

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

The Longest Hour:

The Story of My Son, a Soon-to-be Saint, and a Miracle Part 3

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Hi guys, I'm Bonnie Engstrom, and it is so nice to be with you for the third instalment of this 3-part series in this healing retreat. It is just an honor to be with you. But before we go any further, why don't we start with a prayer?

In the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen. Come, Holy Spirit. Come, Holy Spirit. Heavenly Father, thank You so much for bringing us here. God, I ask that You would send Your Holy Spirit. May He fill me up, may He sharpen my mind, bring focus to my thoughts, clarity to my words. May the Holy Spirit be in the hearts of everyone who's listening. Lord, may we receive whatever word it is that You want us to have. God, I just ask that I would do a good job with this. Help me to do well for Your praise, for Your glory, for Your honor, and for the healing of hearts. Jesus, I trust in You. Amen. In the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen.

Okay. Well guys, it is just really good to be back. I want to do a quick recap before I jump in to the rest of my talk. So in the first talk, I kind of shared with you how, from the very beginning of my son's life, I knew that he was a gift, that this baby was a gift. And all throughout that pregnancy, God had been generous, and He had been faithful to us, and it was just so, I mean, it was beautiful, it was wonderful, it was amazing. And it kind of set us up because when our son was born, he was a stillborn, and we were just shocked. Just shocked. And I shared in the last talk how, after not having a pulse for 61 minutes, James came back to life. But the doctors warned us, you know, "No one is dead for an hour and is okay." So they prepared us for James to die again, or to at least live a life that was just very, very filled with very severe disabilities.

But, you know, we had prayed to Fulton Sheen, and we had asked for Fulton Sheen to pray for our son, and for Christ to grant us a miracle through the intercession of Fulton Sheen. And that's what happened! That's what happened! I ended my last talk by saying that by the time James was 9 months old, we knew, we knew that God had heard our prayers, and He had answered them. And so we took our information, we took our story, our medical records and everything, and we contacted the Sheen Foundation and the Diocese of Peoria, and those were the 2 entities who were pursuing the cause for Fulton Sheen's canonization. And, you

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

know, we reached out to them, we told them the story, and they said “Yeah! This is amazing. This is amazing.”

And so a full investigative tribunal was opened, there were over 20 witnesses who gave their testimony, all of the medical records were examined, everything was packaged and sent to Rome. And in Rome, the postulator, who's sort of like a, I don't know, like a lawyer if we'd say, he took all of that information and he wrote what is called a Positio, kind of like a position paper that argues that a miracle happened, and it happened through the intercession of Fulton Sheen. And when that Positio was submitted to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, it's basically a 4-step review process. And the first review happens by a team of medical experts who advise the cardinals on the congregation.

When those medical experts looked at every detail of James' story, every detail, they unanimously agreed that a miracle had happened. And then the Positio was passed on to the theologians, who advised the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. And when the theologians looked at the Positio, what they were looking for was “Did a miracle happen?” Not medically, but theologically. “And did it happen through the intercession of Fulton Sheen.” And again, it was unanimous, and all the theologians agreed that a miracle happened through the intercession of Fulton Sheen. I mean, this, this was amazing. This was amazing!

So right now, that's where we are. And, hopefully someday soon, the actual Congregation for the Causes of Saints will receive that Positio, and they will review the alleged miracle of the complete healing of James Fulton Engstrom through the intercession of Fulton Sheen. And if they agree that it's a miracle, if they approve the alleged miracle as a real miracle, it will go on to our Holy Father. And if our Holy Father approves the miracle, then Fulton Sheen will be beatified. I mean, that is like surreal to say. It's awesome, you know. It's like a miracle of biblical proportions. My son was dead, and Jesus Christ brought him back to life. It's amazing. It's amazing.

But I wanted to say I know that not every story is going to end like this. I mean, in fact, you know, my very first pregnancy ended in death, and I miscarried my first baby. And I remember as soon as I saw that spotting, I knew it was probably happening. And I remember begging God to spare the life of my child. And He didn't, you know. We lost that baby. A year ago, in the spring, we found out that my 10-year-old daughter needed open-heart bypass surgery because she had 2 congenital heart defects that we knew nothing about, and that she would need to get those taken care of as soon as possible. I mean, that just... it was terrifying, and it rocked our world. It was horrible. It was horrible.

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

So I don't want to... and I share those things with you because I don't want you to think that, like, life has been easy, you know. We, we had this miracle, God had been nothing but... I mean, He has been nothing but generous and faithful to us. But we have also had our fair share of suffering, most definitely. And I wanted to say that I sometimes think that it's even easier to say yes to God in the big things, at least that's my lived experience. When something is so huge as open-heart surgery, or a stillborn baby, or, you know, a hospital stay for jaundice, or just, you know, whatever, all kinds of things that have hit me as a mother, when I'm faced with those things, it is so much easier to say "Fiat, Jesus. Let it be done onto me according to Thy word." Because, as I said in the previous talks, the other option is I choose despair, and I choose to just give in to these feelings of hopelessness and depression and darkness. And I don't want to live that life. I know that Jesus Christ is the light of the world, I believe that with my whole heart. And so I choose, I choose to hope against hope. I choose to say yes to Him.

I find that it is much harder to say yes to God in the little suffering of the everyday. When I'm feeling overwhelmed, when I'm stressed out, when I just, you know, everything is happening, I can't control it, whatever, you know. Whatever it is – it's just a bunch of little things: I burned dinner, we're late for an appointment, I completely forgot about an appointment, I have 3 kids who are crying and I can't take care of all of them at once. You know, whatever it is, it's those things that is so much harder for me to turn to God and say "Yes, Lord. Yes, Lord. What is the next loving thing to do? How can I serve You? How can I live my life that will honor and glorify You?" That's where it's harder for me.

And in reflecting on that, I've come up with a few little tricks and tips that I want to share with you. Because no matter how big the suffering is, if it's just part of the mundane everyday suffering, or if it's just this huge pocket of grief that is hanging over you, you know, I humbly submit these things to you in hopes that they will help you as they have helped me.

So, the first thing is that, you know, the church gives us redemptive suffering, and it's a gift. And I know a lot of people of other, you know, Christian denominations and other just denominations or religious beliefs, they don't have the teaching of redemptive suffering. Not the way that we have, definitely. But to know that I can offer it up and unite it with Christ, and that He can do something beautiful with my pain, I mean, that is such a gift. Such a gift.

And sometimes I'm really bad in the moment at offering it up, and so I have found that a morning offering is the best thing to do. I am really partial to the one that begins "Oh my Jesus, through the immaculate heart of Mary, I offer You my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of this day, for all the intentions of Thy Sacred

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

Heart.” That’s my favorite one. And I just know that when I start my day that way, Christ will take it all. He’ll take it all, He’s going to redeem it all, He’s going to use it all. It’s all going to be, you know, sent up for the Father. It just brings me a lot of comfort knowing that He’s got it. And not only that, but Mary has got it too, and she’s offering it up with me. So I’m not alone in that, which is just... it brings me a lot of comfort, it’s beautiful. Every moment of my day can be redeemed by Christ then, because I’ve already welcomed Him in to every moment of my day.

The next thing I do is I take specific intentions and I partner them with specific actions. So, you know, one of my babies, it was kind of precarious, we thought we were maybe going to lose the pregnancy, the baby, and I had to have progesterone shots. And that is a whole process, and kind of painful, and I had a lot of anxiety about it. So I would use that opportunity, every time I had to have a progesterone shot, I partnered that with a specific prayer intention. Or, every time I cleaned the bathroom, especially around the toilet – it gets kind of gross, I’ve got a lot of little boys. So every time I do that, I pray for my friend whose husband has Lyme Disease. I pray for him, I pray for her, I pray for their marriage, I pray for their family, I pray for his healing and his health. And suddenly, I’m not doing this gross, dirty, everyday chore; I am joyfully, and really sincerely I am joyfully praying for my friend. It becomes this huge, beautiful act of love. And I know, I mean, that is redemptive suffering. That God can make something as gross as toilet bowl cleaning just a beautiful opportunity of prayer. So I invite you to do that too, to find whatever your sufferings are, and assign them to specific people and specific prayer intentions.

The next thing that I do, and this is biblical, is that I recount all the ways that God has been faithful and generous. All the ways that God has overwhelmed me with His mercy and His love and His provision, and I remind myself, and I recount it. And, I mean, think about it, it happens in the bible over and over and over again, especially in the Old Testament. “Israel, your God did this and this and this, and He freed you from these people, and He freed you from these people, and He led you out of slavery, and He did these things, and He will do this.” And then the Israelites were like “Oh, yeah. He did do that and that and that, and He freed us from this, and He led us out of Egypt, and He did all of these things. And He will, He will see us through to the next thing.” It’s beautiful. It’s humbling, and it’s beautiful, and it’s cause for such joy and love, you know. Like, my God is such a big God, you know. He has not abandoned me, and He will not. So do that. Keep a gratitude journal if that’s what would help you to do it, or just, you know, in the midst of it, think back. You can maybe just even have one thing. Where is one big way that God showed up in your life? And go back to that, and praise God for that.

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

The next thing I do, and bear with me, because this is a little bit quirky, but I promise you that this has helped me to say “Fiat” to our Lord in some really tough situations. So what it is, is I ask myself “What would Saint Bonnie do?” This is why: Think of all the saint stories that we tell. You know, we’ll talk about Saint Maria Goretti did this, or Saint Katharine Drexel did this, or Pier Giorgio did this, or John Paul the Great did this. And we talk about these, you know, we share these stories in the midst of “If you’re in a difficult situation, well this is what JPII did.” Or “If you’re struggling with a person, this is what Saint Therese did.” And we have these stories of heroic virtue lived out in really ordinary situations, and we tell them to one another, or to ourselves, we read about them in books to encourage us to do the same thing. To be saints, to love perfect, to throw away vice and to grow in virtue, right.

So when I’m in a difficult situation, I’ll say “Okay, if this were a saint story that was being told in 100 years, how would the saint story go? What would the plot be, and what would the conclusion be? What would Saint Bonnie do?” And I ask myself that, and I think it through, and sometimes I’ll go “Oh yeah, okay, that’s what Saint Bonnie would do. I could do that. That’s okay.” And sometimes I go “Oh, no. I know exactly what Saint Bonnie would do.” And sometimes, a lot of the times, it’s harder to do. You have to kind of step out of your comfort zone, at least I do. I have to stop being selfish and concerned with my own comfort, and I have to love someone more than I love myself, I have to be merciful and forgiving, I have to love, I have to be just. That can be tough sometimes.

But Jesus Christ wants us to be saints, He has given us every good thing so that we can be saints, and that’s what I want too. I mean, I don’t really care if I’m a canonized saint in the church, but I want to be a saint in heaven with Him. And so, asking myself that question in the midst of the situation, “What would Saint Bonnie do? What would be my saint story?” It really does help. It might sound kind of crazy, but it really does help.

So that’s everything I have, guys. Those are my little tricks that help me to say yes to God, to embrace suffering, hopefully to suffer well, and hopefully to live a life that honors and glorifies God. I just want to say one more time: Thank you so much for hearing me out, and for letting me share my story and my experiences with you. I want you to know that I will be praying for you, and whatever hardship, whatever grief, whatever healing it is that you need in your life, please be assured of my prayers. Alright, let’s close in prayer one last time.

In the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen. Come, Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit, thank You for showing up, thank You for being with us, thank You for being so faithful, thank You for being so generous. Almighty God, You are so good. Thank

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

You. Lord Jesus, I ask that everything that I said and did is for Your greater glory, and I ask that You will take everything, everything and perfect it. Holy Spirit, come into our lives and bring healing and comfort. Help us to be saints. Almighty God, we love You. We love You. Thank You for Your mercy, thank You for the sacraments, thank You for Christ and His sacrifice for us. You are so, so good to us. 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 Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen.

Alright, thanks again guys. God bless.