

## Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

### Healing the Father Wound:

#### Part 2

**Maura Preszler**

Hello, and welcome back. In this segment I'd like to talk to you a little bit about forgiveness, and share some practical ways that forgiveness helped me see God as Father and all-loving, and how you can take some of these tips and hopefully incorporate them into your own story, in your own life. But before we start, I'd like to start with a quick prayer.

*In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Heavenly Father, just thank You again for this time that we have to be together. We just ask You to bless all of those who are watching and listening to this video. We just ask that You bring up any areas that they need to forgive in their life, and give them the grace to do so. Amen. Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

So, when I was therapy, one of the more challenging parts of it was my doctor challenged me to forgive my dad, and to forgive some of the other men who had hurt me. And when I thought of doing this, I literally cringed. I kept having these nightmares of things that my dad had done to me, and I just couldn't bring myself to forgive him. And one day I opened my bible during Holy Hour, and I want to read to you what I read, and share how it really challenged me to forgive my dad.

So this is from Ephesians, and it says... it's from Ephesians, it's Ephesians chapter 4, verse 32: ***Brothers and sisters, be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you. Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and handed Himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant aroma. For you were once darkness, and now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of the light.*** And this really inspired me, because abuse, addictions, disorders, they're all... they... society has all of these things in the dark. The devil wants these in the dark, he wants this abuse to remain hidden, to remain in the dark. And Jesus wants us to bring these things to the light, as He said. ***For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.***

And this really struck me, because my doctor always talked about how I just shared how the devil wants abuse to remain hidden, he wants this to be in the dark. And Jesus wants us to bring this to the light, He wants us to live as children of the light. So it helped me see that, yes, my dad did horrible, horrible things to me, but that doesn't need to... it doesn't need to have a hold on me for the rest of my life. Yes,

## Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

these things happened, but I can also forgive him and move on, and separate myself from those situations and start my own life with my own family here that I'm living now.

And a couple other things that really inspired me that I did during the therapy was my doctor challenged me to read the book *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Henri Nouwen. And this is a great story for anyone who has struggled with an absent father, abusive father, struggling to know God as Father, and to see yourself as His son or daughter. It takes us through the story of the Prodigal Son, and it takes us through the journey of the Prodigal Son, the elder son, and then God as Father. And it talks about how at one point in our lives, we are all like the younger son. We are all going off, squandering what God has given us, we have sinned, and we are in need of repentance.

And again, it talks about how at another point in our life we have been like the elder son. You know, when the younger son came home, the elder son was full of resentment and wouldn't even go inside the banquet. He didn't want to rejoice with his father and that his brother had come home, and he was full of resentment saying "You know, I've been with you all this time and you've never even given me the fatted calf to go and slaughter, so I can eat it with my friends." And at some point, we've all struggled with resentment in my life – I know I have, greatly. And it challenges us to get out of that place of resentment, to get out of that place of sin, and to become the father. That's what this book talks about, it talks about how we are called. You know, at one point, we're all the younger, we're all the elder son, but we're called to become the father. And the father is all-loving, all-compassionate, and all-merciful.

Yes, we are human and we will never be perfect, but we can strive to imitate God the Father's love. And reading this book helped me see that if I want to become like God the Father, if I want all of those who see me to see some glimpse of love, to see some glimpse of God the Father, then I need to forgive my dad, and I need to forgive those who have hurt me. And this was a very slow and gradual process. Forgiveness is a choice, just like love, and we need to make that choice over and over again.

So I just want to challenge you to take a couple moments and perhaps, you know, close your eyes, and think about maybe 1 person, maybe several people that you need to forgive, and just jot those names down. And bring them to God in prayer, bring them to the Blessed Sacraments, and ask God how you can forgive them, and I guarantee you He's going to show you. And yes, it's going to be hard, it's going to be hard work, but it's going to be worth it.

## Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

And I can honestly sit here and tell you today that everything that happened between my dad and I, it doesn't hold the same weight that it used to on me. Like people, you know, when I travel and give talks. Girls and men will ask me "Well, how do you know, like, when you've really forgiven someone?" And I remember asking my doctor the same question, and I firmly believe that you will know when you have forgiven someone when you can pray for them authentically from your heart, and wish them the best. And the memories, maybe the horror, the trauma that you experienced through that person doesn't hold the same weight that it used to. And that is definitely true in my relationship with my dad.

And I want that for you, I want that for you. Yes, there are relationships that sometimes you need to completely cut off, as I did when I moved to Nashville, Tennessee and got away from my family. I had to remove myself from that situation and cut ties with my family for a little bit, and take that time and focus on my own recovery. And I just want you to know that that's okay. That's okay if that's where you're at, and you need to sever ties with certain people in your family or your extended family that may have hurt you, and you need time to heal before you can let that person back into your life if they come back into your life at all.

And I just want to... I want to challenge you and I want to encourage you in your journey of forgiveness, because when we forgive, we truly do mirror God's love. And there was something so remarkable about the story of the Prodigal Son – if you look up the painting by Rembrandt that is on the front of *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Henri Nouwen, you will see the father, he has his hands on the son. And if you look closely, you will see that one hand is very masculine, very strong, and the other is very gentle and feminine like a woman. And in the book, he talks about how God as Father is both strong, but also incredibly gentle, just like a father and a mother. And the father is usually, you know, he's strong, he's courageous, he's...

You know, the father is strong and courageous, and the mother is gentle and feminine. And how these –strong and courageous and gentle and feminine – work together to show us love, and that is who God is. You know, a lot of people think of Him as this vengeful God who is always out to get us and desires the worst for us, but that simply isn't true. He is a God of love, He is a God of gentleness, He is a God of compassion. And I want you to get to know that God, that Father, because He truly does love you and care for you.

And I want to share a couple other tips that I actually have taken right from my therapy journal that I want to share with you, because these really helped me. These were things that I went over with my doctor that really, really helped me in

## Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

my journey of recovery, and I want you to have the same relationship with God the Father that I've come to know, and I want you to experience forgiveness and freedom. And so it is my joy to share this with you today.

The first one: free will. I think a lot of people think that if something horrible has happened, it's either by chance, or that God is out to get them, or that they've done something wrong so God is going to punish them, and I definitely experienced this as a child. I, you know, as I mentioned previously, you know, growing up in such a domestic violence filled home, I thought that God was out to get me. You know, I was learning about God at school, but at home there was so much violence and anger and trauma and terror, and I didn't understand how, if God loved me, these things were happening.

But my doctor helped me see that my dad has free will. He... God gave him free will when he was born, when He created him. And it's because of his free will that he chose to be abusive; it's because of his free will that he chose to... that he had the ability to hurt... that he hurt me, and my siblings, and my mom. And, you know, we can do 2 things with our free will: We can choose to love and serve God, or we can sin. And that sin was grave abuse from my dad. And just because he sinned and hurt me does not mean that God loves me any less.

You know, I used to think that God, if God loved me, He would swoop down from heaven and stop the abuse from happening, but that simply is not how it works. You know, God wouldn't be God if He did not allow my dad to have free will, and he needed to make that choice, just the same way I made the choice that I was going to focus on my recovery and get better and find help. And I want you to use your free will for the good, I want you to use your free will to surround yourself with people who will lift you up; to get accountability for whatever it is that you're going through; to maybe call a counsellor if you're really struggling with an absent father, or abuse, or an addiction; to go talk to someone who can help you. Maybe that means that you need to take medication for a little while or for the rest of your life. Whatever it may be, I want you to use your free will so that you can be the best version of yourself, that you can get to know God as Father, and see yourself as His son or daughter.

And another thing that I learned was, you know, therapy was incredibly challenging. And when I went to therapy, every time, I had a goal. I had a goal that one day I wanted to get married and be a mom, and be the best wife and mother that I could be. And I got married 3 years ago this past July 4<sup>th</sup>, and my brother, my older brother Matthew, who is just an amazing man, walked me down the aisle. And I remember... so my goal for therapy was, as I said, to get married, and be a mom and, you know, just be the best that I could be, and I remember when I was in

## Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

the back of the church, you know, all the bridal party had walked down the aisle, and I was walking to meet my brother, and I just said a prayer to my, you know, silently, and I just felt this hug from God. Like, “This is the moment, Maura. This is what you prayed for. This is what you sacrificed for.”

And I had tears just running, you know, just coming down my face, and I had to wipe them off so it wouldn't mess up my makeup or my beautiful wedding dress, and I just felt God's love in such a real way. And it's so amazing when you see that what you've worked for kind of come, you know, come full circle, come to fruition. And my brother walked me down the aisle and gave me away to my husband, and it was just such a moment of “God, You are awesome, and You can do anything.” And He, you know, all the glory to God, and He did that to me, and He wants to do that for you too.

So I just challenge you to set a goal for yourself – whether that be become a priest, or religious, or get married and have a family, or finish college, or whatever it is, the goal that you want to set for yourself – that you need to focus on your recovery, you need to focus on becoming the best that you can be before, you know, you enter your vocation or whatever it is that God has for you. Just pick a goal and stick with it, and just run that race alongside God. And He's going to be there every step of the way with you, in moments when you feel like giving up, in moments of despair. He is going to be there offering you hope, and I just encourage you to run that race with the Lord.

Another moment was when, you know, I wanted to be a mom, and when my first son was born, Pio. And I was in labor with him for 22 hours, and it took 2 hours of pushing to get him out. And when they placed him on my chest, the doctors placed him on my chest, it was another moment where God was like “You did this Maura.” Like “You worked hard. You fought the good fight, and I'm giving you this gift. And I want you to raise this boy to know Me, to love Me, to serve Me.” And I just got chills all over. You know, I just got chills just sitting here thinking about it, because I could not be the best wife, I could not be the best mother that I can be unless I took that time for myself, unless I found that healing.

And our journeys are continuous, you know. I certainly haven't arrived. I'll be on this journey, you know, until the day I die, but I want to inspire you and encourage you to find something that... something, a dream of yours that you want to attain. And perhaps it's today, just call a counsellor, or reach out to me, or reach out to someone you know who can help you set up a plan for your recovery, for your... God wants to give you that peace, He wants to give you that peace and freedom and healing, and it's there waiting for you.

## Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

And another thing was my doctor challenged me. I wrote in my therapy journal to be thankful for the cross. And this is so important, because I look back on my life and – I mean, I'm only 32 years old, but the past 32 years of my life – and I see so much pain and so much anguish, but also so much beauty and so much goodness. And I think about my relationship with God the Father, and I would not know Him the way I know Him now if it wasn't for the pain, and the trauma, and the abuse that I experienced as a child.

Absolutely God does not want that to happen to anyone, He doesn't will abuse, He doesn't want it. But it happens because we have free will, and people choose to use their free will for evil, to sin. But what we do with the circumstances that we're either raised in, or the environments we're in, that will make us great. That will make us... that will make us a saint. And however you grew up, whether your father was there, he wasn't there; whether he was an alcoholic or abusive; whether he was absent or just not emotionally present, I want you to thank God for that. Thank Him for...

Thank Him for that cross, because that cross is going to lead you to heaven. That cross is going to be your sanctity. And I just want you to remember that forgiving someone who has hurt you, that doesn't excuse their behavior, that just prevents their behavior from destroying you. Thank you so much for being with me today. It's been a pleasure to share my story and a little bit of my journey with you, and I just want you to know that I wish you all the best. I've been praying for you, I will continue to pray for all those that watch and listen to these videos. And I just want you to know that you are beautiful, you are valuable, you are enough, you are strong, you are courageous, you have what it takes, and you are so deeply, deeply loved by God the Father.