

GOD and MENTAL HEALTH

God and Mental Health: God & Trauma

February 6, 2022 | Michelle Rader, Lead Elder

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE:

Note to Leaders: Every group is different, please choose the questions that relate best to your particular group and don't feel like you have to get to every question.

Key Points:

1. Traumatic experiences harm us physically, emotionally, spiritually, and relationally.

Traumatic Event(s): A distinct and specific incident, such as an earthquake, rape or unexpected death of a loved one. Can be a standalone occurrence such as a car accident. Can also occur as one particular episode of an ongoing traumatic experience, such as a physical assault experienced as part of school bullying, or a specific atrocity that transpires during a period of military combat. Trauma can be a **one-time event**, or an ongoing, **chronic exposure**. Trauma can be something we experience, witness, or hear about.

Trauma/Crisis/Disaster are all synonyms for an **extreme stress event** that overwhelms the resources which are available to manage or resolve the stress. When resources are overwhelmed, survival is in doubt and victims must do whatever is within the capacity of the available resources to survive. Because the resources are not sufficient, survival can only be achieved with concurrent **severe harm** to the individual or group.

Trauma's Impact:

- Shatters our sense of safety and security.
- Shatters our sense of self and personhood.
- Changes our brain, our body and how the two interact.
- Isolates us from relationships, joy, and wellbeing.
- Leads to increased physical and mental illness.
- Traumas which occur during childhood (Adverse Childhood Experiences [ACEs]) greatly impact lifelong health, happiness, and opportunity, because they impact the *development* of both brain and body.

There is healing for trauma – you are not doomed to a life of misery!!

2. Traumatic experiences inevitably cause us to question God's goodness and presence.

My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?
Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:6

Why do you stand so far away, Lord,
hiding yourself in troubling times?
Psalm 10:1

Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me,
my Lord has forgotten me."
Can a woman forget her nursing child,
or show no compassion for the child of her womb?
Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.
See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands;
your walls are continually before me.
Isaiah 49:14-16

3. The Book of Job tells the story of a man who endures multiple traumatic events.

Why did you let me emerge from the womb?
I wish I had died without any eye seeing me.
Job 10:18

- Job loses his children, his wealth, and his health.
- His wife and friends are not a comfort.
- He wishes he had never been born and he questions God's goodness and fairness.
- Job never gets clear answers as to why God allowed disaster to come into his life.
- God absorbs Job's pain and doubts, provides his presence, but not "why" answers.
- God brings goodness and blessing back into Job's life.

4. We must be careful not to judge people's choices, behaviors and circumstances when we don't know their stories (Matt 7:1-2). And even when we know parts of their stories, we never have God's full perspective.

- Job's friends thought they knew why horrible things had happened to him and what he needed to do to fix things – and they were wrong. And God was not happy with their well-meaning but foolish judgements.
 - Job 42:7-8
- People healing from trauma often do not understand their own motivations or choices. They already feel much confusion and shame.
- Healing from trauma is hard and takes time.
- People healing from trauma need extra understanding, love and support.
 - Nonjudgmental, empathetic presence
 - Calm reassurance – “You are safe.” “You did a good job surviving.”
 - Positive Framing (but not cliches or “answers” that dismiss or minimize harm)
 - Holding out a vision of a hopeful future and healing
 - Carrying them to the Great Healer in prayer.

He won't break a bruised reed;
he won't extinguish a faint wick,
but he will surely bring justice.
Isaiah 42:3 (CEB)

5. God has deep compassion for us, is always with us, and wants to pour healing into our lives. God cares so much about our pain and the traumas we inflict and experience that he came to be with us – in Jesus as a human being who shared our weaknesses and now is with us always and everywhere through the presence of his Holy Spirit.

Jesus himself experienced deep trauma – physical, emotional, relational, spiritual. His body forever bears the scars of the trauma inflicted on him by his creation – us. He understands our traumas. (Zech 13:6; Luke 24:39; Heb 4:15)

The elements of communion – the broken body and blood poured out – remind us each and every time of the God who bore our traumas in order to bring new life to our dead bodies.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

(sermon-based discussion guide for groups and individuals)

Note: While this week's message was on trauma, it is often not helpful to talk about traumas outside of a therapeutic setting. No one should be encouraged or pressured to recount a traumatic experience. However, if someone does feel like they want to share a wound or painful experience, please listen with love and surround them with encouragement and prayer.

1. Are there experiences in your life which have caused you to question God's presence or goodness? Have you found any answers to such questions?
2. Do you have people in your life who have experienced trauma and did this week's message give you any insights into how you could love and support them better?
3. How did Job respond to the series of traumatic events in his life?
4. What was the response of Job's friends to his trauma?
5. What was God's response to his trauma?
6. What does the story of Job tell us about trauma, suffering, and God?
7. What does the cross tell us about trauma, suffering, and God?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Download the Mental Health Resource Guide: <https://damascus.com/resources>

Check out our virtual Live Q & A: Understanding Anxiety, Depression & Addictions
February 16, 7:00 – 8:30 pm. <https://www.damascus.com/events>

Understanding the impact of Trauma – The Body Keeps the Score by Bessel Van Der Kolk

Knowing how to help trauma sufferers - The Johns Hopkins Guide to Psychological First Aid – George S. Everly, Jr. and Jeffrey M. Lating

NOTES

[illegible]