

SPIRITUAL RESOURCES IN DEALING WITH TRAUMA – HANDOUT

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DESCRIPTION: These spiritual resources are essential to providing effective support to traumatized missionaries, resulting in increased resilience and growth in suffering.

KEY POINTS:

1 - Missionaries often experience more traumatic events than the population in their home country. Severe trauma impacts emotional health and spiritual wellbeing and reduces missionary effectiveness in up to 20-30 % of traumatized workers in high stress environments. Generally, women are more affected than men, which should be considered when determining member care strategies. With effective emotional and spiritual support missionaries recover better and are more likely to grow in suffering.

2 – Trauma affects us emotionally (as well as physically) and spiritually. Awareness of the specific impact helps to identify care needs early, which provides opportunity for intervention before things get worse.

Resource: Common reactions to trauma at <http://www.mmct.org/resources/debriefing/>

3 – Emotions, physical body, and soul affect each other. Each one needs different kinds of care. Spiritual resources are a very important part of trauma care. However, traumatized persons may also need physical and emotional care, e.g. medications or counselors.

4 – Neurobiology: Post-traumatic Stress creates an overactive Limbic System and a decrease in Executive Brain control. Calming the Limbic System by connecting with others (community) and grounding helps the brain function better. *Res.:* Schaefer, Trauma & Resilience: A Handbook (=T&R), Chapter III, Section 5

5 – **SPIRITUAL RESOURCES** – there are more than those mentioned here, but the following are key.

6 – **Community Support** is THE MOST IMPORTANT one!

FIRST: Assure Safety. SECOND: Basic Needs like water, food, shelter. THIRD: Listen, don't say much other than expressing care. ALWAYS: Pray. CONSIDER: Calming songs and bible verses describing God's enduring presence, love, and faithfulness. ON THE FIELD: Community should be proactively built among teams because this will be the best means for supporting each other when adversity occurs. Also, proactively developing crisis contingency plans helps make support more readily available when it is suddenly needed.

7 – **Grace**; most people fear seeming weak and hide vulnerability. Christ willingly entered weakness in His suffering. He knows what it is like. He showed vulnerability and desire for community when reaching out to His disciples in Gethsemane. Mysteriously, God’s power is best known in imperfect human Jars of Clay. 2 Cor. 4:7; 2 Cor. 12:9

8 – **Lament** means bringing sorrow, pain, grief, sadness, and anger directly to the Lord as many psalms exemplify. When a person keeps those emotions locked up inside and withdraws, it creates disconnection from God. Some Christians fear that showing these feelings would not be pleasing, nor polite or respectful. However, deep trust in God is shown by opening hearts with all the feelings that are in it. In lamenting we release emotions into God’s heart. Doing this bridges the disconnection, which in turn allows God’s response to reach us deeply. Healing occurs when connection is restored.

9 – **Reconnecting with God**: Jesus approaches the grieving, confused, and traumatized disciples on the way to Emmaus and shows us how traumatized followers of Christ can emotionally reconnect with God through the senses, even if they are numb or depressed. A good question: What helped you in the past to feel connected with God? Was it something like an experience, image, song, verse, touching an item, or communion?

10 – **Remembering God’s truth**, especially when feeling punished or abandoned. People seek explanations why something bad happened to them. Some conclude God is punishing them, though it is usually not true, nor biblical. This misperception can be the result of a punitive image of God, or of depression. In John 9:1-3, suffering does not always result from sin, but the Lord’s intent is to reveal more of himself in the midst of suffering! When Christians feel distant from God in suffering, they wonder whether God has abandoned them. However, the opposite is true: He is very near, though this is sometimes hard to realize emotionally. Therefore “Reconnecting with God” is so important! Bible verses such as Isaiah 49:15 help, too. Missionaries do best if they have studied and wrestled with a biblical theology of suffering and know how God works in suffering. Res: T&R Ch. I and Appendix A.

11 – **Forgiveness** after interpersonal trauma, such as assault, rape, or severe hurt by the people the missionary serves, usually takes time. People need to first acknowledge their grievance and their feelings of hurt, betrayal, and anger BEFORE they can effectively choose to let them go for God’s sake.

12 – **Spiritual Resources and Resilience**: The awareness of spiritual resources to deal effectively with trauma is key for missionaries and their supporters. God desires to be with us in suffering. He entered it himself, and by doing so made way for new life. Effective support deepens the connection with God and makes way for growth in suffering. Growth, in turn, promotes health and resilience.