



Maggie #2: “If I leave, she could die”

Case Study from Live Ministry Series (LMS) Commentary

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Session summary: In this 2007 session Maggie works on fear, uncertainty, and confusion about a very tough judgment call she was forced to make regarding ministry with one of her clients.¹ After identifying the target, I coach Maggie to focus on a memory of a past positive experience with Jesus, and in the context of this positive memory I help her to refresh her perception of His presence and to establish a living, interactive connection with Him *in the present*. She then engages directly with Jesus regarding the recent difficult clinical situation and her corresponding fear, uncertainty, and confusion. Jesus does a beautiful job of mentoring her with respect to the recent situation with her client, and then also brings forward and resolves a traumatic childhood memory with thoughts and feelings that exactly match her recent client situation.

5-month follow-up -- lasting positive changes: Maggie’s report at the five month follow-up interview indicates lasting fruit regarding the issues addressed in the session (the initial fear, uncertainty, and confusion remain resolved).

Discussion/commentary:

A. “Keep focusing on Jesus” approach for accessing underlying traumatic memories: At 14:24 in the recorded session, I suggest that Maggie ask Jesus if there are any underlying traumatic memories contributing to her troubled thoughts and emotions. She initially tries the technique that is taught as part of Theophostic, EMDR, and many other ministries and therapies: she focuses on the trigger, stirs up the negative thoughts and emotions associated with the trigger, and then waits for stimulation of the neurological association networks to access the underlying memories. This is an excellent technique, and it is consistently effective in enabling people to connect with unresolved content from traumatic memories; but it sometimes requires a significant amount of time and skill in order to find the best initial triggers, stir up adequate emotional intensity, navigate blockages, follow a trail of associations that can sometimes be complex, and then recognize the material that comes forward.²

With people who have an especially clear perception of the Lord’s presence and an especially strong connection with Him, an alternative technique can be more effective. Instead of using the “traditional” technique just described, the person asks the Lord to lead her to any underlying

¹ The very short summary: Maggie’s client is working to resolve very complex trauma, and she had not come to a place of good resolution by the end of the time available for the ministry session. Maggie felt the Lord leading her to move on to important family concerns that needed to be attended to, but she was fearful that her friend might commit suicide if she left.

² This technique for accessing unresolved content from traumatic memories can be especially difficult for early, intense traumatic experiences where the hippocampus was significantly impaired (or even entirely “off line”). In these situations, the components of the memory are not organized into a coherent autobiographical package, and are therefore both more difficult to activate and more difficult to recognize once they do come forward. For additional discussion of the storage and retrieval of traumatic memories, see “Brain Science, Emotional Trauma, & The God Who is With Us,” Parts III & IV, in the “Immanuel Series” section of www.immanuelapproach.com.

memories *and then continues to focus on Him as she waits for memories to come forward.* This session happens to provide a particularly nice opportunity to observe the two approaches side by side: after an initial attempt with the traditional technique proves unsuccessful, Maggie tries the “keep focusing on Jesus” approach and is then able to access an important underlying traumatic memory.³ I think the “traditional” technique would have eventually been effective if we would have persisted with it, but it is striking that the “keep focusing on Jesus” approach did not require any additional trouble-shooting.

B. “How do I handle a situation like this?” (Level 4 processing task): As discussed at length in the debriefing immediately following the session, the most important healing work in this session was the Lord helping Maggie with her uncertainty regarding “How do I handle a situation like this?” In both the underlying traumatic memory and in the recent triggering situation, most of Maggie’s distress had to do with feeling inadequate and not knowing what to do; and in both of these situations the Lord addressed this level 4 processing task by reassuring her that she had made good choices, and by showing her that she had actually been following His guidance as she discerned how to navigate the recent difficult scenario.

These interactions between Jesus and Maggie regarding “How do I handle a situation like this?” also provide an example of the Lord taking leadership with respect to identifying and resolving unfinished processing tasks. If you watch carefully, you will notice that Jesus initiates all of the work with respect to these level 4 tasks. I come to understand and appreciate what He has done by the time we get to the debriefing, but I certainly was not leading the process.⁴

C. Correcting erroneous/distorted interpretations (Level 5 processing task): Although resolving unfinished level 4 processing tasks was the most important healing work in this session, the Lord also helps Maggie with the level 5 processing task of correcting an erroneous/distorted interpretation regarding the recent triggering situation. At 33:53, Maggie comments: “He’s already told me that it’s not my fault if she kills herself;” and even though the earlier mistaken belief had never been explicitly identified, this comment from the Lord would appear to be replacing an erroneous/distorted interpretation (lie) along the lines of: “It will be *my* fault if she kills herself (it’s my responsibility to keep her from committing suicide).”

D. Low emotional intensity: Many emotional healing sessions, such as the “Rocky: Father-Son Wounds,” “Lisa: Childhood Surgery, Panic Attacks, and Abreaction,” and “Patricia: First Session with Internal Parts” sessions, include intense emotional reactions during the healing process. This is common enough that some have come to believe this is always the case, and that no real healing can occur unless the person displays intense emotions. However, as is clear from this healing work with Maggie, it is possible to experience important healing in a session where emotional intensity remains subdued. We have now seen many sessions where emotional intensity never gets above two or three (on a scale of one to ten), but careful follow-up reveals lasting fruit from important healing.

³ Time on tape: 14:24 to 19:36.

⁴ To clarify: I *was* leading the process with respect to helping Maggie connect with Jesus and then coaching her to keep engaging directly with Him, but I was *not* leading with respect to identifying and resolving unfinished level 4 processing tasks.