

Biblical Counseling and Trauma¹

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- I. “Trauma Informed Counseling” has become very popular in recent years.
 - a. Made popular by the book *The Body Keeps the Score* by Bessel van der Kolk.
 - b. Assertions are that trauma causes people to behave in certain ways.
 - c. Many secular psychologists take issue with the premise of the book²
 - d. A source of division within biblical counseling circles.
- II. Presuppositions and Common Grace.
 - a. Presuppositions always influence conclusions.
 - i. Van Til, “There are beliefs that govern beliefs.”
 - ii. There are no “brute facts.”
 - b. Common grace: “God’s restraint of the full effects of sin after the Fall, preservation and maintenance of the created order, and distribution of talents to human beings.”
- III. Trauma.
 - a. “The emotional, spiritual, and physical disruptions that occur when a person is overwhelmed by extreme suffering” (Baker, p.68).
 - b. Trauma informed: “To recognize the prevalence and impact of trauma among people and to understand the signs, symptoms, and paths for recovery” (Baker, p. 68).
 - c. Biblically: deep affliction or horrendous suffering.
 - i. Common in the Bible – individuals (Joseph) as well as national (Isaiah 26 - conquest and deportation of Israel).
 - ii. Ask ourselves, “where does Scripture address extreme suffering?”
 - iii. How do people respond to affliction biblically?
- IV. Trauma-informed vs. Biblically-informed.
 - a. Source of the problem?
 - i. Trauma as the missing link to human understanding – “the abused become the abusers,” vs.
 - ii. The Fall of Adam cause comprehensive damage to the human heart: the cognition, behavior, volition and identity of man was fundamentally distorted – sinners sin, suffer, and are sinned against.
 1. Trauma happens because sin-cursed people on a sin-cursed planet hurt one another (Baker, p. 77, 78).
 - iii. Though each of us lives within a world of influences, our obedience or disobedience to God’s two great commandments is not determined by those influences. It is out of the heart that both wisdom and folly spring (Baker, p. 78).

¹ Most of the information is from *Presuppositionalism, Common Grace, and Trauma Theory* by Dr. Ernie Baker, in the *Journal of Biblical Soulcare*, Spring 2024, Volume 8 (1:2024).

² *Analysis of The Body Keeps the Score, the Science That Trauma Activists Don’t Want You to Know* by Michael Scherringa.

- b. Can we change?
 - i. Trauma as something that has changed the brain itself, vs.
 - ii. Humans are much more than a brain, so we must not be reductionistic.
 - iii. Both Scripture and science tell us a person is not damaged forever – the brain is malleable and we can learn biblical truth about the world.
 - 1. The question is always one of worship – what is it that the heart is worshipping?
 - 2. “No counseling model who genes contain secular DNA ever gets motivation theory straight. It is clear that every heart (at every moment, in every circumstance) is either actively serving lies and lusts or is actively serving the Lord God of truth” (Baker, p.80).
- c. What’s the solution?
 - i. Trauma: you are not responsible for causing your problems, BUT you are given responsibility for solving what’s wrong.
 - 1. You are not a sinner but you are your savior.
 - ii. Bible: You are a sinner and you need a Savior.
 - iii. “Our goal is to see those who have been through intense suffering become God glorifiers who worship the true and living God even through their pain” (Baker, p.83).
 - iv. How? Look to Psalms of Lament and other times of suffering among God’s people.
 - 1. Intense prayer – expresses dependence on God.
 - 2. Trust God.
 - 3. Hope in God
 - 4. Understand the character of God.
 - 5. Believe that God is up to something good.

V. Ongoing support

- a. Trauma – support groups, vs.
- b. The local church

I. Having a biblical understanding of the world.

- a. We live in a fallen world because of sin but the gospel includes the redemption of creation (Rom 8:18-25).
- b. Promises of trials:
 - i. John 16:33;
 - ii. 1 Peter 4:12-13;
 - iii. 2 Cor 4:7-18;
- c. Because of that, we are foolish to think that tragedy will not happen.
 - i. Adam and Eve with respect to Cain and Abel.
 - 1. What was it like to Adam and Eve see their one son killed – the first human death ever – and know it was their other son who had murdered him?
 - ii. David throughout the Psalms.
 - iii. Joseph.
 - iv. Job.

- II. Having a biblical understanding of myself.
 - a. Because of the gospel, my identity is an adopted child of God.
 - i. It is solid and unchanging (Matt 7:24-27).
 - ii. I am created to glorify God and I do that by trusting Him and submitting to Him; believing His wisdom above mine as I respond to my trauma.
 - b. I am not broken and/or I am not worthless, but I am suffering.
 - i. "Trauma has the potential to develop a profoundly myopic outlook for its victim. It is an outlook by which a person's entire life becomes defined by the traumatic event. Their life is now trauma-centric, in that everything they do and think is centered in the traumatic event. We must remember that trauma is a sentence in the story – it is not *the story*" (Lelek, p.31-32)
 - ii. The idea of triggers.
 - 1. Many in our society have embraced victimization as a result of this kind of language. A trigger becomes the culprit, blame shifting becomes the practice. For the Christian, although a memory may be induced from a particular context, we are able to control our responses. Because of Christ we can now glorify God and respond biblically to an induced memory instead of being a slave to a "trigger."
 - c. Because of the gospel in my life, I have purpose.
 - i. He created me for good works (Eph 2:10).
 - ii. He created us to be zealous for good works (Titus 2:14).
 - iii. My purpose is no longer a Marine, Soldier, etc.
 - iv. My purpose is to be a wife/husband (if married) and a mother/father (if I have children) or whatever role God has placed me in at the present moment.
 - d. Hebrews 4:14-16; we can find grace and mercy to find help in time of need.
- III. Having a biblical understanding of others.
 - a. Evil people exist.
 - i. God will judge them (Rom 4:12; Rom 12:19; Psalm 37 and 73)
 - b. Godly people exist. We must not allow our experience of abuse cause us to think that everyone is evil and seeking to cause harm.
 - c. We were designed to live in the context of a local church (Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12).
 - i. God designed us to help and to receive help from brothers and sisters in Christ (1 John 4:11).
 - d. Importance of the church and community, small group, etc. (Heb 10:24-25).
 - i. People need to be involved in the lives of others (Phil 2:3-4).
- IV. Having a biblical understanding of God.
 - a. He is good (Matt 11:29; Rom 8:32).
 - b. He is sovereign (Is 45-46; Job 38ff).
 - c. He deals with each person very personally (Rom 8:28-29).

- d. He has sympathy for our weaknesses – “Jesus wept” (John 11:35), not because Lazarus was dead, but because of the pain that illness and death causes in the world.
 - e. Jesus is personally interceding for you (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25).
 - f. Your security is not in experiencing pain, but that you will never be separated from the love of Christ (Rom 8:37-39); (Lelek p. 41).

- V. Having a biblical view of suffering.
 - a. James 1
 - b. Rom 5:3-5
 - c. 1 Peter

- VI. Having a biblical view of our future hope.
 - a. The fallen world is not yet subject to Him, but will be redeemed (Rom 8:18-25).
 - b. Our fallen bodies will be renewed (1 Cor 15:35-58).
 - c. This life is short in light of eternity (1 Pet 1:23-25; James 1:10; Ecclesiastes; 2 Cor 4:7-18).
 - d. We will be delivered from all trauma
 - e. We will behold Him face to face (2 Cor 5:8).

- VII. Conclusion
 - a. We need not be intimidated by the question, “are you trauma informed?”
 - b. We are biblically informed and Scripture has much to say about how we respond to suffering.
 - c. Your life is a narrative that is beautifully woven within the grand and glorious meta-narrative of redemption. (Lelek, p.51).
 - d. The gospel gives us an accurate worldview, meaning for life, and hope for the future.

Resources:

- *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Recovering Hope* by Jeremy Lelek (P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 2013).
- *(Un)ashamed: Christ’s Transforming Hope for Rape Victims* by Anne Dryburgh (Pure Water Press,
- All books by Dr. Anne Dryburgh.