



## **Renaë: Healing Helps Parenting** **Case Study from Live Ministry Series (LMS) Commentary**

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**Session summary:** In this 2008 session, Renaë asks for help with angry outbursts towards her son. She reports that she has been getting triggered by his “whining,” and that when this happens she feels an *intense* need to make him stop the offending behavior *immediately*. She has been very disturbed by the sense that she is only marginally able to control her responses, she finds herself communicating anger, contempt, and disgust as she tries to make him stop, and she is very concerned about the possible harmful effects of her angry outbursts. We start the ministry time with Renaë focusing on past experiences of positive connection with the Lord, deliberately appreciating specifics regarding these past experiences, and then asking the Lord to refresh her connection with Him in the present. After establishing a good connection with the Lord, she focuses on Him and asks for guidance, and He takes her to memories where *her father* responded to *her* in the same way *she* is now responding to *her son*. Throughout the rest of the session I coach her to engage directly with Jesus at every point, and she appears to have beautiful interactions with Jesus and to receive important healing as she does this.

**5 month follow-up – lasting positive changes:** Finally, during the five months following the session Renaë observes that instead of getting triggered to the point of angry outbursts ~once/day, she notices the triggering only once every one to two weeks, and that actual angry outbursts have decreased to ~once/four months. This is certainly a dramatic, lasting improvement, but also indicates that some pieces of the problem have not yet been *fully* resolved.

**Additional follow-up (17 months):** At the five month follow-up interview Renaë reported that episodes of getting triggered had been occurring ~once every two weeks and that she had actually responded in anger only once during the preceding three months, in contrast to the daily episodes of both triggering and angry outburst that had been occurring at the time of the original session. This was certainly a dramatic improvement, but we noted that some “splinters” must have remained to cause these occasional problems. I spoke with Renaë a year after the second follow-up interview (17 months after the initial session), and she reported that episodes of getting triggered by her son’s whining and responding in anger had been completely resolved for many months. It’s not clear what happened to resolve the underlying roots of the lingering occasional episodes, but we are grateful for the eventual complete resolution.

### **Discussion/commentary:**

**“It’s like a switch get’s [flipped], and I’m sort of a different person”:** At 14:23, Renaë comments: “It’s like a switch gets [flipped], and I’m sort of a different person.” When someone uses language like this many will immediately assume she’s talking about dissociative “switching.” It is important to be aware of two other phenomena that could be producing the subjective experience Renaë is describing. One is that she could be getting triggered to childhood trauma, and as the implicit memory comes forward and she blends with the child ego state carried in the memory package, she feels like she is “inside” the child ego state from the original experience. This is strongly consistent with Renaë commenting that she felt “small” as

she was connected to memories during the session (time on tape 29:40). The second phenomena is loss of access to relational connection circuits. If she lost access to her relational circuits in the original trauma, then the unresolved memory will also include loss of access to her relational circuits, and she will temporarily lose access to her relational circuits whenever the memory gets triggered and she blends with the ego state carried in the memory package.<sup>1</sup> Temporary loss of access to her relational circuits is strongly consistent with everything Renae described along the lines of: “I have to stop him,” “he MUST stop,” “I would do *anything* to stop him” (time on tape 17:32 to 17:47); and especially: “I need to get away from him,” and “I want to lock him in the other room” (time on tape 19:10 to 19:30).

Putting these two pieces together, the two “different people” in her subjective experience could be her adult self as a relational being (relational connection circuits on), and her child self as a non-relational being (relational connection circuits off). This possible explanation is consistent with the fact that Renae has not observed any other<sup>2</sup> evidence of dissociation during these episodes. For example, she has not noticed any amnesic phenomena associated with her angry episodes,<sup>3</sup> and when she connected to the underlying childhood memories during the session there was no evidence of amnesic barriers or any other dissociative phenomena.<sup>4</sup>

***Engage directly with Jesus to find the underlying memories:*** One of the best examples in this session of “engaging directly with Jesus” comes at the point where Renae is trying to find the underlying source of her triggered thoughts, emotions, and reactions.

The traditional approach, taught as part of Theophostic, EMDR, and many other ministries and therapies, is to focus on the triggers, stir up the negative thoughts and emotions associated with the triggers, and then wait 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.<sup>5</sup> For example, my perception of

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<sup>1</sup> The subjective experience of losing access to your relational circuits can be much more subtle, especially for those of us who have spent a lot of time subtly triggered with relational circuits subtly off line, and have therefore become very skilled at compensating by using other aspects of maturity and leveraging cognitive information. However, for those who live with the usual baseline of having their relational circuits online, the occasional dramatic loss of access to these circuits can be a very disturbing experience.

<sup>2</sup> “Other evidence” referring to evidence other than the subjective perception of “a switch being flipped” and “feeling like a different person.”

<sup>3</sup> For example, when she is experiencing one of these episodes of being triggered and angry, she remembers the rest of her life without difficulty; and after her anger, contempt, and disgust have resolved, she is able to remember the details of what occurred during the episode.

<sup>4</sup> For example, no disorientation or confusion regarding her current circumstances (as sometimes occurs when a dissociate part comes forward), no change in voice or mannerisms, and no subjective sense of a different personality being present.

<sup>5</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

Jesus' presence and sense of connection with Him are still usually very faint, and so I am usually not able to use the "engage directly with Jesus" approach. In the sessions where I have to use the traditional approach, I often spend 30 - 45 minutes focusing on triggers, talking about them, and deliberately trying to stir things up before I am able to connect with emotions from the underlying memories.

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 help her connect with target triggered emotions and to help her find the underlying memories, *and then continues to focus on Him as she waits for the emotions and 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 (time on tape 15:00 to 23:36), we try the "keep focusing on Jesus" approach (time on tape 25:38 to 27:10). I coach Renae to go back to the place where she perceived the Lord's presence and felt a refreshed connection with Him *in the present*; and then *in this context* I coach her to focus on Him and engage with Him directly regarding "help me connect to the triggered emotions," and "help me find the underlying memories." As you can observe, with the "engage directly with Jesus" approach she quickly connects with the target negative emotions (time on tape 26:23), and then accesses the underlying traumatic memories (time on tape 27:10). I think the "traditional" technique would have eventually been effective if we would have persisted with it, but it is striking that the "engage directly with Jesus" approach did not require any additional troubleshooting.

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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, in the "Immanuel Series" section of [www.kclehman.com](http://www.kclehman.com).