

Interview with Dr. Matthew Breuninger, author of:
Finding Freedom in Christ: Healing Life's Hurts
Hosted by: Father Michael Denk, **founder of The Prodigal Father**

Father Michael Denk: Hi everyone. This is Father Michael Denk. I am here at St. Matthias Church in Parma; I am the administrator and I am also the founder of The Prodigal Father, and I am very excited to meet the author of this book, I found it very moving and I am glad to share with you. Matt, I am not only reading the book but doing some of the exercises that you had in the book, so I am looking forward to talking to you about the fruitfulness that has happened for that so if you can just take a moment and introduce yourself to our viewers so they can know some of your background.

Dr. Matthew Breuninger: Sure. I am honored to be on here, Father, so thanks for having me. My name is Dr. Matt Breuninger, I'm a clinical psychologist. I am currently an Associate Professor of Psychology at Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio. I also have a part-time private practice called Wellspring Counseling and Coaching and we provide Mental Health Services to the area. We have some programs developed that we have rolled out for people nationally, and I am also a father, maybe my deepest and truest pleasure, is to be a husband and father to my wife Brittany and we have six really wonderful kids and so that's me. I earned a Master's Degree at Ave Maria University in Theology and did my doctoral work in psychology at Baylor University. I've always been interested in this intersection of theology and psychology and this book has some of that in there. It allowed me to explore some of those topics.

Father Michael: It's a beautiful book called, ***Finding Freedom in Christ: Healing Life's Hurts***. I think that's been an ongoing charism of mine, especially with this ministry of the Prodigal Father, is helping people come to know God, the Father's love as He is and we'll talk about, as you mentioned throughout the book, that sometimes that image can get distorted because we may not have had people in our lives that have fathered us or mentored us or loved us in such a way that allows us to relate to God in that way.

Dr. Matt: I think that is so important. In some ways the book is about recognizing the obstacles and barriers that we've put up in our relationship to the Father and learning to recognize those and begin to dismantle those obstacles and barriers so that we can have an intimate relationship with the Father. When we have that intimate relationship its Dynamic, it's freeing, we have clarity in what we are supposed to do, where we are supposed to go; we have deep peace. The problem with removing those obstacles and barriers to our relationship with the Father is it presupposes that we trust the Father, it presupposes that he's that kind of person that we'd want to have a relationship with. And see, intimacy is vulnerable, intimacy means that we can be hurt, we can be exposed and I think a lot of us, even though up here (pointing to his head) so many of us know that God is love, it's in here (pointing to the heart) that we wonder, 'yeah, but if I open myself up, if I remove these obstacles and barriers, is He safe, is He trustworthy?'

Father Michael: Yeah, There's even a protective sense, so when I'm teaching people how to pray and enter into a deeper intimacy with God the Father, many people's initial response is, 'I'm good, I've got the prayer thing down I know God is love.' Yes, but I do find that they've not experienced that encounter; they know it, they know that's the right answer to say, yes, even to maybe introduce the idea that it could be deeper and more beautiful, can kind of cause that resistance immediately right away.

Dr. Matt: I know, Father. I think that it's a big enough idea and I think it's so prevalent, I've done a couple of studies. I haven't published these ones yet; I've presented them at conferences but sometimes there's a distinction in psychology, between what we call God image or God concept and God attachment. God concept is what you've learned in Sunday school about God; it's the didactic knowledge you have. God attachment is that felt experience of intimacy in relationship. And when I've done studies on students, overwhelmingly students report God is love, God is saved, God is trustworthy. And then when you measure their God attachment, that felt insecurity, overwhelmingly it's avoidant or anxious and so there's a real disconnect with what they know here (pointing to the head) and what they feel here (pointing to the heart). That's a big enough idea for me that one of the things we've done in my counseling practice is we've developed a 12-week program. I feel really excited about this, we actually just launched it. It's called *Known Embraced by the Heart of the Father*, and the entire purpose of the 12-week program is to help you deepen your experience as a beloved son or daughter of the Father. Basically, it's like that second step in the book which is being honest about where you are with God. I felt like it's so profound, I wanted to expand it out for people. And so, this *Known Program* is intended to help people deepen that sense of belonging, that sense of belovedness. I have people come to me and they say, 'Dr. B, here are my goals, here's what I want to work on,' and I think to myself I'm not sure those are the goals you'd want to work on if you knew that you were beloved. Sometimes our goals, our aspirations come from a place of insecurity, a place of fear; they come from a place of wanting to project something to others or convince others of something, and I think we can only genuinely know our goals or trust out goals when we first know that we are beloved.

Father Michael: Yeah, you know that idea of feeling that and dwelling in that. How did you assess, you mentioned that you assessed the known kind of head knowledge, how did you assess the second level?

Dr. Matt: So there's a couple of instruments or measures that have been developed in psychology, one of them is called the God attachment inventory, and they are basically just questionnaires. They are highly based on, so there's an idea in psychology of attachment and you see this in little children with their caregivers and the idea emerged that just like the parent is a caregiver, God is a caregiver. We can have an attachment or a felt relationship of security and intimacy with God, which is not novel for Catholics right, but in psychology this is a novel thing and these measures really rely pretty heavily upon the measures you would give to a parent or to an individual who is assessing an earthly relationship. It says questions like, in times of threat or stress I turn to God and I experience safety. It has questions like that to try to get at do you turn to God and how do you turn to God. And in so many ways that image behind you of

the Prodigal Son is, I mean this is attachment. What I love about that story, it struck me when I was working on this book, is that it says that the father runs out to meet him when he was a long way off. There's a sense in which the father isn't waiting back and the son trusts enough, the son actually trusts enough in his father's love, to come back even though he sort of says, yeah maybe my father will just have me hired on as a servant or something; he still goes back. An attachment is about seeking proximity to your caregiver, when you are stressed, when you are threatened, you want to be close to them. And just that image behind you is such a beautiful depiction of what a secure attachment looks like and when you're hurting, when you're broken, when you are scared, do you fall into the arms of your caregiver? Literally or figuratively. And so that's what it measures. They try to measure through questions, which are imperfect, you know, there are always some error in these things, but they try to measure, do you feel safe with God? Do you approach God? Do you avoid God? When you do approach God do you feel secure or do you feel worried? And what they are looking for is a deep-felt sense of security and if you have that, they call it a secure attachment.

Father Denk: The reason this image has become so big for me is I did not know God like that and so probably my third year in the seminary, when I made my first eight-day retreat and I went back to make numerous more and the thirty-day spiritual exercises, it's become a theme of my mine. When I was ordained that was the image that I used on the prayer card because as you mentioned, yeah, for me coming to know now that God is going to embrace me and hold me even in my brokenness and sinfulness, and it's come through my spiritual director and confessor, and being able to confess anything and know of his unconditional love and that has been everything for me and now it's like I just want everybody to know...

Dr. Matt: I have a somewhat similar experience and that is why again in the book one of the steps is we have to confess, sort of everything, we have to find someone who we can confess everything to because in some ways we are only as sick as our deepest secret. And when we are holding parts of ourselves back, we never allow ourselves to be touched interiorly by God's grace, because we are always sort of shielding and protecting and preserving ourselves, protecting ourselves. To your point, I think there is a way in which by confessing these things to somebody and allowing that person to give us an image of the father when they hold our darkness and our sinfulness and our brokenness and our shame and our guilt and they don't run away from us and they say, 'Hey, I'll see you next week.' And we say, yeah, you're not going to leave me, you're not scandalized, we start to get this image that maybe God is like that. It's so powerful; it's so transformative and I want people to feel that and then from that place you grow, right? You can flourish from there. All of a sudden you can start stepping into your truest self, your true identity. You can let go of all the things you are holding on to that you thought protected you and kept you safe because now you know what it is to be loved as you are.

Father Denk: Yeah, and you know what the phrase that you mentioned before that they use a lot of times in AA about our sicknesses you know, anything we've not brought to light and I was blessed to have this, he just died this past summer, but for 16 years he was my director and confessor and the poor guy he knew everything about me, inside out like every deep dark, anything that I've ever done or experienced, he knew. But I want to talk about this part of your

book where the subtitle is my wounds. This was so helpful for me, so I want to thank you for this because I did not, one of my other lines is the deeper we go into our wounds for the healing, sometimes we realize the wound is even deeper than we thought. And this helped me tremendously because I had a lot of things that I did not know I was still hurting from. And so there is four things that you cover in here and maybe you could just talk a little bit about each one. **One** was identifying all the people, organizations or institutions that hurt you. I think this is important because a lot of people have been hurt by the church, or institutions, even maybe people, students going to college. You know, we've been hurt by people and institutions. You have the reader make a list out of every single hurt...

Dr. Matt: And nothing is too small. I think that part of what we do sometimes is say things like well I shouldn't feel bad about that. Whether or not that's true, we have to be honest about the fact that we do. It's one thing to say, I shouldn't feel that way, but when I think back on it do I feel a sense of shame or embarrassment or anger or is it still there, still potent? Even if I think it's silly, even if my mind says that is so immature. That's not what I am asking, what I'm asking you is are you still experiencing some adverse reaction, and if you are let's get it on paper. And this could be, you are made at the bank for foreclosing on your house, you are mad at the church, you are mad at your last job or your last employer, you're not getting adequate health benefits. Let's get them all down. You know Father, I was talking to my mom and I was sort of joking that a lot of the people that I talk to about the book have read part of it and it seems like they haven't finished it. And my mom said, Matt, I wonder if it's not the fact that what you ask them to do is work. We all sort of want to be healed, right? They're sort of like okay, look we can be healed, yeah, let me pick this up and then you get to a point that says I want you to start from as early as you can remember and think about all of the hurts that you've ever experienced and write them down. And you go, ahh, I'll just put that away for a while because part of what I am asking is something that requires tremendous courage and tremendous honesty and vulnerability and humility. And that's to dive back into a past that a lot of us have spent a lot of time trying not to think about anymore.

Father Denk: I'll be honest. You say that in the book that this is going to take work. And when I got to this part, I'm reading this as a spiritual read; I'm reflecting and I set a timer every day and I do as certain amount of spiritual reading every day. (*that's awesome*) I'm kind of German in that sense, so if I'm doing my spiritual reading, I'm not journaling, I'm just doing my spiritual reading, right? Well, I broke the rule on this one, because I started to and I would encourage the viewers just to start; Get a couple of things on there (paper), but Matt, it became a floodgate, and I will say, it was effortless for me (*beautiful*). Once I began to do it, it was so, so healing and I think as you said, we tend to say, it's not that big a deal, you know, I shouldn't be hurting over this still (*right*). I should have it under control, but I am still hurting from some things. So for me, just to begin writing that and to categorize that, I found it very helpful, to look first at institutions, and this is so important with God, the Father and the church because we are an institutional church, you know in terms of even a patriarchy; this is a patriarchal religion and I think our culture says throw out the patriarchy and even God the Father; I'm so big on God the Father because you know there was this time we went through with this inclusive language where you could only talk about God as a general but like Jesus said when you go to the

Father...instead of tossing out this image, maybe it's something that could be redeemed in us and we can actually experience the Father for who He is (*agreed, yes*).

The **second one** is to write down what person or what that person or organization did to hurt you. So not only name the organization or person, but then say this is what they did that hurt me.

Dr. Matt: And again this is, Father, I mean, part of the way I think about healing is that we have these barriers to relationship with God and we can only begin to heal once we sort of recognize what, and we are going to get, I'm sort of alluding to what's coming but, so often we contribute a piece or portion to the hurt and that's the good news, the good news is if the problem is the world, if the problem is the bank or your mom or your dad, we are destined to be miserable and unhappy because we are never going to be able to adequately control the world or the people in it. But often times, what I do, is I add something. There's suffering, there's going to be suffering, we are promised suffering but I add to it and I can learn to recognize the part that I'm adding, and how I am making it worse. But in order to get to that part we have to go through first and acknowledge that I am hurting, and that's what these first two steps are just an acknowledgement and humility that I am hurting and I'm not going to pretend anymore. And so, we begin to let go of these safeguards around our wounds, and the simple humble act of acknowledging, 'I hurt because in third grade this girl told me that my nose was too big.' And when I still think about it to this day, my stomach turns. I write it down. Part of what I'm doing there, part of that step is about not avoiding anymore. You know, there are various theories in psychology, Father, but a lot of them will talk about how avoidance is a root of so many of our problems. Avoidance of suffering, avoidance of suffering and how often does that thought, that thought is a sad thought to me, a distressing thought to me and I want to avoid it and so I do all sorts of things to avoid it. You know, you scroll Tik Tok, or Instagram, you look at Face Book, you watch Netflix, sometimes prayer can even be a form of avoidance. I don't want to think about these things so I'm just going to do something holy or pious. And what I am asking people to do here is to get honest, to get really rigorously honest, and that means acknowledging openly and honestly that that particular hurt: I'm mad at my mom. Here's why. I'm mad at my sister. Here's why. And I think for some of us that can feel disloyal, it can feel petty, it can feel immature, but I think it's a crucial step. And being honest, not only with ourselves, but beginning to bring honesty into our relationship with the Father. It's not like He doesn't know either, right Father? It's not like He doesn't know, like he doesn't look into the depths of our hearts and know. It's just that we are acknowledging it honestly within ourselves to Him for the first time.

Father Michael: Well, I even think about my spiritual director. He usually knew what I was going through, but to be able to speak it out loud, and to say it to him, brought about this feeling of unconditional love, like and he even just to say the thing that you think is so horrible or so painful, or so whatever...I teach different types of meditation and contemplation and one of them that you might have heard of is 'pray like a pirate,' and its acknowledge, relate, receive, respond. So, acknowledge what you are feeling, just acknowledging it and relating it to God the Father, and the receiving what He may say or do with you in that moment and responding to Him in some way (*father, that is beautiful*),

Dr. Matt: I love that. That's actually beautiful, that fits so nicely with sort of this model because I think we have to start with where we really are, we have to acknowledge, and ultimately, it is, I wish I had talked to you before I wrote, because it really is I think, healing, the way I define it: *to be healed is to be free to love the way God created you to love*. That's what healing is: freedom to love the way God created you to love. Often times we're not free because we're not loving the way God wants us to love, because our wounds that we've decided we need to protect and defend against our wounds, we don't have the freedom to go where God wants, we have to go where we feel safe or secure. But to your point, in some ways healing is about just receiving this love and mercy of God, and going wherever He called, to be receptive to wherever He wants you to go, to acknowledge and receive. I mean that it's that type of prayer you just described. I've never heard of it, 'praying like a pirate.'

Father Michael: I actually used the image of the Annunciation, where the angel Gabriel came to Mary and she was afraid, and she had this initial feeling and she related it to God, to the angel, you know, so the continuation is 'be not afraid Mary as you have found favor with God.' So that dynamic happens with us as well. When you talk about self-preservation, where I think that we do that so unknowingly, and so it takes a conscious effort and this would probably be praying for the grace of the Holy Spirit, and it's a conscious choice of I want to, I want to understand this and I want you to help me deal with this.

Dr. Matt: I think when we get wounded, when we get hurt, it's painful, it's distressing and most of us don't want to feel that hurt or distress, and so a lot of us adopt ways, and I call them self-preservation strategies in the book, but we adopt ways to not have to feel the pain or suffering of our wounds again, so sometimes we become obsessively controlling. It's a way to not have to feel insecurity or instability, the distress of not knowing what's going to come and sometimes we start talking a lot. I've had people say to me in therapy, I talk a lot so that somebody doesn't ask me a question that I don't know the answer to because I hate feeling stupid, so I talk the whole time so I never have to potentially feel stupid. I mean, that's a subtle thing so to your point, we subtly and unknowingly adopt behaviors, attitudes ideas that are aimed at keeping us safe, secure, protected, and you are 100% right that asking God for the grace, not only to illuminate and reveal these things to us but to even have the willingness to be open to them because sometimes they feel like a part of our personality, I mean I'm just a funny, out-going guy. Maybe. Maybe. But maybe that's not actually free, maybe that's not freedom for you, maybe you became the funny out-going guy because if you couldn't make light of something and if you couldn't turn it into a joke, it was going to hurt you so badly. Maybe you became the funny, out-going guy because you realized that you were shy and quiet initially and you hated that feeling and you felt like high school was swimming with sharks and if you could get out ahead of it then you didn't have to feel insecure or afraid, and so now you're just the funny, out-going guy, but that was something you adopted and I think these self-preservation strategies can feel deeply ingrained in us; they can feel like parts of who we are. So, there is a part of this that's asking you to surrender everything you think is you, all these ideas you think; men shouldn't cry, all these attitudes you've adopted; I'm the tough guy, I'm this guy, and just say to God, 'I'm giving this all to you, and we are going to sift through this because some of this stuff might have been adopted for the wrong reasons. I want to be free; I want freedom.' Father,

Franciscans are very charismatic, you know praise Him and raise Him kind of; I'm not very charismatic in that sense, and I don't often feel that God gives me words or prophecies, but I will say very honestly, when I began to write this book the word freedom, I mean it was like seared in my heart; it was like God was just, this word freedom, it just resonated so strongly with me and it feels to me like, it's just what God wants. From the very beginning God came, after the fall of Adam and Eve, everything God has done has been to set his people free. Free from original sin, the spiritual bondage from original sin, but setting his people free from oppression and slavery literally, freedom, He wants us to be free, and this image to me has just been so prevalent and so powerful. Back to your original point, these things, these self-preservation strategies become so, we adopt really subtle ones Father, intelligent ones and the smarter you are the more subtle and intelligent they are. And some of them are wrapped in beautiful religious packages too. And so, we present ourselves in certain ways. I always tease our students here, they'll do this thing where they have their Demon Ford conservation bracelets, and they make sure they hang out just enough for you to see it and they kind of humbly slouch their shoulders and they talk very quietly, 'Dr. Breuninger...' 'Hey, just cover that thing up first of all, stand up straight and talk to me.' Sometimes we adopt piety and certain habits, religious habits and nobody would point to them and say, 'hey that's bad.' But we've adopted them not from a place of freedom, we've adopted them from a place of preservation.

Father Michael: I think what you've helped me realize too is that, actually just now talking to you, that the pain is there, regardless of what we try to do and until we allow God to heal that, we're carrying, and that is kind of the thesis of your book, we carry and create this extra pain that we don't need to carry.

Dr. Matt: Yes. That's it. It's there and it's going to stay there and what we do is we react to it and we adopt ways to deal with it that just spirals in our life and then we're spending so much time and effort and energy and attention trying to keep these self-preservation strategies in place, make sure all the right people like me, make sure I'm presenting the right way, make sure I'm saying the right thing not saying the right thing. It's exhausting, it's anxiety-provoking, often times we aren't moving in the right direction that gives life meaning and purpose, it's just, and deep down if we take time by the way to get quiet that pain is still there. If we allow our minds time for quiet and reflection it comes up and so we got to stay busy. It's exhausting. What I want us to do and maybe this is another way of articulating what healing is, but to heal is to just be able to suffer well. The pain is there. Hold it. Give it God. Let God touch it. Your acknowledgement. Take that pain, name it, claim it, and acknowledge it before God and sit with Him in it. And it will transform, it will change. But you don't have to add to it, by trying to adopt strategies to avoid it, diminish it, numb it; that's where we get into trouble.

Father Michael: That's where the freedom comes too. And my felt freedom, which I've had prior to this, but a lot of the book re-invigorated that in me. When I sat with my pain, when I admitted it, when I acknowledged it, there was a freedom; it felt like, ok, this happened, it does still hurt and being with the Father in my hurt, there's freedom. And I'm not carrying it and what I like is you end with one of the appendix on the Surrender Novena. What I did with this, I prayed that novena numerous times but for some reason this gave me, I think having read the

book, I really reflected on it line by line and I think the first one, *why do you confuse yourself by worrying? Leave the care of your affairs to me and everything will be peaceful*. And you asked us to examine this too, you know, if we have any core false beliefs. I noticed one of mine, I'm looking at my notes, is well, that would be irresponsible of me to do that, leave all of my cares for the Father.

Dr. Matt: We have to be doing stuff, right? I've got to be doing so I can't turn it all over to the Father...

Father Michael: I gotta have this figured out instead of now you have it. Oh so this is for me was also that we don't trust God. That goes all the way back to Adam and Eve, and I can't find the verse right here but it's a verse from Genesis, and that was the very first time of not trusting in the goodness of God, like we don't trust that He is good...

Dr. Matt: ...so I better take care of it.

Father Michael: Yeah, and that's the self-reliance, a core sin of mine and probably many of ours, is that I have to take care of it...

Dr. Matt: Father, this Marian priest, a Marian father, we were talking one day and he said, there's this line in the Catechism that jumped out to me, and it's paragraph 397, and it says, 'since the fall of Adam and Eve, all of our sins have consisted of disobedience and a lack of trusting in the goodness of God' and that is what jumped out to me and to him and to you which is I just think a little bit like I better do that, I don't know if you really want what's best for me, I don't know if you really care enough, I don't know if you can really hold or handle this for me and so I better do it. We stand guard at the gate of our wounds, because we think God can't.

Father Michael: In our head, God is good, right? But I realize that the trust isn't there sometimes.

Dr. Matt: You know I had the opportunity to speak with, you know in the book I have the Trust Novena, I had the chance to, how providential was this, I was walking through campus and I just had the generic attribution to it in the book, the sisters of life created it, so I'm walking through campus and I see a sign that says 'come hear Sister Faustina talk,' author of the Litany of Trust. And here, the sister that wrote the Litany of Trust was on campus, four or five weeks ago here, and I had the chance to just sit down with her and chat about it. And she gave me this beautiful, she got into religious life and her world started to fall apart, just started to crumble and it was very painful. But she realized that she could either trust that God was allowing something old and unhealthy to fall apart so that he could re-build something new or she could try to scramble and try to hold all to get you pull that old structure back together and not trust that what God was doing was good. Sometimes when it's painful we think it mustn't think it's from a good God. When I'm digging a splinter out of my child's foot, it's causing them pain, but I am a good father, I'm doing this because I love you so much and I gotta get this out, I have to, but my three-year old doesn't understand that, she just thinks, daddy you are hurting me. I know baby,

just trust me, trust me. If you trust me, you'll feel better. And something similar happens in our lives with God where He's allowing these old unhealthy structures and relationships and ideas to fall apart precisely because He loves us and He wants something better, but we are desperate to hold onto it and pull it back together because we are afraid of like maybe you are not good.

Father Michael: And I found by doing this, by writing it out and sharing it with God, the goodness came almost immediately, *(Father, I am so happy to hear that)* And I felt again his goodness, because and I don't know, it's obviously I think the honesty is trusting Him to share enough my pain, I am feeling pain, even though I think I shouldn't be, I am and I'm going to share this with you. But what I like is that you make it so practical. Write down the people, place and institutions, follow that up with what exactly did they do and I think it is so important in psychology to be concrete and spirituality too to be concrete, then **the third** is why this action or behavior hurt you.

Dr. Matt: Father I had this idea, about these wounds. This is what I kind of got excited about that clicked for me when I was working on this, which was what does it mean to be wounded? And I kept thinking that a wound is a failure to be loved the way God created us to be loved. If I think about all my wounds, it's like somebody didn't love me the way I was meant to be loved. So, what does it mean to be loved? And all I find are these sort of academic definitions, to be loved is to have your good willed by the other. And love is to will the good of the other. Well, what does that mean? What is my good? And so, what I did in the book is I identified these Six levels of goods: 1) We have bodily goods, (2)we have goods related to safety and security, (3)we have goods related to self-esteem, (4)to a sense of connection, (5)being excellent, self-excellence, and (6)self-transcendence. And each one of these levels are goods that you and I were made to receive, and I think, what I do in that third column is I invite you to see how did that action or behavior from the person or institution deprive you of a good that you were made to receive. That's why it hurts. That's why it's not silly that it hurts.

Father Michael: And that helps you get real specific and also acknowledging like some of these you think are trivial, but they are not, they're important things, so and this could go from everywhere from just being a child that grew up in poverty that didn't have what you physically needed maybe because that emotional loneliness, whatever that may be, so but not only naming who may have hurt you, how they have hurt you, now you are saying, what was missing that was intended. What did God intend and maybe what was taken away...

Dr. Matt: A wound is an absence of flesh where flesh should be, the good that's missing in our interior wound, there's something missing.

Father Michael: Now here's the part I don't like, the fourth column (laughter). How we contributed to the wound. And I like the image of prime the pump, like where our self-preservation, dishonesty, fear, everything that we've done has contributed to the wound. I really appreciated when you said, whenever there is something that happened and this could be as traumatic as a rape or traumatic, is there any way did we contribute to it? And that's not to take away the fault of the institution or person that harmed us, but it is to acknowledge that

a little bit of ourselves, maybe it's not even true but by bringing it to the light I think we'll realize that, I forget the phrase that you used but it's like even if the two percent, fully owning that two percent...

Dr. Matt: I love the idea that somebody else can be 98% wrong, I'm only 2% wrong but what I am asking you to do in that step, that column, is to own 100 percent of your two percent.

Father Michael: I thought that was great.

Dr. Matt: Somebody said that to me ages ago, and I thought it was perfect. What I began to realize in that fourth column is how often I have put myself in position to be hurt or harmed by others. And so driven by insecurity or fear or dishonesty, or desire, so I put myself... I think I use a funny example in the book, but one of the first times we went to Mass in Steubenville, I happened to go to Mass where Scott Hahn goes, John Bergsma goes, Regis Martin goes, all these professors, prominent Catholic theologians, all go to this parish and I show up with my kids, and I set myself up because I walked in there with an excessive desire to be seen by my colleagues. Not a normal sort of like an excessive that I wanted to impress them. And I walked in there with fear. I was afraid that people would think that the new guy wasn't a good enough Catholic. So, I walk in with fear, and a desire to impress. We walk in to Mass and there's Scott Hahn in the back, we had all these people, all eyes are on the Breuningers. We walk in, sit down, and my kids start acting like kids. My one-year old is crawling around, my three year-old is rolling, and I'm feeling a hot flash of anger rising right, and my eldest, my teenager is putting his head on the pew like and what I want is for him to be absorbed in the beatific vision; I want him, I want the hands folded like this, and they are not. They are just being kids. But see, what they don't realize is that I walked in with fear, and a desire to be esteemed by my colleagues, so when they act like normal kids I'm thinking, this makes me look bad. So now I'm really, I'm looking at my teenager how dare you, you are being so disrespectful. I'm getting short with him and he's like, and I'm doing the whisper-yell to my three-year old, like so help me, when we get back home... and I walk away anxious, angry, unhappy, and if you would ask me at that moment why are you so anxious, angry, and unhappy? I would say my kids. My freaking kids can't just do Mass, and we gotta work on that babe. I'm looking at my wife, I'm getting in the van, we gotta work on that. Is the problem my kids? No, not really. The problem is, I walked in there and set them up. I set myself up. If I didn't walk in there with fear and an excessive desire for the esteem of my colleagues, my kids could have just been themselves and I could have been free to enjoy Mass and parent them the way I want to parent them. But instead, I became overly anxious, angry and unhappy. My impulse is to say, they're the problem, not that my fear and my excessive desire for the esteem of my colleagues is the problem and that's what the fourth column shows me. It says, 'hey Matt, if you acknowledge that you are afraid and that you have an excessive desire, if you acknowledge that and ask me to take them away you will be able to love your kids the way I created you to love them' because that's not how God wants me to be parenting my kids in Mass.

Father Michael: Has that happened to you?

Dr. Matt: Yes, to the extent that I do that every day, Father, and that's the thing, part of the program of healing for me because this is a daily way of living, I wake up every day and I say, 'God, take away those parts of me that are selfish, self-seeking, self-preserving, excessive pursuits of things for me, those are the things that get in my way of loving you the way you want me to love you, and of being of service to those you want me to be of service to. Remove those things from me so that I can be of service to the people you have called me to be of service to,' and to the extent that I do that every day, I get this freedom to go and love wherever God's calling me. Now I will say, in moments, it creeps up. I notice it, but I've gotten decent at noticing, oh there's my fear, and my fear is telling me if you don't start talking a lot right now people are going to di di di di di. I'm embarrassed to say that it's worth saying publicly, when I started teaching, I had a student ask me a question, my very first semester, a student asked me a question; I didn't know the answer, Father, I didn't know it, so I made an answer up. I'm utterly ashamed, but I made an answer up. Because I was so afraid if I said I don't know, that they would think that I was stupid, that I wasn't valuable, I wasn't worth listening to. And now all of a sudden here comes the anxiety. What if they go look it up and find out I don't know what I'm talking about? So, this fourth column really is the most important column because it's the where am I putting myself in positions to be heard, or how am I walking into situations with big buttons that can be pushed? I didn't say this in the book but one way I think about it is, I have these buttons, they're my defects of character, my self-preservation strategies, and as long as those buttons are there, life or the people in it can push them, and I react. I'm hurt, I'm anxious, I'm angry, I'm unhappy, depressed. Part of what I'm asking you to do in that fourth column is to acknowledge your button, and ask God to remove it so that you are free to do whatever He needs you to do.

Father Michael: And again, the freedom then comes, it's hard for us to admit, but maybe there's something I'm doing. And I think that's part of our culture too, it's everybody else, not me. And if you acknowledge that two per cent, you know maybe I did put myself in a bad situation. That doesn't make me a horrible person, or make me totally at fault for the problem but, because I think deep down, we know it too, so again by naming it I think it'll help us just to have some relief from that and freedom from that and learn from that.

Dr. Matt: And understanding why I put myself in a position, part of that third column, what it can do is give me a sense of why I put myself in that position. Sometimes my wound, the self-preservation strategy I adopt directly relates to the wound, to the good that is missing. Maybe I put myself in unhealthy situations because that's where it feels like I get attention, so I have this excessive desire for attention, which makes sense given my wound. If I grew up with a dad who never paid attention to me, or a mom who never paid attention to me, maybe I end up going to places and spaces, that aren't particularly good for me but it feels like I'm getting attention. And so that fourth column can really sometimes help us see our motivation. Why am I going there? What am I getting by going there? Why do I act that way? What do I get by acting that way? And maybe I get the esteem of my colleagues. Maybe I get people that walk around the community, 'Dr. Breuninger, you have a lovely family. Wow you are such a good parent. Thank you. Thank you.' By the way then I'm not free because then when I go into a Halloween party or Christmas, now I am so anxious that my kids are going to blow the top off the house.

What if you actually see my kids be kids? What if you lose that image of me? I'm not free and it causes me to put wounds on my kids, right?

Father Michael: I think we've just come to the end here. You were talking about going to Mass with your children, one of the things that shocked me and only because I have you in person, is why I want to ask you this question. You mentioned the Eucharist can be a place of healing. But I'd like to know a little bit more of why you wrote that sentence?

Dr. Matt: I think to be healed is to be touched by Christ. We heal when we present our wound to Christ and we let him touch it. We see this over and over in the gospels, that often the way healing happens is the touch of Christ. But touch is also this expression of love, or should be, and the Eucharist is this place where we touch Christ. We're touched by Christ. I think what happens is that so many of us receive the Eucharist for years and we don't feel any different; we are so anxious, miserable, wretched schleps and the question is why? And I think it's because we have all these self-preservation strategies that actually prevent Christ and his grace from touching us when we receive Him. But it's this profound encounter of touch. I mean I think about the times, Father, when my wife hugs me, when she just sinks into my arms or lets me sink into her arms. You know your spiritual director, if you ever hugged him, he put his arm around you. It is just so good, so good and so healing, so loving, and we have this sort of in the Eucharist, and yet we need to allow ourselves to be touched more deeply, actually touched by Christ and playing into your theme a little bit, that sort of your apostolate, your charism. Pope Francis said this quote that said that the Eucharist is a memorial not just of Christ and what He has done for us but it reminds us of who we are and don't I need to know. It is so healing. When I receive the Eucharist, it reminds me who I am; 'you are my beloved son, you are mine and I'm embracing you.' Man, to know that to be able to be reminded of that is so healing because what I've spent a lot of time doing is trying to be somebody else. Pretend, protect and God says, 'no no, hey you're mine, you're mine' and if I let the Eucharist be that reminder of my identity, and the beauty there is, Father, like and I sense you've gotten this and I've tasted it, but I've got a pretty good sense of who I am, the good the bad the ugly, and the beauty about that is because I've shared that with one other human being, there's one man in my life who knows it all, Father, you know, I don't feel the need as often to pretend anymore. I know who I am, I've seen it; I've written it down and I've looked at, I've stared at it on paper, and now God reminds me, 'yeah, you know who you are,' but the deepest reality there you've seen it in black and white on paper. But the deepest reality is in your mind, with all of that your mind and I want you to be in my service, you, and I'm like me, like I see what I'm about Lord, I know who I am, and He says, yeah you; I've got things like between you and I and now everyone listening, I was never supposed to write that book. If you knew my story, my history, my background, it's not, it's crazy that I've written a book, like I just feel like utterly unworthy of this Father, utterly unworthy, because I've seen who I am on paper, and God still says, you're mine, hey, I've got a task for you. I say, ok, all right, I'll put it put there. Is it scary? Yeah some people aren't going to like it. Some people are going to think it's stupid. Some people aren't going to think it's academic enough. You're not Bob Healey. You're not Bob Schucht. I like this better, I like that better, and for me to be able to say you know what, it's ok, I was free to do what God asked me to do, I didn't allow

my fear to hold me back, I wasn't a slave to my pain or my wounds and insecurity and God said, I know exactly who you are, you are mine do this for me. I say ok, Lord, I'll do it.

Father Michael: Well, thank you for writing the book. I'm very grateful that it was sent to me. Did Emmaus publish this? (yes, *Emmaus Press*). They send me books for review and this was one I said, yeah, I would love to read it. I want to thank you for our conversation today because I can't wait, I had celebrated the Eucharist today, but I'm going to celebrate it tomorrow. It didn't occur to me to take what I had journaled to take my hurt and my pain, I want to take that and let it be touched by Jesus in the Eucharist and let Him, I want to take that and offer myself to Him...

Dr. Matt: It means so much to me that you've read this. My only prayer was that, 'Lord let this book touch one person.' If it genuinely touches one person it will have been worth it. It means so much to me that you've read this and you dove into it.

Father Michael: Yeah, thank you. Real quickly, I want to address two things for people's own prudence. You talk about in the book that when you pick this person to share with you want to make sure they are a trustworthy person. You even say in there that not and not all priests even they have to be kind of ready and understanding of what you are doing that you are not just being petty, that you are really going deeply for healing. Saint Theresa Avila used to say that too, to find a wise spiritual director. She didn't even say that to be a holy, but wise. So I would encourage you to do that and finally you mentioned that if somebody goes through this book and needs more healing, do not be afraid to go to counseling in psychiatry. I would like you to address that just briefly because some Catholics are afraid of counseling and psychics.

Dr. Matt: Look, I think other parts of psychology that have gone astray and have drunk deeply from modernity and absolutely, but if you are looking for a good Catholic, there's a website, Catholictherapists.com. It's got a list of hundreds of Catholic therapists if you want specifically Catholic therapists. There are also problems that, I know many secular therapists are just very respectful of, one of their virtues is they are so egalitarian, that they think I just want you to find your truth and so if that's your truth we will pursue it, and so in some ways I've met secular therapists who are incredibly encouraging of somebody in the Catholic faith to pursue what they believe is true and so you don't always have to be afraid. I understand this sort of cautiousness and hesitancy but there's two things you can do, One, go to a therapist. If you have a good connection, you feel supported, cared for, encouraged, they're not trying to sort of sort of counter evangelize you, then stay there. But if you don't feel that, then switch. You can always switch. And if you don't have any good Catholic therapists in your area, start with one and if it's not a good fit, switch. If bells start going off, then switch. But I think sometimes we write off therapists who aren't explicitly religious right away out of fear...

Father Michael: Yes, and you mention this in the book and I think I've come to this understanding over the years, with just my background, not professionally, but personally in this, that He's saying in the book that it doesn't matter the therapy, that all therapies kind of seem to work and I think my insight into that might be because it's all about bringing light to the

darkness, so no matter how you do it they're all going to be effective so find the right therapist, find the right type. What about medication?

Dr. Matt: My general take is that sometimes people need medication to get a boost to get a lift so that they can engage in therapy, that they can engage in healthier behaviors, like have the energy or the reduced anxiety to actually start to do the work. But unless we are talking about severe mental illness like bipolar and schizophrenia medications, I think they certainly were never created to be the long-term solution. I am not opposed to them. I have seen clients who were catatonic in their depression, unable to get up at all. Medication gave them a little bit of energy so they could get up, get to therapy, so medication isn't going to touch the root of the problem. It's not going to touch low self-esteem, it's not going to touch faulty thoughts, it's not going to touch, it might give a little mood boost a little bit of less anxiety, but I think oftentimes therapy is a tremendous adjunct, an important adjunct to medication so you can start to get at deeper roots. For years now, we haven't, even though people talk about it in this language still, the idea that mental illness is a chemical imbalance, we haven't gone about that way for a long time. Is there a biological dimension? Sure, but it's bio-psycho-social. There's a social component, our environmental stressors that matters, its psychological, how we think about ourselves, our personality, our beliefs...there's this complex interaction between our environment, the stressors in it, how we think, our beliefs, our temperament, our personality. And therapy can address psychological and the social nicely, and so adjuncting medication with therapy is very important.

Father Michael: Thank you. You mentioned a program earlier in the interview. Is that something that anyone can do or do they have to be a student at Steubenville?

Dr. Matt: No. Anyone can do it. We launched a 12-week coached program called *Known Embraced by the Heart of the Father*, so if you go to the website: www.wellspringccc.com, and click the Catholic identity coaching. It's under services, it's Catholic identity coaching. That's where you can find that program. Just one more exciting thing, I was asked to do a healing pilgrimage to Paris, Lisieux and Lourdes this summer based on the book, so if anyone is interested in coming along and working through the book as we go to the beautiful places of healing, go to versoministries.com/drbb and that's the dedicated page for it and so we will work through this stuff together.

Father Michael: That would be invaluable and I would encourage any of my viewers, if they can do that would be amazing. Again, the book is: *Finding Freedom in Christ: Healing Life's Hurts*, and we are so blessed to have you Dr. B.

Dr. Matt: It's been a pleasure!

Father Michael: Would you mind if I gave you and our viewers a blessing?

Dr. Matt: I would love it. I would love it!

Father Michael: "The Lord be with you."

Dr. Matt: "And with your spirit."

Father Michael: "Heavenly Father, As I extend my hands and blessing over your servant Matt and over all those who are listening, I just ask that you may wrap them in your arms of love, right as they, are in whatever pain they are in, whatever hurt there may be let them know that You love them let them know that they can trust you. Be their Father, be the Good Shepherd, be the Holy Spirit of Consolation. You came to heal and to set captives free so may Almighty God bless you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen."

Dr. Matt Breuninger: Father, thank you so much!

Father Michael Denk: Thank you so much, God Bless you!