

trading up

Bible stories that move us from pain to peace



Trauma traps. God's Word releases hope and life.

Equip people to deal with trauma
using these 12 Bible passages.



an initiative of WMU®

trading up

Bible stories that move us from pain to peace

Project HELP: PTSD Story Set

By Murselle McMillan and Janet Erwin

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how to use

What Is Trading Up: Bible Stories That Move Us from Pain to Peace?

This Project HELPSM: Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) resource includes 11 Bible stories and one personal story with strategic questions that offer hope and healing for PTSD sufferers. Use these Bible stories in sequence to address the issue of PTSD, moving from one story to the next with the people you are serving.

Who Is It For?

This story set is designed to be used with

- a small group of members who has experienced trauma firsthand;
- family or friends of trauma victims;
- care teams who want to minister to those who have experienced trauma.

Tailor the story set to your target audience, as there is a diverse range of groups this could be used with.

Why Use Stories?

Stories are powerful. We remember them. We tell them to others. God knew the power of stories in our lives when more than 50 percent of the Bible was written in narrative form. We have chosen biblical examples to speak hope, understanding, peace, and life into the lives of those who suffer trauma. God's stories help us heal from the hidden wounds among us.

Why Know Worldview?

Storytelling is more effective if we know the worldview (how one thinks about the world and how he functions based on that view) of our audience so we can tailor what to say to speak to its members' situation. Stories must be selected and told through an audience's worldview (PTSD) rather than our perspective.

Each person's trauma may be different in your audience, but the damage is

still there just the same. However, long-term experiences of trauma can create more deeply-entrenched wounds than if someone's environment has been safe up until the time of trauma. The worldview of some experiencing PTSD include the following:

- The world is not a safe place.
 - I do not deserve to be forgiven.
 - It was my fault. I shouldn't have . . .
 - I am out of control.
 - God is not to be trusted.
 - I will never be the same again.
 - I think I may be the only one who feels this way.
 - I am soiled. No man or woman will ever want me now.
 - God is punishing me for past sins.
 - I should just get over it. I really can't expect too much from life anyway.
- I was born under a curse.

Stories house our worldview. Our desire is to journey with PTSD sufferers by offering biblical examples of healing and grace that might provide a solid foundation for present and future hope and healing.

What Is Included in Each Story Set?

1. Introduction to one aspect of worldview thinking of those affected by trauma
2. Scripture promises to claim and learn
3. Review questions
4. Bible story background
5. Bible story prepared for telling
6. Head, heart, and hands questions
 - Head questions call forth the facts of the Bible story. These questions prepare us to tell the story to someone else because we can remember the details.
 - Heart questions help us interpret the passage. They are designed to make us think about changes that need to come about in our lives.
 - Hands questions move us to apply

what we have learned. They call for specific, personal action.

7. Points to make from Scripture commentary if they don't surface during the discussion

What Do I Need to Know about Leading a Group?

This study will equip churches to address the hurt and healing of many already within our congregation. Sufferers of PTSD typically feel alienated. Plan with diligence your presentation of this study so that it does not inadvertently create a "PTSD group" which may have a further alienating effect.

These stories are meant for educational purposes, sharing in a group setting, and for spiritual self-examination. They are not meant for intense therapy. Therapy should be done under the supervision of a professional therapist. However, some guidelines for the group include the following:

- Express unconditional love found in Christ. Caring for one of God's injured children is a gift of love on your part. Don't be afraid. He covers a multitude of mistakes with love, and the person you help will not forget your kindness.
- Practice confidentially. Personal information shared in the group stays in the group.
- Show respect for others. Allow everyone to have his fair share of time to talk. Operate out of kindness. Everyone is important.

→
Page 3 is a flyer you can duplicate and post on your church bulletin board or distribute to individuals.

trading up

12 sessions on PTSD using Bible Stories

- Have you experienced trauma firsthand?
- Do you have family or friends who have experienced trauma?
- Do you want to be part of a care team and minister to those who have experienced trauma?

There is hope and healing for PTSD sufferers.

Please join us for the first of 12 sessions.

If you have questions contact: _____

Time: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

invisible scars

"Trauma touches everyone. It changes our lives. It brings a profound sense of before and after. We are not the same again."

—Dr. Bill Gibson, psychotherapist and neuropsychologist

While everyone has experienced some form of trauma, not everybody has or will develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Only a small percentage of the population develops PTSD. Men normally encounter more traumatic events, but women appear to be more likely to develop PTSD. Even though the percentages are not

high, a significant number of people in America struggle with PTSD. This number will only increase as more of our war veterans return.

The Soul Repair Center of Brite Divinity School uses the term moral injury to describe what has happened to our veterans and those in any profession who work in life-and-death conditions. Its website describes moral injury as the result of individuals "having to make difficult moral choices under extreme conditions, experiencing morally anguishing events or duties, witnessing immoral acts, or behaving in way that profoundly challenge a person's values." In essence, it describes a damaged moral compass.

We know PTSD is broader than war trauma and those working in life-and-death conditions. It can also occur when someone experiences or witnesses a traumatic event: sexual or physical abuse, mass shooting, terrorist attack, natural disaster,

serious accident, robbery at gunpoint, etc. Most people will express some stress-related reactions to a traumatic event, but if these remain and become disruptive, a person may have PTSD.

The Old Testament offers an example of the faith community's involvement in lives of struggle. In Genesis 32:22–31 Jacob wrestled with the angel of God. He battled with God. Jacob would not let go even when his hip was dislocated. Jacob was a changed man. Both parties negotiated for peace. The sign of the struggle was a wound, but the wound was also a sign of the blessing. All the people of Israel knew of the battle wound and the blessing because, to this day, they do not eat that part of the meat.

Our work as the church is to befriend hurting people and their families and offer our prayers and support. Our care and acceptance can help them recover instead of suffering invisibly and silently. No one has to go it alone.

The Church's Role in Recovery

1 Listen to the stories of those who struggle with PTSD. Believe them. Trust them. Their stories are real. Really listen with an open heart not thinking of your response. Establish writing groups where they can begin to tell their stories.

2 Offer acceptance just because—this requires humility on our part because we cannot see another's hidden wounds.

We do not have to understand everything someone has encountered. We just need to acknowledge, "You are a child of God."

3 Be careful of the language we use because we don't want it to damage someone. We need to use language with deep care and respect. Dr. Joretta Marshall says, "People are more than the wounds they carry. People are more than one thing."

4 Educate your church about inappropriate questions not to ask when working with veterans. Remember that moral injury has no quick fix. It requires a lifelong commitment from the church.

5 Watch for ways to do simple acts of kindness for the families of those with PTSD. They may not ask for help, but they need us.

6 Design worship with veterans in mind. Someone with PTSD may need solitude to converse with God. Veterans may need chairs in the back of the room so that no one can be behind them.

7 Listen carefully to the person's language. Is he or she needing acceptance or forgiveness? As Christians, we need to wrestle with grace in a graceless world.

Bible Storytelling Basics

The Bible stories in this product have been prepared for telling. They have been prepared using the New International Reader's Version of the Bible and The Message Bible. The stories have been crafted without commentary to maintain the integrity of the Scripture.

As you begin to prepare to tell the stories, make certain you do the following:

.....
1 Understand the story. Read and reread the story. Fix the theme of the story in your mind. Read the passage over and over until it sounds natural.
.....

2 Imagine the story. Use your imagination as you prepare the stories—close your eyes and picture the scene where the story takes place. Imagine the scene alive with colors, sounds, smells, and tastes. Put yourself in the place of the main characters. Picture the drama unfolding through the characters of the story. Plot out the action in the story.
.....

3 Learn the story. Do not memorize it—tell it like a story. Practice telling it over and over to yourself. Let your family members or friends critique you. Check the Bible to see what you have left out or added. Imagine the story as it unfolds before you as if you were watching a movie.
.....

4 Tell the Bible story. Open your Bible as you begin the story to let your group know the story is coming from the Bible. Tell the story staying as close to Scripture as you can. Tell Bible stories in past tense. Move with the action of the story. By telling the stories, you are letting the Bible speak directly to your audience instead of your interpretation. When telling the story, resist the temptation to offer commentary. Do not interrupt the story to explain anything. Discussion time will come later.
.....

5 Consider your audience. If working with non-Christian adults, simplify some words so they will understand. For example, instead of saying Scribes and Pharisees—call them the religious leaders of the day.
.....

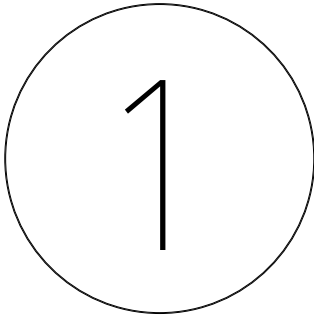
6 Be yourself. Some people will be more dramatic than others, so don't try to be someone you aren't. Just tell the stories in a way that comes naturally to you and leave the audience feeling like they could tell the story, too.
.....

7 Wrap up the story. Close your Bible and let your audience know that the words from the Bible have ended and it is time for discussion. Begin by asking the head, heart, and hands questions.

- **Head** questions call forth the facts of the Bible story. These questions prepare us to tell the story to someone else because we can remember the details.
 - **Heart** questions help us interpret the passage. They are designed to make us think about changes that need to come about in our lives.
 - **Hands** questions move us to apply what we have learned. They call for specific, personal action.
-

8 Always look backward, but never forward. Review the previous Bible stories so that you are linking what your group knows and you are helping them understand what they have learned. Don't tell them what is coming next. For example, ask questions about the last story in the series.
> What did you learn from our last story? How did it help you?
> What part of PTSD was discussed?
> What change did you make in your life because of what you learned?
> Who do you think could be helped by this story? Did you share it with him or her?

*Portions of this material were adapted from *Truth That Sticks* by Avery T. Willis, Jr. and Mark Snowden and *Tell The Story: A Primer on Chronological Bible Storying* by Grant Lovejoy, J. O. Terry, and James B. Slack.



Hope: “I Trust You, Lord”

Without hope, we have no energy and little strength to rise up in faith. We are on the bottom. Suicidal thoughts are at their strongest at this level. How can one dare to get well when his heart is so heavy? In the following story, we learn that we are not alone; God is with us. The key truths are God loves you, wants to restore you to His glory, and has a purpose and a job for you to do in His kingdom here on earth.

Scripture Promises: “But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isa. 40:31 NIV). “Those who put their hope in you [Lord] will never be put to shame” (Psalm 25:3 NIV).

Elijah Challenges Ahab and Jezebel's Ungodly Prophets

1 Kings 18:1-19:18

Background: Ahab became king and ruled over Israel in Samaria for 22 years. He did more evil than any king before him. He married Jezebel and they both did evil. Ahab began to worship the false god Baal and got others to worship Baal, too. The good prophet Elijah went to Ahab and told him there would be no rain in the land until Elijah said so and then disappeared. Ahab looked everywhere for him, but Elijah was not to be found. Listen and think about what to do the next time you are afraid. What will you remember about God?

Story ready for telling



After three years, God spoke to Elijah. God said, "Go and talk to Ahab, and then I will send rain on the land." So Elijah went to talk to Ahab. When Ahab saw Elijah, he said, "Is that you, the one who is always stirring up trouble in Israel?"

Elijah answered back, "I haven't been making trouble for Israel. You and your family have! You have turned your back on the Lord and begun following the Baals."

Elijah told Ahab to send for people from all over Israel to come and meet on Mount Carmel with 450 prophets of Baal. Elijah turned to the people and asked, "How long is it going to take you to make up your minds? If God is the one and only God, follow Him. If Baal is the one and only God, follow him." The people were silent.

Elijah ordered, "Get two bulls for us. Let Baal's prophets choose one for themselves. They are to cut it into pieces and put it on the wood altar. But they are not to light the fire. I'll prepare the other bull and put it on another wood altar, but I won't set fire to it either. Then you pray to your god and I'll pray to the Lord, and the god who answers by sending fire down is the one and only God."

The false prophets prayed to Baal from morning until noon. "Baal, answer us," they shouted, but there was no answer. Then they danced around the altar.

Elijah began to tease them, saying, "Shout louder. Surely he is a god. Maybe he has too much to think about or he is too busy or he is traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and you need to wake him up."

The false prophets did everything they knew to do to get their god to answer.

Then Elijah motioned for all the people to come to him. He rebuilt the altar of the Lord with 12 stones, one for each tribe in the family of Jacob. He dug a large ditch around the altar. Then he arranged the wood for the fire. He cut his bull into pieces and put it on the wood. He turned to some

of the people and said, "Fill four large jars with water. Pour it on the bull and the wood." The people did what he said. Then he asked them to do it again and a third time. Now the water ran down around the altar and filled up the ditch.

Elijah prayed to God, "Let everyone know You are God in Israel and I am your servant. Answer me and then these people will know You are the one and only God and You are turning their hearts back to You."

The fire of the Lord came down. It burned up the sacrifice and all the wood, stones, and soil. It even licked up the water in the ditch.

The people saw what happened and they fell down flat with their faces on the ground and cried out, "The Lord is the one and only God!" And they kept saying it over and over again.

Elijah had all the prophets of Baal rounded up and put to death. Then the rain returned to the land.

Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets. Jezebel sent a message to Elijah that she was going to kill him as she had killed other prophets of God.

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. He sat down under a tree and prayed, "I have had enough, Lord. Take my life; I am no better than my people of long ago." Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. An angel touched him and gave him food and water while he was weak. He got up and traveled to Mount Horeb and spent the night in a cave.

This time, the Lord spoke to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Elijah said, "I have been very committed to you. The people of Israel have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

God spoke to him and told him to go stand on the mountain and He would pass by. There was a very strong wind, an earthquake, and a fire. But God was not in any of those things. Finally Elijah heard a gentle whisper and knew that was God.

Then God said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Elijah repeated, "I have been very committed to you. The people of Israel have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

God told him to go back to Samaria and do the things He wanted him to do but assured him, "I have reserved 7,000 in Israel—all who have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him."

Head Questions

1. Where does the story take place?
2. Who is in the story?
3. Why did Elijah say it wouldn't rain until he said so?
4. Why couldn't Ahab or his men find Elijah for three years?
5. Why did Elijah make arrangements for a contest between himself and the false prophets?
6. What happened during the contest? Why did Elijah pour water over his altar? Who won?
7. Why did Elijah run away? Especially after God answered his prayers?
8. Why was Elijah so disturbed? Could he put his hope in God?
9. How did God answer him? What did God tell him?

Heart Questions

1. What did you like about the story?
2. What bothered or confused you about the story?
3. What does the story tell us about God?
4. What does the story tell us about following a path of disregard for God and others?
5. Why did Ahab blame Elijah for causing trouble?
6. What does the story tell us about consequences?
7. What does the story tell us about obeying God as Elijah did?
8. Was God faithful to Elijah? Did Elijah put his hope in God?
9. Is it possible to feel "down" after a great struggle? Even if good things happened?
10. Does the story show us that we can feel alone even when we may not actually be alone? Without a sense of hope, can we feel strong and full of courage?

God loves Me.

Hands Questions

1. How is God speaking to you through the story?
2. What can you do the next time someone tells you he wants to give up? That no matter what he does, nothing changes?
3. What are some ways you will show people that God cares, and you do, too?
4. What are some ways to assure yourself and others that we are all valuable to God?
5. Who do you know who feels hopeless? How can you use this story with that person?
6. What will you do the next time you feel alone? What Scriptures will you recite?

We can move forward and deal with forgiveness, guilt, anger, etc.

Points to Make

1. Hope

This story is about discouragement in the face of adversity. Severe or prolonged adversity can make a person feel as if it will never be over—there are no consequences for the oppressor or justice for the oppressed. The sense of hopelessness can give grounds for suicidal thoughts. Hope elevates that deep desperation into something manageable.

2. Closeness

God deals softly with and whispers gently to the downtrodden. He is not found in the violent winds and shaking earthquakes of life. He nurtures and strengthens the wounded. Even though the wounded can feel abandoned and alone, God is always near. Elijah found there were many who shared his heart and commitment and would be willing to help.

3. Healing

When wounds heal, scar tissue is tougher than regular skin.

4. Restoration

Even as mighty as Elijah was, he was human like us and had times of depression. He allowed God to restore him. We can, too.

5. Advance

After the foundational strengthening of hope, we can move on to dealing with forgiveness, guilt, anger, etc.

2

Power: “I Can Do All Things Through Christ”

Often people who are wounded in their inner person through trauma feel as if they have lost some power over the world around them. Their sense of safety has been compromised. They want to retreat into a safe place where they can better control their environment. In the following story, we learn how to heal and regain a sense of control. The key truth is healing and empowerment are possible.

Scripture Promises: “Don’t live any longer the way this world lives. Let your way of thinking be completely changed. Then you will be able to test what God wants for you. And you will agree that what he wants is right. His plan is good and pleasing and perfect” (Rom. 12:2 NIV). “I can do everything by the power of Christ. He gives me strength” (Phil. 4:13 NIV).

Review Questions


- Were any of you fearful since the last time we met? How did remembering Elijah's experience and God's response help you?
- How were you able to help someone who was ready to give up?

Jesus Walks on Water

Matthew 14:22-33

Background: Jesus has just finished feeding 5,000 men, along with women and children. He had only five loaves of bread and two fish to do it with, but everyone had enough to eat and some pieces were left over. The disciples helped Him give the food to the crowd. In today's story, listen for how Jesus showed His power in another way.

Story ready for telling

efore He sent the crowd away, Jesus made the disciples get in the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side of the sea. When He was all by Himself, Jesus went up on a mountainside to pray. It started getting dark. Jesus could see the boat far out on the water. He watched the waves pounding the boat because the wind was blowing so hard.

Just as it was moving toward morning, Jesus started walking toward the disciples on the water. They got really scared, because they thought they were seeing a ghost. Then they started yelling.

Jesus called out, "Don't be afraid. It's me."

Peter saw Jesus and said, "Lord, if it really is You, tell me to walk to You on the water."

Jesus said, "Come on."

Peter got out of the boat and started walking toward Jesus. But he saw how rough the wind was. When he did this, he got scared and started to sink. He shouted, "Lord, save me!"

Jesus quickly grabbed Peter's hand and kept him from sinking. He said, "Peter, your faith is so little. Why did you doubt Me?"

As soon as Peter and Jesus climbed into the boat, the wind stopped blowing. Everyone in the boat worshipped Jesus and said, "You *really* are the Son of God."

God can
reshape my
thoughts and
attitudes.

Head Questions

1. Where does the story take place?
2. Who is in the story?
3. How is each person or group described?
4. What is the problem(s) in the story?
5. Why do you think Jesus went up the mountainside alone?
6. Why did Jesus send the disciples ahead of Him?
7. Why do you think Jesus waited so long to go to the disciples when He saw they were having trouble earlier?
8. When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, why were they afraid?
9. Why did Peter want to go to Jesus?
10. Why did Peter start to sink?
11. What did Jesus mean when He said Peter didn't have very much faith?
12. What were the supernatural events the disciples saw in this time period?

Heart Questions

1. What did you like about the story?
2. What bothered or confused you about the story?
3. What does the story tell us about Jesus?
4. What does the story tell us about following Jesus' example on the mountainside?
5. Why do you think Peter tried to walk on the water to Jesus? Why did he begin to sink? What model does Jesus give us by reaching His hand out to Peter?
6. What do the darkness, great wind, and angry waves represent in our lives?
7. Has an event caused a difficult and painful time like this in your life?
8. Where did Peter get the power to walk on water? Do you think similar power is available to us today?
9. What was the purpose of this power?
10. When Peter started to sink, do you think it made him aware of his weaknesses? What do you think they were? Is it helpful to understand our weaknesses? Why or why not?
11. How can we change negative thoughts to thoughts that heal and make us strong?

Hands Questions

1. How is God speaking to you through the story?
2. What will you do the next time someone tells you his life is dark and feels unsafe?
3. What are some ways you can show others that God offers calmness and power over the storm?
4. What are some ways you can assure them God is always near and ready to provide healing of our minds and hearts?
5. What is one way you will work on changing your negative thoughts to positive ones?
6. Finish this sentence: I will rejoice with others and help them worship God by . . .

As a facilitator, you do not have to possess all the answers.

Points to Make

1. Prayer

Prayer (fellowship with God) is vital to refilling our spirits and believing in His promises to us. We pray to God for deliverance while praying for others and their circumstances. Jesus finished a very busy day and went up the mountainside to spend time with His Father. Without any mention of sleep, He went to the disciples to rescue them from drowning and then went on to land at Gennesaret with them. Jesus provided a good model for us to follow.

2. Presence

If someone in your group has cried out to God for help and help did not come, that person may feel as if God has let him down. Please note that as a facilitator, you do not have to possess all the answers. If faced with this situation, know that it is sufficient to just be present with and available to this person. Next we must start doing what we see Jesus doing. This takes a renewing of our mind. Like Peter, many times, we stay focused on the angry waves about us. That makes it hard to receive Jesus' help, but He has patience with us.

Peter let fears, doubts, and disbelief push out the faith needed to stay in Jesus' power. Jesus pulled Peter up, and He will pull us up when we begin sinking in doubt and fear. Exercising faith, learning how to believe His promises, and developing a positive thought life allow us to walk in Jesus' power. This calms the angry sea in our life.

3. Power

And remember power must be used responsibly. In the Bible, we learn that Jesus said He did only what the Father told Him to do. We base our actions on God's Word and the Holy Spirit's direction. One will not contradict the other's leadership.

4. Healing

Because post-traumatic stress disorder is a wound to our innermost selves, we must follow our Lord's lead through a healing process only He can totally complete. We do all we can do, and then we wait upon Him to reach out His hand and heal us. Even though it may seem too slow, His timing is perfect.

3

Anger at Self: “Who, Me?”

It is easy to be angry with others, even God, but sometimes it is hard for us to admit we are angry with ourselves. We make decisions that seem right at the time, but later we realize we acted unwisely or without thinking. Often we refuse to be honest with ourselves. In the following story, we learn how to acknowledge what we have done so that we can be restored by God. The key truths are all have sinned but God has provided the way—Jesus—for us to be restored.

Scripture Promises: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:1-2 NIV). “But God is faithful and fair. If we admit that we have sinned, he will forgive us our sins. He will forgive every wrong thing we have done. He will make us pure” (1 John 1:9 NIV).

Review Questions

- If you had a “storm” in your life this week, how did God help you through it? Who else helped you and what did he or she do or say?
- Who was someone you reminded that God was near and ready to provide healing?

David Takes What Is Not His

2 Samuel 11:8-12:14

Background: David stayed home while his army went to war with the Ammonites and Rabbah. One day, he was walking on his rooftop and saw a beautiful woman, Bathsheba, bathing nearby. She was married to Uriah, but David lay with her anyway and she got pregnant. She sent a message to David telling him she was pregnant. Then he had to figure out how to hide what he had done. He sent for her husband, who was on the battlefield, making the excuse of finding out how the war was going. Pay close attention to the story Nathan tells David. See if you can figure out who Nathan is talking about. Think about the power of stories.

Story ready for telling



David said to Uriah, “Go home and spend some time with your wife.” So Uriah left the palace with a gift from the king. But Uriah didn’t go to his house. He slept at the palace doorway with all the king’s servants.

When David found out that Uriah didn’t go home, David said, “You’ve been away for a long time. Why didn’t you go home?”

Uriah answered, “The ark and the army are staying in tents, and your special troops are camping in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? I could never do something like that!”

So David said to him, “Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back.”

So Uriah stayed in Jerusalem that day and the next. David invited him to come eat and drink with him, and David got him drunk. But Uriah slept at the doorway again and did not go home.

In the morning, David wrote a letter to his general and sent it back with Uriah. In it he wrote, “Put Uriah in the front line, where the fighting is the worst. Then pull your men back from him so he will be hit and die.”

So the general put Uriah in the place where it would be most dangerous in battle and Uriah died, along with some other soldiers. Then the general told a messenger to go back to David and tell him about the battle and the loss of life. He said if David asked him why it happened, to just say, “Also, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead.”

The messenger went back to David and told him what the general had told him to say. He described the details of the battle and said, “Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead.”

David told the messenger, “Tell the general, ‘Don’t get upset over what happened. Swords kill one person as well as another. Keep on attacking the city. Destroy it.’ Tell him this to cheer him up.”

When Uriah’s wife heard that he was dead, she cried and cried. After her grieving was over, David brought her to his house. She became his wife and had his son. But God was not happy with what David had done.

The Lord sent Nathan the prophet to David. Nathan told him a story about a rich man and a poor man living in the same town. The rich man had many sheep and cattle, but the poor man had only a pet lamb that he raised with his children and was part of his household. It shared his food, drank from his cup, and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

One day, a traveler came to the rich man. The rich man wanted to prepare a meal for him, but he didn’t want to kill one of his sheep or cows. Instead he took the poor man’s pet lamb and cooked it for his guest.

David became angry with this rich man in the story and said to Nathan, “The man who did this deserves to die. He must pay for that lamb four times its worth, because he did this and wasn’t even sorry he had done it.”

Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! The Lord said, ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from King Saul’s powerful hand.’ “ Nathan went on to tell all the blessings and provisions God has given David and how He would have given him even more. “The Lord said, ‘You made sure that Uriah the Hittite would be killed in battle and took his wife to be yours. Now members of your own royal house will be killed with swords, because you turned your back on me.’ “ God’s message went on to describe other troubles that would be in David’s household.

Then David confessed to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.”

Nathan replied, “The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But you have dared to make fun of the Lord and the son who has been born to you will die.”

Head Questions

1. Where does the story take place?
2. Who is in the story?
3. How is each person or group described?
4. What is the problem in the story?
5. What was David's first mistake?
6. What was his next sin? Do you think he knew it was wrong?
7. Tell each step David took as he attempted to hide his original sin. Were these acts more sins? Was he successful in hiding the truth?
8. Why did David want Uriah to go home to his wife so badly? Did Uriah suspect what David was trying to do? Why or why not?
9. Who else besides Uriah was killed or put in harm's way?
10. Does sin only affect the one committing it?
11. Why did Nathan tell David the story about the two men and the lamb?
12. Why was David angry?
13. Whom was David most angry with in the story? Did he recognize the object of his anger immediately?
14. Do you think God had to call David out on what he had done? Why?
15. How did David respond to the story?
16. How did David respond to the judgment given?

Heart Questions

1. What did you like about the story?
2. What bothered or confused you about the story?
3. What does the story tell us about God?
4. Did David take advantage of Bathsheba when he saw her bathing? Why? Does the Bible suggest that Bathsheba sinned as well?
5. Was it necessary for David to feel pity for the pet lamb? Why?
6. Have you ever done something wrong that caused a series of problems? Were you angry with yourself? If so, did you recognize it right away?
7. Were you willing to accept responsibility for what you did wrong?
8. Have you ever been angry with yourself for something you had nothing to do with?
9. What is the answer to self-anger?
10. How do you think David's sin and the couple's recovery affected them afterward? Did it make them better people? Did it restore David's heart to God?
11. Do you think God wants us to "live happily ever after"? What does your answer say about your understanding of His character?

God holds us accountable
for our sins but doesn't
hold us hostage.

Hands Questions

1. How is God speaking to you through the story?
2. What are some things that make us less likely to say no to sin?
3. What can you do when you must go places where sin is not easily recognized by others?
4. Do you think God wants us to be angry with ourselves? Why or why not?
5. What does God expect you to do to have a clean heart? What first step will you take?
6. What will you do the next time you're with someone caught up in sin? How will you respond to him or her? Should you be angry with this person? If you are, is that as hurtful as being angry with yourself?
7. How have you handled the consequences of sin in your life? How has God redeemed your situation? Who can you share your story with?

God can redeem any situation.

Points to Make

1. Idleness

Normally David would have been out with his soldiers. Was he feeling privileged and a little bored?

2. Sin

David had slowly fallen into the sins of arrogance, lust, and greed, which led to adultery, murder, and God's displeasure. He tried to cover up the first sin and just made it much worse. It began with him but ended with several people being drawn in.

3. Blasphemy

David's greatest sin was, as Nathan pointed out, "[despising] the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes." This is why God was so severe in His judgment of David; David had committed blasphemy. The surrounding nations would laugh and disrespect God's name.

4. Naïve

The Bible does not suggest that Bathsheba was at fault or aware of what David was doing.

5. Redemption

David's actions show he had moved away from the godly man he once was. The rest of the story shows how God holds him accountable but forgives and restores him. The consequences remain, but later in the union of David and Bathsheba, Solomon is born as evidence that God can redeem any situation.

6. Responsibility

As this story's lesson is about anger, the point is not to blame God or ourselves but to take responsibility. We do this by repenting and returning to a loving relationship with our Father, Who is to be trusted and obeyed.

4

Anger at God: “Why Me, Lord?”

When bad things happen, many people become angry with God. Their thinking can go like this: “God, You are supposed to be in charge of everything. You created everything, remember? Have You lost control of the universe? I thought You would give Christians special treatment, and look at what has happened. Do You not like me?”

Flawed thinking such as this can hinder our healing process and give way to bitterness and resentment. Yet to deny these feelings of anger is dishonest and does little in the way of hiding them from God. In the following story, we learn how to deal with these feelings in such a way that we can have an honest friendship with God and find peace and freedom. The key truths are He is good and is to be trusted.

Scripture Promises: “Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don’t try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God’s voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he’s the one who will keep you on track” (Prov. 3:5-6 MSG). “Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry—but don’t use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don’t stay angry. Don’t go to bed angry” (Eph. 4:26 MSG).

Review Questions

- Have you ever been angry at yourself about something you've done? Did you come clean with God? Why or why not?
- Describe what it feels like to come clean with God.

David's Son Dies

2 Samuel 12:13-23

Background: David's soldiers were off at war without him, and he grew unmindful of his responsibilities of being king and living right. He was on his rooftop and saw Bathsheba bathing. She was beautiful and he took her to bed. She became pregnant with David's child, but she was married to Uriah the Hittite. David sent Uriah to the battlefield so he would be killed by the enemy. God was displeased with David and sent Nathan, the prophet, to confront him with a story about a man who did wrong. David didn't know Nathan was talking about him and was angry with this person. Nathan revealed to David that the man was David. Pay close attention to how David acted when his son was sick and later on.

God
can be
trusted.

Story ready for telling

David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan replied, "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But you have dared to make fun of the Lord and the son who has been born to you will die."

After Nathan went home, the little boy became sick. David begged God to heal his son. He didn't eat and spent the nights lying on the ground. His trusted servants wanted him to get up, but he would not and continued not eating.

After seven days, his son died. David's servants were afraid to tell him his son was dead, because they thought, "While the child was still alive, David would not listen to us. How can we tell him his son is dead? He may do something terrible." David realized his little boy must be dead when he noticed his servants whispering to each other. He asked, "Is my son dead?" "Yes, he is," they said.

David got up from the ground, washed himself, rubbed lotion all over his body, and got dressed. Then he went into the house of God and worshipped Him. Next he went home, asked for some food, and ate it.

His servants asked him, "Why are you acting this way? When your son was alive, you refused to eat and you cried, but now that he is dead, you get up and eat!"

David said, "While my son was still alive, I didn't eat anything and I did cry a lot. I thought, 'Maybe God will be merciful to me and let my little boy live.' But now that he is dead, why keep on not eating? Can I bring him back to life? One day, I will go to him, but he will not come back to me."

Then God gave another son to David and Bathsheba and they named him Solomon.

Head Questions

1. Where does the story take place?
2. Who is in the story?
3. How is each person or group described?
4. What is the problem in the story?
5. When Nathan shows David what he has done, what does David do?
6. Does David make excuses or blame others for what he has done?
7. Why is David forgiven for what he has done?
8. David commits several serious sins. What are they? Are there consequences? Why?
9. Why does David fast and pray? Is he really serious about it?
10. After the child dies, what does David do that surprises his household?
11. How does David explain his attitude?
12. How are David and Bathsheba restored?

Heart Questions

1. What did you like about the story?
2. What bothered or confused you about the story?
3. What does the story tell us about God?
4. What does the story tell us about David's relationship with God before he fell into sin? How was he feeling about life in general?
5. Did David think about the possible consequences of what he was doing at the time he was sinning? Has that same thing happened to you? What were the consequences of your sin?
6. David was angry at the actions of the man in Nathan's story. Do you think he was angry with God when his son died?
7. Does it anger you that God allowed the child to die? Why or why not?
8. Are there things that have happened in your life that have caused you to be angry with God? Why?
9. What things did David do to keep from being tempted to be angry with God?
10. Do you think these things kept him from getting into more trouble?
11. Do you think David's reaction to his child's death was uncaring as some would think, or does it show peace and acceptance? Why?

Hands Questions

1. How is God speaking to you through the story?
2. How can you explain God's purity of character when you hear someone blame Him for evil?
3. Have you known someone who is "stuck or frozen" from getting over a trauma because he or she will not let go of anger? What kind of help could you offer him or her?
4. Have you ever held or are you holding on to anger rooted in trauma? What did or could you do to break free?
5. Do you believe God knows more than you do? What steps could you take to trust Him to do the best thing for you even if you don't understand?
6. How can you help someone experiencing the consequences of sin?

God never brings us condemnation without offering us grace and healing.

Points to Make

1. Sin

David doesn't go with his soldiers to war in the spring and has grown too comfortable in his life. He is not watchful over sin. He knows he is married and Bathsheba is married. But he doesn't walk away from the temptation. He gets caught up in adultery and murder, both punishable by death under the Jewish law. He breaks several of the Ten Commandments.

2. Repentance

David doesn't seem to realize what he has done until Nathan tells him a story about someone else who does these evils. Then he understands what he has done and repents before God.

3. Punishment

David knows God said his son would die, but he fasts and prays "double," meaning he is very sincere. He hopes God will let it go. But God cannot let it go, for a very serious sin against His name has been committed: blasphemy. Israel is to be an example to the nations around it, and now they will laugh at the God of Israel. They will say, "He cannot control the king and lets His favorite, David, get away with breaking the law." They will no longer respect His name.

4. Forgiveness

David is forgiven and his sins are removed because he repented and because of grace. Jesus will die on the cross for his sins. It is the same as being saved by grace in the Old Testament; the forefathers looked forward to a savior who would save them from their sins.

5. Consequences

Even though David's sins are removed, the consequences are not. His family will suffer for years to come.

6. Disgrace

The Bible doesn't speak of Bathsheba being David's wife until after the baby is dead, although they are married. She is still referred to as "Uriah's wife" while the baby lives, meaning it is a legal issue. The child is illegitimate. There is shame in the household. Bathsheba will live with shame and gossip, especially with David's other wives and concubines. The loss of a child was considered a judgment from God.

7. Restoration

God never brings us condemnation without offering us grace and healing. David and Bathsheba are restored and, in time, have another baby who will be king after David.

5

Forgiveness: “I’m Sorry”

Have you ever sought forgiveness and received it with strings attached? Have you ever struggled to forgive someone? Have you ever struggled to forgive yourself? In the following story, we learn how to forgive others and ourselves and accept forgiveness. The key truth is God is patiently waiting for us to repent so He can joyfully set about restoring us without condemnation.

Scripture Promises: “As far as sunrise is from sunset, he [God] has separated us from our sins” (Psalm 103:12 MSG). “He has saved us from the kingdom of darkness. He has brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. Because of what the Son has done, we have been set free. Because of him, all of our sins have been forgiven” (Col. 1:13–14 NIV).

Review Questions

- What do you do when you are angry at God? What did you learn from David's example?
- What have you learned about God that will help you the next time you are angry?

The Son Comes Home

Luke 15:11-32

Background: The Pharisees complained about Jesus: "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." The story of the prodigal son was one of three "lost" parables Jesus gave to show that what has been lost is now found. It pointed to the forgiveness for and the joy over each lost person who returns to the loving Father. As the story is told, listen for what the younger son does and how his father and older brother treat him afterwards. Think about which one you identify with.

Story ready for telling



Jesus continued telling stories. "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the family property.' So the man divided his property between his sons.

"Soon after that, the younger son packed up his belongings and traveled to a country far away. He spent every single penny he had on wild living.

"Then the whole country he was living in ran low on food. He had nothing so he took a job with a man who had pigs. His job was to feed the pigs, but he got so hungry he actually wanted to eat some of the food he gave to the pigs. But no one gave him anything.

"Finally, one day, he remembered how generous his father back home was to his hired men. And he realized he was dying from hunger. So he made a plan. 'I will go back to my father and tell him how truly sorry I am for doing God and him wrong. I will not ask him to accept me like a son but like a hired worker.' So he got up and started toward home.

"But his father saw him coming a long distance down the road, and his heart was full of love for his younger son. He ran to him, threw his arms around him, and kissed him.

"The son said, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son.'

"But his father commanded his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the well-fed calf and kill it for a big dinner celebration. My son was dead and now is alive again. He was lost and is found.'

God offers forgiveness.

"So the celebration began.

"But while all this was going on, the older brother was out in the field and started in when he heard music and dancing. So he asked a servant what was going on at the house.

"Your brother has come home, and your father has killed the fattest calf for a celebration, because he has him back safe and sound,' he said.

"The older brother got mad and refused to go in. The father came out and tried to get him to come in.

"But he said to his father, 'All these years, I have been working hard for you and always did what you told me to do. But you never gave me even a young goat so I could party with my friends. But when this son of yours who has wasted your money with prostitutes comes home, you throw a party for him and feed everyone the best calf!'

" 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be happy, because your brother was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found.' "

Head Questions

1. Where does the story take place?
2. Who is in the story?
3. How is each person or group described?
4. What is the problem in the story?
5. How did the father respond to the younger son's request for his inheritance? What does this tell you about his father?
6. When the young man went to a distant country, did he have many true friends?
7. When he was broke and hungry, did these friends help him? Why or why not?
8. What caused the young man to come to his senses?
9. How did he expect to be treated when he got back home?
10. Was he surprised?
11. How did his father act toward him? What did this tell him about his heavenly Father?
12. How did the older brother react to all that was happening?

Heart Questions

1. What did you like about the story?
2. What bothered or confused you about the story?
3. What does the story tell us about God?
4. Why was the younger son so eager to get away from home?
5. What do you think the young man was feeling as he was feeding the pigs? Was this an honorable job for a Jew? At that point, whom could he trust? Was he truly sorry for what he had done? Did he expect anything from his father?
6. Who did the young man say he had sinned against first? Next? Why in this order?
7. Why was it important that he repent? Why should we repent of our sins?
8. How did the older son feel about his brother coming home? What does this tell us about him? Did he have a duty to help his father welcome him?
9. Which son in the story do you identify with more? Why?
10. Why was the father so happy? How is this father an example of God welcoming us home when we've been far away from Him?

Hands Questions

1. How is God speaking to you through the story?
2. What leads you to think the father looked down the road daily for his younger son? How can we be watchful and eager to help someone come home to God?
3. What signs can we look for in a person trying to come home?
4. Why did the father totally restore the younger son instead of putting him on probation? How will you respond to someone who has recognized his wrong and is seeking repentance and restoration?
5. Do you think the younger son forgave himself for what he had done? Why or why not? Do you think his older brother forgave him? Why or why not?
6. Do you think forgiveness is a onetime deal or a process? What changes will you make in your willingness to forgive others?

Forgiveness is needed to clear away the darkness of our lives and open the way for restoration.

Points to Make

1. Greed

Although it was customary to wait until the father had died to receive an inheritance, the younger son was in a hurry to get away, so he asked his father to divide the property right then. His father did what he asked and divided the property between him and his brother. The older brother could have had his share at that time but chose not to. Sometimes the heavenly Father gives us our way even when He knows it is not the best thing for us.

2. Cost

The younger son soon realized that getting everything his way had a big cost. He remembered how safe and loved he had been at home. The false pleasures lost their attraction, and his false friends disappeared.

3. Awareness

The words “came to his senses” mean he saw his life clearly as it was; the darkness of sin had blinded him. He saw how he had been wrong and hurt God and his father. He was very sorry. He felt he had no right to even expect things to be back as they were before. He had thrown that life away. He represents a repentant sinner.

4. Love

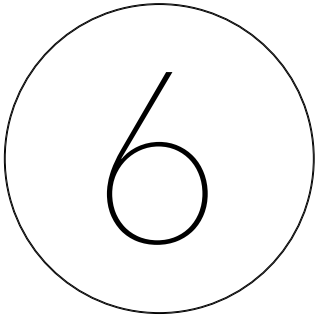
His father had every right to treat him like a servant. But this man was different. Men in this time period didn’t act without dignity, and to run to his son was considered undignified. And to plead with his older son was considered the same. His love was so great for both of them that he just wanted them close to him and safe from the pitfalls of this world. He represents the heavenly Father.

5. Jealousy

The older brother had fallen into a snare. He was self-righteous and tried to earn his blessings. He was unloving toward his brother, and that caused him to have an attitude like the Pharisees.

6. Forgiveness

Forgiveness is needed to clear away the darkness of our lives and open the way for restoration, the putting on of good things. We do not have the “senses” to know God’s love and His joy at our return when we are clouded with unresolved sin.



Protection: “The Lord Is with Us”

In other parts of this story set, natural disasters, accidents, sexual assault, abuse, etc., are dealt with as unexpected events. However, the protectors of our society must face situations where they are in harm's way on a continual basis. Soldiers, law enforcement officers, fire fighters, emergency medical personnel, and others have an initial choice to pursue this role but must thereafter obey orders they might or might not agree with. Their symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder may be the same as those not in these careers, but special attention to this category may be beneficial to the healing process by recognizing the psychological injury they face. It can be a product of their lifestyle.

In the following story, we learn that needless pain can be avoided if we follow Elisha's example: begin by talking to God about the crisis you face and then be obedient to follow Him. The key truths are God is wise and powerful and He cares for us.

Scripture Promises: Psalm 91 with a focus on verse 7: “A thousand may fall dead at your side. Ten thousand may fall near your right hand. But no harm will come to you” (NIV); Psalm 51

Review Questions

- Did someone ask for your forgiveness this week? How did the father and son from our last story change your attitude?
- Is there something you need to ask God's forgiveness for? How do you think He will respond to you?

Elisha Protects Many Lives 2 Kings 6:11-23

Background: The king of Syria was at war with Israel. He talked with his officers, and a plan was made to set ambushes in the path of Israel's army at several campsites. Elisha, the prophet of God, knew where each camp would be set up beforehand and would warn the king of Israel, who would get there first and prevent the attack. After this happened several times, the Syrian king got suspicious that he had some betrayers in his camp. Listen for the strategy Elisha used against the enemy.

Story ready for telling



he king of Syria was angry and asked his officers, "Who is going to tell me which one of you is siding with the king of Israel?"

"None of us, my lord the king," said one officer. "But Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom."

"Go; find out where he is," the king ordered, "so I can send men and capture him."

The report came back: "He is in Dothan."

Then the king sent horses, chariots, and a strong army there. The soldiers snuck out at night and surrounded the city.

When Elisha's servant got up and went out the next morning, he saw all this and asked Elisha, "What are we going to do?"

"Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "There are more of us than there are of them."

Elisha prayed, "Lord, open the eyes of my servant so he can see." God did just that and the servant saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, "Make these people blind." So God made them blind, just as Elisha had prayed.

God
cares
about
me.

Elisha told them, "This is not the right road, and this is not the right city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for." And he led them to Samaria.

After they entered Samaria, Elisha said, "Lord, open the eyes of these men so they can see." God opened their eyes so they could see things as they actually were and where they had gone. And they looked, and there they were inside Samaria!

When the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, "Shall I kill them? I think of you as my father and I need your advice; shall I kill them?"

"No, don't kill them," he answered. "Would you kill men you capture outside of battle? Put food and water in front of them so they can eat and drink and then go back to their master."

The king prepared a big dinner for them, and after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away and they returned to their master.

Finally the Syrian soldiers stopped raiding Israel's territory.

Head Questions

1. Where does the story take place?
2. Who is in the story?
3. How is each person or group described?
4. What is the problem in the story?
5. How did Elisha learn of the Syrian king's plans? For what purpose?
6. Did the Syrian king understand what his officer told him?
7. Why did Elisha tell his servant not to be afraid?
8. How did Elisha know this?
9. What was the first thing Elisha did each time danger was present?
10. How did Elisha get so close to God? Is it possible for someone today to have that kind of relationship with God?
11. Was the Lord at work supernaturally to help His people? Do you remember other passages in the Bible in which God supernaturally helped His people? Tell the ways and events. Do you see a pattern?
12. Do you think He still helps us in these ways today?
13. What did Elisha accomplish by leading the enemy to Samaria?
14. What did the Syrians learn from this? Why did they stop raiding Israel?

Heart Questions

1. What did you like about the story?
2. What bothered or confused you about the story?
3. What does the story tell us about God?
4. Did the Syrian soldiers make the decision to go to war with Israel? Who did? Do you think the soldiers approved? Did it matter to the leadership?
5. What do you think the soldiers cared most about? Would that have been the same for soldiers on both sides of the battle should Israel's army have been involved in protecting Elisha?
6. What did Elisha show toward the soldiers?
7. Do you think needless bloodshed could be avoided if leaders took this story to heart? What elements of the story reflect God's wisdom and caring?
8. Did the leaders of both armies reflect wisdom and honor?
9. If prayer is the first thing we should do in crisis, what is the next thing we should?

Hands Questions

1. How is God speaking to you through the story?
2. Why is it important to live under authority or guidelines? Based on what you've learned in this story, how will you respond to authority in your life?
3. What kinds of jobs fall under the protector category?
4. Can you see how job-related exposure to trauma could be different from other kinds of trauma? Why?
5. How can prayer help as a person serves his or her community? How will this change the way you pray for protectors? What is one way you could let those people know you are praying for them?
6. What are some ways a person or group could avoid or diminish the long-term effects of traumatic events in a career? How could you walk alongside someone on this journey?

God's plan is always superior to ours.

Points to Make

1. Safety

God looked over His people to keep them safe. Elisha was His servant and did His will. The relationship between them was close enough for Elisha to see and know the things of heaven, as God was willing to share them for the benefit of His people.

2. Protection

God was a protector. Elisha was a protector. You may be a protector.

3. Prayer

Prayer was the connection between Elisha and God as it was with other prophets before and after him.

4. Commitment

The other side of prayer is commitment. Once Elisha had asked for direction, he was willing to follow God's plan. God's plan is always superior to ours.

5. Provision

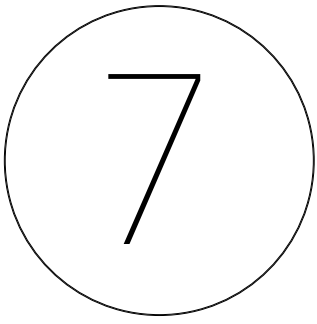
God works in unlimited ways. Many times, we may be like Elisha's servant and not recognize His provisions.

6. Protection

One comfort of protecting the lives of others may come from the fact that it must be done for our society to be stable and safe. On the other hand, anger may gradually build up inside protectors from obeying misinformed orders or not receiving the respect and gratitude due them for their service.

7. Support

Many soldiers say the most important thing is "having each other's backs." This sense of supporting one another is a big factor in preventing long-term effects and is used often by first responders soon after a trauma by talking about and sharing the experience together. For many, a heightened sense of awareness may become a part of their lifestyle.



Humiliation and Guilt:

“I Know the Truth and the Truth Has Set Me Free”

Healing cannot make much headway without dealing with the core issues of humiliation and guilt. Although they appear to be almost the same, they have different roles. They are normal functions to keep a person within healthy boundaries, but they can have a false side, causing one to believe something untrue that can prevent healing. Humiliation is concern with oneself and how others see him or her. This is healthy because it helps prevent breaking acceptable standards of conduct. Guilt is a sign of growth in being concerned with how one's actions affect or harm others. If a person gets stuck in the toxic and negative thoughts of embarrassment and blame and cannot get past these feelings, months and even years can pass without the person getting better (having a normal lifestyle).

In the following story, we learn that the woman at the well has known both humiliation and guilt. Jesus comes to tell her the truth and she is set free. The key truths of this story are God sent Jesus to proclaim freedom for the prisoner and if Jesus sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Scripture Promises: “He [the Lord] sent out his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave” (Psalm 107:20 NIV). “So let us come near to God with an honest and true heart. Let us come near with a faith that is sure and strong. Our hearts have been sprinkled. Our minds have been cleansed from a sense of guilt. Our bodies have been washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:22 NIV).

Review Questions

- How have you thought about military personnel and first responders differently this week? How are you praying for them?
- Military personnel and first responders need to tell their stories. What is your response after hearing their stories?

Jesus Speaks with the Woman at the Well

John 4:7-41

Background: Jesus and His disciples were traveling from Judea in the south to Galilee in the north by the shortest route: straight through Samaria. Most Jews would not have done this because they considered Samaritans unclean. The Jews hated the Samaritans because they had intermarried with the enemy centuries before and had their own worship site and Bible. However, Jesus stopped in the town of Sychar. He was worn out by the trip and sat down by Jacob's well. It was about noon. Listen carefully for what the woman learned from Jesus.

Story ready for telling



When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink of water?" The disciples had already gone into the town to buy some food.

The Samaritan woman said, "Why are you a Jewish man asking me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink? You're a Jew and I'm a Samaritan woman." (Jews in that day wouldn't be caught dead talking to Samaritans.)

Jesus answered back, "You don't know what God's gift is and who I am, or you would be asking me for a drink, and I would give you living water."

The woman said, "Sir, you don't even have anything to draw water out of this deep well. Where are you going to get this living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who dug the well? He, his sons, and their livestock drank from it."

Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again, but if they drink the water I give them, they will never be thirsty again. In fact, the water I give will be like a spring of water within, gushing out fountains of eternal life."

The woman said, "Sir, give me this water so I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming back to this well again."

He told her, "Go, get your husband, and come back."

"I have no husband," she said.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is you have had five husbands, and the

man you're living with now is not your husband. You are telling the truth."

"Sir," the woman said, "you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain for a long time, but you Jews claim that Jerusalem is the only place to worship."

Jesus said, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming and has now come when you will no longer need to worship here or in Jerusalem but will worship the Father in spirit and truth. This is the kind of worship the Father wants, for he is spirit and his worshippers must worship in that way. You Samaritans worship what you don't know, but we Jews worship what we know. God's way of salvation is made available through the Jews."

The woman said, "I know that the Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will give us the full story."

Then Jesus said, "I am the Messiah."

Just then, His disciples came back. They were shocked to see Him talking to a woman. But they didn't ask the question they were all thinking, "Why are you talking with her?"

The woman left her water jar and hurried back to the town and told the people, "Come; see a man who knows everything about me, everything I've ever done. Could this be the Messiah?"

The people left the town and went to see Jesus for themselves.

In the meantime, the disciples said, "Rabbi, aren't you going to eat?"

He said, "I have food to eat that you don't know anything about."

The disciples looked around at one another and said, "Did someone bring him food?"

Jesus said, "The food that keeps me going is doing what my Father sent me to do. My food is to finish the work he began. In four more months, it is going to be harvest time. Well, I want you to open your eyes and look at the Samaritan fields. They are ripe and ready to be harvested. The harvesters who are gathering the crop are already getting paid. They are harvesting the crop for eternal life. So the ones who plant the crop and harvest the field can be glad together. The saying goes, 'one plants and one gathers.' "

Many Samaritans from that town believed in Jesus because of the woman's evidence, "He knew everything I had ever done." The Samaritans invited Him to stay with them, and He stayed for two more days. Many more became believers when they heard what Jesus had to say.

They told the woman, "At first, we believed because of what you told us, but now we believe because we have heard for ourselves. We know this man is really the Savior of the world."

Head Questions

1. Where does the story take place?
2. Who is in the story?
3. How is each person or group described?
4. What is the problem(s) in the story?
5. Why did Jesus sit down by the well? Could there have been another reason besides tiredness?
6. Why did the woman come to the well during the hottest part of the day?
7. Why was she surprised when Jesus asked her for a drink?
8. Did the woman understand what living water was?
9. Why did she mention Jacob and ask Jesus if He was greater than Jacob?
10. Was the woman trying to change the subject by mentioning where to worship? Why? Did she do this more than once?
11. Why is it important that the woman told the townspeople Whom she had met?
12. Did her influence help the townspeople? How? Why? Is this surprising? Why or why not?

Heart Questions

1. What did you like about the story?
2. What bothered or confused you about the story?
3. What does the story tell us about Jesus?
4. Why did the woman choose a time when the other women weren't around to go get water? What does this tell you about the woman or the other women?
5. Can you name the things that helped make her feel humiliated?
6. Do you think she had guilty feelings about her broken relationships? In what way? What feelings of isolation might she have felt? Do you think she felt sad?
7. As most travelers avoided Samaria, why did Jesus act differently?
8. What does worshipping in spirit and truth mean to you?
9. When Jesus touched the woman's life, did she have a change of attitude about herself and others? How so?

God can set me free.

Hands Questions

1. How is God speaking to you through the story?
2. How has this story changed the way you view someone with humiliation and guilt problems? How will you minister through words or actions to someone having these problems?
3. Did the change in the Samaritan woman's life affect others? What does this say to you about sharing the gospel one-on-one with someone else? How will you do the Father's work?
4. How quick will you be to judge someone after listening to this story? How have your thoughts on that changed?

It is hard to face pain and memories, but it is also cleansing.

Points to Make

1. Possibility

The woman at the well probably did not have post-traumatic stress disorder, but she did have some challenges that some PTSD sufferers deal with. However, what happened to her when she met Jesus can happen to others who accept the spiritual healing and freedom He offers.

2. Humiliation

It is possible Jesus sat down by the well because He knew a woman came in the heat of the day when the other women of the town who judged her were home. Humiliation.

3. Guilt

Jesus asked her about her relationships, and she was honest with Him. There were several failures, no matter who was at fault. Guilt. Trouble with relationships is a symptom of PTSD.

4. Isolation

Going to the well alone was a sign of isolation and possible sadness.

5. Avoidance

By diverting the conversation from her many husbands to the proper place of worship, the woman may have been trying to avoid uncomfortable topics—her sins. It is hard to face pain and memories, but it is also cleansing. The truth will set us free. Part of treatment is to separate out the false humiliation and guilt from the beneficial kinds of humiliation and guilt that help us live right.

6. Acceptance

Jesus showed His acceptance of and love for all people by going through the hated Samaritan territory and speaking to a woman, especially one considered unclean by her society. He still finds hurting and rejected people, as well as those *acceptable* to society. We all need salvation and the joy of being in a relationship with Him.

7. Eternity

Jacob gave physical water that needed to be refilled to his people. Jesus gave spiritual water and food that would last forever to His people.

8. Evangelist

When the woman told the townspeople about Jesus, she was sharing the good news. She was taking part in the lives of others; she cared for them. She was also doing her Father's work; she was part of God's kingdom. She was no longer alone, and she certainly was full of joy.

8

Salvation: “The Old Has Gone; The New Is Here”

Experiencing trauma can leave our soul mired in mud, stuck in the hurts of the past. Even when we rise out of the mud, it clings to us, reminding us of the damage. Our bodies have such a memory even when there doesn't seem to be a mental connection with that memory. Take anger for example; anger turned inward produces depression. We may not be able to tie anger over a betrayal to the fact that we can hardly get out of bed in the morning, but our body stores the memory. In some cases, other illnesses and diseases can be related to emotional memories.

A well-known author explains the healing process as the body telling the heart something is wrong, the heart telling the mind, and the mind searching for ways to fix the problem. Christians can be comforted because the Holy Spirit will aid us in the process of cleaning the mud from our souls and teach us how to put on the mind and image of God.

In the following story, we learn how to respond to Jesus' offer of salvation and healing. The key truths are all authority has been given to Jesus and all those who turn to Him are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory.

Scripture Promises: “He [God] lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand” (Psalm 40:2 NIV). “You were taught not to live the way you used to. You must get rid of your old way of life. That’s because it is polluted by longing for things that lead you down the wrong path. You were taught to be made new in your thinking. You were taught to start living a new life. It is created to be truly good and holy, just as God is” (Eph. 4:22-24 NIV).

Review Questions

- How have you viewed your humiliation and guilt this week based on our last story? How have you viewed someone else's? Were you less judgmental?
- Whom is God directing you to speak to about eternal life? Will you obey?

The Paralyzed Man Walks

Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:25

Background: Jesus had just started His ministry, was baptized by John the Baptist, showed His authority over evil spirits, and healed many. Soon the crowds were flocking to Him and He had to find some out-of-the-way places to stay rather than the towns. Listen to how Jesus responds to the paralyzed man.

God can
give me
salvation.

Story ready for telling



After a few days of being alone, Jesus came home to Capernaum. The place where He was preaching was so crowded that the people were even standing outside the door, and no one could get in or out. Four men came carrying a man who could not walk. The place was so crowded they couldn't get him in to see Jesus, so they found a spot above where Jesus was and dug a hole through the roof. Then they lowered the paralyzed man on his mat down to Jesus.

When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralyzed man, "Son, I forgive your sins."

Now some religious teachers were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this man talk like that? He's insulting God! Only God can forgive sins!"

Right away, Jesus knew what they were thinking, and He asked, "Why are you thinking these things? Is it easier to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat, and walk'? I want you to know that I am the Son of Man and I have the authority to forgive sins."

Jesus turned and said to the paralyzed man, "Get up, pick up your mat, and go home."

The man got up, took his mat, walked out with everyone watching, and went home praising God (Luke 5:25).

Everyone stood amazed and praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Head Questions

1. Where does the story take place?
2. Who is in the story?
3. How is each person or group described?
4. What is the problem(s) in the story?
5. How did the paralyzed man get to where Jesus was preaching?
6. When the men helping their friend couldn't get in, what did they do?
7. Why was Jesus willing to help?
8. Why did Jesus forgive the paralyzed man's sins before He healed him?
9. Why did this upset the religious teachers? Did they believe Jesus was God's Son?
10. What did the paralyzed man do? Was he grateful?
11. Why was everyone amazed and praising God?

Heart Questions

1. What did you like about the story?
2. What bothered or confused you about the story?
3. What does the story tell us about Jesus?
4. What was noticeable about the paralyzed man's friends?
5. What does their climbing onto the roof tell you about their attitude and belief?
6. Did most of the people in the room believe the man was paralyzed because of sin in his life?
7. Do you think Jesus thought about illness the same way as the crowd?
8. Which is the most important—healing or salvation? Do you think Jesus would agree with you?
9. What do you think happened to the man and his friends after they left the house? What would have been their choices in the future?
10. Does Jesus have the authority to “clean the mud” from our lives? What in this story would lead us to believe this?

Hands Questions

1. How is God speaking to you through the story?
2. How big a part in the paralyzed man's healing did his friends play? Are you part of a support system that would help a member of your community find help? If not, what steps could you take to be part of such a support system?
3. Was Jesus too busy to be interrupted, especially when people were tearing the roof off over His head? How did He react? How will you respond when you are called on to listen to or help someone?
4. Was Jesus afraid of offending the religious leaders? How will you respond to other Christians who might make light of your helping others? Will you let their words keep you from doing what you know God has called you to do?
5. When you are around people with disabilities, how will you respond? Will you look away and act as if they aren't there or will you engage them?

What Jesus did on the cross opened the gates of heaven for us to be the restored children of God.

Points to Make

1. Support

The paralyzed man had a great support system. He would not have been able to get to Jesus without their help. Not only that, but they weren't going to let anything stop them from getting him to Jesus. How blessed we are to have friends who care for us. In this way, we see Jesus in each other.

2. Results

The Jews believed sickness came from committing sin against God, and they didn't want to be around the sick or disabled. However, today we know about germs and other causes of diseases. But we have found that negative emotions do cause harmful effects in our bodies through chemical changes. Research on this is very interesting.

3. Changed

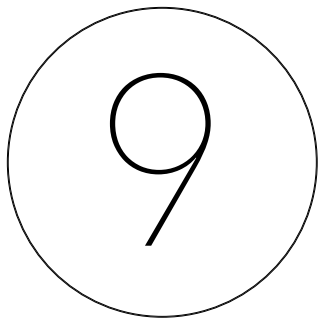
The crowd was amazed at what it saw and heard, for never before in the history of humankind had someone forgiven sins (salvation) and healed. What Jesus did on the cross opened the gates of heaven for us to be the restored children of God. We are made in His image. When we receive salvation, our spirits are made new, but we still must deal with the flesh nature and learn how to act like our Father God. This is a process called sanctification, becoming more like God. We slowly lose our desire to do bad things and feel better following the good paths.

4. Afterwards

Perhaps the biggest question in this story isn't answered. What happened to the man who was healed and to his friends? Did his friends come back and repair the hole in the roof? Did they tell everyone who would listen about what Jesus did? We do not know.

5. Choices

Many of us are at the same place as the paralyzed man at the end of this story. As Jesus forgives us our sins and heals us, do we allow Him to "shake the mud" off our lives and lead us to grow more like Him?



Transformation:

“I Can Sing a New Song Because I’m Happy and Free”

Our lives can make a statement. We can “breathe threats and murderous plans” until we remind others of a raging bull. Or we can live so calmly and full of laughter that we remind others of a stream gently rippling over small rocks. We can be willing to meet new happenings in the future with joy and new learning. We can be like a new song. It feels good to sing old songs in church, but we need to learn new ones also. Our lives can be like that. Some old memories can be remembered fondly, but for the person with post-traumatic stress disorder, there are things in the past that still hurt. The Bible uses the words “sing to the Lord a new song” in several places. We sing because God continues to give us grace and love each day. He rescues us and heals us. Our lives can be like a new song as we let Him make

us more like Him, a person of beauty. We are different from other parts of creation. If a tree is cut down, it cannot regrow even better and more beautiful. But God can help us have a renewed life even better than before, at least in our inner being.

In the following story, we learn that God can make us a new creation by looking at the life of Saul (Paul). The key truths are God wants more for us than we want for ourselves and He can do “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.”

Scripture Promises: “He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in him” (Psalm 40:3 NIV). “Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:7 MSG).

Review Questions

- How have you supported someone this week who needed you? How has someone supported you? How can we support people who are suffering trauma?
- What are some ways we can follow Jesus' example with the paralyzed man?

Jesus Calls Saul to a New Life

Acts 9:1-30

Background: Saul of Tarsus was a well-educated man and a member of the highest leadership of the Jewish religion. He did not believe Jesus was the Son of God and made life miserable for those who did. He did many things that displeased Jesus. Listen and be prepared to give a timeline of the segment of Saul's life told in this Bible story.

Story ready for telling



Saul was threatening to destroy and murder the followers of Jesus. He went to the high priest to get letters to take to the Jewish congregations in Damascus so that if he found any believers there—men or women—he would have permission to round them up and bring them back as prisoners to Jerusalem.

As Saul was getting close to Damascus, a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you fighting against me?"

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, the One you are causing trouble. Now get up and go into the city and you'll be told what you must do."

The men who were with Saul were speechless. They had heard a voice but saw nothing. Saul got up off the ground, opened his eyes but couldn't see a thing, and had to have someone lead him into Damascus. For three days, he was blind and didn't eat or drink anything.

At this same time, there was a follower of Jesus living in Damascus. His name was Ananias. God spoke to him in a vision. He answered, "Yes, Lord."

The Lord told him to go to Judas's house on Straight Street and ask for Saul from Tarsus. He would be praying. Saul had also seen a vision where a man named Ananias would come in and put his hand on him and he would be able to see again.

Ananias told the Lord, "I have heard from many how Saul has harmed Jesus' followers in Jerusalem. And now he is here with permission from the chief priests to arrest anyone who worships you."

But the Lord told Ananias, "Go! I have chosen this man to speak my name before the Gentiles, kings, and the children

of Israel. I will show him what he's in for—the suffering he will endure for me."

Then Ananias went inside the house. He put his hands on Saul and said, "Saul, the Lord Jesus, Who appeared to you on the road on the way here has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Right away, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized. He ate some food and got his strength back. Saul stayed a few days in Damascus with the followers of Jesus.

Right away, he preached that Christ is the Son of God in their places of worship.

Everyone listening was amazed and asked, "Isn't this the man who destroyed everyone who accepted Jesus in Jerusalem and came here to arrest His followers and bring them back to those chief priests?"

But Saul grew more powerful in his preaching and upset the Jews by proving to them that Jesus is the Christ. After this had gone on for a while, the Jews watched the city gates day and night and made plans to kill Saul. But he found out about what they were planning to do, and his followers helped him escape one night by lowering him down through an opening in the wall in a large basket.

When Saul went back to Jerusalem, he tried to join in with the believers there. They were afraid and did not believe he had changed, but Barnabus spoke to the other disciples for him. He told them what had happened to Saul on the road to Damascus and that he had been boldly preaching the name of Jesus. The disciples accepted him and he went around with them in Jerusalem.

But when he taught boldly in the name of Jesus and argued with those of Greek culture, they tried to kill him. Once again, his fellow believers found out and took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

GOD CAN
TRANSFORM ME.

Head Questions

1. Where does the story take place?
2. Who is in the story?
3. How is each person or group described?
4. What is the problem(s) in the story?
5. What kind of background did Saul have?
6. Why did he persecute Jesus' followers?
7. Why do you think Saul didn't recognize the coming of Jesus since he knew the Scriptures so well?
8. Did all the most learned Jews view Jesus as Saul did? Why or why not?
9. Why did Saul go three days without eating or drinking after he was blinded?
10. What were the two main ways Saul and Ananias got information from Jesus?
11. In spite of the way Saul had treated Him, what was Jesus' attitude toward Saul?
12. Was it easy for Saul to gain the trust of the people he had tried to harm? Why or why not?
13. Did Saul lay around in shame, guilt, and sorrow over what he had done? What was his reaction?

Heart Questions

1. What did you like about the story?
2. What bothered or confused you about the story?
3. What does this story tell us about Jesus?
4. Did Saul feel that the way he treated Jesus' followers was pleasing to God?
5. Before he met Jesus on the Damascus road, do you think deep down inside Saul was proud of himself?
6. How do you imagine it felt when Jesus stopped him on that road?
7. What do you think was on his mind and heart as he stayed in Judas's house three days and nights without eating and drinking?
8. Do you think Saul felt like a new man inside? Any joy or other emotions?
9. How do you think he felt when his former friends, the Jewish leaders, wanted to kill him?
10. Do you think Saul felt as if he owed Jesus a debt for harming His followers? Did he owe Him a debt? Why or why not? Do you think you owe God a debt? Explain.
11. Do you feel shame, guilt, and sorrow about your former life? If so, is this healthy? What can you do with those feelings?

Hands Questions

1. What is God saying to you through this story?
2. Can people be blind to the truth and still be able to see with their eyes? How will you relate to people like this?
3. Does it take a blinding light to wake up some people? To whom do you need to tell this story?
4. How will you use this story to bring hope to someone's life?
5. Do you feel as if Jesus is calling you to have a new life and work with Him? How will you respond? What can you learn from Saul's choices?

We become new in Christ and look at and think about things differently.

Points to Make

1. Protest

Paul describes this same salvation experience again in Acts 26:14. In this later passage, when Jesus told Saul he was *kicking the goads*, we gain an insight into Saul. In those days, it was a common farming practice to have a long wooden stick, pointed on one end, to poke a stubborn ox into moving. Some younger oxen would kick back in protest and hurt their legs from doing so. This shows that possibly God was dealing with Saul for some time and he was fighting against believing in Jesus. Perhaps he had heard Jesus preach or others tell about Him. Saul knew the Old Testament prophecies and knew about the coming Messiah. Jesus just didn't act like Saul's image of the Messiah. The Jews were looking for an earthly king, a powerful man who would gain independence for the Jews as a nation. Jesus came to set mankind free from sin.

2. Transformation

Saul and Ananias heard from Jesus by prayer and visions. God speaks to us today in different ways, but always in agreement with the Bible. Saul spent much time talking with and seeking heaven after he met Jesus. We don't know what he was doing those three days and nights when he was blind, but he went into the desert for three years to prepare before he started his ministry to the Gentiles. This was before he went to Jerusalem.

3. Newness

Saul not only regained his sight but also lived in spiritual darkness no longer. Saul had to repent of his sins and commit his life to Jesus before he started his new life. We must do this also. We become new in Christ and look at and think about things differently. Even if we already have a relationship with God before we start dealing with PTSD, we need to have new conversations with Him. Our ways of thinking after a trauma may present questions of trust, faith, hope, etc. We need a new vision for the future. We need to thank Him for His mercy.

4. Reputation

Saul found it difficult to gain the trust of people he had formerly hunted down. His reputation suffered with both the Jews and the Christians, the disciples he wanted to join. Our reputations today may cause us problems, but God will restore us in the right places when we prove ourselves changed.

5. Grace

The question was asked if Saul owed Jesus a debt from his former sinful life. When Saul was forgiven, he was forgiven by grace, which does not require anything other than accepting the free gift of grace. The same is true for us. We are freely and completely forgiven. And we need to forgive ourselves even if we have done really bad things. We are truly free to begin a new life in Jesus and sing a new song!

10

Restoration: “I Praise You Because I Am Fearfully and Wonderfully Made”

Paul understood how a person could be misguided and make bad decisions. He understood it from his own life. He experienced it with John Mark when John Mark deserted the missions trip and went home to Jerusalem. He saw it in Onesimus when Onesimus stole from his master and became a runaway slave. But Paul knew of the restoration that can come from a person returning to God and allowing Him to bring out the wonderful beauty and talents He placed within that person's soul. God is still in the rescuing business today for ordinary people like you and me. God made you in His image with careful planning; you are like Him, unique and wonderful. No one will ever be exactly like you. He restores you to your original blueprint

of creation. You have a special place and a special purpose in God's family.

In the following story, we learn that restoration is possible in our relationships with God and others. The key truths are God made you in His image and has plans for you.

Scripture Promises: “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well” (Psalm 139:13-14 NIV). “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27 NIV).

Review Questions

- How does it make you feel to know God could change a man like Saul? How has He changed you?
- Who do you know who needs to release the shame, guilt, and sorrow about his or her former life? How have you ministered or could you minister to that person?

Onesimus Runs Away

Colossians 4:9; Philemon 1:10-18

Background: Onesimus was a slave in the Christian household of Philemon and his family. When Onesimus ran away to Rome, he found Paul, made friends with him, and committed his life to Jesus. Listen and imagine yourself as Onesimus and what you would have been thinking all along the way.

Story ready for telling



Paul was writing a letter to the Colossae church. He wrote, "I am sending Tychicus, my dear brother, minister, and fellow servant in the Lord to you to tell you what is going on here and to encourage you. He is coming with Onesimus who has become our faithful and dear brother. He is one of you."

Later Paul wrote a letter to Philemon. He began his letter in the usual way by greeting his friends and fellow workers and thanking them for their faith in Jesus and their love for him and the other Christians. Then he told them he wanted a favor, but he wanted to ask in love rather than ordering them to do it.

"I am an old man in prison for sharing the good news about Jesus. Now, I want to talk to you about my son Onesimus. While here in jail, he became like a son to me. He was useless to you before; but now he's useful to both of us. I'm sending him back to you, but he is taking my heart with him. I wanted in the worst way to keep him here as your stand-in to help out while I'm in jail for telling others about Jesus. But I didn't want to do anything behind your back like force you to do a good deed that you hadn't actually agreed to.

God has
a plan
for my life.

"I am sending Onesimus back to you even though I love him dearly. I would have liked to keep him with me so he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains. But I didn't want to do anything without your permission, so that any favor you do will be gladly and willingly given.

"Who knows, maybe he was gone from you for a little while so he could return not as a slave, but as a dear brother, a true Christian brother! That's what he was to me. He'll be even more than that to you both as a man and as a fellow believer.

"So if you still consider me to be a partner in Christ, give him the same warm welcome you would give me. If he damaged anything or owes you anything, chalk it up to my account. This is my personal signature—Paul—and I stand behind it. I don't need to remind you, do I, that you owe your very life to me? Do this big favor for me. You'll be doing it for Christ, but it will also do my heart good. I can count on you to do even more than I ask."

Head Questions

1. Where does the story take place?
2. Who is in the story?
3. How is each person or group described?
4. What is the problem(s) in the story?
5. Why did Tychicus go back to Colossae with Onesimus?
6. Why did they bring letters back with them? Did the letters fulfill their purpose?
7. Why did Paul send Onesimus back to Philemon? Did he really want to do so? Why?
8. What did Onesimus's name mean? Did Paul use its meaning in describing him?

Heart Questions

1. What did you like about the story?
2. What bothered or confused you about the story?
3. What does the story tell us about Jesus?
4. Do you think it was just chance that Onesimus found Paul? Do you think God was putting the yearning in Onesimus's heart to go find Paul? Why or why not?
5. How do you think Onesimus felt when Paul trusted him to carry the letter asking for his freedom back to Philemon? Do you think he felt himself to be trustworthy? Was it a big risk? Do you think he knew what was in the letter? He could have run again. Why do you think he didn't?
6. Why do you think Paul believed Onesimus would be useful both to him and to the Colossians?
7. By the way Paul talks about Onesimus, do you think Onesimus was good to Paul? What does this say about Onesimus's character? What does it say about Paul's character when he showed respect for a man in trouble? Was Onesimus a Christian when he first came to Paul?

8. What was the change? Onesimus was a runaway slave and a thief. Was he created to do bad things? If not, how did he wind up like this?
9. Why did Paul need help in prison? Did this show a shift on Onesimus's part by being concerned for Paul instead of himself? Remember he was a fugitive willingly in close contact with Roman soldiers. Was he in danger of being found out?
10. Did Paul have an eye on the future workings of God when he suggested that God might have wanted Onesimus to be a freed man and brother to Philemon? Do you keep an eye on the things God is doing in the world around you that others may not even notice? Is this a good trait to have? How would a person become more aware in this way?
11. What do you think about a man who would pay another man's debts? Does that remind you of anyone else? Why would Paul do that??

Hands Questions

1. How is God speaking to you through the story?
2. When Onesimus became a Christian, did he act differently? In what ways? How are you acting differently because you are a Christian? What areas of your life do you need to work on?
3. After examining how Paul dealt with his fellow workers, what trait comes to your mind? Was it helpful in creating good friendships with others? What is one way you will work to create good friendships with others? With those experiencing trauma?
4. What was the attitude of people relating to each other in Colossians 3? What were the directions given to slaves by Paul? What are Jesus' directions for us today in how to relate to other people? Should we always try to be first in the world's eyes?
5. What happened to Onesimus when he came back to Philemon? What would you say if someone who wronged you came back and apologized? If God has already forgiven you, do you think it's a good thing to ask the person you have wronged to forgive you? Why or why not?
6. How are traumatized people in bondage? What is one way you will choose to support them?

Points to Make

1. Bondage

Slaves had to obey what their masters told them to do. Onesimus must have wanted his freedom so badly he was willing to steal money from Philemon and risk being caught, which had the possibility of torture or death by the Romans. He went to Rome, where most runaways gathered and he could get lost in the crowds. Somehow he met Paul, who was in prison there, and became friends with him. Onesimus had probably heard talk about Paul, who preached Jesus, when he lived in Philemon's household. Paul wanted to keep Onesimus with him but knew he had to send him back to Philemon, for he was his property. Interestingly John Mark, the young man who had gone home in disgrace from a missions trip ten years earlier, was now in Rome with Onesimus tending to the needs of Paul, who referred to him as a son.

2. Useful

Onesimus evidently was not a believer in Jesus when he came to Paul but committed his life soon afterward. Although Paul was in prison, he wrote several of his letters to the churches while he was there. It would be according to where he was imprisoned if he had much freedom of movement. In one place, he was allowed a house in which to live but couldn't leave it. Having someone to help him with household chores, writing tasks, and receiving visitors as encouragement was very helpful. Different men took turns doing this. Paul got a great deal of work done for the church in this way. Onesimus's true character must have revealed itself, for he was useful (a play on the meaning of his name) and acted in such a way that Paul loved him dearly. He started thinking about what was best for others and was willing to go back and face his troubles. This showed courage and trust in God.

3. Mediator

Paul sent Tychicus back to help protect and encourage Onesimus. He helped open the way for Onesimus's acceptance into the church of Colossae by carrying the letters with Onesimus.

4. Amends

Paul dearly loved Onesimus and wanted him to stay with him but knew he belonged legally to Philemon. He knew Onesimus must go back and make things right with Philemon. God had already forgiven Onesimus, but he must now seek forgiveness from Philemon.

5. Respectful

Paul used good sense and humility in dealing with fellow Christians. He treated others with respect and dignity, asking them to do something instead of commanding them around like a superior. He acted in this same manner with Onesimus, who came to him as a runaway slave and thief. Colossians 3 addresses several classes of people—wives, husbands, children, fathers, and slaves—to treat each other as equals before God. Several of these were considered lower than others, but they were to go about doing their jobs as unto the Lord and in consideration of each other. Paul did not try to get rid of slavery but asked masters to treat slaves fairly. People were not born into slavery in those days but usually became slaves by being captured in battle or selling themselves to pay off debts. In some instances, the person might be the illegitimate child of the master with a slave woman and wouldn't have been considered an heir.

6. Restoration

The Scripture promises on page 42 show that we were “fearfully and wonderfully made,” but we live in a fallen world where our human nature leads us to do things differently and become different than we were created to be. When we accept Jesus, we are restored in our spirits as God created us to be, but we must constantly put away the evil temptations so we can be more and more like the image we were created to be like—God Himself. As we mature, it gets easier and more natural to be like this.

7. Awareness

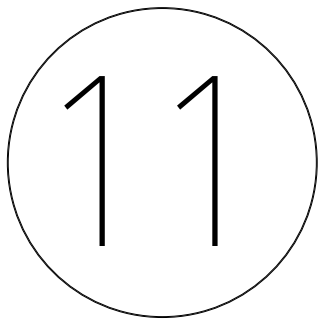
We start seeing the Holy Spirit at work around us, even if others cannot. As we walk with Him, we learn His voice and understand His character, not the one we once feared but the loving and gentle one we see in so many Bible passages.

8. Testimony

Paul's actions toward others illustrated the nature and work of Jesus in his life. Jesus paid our debt and set us free.

9. Outcome

What happened to Onesimus? We do not know for sure, for that name was fairly common, but Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, wrote in AD 110 that an Onesimus became a priest and then a bishop in the church. Several theologians believe it is possible he was the same person as the one in Philemon. He was finally martyred.



Suffering: “My Pain Will Not Be Wasted”

Suffering. It is hard to make friends with that unwelcome visitor. We fight hard against it being anywhere near us or our loved ones. And yet there it is, trying to move in with us. It seems such a waste of time the way it robs us of our freedom, our health, and, many times, our happiness. Tension builds up and we see two more emotions: Despair and Hope.

Despair says, “All is lost. Big chunks of your life are gone, wasted.”

But Hope says, “Just a moment; there are some good things in here you don’t know about.” Hope goes on to explain that God doesn’t waste anything. He works it around so good things are learned and other people are helped by what we have experienced. Hope even explains that Jesus accepted suffering so He could help us be well again and be in God’s household as we were created to be.

In the following story, we learn how to respond to circumstances in our life through the example of Jeremiah, who accepted great trials because God wanted to use him in a special way and for a special purpose. The key truths are “in all things God works for the good of those who love him” and God made a way, through Jesus, for us to be called His children.

Scripture Promises: “Write down my poem of sadness. List my tears on your scroll. Aren’t you making a record of them?” (Psalm 56:8 NIV). “The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God’s people” (Rev. 5:8 NIV).

Review Questions

- How can we shake off the wrong choices we have made? How did Onesimus?
- What does it mean to know you and others are “fearfully and wonderfully made”? How will you treat others?

God Calls and Commissions Jeremiah

Jeremiah 1:5-10; 2:7-8; 4:1-2, 19-20; 16:14-15; 20:7-10; 37:12-16; 38:6; 52:12-16

Background: The nation of Judah had grown wicked and forgetful of the God Who created it and brought it through the wilderness out of Egypt into a good land. He tried to warn the people to return to Him, but they would not listen. He used Jeremiah to tell them they must be disciplined by being taken to Babylon, but there was hope. Pay close attention to how Jeremiah responded to the circumstances in his life.

Story ready for telling



God told Jeremiah, “Before I shaped you in your mother’s womb, I chose you. I set you apart to serve me and be a prophet to the nations.”

But Jeremiah said, “You are my Lord and King, but I can’t speak. I’m only a boy!”

God told him, “Don’t say, ‘I’m only a boy.’ Don’t be afraid of anyone. I’ll be right there, looking after you.”

God reached out, touched Jeremiah’s mouth, and said, “I have put my words in your mouth. You are to speak to the nations. Your job is to pull up and tear down, take apart and demolish. And then start over, building and planting.”

God told the nation why He was upset with it. “I brought you into a land with rich soil full of fruit and fine food. But in spite of all that, you polluted my land and turned it into something I hate.

“The priests never even thought to ask, ‘Where’s God?’ The religion experts knew nothing of me. The leaders refused to obey me. The prophets preached false gods, ones that were just statues.”

But God told the nation how to please Him. He told the people if they really wanted to come back to Him, then they had to get rid of their idols—get them out of His sight. They had to stop going down the wrong path and let all their promises be truthful, fair, and honest.

Jeremiah felt pain, along with God, over Judah’s troubles.

Jeremiah cried out, “I’m suffering! I’m really suffering! My insides are tearing me up. My heart is pounding inside me. I can’t keep quiet. I’ve heard the trumpets blaring and the battle cry. Trouble just keeps coming. The whole land is destroyed. In an instant, my home was wiped out.”

God assured Jeremiah that a new day was coming. The time was coming when the people would say, “As sure as God lives, God will bring the people of Israel back from the land of the north. He will bring them back from all the places where He had forced them to go. He will bring them back to the land He gave their people long ago.”

Time went on and Jeremiah became discouraged and argued with God. “You tricked me and I let you. You were too strong for me and now everyone makes fun of me. All you ever tell me to talk about is fighting and trouble. And all I get for my God-warnings are insults and hatred. Sometimes I think, ‘I’m done. I will never speak your name again.’ And then your message burns in my heart as if my body is on fire. I can’t hold it in anymore. I hear the people whispering, ‘Terror is on every side! Report Jeremiah! Let’s turn him in to the authorities.’ “

All of Jeremiah’s friends were just waiting for him to slip up, saying, “Maybe he’ll make a mistake. Then we’ll have the upper hand and get even with him.”

The people of Judah were angry with Jeremiah for speaking for God. When the Babylonian army was leaving their country, Jeremiah started to leave the city to go to the territory of Benjamin to get his share of the property. The captain of the guard grabbed him and would not let him go, saying, “You’re deserting to the Babylonians.”

“That’s a lie. I am not going over to the side of the Babylonians,” Jeremiah said.

But the captain wouldn’t listen to him. He arrested Jeremiah and brought him to the police. They were angry with him and beat him. Then they took him to the house of the secretary Jonathan, which they had made into a prison. So they put Jeremiah down into a dungeon. He stayed there for a long time.

After some time, he was taken out of the dungeon and lowered by ropes into a well in the courtyard of the guard. There was no water in the well, only mud. And he sank down into the mud.

Sometime later, Nebuzaradan, a commander of the king of Babylon’s army, came to Jerusalem with his army. He set fire to the Temple of the Lord. But he didn’t stop there. He set fire to the royal palace and all the houses in Jerusalem. He burned down every important building and broke down all the walls around Jerusalem. When he finished with all that, he rounded up everyone left in the city and took them off into exile. He left a few poor dirt farmers behind to tend the vineyards and what was left of the fields.

Head Questions

1. Where does the story take place?
2. Who is in the story?
3. How is each person or group described?
4. What is the problem(s) in the story?
5. What was God's plan for Jeremiah's life? How did Jeremiah know this?
6. What was Jeremiah's response to God's plan?
7. What was Jeremiah's relationship with God? In what ways did that come across?
8. What was Jeremiah's opinion of how God treated Judah? What is your opinion?
9. What was Jeremiah's opinion of how God treated him? What do you think?
10. Why did the people disagree with Jeremiah (and God) about their sins?
11. Why do you think they were so blind to their sins? Whose fault was it?
12. Did Jeremiah remain true to God throughout his life? How do you know?
13. Why was it important that God find a person who would be His spokesperson?

Heart Questions

1. What did you like about the story?
2. What bothered or confused you about the story?
3. What does the story tell us about God?
4. Why would God choose someone to do such a difficult task as Jeremiah's? Was He violating Jeremiah's right to happiness? Is there such a thing in God's kingdom? Explain your answer.
5. How did Jeremiah deal with fear? What did God say that helped him?
6. Did Jeremiah suffer for what he did or what others did? Does it make a difference? How?
7. Why is it hard to go against public opinion? Is it necessary to do it in certain cases?
8. What do you need to know about yourself to face conflict?

9. What do you think Jeremiah's response was to the battles and the hardship the people faced? How could he deal with this burden? Was it too heavy?
10. Why did God warn the people of the disasters to come? What would be the spiritual reason necessary for disaster to occur? Why did the people want to shut Jeremiah up? In what way did they think his words were causing the problems?
11. Why did Jeremiah feel it was impossible for him not to tell God's message?
12. Did Jeremiah ever get judgmental and say, "It serves you right"? What does this say about his character? What would you have done in his position?
13. How did Jeremiah handle others' opinion that he was negative all the time? Would he have liked to bring good news? How do you think you would have felt if your message were a doomsday message?
14. What was Jeremiah's response when his friends were against him? How did he handle the loneliness?
15. How did he feel when people gave false reports about him? How do you feel? How do you handle it?

Hands Questions

1. How is God speaking to you through the story?
2. Remember a time when you sensed God was calling you to stand tall in His name over an issue. Explain (if only to yourself) how you felt, what you did, and what you learned about God and yourself during that time. Do you wish to share it with others? What will you do in the future when He calls you to something difficult?
3. Are you tempted to wallow in self-pity and blame God for your circumstances? What would happen if you turned your thoughts to Jesus' suffering for you? How would that change your response?
4. What is the difference between suffering for mistakes we make and suffering for sharing God's Word? How can God use both sufferings?
5. What would be the benefit to others when we share how God constantly remembers our tears and prayers? Who is one person you need to share that reminder with this week?
6. What happened to Jeremiah when the people went to Babylon? How are we affected by the world around us? What are you bumping up against in the world now? How will you respond in a godly manner?

Points to Make

1. Contaminated

God cares very deeply about His people (saved or unsaved) and has plans to grow us into being like Him. It is hard to understand a spiritual being like God, as we are very much geared to physical appearances, so His model for us is Jesus. What Jesus said and did show us what God is like and what we are to become. In Jeremiah's day, the people forgot what God was like and what He wanted them to become. Even the leaders copied the way foreign people acted and wanted a god they could physically touch. This broke God's heart, for He knew they were choosing trouble. They would not become pure and beautiful in their hearts like Him. And He knew He could not bring them into heaven because no sin is welcome there. They would be lost forever.

2. Chosen

God knew Jeremiah's heart well. Jeremiah loved. He would get angry, disappointed, and hurt, but he was still willing to be partners and friends with God. He was willing to help God with His plan to save the people. In fact, Jeremiah was grieved just as God was over the way the people were being stubborn and disobedient. God was looking for a man like this, so He chose Jeremiah.

3. Disciplined

God treated the people of Judah as we would a spoiled and rebellious child. He disciplined them because He loved them. He wanted them to learn what they were doing wrong and be willing to make changes for good in their lives. He warned them several times, and they wouldn't listen. Did they think nothing would happen? They were wrong. He let them suffer the consequences of their actions. And after they learned their hard lessons, He brought them back home, but it took 70 years. They cried out to Him. He heard them and helped them.

4. Obedient

Although life was very uncomfortable for Jeremiah, he found he was better off doing the job God gave him. In fact, to remain silent hurt his insides. He felt as if he would burst into flames from the inside out. There must have also been a joy in walking with God and knowing God was pleased with him. That feeling must surpass the greatest riches a man could have. Even today for a person to know he has suffered for doing good as Jesus did is a very pleasing kinship with Jesus.

5. Influenced

We are community people in that what happens in the world around us affects us. Jeremiah suffered God's discipline of Judah as they did even though he was not guilty. He was not forced to go to Babylon with the first wave of people, but he was later captured and taken with them. However, those who are right with God have His promise that He will look after them as He did Jeremiah.

6. Selfless

Understanding what being made in God's image is like helps us to see that He is always willing to give of Himself for our needs. He is no pushover. There are harmful things He will not give us, and He will discipline us when we need it. We find ourselves becoming as He is, and some people will call it suffering. But we find an element of joy in it that changes our understanding of selfless giving.

7. Warned

Throughout the Bible, God warns people what will happen before it does. Is that a spiritual rule? The answer is open for interpretation, but it is comforting that He cares so much for us that we can be prepared.

8. Character

A good lesson in life is to learn that what others think about us is not as important as what God thinks about us. This realization allows us to let hurtful words slide off us like rainwater.

9. Transparent

It is OK to talk to God about our anger at and disappointment with Him as long as we remember He is our loving Creator. He knew how Jeremiah felt.

10. Rescued

Why does it matter that God keeps watch over our tears and prayers? It is important that we realize He notices, cares very deeply about everything that happens to us, and gives us justice. He can turn our grief around and use it to help others. Our testimonies are powerful. No one can deny what happened to us and how the Lord came to our rescue.

*God can use my
pain to help others.*

12

Life After PTSD

Finding information about post-traumatic stress disorder can be easier than finding answers to the question, "Can I hope to live normally someday?" Yet most people who are dealing with the stress and pain after a damaging trauma want to know just this. I believe it is a matter of hope and can be best answered by the survivors themselves. So many people finish with treatment and leave therapy; therefore little potential feedback is available to the therapist. This was the case back when I was finishing my professional therapy about 20 years ago. My therapist said not much had been written at that time about life after therapy. I have had the opportunity to monitor my growth and healing through those years. Being involved in support groups, marrying a man who developed PTSD after being shot in Vietnam, and research have given me insight into what others have gone through.

Scripture Promises: "God, create a pure heart in me. Give me a new spirit that is faithful to you" (Psalm 51:10 NIV). "So lift your sagging arms. Strengthen your weak knees. 'Make level paths for your feet to walk on.' Then those who have trouble walking won't be disabled. Instead, they will be healed" (Heb. 12:12-13 NIV).

Personal story ready for telling

I am Murselle McMillan, and I wrote the 11 Bible storytelling portions of this PTSD publication. I asked God to help me choose the topics and what to say about them. Without Him, I cannot write well; with Him, I am amazed that the words are so much higher and better. The topics selected are the foundational basics of developing healthy character traits for healing and living more like Jesus in life after PTSD. Hope is the first topic, because hope provides the strength to face healing and all that goes with it. Suffering is the last topic, because knowing God can use suffering for good made my pain worthwhile. I had PTSD, and I am totally healed. The proof is in the last ten years of being symptom-free, with enough stressors to challenge that statement.

Background

I was born the fifth child of a family of eight. My father was away from home working and came home on weekends. My mother was stressed with the burden of being pregnant, while handling our farm and four children alone. She had little time for personal attention to the children, leaving me vulnerable to abuse.

My early memories are sketchy, but I remember a cousin coming into our home. I think I worshipped him for the attention he gave me, but the attention was inappropriate for a young child because I remember the turmoil surrounding his leaving and a few glimpses of being alone with him. I do have a clear memory of being verbally abused by my father throughout my childhood and adolescence. Then I remember being beaten and threatened with weapons by my husband. Finally a neighbor raped me, tied me up, and was trying to decide what to do with me when I tricked him and escaped. As a result of all this, I developed a dissociate disorder that took me years to overcome, several hospitalizations, and the support of the most wonderful therapist one could have.

Life with PTSD

First I remember all the emotional pain that was a constant companion. I related to Jeremiah at times when he said, "I'm suffering! I'm really suffering! My insides are tearing me up." At other times, I just felt a sense of sadness and unrest and the need for love. But I didn't know how to open my heart wide enough to receive love. I didn't have the desperate desire to be alone and avoid stress as others have experienced. Some turn to alcohol and drugs. Some attempt to escape from society.

My husband picked a fight with me after we were first married and moved into his own bedroom, using that excuse to build a man cave where he felt safe. We remodeled the house and put a minikitchen close to his room. That way, he could control his environment, join

the rest of the family when he felt like it, and retreat when he relived the past. By joining a VA support group and with family support, he grew to understand himself and has become nearly symptom-free. He still reacts to loud noises and has frequent nightmares. Although not quite conventional, marriage has worked for us because we understood and were willing to help each other.

In high school, I made high grades and hoped to accomplish great things, but I could not be successful at one thing for very long. I just did not have the inner strength and drive to focus, so I became good at many things and made compartments in my life. This is typical of a dissociate disorder. When my mind could not handle a problem as one unit, I would switch the problem over to separate units I had created in my mind. I had one for anger, one for fear, one for gender, etc. Each unit was created to protect me. This prevented lasting success in any one area. Life was difficult. I had to act normally to live and work in society, but I was not normal inside. One psychiatrist told me I did not have the luxury to be crazy if I wanted to be functional in society. And right he was. I was functional: I raised my son, kept a job, and supported my child and myself. I was like a shattered plate that had been glued back together.

Treatment

Type and length of treatment depends on the severity and length of the trauma. The best treatment for me was talking everything out with my therapist, some medication for depression and anxiety, and a growing friendship with God. Friendship with God was the greatest healer. I was so angry with God that it took many years of painfully fighting against Him before I gave up and said, "You are the only game in town. I don't know if I can trust You, but I know You are the only answer." I had tried so many solutions, and none of them worked. My spirit told me the truth, but it was hard for my mind and heart to accept it.

Learning to trust God and His character took a long time and much study. I had attended church only a handful of times growing up. Becoming agnostic in my twenties left me knowing almost nothing about spiritual things. For about five years after conversion at age 30, I carried my Bible under my arm everywhere I went. I read it during my lunch break and every other opportunity I got. Slowly I started to see how beautiful and humble His character was and how tenderly He watched over me. I felt His presence and saw His actions around me. I was amazed. The Creator of the universe was real and right here around me in the most common of details! He was in the wind blowing across my face in gentle caresses. His words flowed through my mind; He was always with me on some level. How had this knowledge escaped me? The world around me took on a new brilliance, especially as I healed.

My brothers and sisters loved me, but I could not talk to them about PTSD. We came from the same family, so they wondered why they hadn't been traumatized. I felt as if they didn't believe the inner turmoil because they couldn't see it, so I would quietly enter the hospital without their knowledge when I sensed an episode coming on. But I could see how the chaos of our family had affected each one of them differently. Good support is important for healing.

On the Other Side

Life after PTSD started gradually. As I said, active counseling started coming to a close about 20 years ago, and I went into maintenance-type visits with my therapist. We talked about what normal life was like. I had never lived normally. I had coped with a shattered life from very early childhood and made my own normal.

I had to learn how to stay present in my inner personhood at all times. Now that I was living as a whole person without other units of escape, I realized I must stay in my present state instead of sliding into another unit to relieve the pressure. My head felt as if it would explode as I sought healthy ways of dealing with problems. I could no longer use avoidance. I could not escape. I was very full inside. The shattered plate must become seamless and new. God was there to make it happen. Would I show up and do my part? I was trying to go to college. Some semesters, I could carry 12 hours; some semesters, I could not go at all or carry only one or two classes. The important thing was I would not give up. I expected to get well. Surely God had some plans for an odd person like me. I had lots to give to the world, especially people who were going through what I had. I understood.

My therapist warned me that I would experience mixed emotions living as a whole person. What did she mean? I found out. It was novel to feel love, hate, and fear all at the same time. My old coping mechanism allowed me to feel emotions more separately as I slid from one unit to another. I truly felt my anger could physically harm those around me, so I kept it sectioned off. I was rather surprised when I found I did not have that power. Feeling numb was being replaced with freedom to feel. I carefully chose positive thoughts and what I called my gratitude quotient. If I started feeling low, then I would praise God for all the provisions He had put in my life. My life energy would rise again, and I would feel strong.

My thought life had always been a great battle. I had been pulled in many directions: the fleshly side of my nature, the different units of myself, the Holy Spirit, and Satan. Spiritual warfare was present from early times, especially after I became a Christian. It was as though I was a special person in God's kingdom, being equipped with knowledge and power to cast the evil ones down and raise the downtrodden up. I was a partner of Jesus. I must be stopped. I must be taken out of the race. The knowledge

I had was that Jesus had the key to the gates of hell. The power I had was given to me and anyone else who follows in Jesus' steps. We are powerful. We can do good in His name. We are dangerous to the evil kingdom.

I grew stronger. Loud sounds no longer sent me running for cover. Large groups still made me uneasy, but I was more social one-on-one with people. Nightmares came less and less often.

Ten years ago, I no longer had daily symptoms. However, if I encountered heavy stress and I had not been careful to take care of my thought life and gratitude quotient, then I would feel myself slipping toward creating a unit within myself to handle the problem. It would be so easy to revert back because I had those old neuron pathways within my mind. I refused to allow it to happen and would quickly correct the problem if I had already fallen victim without realizing it. How did I do that? The same way I was healed in the first place—I had rules. I would not push bad feelings off on another part of myself for that part to handle alone. That would be rude. I had Christian standards for all of me and I would follow them. My greatest healer was God. After I had done all I could do humanly, I would sit back and wait until God reached His hand inside my soul and set it straight. Some things man cannot do by himself.

Finally, a few years ago, I came to a place in my life where I had the following conversation with God: "From now on, I will not keep an ace up my sleeve to escape what is in front of me. I know I can slip over into another part of me, hide out, and save my sanity. But I will no longer do that. I ask You to catch me. If I fall, then I fall. If You do not catch me, I will go crazy. I will make no plans to catch myself. I will trust You."

Something surprising happened at that moment of decision. I heard His voice in my mind: "You are healed. You no longer have post-traumatic stress disorder."

As time went by, stressful events occurred when the evil one tried to trick me into thinking PTSD was coming back, but I sent him away. I would not accept it. The symptoms would immediately go away. Finally there was no more desire to run away. It was too much fun to seek God for answers and feel His power flowing through me to meet the problem. The scars have turned into tough places of strength. I still have two problems in my life: I use food to nourish my soul, and I am so content it is hard to drive myself. I take a nap instead . . . so I'm a work in progress.

I have peace. My life has contentment, joy, and love for others. Like Jeremiah, my life is not my own, but God's to do with as He wishes in the supreme plan for the redemption of mankind.

Head Questions

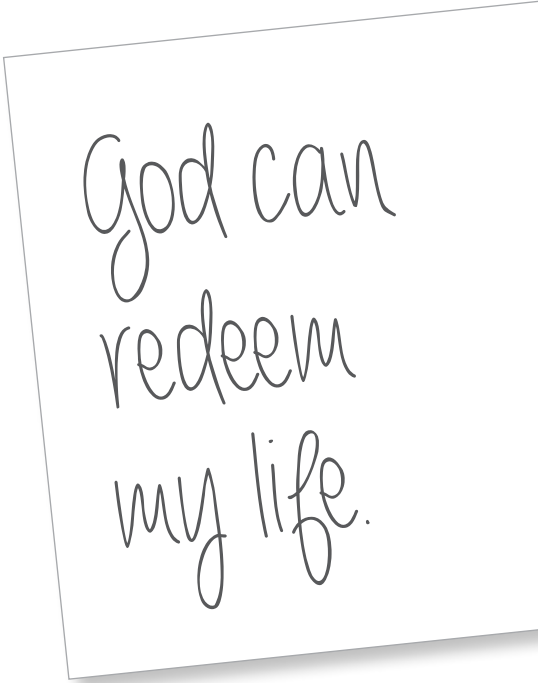
1. Can you name the traumas Murselle encountered?
2. How did she try to live with PTSD before she got help? What coping method did she use?
3. What treatment helped her? How was God a part of that?
4. Describe how Murselle lives as a whole person. What did she have to allow into her life? How did she move from feeling numb to truly feeling?
5. How did her thought life have to change?
6. How does she describe her life now?

Heart Questions

1. Have you, a family member, or someone you know experienced trauma? What parts of Murselle's story might help?
2. What impact does compartmentalizing feelings have on us?
3. Why did Murselle say friendship with God was the greatest healer in her life?
4. What role does therapy have in PTSD?
5. What does it mean to live like a whole person?
6. Why is our thought life so important?

Hands Questions

1. Who needs to hear Murselle's story of healing? When and how will you tell her story to that person?
2. How will you discover good therapists to refer PTSD sufferers to? What criteria will you use to vet them?
3. What are some other Bible passages that might help PTSD sufferers? Search your Bible and make a list to share with others.
4. What has God delivered you from? Whom can you share that with? How will you bring honor to Him by doing that?
5. Whom will you walk the journey to wholeness with?
6. What changes need to be made in your life?



God can
redeem
my life.

Resources

WMU Resources

- Crosby, David. *Your Pain is Changing You: The Power Is in Your Response*. New Hope, 2014. N144119
- Drawing Near: Understanding Supporting Those with PTSD. W144102
- McCall, Robin, and Joye Smith. *Sometimes I Am Afraid* (WMU, 2014). W148103

Storytelling

- Willis, Jr., Avery T., and Mark Snowden. *Truth That Sticks: How to Communicate Velcro Truth in a Teflon World*. NavPress, 2010.
- Tiegreen, Chris. *Story Thru the Bible: An Interactive Way to Connect with God's Word*. NavPress, 2011.
- Walsh, John. *The Art of Storytelling: Easy Steps to Presenting an Unforgettable Story*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013.
- Terry, J.O. *Basic Bible Storying*. Fort Worth, TX: Church Starting Network, 2009.
- Novelli, Michael. *Shaped by the Story: Helping Students Encounter God in a New Way*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008.
- Slack, James B., James O. Terry, and Grant Lovejoy. *Tell the Story: A Primer on Chronological Bible Storying*. Rockville, VA: International Centre for Excellence in Leadership, 2003.
- Koehler, Paul F. *Telling God's Stories With Power: Biblical Storytelling in Oral Cultures*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2010.
- Walker, Andrew. *Telling the Story: Gospel, Mission, and Culture*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004.

PTSD

Books

- Almony, Connie. *At the Edge of a Dark Forest*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014.
- Benderman, Kevin. *Letters from Fort Lewis Brig: A Matter of Conscience*. Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2007.
- Boudreau, Tyler E. *Packing Inferno: The Unmaking of a Marine*. Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 2008.
- Brock, Rita Nakashima, and Gabriella Lettini. *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2012.
- Claypool, John. *Mending the Heart*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999.
- Claypool, John. *The Hopeful Heart*. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Morehouse Publishing, 2003.
- Lester, Andrew D. *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995.
- Mehl-Laituri, Logan. *Reborn on the Fourth of July: The Challenge of Faith, Patriotism and Conscience*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Books, 2012.
- Sherman, Nancy. *The Untold War: Inside the Hearts, Minds, and Souls of Our Soldiers*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2010.
- Slone, Laurie B., and Matthew J. Friedman. *After the War Zone: A Practical Guide for Returning Troops and Their Families*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2008.
- Wiesenthal, Simon. *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*. New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1997.

Web

- The Soul Repair Center at Brite Divinity School, <http://brite.edu/academics/programs/soul-repair>

Duplicate the cards on page 55 onto cardstock. Choose a time to distribute them to group members. Suggest they keep a card as a reminder that help is near and offer the remaining cards to others experiencing trauma.

Disclaimer: All sources are for informational purposes only. They do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or endorsement of WMU®.

"Give praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! He is the Father who gives tender love. All comfort comes from him. He comforts us in all our troubles. Now we can comfort others when they are in trouble. We ourselves have received comfort from God" (2 Cor. 1:3-4, NIV).

Help is available.

Visit the National Center for PTSD at **ptsd.va.gov**.

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trading up

Bible stories that move us from pain to peace

Project HELP: PTSD Story Set

By Murselle McMillan and Janet Erwin

This 56-page PTSD Story Set offers 12 small-group sessions with targeted discussion questions as examples of hope and healing for PTSD sufferers and people who want to walk alongside them.

This kit includes:

- Bible stories prepared for telling
- One personal story (the last session)
- A flyer for promoting the first session
- Duplicable support cards for distribution

Each story session includes:

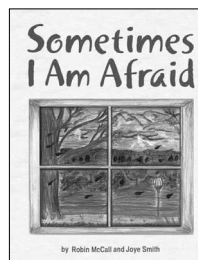
- Bible story ready for telling
- Bible story background
- Scripture promises
- Points to make from Scripture commentary
- Discussion questions to understand, interpret, and apply the stories in our own lives
- Review questions

Use this story set with

- survivors of trauma (war, abuse, natural disasters, mass shootings, life-threatening accidents, robbery, rape, etc.);
- family and friends of trauma sufferers;
- trauma care teams.

This story set may be tailored to your particular audience.

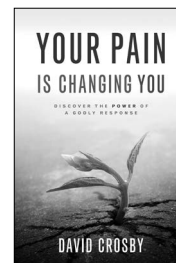
Help all age levels in your church understand and learn how to address the issue of post-traumatic stress disorder with these additional resources:



Preschoolers:

Sometimes I Am Afraid
(W148103 • \$8.99)

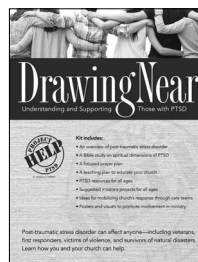
This book's reassuring, warm text and illustrations can help Mission Friends® leaders and parents comfort preschoolers and teach them to trust God and pray when they are afraid. Suggestions and tips for using the book are included.



Adults:

Your Pain Is Changing You
(N144119 • \$14.99)

In this book, author David Crosby encourages readers to focus on their response to suffering rather than explain why or how through a narrated view of real-life stories of suffering.



All Ages:

Drawing Near
(W144102 • \$9.99)

This resource kit helps the church understand ways to create a loving community around those struggling with PTSD.

wmustore.com



an initiative of WMU®

wmu.com/ProjectHELP



RELIGION/Christian Ministry/General



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