

Trauma: Caring for Ourselves

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A kindergarten teacher once told her students, “Sticks and stones may break your bones, but names will never hurt you.” Expressed out of her own frustration with the class, the statement translated poorly. More often than we know, a statement like this one ends up meaning cruel words, verbal attacks, and bullying should not create a sense of shame or emotional hurt. But the lasting effects of trauma, no matter the form it takes, can be healed. Healing is possible because our minds and our bodies are fearfully and wonderfully made by our Savior. Healing is possible because healing is part of what Christ came to earth to do.

Defining trauma simply would be to say that *trauma is anything that threatens our sense of survival as a person*. Various kinds of trauma exist: exposure to combat, child abuse (of any sort), social trauma (bullying, car accident, weather, etc), medical trauma, and spiritual abuse. It’s easy to dismiss the impact any of these may have on how we think and feel. Research reveals that exposure to traumatic stress and acute stress impacts our body’s ability to fight off infectious diseases. John Gottman (2002), in his research, shows a significant connection between unresolved trauma and infectious/terminal diseases. Unaddressed trauma increases our risk of disease by 30% or more.

So, you say, “What do we do? How can we cope since there appears to be traumatic events all around us? All one has to do is watch the news!” Here are a few things you do NOT want to do:

- Turn to alcohol, drugs, or any other addicting behavior.
- Run away by keeping yourself so busy you don’t have time to think about what happened.
- Detach from your emotions.
- Become cynical or addicted to traumatic events or shows.

Part of the physiological impact of trauma is the rush of “fight” or “flight” hormones into your blood stream. It is possible, over time, one may not feel alive or like they are really living unless the rush is present.

What you can do centers around a number of practical things:

Social Support - Studies show people live longer if they have a caring and ongoing support system around them. Stay social! The tendency is to withdraw and deal with the effects alone.

Exercise and nutrition - Since the hormones produced by long-term stress and trauma are not the kind our bodies eliminate, they must be burned off. This is why exercising and eating well become so crucial. Our bodies need the help of both to aid in the cleansing the body of the harmful effects of trauma.

Organize your time - This is a tough one in that there is no one style that is the preferred method. Find what works for you and stay with it. Granted, some will be much more structured with their time than others. The key with this point is to structure your day in a balanced manner without over-scheduling yourself.

Organize your money - Again, knowing where you stand financially may increase your stress or reassure you, depending on where you are. Ultimately, it means learning to live within our means so as not to sabotage ourselves by creating more stress with over-spending.

Relaxation - Rest? What's that? Learning to include times of relaxation takes time. Enter it slowly. For some, you will find that 15 minutes of quiet does the trick. For the rest of you, you may need an evening of relaxation to recover from your day. Remember, when you take time to relax, you are allowing your body time to unwind and return to a calmer state of being.

Reflection - Taking time to reflect on the faithfulness of God and the truths of His Word never fails to restore and renew me. I trust it does the same for you. In addition, it reminds us of how much we can really trust that God will be there for us and that His plan is a good one.

Fun - Last, but not least, have fun! Allow yourselves the joy of playing. No matter the age we need to remember that "play time" is "restore time." Besides, it only takes about 5 or 6 muscles to smile rather than the 200 it takes to frown!

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