

Prayer Ministry Session: August 24, 2011
Seeking Healing from 9/11 Trauma

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Following is my recollection of the prayer ministry session where I sought the Lord for healing from the trauma of 9/11 – ten years after the event.

We opened in prayer. Then I began to share with my prayer minister how I felt, coming up on the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy:

“A week ago, I decided I am sick and tired of feeling shut down as a writer. Writing with God is one of my greatest desires, yet it’s been nothing but agony for years. So I finally asked God, ‘When was the last time I felt joy and freedom as a writer?’ He showed me it was right before 9/11. That’s when I had shut down.

“As the Lord showed me that, I started to feel a spirit of terror rising in me. I realized it was time to deal with my total 9/11 shut down. It was time for healing. But I asked God to put a lid on all those emotions until I could get ministry.

“At that point, I realized it was almost the 10th anniversary. I would like for once not to shut down, not to hide. I would like to be healed. But I feel like this is too big, even for God. There is a lot of dark stuff shut behind those doors. I’m afraid to open them.”

I didn’t go into details of the event. I just identified all the emotions I had felt – on the day, and for years afterward.

My prayer minister invited the Lord’s presence. Then he asked me when was the last time I had felt the Lord’s comfort after grief. (Through the Lord’s leading, he had identified grief as the key emotion we would be dealing with.)

I told him, “Never. In my whole life, despite so many losses, no one has ever comforted me in my grief. Consequently, I have no idea what it is to feel God’s comfort.”

He asked the Lord to help me feel His presence and comfort. With my eyes closed, I waited on the Lord. The first thing I saw was the side yard of my childhood home. There was a lemon tree in the middle. It was my favorite yard – I loved to roll in the grass. The Lord showed me standing in the yard for a moment, and then He took me inside the house. He showed me as an infant, being picked up and held against His chest.

As I told my prayer minister what the Lord was showing me, I used the words, “It’s like I’m a baby being held against the Lord’s chest.”

My prayer minister said, “Is it *like* you’re a baby? Or *are* you the baby?”

I said, “I’m not the baby. I’m watching from a distance.”

My prayer minister is aware, from previous sessions, that I have trouble allowing the Lord to hold me, because that has not been modeled safely for me throughout my life. I have the experience of being suffocated and crushed by someone who was supposed to model safety and love. That experience affected how I see God. Slowly, gently, God is bringing healing. But He will not push, and He will not try and hold me that way until I’m ready.

My prayer minister invited the Lord to help me experience His presence in a way that felt safe for me.

The Lord shifted the scene to the side yard again. This time, I was lying in the sunny grass near the lemon tree. I felt comfortable. I sensed Jesus sliding slowly up next to me, as if He were lying beside me. Gently, He took my hand. I could handle His presence next to me, in this way, and I moved as close as possible. I told my prayer minister what was happening.

“Do you feel safe with Jesus this way?”

“Yes.”

He triple-checked that I felt the Lord’s presence and that I felt safe with Him. (I realized he was making sure of this, prior to any exploration about how I handle grief. I made sure to wait until I felt completely safe, and felt that Jesus wasn’t going anywhere, because I knew I’d need His presence for whatever would come next.)

My prayer minister asked me, “How did you generally deal with grief, prior to 9/11?”

“I stuffed it. That’s the way I was taught. Don’t feel, just stuff. I’ve always stuffed it.”

“Where did you stuff it?”

I pointed to my heart. “In here.”

“Lord Jesus, would you show Janet where You were, all the times she was stuffing her grief in her heart?”

The Lord gave me a visual of myself, stuffing grief, like little shreds of paper, into my heart. Stuff, stuff, stuff. I was cramming so much in there, and I was so intent that I didn’t look up. Suddenly, I sensed the Lord’s presence and looked up. He was sitting opposite me. I was crying at this point (in the vision and in the natural) and Jesus said, “I’m here.”

There was a revelation deep in my heart – a brand new truth. *He's really here. He really cares.* Jesus was so intently focused on me; on every shred of grief that I was stuffing into my heart. *He knew about it? He really knew about each shred of grief?* Such a revelation to my heart.

It had never been modeled to me, in my life, that anyone cared about my grief, or about what I felt in moments of sorrow. Here Jesus was, showing me that He was focused intently on what I felt, and that He really cared about every bit of it. That He had been sitting with me the whole time, every time I grieved, throughout my life.

To reaffirm that revelation, the Lord held out His hands, and immediately I recognized that He was holding Fluffy, the plush green bunny rabbit that had been my favorite stuffie as a child. I always brought stuffed animals and other toys to the park across the street from my home, but I'd never brought Fluffy, for fear of losing him. One day, I decided to bring him. My mom warned me that if I brought him, I would lose him. Sure enough ... I mourned that green plush rabbit. I beat myself up for years over that lost stuffie. I cried and cried. Here was Jesus, holding Fluffy, who looked brand new.

I started sobbing. I told my prayer minister, "Jesus has Fluffy!"

My heart melted at the thought that Jesus loves me that much. That He really, truly cared about *all* of my moments of grief. Even a 7-year-old girl's grief over a lost green bunny (and a very special grandma who had died not long before).

My prayer minister said, "Lord Jesus, tell Janet how You feel about her stuffing all that grief into her heart."

The Lord held out His hands and said I could give all of that to Him instead.

"Are you willing to give that to Him?"

"Yes."

This was not easy. I started shaking as I reached, symbolically, into my heart to give Jesus the first piece of grief I had stuffed. I handed it to the Lord, and I felt that He took it. I reached for another piece; and another. There was too much in there, and I started to cry again. But soon, the emotion shifted from fear to relief. I suddenly couldn't get the pieces out fast enough. I mentioned that to my prayer minister.

"Would you like Jesus to take all of it, at once?"

I nodded my head.

"Ask Him."

“Lord Jesus, would You please take all of this for me?”

I felt the Lord lift my heart gently in His hands, and I felt His light surround me. He shook all the grief out of my heart. There was so much. I was sobbing, but I felt like I could breathe again.

The Lord made sure my heart was empty of every last shred of grief, and then He brushed off my heart and kissed it, and gently put it back into place. Jesus kept His hand on my heart, and I still had the strong sensation that He was watching me intently; that He really cared.

“Lord Jesus,” my prayer minister said. “What’s your response to all the grief Janet just handed over to You?”

I still struggle for words to describe what happened next. I felt that the Lord came and put His arms around me, and held me close to Him (and this was safe for me; I wanted this). I felt that He was reaching down into the depths of me, and identifying with every moment of grief and trauma I had ever experienced; and at the same time, His head was above the clouds, in His glorified, resurrected state, looking over the New Earth, and all that is to come, rejoicing in my future, where there will be no more tears.

Jesus held me like that, for the longest time. He was a bridge between all I had experienced, and all that God promises for my eternal life with Him. Jesus stood between heaven and earth, holding me, linking me to Him, letting His strength seep into me. At the same time, He fully identified with every single moment of grief I had experienced, and He held every one of those moments in His heart. He was holding me and telling me, “I’m so sorry,” and He was fully present in that place of sorrow with me – even as He was also fully present in that new place of hope, and pointing the way to what will be.

I was reminded of the drawings I’ve seen of Jesus, in heaven, holding someone who is newly arrived – welcoming them, comforting them, yet all the while surrounded by the glorious promise of a new life.

Jesus felt, to me, so powerful, so strong, so able to bring comfort, so filled with hope, and with authority, the everlasting King – and yet so completely at one with me in my sorrow and grief; so willing to take the time to hold me and recognize all that I’d been through.

When I had absorbed all of this into my heart, I felt that I had to share it with my prayer minister, but I struggled for words. I asked him if I could demonstrate it using a prop. He said, “Yes. You need to be able to express this, so you can claim it.”

I walked over to a chair, picked up a pillow, and walked back to the couch. Using the pillow, I showed him how Jesus had held me, and what I felt – the Lord coming into my place of sorrow, while He was at the same time pointing with hope to my place of future promise, and holding me all the while. In the process of demonstrating this, I literally squeezed the stuffing out of the

pillow. (My prayer minister later pointed this out, and it made me laugh, but it also showed me what the Lord had been doing with me and all that I had stuffed.)

My prayer minister recited from Isaiah 53:3: “He was a man of sorrows.” He said, “Jesus identifies with us in our sorrows. Now you’ve experienced that with Him.”

My eyes were closed again, and the Lord shifted the scene. Jesus was inside a barn. It was a brightly lit barn. There were people from all over the world. Each of them had experienced some type of horrific trauma. Jesus was on the floor of the barn, sitting in the straw, bringing comfort to each one. There was a depth of understanding that passed between Jesus and each person, that they shared a heart understanding of deep pain and sorrow.

For a moment, I watched all of this through the barn window. Then Jesus brought me inside. I began to feel the same depth of understanding (beyond words) that the others had exchanged with Jesus.

I said to my prayer minister, “I feel like I just met Jesus for the first time.”

He said, “You did – a part of Him. You’ve never known this dimension of Him – the man of sorrows. You now have a more complete picture. When you were looking through the window, you saw Him in two dimensions. Now you see Him in three. Now you are part of the fellowship of His suffering.”

Until now, I had “known” with my mind how Jesus felt about sorrow and grief. But now I finally had that understanding in my heart. And now I began to feel His heart for the others inside that barn. I was not alone anymore, in my grief. I was part of Christ’s heart, and part of all those around me who had suffered. I was able to feel their grief, because I knew that Jesus had felt mine.

My prayer minister said, “Now, what will you do in a time of sorrow?”

“I will run to Jesus. I will go straight to Him.”

As I said the words, I felt a deep peace. I felt that I could actually bear whatever more sorrows would come my way in life, because I knew where to turn. I knew that Jesus would truly hear and feel my sorrow, and truly understand. I also knew that in that place of sorrow, I would be in fellowship with Him, at a deep heart level, and be able to share with Christ, in my heart, the grief of others as well.

“Now, we’re going to ask Jesus to meet you in that place of grief and sorrow that you felt after 9/11. Ask Him to meet you there.”

“Lord Jesus, where were You on 9/11? I’ve had all this grief in my heart for years. Meet me in that place in my heart.” (For years, I had been so scared of inviting this moment that I hadn’t

dared to seek healing. When the moment arrived, I felt a lightness of spirit and a strange sense of anticipation for Jesus to meet me – because now I knew what it felt like to share in the fellowship of His suffering.)

In that moment, Jesus showed me standing in the middle of the street between the World Trade Center and my office building. Chaos swirled in every direction – not just the chaos of the day, but everything, all that happened in the next year, in the rebuilding effort, and for years after. Every painful image, every painful thought, every painful moment was all there, in one big funnel cloud that covered the ground to the edges of Lower Manhattan. All of it. I was standing right in the middle, with my heart bursting in pain.

I looked up, and from the next street over, Jesus entered the scene. He came running straight to me. My pain, my grief, was written all across His face, and I could literally see the heaviness He carried in His heart. There is a depth of understanding that you share with a spouse, where you don't have to exchange any words. That's what happened between the Lord and me in this moment. He came straight to me, and with one glance exchanged between us, I knew that He knew everything I felt – and I knew that He felt it too. I knew that my sorrows were His. I knew the disaster all around us struck both of us in the very same ways. I knew the grief I carried in my heart was exactly the same as what He felt.

Without a word, but with a glance that said everything, Jesus took me in His arms. He held me. He cried with me. We cried the same tears. We poured the same grief out of our hearts. We felt the same devastation and loss. And as I shared my grief with Him, He shared His with me.

I stayed in that moment with Him for a long time. Jesus didn't lead me out until I knew that I knew that I knew that He understood. And that He would carry my grief for me, because it was His grief too, and it was too much for me to bear.

I opened my eyes and I felt a deep peace that I'd never known before, not ever in my entire life. I told my prayer minister that as crazy as it sounded, I didn't want to leave that scene, because Jesus was there, holding me. For 10 years, I hadn't been able to go to that place in my mind. I hadn't allowed myself to picture Ground Zero. Yet here I was, lingering in that place because of Christ's presence in the midst of my greatest sorrow.

My prayer minister said, "The place of my greatest sorrow has become the place of my greatest attraction ... because Christ is there."

I closed my eyes again, still in the same scene. Except now, the chaos was lifting, and familiar buildings and streets and shops and cafes were coming into view. Like dawn breaking through the darkness, the entire scene transformed into a place I remembered fondly. For the first time since the tragedy, I began to remember all the things I had loved in Lower Manhattan before that day. I had blocked them out all this time, and God was restoring them to me.

My prayer minister asked me, "What will you do now in sorrow?"

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I said, from a deeper place in my heart than even a few minutes earlier, “I will go straight to Jesus.”

“Are you afraid to be in that place of grief and sorrow?”

“No. I’m not afraid. Because Jesus is there.”

“Now you can step into your sorrow instead of stuffing it away.”

“Yes. Because Jesus is there.”

Since that moment, just over three weeks ago, I have had peace, and my grief has subsided ... not just from 9/11, but all the grief I had stuffed away all of my life. On the drive home from that prayer ministry session, I pulled up at a stoplight behind a white truck. All over the back of the truck were 9/11 FDNY stickers depicting the towers. I looked at the stickers, that previously would have made me run and hide, or burst into tears, or struggle to breathe. I looked at the stickers now, and I stared into the scene, searching for Jesus. I had peace. I knew He was there, and that He understood.

From that day, until the 10th anniversary two weeks later, whenever I heard 9/11 discussed ... I was filled with peace. All those overwhelming emotions had subsided. I still knew the enormity of what we all lost, but I was able to move in that and not crumble. I was able to remember the sorrow without becoming overwhelmed. I knew Jesus was the one carrying it now; not me. I knew I could put my hand in His anytime I wanted, and find real and lasting strength. I knew that the core of my being was made up of His deep peace.

A few days after my session, I shared my testimony of healing briefly with one of our pastors, and she told me that God seemed to be nudging her to ask me to share on the anniversary day. She asked if I would be all right. I knew without a doubt the answer was “yes.” I also knew that God had orchestrated my healing to take place before the day, so I could share with others that Jesus brings genuine peace, even in the midst of our worst circumstances.

The biggest testimony wasn’t the words I shared. It was the fact that, finally, I *could* share. It was the peace of Christ that was visible in me. That was my testimony.

And on that day, after I shared, I was able to listen to the stories of others, as they had been impacted – by 9/11 or by other things. I was able to listen and truly hear their hearts, because my own grief wasn’t standing in the way. Through the heart of Christ in me, I was able to listen to their struggles, and to offer them assurance of the peace of Christ that is available to all.

After I shared my testimony on the 10th anniversary of 9/11, the Lord spent the rest of the day giving me one wonderful surprise after another. It turned out to be one of the most enjoyable

days of my life. It wasn't until that evening that I finally realized what God had done. He had restored that day for me.

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." – John 14:27 NKJV

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." – Philippians 4:7 NKJV