



# Transcript

## Means of Grace

### Episode 52

**Speaker:** Welcome to Means of Grace, a podcast produced by the Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church.

**Kim:** Welcome to the Means of Grace podcast. I'm Kim Ingram, the director of ministerial services for the Western North Carolina Conference, and today I'm going to be talking with Reverend Jill Smith. Jill is journeying in the Kingdom of God on Earth with all of its mountains and valleys and learning to love each place as it comes. And this conversation that I have with her today is genuine and real, as she shares some of what she has learned and how she is journeying with others. Jill has been a pastor in the Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church for 20 years and has served three churches during that time.

And then, just this past July, she was appointed to an extension ministry that she has created called [Flourishing Souls](#). It is a ministry that uses contemplative prayer for a deeper connection to God and the Enneagram for self-awareness, as Jill says, because we can't give our whole selves to God if we aren't honest with who we are. I am delighted to have this conversation today with Jill.

Jill, thank you so much for joining us today. We look forward to this conversation. I'd like to start with a reflection on your ministry and what led you to consider leaving local church ministry in order to develop under your own ministry that we'll talk a lot about today.



**Jill:** Thank you for the invitation to be here. Kim, I am honored. Basically, I was in a local church ministry for 20 years and what I've discovered about myself, it takes me a long time to get comfortable with things. So when changes come, they don't come quickly to me. So it took me a long time to realize I could be a woman in ministry, first of all, and in seminary took eight years as I was trying to develop that call. And then when I started ministry, I felt very affirmed going into it. But I didn't have a lot of self-confidence. So it took a lot of years before I developed a rhythm and learned what my best gifts were and was able to use that in ministry.

And then as I got comfortable and loved what I did I was in a church that was healthy and growing, and I was able to just see the best of what a church can do. And then as I was there, I was in one church for 13 years, I started to get another nudging that there's more here for the Kingdom of God, and so I wasn't sure what that was. It also takes me a long time to see specifics when God is nudging me.

So I came to my last church and I was the solo pastor there. So I got to use a lot of my gifts and areas where I wasn't so comfortable. I was able to use them and grow them. And so I realized I could do it. But not all of ministry fits well for every person. And at the same time, when I came to this church, I knew I needed something within myself to dig deeper and to connect to God, to be a pastor to this specific congregation. And so that is when I began regularly doing centering prayer. And that opened up in me just my heart space.

I kind of, before that I was much more deliberate about what God wanted of us and how to go about doing that in ministry. I thought I knew



how God was in the world. And then when I came to my most recent church, I began to see that I don't have all the answers and that God really pushes us out of our comfort zone. And that's exciting and scary at the same time.

So the centering prayer gave me a new perspective on the world. It's as if the world opened up and I felt like something Richard Rohr has written about that everything belongs. It was no longer - its people of faith just trying to share the gospel with people who don't believe. I really got the sense that God is here for everyone and everything belongs and the world is God's wonderful creation. And so inside I just felt like I expanded in ways that weren't available to me previous to starting the centering prayer.

And a few years before that is when I found the Enneagram and when I found it, I realized that I was in an unhealthy place because the Enneagram doesn't just show us personality traits, it shows us if we're kind of average, or if we're healthy, or unhealthy. And I was in a very stressful place, and I could read the descriptions and see that I was not doing well. But the beautiful thing, it shows you how to get healthy. And so I was determined I wanted to be the description of a healthy person in my Enneagram type. So that's a long road. Like our life it's a journey.

So, I began to read everything I could on the Enneagram and go to trainings. And so in my last church, the church that I just left in July, I was able to use the things I learned about the Enneagram to step into that discomfort zone and realize all of the fears I conjured up that would happen if I did what scared me, never really happened. And it gave me a



strength and confidence to do things I've always wanted to do and didn't think I could.

So, I just kept feeling the nudging over the last couple of years that the Greater Kingdom needs more ways for people to connect to God. I began to see over time really, over several decades that people were leaving the church. Faithful, gifted people and they weren't leaving God but the church they had not - didn't continue to excite them. And so they were looking for other ways to serve God, and it was less and less becoming something the church was offering to them. And I realized too many churches don't teach any contemplative practices at all. And if you can connect to God on a deeper, more intimate level, where you're willing to open yourself up to God, which can be pretty scary, there's also a beauty of that connection.

The ancient desert fathers and mothers call that union with God, and contemplative prayer practices give you a place to be in union with God; and it doesn't replace other prayer forms, so I don't have people to worry they have to change everything. It's just another way to connect to God when sometimes we feel like we're distant, even when we're doing all the same faithful practices we've done over years.

**Kim:** Jill, there are so many things you've said that I think people can resonate with. And really be able to kind of identify some of the feelings that you felt within themselves, some of the experiences that you've had in ministry. And it sounds like even the relationships in the ways you've connected with people in your congregations that other people can identify with. And so it's generated for me several questions, one just for



my own kind of understanding. You talked about centering prayer, and then you talked about contemplative prayer. Are those two names for the same thing? Are they different things?

**Jill:** Centering prayer is a contemplative prayer. There are many different contemplative prayer forms and contemplative means, what you think it means. It means a quiet centering of oneself to be very present to what's going on to contemplate it. So to have different forms of prayer in the contemplative tradition means there are different ways to closely connect with God that come from different parts of who we are. Some can be just - centering prayer is where you're sitting quietly and you're learning to let go of your thoughts, because when we sit quietly, thoughts come in and bombard us. But that also means we can't let God in if we're always thinking about grocery shopping and what we have to do next week. And so centering prayer teaches us how to receive thoughts as they come and release them. And in a few seconds where we've released the thought, we open our hearts to God coming in and seeing our true selves. So that's one form of a contemplative prayer.

There are other forms where you're actually using your body or studying scripture. So they're actually different forms of contemplative prayer that will connect you to God, and some work better for others.

So, my goal is to help people find the deep connecting prayers that work best for them. I hope they try all of them, but sometimes the ones we resist are really the ones we need the most. We're resisting them because they challenge us. So that's the beauty of how God makes us grow in our lives.



**Kim:** That's the nature of life some days, isn't it?

**Jill:** Mostly.

**Kim:** So that's been a lot about how you've kind of connected and reconnect with God and listened, it sounds like, to how God was working in your life, especially in the last couple years. And then the Enneagram, you said, was a tool that you've used more to develop some self-awareness and some self-understanding. And you were talking a little bit more about that and how you discovered, I guess, your number, your type and then discovered you were an unhealthy of those types and wanted to become a healthy type. Talk a little bit more about that for a minute, if you would.

**Jill:** The beauty of the Enneagram is it can be a very simple tool to see what different personality types are out there. And that's all some people do with the Enneagram. They use it to notice habits and people, because certain people tend to develop habits in certain ways. I want to emphasize every single human being is unique, and the Enneagram does not stereotype people. It's just showing us where we have covered ourselves, protected our hearts, just to keep safe early in life. And then when we try and keep using the same behaviors and actions they don't work as well for us.

So the Enneagram was the one personality tool I found that didn't just show me what things I did, which are kind of predictable - our personality likes predictability, but it reveals why we do that and how to break those habits. Because the other thing is, the Enneagram really doesn't tell us that's who we are. It's telling us you are *not* this. This personality trait I cling to is a defense mechanism. And so it's really inviting



us to see how we behave in the world and decide if that's really working for us. And then, if not, we can go from being unhealthy, where we're very defensive and constricted inside, to seeing what we're using to cause that. And the counterintuitive thing is, the Enneagram teaches us to let it go.

We can't fix it ourselves. We can't change it out of willpower, because then we're trying to solve a problem with the same thing that causes the problem, which is kind of our ego. But the Enneagram invites us to really see ourselves and how we're covering our true self up and then just begin to release those things. And as we do, that's another invitation to ask God into our life to really do that work for us.

So the Enneagram is inviting, not change, but really transformation, so that we could be who God has authentically created us to be, which is going to be unique for every human being and live into that. So it really helps us find our true selves rather than being satisfied just living in the world, reacting to the world through our false self or protected self.

**Kim:** So as you become more familiar with each of these practices or tools, it sounds like it has been transformative for you and shifted the direction of your ministry. Am I understanding you correctly?

**Jill:** Yes, it gave me an understanding why people do things, what they do. And when you become familiar with the different personality traits in the Enneagram, it's meant to give us compassion. For other people, when we see if they react to the world in certain ways, then we can understand maybe what they're reacting against, and we don't have to take everything personally, but it also means we give compassion to ourselves.



Just in starting this ministry I didn't know God was going to do it, but in the last few months I've had to go back to some very early childhood traumas that I hadn't dealt specifically with, you know. Why I'm this type of person. Why? Why did I develop to be the type nine that I am and not a type eight or something else? Because I was judging myself because I didn't want to be that way. I wanted to have the strength that I don't always have as a nine, to speak my mind. And when you go back to look at why each type is the way it is, each type comes into the world, each human being comes in the world with a certain perspective on their connection with God. So the Enneagram shows what each type's holy idea is. But then because the world either ignores us or treats us badly or causes us to react in different ways.

We put up those defense mechanisms, and I was only - I was judging myself on the defenses I had developed and didn't look deeper to see what it was I was defending myself against. And when I realized that, I could see myself as a little child and, "Oh, that's why I would have done that. I was afraid my connection to God would be cut off". And so to protect my heart I started, for nines we withdraw, we avoid conflict. So I was trying to protect my heart by doing that, but which saved me in my childhood. It helped me to grow to a point where as an adult, I can look at that now and say it doesn't help me now to avoid conflict, because there are lots of conflicts in life and we grow through conflict. So to avoid it means we remain kind of immature. So I had had to reframe everything for me, so that conflict wasn't something to avoid. It was something to step into and use. And that actually made me stronger for, really, all aspects of my life.



So the types, the number types, in the Enneagram that we most identify with are - that's only the number that shows what some of our motivations are in the world. It really doesn't tell us who we are. So every human being has access to all of the energies in the Enneagram. So we really have a wholeness which reflects us being created in the image of God. But the one area where we have over protected ourselves, that becomes the type we identify with.

So the more we can grow and understand why we do things and allow God to use that to teach us to move into these places we've always avoided, because every number avoids different things for different reasons. When we realize we can release those things that hold us back it just opens up, it opens up our hearts. It connects us to our bodies, and it allows our minds to be used in the best sense of the word.

The Enneagram teaches us that there are three aspects to us, which is our minds, our hearts and our bodies. And the goal of getting healthy and mature is to integrate all three of them and use all three of them to make decisions from. Because to use all three well is to be integrated and to be informed and to be, to access all parts of our body to live in the world. We tend to work out of one of those rather than all three. We have one we probably overuse, and one we probably under use and one we use, more or less whenever we need it.

**Kim:** It's clear that you have really delved deeply into these things and that they've really changed your life. And now you're helping other people kind of understand it for themselves. And you are not appointed to a local church anymore. You're appointed to your own ministry called Flourishing



Souls and, really, you're developing this as a way to walk alongside other people I think for - I'm going to let you describe this - but I think for their own kind of self-understanding, their own development of their faith and their relationship with God. Can you tell us a little bit more about what that looks like and how you've been walking alongside other people?

**Jill:** Because I personally experienced inner healing and a sense of wholeness through centering prayer and the Enneagram, and you can use each of them separately or together. I love using them together because they're, they work so well together. But contemplative prayer can often bring people to the place of an inner healing and a wholeness and just using Enneagram - if someone is even non-religious, they can use the Enneagram to really find who God created them to be, whether they believe that or not - they can find inner wholeness through it as well. So they each achieve a connection to one's self and to God, to open oneself to God.

So because I experienced it personally, and I know there are different reasons people don't feel connected to God, but when centering prayer helped me to see a new level of being a part of God's world I thought a lot of people who leave the church never know about contemplative prayers. And so I wanted to give them an opportunity to teach about it, to invite them to do contemplative prayers with me. I have a website, and so I'll have times we can meet together and just talk about a little bit of what's going on in life and then do centering prayer. It's actually a 20-minute sit, where you try and be quiet and release the thoughts that



come to you. And then there I will do teachings on different kinds of contemplative prayer so people can find what works best for them.

So kind of my byline for Flourishing Souls is to connect people to God through contemplative prayers and connect to themselves with self-awareness through the Enneagram for the transformation of the world, one person at a time.

**Kim:** Have you had the opportunity to work one on one with somebody, or have you done some cold consulting with churches or small groups or, what kind of offerings? How does this work?

**Jill:** I have done both, and my goal is to do both. I've worked with a church staff, primarily with the Enneagram, to show them how you can use a knowledge of the different personalities on a staff, because we all need each other. The world will grow and be successful if we all show up in the fullness of what God has given us. So we're not going to look like one another when we mature and grow, we're going to be beautifully unique.

And so any time a group or a church staff or a company, I know more and more starting to work with the Enneagram, just from the personality perspective but there's wisdom in doing that, and the compassion for others is a big part of that. But then I also work individually with people. I use the tool - there are different schools of thought with the Enneagram, and they have all the same basic information, but they approach it from different angles. And so I've gotten trained on what's called the Integrative Enneagram, and they're one of the newer schools that took all of the wisdom from the other schools that are out there and put them together.



And has used some current social science and statistical information to ask certain questions to determine what your type number is, what your subtypes are, and there's so much depth. And with the Integrative Enneagram, there are lots of different ways to see how you react and experience the world. And by filling out these tools, you get a feel for that.

And then I am also bringing into the Enneagram work the spiritual aspect of it. The Integrative Enneagram does not have the spiritual components within it. But when I talk with someone and look at their report, once it comes in, I can explain that this is how God uses this in the world, and this is what we're doing. And if you want to develop a comfort level with how you approach things, or if there's something that's not working for you in your life, is this why?

So it's really to help people get a self-awareness of how they appear in the world. And then, if they want to look at certain aspects of their life or their personality, we can do that again. It's just for them finding out for themselves how they have been covering up what's really in their soul. What's top, what gives them joy in their life that they might have been afraid to step into.

**Kim:** Well, it sounds like a wonderful tool. I have been exposed to it, but I haven't kind of delved deeply into it. I know my husband uses it sometimes in counseling, and now I kind of have a better sense of why. Because of the breadth, it sounds like the Enneagram will offer into your - who you are and how you got that way and what does that mean for you now and into the future. So thank you for that beautiful description. So, Jill, how is this similar to or different from counseling or spiritual direction?



**Jill:** Working with someone with the Enneagram is different from counseling because it isn't delving into why things happened and taking time to look at that and find specific healing for that. That can happen with the Enneagram, but the goal is for you to see how you react to things and how you respond, what your strengths are, what the lower aspects of your personality are, which we call them blind spots because every person has them and they're blind because we don't realize we react to the world in a certain way. But if you ask your loved ones, they might say, "Oh, yeah, you react that way." Because we're so used to them they're so normal for us, and they're just habits that we've developed. The Enneagram helps to reveal some of those things, but it doesn't actually go into what might have caused it, what you can do to heal or release that type of thing.

We look in so many things in depth, but the goal is not to fix anything. The goal is to see who you really are and accept it. And then when you invite God into your life, into the mess of who we are and the joys of who we are, it's really God who allows us to let go of the things that we use to protect ourselves.

So, many counselors use the Enneagram because it helps identify things people can't see in themselves. But it doesn't take the extra time to go in for the healing work itself. I highly recommend if people have had a lot of trauma in their life, they should do counseling.

And I specifically looked for a counselor when I realized how unhealthy I was. I looked for a counselor who knew the Enneagram, and I was thrown off course because I started with the counselor, and I said, "You know, I want to do this in light of the Enneagram." She's like, "Oh, yes, I



know the Enneagram.” And she only knew it because she took it. She didn't know how to use it or how to help me see my blind spots or pushed me in the areas I was resistant.

**Kim:** Really, she was familiar with it. She really wasn't trained in it as part of her counseling practice.

**Jill:** Right. So it truly makes a difference. So you get someone who's trained in the Enneagram who can use that in their practice. So just a word to the wise out there.

And as far as spiritual direction goes, spiritual direction is for you to journey with an individual who has wisdom, has maturity, has a spiritual depth and strength. Spiritual directors help to point out things. So I have a spiritual director who is highly trained in the Enneagram, so he often uses that with me, which I need. I need real specific information, and so he's able to do that.

But not all spiritual directors need to know the Enneagram because there's a gifting to be able to journey along people on their spiritual walk, and still give good information and ask good questions. Like a spiritual director, someone with the Enneagram should be inviting the client to see what fits for them. Is this true for you? Because we're not going to match everything within our type on the Enneagram, and we're going to recognize ourselves in every other number. So, it's a bit of fine tuning to go on. And, none of them, the Enneagram doesn't replace counseling or spiritual direction, but it can enhance both of them.

**Kim:** Yeah, that's really helpful. Thank you for sharing that in that that way. So one thing that comes to mind, as I'm listening to you is, I don't know, a



lot of people don't want to do this hard work. Sometimes, me included, you know of thinking about, kind of the hard things about life and where we're going. And I just wonder, kind of as we close if you have a word of wisdom or encouragement that would help people kind of be open to and want to do some of the exploration that you've talked to us about today.

**Jill:** One thing I want people to know is that the Enneagram reveals who we are and how we are whole within God and that we are not broken. We don't need to be fixed. What we need to do is realize how we've covered our true selves. And so the goal is to help release what binds us so that the gifts and graces God has given us just shine through us. We're still going to be fearful. We're going to feel fear. But we're going to realize it's just fear. And if I know I can survive, what I make up might happen because of it, well, then it's worth stepping into.

So when we don't want to do the hard work, and initially - just like centering prayer, when you start centering prayer and you open yourself up to God, you know what's right on top with inside us is all the yucky stuff we've stuffed and haven't released from our hearts. So when you open yourself up to God, you're going to start feeling painful, difficult, uncomfortable feelings. And that's good, because then you're giving those to God and God helps heal and remove them. And when you keep coming back to centering prayer, that's not on the top anymore.

There's always things God is going to be dealing with our hearts toward, but knowing it's difficult, painful early on doesn't mean it's always going to be that way. And the Enneagram does the exact same thing. So you are going to be uncomfortable. Isn't that how we learn things in the



world? We never move to the next level of consciousness, of integration unless we're kind of forced to do it, and that's reflected in the Christian journey as well.

The Enneagram talks about our passions, which is our sin. That's not a good thing in the Enneagram. Its passion the same way the Passion of Jesus is used. It's the suffering that Jesus went through. And the Enneagram passions for us are the things we cling to that don't benefit us at all. But we just don't want to let go of them either.

So it's learning to see what isn't working for us and that is God really shaking us up to say, I've got so much more for you that includes healing and wholeness. But we have to do the work. God doesn't do it for us. He leads us to this place where that expansiveness is available to us. But unless we are willing to allow God to work within us, it just doesn't happen on its own. And that's what I love.

And I think it connects us, both the contemplative prayer and the Enneagram wisdom of who our true selves are. Allows God just to shine through perfectly meaning maturely and wholly.

**Kim:** Jill, this is just beautiful. And you have inspired me today. And I know you've inspired our listeners just both to learn more and to experience more. So we're going to put in the show notes some of the references that you've given today and especially your [website](#) so that they can learn more about it as they are interested. And I just want to say thank you so much for being with us and for really sharing your heart and your soul in such intimate and deep ways today.

**Jill:** Sure. Thank you for having me letting me share.



**Kim:** What a beautiful conversation that was with Jill Smith. I am so grateful that she gave us the time today and just really enlightened us with thinking more about how we grow in our relationship with God and how we grow in our understanding of ourselves and how we live and we are in the world. She shared a poem at the end with me that I want for us to use as we close our time together today.

**Jill:** Finally, on my way to yes

I bump into  
all the places  
where I said no  
to my life -  
all the untended wounds,  
the red and purple scars,  
those hieroglyphs of pain  
carved into my skin, my bones,  
those coded messages  
that send me down  
the wrong street  
again and again  
where I find them -  
the old wounds  
the old misdirections -  
and I lift them  
one by one  
close to my heart



and I say, "Holy,  
holy." (Poem by Peshya Joyce Gertler)

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