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Invitation to the Healing Journey

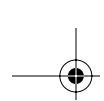


I will never forget that Sunday morning. We had been preparing to pray for people in the worship service. Several months earlier Bill Leslie, senior pastor of LaSalle Street Church, an inner-city congregation, had shared his desire that our church become a place of deep healing.

As I write these words, memories of Bill Leslie flood my mind. Philip Yancey, who also attended LaSalle at that time, speaks for me in a memorial reflection he wrote about Bill years later:

Bill talked too loud in the pulpit, and laughed at his own oft-repeated jokes, and he occasionally slaughtered the English language. But he was our pastor, and we grew to love him.

Bill Leslie did many things wrong, but he got one thing right: he understood the grace of God. He recognized his own endless need for grace; he preached it almost every Sunday morning; he offered it to everyone around him in starkly practical ways. Because of his faithfulness, the Near North side of Chicago is a very different place today. And so I believe is heaven.¹



Bill drew me into his lifelong vocation of seeking and extending grace. He recruited me to lead the healing prayer team that ministered at LaSalle Street Church. That first Sunday Bill preached on the woman who had a hemorrhage that had lasted for twelve years. You can read about her in Mark 5. Because of Jewish purity laws, her condition kept her isolated from others, and the Gospel writer tells us that she had suffered at the hands of many doctors. Still, she believed if she could just touch the hem of Jesus' robe, she would be healed. She did, and she was.

But Jesus didn't let her slip away anonymously, still a social pariah. He wanted to heal her fully. So he looked around for her, exclaiming that he had felt power go out of him when she touched him. Finally she identified herself, and he spoke these powerful words: "Daughter, your faith has healed you [made you whole, or as in some translations, 'saved you']. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." Bill wove his own story of brokenness and healing into his telling of this woman's story.

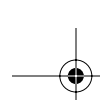
At the end of the sermon, Bill looked out at the congregation earnestly and offered the opportunity to come forward for prayer. He had a wonderful way of putting the invitation. "The worst that can happen to you is that you will have an experience of being profoundly loved. And that's not so bad, is it? And you might hear the Master's voice, 'My son, your faith has made you whole. My daughter, your faith has made you whole. Go in peace, freed from your suffering.'"

People streamed forward. We prayer ministers prayed for them in teams of two. The prayer time lasted nearly thirty minutes. And such prayer ministry, launched on Mother's Day 1986, continues today on the second Sunday of every month in LaSalle Street Church.

All of us long to be healed. We know things are not as they were meant to be, neither in our individual lives nor in our common lives as churches, communities and even nations. We long for things to be put right.

The healing ministry is about letting God put things right in our lives.



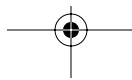
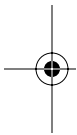


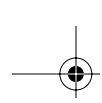
HEALING FOR SEXUAL, RELATIONAL AND SOCIAL HURTS

In our world the healing ministry is urgently needed. We live in a day of immense challenge and incredible opportunity. Divorce is at an all-time high. Broken and blended families and single-parent households are more and more the norm rather than exceptions. Gender confusion and sexual addiction are becoming epidemic. Historically, pornography and compulsive masturbation were male problems, but in our incredibly sexualized culture, increasing numbers of women are also struggling with these problems. The Internet has made addictive experiences available at the touch of a mouse.

At a recent Urbana Missions Convention I led a prayer seminar on sexual healing and purity for twenty-five hundred students. A staff team of seventy prayer ministers had been trained and stood ready to pray for the students. The sexual struggles people brought seemed overwhelming. Cross-dressing, demonization, homosexual struggles, addiction to pornography, sexual abuse, compulsive masturbation, widespread promiscuity, intensely sexualized fantasy lives and debilitating emotional dependencies are just a few of the many issues we prayed for. If God doesn't stretch forth a powerful hand to heal and save, where are we headed as a culture, as a world? Sexual and relational brokenness, woundedness and confusion rage among us, maybe as much in the church as in the broader culture. Can God make a difference? Can God's power and presence heal us? If not, how real and potent is the gospel? Is it really good news?

The wounds for which we need healing are not limited to sexual and gender identity and experience. Today's young people drive the entertainment, fashion and media industries, and they live in a horizontal culture of peers who decide morality and values without much regard to former generations and older authority figures.² Trust in institutions and leaders has been shattered. Further, ethnic divisions and hatred are tearing the world apart. Violence is increasingly per-





vasive and being exported to the world through mass media.

Who will deliver us from such a divided world? Who will intervene to halt the global violence? Is God still powerful and present to heal and to save? Is the good news really good?

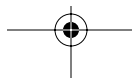
In the face of all these challenges, I remain profoundly hopeful. God is still at work. Jesus is still the same Jesus. What Jesus did in the Gospels and in the biblical book of Acts, God can and will do in our day. God is powerful and present to heal and to save, if we will but open our eyes and our hearts and look to God in faith.

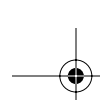
I also have profound confidence in the emerging generation. Yes, there is increasing brokenness—sexual, relational and emotional. But there are signs that the emerging generation could lead the way into a new day of healing and transformation in the church and in the world. This generation is more relational, more experiential, more naturally spiritual, more rooted in worship and in mystery. Young people today are also more vulnerable and authentic with their pain and their reality. Thus I believe that the emerging generation is poised to turn to God to humbly seek healing. And it is poised to lead all of us into the healing presence and ministry of our transforming God.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

At the heart of our search for healing is our longing for a transformed identity, an identity that is solid. Think of all the identity labels we throw around—gender, class, racial and sexual orientation labels. We seem to believe that if we can find the right label, we have found our identity. Our culture has become so confused and self-referential in the search for the source of human identity. *We try to name ourselves.* This act of self-naming may be the most central characteristic of the spirit of our age. But we can never name ourselves. The effort is doomed to failure from the start.

The journey of healing is at its heart a journey of hearing and em-





bracing our true name, our deepest identity. It is about becoming who we were created to be, reaching all the immense and beautiful potential that we have because we are made in the image of God and therefore of infinite value. We need to hear our true name. We need to hear from our Creator who we are and how valuable we are. Naming ourselves is a futile activity. But as we turn to God to name us, God can lead us into a new future full of transformational possibilities.

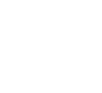
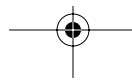
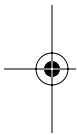
What do you face? Have you struggled with sexual addiction, or gender confusion, or an intensely sexualized fantasy life? Have you experienced sexual abuse? Are you part of a broken or blended family or a single-parent home that left you longing for more parental nurture, blessing and protection? Have you experienced broken relationships that wounded you deeply?

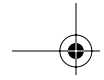
Do you find yourself numb, apathetic or emotionally flat? As you were growing up were you mistreated or abused, physically or sexually? Are you emotionally dependent and unhealthily enmeshed with another person? Is violence a primary part of your inner world, your entertainment world or your outer world? Are you part of an ethnic community or marginalized group that has experienced discrimination or rejection? Do you have a physical condition that you would like God to touch and to begin to heal?

If you resonate with any of these common struggles, this healing journey is for you. If you long for God to put things right and know that God is our only hope, then this healing journey is for you.

I invite you to join me in the journey. The worst that can happen is that you will have an experience of being profoundly loved by God and by others you invite to be your traveling companions. That's not so bad, is it? And the best that could happen is that you might hear the Master's voice: *My son, your faith has made you whole. My daughter, your faith has made you whole. Go in peace, freed from your suffering.*

When I was considering whether to write this book, and if so what





it should look like, I spent some time in the gardens at Cantigny west of Chicago. As I pondered, I had a sense that the book would be not so much an academic exploration as a heart-to-heart conversation. I would receive healing in the conversation and so would you.

So let us walk for a while together in the garden of the heart and talk about things of the soul. Let's travel together on the healing journey toward wholeness in Christ.

