

Welcome

If you know me, you know I love pop culture. I work hard to keep up with what movies, tv and books people love. And it's not primarily because I love them (also if you know me, you know my tastes run significantly more weird - fantasy, sci-fi, horror).

No it's because by paying attention to what's popular, we're actually seeing what stories resonate the most with our culture. We're learning what stories people experience and say, "Yeah, that's me!" They're the stories that tell our stories, the ones where we see ourselves reflected.

There wasn't a bigger movie last year than *Encanto*. Disney's latest animated triumph told the story of La Familia Madrigal and their magical abilities. Set to the music of *Hamilton* scribe Lin Manuel Miranda, *Encanto*'s songs had everyone tapping their toes and singing along, warning that we better not talk about Bruno.

But I want to suggest that it's more than the catchy music that made *Encanto* such a hit. Because as much as we couldn't quit humming the songs, I found we couldn't quit talking about the characters either. It seems that we all saw ourselves in one of la familia. Maybe it was moody Pepa or strong Luisa. Juileta the servant or Camilo the prankster or Bruno (I know... we don't talk about him!). Or poor overlooked Mirabelle.

What is it about these characters that resonates with us so much? Well, there's a lot, but one thing my wife Amanda and I discussed after seeing the film was how well each of the characters embodied a model of spiritual transformation called the Enneagram.

Don't worry if you don't know what that means. We'll get there. For now, I want to invite you to consider the possibility that the reason we enjoy this movie so much is because it offers us a picture of the possibility of spiritual transformation, one that we long for deep in our bones. I want to invite you into a journey of meeting these characters who are actually sketches of our own inner selves. How do they help us listen to how God's Holy Spirit is inviting us to be transformed, to find a freedom we never imagined?

Message

Welcome to Summer at Catalyst! This year, we're going on a quest for spiritual transformation. So often, spiritual transformation is reduced to self help - do this Bible reading plan or that prayer model. Serve this many times per week. Do these things and you'll be better. But most of us have tried those methods and... they just don't really work. I'm not saying they can't - If you've been around Catalyst, you know we really value spiritual practices. But far too often, the practices become ends to themselves, as though the goal of faith is to have the most Bible knowledge or spend the most time in prayer or rack up the most serving hours.

But the real goal of faith is formation - allowing ourselves to be molded into the image of Jesus for the sake of the world around us. Spiritual practices that help us do this are golden. Those that aren't are a hindrance.

To help us get at that, we're spending our summer with La Familia Madrigal from *Encanto*. When the film released, a whole bunch of believers noticed that the nine magical Madrigals correlated weirdly closely with a tool utilized in Spiritual Direction called the Enneagram.

On its surface, the Enneagram looks like a personality profile - like Myers-Briggs or Strengthsfinder. In the Enneagram, you identify yourself as one of the numbers 1-9, which then goes on to describe how you interact with the world.

And this is as far as a lot of folks take the Enneagram. But if we stop there, we miss why so many Spiritual Directors find the Enneagram a tool that's useful for Spiritual Formation.

Ian Cron, a Spiritual Director who has written about the Enneagram a lot, says it like this: "Personality tests tell you who you really are. The Enneagram tells you who you're really *not*."

In other words, what the Enneagram helps you identify in yourself is something theologians and mystics call our *shadow self*. It's a false self we all create out of fear, shame or anger. Our shadows are like a video game avatar - they're a preferred way for us to interact with the world. Our shadow selves feel safer than our real selves. But because our shadows were formed out of darkness, they create darkness. And facing down our shadow selves is really hard.

Until we face down these shadow selves - and understand the lies we believed that led us to create them in the first place, we can't heal. So how do we do that?

Believe it or not, our healing begins by allowing God to see us.

Turn with me to [1 John 1](#).

In both the gospel and letters, John uses the image of light and darkness to describe our relationship to God. Right here at the beginning of his letter, John offers some framework that sounds pretty confusing for a lot of us raised in the church:

This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth. But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

So far, this sounds like what we expect: God is good, sin is bad. God is light, sin is dark. Our goal is to quit sinning and come into God's light.

It's what we expect, but it's also where we fail, because we've all had the experience of coming into God's light, but still sinning. So what's the deal? Are we hopping back and forth between light and dark? Are we just still living in the darkness even though we're good sometimes?

Let's keep reading what John says:

If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts. -- [1 John 1:5-10](#)

So we should live in the light, which cleanses us from all sin, but if we say we have no sin, we're lying and living in the darkness? What's happening here?

John wants us to separate our identity from our actions. When we sin, we think of ourselves as sinners, as though our core identity is something disgusting and hateful to God.

But that's not the core of who we are. As humans, we're created in God's image - that's the first truth of who we are. Sin is darkness, it's deception. Sin keeps us from seeing the truth of who we are. Sin lies to us about our true nature and about the truth of other people.

This is why Jesus said in John's gospel that he didn't come to condemn the world, but to save us. God always loves us. God has always loved us. God will always love us. That is the first truth of how God sees you: a beloved child. Sin convinces us otherwise. Sin convinces us to be angry. Afraid. Ashamed. Sin convinces us to hide from God.

But it's all a lie. This lie creates our shadow self.

It's scary. Because the shadow is what has kept us safe all these years. But if we can learn to sit in God's light, if we can learn to let ourselves be seen by God, we find we're loved by God, we live in the light, and we are transformed.

Not by our actions, but by God's love for us. God shows us who we really are. God shows us who our neighbors really are. God shows us the lies that give rise to our sins. God is the light by which we see the world around us.

When we live in God's love, when we see by God's light, we become the images of God we were created to be. Not by working hard. Not by earning. But by receiving from God pure, unconditional love.

BREAK

Spiritual change begins when we allow ourselves to sit in the light of God's loving gaze. When we allow God's love to tell the truth about us and dispel the shadow self.

So how does the Enneagram help with that?

Our shadow selves don't all look the same. They don't all arise from the same lies. The Enneagram is a tool that's been developed over hundreds of years by various mystics and spiritual directors working with people of faith to be changed by God's love.

The system they've developed groups us into three sets of three numbers. These groups are called triads, and they're all based around a core kind of lie we believe about ourselves.

So the 8s, 9s and 1s are part of the Anger triad. 8s are angry at the world. 9s avoid anger like the plague. And 1s are angry at themselves.

2s, 3s and 4s fall into the Shame triad. 2s source of shame is the world around them. 3s avoid shame by doing, producing, keeping busy. And 4s direct their shame inward.

5s, 6s and 7s comprise the Fear triad. 5s are afraid of the world around them. 6s avoid fear by trying to predict everything. And 7s are afraid of being alone in their inner life.

Each of these broad categories believes something false about themselves. I'm a 3, and the lie I believe, the lie that formed my shadow self, is that I am fundamentally unlovable. My wife is a 9. Her basic lie is that her thoughts, experiences and emotions don't matter.

All this can get really abstract, so here at the beginning of this journey together, I want to make a few things really clear:

This is a tool for spiritual growth. Much like a devotional commentary or notes in a study bible, the Enneagram interacts with Scripture but is not Scripture. As with every spiritual tool, it's only good so long as it's helpful.

You're not going to connect with every number. In fact, you're only going to connect with one of them. But I have found that understanding the other numbers has massively helped me gain *empathy*. I'm a 3, but understanding how 5s work helps me love my friends who are 5s better (and vice versa). Knowing I am a 3 and my wife is a 9 has made a huge difference in our communication in our marriage.

Speaking of connecting with only 1 number, what most people experience with learning their Enneagram number is a lot of discomfort. If you're a 1, expect to be really uncomfortable the week we discuss Isabela. Hearing someone talk about your Enneagram number feels like someone has opened up your diary and is reading your innermost thoughts aloud. That's because someone is shining a light on your shadow self, and our shadow selves want to stay in the shadows. So when you feel that, just hang in there.

We're going to use Encanto because the members of La Familia Madrigal embody each of the numbers of the Enneagram so well. It's a fun, simple pathway into the promise of spiritual change.

Each week, we'll investigate a different member of La Familia. We'll use their ability and behavior as a doorway into a particular number. We'll explore the core lie that number believes, why it's false and what God's love says is actually true about that person.

Each week, we'll gain some tools to help us make space for the Holy Spirit to teach us the truth about ourselves.

In the end, our hope for this series is that we learn better how to love ourselves. We hope to learn better how to love each other. And we hope we learn better how to love our neighbors outside the Catalyst community.

I hope you're excited to join us on this summer of transformation!

Communion + Examen

No matter what our background, Jesus invites us out of the shadows and into the light of his love.

When in the last week have I allowed myself to receive God's love?

What has been a barrier to God's love in the last week?

How might those barriers show up in my life this week?

How can I choose to receive God's love for me this week?

Assignment + Blessing

How are you preparing for this summer of transformation?