

# Trauma

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From Newcastle. **For the world.**

**TRAUMA, A WORD THAT IS DERIVED FROM  
ANCIENT GREEK AND MEANS “WOUND” OF  
BEING SEVERELY HURT AND INCLUDES BOTH  
PHYSICAL AND/ OR PSYCHIC WOUNDING.**

## What is trauma?

Trauma is a kind of crippling suffering, that overwhelms our ability to cope. It is a wound that buries itself deep in our mind and body. It may have happened in the past but asserts its wounds over and over in our present.

It can be caused by many reasons such as :- sudden death, violence, intimate betrayal, prolonged neglect, violations which are normalized, abuse which is excused, too early or unwanted sex, pervasive ongoing pain, to name just a few.

It is sadly all too common in our world. Knowing this fact does not detract from an individual's suffering.



# What help can the Christian Faith give in navigating overwhelming wounds and unpredictable triggers?

It may be helpful to reflect that the Bible is full of stories of trauma and by spending time in these stories we can see how the people of the Bible navigated these difficult times and found strength in their relationship with God.

The Bible contains stories of murder (Genesis 4), rape (Genesis 34), dismemberment (Judges 19, 1 Samuel 18), kidnapping and forced marriages (Judges 21) forced migration and infanticide (Psalm 137), slavery (Exodus 21; Leviticus 25, Deuteronomy 15), genocide (Joshua 1-12), political corruption (1-2 Kings), and social desolation (The prophets). TO NAME BUT A FEW!

Many times we read the bible for comfort, but sometimes it can be helpful to reflect on these stories of loss as they show us the resilience of God's people.

In each instance these people took all the emotions they felt to God. Their pain, anger and despair, their faithfulness and fallenness. They knew that no matter what had happened to them they remained in relationship to God who was as close to them as they were to themselves.

## God understands your loneliness

God created us with all our emotions, so must understand us. Jesus experienced loneliness in many forms:

- The loneliness of leadership
- The loneliness of betrayal by one of his disciples
- The loneliness of feeling abandoned by his nearest disciples and God as he died on the cross

Hebrews 14:15 *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathise with our weaknesses.*

Matthew 27:46 *"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*

Jesus Christ has experienced every human emotion, and He knows what it's like to be lonely.

Talk to Him about it!

# God wants you to come to him with every honest aching detail

Genuine trauma is done a disservice when the wound is hidden, we need to speak freely and with truth to God.

We need to name that which is wrong and plain evil as such and that which has devastated us as trauma.

We should not white wash the past, minimise the harm, or give excuses for the perpetrators, or protect those in power.

In Psalm 62:8, God uses David to give us permission to tell Him everything: *"Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us"*.



## Truth can feel like a heavy burden for the hurting, but it is ultimately the only relief for the oppressed

God gives us words for trauma & abuse to help us with this.

A large part of the Bible is poetry, because poetry can so often express the pain and struggle of emotions so much better than prose.

We need to name that which is wrong and plain evil as such and that which has devastated us as trauma.

God speaks about our trauma with precision. The book of Lamentations is full of examples of cries in God's arms yet still fragile and vulnerable. Because when trust seems to have been betrayed, trust in a God who could have prevented the pain, trust in a friend who was supposed to protect, trust in a system that was supposed to defend us — the pain and trauma run much deeper.

As in David's poem, (Psalm 55:20–21), *“My companion stretched out his hand against his friends; he violated his covenant. His speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords”*.

# God didn't intervene to prevent the abuse

In the bible story God doesn't micromanage the suffering, or give the victims a clean and quick "recovery story."

And yet he still put them in his story of redeeming humanity. Because he knows we live in a fallen world that is broken. He is honest with us.

He does promise however to be with us in suffering and never to leave us. Hebrews 13:5 *"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."*



# The process of recovery is not typically immediate

As much as we possibly can we need to have accurate self assessment and self honesty about our situation and emotions because, (John 8:32.)  
*"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

We should not try and convince ourselves or others that we are improved before this truly comes.

We need to remember we are precious children of God who loves us. (Ps. 73).  
*"There is nothing on earth that I desire besides you." Worldly sorrow and sin will not last. Our flesh and hearts may fail, but God is the strength of our hearts and our portion forever."*

## We may find our selves suddenly in the grip of strong feelings for no apparent reason

This is a trigger, when suddenly the past comes into a present situation without apology or even warning. You may suddenly feel, angry, afraid, anxious etc.

This may be set off by a person, a place or a situation or for no apparent reason we can see. Triggers are neither good or bad. They are adaptive tools our body gives us to protect us from future harm.

However they can be overactive in telling us that there is danger where there is none. As you heal listen to your gut feelings, but also get to the bottom of your triggers and learn when they are false and when they are a true warning of danger.

Trust, and beware. Step out, and watch your step. Don't submit to the prison of your fear, but accept the edge it gives you: (Matthew 10:16). *"Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves"*

# Trauma is not a life sentence

Trauma is not something that has to control us forever because no trauma is bigger than God.

Working through of trauma may be hard work and we need the grace of God to help us work through the process with the help of the Spirit to be bold and honest.

The gospel really can provide the impossible feelings of joy, hope, and love for those willing to bravely embrace the impossibility with faith.

The Bible can create space for us to feel and process our pain, if we will do it with faith, believing the promises of God even when they feel too distant or unreliable

Many people do recover, and many more have learnt to live fruitful, grace filled lives, perhaps even because of the suffering they have endured. Scars may remain but life is lived to fullness.

All our suffering is some expression of the now-and-not-yet of Christian existence.

Be encouraged, Christ himself refuses to forget the scars of his earthly pain, even in glory: (Revelation 5:6). *"I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain."*

## God has a heart for the hurting and the suffering

God is near to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18) *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."*

He is with us in all types of tragedy (Isaiah 43:2), *"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned the flames will not set you ablaze."*

Jesus walked with and healed the hurting (Luke 17:11). *"As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, 'Jesus, Master, have pity on us!'"* When he saw them, he said, *"Go, show yourselves to the priests."* And as they went, they were cleansed. "

Matthew 14:36. *"When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick."*

## With the help of God we can find safe places to heal and learn to trust again

God is near to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18) *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in It is important to understand that what happened was not your fault. John 10:10 says, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."*

God is concerned about justice for you: Jeremiah 9:24 *"But let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD."*

Remember God promises to be with us (Matthew 1:23). *"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"(which means "God with us").*

Psalm 34:8 *"Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him."*

## Finding safety

You need to find a safe place/person that is free from judgement or shame. Someone who can walk with you on your journey of healing

Be wary of those who offer pat answers and unsolicited advice.

When a relationship feels safe, for a traumatised person this can be life changing and can quite literally help re-wire the person's brain.

Van der Kolk explains it this way in his book, *The Body Keeps the Score*: *"Being able to feel safe with other people is probably the single most important aspect of mental health ... numerous studies of disaster response around the globe have shown that social support is the most powerful protection against becoming overwhelmed by stress and trauma ... for our physiology to calm down, heal, and grow we need a visceral feeling of safety."*

John 3: 16 *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

## Remember you are made and loved by God just as you are, wherever you are. He will never leave you.

Psalm 139 *“You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”*

Romans 8:38-39 *“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Psalm 117:2 *“For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.”*

HELP IS AVAILABLE FROM THE CHAPLAINCY SERVICE & STUDENT WELL BEING CENTRE.