

Healing and Moving Forward

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Okay, everybody, here we go, this is the final talk here on this healing retreat, and I prayed that, so far, the lectures that I've offered to you have been helpful to you, have been able to help you to grow in a deeper understanding of your own heart, of your own sense of self, of your own relationship with the Lord, and so what we've been talking about over the course of these four lectures, this being the fourth one, the first one, again, is just kind of thinking about our memory, and what the purpose of memory is, how it helps us in our psychological and spiritual makeup.

We've also talked about the need to look to the future with hope, and how to take steps that will lead you to a better place, how to be able to assess your desires, try to put plans together, try to understand what the goals are that the Lord has put on your heart, for you to be able to pursue those things as an act of faith. So, hope that guides us and moves us in this space of seeking goals. And then the last presentation, we talked about what it means to cling to hope when things are turning upside down and what it means that, even in those difficult moments, to be able to accept the states that guide us, allowed us to experience, but being able to still cry out and experience the hope and the grace that He offers to us. And so now, in this fourth lecture, I'm going to try to bring things that I've been talking about over the course of this series and pulling it all together to talk about healing and what healing is, or at least how I understand what healing is, because obviously it's a very broad topic.

Healing Requires Time

So healing, let me just say this out of the gates, I don't think the healing of memories or healing of our emotions is something that you do in a quick fix. I think that the healing of our memories and the healing of our emotions, our current emotional state, is something that requires some dedication, it requires some time, some understanding, some ability to assess, and dig deeper, and understand what's going on under the hood, and again, like I said earlier in the first lesson, that we are certainly capable of being able to rethink or reassess, or, yeah, what's the word? Attribute emotions to certain experiences. Again, it's not that we can go back and change the past, we can't do that, but we can certainly come to a greater acceptance of things. And so, we're going to dive a little bit deeper into what that means in this lecture.

But I just want to say that even watching this lecture, I hope it offers some suggestions, some ways for you to be able to move forward, but this isn't a magic bullet. There's no one prayer, there's no one book that's just going to fix it all, it is a process. That's why throughout these series, these lectures that I've been offering, I talk about this as a journey, a healing journey, and I really believe that. So much in the work that I do in counseling, I'm always amazed at when people come to me and you know how St. Paul says that sometimes he waters and Apollo reaps, and sometimes Apollo waters and he reaps, something to that effect, I've felt that also, that sometimes when people come to me in counseling, they're at a point where they're ripe and they're ready to kind of go into the spaces that they need to go into, but that's only because of the work that they've been doing leading up to that, and sometimes I'm just the first step, first rung,

help push things a little bit along, but knowing that somebody down the line is going to be the one who's going to take this person to the level that they need to get to in their healing journey. So, wherever you are in your journey, just submit it to the Lord, wherever you are in this process, give thanks to the Lord that you are here, that you're pursuing Him, and that you're trying to grow in a greater understanding of who you are, and a greater understanding of what's going on under the hood.

Four Elements of Healing

So, for me, how do I define healing? Well, I think healing has four particular elements to it, four things that are part of the healing process, and that's what we're going to be speaking about. So healing is remembering, healing is assimilation, healing is relationship, and healing is virtue. So, let's go break those four things down with the time that we have today. So healing is not forgetting.

Healing Starts with Remembering

The best example that I can offer of what I mean by this, that healing is remembering and not forgetting, is Mufasa, "The Lion King," a great story, my favorite Disney movie of all time, it's the best, I think it's the best story, and if you haven't seen it, then I'm sorry, I'm about to ruin it a little bit before you, but if you have seen it, listen, the movie came out over 25 years ago, so if you haven't seen it, then I don't know where you've been in that time, watch it, and I'm sorry your parents didn't show it to you when you were a kid, but you need to watch it, and so think about it in the context of healing.

There's a great scene where Simba finally is kind of called back and his conversion experience, happens through Rafiki, through the monkey, the priest character of the movie, challenges Mufasa, challenges Simba, excuse me, to remember who he is, and so he has this great kind of almost supernatural experience in the clouds, and he sees his father, and his father comes outta heaven, and he says, "Simba, you have forgotten me," I can't do James Earl Jones, I'm not even going to try to impersonate him in this moment, but he says, "Simba, you have forgotten me, you have forgotten who you are and so have forgotten me."

This notion of remembering who we are is crucial to our healing journey, and if we take it one step forward, not just remembering who we are, but remembering who the Lord is and what He has done in our life. So healing starts, regardless of what's happened in your life, healing starts by remembering who you are, remember your own goodness, remember the things that you've done, remember the life that you've lived, remember everything that has happened to you, remember, and try, and not just try, but if you can call to mind those things and pray for the grace to remember and see your goodness through the dignity that God has for you, then in that space you can have the capacity to be able to renounce some of the shame, some of the lies that certainly accompany us.

This is one when we struggle with shame, one of the best things that we can possibly do is open up to others, is being able to find trust at others, family members, friends, a therapist, a priest, a spirit director, people that we trust, people that we know and be able to open up those

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spaces within us, because when we open up and we share that sense of shame that we have about something that's happened in our past or something that we've done, what ends up happening is that it calls to mind, it helps us to remember that we are loved, it helps us to remember that, despite the things that have happened to us, we certainly are still capable of being able to receive love, of being able to give love, and so remembering who you are, see the fullness of your life in this sense.

See, so often what ends up happening is, because of shame, or because of negativity, or because of certain scripts, or hardships that we've encountered, what ends up happening is that we only choose, not just choose, but we only tend to remember the difficulties and remember the things that are challenges to our life, and I understand why we do that, because our brains are wired in a certain way, that negativity tends to be much more compelling. When something negative happens in our life, it pulls on us, and it draws on us, and we see it, and we're hard to let it go, why? Because negativity, whether it's our anxiety or whether it's threats that are happening, those things are certainly activate the survival mechanisms within us, and so the reason that we dwell on shame is because there's a lot of fear that accompanies it, and a lot of fear of social rejection, and social rejection, of course, is never good.

So, what we're trying to do is trying to encourage you to remember everything that's happened. Take a time, just take a moment right now, if you struggle with this, then try to remember just something good that's happened to you today. Just trying to be a little bit more grateful for, maybe, something that's happened to you in this moment, something, maybe, that you've even taken away from this retreat, trying to call those things into your memory as well, bring those things up into your awareness, and I believe that it will be helpful. See, but healing, if we're talking about remembering, remembering isn't just about remembering our own experiences or our own goodness, but it's also about remembering who God is and having an obedience of faith to Him.

See, the great tragedy that happens in these moments is that there's always a temptation to abandon, how do I say this? There's always a tendency to want to forget God's goodness, there's always a tendency in the hardships of life to forget that God genuinely loves us, that He's our father, that He wants to care for us, He's benevolent, that He knows who we are, and there's a temptation always to forget who God is.

This is why, like in the movie, in "The Lion King," again, like he says, "You've forgotten who you are," why has he forgotten who he is? Because what has he chosen? Simba, in response to the great tragedy of his father's life, out of fear and out of shame, runs away, and when he runs away, where does he go? He goes to the jungle, and he's hanging out with Timon and Pumbaa, who are, again, good friends, and they well-intentioned to do the best for him, but what is the story, what's the narrative, what's the motto that they live by? Hakuna Matata? Hakuna Matata, no worries, and so Simba kind of adopts this, and what ends up happening is that it becomes lazy and he negates his responsibility, and that's why when Nala comes, she challenges him, and he's just trying his best to forget about the past, why worry? Forget it all, just do what you, just have fun and no worries, but that type of lifestyle, of course, is selfish, inherently selfish, and so what you see is that Simba has forgotten his dignity, has forgotten his responsibility, has forgotten who he is as the king, by living this life of hedonism, and then, in doing so, he has forgotten who

God is, and has forgotten that the Father loves him, that the Father has a call for him, that despite the challenges and despite the sin, despite the things that he has done, God still loves him, and God is still calling him to be the man that he's always seen him to be, that's the message of "The Lion King," and that's the message for us.

And so even in our hardships, or even when we succumb to sin or some other type of struggle, we have the tendency to want to forget God's goodness, or forget God's call, or forget God's Providence, or forget God's mission, or forget the mystery of God, and how he orchestrates events, and guides us, and leads us, and does all of these things for our goodness. We forget the benevolence of God, which is why, again, when we think of that great passage in Matthew 6, when Jesus is saying, "Look to the birds, look to the lilies of the field, they do not take care of themselves, but look at the way, look how beautiful they are, how much more does your Father in heaven love you?"

That's the stuff that we want to anchor ourselves in, those are the stories, those are the truths that we want to anchor our experiences, and we cannot forget the great truths of our faith, but also remembering that part of this great truth is that God exists outside of time, and He lives in eternity, He exists outside of creation and can see the fullness of the story unfold as it was meant to be. And even in all the dips and turns and the side, he has a way of being able to constantly pull us back together.

So, one simple suggestion here is to anchor your sense of self in God's memory. How does God see us? How does God see the beauty in the unfolding of our life? Even if we can't fully understand what that means, at least in hope and out of an act of faith, we can believe that God sees the best version of ourselves, that God sees us as we were always meant to be seen, and so anchoring yourself in that reality and the beauty of who we will become.

So, this process of healing, of remembering, isn't meant to minimize the pain, of course, I'm never going to minimize that, and take that away from anybody, because we need to grow into that space, but it's also just remembering the totality of who we are and remembering that there are good things in as much as there are bad things in our life.

Healing is a Process of Assimilating

So, this brings me to, then, my second piece here, which is that healing is about assimilation. Healing, if we can just remember both aspects or the totality, or see the fullness of our life, or the fullness of who God is, and how His love and care is even present with us, then what healing is, is a process of assimilating the bad, the hardships, together with the good, and trying to tie the whole narrative together in some coherent space, and of course, I know that this is hard because many of us, of course, have experienced significant hardships, or many of us, of course, have experienced significant struggles with persistent sin, or difficulties that we can't seem to be able to let go of, but I believe that the process of entering into our experience of healing our memories, and healing our emotions, and overcoming addictions and trials, is part of God's Providence in our life, it's part of God's growth and how He leads us, and it's part of the conversion process inside of us.

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See, we can't just lobotomize our memory, we can't just forget things, or even Jesus, if he would've come back, why did Jesus come back with the wounds? I mean, that's always the question that baffles me, why? It's because He has found a way to be able to assimilate the fullness of His life into the fullness of who He was always meant to be. Healing is about integration, healing is about seeing things through the lens of Christ, healing is about holding onto everything and letting the full complexity of our life, the nuances of our life, the richness of our life, letting it all be present. Healing is about being able to step into the negative and still be able to navigate it in a way that allows us to be able to see providence playing out in the fullness of our life.

See, when we speak about healing in this context, about assimilation, and being able to assimilate all aspects of our life. Another word here is what Pope Benedict says with regards to healing. He says that it's also closely tied to the word salvation, think about that. Salvation, how is healing salvation? Well, salvation is God's Supreme act and desire to bring all things together for His goodness, it's the salvific act of Christ that is bringing together all of creation and opening the pathways for the human race, and again, for all of creation, to be able to be restored, not just restored, but brought to its fullest destiny, and it's only by God's saving grace that we're able to do that. And so certainly we see that in the eschatological sense, we certainly see that in the big-picture sense, but what does that mean within us? What does that mean within our little experiences?

Well, it means this, it means that God makes all things new. We know that in everything God works for good, for those who love him, that's what Romans says. He is before all things and in Him all things He holds together, that's Colossians. God holds all things together and God makes all things new. So healing, this notion of assimilation is about taking the past, about seeing the experiences that we've had, entering into them, offering them to the Lord, believing that everything He can use for His goodness, and that he holds all of it together, the full mystery of our life, the full experience of our life, the full totality and conscious awareness of our life, God holds it all, everything that we are God holds together. And so, healing that is about availing ourselves, and allowing ourselves to fall into that space.

So, heavy stuff, I understand, right? But it's about taking the past, integrating with the present, and allowing us to be more whole for the future, because God wants to bring us into a full sense of wholeness and reconciling himself, the totality of ourselves into him. God wants everything, God wants it all, God wants it all, God wants it all. Every sin he will bring to restoration, every hardship, every pain, every wound, every experience that we've had negative, God will bring healing and salvation to all of that, because He will use each one of those experiences to lead us into a deeper conversion, to lead us into a deeper sense of reliance on him, to lead us into a deeper fullness of who he is, and that is what God wants, God wants us to be saints, and God will use every experience possible to lead us to become the saints that he wants us to be.

So, where you are in your journey right now, of assimilation, means that you just have to be really accepting, accepting, and understanding of where you're currently on, if you are struggling with some real anxiety, then accepting the fact that anxiety is just present in your life. If you struggle with an addiction, recognizing, accepting that this thing just has a power over you and acknowledging that, recognizing that, being humble with that, and praying to the Lord to be able

to guide you and to lead you into the deepest sense of healing that He desires for you to heal. So not necessarily related to emotional healing, but I just want to take a second to talk a little bit about my own journey physically.

A couple years ago, I got long COVID, and that was, I had the COVID symptoms, but then I had that persistent kind of lingering symptoms afterwards, and maybe some of you experienced it, and so in that I had brain fog, I had fatigue, I had heart palpitation, I had light sensitivity, all sorts of crazy things that I had never experienced before in my life. I'm typically a pretty healthy person, I'm a runner, I ran a marathon earlier in 2022. So literally, from, in a year I went from the best health of my life to the worst health of my life, and so the process of healing and recovery from these persistent symptoms started by just taking an honest assessment of where I was, and I went to the doctor and I got all the tests to be able to really assess what's really going on and being very clear with the diagnosis, and then from there, it was just being incredibly patient and compassionate with myself as I took one step forward. What it also meant is that I couldn't compare myself to who I was the year before, and I couldn't compare myself to other people.

See, I had gone from being able to run a marathon to barely being able to walk a block because the heart palpitations and the fatigue, and just the extreme exhaustion, but that's where I started, by being able to walk a block, and then walking a block turned into walking three blocks, and then walking three blocks turned into walking a half a mile, and then walking half a mile turned to walking a mile, and then walking a mile turned into jogging three blocks, and then running, and then walking the rest, and then jogging half a mile and then running, and then walking the rest, and it was a slow process that almost a year after initially getting COVID, I finally was able to run again, run sort of in the way that I could have before. Again, my body is not fully recovered, I still have moments where I can still feel the symptoms inside of me, but my point is that that doesn't matter, the point is that whether it's our physical recovery, our emotional recovery, addiction recovery, relationship recovery, this process of assimilation starts by being profoundly accepting of where you are and taking it one step at time, and as you take one step at a time and you avail yourself to God's Providence, even as you fall, even as you get back up, you will be growing in a deeper understanding of who you are and who God is in relationship to you.

Healing is Relationship

So that leads me then to my third piece, that healing is about relationship. Healing is about acknowledging that we don't have it all figured out, that we have real limitations and real inability to be able to save ourselves. Another way of being able to articulate this is that healing is a process of accepting our poverty and being vulnerable with God. When Jesus says that the poor would be with you always, he's not just talking about the homeless people on the streets, certainly he's talking about that, and why, because we have to be charitable, we have to grow in charity towards the poor, that's what Jesus is saying, is that the poor will always be with you, because he wants us to always be people of charity and love towards those who are in unfortunate circumstances.

Do we have that same level of compassion within ourselves? Do we look at our own experiences and our own failings with that same sense of compassion? If we accept our poverty, if we accept our limitations before the Lord, and we cry out to him, we recognize that this is the space that

God, this is the posture that God wants us to have, because God wants us to be poor before Him so that He can pour out the fullness of who He is. If we come before God having all the answers, then there's no space there for God to love us, but if we come to God with poverty, with our limitation, with an acknowledgement of who we are, with an assessment of who we are, and a recognition that we can't save ourselves, then that's the space that God wants to meet us, that's where the Holy Spirit desires to reign within us, and so recognizing then that healing, the sense of poverty is what brings us often into a deeper relationship with the Lord.

And again, I understand that that's hard because we've had certain memories maybe, that we can't give to the Lord, but try, try, try not to run away from the past, try to bring your current sufferings to the Lord, try to invite Jesus into those space, try to invite the Lord, to give Him permission to be able to guide you and to teach you in the midst of it. Accept our poverty, accept our need for salvation. God wants to be our God and that He wants to be our savior, He is our creator, He wants to be our sanctifier, and He asks us to be a little bit humble before Him.

Again, in one of my early lectures I talked about the Book of Job, and the challenges that I experienced in that, but again, this is what the lesson is teaching us, it's teaching us that Job recognized, trying to reconcile his suffering with his relationship with God, and it's when God shows up at the end that God reminds him of who he is, that that's what reconciles the relationship and it restores it, and so the book is a beautiful sense of poetry, beautiful understanding of suffering, and conviction, doubt, restoration, but this is why we're supposed to read these things and hold fast these things so that we can come to see that God wants to be present within our experience, even if we are having a Job type experience in our life, bring the Lord into that space, bring him over time, again, being patient over time, He will guide you out of the circumstances and he will lead you into a deeper relationship with him because we are incapable of saving ourselves, we don't have the means to be able to save ourselves, we're not this Pelagianism, we can't fall into that, or even our Techno-Pelagianism, modern Pelagianism, the flavor that it takes, we have to resist that, we have to acknowledge our poverty before the Lord.

Healing is Virtue

So, the last thing I want to say here before I wrap up, the fourth piece is that healing is about virtue. See, God, if he's guiding us in taking every step, what He is doing, He's shaping us, He's forming us, He's restoring us, not just restoring us, but He's guiding us to be that best version of ourselves, and what's the best version of yourself? The one that knows how to love, the one that has mastery over your desires, the one that can be charitable and generous with your charity, that's the person.

So, the things that you want to ask yourself along your healing journey is, are you becoming less self-centered as a result of it? Are you becoming more patient with people in your life? Are you becoming more charitable with those who are around you? Are you more kind? Are you more understanding? Ask yourself those questions, and that's a great measure to be able to see if your healing journey is in fact real and authentic, because you'll see more virtue emerge, but also what it means is that we're supposed to then call to be helpful to others, because healing isn't an end to and of itself. The reason that God's calling you to a deeper sense of healing is so that you can

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grow in your capacity to love, and to give, and to be of service to others. Again, this is why in AA circles or in addiction circles support groups, what we often see is that the sponsors, the mentors are those who have gone through the battlefields themselves.

So, the Lord is guiding you to a deeper sense of healing so that you can be restored and not just restored, but led to the best version of yourself, but then also so that you can grow on virtue so that you have the capacity to be more charitable towards others, to be able to give the best of yourself towards others.

Recap

So again, healing is about not forgetting, remember who you are, remember who God is, assimilate, do the work of assimilating your past with the fullness of your life, the good times and the bad, and come to a greater reconciliation about your memories and your experiences, acknowledge that even in our poverty, healing is about growth and relationship with the Lord, and that lastly, even in that growth and relationship, God wants us to have growth and relationship with our communities and our families, and He's asking us to be more virtuous in the spaces that He's called us to be.

So, my dear friends, thank you so much for allowing me to be part of this journey with you. I pray that these lectures on hope, and healing, and memory, have been blessing and been a blessing to you, and God bless you, truly God bless you on your journey of faith, as you continue to understand who you are in a spiritual sense, in an emotional sense, in a psychological sense, and understanding who God is and His profound love for each and every single one of you. So, God bless you, I'll be praying for you, and I pray and hope that you're having a wonderful, wonderful day.