

## The Gift of St. Therese & Her Weakness

Jake Khym

Hi, thanks for being with me, my name is Jake Khym. Looking forward to reflecting with you here for a few minutes about St. Therese and the gift that she is to us, especially when we're trying to work through our weaknesses.

### Opening Prayer

So let's pray. *In the name of the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen. Holy spirit, please come. As we take some time here to dive into and reflect on where our weakness meets your grace and love. This can be a difficult space, this can be hard to trust and believe. But we need you and we need your life in us for this to be possible, for this to transform us so that we can come to know your love and be who you made us to be. So please send your spirit and give us the things that we can't give ourselves and do on our own. St. Therese, I ask for your special intercession that you would draw us into your wonderful little way. Show us how to be holy and thank you for loving us. Thank you for all the yeses you made so that we can learn to do life like you did it. Jesus, in your name, we pray, Amen. In the name of the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.*

### A Serious Faith

So, I got really serious about my faith when I was in college. Now, I had kind of known the Lord before that, and there were some pretty neat things that happened when I was a kid with God, and well, I'll share that for another story, but when I really started to take it seriously is when I went to university and I joined the Newman Center and long story there, but it was great where I ended up going. And I can still remember to this day, kind of the first time that I heard the Sermon on the Mount. The beatitudes and all the, if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it, I mean all that really like, that's some pretty intense stuff that Jesus says there. And I remember hearing it, and there was the phrase that came out, it was from Matthew chapter five, like goes through chapter five, six, seven. And I remember hearing early on, when Jesus says, be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect. And that scripture just like captured my heart and it captured my heart in some really awesome ways because it compelled me to pursue holiness.

But it also, I misinterpreted it because I started to treat myself and other people, and approach to Christianity that if you're not perfect, you're massively failing. Like perfection or nothing. And it really led to a lot of self-reliance in me, relying on myself and not God. It led to a lot of scrupulosity in me because it was really rooted in fear that I'm not good enough, and that God won't accept me if I'm not good enough, basically like Jesus set out the criteria, be perfect, and if you're not, you're going to hell so get your act together. And I think unfortunately, that's maybe a belief that a lot of us have, a lot of us kind of have that dynamic going on in our heart where we think that if we're not perfect, we're failing Christianity, and God's just like rolling his eyes and heaven at us. And there's nothing good that we can do. And that's not good news. That's condemning news. Just notice for a moment how your heart responds to that. That we get to have

the truth of that scripture be there, but there's another way. There's a way that's deeper, richer, truer, more real, that's of God.

## **The Beatitudes**

Now, my daughter, my oldest daughter, ever since she was little, she's notorious for doing things without ever reading the instructions. We had to do a lot of work with her when she was in elementary school to teach her about reading the instructions, because she would go in to do something, an assignment or whatever, and she would never read the instructions and then she'd do it all wrong and they get really upset. And it was this basic thing about what you've, you've got to read that first sentence there 'cause it tells you what everything else that follows is actually about. And she's in college and she's still working on it. But I think there's something there because in the Sermon on the Mount, the instructions come very early. And I feel like we miss them, or we don't understand them. And the instructions are really simple. It's the first line of the beatitudes. And I'm going to read it from what's called a New Living Translation of the Bible. And this is what it says, *“God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for Him for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.”*

Okay, let me say it again. *“God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for Him for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.”* Just let that sink in for a moment. God blesses those who realize that they can't do it on their own and are honest and accepting of their utter dependence on him. What do they get? The kingdom of God. Those are some pretty important instructions to then listen to all the other things through like be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect. The invitation there is a little bit nuanced if I've read the instructions that loves it when I'm poor and I realize my need for him. Not because He likes being powerful, it's like the experience of seeing, a cute little infant who's trying to walk. I just saw one the other day at the store and this little guy was trying to walk and it was really hard and he stumbled over and I smiled. And it wasn't because you know, it wasn't like those silly YouTube videos where somebody falls over and you point and laugh, that's a shaming experience. I smiled because of his innocence, because of his honesty, because of just the beauty of what was going on. And my desire, as well as those two parents desire was to help him. I was drawn into his little stumble.

And Jesus says really clearly, in these same areas of the scripture, that what father among you, if your son asked for a loaf of bread would give him a stone, or if he asked for, you know, something, he'd give him a scorpion or, like... He's basically saying, you know even that if you fall a little bit, that if you really are loving your son, you don't want to shame them and condemn them. And then he says, how much more does the heavenly father love you. Again, some important instructions there.

## **Discipleship**

Now, a lot of stuff in the church right now we use this phrase called discipleship or disciple. Disciple literally means student. It means I'm not sure how to do it, but I'm eager, and I need someone to teach me. And so that's what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, is I wanna know how, you know how, teach me, please teach me. That's why you hear in the scriptures the apostles or

## Pray More Healing Retreat 2021 - Transcript

various disciples saying to Jesus, teacher or rabbi. They're referring to him as the one who knows who's going to offer them a better way.

Now, look at how the church has really done this cool thing where they'll actually call a particular Saint a doctor of the church. It's like they got their PhD in holiness. And so, the church says they're a doctor. They've figured out and lived a particular element of the gospel so well that they elevate them with this title of like doctor of the church. Now, a lot of us think of doctors or PhDs, and we think they're super, super smart. And they're gonna say things that we can never think of or understand and we're like, I don't even get it. That's not totally true. Although doctors and PhDs can be super smart, but it's that they've got it figured out, and they have something worthwhile to listen to.

### **A Doctor of the Church**

So, if you're a disciple and a student, you listen to the professor, the teacher, the doctor, St. Therese is a doctor of the church. And I'm going to walk you through her perspective on how to handle weakness, how to handle struggle. She was somebody who knew struggle. There are people who debate whether or not she potentially had mental illness, whether she had a personality disorder. We don't really know that. But what we know is that life wasn't easy for her, and that she struggled likely with depression, anxiety, probably potentially an attachment disorder. We see a lot, if you read that and get to know her story.

But she's a doctor of the church. She's got a lot figured out. She's a PhD in holiness. And what does she say to us, what's her primary message to us? It's summed up as the *Little way*. One of her favorite scriptures was the instructions that I just read to you earlier about those who are poor in spirit. Those who are poor know their need for God and turn to him. That's her secret.

### **Accept it, and Welcome it as a grace**

And so what am I going to do for you for the rest of our time here is, I'm just going to unpack for you some parts of a book that's maybe one of the best books I've ever read. And it's been one of the most impactful books that I've ever read about St. Therese. And it's a book by Father Jacques Philippe, maybe you've heard of him, he's amazing. Maybe one day he'll be a doctor of the church. But he's written a book called *The Way of Trust and Love*. The Way of Trust and Love. And it's all about Saint Therese and how she learned how to navigate these various dynamics that we're talking about. What do I do with my weakness? Like Therese was a doctor, she figured it out. You and I have weaknesses, that's very true. We're on a healing retreat here. So how do I respond to them? St. Therese, she's a good one to follow.

So, this book I'm going to read for you some quotes. So, let's start off with this one. This is Father Jacques Philippe talking about Saint Therese and he said, *"But I believe that these were the mysterious words of consolation God addressed to her."* What are these mysterious words of consolation that God addressed her? Here it is: *"Instead of bearing your poverty as a handicap, an obstacle, accept it and welcome it as a grace."* Okay, instead of bearing your poverty, your inability, your struggles, your falling over, you're not being able to do it, as a handicap, an obstacle, accept it and welcome it as a grace. *"This is her revolution,"* Father Jacques continues,

## Pray More Healing Retreat 2021 - Transcript

*"Her novelty. It is at one in the same time, a new way of looking at God and a new way of looking at ourselves. A way of reconciling with ourselves, all of our weaknesses."*

That's huge. How many times for you have you disqualified yourself because you didn't live up to the, be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect? We do it all the time. And what this doctor of the church is telling us is that what's this new way, what's this little way, what's this PhD, what's the path, what can you specialize in? It's basically this revolutionary way of seeing God and seeing herself that says, my poverty, my inability, it's not a handicap, it's not an obstacle. It's a grace, it's a gift because it makes us dependent on the one who can save us. Just let that sink in for a moment.

### **Our Call is to Trust**

Our call as disciples is to receive and to trust, that's St. Therese's lesson. Trust is the most important thing. Trust that leads me into a dependence on grace that maybe one day we'll be perfect, but that's not what I'm thinking about because I'm so focused on what's required for me to just stay open to God and to trust in his goodness. There is the secret. See, oftentimes when we seek healing, often what we're looking for is, "I want to get away from the thing that disqualifies me. I want to get away from the thing that makes me not perfect, because I need the validation, and the security, and the assurity that I'm perfect. I'm in, I'm good." But there's a dilemma there. Because what would we actually do if we got that prayer answered? I'm scared to say that for me, I don't know if I would actually pray anymore. I don't know if I'd actually need God. I don't know if I would turn to Him.

I mean, sometimes our prayers for healing are attempts to rid ourselves of something that's the very thing keeping us connected to God. Now, I'm not saying that, oh yeah, just keep sinning. And that's where the confusion comes in, because that be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect just is so powerfully within us. Therese knew this, like she never once was like, oh, it doesn't matter, just sit and do whatever you want. No, that's not the point. It's the acknowledgement that apart from God I can do nothing. And if I do nothing, it's apart from God.

There's that sweet spot of, yes, I'm participating with grace, but I'm not saving myself. I'm not the savior. I'm the student. I'm the little one in need, I'm the one who falls over and needs to be picked back up, and that need to be picked back up is a grace.

### **People of Goodwill**

See, there's adversity that we experience in our lives, and a lot of times the adversity we really misinterpret it. We interpret it as the problem, we interpret it as the thing that's got to be overcome. And in healing, there's a lot of adversity. Healing is usually the result of something that's happened that wasn't good. But adversity also is a blessing because for one, it makes us very dependent on God. Isn't that holiness? And two, it really exposes what we believe to be most important. Do I trust and believe that God is the thing that will answer it, or do I have to get

## Pray More Healing Retreat 2021 - Transcript

myself fixed before I can approach God? See, adversity exposes a lot in us. And if we're willing to receive it as a gift, we can learn a lot about our hearts and come back to our need for God.

You know there's this phrase that, when, several years ago, when the church tweaked some of the language and the liturgy, and one of the things that has always jumped out at me is this phrase, people of goodwill, be of goodwill, goodwill. And I've always gone, what the heck does goodwill mean? And so who do I turn to again? Father Jacques Philippe was some help from St. Therese, or maybe the other way around. And this comes out of a book by Father Jacques Philippe called Searching For and Maintaining Peace. He says, this is when he talks about people of goodwill. Here's what it means. *"Here then is what we mean by goodwill,"* he says. *"It is not perfection, nor sainthood achieved."* Like what, it almost sounds like, like you're not allowed to say that, you know. But he's one of the masters right now, drawing from a doctor. Okay, it's not perfection nor Saint had achieved because "it could well co-exist, goodwill, can co-exist with hesitations, imperfections and even falls. But it is the way which permits the grace of God to carry us little by little toward perfection." What is being of goodwill? "It's the way where we open ourselves to grace, which carries us." Not me carrying me, but grace carrying me. And so what do I do, I open to grace. I do things where grace comes in, I invite grace in so that little by little, I grow toward perfection. Not because of what I did, but because of what God is doing.

### **A Few Practicals**

So, what's my part? I confess my need. I accept my weakness as a poverty, as a gift, my weakness and my poverty as a gift. This might sound a bit radical to you, but I can tell you that it is incredibly life-giving and transformational. This has been a huge part of my journey of healing, has been, that my weaknesses and my poverty are not what disqualify me, they're actually a gift. And so a few practicals to end with.

A lot of times when these dynamics, like I'm talking about right now, or when you encounter adversity or you bump into your poverty, there's two things that are very active usually. One is thoughts or beliefs, and the other is emotions. And so I want to invite you as you're noticing these dynamics come up, when I'm inviting you to think about poverty, what are you telling yourself? And I wonder if what you're telling yourself is the same as what the doctor, St. Therese, would say. Is what you're telling yourself, coming from a place of trust and love, or is it coming from a different place that says you're not good enough? In addition to our thoughts, we got to be aware of them, and then once we're aware of them, we need to surrender them to Christ.

So literally the scripture saying that, and Paul talks about taking every thought captive under the obedience of Christ. In other words, my thought life, I can't just let it go wherever and not think it's going to impact me. I have to take those thoughts and surrender them, put them under the mission, and the love, and the truth of who God is. That's actually really practical. It's not some psycho-babble. This is some really practical things. Our minds are very powerful and doing a lot for us, and doing a lot in us, whether they're bringing a, bringing us toward God or away from God, will I trust truth within me? Or I believe the suggestions that come in my mind? Okay, so here's the second practical.

## Pray More Healing Retreat 2021 - Transcript

Our emotions are really powerful. They're always doing stuff. Our emotions are neither good or bad, what we choose to do based on our emotions, that's when things start to really get interesting. And so usually when adversity hits we get emotional, and then those emotions start stirring within us and pulling us in various directions, that's what emotions are supposed to do. But when the emotions aren't oriented toward what is good, when they're not aligned to a truth that's in our mind, they can pull us down a road of shame. They can pull us down a road of disqualification, of I will never be loved again, the whole gospel is ridiculous, Jesus doesn't love me, I'm a total failure, he doesn't accept my poverty. All of those beliefs, because it feels true. I just noticed how much we operate based on what feels true instead of what is true.

And so, you might be going like, ah, like, but what am I supposed to do then? How do I base my life on things? Like, what do I do? We turn back to St. Therese, what does she based her life on? The goodness, love, and mercy of God that never leaves us, that's always with us, and that draws us into intimacy because we need him not because we're perfect without him. Jesus said, I've come to save the sinners and the lost. I'm that lost sheep all the time. I'm the one, right? I can't ever stay with the 99 for some reason. I don't even know how the 99 stay together sometimes. Like I'm always out there. But that's the one that Jesus goes for. And he's not mad when he does it.

### **Closing Prayer**

I think a very simple prayer that we can close with that maybe you could adapt in your life is one that comes from Saint Faustina and The Divine Mercy Revelations and the Chaplet, which is Jesus I trust in you. It's a really powerful phrase and I would invite you when adversity is coming, when all those statements are coming that are to disqualifying, when all that dynamic is going on, that you would actually trust and pray this prayer, Jesus, I trust in you. So let's just pray it for a few moments here.

*In the name of the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen. Jesus in the midst of all that's going on in my life, and amidst all the struggles I might have to trust you in adversity and the struggle with my weakness. I come to you and I acknowledge how I feel, and I acknowledge the thoughts in my head, and in the midst of all of that, I say, Jesus, I trust in you. Jesus, I trust in you. Jesus, I trust in you. Jesus, I trust in you. Jesus in your name we pray, Amen. In the name of the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.*