



## Articles

# The Gospel Speaks to Your Trauma

In a world stained by trauma, the Gospel offers a sustaining hope and healing that allows the believer to find identity, not in their past, but in Christ who has redeemed them.



**Matthew Statler** · Apr 24, 2025

*“What if I told you that you don’t need healing from your trauma?”*

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I asked this question of my counselee, Jim,<sup>1</sup> whom I had been meeting with for a few weeks. Jim had been through horrific suffering in the military and in civilian life, even spending some time in prison. Although he initially started at this question, it ultimately proved the catalyst for a whole new perspective on his suffering, a perspective that eventually led to relief from his symptoms.

You may ask why I framed the question that way, and it is because we live in a world that speaks the language of trauma fluently. Turn on the news, scroll through social media, or sit in a counseling session, and you’ll hear it everywhere: “Trauma shapes us. Trauma defines us. Trauma needs to be healed.” So again, I ask, “What if you don’t need healing from your trauma?”<sup>2</sup>

I don’t mean that pain isn’t real or that suffering doesn’t hurt. I don’t mean we become stoic and ignore or just endure the pain. The Bible is full of raw, honest portrayals of suffering—Job scraping his sores with broken pottery, David crying out in the Psalms as

he is surrounded by invading armies, Paul listing his numerous beatings and imprisonments. The Bible doesn't shy away from traumatic events, but it also doesn't frame trauma as something that owns us, something that demands lifelong management, or defines who we are. When I was diagnosed by the Army psychiatrist as having post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), they told me that I would need to learn how to *cope* with the disorder as my new normal. This hopeless diagnosis pushed me to pursue counterfeit solutions and various pseudoscientific interventions rather than to the Redeemer who lives!<sup>3</sup>

## The Problem with the Popular View of Trauma

People often believe that their past is their identity, and this identity determines their present life. A veteran I counseled struggled with this. He believed that because he survived the war and his comrade didn't, he needed to be miserable and hate life; otherwise, he would dishonor his friend's memory. For some, a psychological diagnosis can give an initial sense of relief because it seems to provide an explanation for life's distress. Books like *The Body Keeps the Score* argue that your body holds onto trauma, which in turn shapes your emotions, behaviors, and even physical health.<sup>4</sup> Relief over an explanation gives way to hopelessness when sufferers discover that they have become trapped, as if healing is this elusive goal they'll always be chasing but never quite reach. Furthermore, such a psychological diagnosis points to symptomatic relief rather than true redemption. For example, van der Kolk claims that trauma embeds itself in the body, bypasses conscious recall, and resurfaces years later as physical and psychological issues.<sup>5</sup> Such a reductionistic explanation is quite troubling as it denies people of moral agency and contradicts the biblical data, which affirms that thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are tied to the soul ([Proverbs 4:23](#), [Matthew 15:18-20](#)). Van der Kolk's views undermine moral responsibility and transformation because if trauma bypasses thought and decision-making, then the command to renew our mind in [Romans 12:2](#) would be diminished as an impractical and insufficient antidote for the believer. This hopeless view espoused by trauma-informed therapists claims that change must occur via bodily interventions rather than via the truth that comes from the "mouth of God" ([Matthew 4:4](#)), but real change only comes through knowing and applying the truth of God ([John 8:32](#)). The idea that trauma is stored in the body in a way that bypasses human thought and moral agency is hopeless because it leaves people with the idea that they are trapped in and by their trauma.

While believers do not dismiss the reality of deep suffering, the Bible offers a radically different perspective than van der Kolk's. Scripture doesn't point us to endless introspection or leave us with lifelong labels. Instead, it invites us to see our lives, especially in the midst of the deepest valleys of suffering, through the lens of God's

sovereignty and grace. Instead of mere “healing”—a temporary amelioration of suffering to feel better—the Bible points us to redemption<sup>6</sup> In [James 1:2-4](#), we are told that our trials produce perseverance and maturity within us. This maturity is ultimately Christlikeness, which we call sanctification. Moreover, Paul says in [Romans 5:3-5](#) that our afflictions produce hope—hope that does not disappoint us!

## A Biblical View of Suffering and Identity

In [2 Corinthians 5:17](#), Paul writes, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (LSB). Notice what Paul doesn’t say. He doesn’t say, “If anyone is in Christ, he begins the long, arduous journey of healing from his past.” He doesn’t say, “You’re still broken, but now you have Jesus to help you cope.” No—he says you are a new creation. Your identity isn’t in your trauma; it’s in Christ. For Jim, the traumatic events he experienced were so great and overwhelming that it was all he was able to focus on. Thus, it was his perspective (and faulty belief) that needed to change. Jim needed to take his eyes off himself and his experiences, and he needed to look to Jesus. He needed to look to the gospel, the only hope that can truly speak to the sufferer.

The Bible acknowledges the pain of this world, but it places that pain within the larger story of redemption. Suffering will not have the final say. You are not the sum total of what’s happened to you. You are not defined by your scars. You are defined by your union with Christ—the true measure of your identity. That alone is where true hope lies.

## Healing May Not Look Like You Think

When the Bible speaks about healing, it’s often less about removing the pain and more about transforming us through the trial. Consider Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” in [2 Corinthians 12:7](#). Paul pleaded with God to remove his thorn, but God’s response was, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness” ([2 Corinthians 12:9a](#)). Paul’s healing didn’t come through the removal of his thorn but through a deeper reliance on God’s grace.

Redemption is greater than mere relief. Once we begin to see our suffering through the lens of God’s sovereign and good purposes, we begin to have a hope that does not disappoint us ([Hebrews 6:18-19](#)). Our suffering is an opportunity to grow in dependence on His purposes. It’s about seeing that even in our weakness, God’s strength is made visible.

## The Freedom of Not Needing Healing

You don't need healing from your trauma, and you don't need to be "fixed" in the way the world defines it.<sup>7</sup>

True healing isn't about erasing the past but about living in the present reality of who you are in Christ. And it is in living in the present reality of our identity in Christ, that we can embrace the greater reality of our daily need to depend on God ([2 Corinthians 1:9](#)).

This biblical perspective may not minimize your pain, but it does renew your mind and conform your thinking to God's perspective. It lifts your eyes from your affliction to your Savior. It frees you from the pursuit of feeling better as the ultimate goal and invites you into the peace of resting in God's character and Word. In [2 Corinthians 1:8-9](#), Paul indicates that dependence on God through affliction is the goal of our suffering. By depending on God and looking to Him, you can rest in the God-given eschatological hope that your light momentary affliction is preparing for you an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison ([2 Corinthians 4:16-18](#)).

Your trauma doesn't define you. Your healing doesn't save you. Jesus does. And that's more than enough.

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### Helpful resources on trauma:

[God's Redemptive Use of Trauma \(Part 1 and Part 2\)](#) – Articles by Matt Statler

[Engaging Trauma Biblically](#) – Truth in Love 413

[Committed to Care](#) – Statement on Abuse and Biblical Counseling

TOPICS: **Suffering**



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