

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

The Longest Hour:

The Story of My Son, a Soon-to-be Saint, and a Miracle Part 1

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Hi! I'm Bonnie. I am so honored to be with you for this session, and why don't we start with a prayer?

In the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen. Come Holy Spirit, come Holy Spirit. Almighty God, I thank You, I thank You for bringing us together. I ask, Lord Jesus, that You would be with us. Holy Spirit, I ask that You would guide my words and open our hearts, that we may follow whatever prompting it is that You want us to, to hear, to listen, to act on. Lord Jesus, I believe, and I trust that You will take whatever grief, whatever pain, whatever suffering, whatever brokenness or wounds that we have, that You will take those and redeem those. And Lord Jesus, I believe that You will bring mercy and healing to those situations, those pains and those wounds. Almighty God, I ask that You would be with us, be with us. And glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, it is now and ever shall be. World without end. Amen. In the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen.

Okay. I am so honored to be one of the speakers for this retreat, and I am so honored to be invited to walk with you through whatever burdens or suffering it is that you have. So thank you, thank you for allowing me to be a part of this with you. It really, really is an honor. I don't know if you're familiar with my story: My son, James Fulton, has an amazing story of his birth, and what happened afterwards. But before I really jump into that, I want to start with a verse. It's from the gospel of John, it's a favorite of mine, because it always brings me such hope in any situation where I'm suffering.

Okay, so it's from the eleventh chapter of John, it's from the story of Lazarus. So Jesus has just been told that His friend, Lazarus, is ill. But instead of hurrying to go see him, He stays and He waits, right. And everyone is kind of like "Uh, Jesus, what are You doing?" But Jesus says, in verse 4: "This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." I hope and I pray that whatever it is, whatever burden or grief or sorrow that you have, that it will end in life, and that it will end in the glory of God. That the Son of God will be glorified through it. Okay. So with that kind of as our context to everything else I'm going to say, let's jump in.

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Okay. My story about my son, James, really begins not with his birth, or even his pregnancy, but my engagement to my husband, Travis. Travis and I have been married for almost 12 years – I'm going to round up a little bit and say 12 years – and I still remember though, during our engagement, when we were presented with all of the church's teachings about married life, about children, about families, babies, all of it, one of the things that we were taught was that children were gifts. Only and always gifts. And that really struck a chord with us. That, that truth sat in my heart, and I knew it was true. And because of that foundational teaching, that everything else of the, you know, everything else could be built upon that one teaching, children are only and always gifts, I knew that was true, and I knew that we were going to enter our married life accepting whatever gifts God wanted to send us.

God just so happens to really like giving us the gifts of children. In our 11 years plus of marriage, I have been married... gosh, I have been married once. I have been pregnant 8 times. Our first child was lost in miscarriage, but I then went on to have 7 kids in 9 years. So God really loves to give me the gift of babies. And I don't say that, you know, I know maybe the cross that you are carrying is infertility, and so I don't say that to, like, kind of put salt on any of your wounds, but I say it just for the context of, you know, this is kind of where God...

God gave us the gift of 8 pregnancies in 11 years. And the first baby we lost in miscarriage, but we then went on to have 7 children in 9 years. And so, again, God really loved giving us this gift. And I remember when my firstborn was not yet 2, and my second-born was just 3 months old, they were playing in the living room – I mean, as much as a 3-month-old baby can play I guess – they were in the living room, and I was sitting on the edge of my bed holding a positive pregnancy test, and this was not a planned pregnancy. My husband is a public high school teacher, and I am a stay-at-home mom. And basically what I'm telling you is we do not have a lot of money, right, and we had even less then.

And so I just remember, you know, looking at that positive pregnancy test, and then looking out the window and praying, and saying "God, I believe that this baby is a gift. I believe that You have a purpose for this baby. But I'm going to need You to provide, God, because things are tough, and You better provide." And folks, I could spend the next 20 minutes giving you example after example of ways that God did provide for us. And He did. He showed up in big ways.

I'll give you one example, this is my favorite. I was actually at Spiritual Direction, and I was talking to my priest, and I was telling him "You know, I do not feel very pro-life." I was like "I cannot have another baby. I cannot do this. I cannot do this." And, at the time, I didn't know I was pregnant, and he, you know, so we kind

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of had to talk through that and work through that. And a month later, I show up and I say “Well, father, joke’s on me, because as I was having that conversation with you last month, I actually was pregnant.” And he said “Well, gosh, how do you feel about that?” And I said “You know, I think that the Lord wants to bless us with this baby, and this is a gift from God and, you know, He’s generous, and He’s going to provide. I just believe it.” And my priest said “That is really interesting that you say that, because I have something for you.” And someone had given him something to be passed on to us.

And so father handed me an envelope from this anonymous person, and I took it. At the end of our meeting, I took it, I left. And I got in my van and I opened up that envelope, and inside were five \$100 bills. Now, I know five \$100 bills is a lot of money to a lot of people, but when you are broke it is a LOT of money, okay! A huge amount of money. And I just remember thinking “Oh, Jesus, You are amazing!” You know, I was just... I was... I was flabbergasted, it was amazing. And I drove home, and the first thing I did was I went to the mailbox to get the mail, and in the mailbox was our car insurance bill for \$482.

You guys, that is a hard bill for us to pay every 6 months. And I remember looking at that number, \$482, and I just grinned, and I laughed, and I said “Not only did You give us enough money to pay this bill, You gave us so much we could go out for ice cream too.” I mean, it was such a treat. And I have so many more examples like that, of ways that God was faithful and generous, ways that He provided for us during that pregnancy.

Now, another thing He did was we met a man who was soon to become a very good friend of ours: Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen. Now, you may be familiar with Fulton Sheen already. In a way, I already knew who he was, kind of in a peripheral sense, I knew who he was. I grew up in the Peoria area, and Fulton Sheen was born in the Peoria area, raised in Peoria. Then, he was a priest for the diocese of Peoria. I remember my grandparents talking about Fulton Sheen. So I kind of knew who he was.

But it was during my pregnancy with James that I sat down and I watched a YouTube video of Fulton Sheen preaching, and he was really good. He was really, really good. He was funny, he was articulate. He took these ideas and these theological principles and teachings of the church that were very delicate and intricate and sophisticated, and he explained them in a way that I could understand. And he did it with humor, with wit. He was elevating me to his level, not dumbing it down. He was bringing me higher. I was so impressed, that when my husband got home from work that day, I made him come and watch the YouTube videos with me. And together, we thought “Oh my goodness, this guy is just amazing,”

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you know. And so we knew at that time, if the baby in my belly was going to be a boy, because we didn't know the gender, if he was going to be a boy, we were going to name him after Fulton Sheen. Because we knew his cause was open, we knew the cause for canonization was open, and we believed, watching those videos, that he would be a saint.

So, from that day, we learned more and more about Fulton Sheen. We watched more videos, we listened to him preaching, we read more about him. And I started praying every day and asking for Fulton Sheen to watch over the baby in my belly, to walk with my child for the rest of his life, and to be constantly praying for us, constantly praying for us. And so that was really the beginning of this beautiful friendship that has carried on all of these years later. Another example of the ways that God was generous and faithful.

And so, you know, between all of the, you know, the money and the friendships and the support, it was so much you guys that I remember one day, you know, at the end of the day actually, laying in bed with my husband, Travis, and saying "There is something really special about this baby. Like, this is incredible, the things that God is doing in our lives." And Travis and I looked at each other, and we were like "This kid is going to be a pope. Like, I am pregnant with the future pope! This is what's going on. This is amazing! I'm pregnant with the pope." So, I mean, it really was. It was just amazing.

So, with all of that going on, we get to early September, and I go into labor. And you guys, it was beautiful. It was a beautiful September evening. And, you know, I'm a blogger, I was on Facebook, my blog. I got online and I told people "I'm labor, please pray for me." And I knew that I literally had people all over the world who were praying for me. And we had friends come in, you know, some friends came. One came to take care of my other kids, one came to be in the room with us and take pictures – pardon my squeaky chair.

So we had a friend coming in to take pictures, and to pray there in our home for us, you know. And you could tell the whole evening was bathed in prayer. It was beautiful. There was something in the air. You could just tell that we were on the cusp of something great. I was about to give birth to a pope. I mean, it was amazing. It really was though. I mean, all jokes aside, it really was amazing. And the labor went so beautifully. My easiest labor by far. And it was just so special you guys, you know. It was so special.

What we didn't know though was that there was a knot in the umbilical cord. So while we were doing fetal monitoring, and the heart rate sounded great, and everything was looking beautiful, beautiful; while I pushed for 20 minutes, and my baby was descending, that knot was getting tighter and tighter, so that by the time

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James was born he did not have a heartbeat, because he did not have oxygen coming from the umbilical cord. And I remember right after he was born, you know, my midwife caught him, and then she passed him to me. And I held him in my arms, and his arms and his legs just dangled. And he didn't move, and he wasn't breathing, and he was this blue-gray color.

And, you know, sometimes birth – well, always birth – is a traumatic thing. You know, it's hard on the mom and it's hard on the baby. And maybe you'll remember those old videos, those old movies where the doctor holds up the baby by the ankles and smacks the butt, and then the baby starts to cry? The baby has to be stimulated sometimes to kind of come out of the shock of being born. And so my midwife said “Bonnie, I need you to rub his chest and say his name. He needs to hear his name, he needs to be woken up a little bit.” And so I rubbed his chest and I said “James Fulton, James Fulton it's your momma.” But he didn't move.

And so she... I mean, I maybe held him for 5 seconds, and then she took him out of my arms and put him on the ground. She looked everywhere, you know, searched his body, trying to find a pulse and could not find one. So chest compressions were started, and my husband reached for my cup of water, and he dipped his fingers and thumbs in it, and he let the water drip on James' forehead. And he made the sign of the cross, and he said “James Fulton, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” And I was going into a state of shock, but I remember thinking “Okay, that's good. That's good.” Because my job as a mom is to get my kids to heaven. And so, you know, even if, even if James didn't make it, he would go to heaven.

Now, we, we believe there's power in the names we give our kids. We are very intentional that we give our children a family name and a saint name, because we believe that every time we speak that child's name, we are invoking that saint, you know. So, for example, if I say “Teresa Mary, get over here right now.” Then, you know, Mother Teresa and Mother Mary are both in heaven, and they are praying that Teresa will make the next right choice. They are interceding in her life. But we really do believe that. And so it is with James Fulton. You know, when Travis spoke James' name during the baptism, we were invoking Fulton Sheen and his prayers.

And I remember, you know, later, our friend who was there praying and photographing the birth, the event, she told us that as soon as she heard Travis say James Fulton's name, she had what I would describe as a mystical experience. She was overwhelmed with images of Fulton Sheen, with this powerful feeling of his presence, and his prayers in that moment and in our son's life. It was profound. And then there was me, and I was tired, I was looking at my dead son, I was going

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into shock, I felt like I was moving further and further away from my baby. And I sat there on my bedroom floor, because James was a home birth, I sat there on my bedroom floor and I didn't know what to say. I had no words.

But, because I had been praying and asking Fulton Sheen to pray for my son, every day – for months I've been doing that – what I did, what I remember doing is sitting there and saying “Fulton Sheen, Fulton Sheen, Fulton Sheen” in my head, over and over and over again. “Fulton Sheen, Fulton Sheen, Fulton Sheen. Fulton Sheen, Fulton Sheen, Fulton Sheen.” I had no words, I needed Fulton Sheen to pray for me. I needed him to fill the gap, and I needed him to pray for God's will to be done. I need him to pray for a miracle.

Our friend then called 911 as soon as the baptism was done. She knew it was bad, she had been a NICU nurse. She later told us “Bonnie, you know, the only time I have seen a baby look the way James looked was when I was carrying one to the morgue.” So she left, called 911, and we waited. We waited for the ambulance. And that's where I'm going to end this section of my talk. I promise it gets better, but I stop here in the midst of the suffering and in the midst of just what was maybe the darkest, longest hour of my life so that you know that I've been there. But we hope in the Lord who made heaven and earth. Let's pray.

In the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord Jesus, You are so good. Help us to always be grateful, and to remember Your goodness. Even in our darkest times, when we feel abandoned, when we feel scared, when we are angry and bitter, help us, God, help us, help us, help us to remember that You are faithful, and that You are generous. Holy Spirit, be with us. Jesus, I trust in You. Amen. In the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thanks guys. God bless.