

Title: "Beautiful, powerful IVCF Immanuel story"

February 6, 2024

Greetings all,

Just received an e-mail from an InterVarsity staff who I met outside the ministry room in Orlando. Wanted to share his beautiful Immanuel story with the rest of you (sharing it with his permission). I'm expecting that you will be as blessed and encouraged as I was.

"I have had multiple opportunities to provide and receive Immanuel Prayer since going through your training, and they have always been extraordinarily positive and transformative, so it will be hard to pick just one experience, but I will try my best anyway.

CONTEXT

One of my favorite experiences with Immanuel Prayer involved a memory with my grandfather. I'll provide some brief context to illustrate why this experience was so impactful for me. I grew up without a father, it was just my single mother and I living in my grandparents' house. My grandfather worked from home, so from as far back as I can remember, he was with me everywhere I went. He was my ride to school, he picked me up from school. He took me to every baseball practice, he was at every game. Wherever I went, he was with me. We were inseparable and he was very much my father figure growing up.

In 2009, my grandparents were involved in a very serious car accident. My grandmother was miraculously left fairly unharmed, aside from several bruises and general back pain, but other than that, uninjured. My grandfather was not as fortunate. He became paralyzed from the neck down and bedridden in the hospital for several weeks. After roughly a month, he decided to be removed from life support. Although this decision was extremely difficult and detrimental to our family, he was a believer and knew where he was headed -- he knew the Lord was calling him home. He was taken off life support and quickly passed afterward. I was nine years old at the time of his passing.

POSITIVE MEMORY

So when doing Immanuel Prayer, the positive memory I started in was with my grandfather. I was around 5 or 6 and we were swimming in the pool behind his house. As I mentioned, he worked from home, so he spent many hours floating around the pool when he wasn't working and he always brought me with him. My grandfather was also anal about his pool being clean, so he would routinely keep a net with him to fish bugs and leaves out of the water. We began a tradition of taking the bugs he caught and feeding them to the lizards around the pool.

In this positive memory, I'm floating next to my grandfather, holding on to the edge of the pool deck, while he feeds bugs to the lizards. I would watch the lizards come out of the bushes and

hesitantly approach the buffet of bugs before them. I always loved how they would shoot their tongue out and snag a bug, and then scurry back into the bushes before coming back for more. My grandfather and I would float out there for hours, watching the lizards eat the bugs. I was filled with an extreme sense of peace and comfort in that memory.

When asked where Jesus was in the positive memory, I found him sitting on the edge of the pool deck, right next to both of us, swishing his feet in the water. He had the biggest grin on his face as he watched my grandfather and I feed the lizards. I got the sense that he was just happy to be there with us, content to enjoy the sunny afternoon by the pool as much as we were.

PAINFUL MEMORY

When asked by the facilitator to then transition and think of a painful or traumatic memory, I sat for a good long while before a memory came. Eventually, the memory of learning about my grandfather passing away came to mind. As I mentioned earlier in the context about my grandfather, he passed away in the hospital after agreeing to remove life support. During his time in the hospital, I wasn't allowed to visit him, so I learned all of this second-hand from my mother and grandmother.

The painful memory comes from how my mother told me my grandfather had passed. The memory starts in my childhood bedroom. What I was doing was unclear -- maybe I was playing with toys, or reading a book -- I'm not entirely sure. Suddenly, I hear my mother call me to come into the living room. I stop what I'm doing and head down the hallway, through our dining room, into our living room, where I find most of my immediate family standing together (my aunt and uncle, my grandmother, my mother, etc.). They are gathered in a semi-circle, I suppose waiting for me to come into the living room.

I walk up to my mother and she says something to the extent of, "We have some news about Papa (the name we all used for my grandfather)." She then says, "Papa died today." As I'm reliving the memory, I remember how that information didn't process with me -- I didn't understand what she had said. I had never experienced death before, and I was only nine, so I said, "What do you mean?" My mother repeated herself, saying, "Papa died in the hospital today and we wanted to tell you."

I slowly looked around at the faces of all my family members. There wasn't a dry eye in the room. It felt like 30 minutes went by before the reality of what my mother had said really sunk into my mind. As I watched everyone around me, the gravity of her words hit me like a truck. I began to cry, which quickly turned to weeping, which then turned to wailing, letting all my emotions flow freely. The idea that my father-figure, my best friend, my closest companion was gone started to settle in my head and it crushed me. I just remember weeping until I ran out of tears -- I cried until I had nothing left.

JESUS ENTERS THE PAINFUL MEMORY

It was in this moment that my facilitator asked where Jesus was in the room during this painful memory. It took me several minutes to perceive where he was, but finally I saw him. It was a strange blending of what I remembered happening in the memory and what happened with Jesus. In my memory, I only remember crying while my mother held me, never moving or leaving the room. But when asked where Jesus was, I saw in this Immanuel Prayer a different scene. In this new scene, rather than staying with my mother and crying, I left the room. As soon as I heard the news of my grandfather's passing, I turned and started to run out of the living room.

But then Jesus appeared. He was on one knee and caught me in his arms as I tried to run away. He enveloped me and held me tight, silently crying with me as I wept. After a moment, he whispered in my ear, "I was always with you; I was with you in this moment too." He then said, "I'm sorry you lost your grandfather, I know how much you loved him." I just stayed there in that moment with Jesus for another minute or two before the memory ended.

REFLECTION AND PROCESSING AFTER IMMANUEL PRAYER

The Immanuel Prayer training that both the facilitator and I went through instructed us to go from the painful memory back to the happy memory. But what I experienced in the end of the painful memory brought me so much joy and relief that we decided to stay there. After that experience with Jesus in the painful memory, I processed how I was feeling with the facilitator: I was given closure and peace. For roughly a decade after learning of my grandfather's death, I was angry with God. I was so confused and hurt -- how could he let someone so deeply connected to me die like that? And why at such a young age? Why did he allow me to go through this trauma?

As I processed out loud, I realized that even in this painful memory, Jesus was there. And I'd like to believe that he really was there, embracing me as I cried over losing my grandfather. The closure I felt came from the understanding that my grandfather hadn't died because God just decided to take him. For many years after his death, I questioned God, simply asking, "Why?" But after experiencing the way Jesus met me in this painful memory, an overwhelming, indescribable sense of peace and comfort washed over me. The question of "Why?" became irrelevant. Rather than questioning God, I turned to thanksgiving. In that Immanuel Prayer space, I began to thank God for simply being there with me during one of the hardest, if not the hardest moment of my life. I thanked Jesus for stooping down on one knee to hug me and embrace me. I thanked God for revealing his presence in this memory, because for so long it felt like he was completely void from it.

FINAL THOUGHTS

This entire experience of Immanuel Prayer -- the memory of my grandfather in the pool, the memory of learning about his death -- all of it culminated in the new understanding that Jesus truly is Immanuel, that he truly is "God with us". It was a phrase I had grown up hearing in the church -- it was like a broken record, especially around Christmas time when everyone started

singing carols or Christmas songs. This Immanuel Prayer session revealed to me that I had known about the idea of "Immanuel", but I had never truly *experienced* what it meant. I'm happy to say that after going through both of those memories, my eyes were opened to the very tangible, practical, and sensational truth that Jesus truly is always with us. Even after reflecting on Dr. Karl's videos, where he would reiterate over and over again the importance of knowing that God is always with us, I realized that even while watching those videos, I wasn't really thinking about what that implied. It wasn't until I had lived through Immanuel Prayer for myself that the truth of his constant presence was revealed to me.

Immanuel Prayer forever changed my understanding of God. It engrained in me the truth that Jesus is closer than a brother -- he was Immanuel then, he is Immanuel now, and he will always be Immanuel in the future. More importantly, he's not just Immanuel when times are good. The beauty of this experience for me was learning that he is with me in the good and the bad. He does not disappear or abandon me when hardships come. He is always with me regardless of my environment or circumstances.

I'm truly grateful for this exercise and can confidently say that every single time I go through it, I have a positive experience with Jesus. Allow me to add to the 100% success rate statistic because from the dozen or so times I've done Immanuel Prayer, that statistic holds true."

Note from Dr. Karl: When Josh comments about the 100% success rate, he is referring to a comment I made to him regarding my experience with InterVarsity staff. Specifically with InterVarsity staff, 100% of the people I have prayed with have been able to connect with Jesus, and have had powerfully positive experiences. Also, note that Josh is seeing powerfully positive experiences when he facilitates Immanuel sessions for others, as well as experiencing profoundly positive encounters with Jesus when he receives Immanuel prayer for himself.

Blessings,

Dr. Lehman/Karl

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