

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

Anger, Fear, Loneliness and Sorrow

Jeannie Ewing

Hi everyone. My name's Jeannie Ewing, and I'm really grateful to be making this journey with you on the Pray More Novenas Healing Retreat this year. This talk I want to give is about dealing with dark emotions. So let's begin with prayer.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord God, You are the Divine Physician, You are the healer of hearts. You know that sometimes I struggle with rage, fury, ugly thoughts, jealousy and envy, bitterness, resentment, unforgiveness, fear, anxiety, duplicity, loneliness, guilt, shame, and a whole conglomerate of other feelings that sometimes I don't want to admit I feel. But You remind me that feelings do not define me; they teach me. They guide my heart to know how to pray to You, and how I need to grow. And so I thank You for all of the feelings I feel, even the dark emotions. Lead me through them, Lord. Lead all of us here making this retreat through those dark emotions by reflecting Your light so that we can see truthfully what they are and how we can hand them to You. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Well, my friends I would say, in this journey of the healing retreat, I want to talk to you today about the dark emotions. This is something that's very important to me, a subject that's really important to me. So, in my first talk I talked about what grief is, and some of our grief triggers. I shared with you a little bit about my story with grief, a little bit. I didn't tell you everything about it - I didn't have the time or the space for that. But now I want to talk to you about those dark emotions. So I'm going to bring you back to one of the stories I had led off with in my first talk, and that was the story about my daughter Sarah's birth.

When Sarah was born in 2013, the first two weeks after her birth were probably the darkest times in my life to date. I was spiraling in a really ugly place. Two of my good friends had given birth to beautiful, healthy babies within a week of when Sarah was born. And not only was I trying to heal up from a C-section; I also had a toddler, my oldest daughter Felicity, whom I had to leave with friends from church and neighbors whom I trusted almost every day to take Sarah to get some kind of diagnostic test, to take her to a specialist, to talk about her care. "What are we looking for, what's on the horizon in terms of the surgery?"

And I was so angry. I was so angry at God about it. I yelled at Him, I cried, I screamed. I was so enraged. I almost felt like it was how Jacob wrestled the dark figure in the Old Testament. Remember that? And it was like he had to wrestle it

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before he could make peace with it and embrace it. Different theologians say that dark figure was an angel from heaven, Psalms say it was Satan himself or a diabolic figure. The point is, I think, for us that that dark figure are the dark emotions, aren't they?

So why do I call them dark emotions? Well, because a lot of people call anger, or really intense feelings - like overwhelm, loneliness, guilt, shame, deep-seated sorrow, frustration, jealousy, envy - a lot of people call those negative emotions. We think of positive emotions as joy, and euphoria, and happiness, and laughter, and... We don't think of the dark emotions as just being dark, we think of them as being negative. Well, I don't like to call them negative emotions, and this is why: Because you might have heard that feelings are just feelings, right. They are not an indicator of good or bad, it's just... they just exist, and they're actually meant to be indicators of change for us. They're meant to kind of be a radar, or a barometer I guess is a better word, that leads us to change, change something about ourselves.

But I don't think it's fair to call them negative, because anger, for example, can be very constructive. Sadness can actually be very healing. Doesn't that sound ironic? Think about the last time you had a really good cry. There are actual chemicals in your tears that differ when you are stressed vs when you are sad. Isn't that interesting? So you can look that up, but that's true. There's a different chemical composite of your tears when you are stressed vs when you are sad. And anytime you have a really good cry, you feel a sense of relief, a sense of release. So dark emotions aren't bad, they're not negative. They just exist. They're dark because they can be kind of ugly, they can feel kind of ugly to us, and they can also be very intense. And we often don't know what to do with them, we are very uncomfortable with them, and we tend to live in a world in our modern age that is also uncomfortable with dark emotions.

So, one thing I want to begin with in this talk is understanding that contrast between light and darkness. So if you think about, in scripture, when we go all the way back to the beginning in Genesis, when the Lord God created the light and He created the darkness. So don't you think that the darkness can be good? That dark emotions can be constructive? I think we need to remember that. There's also a scripture verse in Song of Songs in which it states "I am dark, but lovely." Wow. I love that verse. "I am dark, but lovely." Because, think about that again. Again, we think of darkness as being "Ugh, I don't want anything to do with darkness," because most of the time we think darkness is where things can hide, there's creepy crawlies that come out at night. We think of darkness as being a reflection of Satan, and certainly that's true, but there is a particular kind of darkness that is mystery. And remember that God is also mystery. Yes, He has revealed Himself to us through sacred scripture and sacred tradition through the church, but there is no

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way for you or for me to know everything there is to know about God. It's not possible.

So when God Himself is talking about darkness as good, because He created the night as well as the day, He says "I am dark, but lovely." We also have in the New Testament the very famous example of righteous anger, in which Jesus turned over the tables of the money changers, right. So we have to remember... And there was also a verse, I'm just remembering this, where it says Jesus wept when Lazarus died, one of His best friends. So Jesus even expressed these very human emotions that we tend to label as negative, but are actually just the dark emotions.

This concept of how darkness can be good or holy is, I think, more acceptable to us when we become comfortable with our discomfort, and thus become comfortable with the suffering of others. So, for instance, if someone comes to you and they are just a wreck, emotional wreck - because they're going through some very, very difficult trial - instead of shying away from them, you come nearer to them. You are reflecting how their darkness can be lovely. That you're entering into their pain and entering into their darkness.

And I hope that these talks during this Pray More Novenas Healing Retreat, I hope those are doing that for you. I hope that they're all entering into your darkness, entering into those places you'd rather shy away from, deny, ignore. The Lord is inviting us, though, to healing. And so I want you to remember that healing cannot happen without entering the dark emotions. I'm going to say it again because I believe it whole-heartedly, and I want you to remember... if you remember nothing else, remember this: Healing can only happen when you are willing to enter the dark emotions. Wow, that's tough isn't it?

And when you think about how... how do you do that? Well, first you recognize the dark emotion, and I listed some of them earlier. Secondly, you let it sit with you. Instead of pushing it away, instead of distracting yourself with something else, maybe doing something to be busy, maybe... whatever your diversions are - shopping, binge-watching TV, putting your earbuds in, whatever it is, internet gaming - you have to sit with that emotion, however ugly and uncomfortable it makes you, and then you need to bring it to God, bring it to prayer. "Lord, what is going on with me? Why is this happening to me? And what do You want me to do with it?" And you need to sit with it as long as you can, because the Lord will then enter into that place and He will enter you.

Now this is a journey, okay. You can't just do this once or twice, or even like a dozen times. This might take you a lifetime. I firmly believe for myself it's going to take me a lifetime to learn what I'm telling you now. It's something that I have to engage in on a daily basis, sometimes multiple times a day, so I don't want to

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mislead you into thinking this is some simple formula that, you know, does something magical for your healing journey. It's one piece of the puzzle. So you're getting a lot of different talks in this retreat, this is only one piece of the puzzle. You're getting other good pieces of the puzzle from other people and from other talks.

So, one of the ways that we can sit with the discomfort of ourselves and other people and with these dark emotions, besides entering into prayer, which is the first thing we should do, is praying for the virtue of fortitude. So you might be thinking "Well, fortitude is courage. Yeah, I need more courage in my life." And that's true, fortitude is courage. But there are also what St. Thomas Aquinas calls six sub-virtues of fortitude. They include perseverance. So what's perseverance? It means you don't give up. So let's say you're struggling with the dark emotion of discouragement. Day after day you just feel this heaviness, and it's suffocating you. You are so discouraged and you can't find any hope, you can't see any way out, you don't see the light - there's the light and the dark, right. Perseverance means you don't give up. You keep moving forward. You keep bringing these things back to God over and over. Yes it's going to be hard, yes it's going to be exhausting, but you don't give up. That's number one.

Patience. We all hear about patience, don't we? Myself included. This is not a virtue that is very prevalent in my family, but it's one that we try to work on. And patience is the... it means long-suffering. So patience means the willingness to endure and to suffer whatever God permits. So we're going back to the issue of discouragement. It means you're willing to endure the discouragement. That's patience.

Magnificence. This is a... it seems a little out-of-place. I'm just giving you a rundown of the Thomistic virtues related to fortitude. Magnificence is actually doing the right things with your money, okay. That might not seem related, but let's go back to discouragement. Let's say you're discouraged because you can't find a job. You've been looking for a job for months, maybe it's in your field of study, maybe you've just come to all of these dead ends and you just don't think you're going to find one. So not only are you enduring this, patience, you're persevering by not giving up. You're going to keep looking, you're going to keep trusting God will find or send you something. But you're going to do something great with your money. Well, how do you do that when you don't have a job? That's trust. That's trust. So magnificence means that, even in the midst of your discouragement, you are going to pray about how you can help someone out with your money. And it doesn't have to be a lot of money. That's part of fortitude.

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Magnanimity. Magnanimity I love, I love this one. This is a sub-virtue of fortitude that means striving for greatness in all things, but especially great things, excellent things. So you're striving for excellence and greatness in all things, but especially great things. So what are great things? It's the virtues. The virtues. So, striving for excellence means you're not going to be mediocre. You're not just going to sit at your computer maybe for five minutes and look for a job, if we're going back to the example I'm using here. Striving for excellence means you are going to go above and beyond all the time. Yes, it's going to hurt, yes it's going to be hard, but fortitude literally means the willingness to engage in what is arduous and difficult. That's what all of these sub-virtues I'm talking about amount to. So, magnanimity, strive for excellence in your life, especially virtue. Don't do anything halfway, do it all whole-heartedly.

Longanimity. Longanimity is not one that I'm really, really familiar with, but it has to do with longness of soul, which is what it literally means. So I'm assuming this kind of relates to patience, that long-suffering, but longness of soul may be beyond just suffering; it means that you're willing to have your soul grow through this trial that you're experiencing.

And finally, the sixth sub-virtue of fortitude, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, is mortification. So mortification is that self-denial, it's the self-sacrifice that's intended to elevate us to a higher order, to order us towards heaven, towards eternity. Why am I talking about fortitude when this is a talk about the dark emotions? Well, because I want you to remember that engaging in your dark emotions can be destructive if you give them free rein. If you just verbally explode at whoever's around you, that's not healthy. It can be sinful, it can hurt somebody else, not to mention you. But, at the same time, we're not supposed to ignore those dark emotions. It's okay to feel what you feel, thank you Mr. Rogers. If you don't know who Mr. Rogers is, look him up. He was a childhood favorite of mine when I was a kid.

And we're supposed to acknowledge feelings. Enter into them by asking those questions I mentioned earlier: "What's going on with me, Lord? Why is this happening? And what do You want me to learn from it?" Those are three things that we can ask in prayer when we're feeling really deep-seated sorrow, or loneliness, or we're feeling shame or overwhelm or anger. And then we need to remember the virtue of fortitude, and we need to pray for that. So when you complete this prayer, asking God to heal you when you are suffering from these dark emotions, sit with it, sit with the discomfort in prayer, and then ask Him to help you grow in the virtue of fortitude.

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With that I would like to close with a prayer I wrote called “The Litany of Fortitude.” *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Christ, hear us. Christ, graciously hear us. God, the Father of heaven, have mercy on us. God, the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy on us. God, the Holy Spirit, Consoler of souls, have mercy on us. Holy Trinity, one God, have mercy on us.*

From the fear of people and their opinions, deliver me, O Jesus. From the fear of rejection and ostracism, deliver me, O Jesus. From the fear of loneliness and isolation, deliver me, O Jesus. From the fear of judgment and condemnation, deliver me, O Jesus. From the fear of pain and failure, deliver me, O Jesus. From the fear of persecution, deliver me, O Jesus. From the fear of the Cross, deliver me, O Jesus. From the fear of suffering, deliver me, O Jesus. From the fear of rejection, deliver me, O Jesus. From the fear of disapproval and disappointment, deliver me, O Jesus.

From the fear of waiting in the unknown and uncertainties, from audacity and ambition, deliver me, O Jesus. From presumption and inane glory, deliver me, O Jesus. From smallness of soul and hardness of heart, deliver me, O Jesus. From stinginess and miserliness, deliver me, O Jesus. From effeminacy and impertinence, deliver me, O Jesus. From helplessness and hopelessness, deliver me, O Jesus. From restlessness and nervousness, deliver me, O Jesus. From anguish and tension, deliver me, O Jesus. From dread and desperation, deliver me, O Jesus.

From seclusion and reclusion, deliver me, O Jesus. From spiritual suffocation and heaviness, from cowardice and apathy, deliver me, O Jesus. From depression, despondency, doubt, and despair, deliver me, O Jesus. From shame and a sense of unworthiness, deliver me, O Jesus. From spiritual shackles and traps, deliver me, O Jesus. From traumas, troubles, turmoil, and torments, deliver me, O Jesus. From all inner conflict, deliver me, O Jesus. From suppression of joy, deliver me, O Jesus.

Jesus, grant me the grace of humility, that I might seek only to please You in all things. Jesus, grant me the grace of detachment, to relinquish control over the outcome of my life. Jesus, grant me the grace of abandonment, that I might surrender all of my hopes and fears, wants and needs, life and death to You. Jesus, grant me the grace of charity and clemency, to generously love and forgive everyone who has hurt me through betrayal, rejection, or slander. Jesus, grant me the grace of hope, that I might not become despondent or discouraged when life doesn't go as I'd planned but instead wait for Your promise and timing.

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Jesus, grant me the grace of confidence in You, to thank You for all that You have done, are doing, and will do in my life. Jesus, grant me the grace of strength and courage, to face what is arduous and difficult without hesitation. Jesus, grant me the grace of magnanimity, to strive for excellence in all things but especially great things. Jesus, grant me the grace of magnificence, that I might be generous with my time, talent, and treasure to bring about Your kingdom on earth. Jesus, grant me the grace of perseverance, that I may endure hardships and overcome obstacles until I achieve Your will.

Jesus, grant me the grace of patience, that I may be willing to suffer whatever You permit at the hands of others with peace and kindness to all. Jesus, grant me the grace of longanimity, to wait in vigilant anticipation for the fulfillment of the good You are doing in my life. Jesus, grant me the grace of mortification, that I may sacrifice all trials and troubles and frequently offer to You what I choose to do without. Jesus, grant me the grace of true freedom, that You will release me from the bondage of sin, spiritual sicknesses, and woundedness in Your Most Sacred Heart and by the power of Your Most Precious Blood.

Jesus, grant me the grace of interior peace, that nothing may disturb me or become too difficult to endure for my sanctification or the salvation of souls. Jesus, grant me the grace of authentic joy, to experience the gift of the present moment, to be fully alive, and to spread Christian happiness to all whom I encounter. Jesus, grant me fortitude, that all forms of fear and anxiety may be overcome by the cultivation of both the infused gift of Your Holy Spirit and the acquired virtue that leads me through Your refining fire with encouragement and fidelity.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, You created me in Your perfect image; please restore me, mold me, and use me for Your glory and the good of others. Jesus, You who are the utmost example of meekness, strength, and courage, bestow on me the necessary struggles that prune and purify my soul to make me more like unto Yourself. Pour down into my heart Your Holy Spirit, the Giver of all good gifts and graces, the One who breathes life into me when all has been broken or lost. Most Blessed Trinity, I adore You. I worship You. I thank You. Amen.