are so used to blending with other people and seeing the world from other people's perspective that we can't always see ourselves. I was like, how much of what am I thinking is what other people see, but what is my own perspective? What makes me mad or angry? What are my vices, like, let's be honest about them, not tell myself things, just to make myself feel better, you know, like, especially that kind of mentality where, you know, you've heard it where, the thing you're like, eww, really, I don't really want that to be my number, because I don't want that to be me, that kind of thing. Yeah. That's how I felt about the nine. Well, speaking of being a nine, can you summarize to our listeners what that even means? What does it mean to be a nine?

Marlena Graves 33:21

Just the basics, which those familiar with the enneagram would know, but some not, nines they say are peacemakers or good diplomats. And I saw that in my life, I wanted and I still want people on different sides to love one another and not go to war. Nines are able to see the good and sometimes disparate sides. And that doesn't mean that you ultimately don't make a decision, you're gonna say you could, you know, get to the point where you're like, yeah, this is better than that. But nines are good at seeing the positives from different points of view. That's why I say nines are a lot of good diplomats, because they can bring a lot of disparate sides to the table and say, Okay, what do we have in common? Is there a way that we can bring about peace, and they're peacemakers because they want peace inside of them. And so nines will try to make peace in the outer world among relationships, and you know, maybe on an international level, if they happen to be a diplomat, but also inside and so nines will do whatever it takes to get peace. Some people are motivated because they really want praise. And I'm not saying nines don't want praise, but what nines want the most is peace. nines are also that's another thing. They're very attuned to everything around them in nature, people call the nines mystics, there's a certain intuition that nines have that they kind of figure out who people are. The the



negative thing about nine is, for example, if you're in a relationship with a nine, and you're in a group, they're that person that like, yeah, wherever you want to go eat, let's go eat because they just want to please people but it got to the point where I'm like, I sorry if I'm offending someone, I don't like seafood. That's a nine, like I can say, I don't like seafood. So anywhere else let's go if it's just a seafood restaurant, I'm gonna be in trouble. No Red Lobster for me.

Maila 35:13

I love that right before you say that though. you apologize? Yeah.

Ed 35:17

We're gonna lose all our seafood listeners here.

Marlena Graves 35:21

But I, you know that I'm healthy because I went out on a limb and I made that I made I you know, yeah. But nines, could be really upset and angry. But they don't let you know. Because they want to keep peace. So my husband, that has resulted in the past like, I just blow like Mt., you know, St. Helens, and people are like Marlena, you're such a patient, gentle person. You're probably the most patient one on the planet, where I'm like, I am not. I don't know why you say that. Because I'm boiling inside, you know, there was, I might let it go longer than some people before I say something. But that's the negative of nines, like you can explode, and then you get angry, you blow your top, then you're fine. But that doesn't always go over well, you know, especially with people close to you, because you're fine and it's over for you. But they're still reeling from your explosion. And so because nines have that, there within the anger triad, it's eight, nine and one. So we have this really angry motion. But again, you know, if you hold anger inside or anything else, like depression is not good for you. So it's funny because you appear like you're a peacemaker. And you want to make peace, but you also struggle with anger. It's like conflicting inside. And maybe that's why we want peace so much. We're angry about something. We don't want to rock the boat. And so we kind of repress it, but then it makes us not well.

Maila 36:45

Well, you know, something we're curious about is the intersection of the enneagram and our ethnic identity. And so I'm curious for you, what are ways that you experienced being a nine differently because of your Puerto Rican heritage?

Marlena Graves 36:59

Yeah, that's a good, I've been thinking about that. You know, like, I think it's in a few ways. One is when I've read descriptions about how nines dress and like, nines are like kind of plain and



boring. I'm like, what, are you kidding? That does not describe me. I mean, I'm not saying I'm flamboyant. But I don't like to, when I think of plain or whatever, that does not describe me. So I don't know if that applies to other people of color. But I like interesting things mostly, usually is my glasses or something. Sometimes my color, the color of the clothes I wear. It is very interesting to me. I don't know if it's ethnic or not people, I mean, you know, people have stereotypes and labels, but they're like, fiery Puerto Ricans, you know, you gotta watch those Puerto Ricans. But then there are people Marlena, you're so gentle, I have that gentleness, maybe and that fire together, that maybe that's the intersection. But I also think that's part of the eight wing. When there's oppression, and all the things that's been part of American culture since the beginning, when there's all that kind of stuff, and I see stuff happening. I'm, I don't like conflict, but I will stand up for the bully or if someone's being oppressed, but usually, nine times out of 10. I'm like, okay, we got to do something about this. So maybe that fiery intersection. I do want to say that I think that nines, because I'm not in a Puerto Rican community right now, I, you know, I'm not living in an ethnic community and kind of out on my own here, I'm really curious how it would manifest, nines would manifest. You know, maybe we would be the more easygoing ones of the whole community, just like others. So I just think though, from my perspective, where I'm standing, it's hard to say exactly, but, but maybe Puerto Rican nines are more flamboyant than non. So.

Maila 38:48

I like that, because I think you're speaking into the stereotypes of what nines are. And I like that you're saying, it doesn't mean you're boring or passive. There are so many layers to what it means to be a nine. And then the intersection of being Puerto Rican. Of course, there's probably even more layers to that. So we know that there are different reactions to the enneagram, right, you meet people who love it, and then you meet people who don't love it. And so, can you share with us, have you ever gotten criticisms for being connected with the enneagram? And if you have, what are those critiques? And how have you weathered that, especially being a nine? I don't want to present myself as a typical nine. So nine, we all have similar traits, but we're not all the same. So that's something that I hope that listeners, not only on the healthy spectrum, but yes, there are certain characteristics that we have, but it's not going to be expressed the same way. So if you're listening and you're like, oh, man, I'm not exactly like that, I'm not sure. Nines come in all shapes and sizes and ethnicities. You know, I first heard it not in the circles that I usually run in, like criticism about a nine, but I did hear someone that said, "you're adopting a pagan kind of system when you talk about the enneagram." And then I heard someone else that actually interviewed me about it and said, "well, it's not in the Bible." Well, yeah, that's right. There's a lot of things that aren't in the Bible. Eyeglasses are not in the Bible, you know. So it's a lot of things that are not biblical. Nor is like the vast knowledge base we have in medicine or science, it's not in the Bible. To say it's not biblical, that's a weak argument, because there's a lot of things that aren't in Scripture. And I see



the enneagram as a tool Christians have often used and repurposed things to shed light just like early Christians use, like Platonic philosophy or whatever, in the ideas. When you read in John 1 about the Logos, those are philosophical ideas of the ancient world. And in Scripture, the disciples and other people in that culture that they were in, they used the ideas of their day. And so today, same thing with the enneagram, I mean, if you have a television, if you have a phone, if you have a computer, I mean, that's not in the Bible, but you use it. That's kind of what I would say, I see it as a tool to understand ourselves better. It is not the gospel, but to make arguments about, criticize it, because it's not equivalent to Scripture. I don't think anyone seriously thinks it's equivalent to Scripture, that it's the gospel.

Ed 41:12

So Marlena, this isn't your first book, you actually received a CT Book Award recently for your book *The Way Up Is Down*. Big congrats on that.

Marlena Graves 41:21

Thank you.

Ed 41:23

And you've done tons of other writing as well. But what was unique for you about working on this particular project?

Marlena Graves 41:30

You know, people think that I'm vulnerable in my writing. And I think that's true, because I feel the only way we can be healed to be better is by telling the truth, and I need to tell the truth about myself. And, and that's what I was doing. When I wrote this enneagram book, I felt extremely vulnerable, writing this book, like extremely, just saying a lot about my personal life. And someone might be like, well, Marlena, you do talk about your life, your life in your other books? Yes, I do. But I feel like this is daily reading about the things that I'm not proud of in me, you know, the things that need to be more Christ, like, I'm like, oh, this is hanging it all out to dry for people to see, as an enneagram, whatever number that you are, you have to be able to tell the truth about yourself in order to get healthy and do well. And so I really had to talk about things that one is like just conflicts or conflicts with myself things that made me feel uncomfortable. And so that's makes it different. And so it was constantly holding up the mirror to me, for the 40 days. And I'm like, you know, I always say, as writers, we might say, oh, yeah, people know a lot more about us than we do about them. And this is even more so.

Ed 42:45



I see you as having a bit of an activist voice in the way that you, you stand for justice, and you speak out against injustice. Is that a reflection of the eight wing in you? Or are you having to push against your type to take on those types of stances?

Maila 43:02

When I used to ask the Lord, Lord, why, it'd be so easy for me to live an easy Christianity where it just kept my head down. I mean, I don't even know what it is to live a life like that. And maybe, you know, being a person of color too. But I think at that challenging is probably the eight wing, but I just get a fire in my bones when I see if someone just lies to you outright, or sells their soul for money. I'm like, are you kidding? You know, and you could be you purport to be a leader of Christianity. I know everyone's around you scared to say something. But someone needs to say it. And it's not always me. But every now and that I will. And the thing is, it's not like, I'm sorry, I'm not out Ed and Maila to bring people down. I really don't want to bring people down. Just repent and be happy in your circle of influence and do what's right in your circle of influence. But in some cases, I think no one says anything to you ever, because they're scared of the repercussions. I think I am an activist voice and as much as that I want to live what I did. I feel like I can also say that too, because I think I have credibility in that area. And if I Lord forbid if I fall, right, I need people to keep me accountable. But I've had plenty of chances to sell out. And I haven't sold out yet and God forbid that I ever do. But I think that's maybe a nine eight and that's where Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile say in *The Road Back to You* that nine eights are the most conflicted, because they want peace. But then there's that like challenge of oppression and inequality constantly vying in you. like should I say something now or not? Should I let this one go or not? Even as I'm hearing that it's making me redefine what longing for peace means, right? Because when I think of peace, it's so nice and quiet and everyone's chill. But if you think about it, the fight for justice is the fight for peace, right ultimately, yeah. And so it's not like you're pushing up against yourself. A nine to stand up for justice is because I want peace. Right? Yeah. And it does press into that which I think I haven't heard that before until you were talking about just even your passions and wanting to stand up and wanting to speak out. It's because you longed for peace, right? And sometimes that's a loud fight but it's still it's still a longing for peace and so that's a really unique way of thinking about nines.

Marlena Graves 45:25

Yeah be peacemakers. You know, blessed are the peacemakers. I'm not just talking about myself, but you have to make peace. You know, sometimes I have this ideal and Shawn's like, yeah, you know, we're married monastics, Marlena. I'd like to be like a Thomas Merton at a monastery, not to disavow my daughters. I don't mean that. But I feel like I could live a life where I'm at a monastery very easily. And I think that's where the nine eight comes in. It swings between contemplation like that silence and solitude and that peace, and taking time to be with



the Lord and to be rejuvenated, or with friends. And that gives me the energy to do the action. I think it allows me to love people when I get rejuvenated, and then can go out but my conscience is saying, you have to say something and you don't they're not you know, I want to have a clean conscience before God. Marlena, I'm wondering if you could give readers a little taste of your voice, your writing in this devotional? Is there a selection that you would want to share if we asked you to?

Maila 46:23

Yeah, so I'm gonna read Day Three, which is titled Out with It. And here it goes. "What do you hold back?" a mentor asked. "You have so much more to offer," she explained. The same question and comment has been echoed by others close to me in some form throughout different intervals in my life. I was surprised they had picked up on my holding back. The simple reason is I fear running over people with whatever power intellect, skills, and abilities I have. I know what it is like to be run over and rendered invisible. I don't want to do the same to others. The problem is, I held back for so long that I inadvertently rendered myself invisible. That is a trap in which nines find ourselves unlike others who have to practice keeping their mouth shut. We have to practice speaking up. We have to be very intentional about it or will regress. Maybe there are reasons we fail to speak our opinion. Maybe we don't have an opinion, we simply don't know what we think. Or perhaps we can see both sides of an issue. Seeing both sides most often has something positive to offer. We fear coming down on one side will displease offend or alienate others. And that runs counter to our natural disposition of gathering people together in unity. We want everyone to get along, to see the good in others, despite our differences. We get along with a diverse cross section of individuals from across the political, religious, class, and ethnic spectrum. Even if we're not on the same page about everything, why can't others? So out with it, let's offer our opinions and stances if we have them. I know it's uncomfortable and hard. But we have contributions to make to the world. We have God's gifts to steward. When we fail to speak up, we are doing ourselves in the world a disservice. Don't worry, I'm not advocating that we vocalize everything that crosses our minds. That's foolishness. But I am saying we need to speak up much more than we have historically been comfortable. It's okay to say "I don't know" on controversial issues where we haven't made up our minds yet. It is okay to be on the journey, whether or not one side or the other militates at your current inability to stake your claim. That is spiritual and intellectual honesty. But it is dishonest to not speak up for fear of rocking the boat or displeasing another.

Ed 48:43

I feel like you're telling me about myself. Marlena.

Marlena Graves 48:45



Are you a nine, Ed?

Ed 48:47

At least that's what I've been told. But as I listened to you throughout this episode, I go back and forth. It's like, yeah, that's me. But then it's like, oh, I don't know.

Marlena Graves 48:57

Yeah, I mean, I can't tell you what you are, of course, but we all manifest a little bit differently. So, and maybe, I mean, it could be if you are nine, you might be a nine one. And then there's Marlena out here, like whoo!

Ed 49:13

Well, thank you for being on our show. Marlena.

Marlena Graves 49:16

Thank you so much. It's been such a joy.

Ed 49:19

We need to take one more break. But when we return, we'll continue our conversation with Gideon Tsang, author of *Forty days on Being a Seven*. But first, it's time for our Behind the Books segment where we pull back the curtain and find out more of the story behind the scenes at IVP. Today you'll hear more of the backstory from Suzanne Stabile, who serves as a series editor for the Enneagram Daily Reflections.

Suzanne Stabile 49:51

Suzanne Stabile, and I'm a public teacher and an author, and wife and a pastor's wife, which are two different things. And a parent and a grandparent. I co-authored *The Road Back to You* with Ian Cron. And I wrote *The Path Between Us*, and I just turned in my third book. I've been teaching the enneagram for the last 25, 26, 27 years, I think the best way to talk about it is that it is an ancient wisdom, spiritual help. Or maybe I would say, it's ancient spiritual wisdom that was handed down orally for hundreds and hundreds of years. And it is about nine different ways of seeing. That's the best definition I have. It's about nine ways of taking in information from the environment, and nine ways of making sense out of that information and deciding what to do. So one of the things that I'm so excited about in relationship to the Daily Reflection series, and I've said it so many times. I can never say for another number something about them that they can't say better themselves. And it has to do with nuance usually. And what happens with the Daily Reflections series, is that in terms of my definition of nine ways of seeing, you get to spend 40 days reflecting on life or Scripture or a good quote with someone who sees the way



you see. So that's level one that I think is so valuable, but level two that I think is so valuable about this series is that the authors are culturally diverse and racially diverse. And they come from diverse backgrounds as Christians. So with all of that diversity, there is a window into people who are not like me. And I'm a relationship person. And I don't think I'm going to get to the kind of understanding that I seek regarding racial diversity and cultural diversity, without us understanding difference around a story. And this series offers that. Your enneagram number is not determined by behavior, it's determined by your motivation. And sometimes motivation is determined by culture. I think we all need to nurture space for difference. And that includes authors of color, right, they have to set the authors of color have to set the table for me the same way I have to set the table for authors of color. And this series can be the beginning of doing that. When people ask me how to use the books. Here's what I must say. Get somebody of every number and do a year long program and read all nine books together. And include as much cultural and racial diversity in your group as you can. Because every single reading is a discussion starter. So it's more than you could ever need to get together and get to know one another as Christians who see the world in nine different ways. And from nine different perspectives.

Maila 57:35

You're listening to The Every Voice Now Podcast and I'm Maila Kim. Today, we've been talking with authors of color in our Enneagram Daily Reflection series. And so up next, we are speaking with Gideon Tsang, author of *Forty Days on Being a Seven*. So welcome, Gideon.

Gideon Tsang 57:51

Thanks, Maila. It's good to be here.

Maila 57:52

So can you tell our listeners a little bit about your personal background? So where did you grow up? And what is your family origin? All of that?

Gideon Tsang 58:01

Yeah, so I have a mixed and adventurous path, living as an Asian American in Austin. This is how I describe what it's like to be a person of color. And this happens once a year in Austin. I remember sitting in a little bodega called Quickie Pickie. And I was working outside. It's beautiful spring day. And then I see this white dude staring at me. And so I kind of look up, we make eye contact, I nod, maybe I know him, he looks back at me. Five minutes later, he's like, still, like eyes bearing down on me. And I'm like, so I just wave. And he took it as like a sign of, he wants to come talk me and I was like, "Oh, no, please don't, please don't. So he stands over. And the first question he asks is the question people of color love to be asked. He goes, where are you



from? So I was like, oh, I like to play this game. I go, I'm from Austin. I've lived here for 20 years. He was like, no no no, where you from? I go, you're right. I lived in Detroit before that. He goes, no, no, where are you from? I was like, yeah, actually Chicago. And then he just kept going. I was like, I can play for a long time with Toronto and Calgary, South America, Calgary, Hong Kong, Saskatoon. So those are all the places I've been. I left Canada in '95. And I've been in Austin for 21 years.

Maila 59:26

I want to talk a little bit about your ethnic identity journey. And so for our listeners who don't know, can you tell them what your ethnicity is? And then also what that relationship has been in your journey as becoming a writer.

Gideon Tsang 59:40

Yeah, so my mother is from Hong Kong. My father is from southern China, arrived in Hong Kong as a refugee. And they immigrated to Canada, where I was born in this large poppin metropolis, called Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Which I think is hilarious, by the way. I think immigrants landing there probably like Toronto, Vancouver, Saskatoon, probably about the same. So that's where I was born. So the intersection I think, is I've never wanted to write. Okay, that's not true. I've wanted to and not wanted to. I've wanted to, but found every reason not to. So in terms of, I think my upbringing, there's a couple of stories that I think inform it. I played a lot of basketball growing up. And I remember wanting to make my father proud. And he was busy, didn't come to very many games. And he came to one, I was a junior in high school, I played really well, but didn't play perfectly. So I think I scored 16 points in the first half, which is quite a bit, the most I've ever scored. And then I was so excited he was there I fouled out in the first half. But I was just wanting him to be proud of me. And on the car ride home, the whole conversation was why did you foul out? How can I not foul so much? And so tied to my family origin, tied to my ethnic identity, for me carrying the need to do things well, and to not try something if I'm not going to be good at it has always been a barrier. It's a human creative barrier for anyone. But I think there's a little added weight. And then how I ended up writing my book was my life fell apart in 2019. Like everything, everything gone and I was barely barely staying above water. Yeah. Which was hard. But I think, in hindsight, a gift now. Have you heard Wendell Berry's poem, so a stream that's impeded, that's when it finds that song. And life was helping you find that song, but it was, it was overwhelming. And while life was unbelievably overwhelming, I got an invitation to write a book. So I think this is what happened. I think that the book was always meant to be, and perhaps me exploring at least what it means to be a writer. And my life had exhausted me enough, my inner critic enough, I was just tired where when the opportunity presented itself I was just here and now. And I said, okay, fine. I'll do it.



Ed 1:02:32

So you've written this book about the enneagram? Could you tell us a little bit about your journey and connecting with the enneagram, and how you discovered it and what led to this place where you are today as a contributor to this series?

Gideon Tsang 1:02:47

As per my enneagram type, sevens, that's what I am. We don't like to get boxed in. It feels confining, restricted. And so all typology systems felt like that to me. So for years, I had heard, you know, hey, check it out. I don't want a box. I've got enough boxes, I don't need another button. So probably 10 years ago, I was at a leadership training weekend. And on the first day, they put us through some typology tests, through the Myers Briggs, which I was familiar with, ENFP. And then I had heard of the enneagram, I was like, fine. I don't really know what it is. I'll do it. I cared so little, that I don't remember what I typed in. Whatever, here's, here's the results. And then I, you know, was leaving that community. We had a board retreat, probably five years ago now, six years ago. And at the beginning, we have a spiritual director on staff and he was like, Hey, what do you think about taking the team through the enneagram and I was like, okay, seems like a good space for us to be a little more reflective, introspective, before we go into some external future oriented work. And then this time, because it was my community, I just had to be more engaged again, but still still subtly rolling my eyes in the back of my head. And then, before we finished the typing, he listed famous sevens, or famous celebrities of each type. And I remember it came to the four. And they listed people like Bob Dylan and Alan Watts. I'm like, good god, I want to be a four. And then it came to the sevens, and it was like Miley Cyrus and Robert Downey. I was like I do not, I do not want to be a seven and I left that weekend as a seven reluctantly. I was like this guy, this has just gotta be wrong. I need more tests, read some books. And then over the next few years, I was okay, fine. I'm a seven. So kind of came to terms, right?

Ed 1:05:07

Tell us for those of our listeners who are new to the enneagram, what does it mean to be a seven? You're a seven, tell us what that is, exactly.

Gideon Tsang 1:05:15

Yeah. So the more realistic, less kind way I would call us the blind optimist, or the squirrel chaser, squirrel, chase shiny objects.

Ed 1:05:29

Right, right.



Gideon Tsang 1:05:31

And the more kind would be, you know, the adventurer, the epicurer, the person who's trying to, to mine the fullness of life, to experience it, to really live it.

Ed 1:05:45

And how does that sort of play out in your own journey and your own experience? What kinds of things about you would someone look at, someone knowledgeable would look at and say, ah, yeah, he's a seven.

Gideon Tsang 1:05:58

I'll just choose something embarrassing. If you look at my Instagram, you would think it's a textbook Instagram for what a seven should look like. It's adventures, it's trips, it's exploration, it's with friends, in beautiful places, it's like mining beauty and life and travel--

Ed 1:06:17

Collecting things, yeah.

Gideon Tsang 1:06:18

Collecting things, yeah. And then you'll see hints of frustrated idealism, which is a seven thing, you want this world to be, you know, certain way and it's not.

Maila 1:06:28

I'm curious, you said something earlier how it was in 2019, that your life completely fell apart. And then you were invited to write about what it looks like to be a seven, which I feel like is the complete conflict of what it means to be a seven, right? You weren't in a season of life where you're living it up, and you're like, I'm a seven, let me tell you about all the great things about life, it was like your life fell apart. And then you had to write about that experience. And so how was that for you, how did you resonate with being a seven as you were forced to write about a seven in a painful season?

Gideon Tsang 1:07:01

Yeah, that's, that's a fantastic question. So one of the markers of a seven is we run from our pain. We will do anything to avoid sadness, and grief, and pain. And it took me a long time, not by choice, you know, life chooses you at some point. I think that's what grace is. These things you don't wish upon anyone. But having come through it, I wish the grace of the fruit of that upon everyone, if that makes sense. So as a seven, basically, all those things I was experiencing were there. And when you're young, in the first half of your life, you just have enough energy to avoid it. Or when you face it, you can just bounce back, then as you age,



those mechanisms stop working. And then at some point, you either have to be confronted with what your life actually is, or you double down on your protectors and managers that just keep you afloat, if that makes sense. So a lot of what sevens look like, not all, when it looks like, I'll just speak to myself, when it looks like I'm having fun, I'm traveling, I'm with people, I'm at a party, oftentimes, I'm the most sad. It's the way that I'm running from my grief and sadness. That's what sevens look like, when we're depressed. It looks like we're having fun. So in my estimation, why the book presented itself in the season of my life that it did. I was fully here with all of my life, not just the externalities, but my internal universe, not just what's beautiful and good, but decades of grief and pain. And further, it was really the first time in my life, its first season in my life, where some of that stuff surfaced. And this is where the enneagram is helpful. I now know that, hey, I've been I've been running from that. I could continue. But I was just ready. I was tired in a way that I now see as a gift. And I would sit with my pain, I would sit with parts of my life that I was putting an optimistic rosy lens on to try to avoid seeing what really was in my life, with relationship, with work stuff, with just a lot of it. So it wasn't easy. It didn't feel like a choice. But I think you might get at least an honest depiction from what I was experiencing in the fullness of life as a seven from the high highs and then a lot of pain as well. So I think.

Ed 1:09:48

Could you talk a little bit about how your ethnicity intersects with the subject matter of this book. Are there ways that the enneagram has helped you understand your Chinese heritage or vice versa.

Gideon Tsang 1:10:01

Yeah. So I was telling the story of how I finally accepted my sevenness. OK fine, fine. And then I was in Santa Fe with a few friends spent a weekend with Richard Rohr. And we were going through multiple things. But he started with the enneagram. And he's considered one of the founding fathers of at least the modern Western version that's been brought to the masses. So we were with him, we did a morning and then there was a coffee break. We're in a small little hotel in Santa Fe's, eight of us there. People were drinking coffee, kind of stretching their legs. And he was sitting there in this chair, just kind of quietly. And I walked up to him, and he was like, hey Gideon. He was like, so, what do you think on the enneagram? What what type are you? And I go, Richard, I think I'm a seven. And he goes, hah, hmm. And then I walked away, I was like, what the? It really seemed like he didn't think I was a seven. And it threw me into this existential, "who am I???" So from that, I think I'm an Asian seven. And most of the literature is pretty Western, pretty white. And so there's a little bit of difference that comes with that, that I think he probably didn't have as much exposure to. And then I grew up with two layers of repression. I grew up in shame based cultures, both Protestant fundamentalism. And so everything of what it meant to be alive and individual, just push it out just, shhh. And then I grew



up in a Confucian-based culture, which is also very shame based. You don't stand out, fit into the community. So my sister is a six, which is the loyalist, if you talk about a structure for a six to thrive in, that was perfect for her, right, she could play the game, she could fit the roles, wear the right hats, get the right right degrees, and it's just a nice ecosystem for her. And as a seven, who's wanting life, wanting new experiences, wanting out of the tribe, what's beyond my tribe, so sometimes, not in an unkind way to my parents, I think this was the model of parenting, at least in my generation, it's a little bit like when you get a puppy, and you need to break it spirit, so that it's trainable. I think a lot of parenting works like that, if I could just, if I can just break his will, my job is gonna be so much easier the next 18 years. It's very functional. So I think by the time I got to Richard, I was an Asian seven, I think a lot of that that's beautiful and expressed in my own way. And then it's been a journey of picking off those scabs of repression. Oh, this is a really beautiful part of me that just wasn't allowed to exist. And it's me. It's like the most core parts of me. And okay, this is a little scary, but I'm gonna kind of spread my wings a little.

Ed 1:13:27

Did you coin that, an Asian seven? Or is that a pretty commonly expressed idea?

Gideon Tsang 1:13:34

I don't know. If you've not heard it from anyone else. I'll take credit. I have no idea.

Maila 1:13:41

I like that. I think we're going to use that term from now on. Well, I love what you're saying. Because so my husband is a seven. But he's also a Korean American. And he says, all the stereotypes of a seven doesn't feel like him, right? And he's always like, I don't know why, or what that is, but it just didn't fit. But in his own experiences, he's like, I think I am a seven, I'm of all the numbers. This is what makes sense. And so I think it's kind of what you're speaking on, is there's this cultural layer to it that makes it a little bit confusing when you characterize a seven, and then you don't look like it or you don't smell like, right, but internally, you you feel that, right? And so I'm curious, can you speak to our listeners, who are people of color who feel like the enneagram, right now in its current stage is more of a dominant culture thing, right? The tool is, is usually used in the majority culture. And so can you speak into how do you how did you navigate that? And how did you stick to your guns, and Richard, I am a seven even though you don't believe me? What does that look like for people of color?

Suzanne Stabile 1:14:50

Yeah, that's a great question. Because even your husband's experience, I can relate to that deeply. So if you think about a book that's coming through the lens of white men, so you think about a seven, who's a white man, anything he thinks he wants to do, he's just gonna do it. And



then the world just gonna be like, oh, you you're allowed to do it. And it turns out, turns out most of us, that's not our existence, you know, which is both a curse and a blessing, right? Because I don't think we should all go through this world, doing whatever we want, without any acknowledgement or consideration of the impact it has on other people, and men, especially people with less power. So that boundary is a gift, but then I think, at least, especially for sevens, because sevens are just so explorative and adventurous and wanting to try and pursue beauty. For me, at least as a Chinese Canadian, Cantonese Canadian, it's been a lot of giving myself permission, and then having compassion for myself for some of the fear that comes up when I'm wanting to explore and try some of these things. But I think it's absolutely true. I think it's come through, so you know, how hip hop had to come through--for the dominant culture, right? It was an art form in the black community, but it took the Beastie Boys. Yeah? It needed it needed a white, easy to listen vehicle to bring it to the masses.

Ed 1:16:27

A little Vanilla Ice, yeah.

Gideon Tsang 1:16:30

Right. And I would say the same thing's happened with the enneagram. So I hope that for women, men, or just anyone on the spectrum of people of color, can really give language to their experience, and the diverse ways that this is expressed, because we've always said that. That's what enneagram people say, it's like primary colors. There's not just nine types of primary color. And it offers the diversity, that infinite expression, right? And I hope that with time, we allow more people of color and their actual point of view and their lived experiences can be heard.

Maila 1:17:08

Can you share a little bit about your journey of writing Forty Days on Being a Seven? How has that experience been? Has it been hard trying to express to people what it's like being a seven? Or has it been pretty simple as you've come to know the enneagram?

Gideon Tsang 1:17:24

It's both. So it's hard in so far as writing is just hard. Right? The craft, the craft of it is solitary and vulnerable. It's vulnerable art form. No, in the sense that I think it was a gift where my inner critic was just so tired. So do you know the comedian, Neal Brennan, he started he co created the Chappelle show with Dave Chappelle. And I was hearing him talk about the inner critic. And he was like, if you met someone that was saying the things your inner critic was saying, you would not be their friend. You'd punch him in the face. And part of the beauty of the enneagram, it gives me some handles to kind of go pretty deep into some of those wounds. And so now that



I've written it, I need to still, I haven't yet, said, hey, Mom and Dad, so by the way, I wrote a book. They don't know yet. And there's some stories in there. I love you. It's my own work and journey. And I'm thankful for how you love me. And it's no, it's it doesn't change how much I respect them. So there might be a couple stories you might want to like, not read. And then there's one of my sister too, and that'll be an easier conversation. There's one where she slaps me in the face when I was a teenager. She's since apologized many times. But in hindsight, with the lens of the enneagram, it was kind of a formative way I go through the world. I'm, there's, there's this way, I feel like as a seven, I stand as myself in this world, there's a younger part of me that ducks. And it feels like someone's gonna slap me, if that makes sense. And that comes from that experience.

Maila 1:20:31

I love your story of even telling your parents and letting them know and having the side conversations your sister. And I think it speaks a lot into what we've been talking about the enneagram, but also that layer of culture and all the different nuances of what it means to be a person of color. What are your hopes for this book? Who do you see reading it? And how do you see them experiencing it?

Suzanne Stabile 1:20:54

My hopes are that through this series, like most things that are important, it's more important to live it and experience it, than to just know it and talk about it. Right. And I think that enneagram can be a system. Because once you get in, it's pretty fun, it's dynamic, there's a lot of nuances. It can become just this cognitive system of introspection, you can talk about it, and be into it as a form of avoiding. And I think this series, it starts with the experience of that person of that number. So you're getting lived experience. And then hopefully, that will spur other people to connect to their own lived experience, or to ponder, reflect as they're living life how that plays out. And so I think when I was writing the book, the more specific I can be to my experience, which is a pretty weird, you know, Cantonese Canadian, who lives in Texas, those are a bunch of weird cultures, right? But rather than trying to connect at a broad level, I just wrote to as narrow a point of view as I could, and just trust my humanity and divinity will connect to the humanity and divinity.

Maila 1:22:25

Well, thank you so much, Gideon, for just your time being with us here today.

Gideon Tsang 1:22:30

Thank you. Thanks for having me.



Maila 1:22:31

And thanks to our earlier guests to Shawn Palmer and Marlena graves, it was great to have them on the show as well.

Ed 1:22:38

We also want to let everyone know that there are still more guests to come who have written for this devotional collection. So stay tuned for season two as we feature even more authors of color from the Enneagram Daily Reflections series.

Maila 1:22:49

And now as we close out our first season, we wanted to share that you can find all of these devotionals at ivpress.com. And if you use the code EVN40, you can get 40% off and free US shipping. So visit our site to get a great deal on any of the Enneagram Daily Reflections or on any book we have featured by authors of color this season.

Ed 1:23:14

Thanks everyone for listening to The Every Voice Now Podcast brought to you by IVP. Our producer is Helen Lee. And our sound engineer is Jonathan Clauson. If you are enjoying our show, please share about it with your friends and review and recommend us on iTunes, Spotify, or wherever you listen to your favorite podcasts.

Maila 1:23:32

And we love getting your feedback. So get in touch with us with your comments, critiques or questions. You can find us on Instagram and Twitter @EveryVoiceNow or you can email us at evn@ivpress.com. And join us next time for another inspiring episode of Every Voice Now.

[More About Sean Palmer](#)

[More About Marlena Graves](#)

[More About Gideon Tsang](#)

SPECIAL OFFER | Save 40% on all the [Enneagram Daily Reflections](#) volumes and get free US shipping when you use promo code EVN40 at checkout.



About the Hosts:



Maila Kim, Co-Host

Maila is a marketing manager at IVP; she holds a B.A. in English Language & Literature and a B.A. in Communication Studies from the University of Michigan, and an M.A. in Christian Formation & Ministry with a concentration in Bible & Theology from Wheaton College Graduate School. She enjoys photography, growing and caring for her plants, and listening to podcasts such as *This American Life*, *Invisibilia*, and *Unlocking Us*. Follow Maila on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#).

Ed Gilbreath, Co-Host

Formerly an editor at IVP, Ed is currently an executive leader at Christianity Today; he earned his bachelor's in communication arts from Judson University and a master's in philosophy of history from Olivet Nazarene University. He is also the author of two IVP books: *Reconciliation Blues* and *Birmingham Revolution*. Ed loves listening to an eclectic mix of music, reading narrative nonfiction books on American history and pop culture, and taking long walks while listening to podcasts such as NPR's *How I Built This*, *The Daily*, *Pass the Mic*, and CT's *Quick to Listen*. Follow Ed on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#).



The Every Voice Now Podcast:

Twitter/Instagram: @everyvoicenow

Website: everyvoicenow.com

Producer: [Helen Lee](#)

Sound Engineer: Jonathan Clauson

Music: ["Staring at the Sun" by Gyom](#)