



## **Maggie #3: Labor and delivery trauma** **Case Study from Live Ministry Series (LMS) Commentary**

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**Session summary:** After we identify the tentative<sup>1</sup> target for this 2009 session (anger towards her husband and the Lord, and the feeling that a certain client situation is more than she can bear), I coach Maggie to focus on a memory of a past positive experience with Jesus, and in the context of this positive memory she refreshes her perception of His presence and reestablishes a living, interactive connection with Him *in the present*. She then engages directly with Jesus regarding the thoughts and emotions associated with her difficult client situation. As she engages directly with Jesus He leads her to unresolved memories from the traumatic labor and delivery of her first child; and, “coincidentally,” these memories contain the same negative thoughts and emotions that felt true in her interactions with her client, her husband, and the Lord. As she continues to engage directly with Jesus He helps her to resolve these traumatic memories, and we then observe that her anger towards her husband and the Lord, and her sense of unbearable burden regarding her client have also resolved. Finally, Maggie’s report at the six month follow-up interview indicates that these positive changes have remained.

**6 month follow-up – lasting positive changes:** As Maggie describes at length in the follow-up interview, the positive changes observed at the end of the session have remained. She has continued to be free from feeling that work with this particular client stretches and exhausts her beyond what she can endure, she has continued to be free from perceiving her husband to be selfish and hard, she has continued to be free from feeling that the Lord is hard and mean, and she still acknowledges the pain and difficulty associated with childbirth, but now continues to perceive that it can also be a profoundly joyful experience.

### **Discussion/commentary:**

**“Keep focusing on Jesus” approach for accessing underlying traumatic memories:** By the end of the initial discussion both Maggie and I perceive that some of her thoughts and emotions are triggered, and it seems like the Lord is leading in this direction as well, so at 16:17 Maggie begins trying to access any underlying traumatic memories that might be sourcing the suspected triggered content. 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

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<sup>1</sup> When a person comes into the session with ideas about what we should work on, we always offer these initial targets to the Lord as tentative; asking whether we should, indeed, pursue the issues the person has suggested, or whether He would like to lead the session in some other direction.

that comes forward.<sup>2</sup>

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 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, since after an initial attempt with the traditional technique proves unsuccessful (16:17 to 19:33), Maggie tries the "keep focusing on Jesus" approach and is then able to access the underlying traumatic memories (21:30 to 22:28). I think the "traditional" technique eventually would have been successful if we had persisted with it, but it is striking that the "keep focusing on Jesus" approach did not require any additional trouble-shooting.

**"Get the emotion in the search box":** At 19:52, as part of discussing options for accessing the underlying memories, I comment "One way to do it is to actually get the emotion in the search box – *feel* the emotion, and that will light up the pathways that connect to memory." This comment refers to the traditional way of accessing memories just described above, and the phrase "*get the emotion in the search box*" is alluding to an analogy between the ways in which our brains access memories and computer search functions. For additional description and discussion of this analogy, see pages 3-5 in Part IV of "Brain Science, Psychological Trauma, and The God Who is With Us" (available as a free download from [www.immanuelapproach.com](http://www.immanuelapproach.com)).

### **Thoughts regarding the pain processing pathway<sup>3</sup>:**

**Level 1:** In the original experience she had *not* fallen into disorganized attachment, thereby *successfully* completing processing at level 1.

**Level 2:** In the original experience inadequate capacity resulted in Maggie *not allowing herself to feel or express her negative emotions*, thereby failing to complete the level 2 processing task of staying connected. However, Maggie's capacity had grown since the time of the trauma, being able to perceive the Lord's presence with her in the memory provided powerful capacity augmentation, and being able to receive His attunement provided yet another powerful source of capacity augmentation. Therefore, during the healing work she was able to successfully complete level 2 processing tasks by *connecting with*, and *staying connected with*, the painful thoughts and emotions that had been carried in the traumatic memories.

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<sup>2</sup> 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, Psychological Trauma, & The God Who is With Us," Parts III & IV, available as free downloads from [www.immanuelapproach.com](http://www.immanuelapproach.com).

<sup>3</sup> If you are not familiar with the concepts alluded to in these comments, see the extensive discussion of the pain processing pathway provided in Part II of the "Brain Science, Psychological Trauma, and The God Who is With Us" essays (available as a free download from [www.immanuelapproach.com](http://www.immanuelapproach.com)).

**Level 3:** In the original experience Maggie had failed to complete level 3 processing by first *losing access to her relational connection circuits*, and then *being unable to bring them back on line*.<sup>4</sup> However, her level 3 maturity skills had grown since the time of the original trauma, and she also had the additional powerful resources of being able to perceive the Lord's compassionate presence and receive His attunement *while inside the memories*.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, during the healing work she was able to successfully complete level 3 processing by both *regaining* and *maintaining* access to her relational circuits.<sup>6</sup>

**Level 4:** Not only did twenty-year-old Maggie probably start out with level 4 maturity skills that were not yet strong enough to lead her through her very painful, very difficult labor and delivery; but she was also operating with the level 2 handicap of being unable to feel or express her painful emotions, and the level 3 handicap of being unable to maintain access to her relational circuits. Not surprisingly, she was *not* able to successfully complete the level 4 processing task of *navigating the situation in such a way that she would afterwards feel satisfied with how she had handled it*.<sup>7</sup> However, Maggie's level 4 maturity skills had grown since the time of the trauma, increased and augmented capacity enabled her to both feel and express her painful emotions, and increased level 3 maturity skills, perceiving the Lord's compassionate presence, and receiving His attunement enabled her to regain and maintain access to her relational circuits. Furthermore, she was able to receive the Lord's level 4 coaching regarding the situation *while inside the memories* – He encouraged her to “just be,” instead of trying to be super strong (time on tape: 34:08 & following). Therefore, during the healing work she was able to successfully complete level 4 processing by living out of her true heart – instead of going to an emotionally shut down, non-relational place in her attempt to get through an overwhelming situation in her own strength, she was able to stay emotionally connected, relational, and vulnerable, *turning to the Lord for help at any point the situation felt like more than she could handle with her own resources*. By the end of the session she felt satisfied with how she and Jesus had gone through the whole experience.

**Level 5:** Not only did twenty-year-old Maggie go into her labor and delivery with level 5 maturity skills that were probably not yet strong enough to correctly understand the extremely difficult situation, but she was also operating with the additional handicap of working with raw material that was distorted by the unsuccessful processing at levels 2, 3, and 4. Not surprisingly, she was unable to successfully complete the level 5 processing task of correctly interpreting the meaning of the experience. At least part of her distorted interpretations were conclusions along the lines of: “I'm not in good hands, my own resources are all that I have to work with, and I therefore have to be super strong in order to handle this situation,” and

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<sup>4</sup> Among other clues, Maggie's comments regarding lack of joy in the experience indicate loss of access to her relational circuits (time on tape: 35:03 & following).

<sup>5</sup> Maggie makes many comments, from the perspective of being *inside* the memories, indicating that she can perceive the Lord's presence, compassion, and understanding, and that she is receiving His attunement (see, for example, 30:46, 32:55, 36:13, 36:22, and 38:26).

<sup>6</sup> Maggie's ability to *feel* the Lord's compassion and understanding in the memories, her new ability to experience *joy* in the memories (42:39 & following), and her ability to *feel* love and gratitude towards the Lord (44:18 & following) all indicate that she was back in relational mode.

<sup>7</sup> With successful level 4 processing you might still conclude that the experience was very painful, but you will feel satisfied with the way you handled it.

these erroneous conclusions then looped back to exacerbate her difficulties at levels 2, 3, 4. However, Maggie's level 5 maturity skills had grown since the time of the original events, new adequate capacity enabled her to stay emotionally connected, new successful processing at level 3 enabled her to return to relational mode and to stay there, and new successful processing at level 4 enabled her to turn to the Lord for help and hold onto her true heart. Furthermore, perception of the Lord's tangible presence *while **inside** the memories* directly revealed the strategic truth that the Lord was with her. Therefore, in the Immanuel healing work she was able to successfully complete level 5 processing and come to accurate interpretations, such as: "I can't trust the doctor to care for me (especially emotionally), and this situation is more than I can handle in my own strength; but *Jesus is here with me, He understands, and He will supply any help I might need as we go through this together.*"

A piece of really good news regarding all this complex pain processing pathway stuff is that Jesus was the one caring for these details during the session. I was able to put this formulation together afterwards (with hours of careful thought), but during the session I was neither explicitly thinking about any of these processing tasks nor deliberately leading Maggie through the journey of completing them. I focused on helping Maggie to perceive the Lord's presence, maintain a strong connection with Him, and turn to Him for help with every aspect of the session. Fortunately, the Lord thoroughly understands every detail with respect to the pain processing pathway, and He took care of helping Maggie complete all of the previously unfinished processing tasks.