

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

Uniting Our Suffering to Jesus to Find Healing

Dr. Bob Schuchts

Welcome back. This is the third week of the Pray More Healing Retreat. And if you remember the first week, we talked about Jesus as our Divine Physician, and how He desires to encounter us, and it's in our faith that we receive His healing love. And how we all need our viewpoints changed to expand to be able to see how much He desires to heal us in the areas we need it. And then last week we talked about His presence as a Divine Physician in the sacraments, in each of the sacraments. I told the story of my brother Dave, his dying process, and how, even before his dying process, the sacrament of reconciliation, the sacrament of... two sacraments of healing - reconciliation and the anointing of the sick - and how dramatically that changed his life.

Today we're going to talk about redemptive suffering, because there was plenty of suffering in all of that. It was also healing, because it was redemptive. So before we get into that, I want to take a minute and just enter into prayer so that all of us could be just open to the Holy Spirit and allow all that we are talking about to really penetrate to the depths of our hearts.

So, In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Holy Spirit, teach us, through Jesus, how to enter into our suffering in a way that's redemptive, in a way that brings healing, in a way that brings transformation, not only to us but to the people around us. And please show us with Mary how to stand in the suffering of others, so that we can bring healing to them, and experience our own healing as we really fully enter into that with hope and with love and with faith. And we pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen. In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Too often when we talk about healing we get questions, "Well, what about suffering?" You know. "Doesn't Jesus want us to share in His own sufferings? Why would we want to pray for healing if suffering is redemptive?" And I think it's a false dichotomy. Now, there is inevitable suffering in all of our lives, so the question isn't whether we suffer or not; it's how much, and how we respond to it. And, as my good friend, Sister Miriam James Heidland, says, suffering that is not transformed is transmitted. And so the question isn't "Will we suffer?" Because all of us in this world are going to experience physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering. We can determine how much we suffer by our own participation in that, and how much we cause other people to suffer by how we deal with it. But if we

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

will allow ourselves to enter into the suffering with Jesus, that Jesus will even heal us in and through the suffering.

Now, that's a hard concept for many of us to get but, you know, everybody in the Gospels who's healed has been through a period of suffering. You know, the woman with eighteen years of suffering with a hemorrhage, the man who was by the pool for thirty-eight years, the woman who was caught in adultery, even if her suffering was only a couple of hours, it was an intense humiliation and suffering. The woman at the well, you know, was suffering for all of those years of going from one relationship to the next. I mean, there's intense suffering in all of that, and Jesus comes into the middle of the suffering and brings healing.

And, you know, the paramount example of Jesus' presence in the suffering is in His own suffering. As He goes through His Passion and the cross, He's made a decision to fully participate in our suffering. It's by His own choice, it's by His own love. But, while most of us distance ourselves from other people who are suffering and our own suffering, Jesus has the complete opposite attitude. In love, He comes close to the suffering. In love, He has compassion for the sick. In love, He visits those who are struggling. And He so identified with the suffering that He even says to St. Paul, you know, "Why are you persecuting Me?" So Jesus has completely identified Himself with our suffering humanity, and in Matthew 25 He says "***Whenever you've gone to somebody who's in prison, or gone to somebody who's sick, or gone to somebody who's hungry, and you've relieved their suffering, you've done it for Me.***" I mean, Jesus has completely entered into an identification, and nowhere is that more true than on the cross.

And in His Passion and on the cross, Jesus fully drank from the cup of our suffering and, in drinking it, heals us. Now, it seems like a strange way to heal. Wouldn't it have been easier if God just would have not made Jesus go through that? The Father may have said "Jesus, You can skip that," you know. "You don't have to go through that." But it was the means of our healing, because it was the means of our communion. That it was the means of His communion with us, so that we could have communion with Him in everything that we've suffered.

And so as we look at Jesus in His suffering, He teaches us how to suffer in a way that's redemptive, how to be transformed in our own suffering. And this is true physically, emotionally, spiritually, in every area of our suffering: If we join it with Him, we can be healed through it. And that was the story with my brother Dave. My brother Dave, when he entered into his diagnosis of AIDS, we were on the back porch and he said to me "I've been looking for a purpose, and I know this sounds really strange, but I'm going to be a person with AIDS for Christ." And, sure enough, Jesus worked through him powerfully, bringing redemption not only

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

in his own life, but to other people. There was a young man who had AIDS that Dave and I went to visit who was an unbeliever, who was suffering miserably. And when Dave was able to share his story and his joy and his faith, I believe this young man had a conversion, and we'll see him in heaven someday.

But it wasn't just strangers, it was our family. As he entered into the suffering with joy in communion with Jesus, we were healed by that. His suffering wasn't transmitted to us, even though we suffered with him; he was transformed in his suffering, and we were transformed with him as he suffered. I saw the same thing happen with my wife, Margie - who died a couple of years ago - and my father - who died around the same time. Just there was something beautiful that happened as they became sick, and turned more and more to God in that, and opened up to the grace, and just the presence of God through them, in their weakness, began to heal others in their presence.

And so it's something that we fear, it's something that we want to run from, but God can work powerful healing in our lives through our suffering. You know, there's some saints who would have the stigmata during the day, and they would be healed at night, and they'd wake up the next day and have the stigmata, and then they'd be healed at night. And Jesus was showing His presence in both sides, both in the physical healing and in the accompaniment in the physical and emotional suffering. And they were both parts of healing, because they were both places of communion. Where we get into trouble is when we lose sight of who we are and who He is in the midst of our suffering.

And so when I think about "How do we suffer with Jesus?" I think first of all about how He experienced the same kind of woundedness that we experience. Jesus was rejected by nearly everybody but His mother and a couple of the disciples. Everybody rejected Him. He was abandoned by almost everybody. They ran away. Even experienced our own abandonment before the Father, and the pain of sin, even though the Father never abandoned Him. He experienced humiliation, shame, powerlessness, hopelessness. You know, death is an entering into hopelessness. But He never lost hope, He never gave in to the belief that He was powerless.

And so He teaches us in that how, in the midst of our own suffering, in the midst of all the woundedness that comes at us, how to live in that true identity of beloved sons and daughters that we talked about last time. That's really the core of our healing. As we go through whatever we go through in life, we can't allow the suffering - even if it's people's taunts, people's rejection of us, people's abandonment of us - we can't allow their choices to be transmitted into our identity, into our livelihood. It hurts, it hurt Jesus, it hurts us, but it hurts more when we begin to believe that that's who we are.

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

You know, when my dad left, I felt abandoned, I felt very much alone. My mom had to go back to school and back to work. I was kind of on my own. The damage was not just in their leaving - there was a lot of damage in that - but the damage was also in what I began to believe about God, you know. That I'm on my own, I've got to take care of myself. If God allowed this to happen, then He's not with me. He doesn't care. And in our suffering, big and small, we tend to do that. We tend to distance ourselves from God, and we tend to try to cope on our own. And, in that, we end up abandoning God, abandoning ourselves. He never leaves us, but we can leave Him. And so that's the first thing we can learn from Jesus, and how to heal in our suffering is to stay true to our identity as beloved sons. To know that His power is made perfect in our weakness, and that that radiates out to the people around us, like it did with my family members.

The second thing is, from the cross, Jesus forgave everyone. And really, if you study the scriptures, you begin to realize that the way that we combat the suffering in our life is through forgiveness - Our own suffering from our own sins by receiving forgiveness, and the suffering that we receive from others by forgiving them. And sometimes that's really difficult, depending on how deeply we've been hurt, and I want to take most of the rest of this time now to enter into that together with you, to lead you into a little longer prayer, so that you can, in the areas where you suffer, particularly emotionally and spiritually, that you can enter into and experience Jesus' power of forgiveness through you and in you to release you from the things that have been keeping you bound up.

So I'd just like you to get comfortable and quiet, and remove any distractions in front of you. And if you want to close your eyes for this, you're welcome to do that. If you want to keep them open, you can do that also. But I want to invite you to ask the Holy Spirit to show you the person that you need to forgive. And that person could be somebody in your family, it could be somebody from your childhood, it could be somebody currently, it could be God - even though He doesn't need forgiveness, we may need to forgive Him. Or it could be yourself. It could be you're having difficulty, like my brother Dave's example of forgiving himself.

So whoever that person is, I just want you to imagine that person in front of you, and pay attention to the distance between you. Is that person close to you, or are they far away? And what do you experience when you envision them? Some people are more visual than others, so just in whatever way you envision that person, just pay attention to what you see and what you feel. How do you feel when you're in their presence?

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

I just ask you to give yourself permission to allow yourself to feel whatever it is. If you're angry, to feel angry; if you're hurt, feel hurt; if you're afraid, if you feel afraid being around them, feel that. If you feel hopeless. Whatever those emotions are, just allow yourself to experience them. And if you're angry and hurt, you're free to speak that. They're not going to hurt you right now. You're free in this exercise to express to that person "This is what I'm angry about. This is what you did. This is how you hurt me." And I think it's really important that we be honest with it. We pay attention to what we've experienced. Not being in denial of it, but that it really did hurt. Otherwise, we wouldn't need to forgive. What people did to Jesus really hurt and was unjust, and what was done to you was most likely very hurtful and unjust.

So, as you express that to the person, just allow the emotion to come up with it. Whatever it is that you feel. I'm just going to be quiet for a couple of seconds as you express that to the person who hurt you. And then pay attention to any judgments that you're holding towards that person, just kind of raw in your heart. What do you believe about that person? And just kind of speak to yourself, out loud or silently, the judgments that you're holding. Judgments are a way of condemning them and distancing yourself from them, so just speak them out loud.

And, if you're willing, I just ask you to renounce the judgments, to release them. Because the judgments, as the scripture says, keeps you bound up. Judge not and you will not be judged. Condemn not and you will not be condemned. So just release and renounce the judgments. "In the name of Jesus, I renounce the judgment that I've had towards this person. And Jesus, I ask You to give me a new perspective, maybe seeing this person when they were hurt in a similar way, or maybe seeing this person outside of the situation, just a way of seeing beyond the judgment." Just ask the Holy Spirit to do that.

And also pay attention to what you experienced from this hurt. What did you believe about yourself in this hurt? How did you internalize it? You felt unloved, you felt alone, you felt helpless, you felt afraid. Whatever it was. And how does that affect your identity? Whatever that is, just renounce it. "In the name of Jesus, I renounce that I'm unlovable, that I'm alone, that I'm not cared for, that I'm helpless, that I can't trust anybody." Whatever that is, just renounce that in prayer.

And then ask the Holy Spirit to show you the truth: That Jesus is with you, that you're loved, that you're cared for, that you're filled with His power by the Holy Spirit. And now, if you're ready, if you can invite the person to walk with you before the cross, and you can imagine you and this person standing before the cross and hearing Jesus speak the words to both of you "Father, forgive them. They

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

know not what they do.” He’s forgiving you for any judgments, resentments, bitterness that you’ve held, and He’s forgiving this person for what they did to you.

And again, if you’re willing, if you can turn and face the person and speak the words of Jesus, Jesus in you, united with you, speaking to this person. “I forgive you.” And as you forgive this person, pray a blessing over the person. Speak good into their life. Tell them that they’re a beloved son or daughter of the Father, and that, behind all of their wrong actions and sins, there’s goodness in them. And then, as you bless them, release whatever you’ve been carrying.

See, forgiveness is an exercise of redemptive suffering because, in forgiveness, we’re willing to suffer the hurt and have it transformed in us, rather than retaliate and cause the hurt with the other person. So, every day, healing happens through that kind of redemptive suffering. We experience every day events in our life where we may judge God and we may judge the people around us. But as we choose to enter into forgiveness, forgiving ourselves and our own sin, we move from unnecessary suffering to transformed suffering. We experience the suffering momentarily, so we live in peace for a longer period of time.

So, you see, as we enter into suffering, we actually reduce our suffering through forgiveness, through bringing our suffering to Jesus. As we push away our suffering, as we deny our suffering, as we retaliate in our suffering, we actually increase the suffering in our life and in the lives of the people around us. And so redemptive suffering, in all the ways we do that, is joined with Jesus in loving as He loves, trusting as He trusts, hopes as He hopes. So, between now and the next time, which will be our fourth time when we’ll look at prayer for healing, I just ask you to practice living in that redemptive suffering as a way of healing, and particularly the grace of forgiveness and staying true to your identity. God bless you.