



Enneagram Global Summit™

The Gift of the Enneagram in Grieving

Suzanne Stabile

Jessica: Welcome to *The Enneagram Global Summit: Nine Essential Pathways for Transformation*. For the first time, we're having a session on grieving and the Enneagram. This session is called "The Gift of the Enneagram in Grieving," and our faculty is Suzanne Stabile. Suzanne is known as a priceless source of wisdom, and a grace-filled truth teller. She's been a student and teacher of the Enneagram for more than 30 years. She is also the host of the popular podcast, *The Enneagram Journey*, which seeks to promote community, patience and tolerance through a growing understanding of the differences and similarities that undergird our humanity. Suzanne, I am so delighted that you are here with us, thank you.

Suzanne: Thank you so much. I'm delighted to be here. I've been a fan for a long time. To have an opportunity to participate is really a gift for me.

Jessica: The intersection of the topic that you're bringing and this summit and myself is very dear to me both at a personal level and also at a global level. At a personal level, I have had my share of grief, maybe much more than many others. At a young age, my beloved younger sister, my beloved younger brother, my husband, and others have passed at way too early and young of ages. For me, the grieving journey as a doorway to love, as a doorway to God's mercy, as a doorway to developing character and capacity has been a huge part of my life. Then I look around as a human being and as a global citizen, as a teacher, and I just see that, especially in the United States, it feels to me like we're such kind of a Three culture, Three-Six culture. We're so committed to productivity. I just cannot believe that people have these losses that they go through, and their work gives them three days off or seven days off or something, and they never get to process that grief. When you offered this as one of your topics, and I saw that you had some experience, I just felt like it would be a jewel of a session to bring to all of us. I'm wondering if you might begin by sharing with us, why did you feel called to explore this topic and use the Enneagram? Why did you

become called to commit to working with people with grief and use the Enneagram with it?

Suzanne: Almost every call on my life is personal. I'm a Two on the Enneagram, so that tends to suggest that the way I'm more easily led is by my own relationships. My husband and I have four children. One of our children attempted suicide. We were kind of prepared for everything, but not for that. We've been through "Well, what if this happens and what if this happens?" and we were as prepared as one can be, but not at all for this. That child is a Seven on the Enneagram. By the way, he's doing really well today, so we have a grace-filled, hope-filled ending to that. But when we were going through that with him, at the exact same time, we had a friend who was the pastor of a big steeple church, and he called us and said, "I'm in a lot of trouble, and I'm not sure that I want to live anymore, and I don't know who to call. Will you come?" We said, "Yes, we'll be right there." He lives several hours away. He's a Seven on the Enneagram. At the same time, one of our friends, a couple that we're friends with, and we had a dinner engagement with them and it was cancelled. We found out that he had not been to work in 42 days. He is a Seven on the Enneagram.

We were dealing at one time with three people who were contemplating suicide, who thought about suicide, et cetera. They were all male Sevens. I took that as an opportunity for me to figure out what I was supposed to learn from them. I spent a great deal of time, by their invitation, listening to each of them. What I discovered was that even though they're of different ages, they all had come up on the first thing in their lives that they couldn't reframe. As I'm sure you know, Sevens reframe everything in real time. When they came upon the first thing they couldn't reframe, in each of these individual stories, it worked kind of like dominoes. They had the grief, but it knocked over, as if lined-up dominoes, all the things that they hadn't yet grieved in their lives. They ended up in a pit that was just a pit that there was no way out of for them without a great deal of professional help. I was very taken with that discovery about grieving, and I decided that perhaps I should do some work around the Enneagram and grieving.

I immediately discovered when I began the work that I would have to teach grieving before I could do anything with the Enneagram, because we don't know how to grieve. We, culturally in the West, have been taught and learned to move on. We know how to reframe, we know how to meet expectations, we know how to repress our feelings, but we don't know how to grieve. In putting together some work, I decided, well, I'll teach grieving. The first thing I did was offer people the definition that I preferred, and it is that grieving is a strong word that implies deep mental suffering, often endured alone and in silence, but revealed by one's nature. It was clear to me that the inability to grieve would be revealed by bad behavior in your number. The ability to grieve would be

revealed by some sign of health. Since my husband is a pastor, he is head of congregational care in a 16,000-member church, meaning I have lots of opportunity to learn from people who are grieving, to be present to people who are grieving, and to be available to teach something about grieving to people who simply don't know how. As with all my work then, those people all became my teachers so that I can learn about Enneagram and grieving.

Jessica: What a powerful story, Suzanne. One of the things that you mentioned is that you notice that when people can grieve well, that there's the sign of health. I'm thinking that what you meant by that is that within their Enneagram type, the grief actually opens them up to more of their capacity, and they grow as a person. Is that what you mean?

Suzanne: That's absolutely true. If they've had the gift of learning how to find some kind of balance with the three centers of intelligence, and if not, then it's very difficult to grieve. It's just very, very difficult if you're not able to use all three and use them in some kind of challenging but balanced way, even though you're really, really hurting.

Jessica: Let's talk just a little bit about three-centered grieving. It's interesting because that's a term that comes up more and more in the Enneagram field. We talk about three-centered inner guidance. We talk about Three-centered love. Tell us about three-centered grieving.

Suzanne: It is the tendency, as I'm sure you know, that we generally use two of three. We kind of figure out early in life how to make our way using just two, and the answer always seems to be in the third one. As a Two on the Enneagram, I'm feeling-dominant and doing supports feeling, and that makes it look like I'm grieving. But when I don't use the thinking center, then what I'm really doing is behaving in ways that seem appropriate for the experience and in ways that comfort other people, but not in ways that are transformative or that are real for me. In an average space, I can look like I'm grieving, I can think that I'm grieving, I can believe that I'm grieving, but I end up not being able to move in a direction that offers holistic healing unless I use all three centers.

Jessica: And for the Two, I would imagine that some of that is that when the thinking center is not being engaged, you're not actually able to see in perspective what happened and what might have been yours and what is not yours. It's like becoming overwhelmed by the feeling without having a sense of the learning. Is that correct?

Suzanne: That is correct. The sad thing about that is that the feelings that I'm overcome with are usually not mine.

Jessica: Can you say a little bit more about that?

Suzanne: Sure, I think most Twos make their way in the world feeling other people's feelings. The hardest question anybody ever asks me is "What do you feel and what do you need?" Those two things are almost impossible for me to respond to appropriately because the focus of my life is on what other people feel and what other people need. I find enough satisfaction from meeting other people's needs that it takes a lot for me to think about what I might need or what my response might be if I were autonomous enough to respond from myself.

Jessica: You also talked about, Suzanne, that with all three of these male Sevens, when they couldn't do the usual Seven thing of reframing whatever it was that they were experiencing, not only did they have a crisis, but it was like every other grief that they had never grieved came up.

Suzanne: Right.

Jessica: It's interesting because from the perspective that some of us have kind of come upon that there's a way that whatever our type is, we also have all nine pathways in us. Certainly, culturally, there are these overlays. It seems to me that that experience is happening more often, almost like there's a kind of Seven overlay in our culture that you should just get on with things and be happy and find a new way through. It seems to me like more people than ever, when they encounter their first grief that they're can't handle, all of a sudden have all that other grief come up, including trauma. Are you seeing that as well?

Suzanne: I am. I'm doing some work right now around a response to crisis and trauma because I think we're responding very ineffectively. When we have what we need to respond appropriately, we just haven't learned to tap into it. It is the cultural game to move on, to get back to work. The church even offers all these sayings that are not at all comforting. Things like when a child dies, she's in a better place. If one of my children died, my response would be there is no better place than with me. That would be my honest response. But because we don't understand grieving, and because we don't know what to do with it, we move on because it causes discomfort for everybody, not just for the person who's grieving. In that discomfort, all we know to do is change the scene, change the game, change the conversation and try to live into something that isn't comfortable necessarily, but that we can be talked into.

Jessica: It strikes me that in many ways this session, as much as it may be about each type hearing something about a doorway, a portal into how they could grieve more authentically, will also be a teaching for all of us about how to be in a better way with each type when they're grieving rather than the platitudes that we've been entrained to do.

Suzanne: Exactly. I think if we could hold value for grieving, then we could intuitively hold space for people to do it who aren't like us. I think we can intuitively know what to do because we have pieces of every personality type in us if we can allow rather than protect ourselves. If we can allow things to unfold rather than protect ourselves from having to be involved, then I think we'll have what we need to be present to people who are grieving.

Jessica: So powerful, I'm really looking forward to sharing with our listeners a little journey around the Enneagram and saying something for each type. Before we do that, Suzanne, I'd just love to hear from your own body, heart, mind, from your own learning what to you are some of the gifts of being able to grieve well. What does it open us to?

Suzanne: The first thing I want to say about that is I think we have to be very careful that when we talk about grieving, we're not just talking about grieving death, because there are so many things that require grieving if we're going to come out on the other side in a healthy way, like retirement or empty nesters sometimes have trouble and have to grieve, or I'm dealing now with a lot of people who are struggling with having left the faith belief or the religion of their childhood. That has to be grieved. It was a huge part of life for so many people, and it doesn't fit them anymore. It doesn't work for them anymore. But you can't just walk away from that. I think, first, we have to think about that. Then I would say that I think loss of autonomy has to be grieved, illness, aging, injury. I think loss of a sense of safety has to be grieved. I am a survivor of sexual abuse as a foreign exchange student as a junior in high school, and I am totally committed to a recognition that if you can't grieve trauma and crisis, then you don't ever feel safe again as far as I can tell. Everything is pseudo safety. My first place I'll start in really addressing the question you ask is if you lose safety, you don't feel safe again until you grieve what you lost.

If you lose someone that you love deeply, then your ability to ever love that way again, I believe, is dependent on your ability to grieve loss. You can't just keep moving. It just doesn't work. Each personality type has different struggles and different things that they have to manage in order to grieve appropriately. I just don't think there's much help with that. I think we need help with all it actually. In my husband's work, he does lots of funerals, and it is astonishing how many people in a family who have lost someone they love have never seen a body, have never been to a funeral home, have no idea about planning a funeral. It's all just swept away and then everybody is supposed to show up for some kind of service that they didn't participate in preparing. None of that works. We have unresolved pain that we're carrying. I think lots of people, once they recognize that it's unresolved, would like to put it down, but they don't know how, and the Enneagram helps.

Jessica: We want to hear how the Enneagram helps. As we enter into that, I just want to say that you have so generously shared about two of your own moments of grieving with your son and the scare that that must have been and then this sexual assault at a very young age. I want to thank you for that generosity, Suzanne. I know that you don't need me to say anything, but I want to say that I'm sorry for the pain and I am inspired by the heart and the courage that has allowed you to use those experiences to be able to support all of us.

Suzanne: Thank you. I actually think that the reason I can is because I've grieved them. Otherwise, I think there's a need to protect those parts of ourselves because we're afraid we'll be hurt again.

Jessica: Where should we start? Where do you like to start on the Enneagram?

Suzanne: Well, I usually actually start with Eights when I'm teaching. It's comfortable.

Jessica: Me too.

Suzanne: Do you?

Jessica: I do.

Suzanne: I love that.

Jessica: Well, it's because it's the first entry point to the body center, and I feel like unless we are here, everything else that we're doing is kind of a trance. It just seems like we should start with being here.

Suzanne: That's very interesting. The reason I start with Eights is because I find that people either know that they are an Eight or they know that they're not. I feel like I'm starting with a place where people can dial in or take a little break.

Jessica: Well, let's dial in.

Suzanne: Okay. Well, I'm going to just give you one piece for each of the nine personality types. If you ever want me to talk to you for eight hours, call me and I'll give you all the pieces.

Jessica: We'll make sure that everyone knows how to contact you at the end of the session.

Suzanne: Okay, that would be great. In order for Eights to grieve, the first thing they have to embrace is the most difficult perhaps, and that is that they're not in control. Control is an illusion and Eights tend to, by nature, immediately begin to control

their environment. And then secondly, Eights have a tendency to deny their vulnerabilities. The problem is that if you're an Eight, when you deny your vulnerability, that doesn't mean that you're never vulnerable. It just means that you're not aware of that. It doesn't mean that those vulnerabilities don't have influence over you. Because Eights believe that they can reshape and rename reality, they are unprepared for great loss and they tend to manage it rather than experience it. I think Eights in situations and community or in families where there's loss, they end up leading. Everybody wants them to lead, and so they step up and lead. If you think about this, if you're an Eight, you will trust maybe ten people in a lifetime unless you're exceptional. Losing one or more of those ten will be absolutely devastating. But if you can prepare for it with some of the work that you can do with the Enneagram, then you can do far better with grieving and with allowing space for other people around you to grieve.

For Nines, it's so interesting to me. People ask me what number I would be if I could pick a number, and my answer is I would for sure pick Nine. I'm married to one, and he's just not easily ruffled. It's a thing. But I would say that I say to him frequently, staying comfortable eventually creates discomfort, and avoiding conflict eventually creates conflict, and narcotization is not good when trying to avoid feeling. For people who are Nines, despite your need for preserving a sense of comfort, calm and peace, the truth is that avoiding feelings and being affected by all that is happening around you and an awareness of your own desires tends to lead to isolation, and isolation is never good when dealing with grief. Some things have to be experienced honestly and in real time. To miss that is both tragic, and I've learned that if you don't grieve in real time, regardless of your personality type, that opportunity is unredeemable. The farther you get away from the event that would cause you to grieve, the less likely you are to grieve fully or effectively. I think Nines have to claim in those times that their presence matters to everybody else, and it matters in the moment. If they've had a great loss, I think they have to claim in that moment and in real time that their presence mattered to the one they lost as well.

It's fascinating to me to watch Ones, regardless of circumstance, believe that there is a perfect or a correct way to do whatever is before them. The idea that there is a correct way to grieve is a burden that nobody should have to carry. It is an assignment that doesn't exist in reality. There is no correct way to grieve. There's no standard way to grieve. There is no commonly approved of way to grieve. There's only your way. When Ones are dealing with significant loss and trying to do it perfectly, it prevents any opportunity to have the available experience of pain, anger, a lack of understanding. The fact that things can't be done correctly, that there's no rule book tends to make Ones angry at the wrong time in the wrong place. Ones who are trying to not share any anger tend to be the people for whom anger comes out sideways, and then that just creates more and more and more pain. I've had the gift of watching two Ones really grieve

from a healthy place, and they ended up coming out of that knowing that it was good enough, that it was just good enough, and that that's all it had to be. It didn't need to be anything other than good enough, and that you could be on that journey over a period of time and every day your response could be good enough, which then sets a One up for a whole different way of approaching other big important pieces of life.

I don't know if it's because I'm a Two, I'm sure that has something to do with it, but Twos have a significant problem in grieving because they don't know their own feeling. They pseudo grieve and then they pseudo feel good about it, and then they think they've done it. I think Twos have to do some real work in naming what they feel and in being careful that they can't associate it necessarily with the feelings of people around them. We talked a little earlier about whether or not you could do three-centered grieving. I want to give an example of that here because I've got one and I'll not do that for every number, but I'd like to do one. My mom lived to be 92, and she did life on her own terms. She rehabbed from a broken hip at 90, and she broke her hip again at 92 and insisted on surgery. We all thought that that was very dangerous for her, but she didn't really care and she died. She died two weeks after surgery. We had to drive an hour to the small community that I'm from from the hospital. We got there and my whole family was there. I had a very dominating sister-in-law. My brothers are 18 and 15 years older than me. The day my mother died, there were tornadoes within a mile of her home, so we were in a closet and I was grieving, I was feeling and doing and feeling and doing.

During the tornado time in the closet, this sister-in-law said, "I either want your mother's dinner ring or her wedding ring. I've been in the family almost as long as you have, and one of those is rightfully mine." Because I didn't do three-centered grieving, I gave her the wedding ring in the closet during the tornado, because all I was doing was feeling and doing and feeling and doing. Now, I want to talk about the fact that the value of the rings is not the value of the story. The value of the story is that we all make those kinds of mistakes when we use two of the three centers, when we're trying to figure out how to manage loss. Generally, the stories that I hear from across all the numbers is that you often add to your loss when you're not using all three centers. What happens with Twos who are feeling other people's feelings and not their own is that it enables them to take excellent care of others and then be rewarded for that and appreciated for that, and maybe even wanted for that. That feels good enough in the moment that managing the grieving piece is likely not going to come for a long time. The final thing I want to say about Twos is that when there's a loss, people seem to behave badly for the most part. Families are notorious for bad behavior at weddings and funerals.

I have discovered about myself that when things are tricky, I make people like me by being less like me. I actually just kind of become what I need to be so everybody will like me. That causes all of us who are Twos to miss opportunities for self-actualization that would serve us really well in grieving and beyond. For Threes, I would say just follow this, these are just some steps to follow. The first is that Threes have a tendency, when grieving is called for, to become what they think they need to be. Unfortunately, they're very good at it. But then, because they've become an image that isn't necessarily who they are but an image that's valued, then what happens is it's a nontransferable value from your image back to your real self when it has to do with loss. Then you see you aren't available for real love and connection, which you desperately, desperately need, especially in times of vulnerability and grief.

Fours are in a very dangerous spot because it can look like they're grieving when they're not, and they can think that they're grieving when they're not. When they are in average or unhealthy space, there are studies after studies and I could give story after story of Fours who sometimes seek love through pain or neediness. I think with grieving, when you're in it to get something rather than to experience something, then you're on the wrong road. Fours get in that place of "I'm never going to be loved and I'm never going to be happy," and that creates so much confusion. That whole history that they have of creating a way of being loved often around pseudo loss creates real confusion for Fours when they experience real pain and real loss. That makes healthy grieving problematic. Another example is that Fours are very concerned with abandonment. One way they try to control that is by abandoning other people before they have an opportunity to abandon them or leaving a communal gathering before they feel like they're not supposed to be there. They push people away and then they pull them back in, and they push them away and they pull them back in.

If you think that through, I can get it down to three things that I think are helpful. If you can own that you do create your own neediness at times in order to feel loved, if you can see that that's a problem when you are truly in pain, you've experienced some great loss and you have real need is that number one, nobody can protect themselves from real loss. If you invalidate the love that's offered to you in ways that people don't know how to approach you, then you create the very thing that you're afraid of. If you abandon people when you're afraid they're going to abandon you, or if you abandon your own desires because you're afraid nobody will hear them, then you're in no way prepared to grieve. Because Fours are the only number in my experience who can bear witness to pain without having to fix it, Fours think they know how to grieve and they think they're really good at it, and they think they're really good at bearing witness to their own pain, and it's very seldom true that they bear witness to their own pain well.

Jessica: Suzanne, I'm wondering because you gave the example with the Two about the repressed center, you call them the stances, it was the thinking center, if you might just say for each of the types, even though we won't have time to go into it, what is the center they need to be aware of that they are not usually using when they're grieving.

Suzanne: Okay, for fours, they're doing repressed. They tend to use thinking and feeling. What happens then because of that is that they have a feeling and then they think about it, and then they have feelings about what they think about what they feel. It's all very gratifying in dealing with melancholy, but it's ineffective in dealing with deep pain. Fours have to do something with what they're feeling, not just think about it, they have to do something about it. Generally, when Fours are grieving and I get to have a voice in that, when they have an opportunity to grieve, I encourage them to risk moving toward people, not just bearing witness to people, to risk doing something like conversation or participation as opposed to observation.

Fives, it's so interesting to me that grieving is a part of life for every human. Whether or not we learned to do it in a healthy way, it's there. If we're going to be healthy, that's up to us. Scarcity mentality is an enormous problem in relation to grieving. When you're protecting what you have, whether it's privacy, or money, or secrets, or time, you're also protecting yourself from friendship, love and deep connections. Loss is going to come to all of us, and we will surely, surely need support from other people. My mom was a Five, and my mom and dad were best friends. He was a doctor and early in their life she was his nurse, and they just had a lot of life going on together. They've been married 58 years when my dad died. We all adored him. Our whole family adored both of them. My mom was just doing so well, it seemed. My dad died in September, and in March, my mother came from where we're from in the Panhandle to Dallas to be with us, and we were going to the Texas coast for spring break. I had a conversation with her. I said, "You know, Mama, I know that daddy was such a huge part of all of your life, and I'm so surprised, frankly, that you're doing so well. If it were me and I had lost Joe, I would have my face in my pillow, screaming." She turned to me and said, "What makes you think I don't do that?" I learned in that moment that the reason I thought she didn't do that is because she didn't do anything about sharing that with me or with anybody else that she was close to.

She taught me well how to do so much of life, but she, until that moment, didn't teach me grieving. Her mom died when she was nine, and it was during the Depression. There was no chance for her to grieve. I think she lived her whole life with "We kind of have to buck up and be strong and get it done." I don't think that's just the story from my mother, but I do think that's a story that Fives are particularly suited to adopt and fall into. I would say to Fives, "What if you

believe that contact with the outside world would be a really good and supportive thing? Then you'd be more likely to risk being with other people, which is doing, and taking in some care and sustenance from other people." I would think that grieving alone is a reality for everybody at times, but I also can't help but believe that grieving alone all the time must be both exceedingly lonely and ineffective. It's a product of scarcity mentality, but it's just not necessary. It's just not necessary. Doing for a Five would be starting a conversation with somebody about loss and about how you're dealing with it and teaching us as her children to grieve fully and wholly and teaching us all the things that she was doing to grieve that we didn't see.

As we all know, Sixes really struggle with fear and anxiety, and I think it's such a hard time for Sixes right now in our world because, as we all know but may not have named, anxiety and anger seem to be just falling on all of us all the time. It's everywhere. I think it is the nature of many Sixes to substitute fear for grieving and not know they did it. Both feel intense. Both feel dangerous. But one is a head trip, and the other part is a journey of the heart. I think Sixes have to spend some time asking themselves, "Am I in my head or am I in my heart? Am I thinking this through? Am I thinking about things that are not actually happening? Or am I present to everything that's happening? And can I allow myself to trust the universe so that I can feel this pain and feel everything that comes with it?" In terms of Sevens, I've already really talked about Sevens. I started there. But I would say that for Sevens, movement away from pain ends up creating its own kind of anguish. I would really encourage a lot of work to not do that.

Jessica: Can we just name the repressed center for type Six?

Suzanne: Absolutely, Sixes are tricky because they're both thinking dominant and thinking repressed. What Sixes will have to do is they'll have to use productive thinking around whether or not they're in the head space or heart space. Productive thinking means limiting themselves to what they do know to be true, not what might happen.

Jessica: Then, Suzanne, just even without much explanation, but just for Sevens, the center they would need to use would be?

Suzanne: Sevens need to bring up feeling.

Jessica: And Eights?

Suzanne: Eight need to bring up feeling.

Jessica: And Nines?

Suzanne: Need to bring up doing.

Jessica: And Ones?

Suzanne: Ones need to bring up productive thinking.

Jessica: And then Threes?

Suzanne: Threes need to bring up feeling.

Jessica: Suzanne, I feel so privileged and I am imagining that many people listening to this, just the searing personal honesty and then the hard-won insight and experience that you're sharing about each type was just so moving. There were so many times when my being was opening up to experiences and realizations. I want to ask you one final question which we're asking all the faculty is can you just share one way that knowing about the Enneagram and your type has transformed your life? With you, it's particularly poignant because it's clear that you've been doing that work and it's helped you be present to this very painful experience that we human beings go to. What would you say is one way that realizing you were a Two and working with that has changed your life?

Suzanne: I was adopted at birth, and I think without the Enneagram I could have given myself away looking for a feeling of being wanted for all of my days without ever learning to have some respect for myself and some discernment around what's mine to do.

Jessica: Thank you so much. Will you let people know where they could get a hold of you, a website?

Suzanne: Sure, all my work is available at suzannestabile.com.

Jessica: Suzanne, I'm so very glad that we brought this very important topic into the summit this year. I thank you for listening all the other years, and I'm so happy to include you in the faculty and look forward to much more richness to come.

Suzanne: Thank you, Jessica.

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