

The Longest Hour, A Miracle featuring Fulton Sheen

Bonnie Engstrom

Hi! I'm Bonnie. I am so honored to be with you for this session, and why don't we start with a prayer?

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen. Come Holy Spirit, come Holy Spirit. Almighty God, I thank You, I thank You for bringing us together. I ask, Lord Jesus, that You would be with us. Holy Spirit, I ask that You would guide my words and open our hearts, that we may follow whatever prompting it is that You want us to, to hear, to listen, to act on. Lord Jesus, I believe, and I trust that You will take whatever grief, whatever pain, whatever suffering, whatever brokenness or wounds that we have, that You will take those and redeem those. And Lord Jesus, I believe that You will bring mercy and healing to those situations, those pains and those wounds. Almighty God, I ask that You would be with us, be with us. And 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 name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen.

A Verse From the Gospel of John

Okay. I am so honored to be one of the speakers for this retreat, and I am so honored to be invited to walk with you through whatever burdens or suffering it is that you have. So thank you, thank you for allowing me to be a part of this with you. It really, really is an honor. I don't know if you're familiar with my story, My son, James Fulton, has an amazing story of his birth, and what happened afterwards.

But before I really jump into that, I want to start with a verse. It's from the gospel of John, it's a favorite of mine, because it always brings me such hope in any situation where I'm suffering. Okay, so it's from the eleventh chapter of John, it's from the story of Lazarus. So Jesus has just been told that His friend, Lazarus, is ill. But instead of hurrying to go see him, He stays and He waits, right. And everyone is kind of like "Uh, Jesus, what are You doing?" But Jesus says, in verse 4:

"This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

I hope and I pray that whatever it is, whatever burden or grief or sorrow that you have, that it will end in life, and that it will end in the glory of God. That the Son of God will be glorified through it. Okay. So with that kind of as our context to everything else I'm going to say, let's jump in.

Children Are Gifts

Okay. My story about my son, James, really begins not with his birth, or even his pregnancy, but my engagement to my husband, Travis. Travis and I have been married for almost 12 years – I’m going to round up a little bit and say 12 years – and I still remember though, during our engagement, when we were presented with all of the church’s teachings about married life, about children, about families, babies, all of it, one of the things that we were taught was that children were gifts. Only and always gifts.

And that really struck a chord with us. That, that truth sat in my heart, and I knew it was true. And because of that foundational teaching, that everything else of the, you know, everything else could be built upon that one teaching, children are only and always gifts, I knew that was true, and I knew that we were going to enter our married life accepting whatever gifts God wanted to send us.

God gave us the gift of 8 pregnancies in 11 years. And the first baby we lost in miscarriage, but we then went on to have 7 children in 9 years. And so, again, God really loved giving us this gift. And I remember when my firstborn was not yet 2, and my second-born was just 3 months old, they were playing in the living room – I mean, as much as a 3-month-old baby can play I guess – they were in the living room, and I was sitting on the edge of my bed holding a positive pregnancy test, and this was not a planned pregnancy. My husband is a public high school teacher, and I am a stay-at-home mom. And basically what I’m telling you is we do not have a lot of money, right, and we had even less then.

And so I just remember, you know, looking at that positive pregnancy test, and then looking out the window and praying, and saying “God, I believe that this baby is a gift. I believe that You have a purpose for this baby. But I’m going to need You to provide, God, because things are tough, and You better provide.” And folks, I could spend the next 20 minutes giving you example after example of ways that God did provide for us. And He did. He showed up in big ways.

I’ll give you one example, this is my favorite. I was actually at Spiritual Direction, and I was talking to my priest, and I was telling him “You know, I do not feel very pro-life.” I was like “I cannot have another baby. I cannot do this. I cannot do this.” And, at the time, I didn’t know I was pregnant, and he, you know, so we kind of had to talk through that and work through that. And a month later, I show up and I say “Well, father, joke’s on me, because as I was having that conversation with you last month, I actually was pregnant.” And he said “Well, gosh, how do you feel about that?” And I said “You know, I think that the Lord wants to bless us with this baby, and this is a gift from God and, you know, He’s generous, and He’s going to provide. I just believe it.” And my priest said “That is really interesting that you say that, because I have something for you.” And someone had given him something to be passed on to us.

And so father handed me an envelope from this anonymous person, and I took it. At the end of our meeting, I took it, I left. And I got in my van and I opened up that envelope, and inside were five \$100 bills. Now, I know five \$100 bills is a lot of money to a lot of people, but when you are broke it is a LOT of money, okay! A huge amount of money. And I just remember thinking “Oh, Jesus, You are amazing!” You know, I was just... I was... I was

flabbergasted, it was amazing. And I drove home, and the first thing I did was I went to the mailbox to get the mail, and in the mailbox was our car insurance bill for \$482.

You guys, that is a hard bill for us to pay every 6 months. And I remember looking at that number, \$482, and I just grinned, and I laughed, and I said “Not only did You give us enough money to pay this bill, You gave us so much we could go out for ice cream too.” I mean, it was such a treat. And I have so many more examples like that, of ways that God was faithful and generous, ways that He provided for us during that pregnancy.

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

Now, another thing He did was we met a man who was soon to become a very good friend of ours: Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen. Now, you may be familiar with Fulton Sheen already. In a way, I already knew who he was, kind of in a peripheral sense, I knew who he was. I grew up in the Peoria area, and Fulton Sheen was born in the Peoria area, raised in Peoria. Then, he was a priest for the diocese of Peoria. I remember my grandparents talking about Fulton Sheen. So I kind of knew who he was.

But it was during my pregnancy with James that I sat down and I watched a YouTube video of Fulton Sheen preaching, and he was really good. He was really, really good. He was funny, he was articulate. He took these ideas and these theological principles and teachings of the church that were very delicate and intricate and sophisticated, and he explained them in a way that I could understand. And he did it with humor, with wit. He was elevating me to his level, not dumbing it down.

He was bringing me higher. I was so impressed, that when my husband got home from work that day, I made him come and watch the YouTube videos with me. And together, we thought “Oh my goodness, this guy is just amazing,” you know. And so we knew at that time, if the baby in my belly was going to be a boy, because we didn’t know the gender, if he was going to be a boy, we were going to name him after Fulton Sheen. Because we knew his cause was open, we knew the cause for canonization was open, and we believed, watching those videos, that he would be a saint.

So, from that day, we learned more and more about Fulton Sheen. We watched more videos, we listened to him preaching, we read more about him. And I started praying every day and asking for Fulton Sheen to watch over the baby in my belly, to walk with my child for the rest of his life, and to be constantly praying for us, constantly praying for us. And so that was really the beginning of this beautiful friendship that has carried on all of these years later.

Another example of the ways that God was generous and faithful. And so, you know, between all of the, you know, the money and the friendships and the support, it was so much you guys that I remember one day, you know, at the end of the day actually, laying in bed with my husband, Travis, and saying “There is something really special about this baby. Like, this is incredible, the things that God is doing in our lives.” And Travis and I looked at each other, and we were like “This kid is going to be a pope. Like, I am pregnant with the future pope! This is what’s going on. This is amazing! I’m pregnant with the pope.” So, I mean, it really was. It was just amazing.

So, with all of that going on, we get to early September, and I go into labor. And you guys, it was beautiful. It was a beautiful September evening. And, you know, I'm a blogger, I was on Facebook, my blog. I got online and I told people "I'm labor, please pray for me." And I knew that I literally had people all over the world who were praying for me. And we had friends come in, you know, some friends came. One came to take care of my other kids, one came to be in the room with us and take pictures – pardon my squeaky chair.

My Unforgettable Labor Experience

So we had a friend coming in to take pictures, and to pray there in our home for us, you know. And you could tell the whole evening was bathed in prayer. It was beautiful. There was something in the air. You could just tell that we were on the cusp of something great. I was about to give birth to a pope. I mean, it was amazing. It really was though. I mean, all jokes aside, it really was amazing. And the labor went so beautifully. My easiest labor by far. And it was just so special you guys, you know. It was so special.

What we didn't know though was that there was a knot in the umbilical cord. So while we were doing fetal monitoring, and the heart rate sounded great, and everything was looking beautiful, beautiful; while I pushed for 20 minutes, and my baby was descending, that knot was getting tighter and tighter, so that by the time James was born he did not have a heartbeat, because he did not have oxygen coming from the umbilical cord.

And I remember right after he was born, you know, my midwife caught him, and then she passed him to me. And I held him in my arms, and his arms and his legs just dangled. And he didn't move, and he wasn't breathing, and he was this blue-gray color. And, you know, sometimes birth – well, always birth – is a traumatic thing. You know, it's hard on the mom and it's hard on the baby.

And maybe you'll remember those old videos, those old movies where the doctor holds up the baby by the ankles and smacks the butt, and then the baby starts to cry? The baby has to be stimulated sometimes to kind of come out of the shock of being born. And so my midwife said "Bonnie, I need you to rub his chest and say his name. He needs to hear his name, he needs to be woken up a little bit." And so I rubbed his chest and I said "James Fulton, James Fulton it's your momma." But he didn't move. And so she, I mean, I maybe held him for 5 seconds, and then she took him out of my arms and put him on the ground. She looked everywhere, you know, searched his body, trying to find a pulse and could not find one.

So chest compressions were started, and my husband reached for my cup of water, and he dipped his fingers and thumbs in it, and he let the water drip on James' forehead. And he made the sign of the cross, and he said "James Fulton, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." And I was going into a state of shock, but I remember thinking "Okay, that's good. That's good." Because my job as a mom is to get my kids to heaven. And so, you know, even if, even if James didn't make it, he would go to heaven.

Now, we, we believe there's power in the names we give our kids. We are very intentional that we give our children a family name and a saint name, because we believe that every time we speak that child's name, we are invoking that saint, you know. So, for example, if I say "Teresa Marie, get over here right now." Then, you know, Mother Teresa and Mother Mary are both in heaven, and they are praying that Teresa will make the next right choice. They are interceding in her life. But we really do believe that. And so it is with James Fulton. You know, when Travis spoke James' name during the baptism, we were invoking Fulton Sheen and his prayers.

And I remember, you know, later, our friend who was there praying and photographing the birth, the event, she told us that as soon as she heard Travis say James Fulton's name, she had what I would describe as a mystical experience. She was overwhelmed with images of Fulton Sheen, with this powerful feeling of his presence, and his prayers in that moment and in our son's life. It was profound. And then there was me, and I was tired, I was looking at my dead son, I was going into shock, I felt like I was moving further and further away from my baby. And I sat there on my bedroom floor, because James was a home birth, I sat there on my bedroom floor and I didn't know what to say. I had no words.

But, because I had been praying and asking Fulton Sheen to pray for my son, every day for months I've been doing that, what I did, what I remember doing is sitting there and saying "Fulton Sheen, Fulton Sheen, Fulton Sheen" in my head, over and over and over again. "Fulton Sheen, Fulton Sheen, Fulton Sheen. Fulton Sheen, Fulton Sheen, Fulton Sheen." I had no words, I needed Fulton Sheen to pray for me. I needed him to fill the gap, and I needed him to pray for God's will to be done. I need him to pray for a miracle.

Our friend then called 911 as soon as the baptism was done. She knew it was bad, she had been a NICU nurse. She later told us "Bonnie, you know, the only time I have seen a baby look the way James looked was when I was carrying one to the morgue." So she left, called 911, and we waited. We waited for the ambulance.

My Stillborn Son

So, my son, James, was a stillborn, and he was laying on the floor of my bedroom as we were waiting for the first responders and the paramedics to come. My midwife and her assistant were continuing to do chest compressions and mouth-to-mouth, they were continually assessing me and my baby, but things were looking pretty bad.

And I remember the first responders came and, you know guys, we lived in a very small town, like 600 people, when James was born. A very small town. So the first responders who came, these were my neighbors. These were men who, you know, I saw at the gas station, I walked by their homes when we went on walks with the kids, and suddenly they were there in this situation that I don't think they were really, I mean, how do you prepare for that? How do you prepare to, you know, for the death of a newborn? You know?

And, as first responders, there's some things they can do, but they just... they could not really take care of James or that situation. And so I remember they let my midwife continue to kind of do what she was doing. They also helped with the chest compressions and whatnot, and then they also assessed me. But mostly, they were waiting for the paramedics to come, because the paramedics, they believed, would be able to intubate, to be able to put a breathing tube into James.

A Little Ray of Hope

But I do remember there was one man, he had a great big mustache I'll never forget, and he kneeled next to me on the floor, and he held my hand, and he just let me rest my back against his leg. And I think of him a lot, and I think of that gesture, and just how sometimes when we are just drowning in so much pain and confusion and anger and hurt, and, I mean, it just seemed like, it seems like this story was going to end in a funeral, right. But even in the midst of all of that ugly, there was still this little act of kindness that just reverberated throughout all, you know.

And I share that with you because I think that looking at that for myself, and kind of naming that and appreciating that really helped me to see how I was not completely abandoned. Like, God had still put that man in that situation to take care of me in this very simple way. But it was just so loaded with love, you know. So I hope that maybe you are able to look at your own situation and find those little, you know, that little cup of water that someone is handing you, this one little ray of hope.

PEA on the Monitor

So the paramedics arrived, and they took James in their ambulance, and my husband went with him, I followed in another ambulance with some other first responders. And it was about a 20-minute drive from our home to the Children's Hospital of Illinois, where James was taken, in Peoria Illinois. And during that time, James was hooked up to a heart monitor, and the entire time he was hooked up to that heart monitor, James' pulse was what they call PEA on the monitor.

That stands for "Pulseless Electrical Activity." If you think of, like, a normal heartbeat and what it looks like, you know, it has the *bump* *bump* *chicka* *chicka* *bump* *bump* *chicka* *chicka* *bump* *bump* *chicka* *chicka*. And that *bump* *bump* is the heartbeat, right. And then the *chicka* *chicka* are the electrical impulses that kind of fire off in the heart to make the heartbeat.

You cannot have a heartbeat without those electrical impulses, but you can have the electrical impulses without the heartbeat – that's PEA. And James, his heart monitor was just the PEA, and legally, you can be declared dead if you are PEA on the monitor.

So James was PEA on the monitor, and to help restart his heart they gave him epinephrine. And in an emergency, they'll try to get a line straight to the marrow of your bone, because it will be absorbed quicker, and hopefully will take effect faster. However, it can... at times it's, you know, in medical jargon, it's called an unstable line. So the first attempt was an unstable line, and that just led to a massive chemical burn in James' right leg.

The second attempt was in his left leg, and this time it did go into the marrow, but the medicine did nothing to restart his heart. So that when James arrived at the emergency department with my husband, you know, in the cab with him, there was a nurse practitioner and another nurse from the NICU, the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, who had come down to the emergency department in order to help the ED team to take care of this newborn baby.

And later, I was talking to one of those nurses, and she said, you know, that we were standing there waiting for them to come in, and they pulled this gurney out with this itty-bitty baby, and over him is this full-grown man doing chest compressions, and she said it was just, you know, heartbreaking. And they took James back to a room in the ED and, you know, all hands on deck, everyone was trying to save this little boy.

They did a sonogram of the heart and they said, you know, it just sat there. It was not moving. Any type of heartbeat that registered on the heart monitor was only because of chest compressions that were being done. Otherwise, James continued to be PEA on the monitor. They continued to give him medicine, epinephrine, I don't even know what, all they gave him trying to restart his heart.

And that nurse told me that "You know, there's this little baby, and you just wanted to, like, pick him up and hold him and wrap him in a blanket. But there is nothing you can do because, you know, he has to be there, they're trying to save his life." So, just this instinct in her to in some way comfort him, she held on to his little foot because that was the only thing she could do, was hold on to his foot, so she would not be getting in the way. And she told me much later, she said "He was so cold, Bonnie. He was so cold." And she said it was like the expression "cold and dead." And I knew what she was saying to me was that, for all intents and purposes, they were working on a corpse.

Crucial Five Minutes

So, there was a Neonatologist, it was the middle of the night, so she was on call and she was driving into the hospital. And the ED team was on the phone with her and they would, you know, they were telling her what was happening as she was driving in. And at one point, something happened, maybe a reaction to some medicine, but his heart kind of fluttered a little bit. Not a real beat, but just kind of a twitch, and they

told her that. And so the doctor said “We’ll, try for 5 more minutes, and then call it.” call time of death.

So they tried for 5 more minutes and, you know, really, a heart twitching, it wasn’t that big of a sign of hope, right. They were trying for 5 more minutes, because at the end of those 5 minutes the doctors would then be able to walk out into the hall where my husband was waiting and they would be able to say “I’m sorry Mr. Engstrom. We did everything we could to save your son, but he didn’t make it.” So they tried for 5 more minutes, but James’ heart remained still. So all hands came up so they could call time of death, and the minute that happened, James’ heart started to beat 148 beats per minute, which is a healthy heart rate for a newborn baby. And it never stopped again.

Altogether, James had been dead for 61 minutes. Immediately, all hands were back on him, and they did everything they could to stabilize him. He had some seizures when he came back, and so they did phenobarbital, and just all of these different things to make him stable. He was intubated, and they moved him up to the NICU, where they did what they call cooling therapy. So he was laid on this blue pad that lowered his body temperature by a few degrees, so that any further and ongoing damage to his organs would be slowed down or complete stopped.

Grateful for the Sacraments

And when I was taken there in the early hours of the day, you know, they kind of brought me up to speed with what was going on, and our pastor and the hospital chaplain were both there, and they said to us “Mr. and Mrs. Engstrom, we understand that you have baptized James, and so we would like to offer confirmation to you.”

And, on one level, I knew what they were saying. I knew that they were saying, you know, we’re Roman Catholic, and in the Roman Catholic, right, you don’t baptize a baby unless that baby is going to die. And so I knew they were saying “Your child’s going to die, this is what we’ve been told, and we would like to offer to him the sacraments, so that he may die a holy death and be received into heaven.”

And I knew, I knew that’s what they were saying, and I was so grateful to the church, who was able to care for us and carry us through this incredibly difficult situation. And I’m so grateful to God for the sacraments. But on another level, I just didn’t get it. I was still just in a state of shock, and I didn’t know what was going on, and I couldn’t really process maybe I refused to process. I don’t know, but I said to them “Well, I mean, yeah. Like, let’s do it. But what will he do in 7th grade?” And they looked at each other kind of awkwardly, like “Uh, which... who’s going to tell her? Do you want to tell her? I don’t want to tell her.” And so they just said “You know, he’ll serve at the mass.”

And so he was confirmed. He was confirmed James Fulton Linus, and basically, you know, he had come back to life, but what everyone expected was that he was going to die again. Your body does not go an hour without oxygen and survive and thrive. Like, that does not happen, you know. What all of science and medicine told those doctors was that massive organ failure was going to kick in and, one by one, all of his organs would fail, and our son would die again.

Prayed for a Miracle

But we prayed for a miracle and, you know, in the NICU, they want to give you hope. And hope is, I mean, it is worth more than gold, hope is, you know. And so they said to us “You know, we don’t know what’s going to happen to your son. He may live, and he may be completely normal, completely normal. Or, he may not make it.” And that was the spectrum that they gave us. They didn’t know if he would live through the night. He was born on a Thursday, so he would probably not live through the weekend, and he would definitely not live to be a week old. And so, you know, they thought he was going to die. But, you know, what happened was he lived.

And so then they said “Okay, well, you know, he might live, but he’s probably going to, he’s going to be very medically frail, there’s going to be a lot of complications. He will be blind, he will have a feeding tube for the rest of his life, you know, he won’t be able to eat or drink anything orally probably. He’ll be in diapers, he will have cerebral palsy that will be so severe that his body will be just kind of locked in into a really tight, possibly contorted positions, and he’ll be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. He’ll have the mental capacity of probably an infant.”

He is Faithful and Generous

And I thought about God, and how He had told me that children were gifts, only and always. And I was so mad, because I just thought, you know, “Here You gave me this gift, and then You took him away, and then You gave him back to us, but now You’re just taking him away piece by piece again.” And I thought “You are a horrible gift-giver,” and I was so angry, I was so angry. But I knew, thanks be to God, I realized that I could either live in that despair and in the darkness, or I could remember who God was in my life.

And God was faithful, and God was generous. That whole pregnancy, He had been faithful and He had been generous. And from the very beginning, as soon as I knew about my son’s life, I knew that God had a purpose and a plan for my son, that my son was a gift. And so I chose to believe that, and I chose to live in the light, and doing that, it was like a, it was like all the weight in the world was lifted from my chest. I could breathe again, you know. But we still prayed for a miracle. We prayed for a complete healing for James.

And as the days and the weeks went by, the weeks turned into a month, which almost turned in to 2 months we were in the NICU for 7 weeks altogether. And by the time we left, James was just this cute, normal little boy. By 9 months, he was hitting milestones. I mean like, you know. And we knew, he had been hitting milestones for a while. But by 9 months, when he's sitting in his high chair, and he's picking up cheerios and eating them, I mean, we were just amazed. And, you know, James is a year old now.

So, yes. By 9 months, we just knew God has heard our prayers. God has heard our prayers. We went through a major valley, but I really believe that God was faithful to us that entire time. Even in the darkest, darkest times, in my hardest hours, in my hardest moments through that entire, you know, not just the hour when James was literally dead, but the weeks in the NICU that were just heartbreaking, and the weeks and the months at home of kind of figuring out "Who is this baby, and what he's going to be able to do, and has God really heard our prayer?"

You know, in the bible, Jesus says "Pick up your mat and walk," and the man picks up his mat and he walks, you know. And we know that the healing is complete and instantaneous, but for a newborn, I mean, we had to wait for just nature, for milestones to happen, because a baby, you know, a newborn can't even lift his head, let alone a mat, you know. And so there really was just a lot of months of begging God, begging God. But He was faithful. He was faithful.

A Miracle Through the Intercession of Fulton Sheen

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 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 was 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.

Suffering In Our Life

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.

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.

Morning Offering

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 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.

Specific Prayer Intentions

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.

Recounting God’s Generosity and Faithfulness

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.

Think About the Saints

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 perfectly, 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

Closing Prayer

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 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.