

“Tackling Trauma” (launch 20 Mar 2020)
Perspectives from a practitioner and learner.

We are talking about trauma; if you find yourself impacted by something you hear please contact a friend and talk with them today and pray together.

Preface: “Tackling Trauma” will be a most useful present for the pastor, thinker, leader, counselor or cross-cultural worker.

Intro:

Our world is in crisis – I call it Global warring. War is a way of dealing with difference by using power to create conflict that shocks, spawns pain and nourishes grief. This is like a whirlpool that spews out individuals in trauma. ‘Peace is dangerously in deficit today’ (p 286) and Winston Churchill’s words are repeated over and over again: *Old men plan wars and send young men to fight them.*

The fear and haunt of trauma is on the minds and in the lives of Christians of many backgrounds, including believers in Asia, Africa and Latin America. ‘Majority World’ pastors cry out for help with this epidemic, and many will welcome this resource.

It is time to move beyond hoping that people with trauma will just ‘get over it’. THIS BOOK demands that we take trauma seriously, and helps us better understand how we can reach out to those in traumatic stress.

I give a brief summary of the content of 338 pages, its value and its challenge to us. *AND I will add insights from my experience.* I’ve lived overseas for 16 years -- in countries traumatised by war and acts of cruelty, causing grief and loss. Most recently I have been involved part-time for 20 years in the recovery of Rwandans impacted by genocide and its after-effects.

CONTENT

This book has three broad categories.

1. The Scriptures are taken seriously: 1-124

Throughout the book we find regular use of scripture and reflection on the message: that Christians are called to respond to the examples of Christ and the faithful that we find in Scripture.

Here are the scriptures in focus for this section.

* From Genesis: Joseph had 6 separate events with deep personal impact (that I would call traumatic), yet he did not lose faith or hope. He served hundreds of people, and modeled forgiveness to his own brothers. So, what made that steadiness possible??

- * Praying the Psalms as a way to cope with trauma and keep growing, by bringing thoughts and feelings to God; finding meaning in adversity; courage in enduring.
- * How to face trauma in Prov 24 and respond with virtue ethics (moral muscles). This **brief** article stresses knowing the weight of our emotions and feelings; which is central to dealing with trauma. Many of us find it hard to 'bring our mind into the heart'. BUT *We cannot heal what we cannot feel*.
- * Noah, Job & Ps 139, Revelation and Matthew. *A Trauma Observed* is a deep and rich unfolding of one person's journey to tackle their trauma, and almost worth the price of the book on its own. The author explains the deepening of her agony when she survives an accident like the one that killed her parents 40 years previously.
- * The voice of Matthew speaking to conflicts in the Congo civil war. His insistence that the victim forgive, which is a new theme in the NT.
- * Creation's groaning in Rom 8 applied to Disasters in the Philippines.
- * Forgiveness in the drama of Scripture (India)

2. Themes/ Case studies Pastoral p 125-228

A section where Scriptures and human energy are put to work.

- * The role of discipleship as a response to trauma (Congo)
 - * Forgiveness towards perpetrators after trauma (various sources)
 - * Pastoral & spiritual responses to trauma and tragedy. Broad, thorough describing general principles. Scholarly with many background references and experiences in the Middle East.
 - * Care for disaster survivors (Haiyan 2013) overarching summary of need by the social anthropologist Melba Maggay.
 - * Psychospiritual/psycho social support – how the ATS mobilized staff and students to be involved in the recovery process of the same super typhoon.
 - * Biblical teaching on Suffering and case studies from interviews [narrative research] on Christian suffering in Cambodia.
- All of these are from people committed to doing.

STORY *The Rwandans became my teachers in 1997. I loved the way they could look me right in the face. I learned a strong pastoral lesson when I sent one of my staff JBN to observe the HWEC seminar for 3 days. When he returned, he was livid: How dare you send me to observe ...! You know I lost 250 relatives from my clan. I must go to the next event as a participant.*

I approved his request and he came back a different person. He was most touched after the Welsh leader apologized for the failure of the west to intervene in the genocide. That form of identification repentance is a Hebrew concept found 3 times in the OT. I had heard the theory, but JBN showed me that it can meet a deep need. We can learn much from the people who do the work.

3. Practical - Learning by doing 229-332

* Family based trauma in military conflict (Ukraine) – impact of the conflict within families eg 500 suicides in less than 4 years after return from the front. This is five times the rate of 100 per 4 years in Australia since 2001.¹

* Healing of Wounds – uses a universal image: of physical wound healing to consider what is needed to restore me after an experience of deep hurt, and bring me to a place where I can love myself and others. (Rwanda).

* Civil War – its impact and the role of the church in its responses (Congo).²

* Healing and Reconciliation & the role of the church (Sub-Sahara Africa). A significant contribution on 3 themes by an experienced motivator, counselor and trainer from Kenya. It has some great biblical principles. The only chapter to mention the huge contribution of HIV/AIDS to trauma in Africa (p 285)

* Followed by practical insights of a missionary couple:

Healing in Men (Nigeria)

Art & Drama (Nigeria)

* Healing around the cross liturgy (Rwanda /Australia) – has blessed individuals and groups. It is suitable for Christians anywhere.

Background to how it works is in chapter 3 in my book From Genocide to Generosity [Taming the trauma]. If you work with a general audience an adapted approach is available.

I was working with a group of leaders from the Pacific: One woman had been a distracting, nuisance-- until the afternoon of the third day when we came to the cross liturgy. She knelt by the large, bare wooden cross on the ground, became fully present, and moving her note of pain & loss up and down, then across. Finally, she took the nail and hammered it on one side saying: I place this paper with my pains and nail them right into your hand Lord. I need you to hold me firmly in your grip, you died for me so that I can be free from the weight of my grief and you can begin to change me.

Next day she was present to the group in a new way. Her healing moment moved her one step forward...

VALUE OF THE BOOK – why I recommend it.

1. Quality & suitability of the material:

Authored by 9 women and 11 men of faith and credible service; both active & reflective. Passed through a peer-reviewed group process led by Bishop Paul and 6 of the contributors, resulting in improved clarity; this was followed by a professional edit.

¹ **The Age**, Weds 4 Dec, 2019, p 5.

² For further background see the book on Bishop Isisemo (Langham Publishing).

All the authors brought their experience in the Majority World – with thanks to the efforts of Bishop Paul Barker.

Practical and scholarly, but also personal; it is less technical or theoretical than many writings on trauma, more down to earth and hopeful.

And yet each article contains footnotes and most have reference lists: 24 pages in all, over 400 individual references. HUGE RESOURCE.

This would enable English speaking pastors, leaders and training colleges to introduce their audiences to material that encourages the Christian community to make a response to trauma.

NB: TT is less focussed on the practical side of implementing trauma healing, but that was not the intention for this book. I have written that kind of focus in “From Genocide to Generosity”. And I’ve added a Study Guide for small groups to benefit from the Rwandan journey.

2. The significance of the issue. Trauma is strangling our world. Yet we now know much about what can help change people. Each author has grappled with issues of trauma, and ways to offer a response that supports recovery.

Briefly:

- a) We hear the stories of trauma and understand the human experience of shock, loss, and pain from the perspective of the speaker – either victim or survivor.
- b) When we understand their story we can explore the road-blocks in the heart that form through unhealed emotions of guilt, fear, blame and shame, disappointment and powerlessness.
- c) Then we find how God wants us to support this person in extreme fragility as they journey towards change.

Two new awarenesses –

- i. Listening is a powerful form of loving; and prayerful listening is a way for God’s spirit to begin work.
- ii. We supplement that gift by exploring feelings, the way of grasping our need and exploring the stuckness in our heart.

Drocelle’s story (in the Prologue of my book) illustrates a major turn around in one traumatized person, where members of the small group just asked gentle questions: nothing beats the moment that follows a healing insight – nothing is more surprising, sacred or significant. It is the in-breaking of grace in fulfillment of Jesus words in John 14:12—“you will do greater things because I go to my father”.

3. In the context of Christian service **we** have the potential to become involved in a ministry reaching deep into the general community who have no interest in conventional Christianity.

[Jesus gives us two evangelistic suggestions in Luke 10 & 17 (p 256).]

This is **not** about becoming counselors and psychologists; but becoming open to a new dimension of ministry. Frankly, while the specialists are trained to work one-on-one, those who can work with groups (and small congregations) are the ones to equip the body of Christ to take this work to the grassroots. This requires discipling and mentoring of 'available others' to reach new areas by living out the principles of making peace.

By starting with the scripture passages in *Tackling Trauma* ministers can broaden their preaching to speak into situations of trauma. They can also use other relevant passages not found in the book such as Daniel's story, The Prodigal Son, Stephen's final words in Acts 7; an especially the sufferings of Christ.

A new appreciation for the possibility of trauma healing work led by a team of ministers and facilitators requires learning the discipline of observing the signs of trauma and its impact. Many pastors have begun this after times of local disasters or tragic loss. (We would need wisdom to know when we are getting out of our depth and choose to refer a situation to specialists).

Just imagine the impact of reaching out to persons who have not processed their suffering: Victims of violence and their perpetrators; refugees, people unjustly treated, the unemployed, first nations people.

I must mention generational trauma: where children carry in their lives the consequences of the unhealed trauma of their parents and forbears. The result is people haunted by bad memories, or unfulfilled dreams; those heading towards depression and thoughts of suicide. What if we became "Connected churches" working with the community (p 293)?

The church could become a servant and relevant again. Being "Alive to Love" is a much-needed testimony of a derided church. We need the will and the skills to do it.

Story: 2005 My heated debate with Solomon about purity of process vs breadth of impact in the healing work. We argued all the way to the airport. Eventually the importance of 'reach' won, and 1000 facilitators of healing were trained at the district level.

4. Our call to honor Christ and follow in his footsteps.

We see examples of Jesus' sensitive behavior towards others such as the lame man lying beside the pool, the woman who anointed his feet in Luke, the woman taken in adultery in John, Acts: silver and gold have I none...

Jesus listened to people and told them stories. He used a form of communication that was different from the orator, the philosopher and the prophet. He chose to relate as a human being through narrative & story and by affirming the victims by listening to them (a repeated theme in TT.)

Luke 23 describes the behavior of Jesus on the cross—a day when so many around the cross were traumatised, and the culmination of hours of testing in his life. He ministered out of his own experience of pain; he transcended the depth of suffering to engage person after person and offer them grace and presence. And Jesus continued this work after the resurrection (p 255). And so, he fulfilled scripture: *by his wounds we are healed*.

This is a challenge of discipleship confronting the forces of evil. **Jesus did it and with the gift of the Spirit – why cannot we also?** BUT we must first ‘take heed’: Our own unattended wounds must be healed. If not, they do daily damage to us and our work, because trauma sticks to us and when my expression of trauma intersects with your expression of it, conflict is inevitable.

To follow Christ, I must first engage with our own experiences of grief and loss, with the inappropriate actions that harm others. In biblical terms this requires me to explore the reality of the bitter root of Heb 12: 15 (p 277).

Whether my change is dramatic or imperceptible, it is productive work because **HEALING IS WHAT TURNS TRAUMA INTO A MEMORY**. And that transformation releases my energy to serve others.

Here is my final connection with Rwanda:

It is normal that any of us would resist this idea of such involvement. We are trained to keep our distance. I found this in Rwanda – whenever pastors and leaders came to my office requesting funding for reconciliation, I asked them to first participate in a healing experience for their traumas. The constant response was “no – we are leaders”.

Today in Rwanda some of these pastors are calling Munyeli one of my former staff and saying ‘Please don’t laugh at us. 20 years ago, we rejected John’s offer of help. And we have watched others being freed of the impacts of grief and loss. We still live with the effects of our past! Munyeli, please would you help us.’

This is the INVITATION TO US.

1. The best reason why we need to buy & study this book is to explore how we might minister to people with stress & trauma. It is a spiritual and practical challenge. Such work may even alleviate the angst in society against the church, because uncovering past abuse in the church has brought public distain to the name of Christ, and the belief that we are no longer relevant in our society.

2. My second reason: Jesus said, ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, they are called children of God’. These makers of peace are the people who our troubled world awaits. But to bring peace I must first be at peace.

Please get this Langham resource.

John Steward, Junction Village (Revised 21 Oct 2022).



TO LIVE WELL & TO DO WELL

Alive to Love.

It's more than 25 years since the terrible Rwandan genocide. Many people wonder what has happened since, and is it due for another outburst of violence?

After observing Rwandans for 18 years I published *From Genocide to Generosity* to respond to those who are unaware of the hope that is emerging there. Rwanda is now a standout in the pursuit of personal healing, justice and peace.

With the help of some who led the way in the recovery I launched 'TO LIVE WELL & TO DO WELL'. This Study Guide offers practical insights to all who seek peace. Such a positive gift from Africa excels because people need to work in groups. Explore this in 4 mins at <http://2live4give.org/study-guide-intro/>

We too can change and tell a different story

My personal agenda in 2023 is to bring awareness of this small group study process and to demonstrate alternative human responses to violent behavior, conflict and abuse.

I am available to introduce this work or to discuss the importance of group work in the sessions. My goal is to reach out to those who will gather two or three people to share the journey through the Guide: 2 hours a week for 2 months.

Please contact me for further information or with suggestions or a referral to groups who may benefit. I can provide feedback from participants who've already used the guide. I am happy to discuss your questions and can support and mentor leaders of groups. I list my Reference Group below and hope to engage with you soon. Sincerely,

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