

The Trauma Informed Church



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The Trauma Informed Church

Table of contents

Introduction	2
Being Trauma Informed	3
Strongholds vs Demonisation	4
Why do we need to be trauma informed?	4
Understanding Trauma	5
Types of Trauma	7
The effects of Trauma: Neuroscience	17
Memory and Trauma	20
Identity and Trauma	20
Relationships and Trauma	21
Worldview and Trauma	22
Healing the Broken-hearted	23
Dealing with Shame	25

The Trauma Informed Church

INTRODUCTION

You were not designed to stay broken.

Somewhere in the pages of this book, you may find words for something you have carried for a very long time — a heaviness you couldn't quite explain, a pattern you couldn't seem to break, a wound that never fully healed no matter how many times you prayed over it. If that resonates with you, you are not alone, and you are not without hope.

The Church has always been a place of healing. Jesus made that unmistakably clear when He stood up in the synagogue and declared that He had come to bind up the broken-hearted, to set the captives free, and to release the oppressed. That mandate has never expired. But in order to fulfil it well, we need to understand the people we are called to serve — and that means understanding trauma.

Trauma is not a word reserved for the battlefield or the emergency room. It lives in the child who was never allowed to cry. It lives in the adult who can't explain why certain sounds fill them with dread. It lives in families, in bloodlines, in communities, and yes — it lives in our churches. It is part of the human story, and because Jesus stepped into our humanity, it is something He is intimately acquainted with.

This book is not a clinical manual. It is a pastoral companion — written for the everyday believer, the small group leader, the parent, the friend sitting across the table from someone in pain. It is an invitation to look beneath the surface of toxic behaviour and ask a different question: not *"What is wrong with you?"* but *"What happened to you?"*

Because when we begin to ask that question, everything changes.

Inner healing and deliverance are not fringe ministries reserved for the spiritually elite. They are the heartbeat of the Gospel. And as we grow in our understanding of how trauma shapes the mind, the body, and the soul, we become better equipped to be what the Church was always meant to be — a safe place, a healing place, a place where the broken-hearted discover that they are deeply, irreversibly loved.

You were made for wholeness. Let's begin there.

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Being Trauma Informed

Matthew 28:18-20 AMP

Jesus came up and said to them, "All authority (all power of absolute rule) in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations [help the people to learn of Me, believe in Me, and obey My words], baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always [remaining with you perpetually—regardless of circumstance, and on every occasion], even to the end of the age."

Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

Matthew 10:8 AMP

Inner healing and deliverance go hand in hand. Inner healing deals with the restoration of the soul, mind and physical body (structures of the brain) by healing the wounds inflicted by trauma and deliverance sets the body, soul and spirit free to be able to heal.

The thief comes only in order to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it in abundance [to the full, till it overflows]. John 10:10 AMP

In order to be effective heart medics, we need to have a firm grasp on the difference between Inner healing, and Deliverance ministry. Inner healing deals with soul wounds, as a result of sin and/or trauma. In this context, I would describe trauma as the sin committed against us. We also need to be able to discern between demonisation and having strongholds.

Sin is what gives access to demons...it lets them in, and strongholds are the structures they build once they have access...it keeps them in.

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STRONGHOLDS VS DEMONISATION:

A stronghold is a structure, or fortress of lies that the enemy builds in your mind and emotions. Sin, or generational open doors are how demons get in, strongholds are how the demons stay in. Strongholds must be cast down by the renewing of the mind, according to 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, while demons are cast out.

While demons are cast out quickly. In the name of Jesus, with His authority delegated to us, we deal with them quickly. Strongholds, on the other hand, come down little by little, brick by brick. As people are disciplined into the truth of Who Jesus is, as they learn who they are in Him and as He heals and binds up their broken hearts, they get free.

WHY DO WE NEED TO BE TRAUMA INFORMED?

To become a resource of safety, as individuals and corporately, we need to be informed. For too long, as Christian communities, we have tried to counsel demons, and we have tried to cast out trauma.

Often times, deeply traumatised and unhealed people have been regarded as troubled, and as troublemakers. Often, they have been under suspicion of being demonised. Having even a basic understanding of what trauma is, its effects on people and communities will go a long way to helping us to be safe, kind and healing places for those needing help to recover.

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UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA

Definition: an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, crime, or natural disaster that may result in psychological harm.

What does it mean to be trauma informed?

Understanding what is driving toxic behaviour is a key factor in being a trauma informed community. It is the ability to see "underneath" and recognize that disfunction is a response and survival pattern in reaction to pain. We need the gift of discernment, as well as at the very least, a basic understanding of the psychology of trauma.

Trauma is an adaption, not a disorder. In simple language, it means that a traumatized person is not necessarily mentally ill, but that they have made changes to who they are, and how they react because of what they suffered. To heal from trauma, a person needs to learn to re-adapt, or change again, by the renewing and healing of the mind

A lot of mental illness is linked to trauma. Therefore, as communities we need to learn to ask, "what happened to you?" instead of "what is wrong with you?". Events in childhood create an adaptation (or change) in a person that leads to toxic behaviour. This is also true for adults, who have suffered through overwhelming, traumatic experiences. Take soldiers returning from war. They often suffer great emotional pain, and they are often very different people when they come home.

Trauma is a spectrum, which means there are different grades of trauma. We are all traumatized at some point, it's part of our human experience and we would be wise not to judge people's pain. Two people might suffer the same situation, or trauma but have quite different responses. What might not be a big deal to one person might feel quite devastating to another, based on their previous experiences, family of origin and other factors that we will explore later.

I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have [perfect] peace. In the world you have tribulation and distress and suffering, but be courageous [be confident, be undaunted, be filled with joy]; I have overcome the world." [My conquest is accomplished, My victory abiding.] John 16:33 AMP

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What happens during trauma?

During trauma the nervous system is overwhelmed, and we see five different responses, namely fight, flight, freeze, fawn or flop.

The person reacts to it by responding in various ways. The person choosing the *fight* response will leap into action, often with aggression, whether physical or verbally. Typically, they will be seen as "aggressive", "angry", "unruly" or demonized.

The *flight* response will cause the person to make a run for it, as they try to get away from the situation. In tricky situations, they will disengage, isolate and in many cases, disappear without informing anyone.

The *freeze* response will cause someone to shut down. They might not physically leave, but in their minds they do. They get stuck, not being able to remove themselves from a situation, but being emotionally unable to cope, they turn inwards and go still in an attempt to hide themselves.

The person who *fawns* will be whatever, or whoever the situation requires. You never know whether they are sincere, as being themselves feel unsafe, and *flop* response will cause a person to give up in any unsafe situation. They won't even try to defend themselves.

Emotions are stored in the subconscious mind, where painful narratives, or stories, are created. God created us in such a beautiful way, that parts of our psyche are able to fracture, or break off, into orphaned parts, holding the pain, fear, overwhelm and any other emotion that is too difficult to handle. In doing so, the core person is able to survive the trauma, and they are able to keep functioning without that part. When this happens to the extreme, the person becomes very fractured and it becomes a disorder, formerly known as multiple personality disorder. It's now called Dissociative Identity Disorder or DID in short.

Trauma is not the event that takes place, it's what happens inside a person because of the event that takes place.

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TYPES OF TRAUMA

Trauma is not just something that happens to soldiers or survivors of terrible accidents — it touches far more of us than we realise. It shapes the way we think, feel, and respond to the world around us, often without us even knowing it. Science is helping us understand how deeply trauma affects our minds, our bodies, and even the generations that come after us — and much of this lines up with what the Bible has always told us about the human heart.

In this section, we will look at the different types of trauma: from a single shocking event to painful patterns in childhood, to wounds carried even before we were born. Understanding where our pain comes from is the first step toward the healing and freedom that God has planned for each one of us.

Acute Trauma

This is a single, catastrophic event. Because humans are more complex than animals, the fight, flight, freeze loop remains open. Let me explain what I mean by the loop staying open.

When something scary happens, as well as an emotional reaction, there is also a chemical reaction that happens in the body. A very simplified explanation is that the person goes from shock or fear, to the reaction that they have been conditioned for, as the body releases chemicals into the bloodstream. The person's nervous system reacts and causes the body to react also. It's like a chain reaction that happens. Eventually, as the shock wears off or the danger passes, the person's nervous system and the chemicals return to normal, closing the loop.

Imagine walking in the dark, and someone plays a prank on you. They jump out from behind a tree, and yells "BOO!" Your heart races, and you might have your fists out, ready to punch. Or you might freeze, not able to run or scream. Then you recognize the person, you understand they were not a real threat, and your breathing comes back to normal, and your heart slows down again. That was a scare, not a trauma.

The chemical our bodies release is called cortisol. It's released by a part of the brain called the amygdala and it keeps the body ready to fight or to flee. This should shut off once the shock wears off, but in acute trauma it does not and the body stays in that ready state. Talk therapy, the traditional way of counselling people, does not resolve the trauma until the body realizes the traumatic event is over.

A good question to ask is "when did it start?" If a specific event can be pinpointed, it is an acute trauma.

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Developmental Trauma

This kind of trauma can apply to any period of development, not just the first 7 years of a child's life, although it's most common. For example, prolonged marital abuse, bullying at school, difficult childhood or any other time you are orienting your life around attachment could cause trauma.

Not being allowed to cry, show anger or other difficult emotions can cause developmental trauma, as the person learns to adapt to the person, or situation that causes the trauma, in order to survive.

In these cases, emotions become a threat to survival resulting in a form of attachment trauma, which I will discuss later. Parents who are unable to connect to their children emotionally cause attachment trauma.

This is problematic, as secure, or safe attachment is necessary for the survival of a child, so the child will adapt to maintain some sort of relationship or connection with the parent, for example be a people pleaser, submit to sexual abuse etc.

If the pattern is repeated, the child loses who they are to the adaptation, or change. Personality traits then don't represent who they are, they represent the loss of who they are. Look at what the Bible has to say about us:

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Jeremiah 1:5 ESV

*For You formed my innermost parts; You knit me [together] in my mother's womb. **14** I will give thanks and praise to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. **15** My frame was not hidden from You, when I was being formed in secret, and intricately and skilfully formed [as if embroidered with many colours] in the depths of the earth. **16** Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were appointed for me, when as yet there was not one of them [even taking shape]. Psalm 139:13 – 16 AMP*

We feel anger so that we can set boundaries. If anger is continually shut down, a person becomes people pleasers, have low self-esteem, no boundaries, low confidence, and low self-respect. Yet, children are often punished for feeling, or expressing anger, rather than being taught healthy ways to deal with anger.

Ephesians 4: 26 says: *"Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger"* (ESV). As believers, we are not forbidden to feel angry, we are to feel righteous anger, but we need to be taught how to deal with that anger in a godly way, without sinning.

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Many new parents are encouraged to sleep-train their children and the “cry it out” parenting technique is advised. Children are put to bed to self-soothe and are allowed to cry themselves to sleep. This causes terror, feelings of abandonment and annihilation, and cause survival rage stress responses. Eventually it teaches the shutdown response. It has been well documented that children in orphanages where they are left to cry themselves to sleep, where there are not enough staff members to hold, rock and feed the children, and they are just getting enough care to keep them alive will be silent places. Even very young children will stop crying, because they have already learned that no-one is coming to rescue them.

This can lead to adaptations that present as learned helplessness, extreme tantrums, outbursts of rage, and lead to very naughty children who are often acting out.

In adulthood it leads to people who always feel alone in the world, leading to attention seeking behaviour or shutting down if there's even the slightest conflict or feelings of threat.

Attachment Styles

Attachment styles are basically patterns that describe how people act and feel in close relationships. They're shaped by your early experiences with parents or caregivers when you were a child, and they tend to stick with you into adulthood. There are four main types — secure, anxious, avoidant, and disorganized — and whichever one applies to you influences how comfortable you are with closeness, how safe you feel emotionally, and how you handle arguments or conflict in relationships.

Let's look at the most common ways people form attachments:

Secure, or healthy Attachment: These people are comfortable getting close to others without losing themselves in the process. They have a healthy sense of self-worth, trust people, and can actually talk about how they feel. In high intensity situations, they are able to complete the loop and come back to feeling safe.

Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment: These people crave closeness but are constantly afraid of being rejected or left behind. They tend to read a lot into other people's behaviour and need frequent reassurance that everything is okay. In high stress situations, they cannot complete the loop, and their nervous systems stay in a state of fight or flight.

Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment: These people prefer to keep their distance emotionally and can come across as cold or closed off. When things get intense, they shut down and pull away rather than face it head-on. They can come across as disconnected, distant, and dissociative, or not present.

Fearful-Avoidant (Disorganized) Attachment: These people want connection but are also scared of it — basically pulling people in and pushing them away at the same time. Relationships feel confusing and trust is really hard to come by.

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To sum up:

Understanding how people bond with each other helps us to understand behaviour in people we fellowship with, or minister too. These are tools designed to help us minister healing and freedom, but more than that, they can help us educate young parents, for example, in how to break generational patterns of abuse... something that is very rampant in many cultures.

Let me recap some definitions, for clarity:

Trauma bonding: attracted to "mum and dad" in different clothes, or

same man/woman, different name, which is why we see

someone marrying the same person over and over, or

marry someone just like the person that caused them

trauma as a child.

Acute trauma: a definitive event

Developmental trauma: a pattern of unregulated emotions, or symptoms

So if the Son makes you free, then you are unquestionably free.

John 8:36 AMP

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Preconscious/Precognitive Trauma

Definition: Infant trauma that happens in the womb, or until 18 months of age, before the brain is developed enough to form memories.

Babies remember what they hear and see while in the womb, and the memories are stored in the body. For example, babies will hear and feel arguments, physical violence against mum, shock, accidents etc. As they share their mother's blood they are also impacted by what is happening in her body on a chemical level.

Stressed mothers have babies with high cortisol levels. These babies expect to be born into a dangerous, unsafe world; therefore, they adapt physiologically before birth by secreting more cortisol to match the mother's cortisol levels.

As a result, highly-strung children grow up to be highly strung adults – they don't know that it's possible to be calm and at peace. These babies are born with a sense of not belonging anywhere, not being welcome in their family or the world, never feeling safe or wanted or loved and the effects last until they receive proper ministry.

Read Psalm 139 for self-study. The Lord is very clear on His intentions for us. Jesus paid a great price for our complete healing and deliverance, but we cannot heal what we cannot acknowledge, and we cannot acknowledge what has not been brought to the light. Here are a few more scriptures to meditate upon:

"Certainly the faithful love of the Lord hasn't ended; certainly God's compassion isn't through! They are renewed every morning. Great is your faithfulness." Lamentations 3:22-23

"My lips praise you because your faithful love is better than life itself!" Psalm 63:3

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"The mountains may shift, and the hills may be shaken, but my faithful love won't shift from you, and my covenant of peace won't be shaken," says the Lord, the one who pities you." Isaiah 54:10

Birth Trauma

When there's a disruption of the proper, natural birthing process e.g. c-sections, breach birth, premature birth of any kind of distress, the baby suffers trauma.

As adults people may suffer from negative feelings and/or emotions, like feeling stuck, terror, feeling trapped, rage and anger, disconnection, suffocation or internal pressure or heaviness.

Until the 1980's doctors didn't even acknowledge that babies feel pain. They would routinely do medical procedures on babies and give them drugs to paralyse them, without giving any pain medication.

Science is a valuable tool to help us understand the intricate working of the human body, mind and emotion and can help us heal to a degree BUT complete and full healing, and overall restoration, is only found in Jesus Christ. The prophet Jeremiah describes the heart of the Father so beautifully when he says:

Oh, that I (Jeremiah) could find comfort from my sorrow [for my grief is beyond healing], My heart is sick and faint within me!

Behold, [hear the sound of] the cry of the daughter of my people from the distant land [of Babylon]: "Is not the Lord in Zion? Is not her King within her?" [But the Lord answers] "Why have they provoked Me to anger with their carved images and with foreign idols?"

"The harvest is past, the summer has ended and the gathering of fruit is over, But we are not saved," [comes the voice of the people again].

For the brokenness of the daughter of my people I (Jeremiah) am broken;

I mourn, anxiety has gripped me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has not the [spiritual] health of the daughter of my people been restored? Jeremiah 8: 18 – 22 AMP

I believe the Lord allowed Jeremiah to feel, not only the grief and pain of the nation of Israel, but also the Lord's heart as he identifies with His people. I am fully convinced that Jesus still enters into our grief and pain, to heal us, our families and whole communities and even nations.

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Intergenerational Trauma

Definition: Trauma passed down via our DNA

Let us lay a biblical foundation for this type of trauma by studying some scriptures:

You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous (impassioned) God [demanding what is rightfully and uniquely mine], visiting (avenging) the iniquity (sin, guilt) of the fathers on the children [that is, calling the children to account for the sins of their fathers], to the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,

Deuteronomy 5:9

"Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin." Deuteronomy 24:16

Also read Exodus 20:5; Exodus 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Job 21:19 and Ezekiel 18:20

It is important to note that we receive salvation for ourselves, and we are not lost because of our fathers' sins, but we do suffer the consequence of their sin. Generational iniquity and trauma stop us from living an abundant, fruitful life and in turn impacts our generations and the body of Christ at large if it causes us to sin.

There was an experiment done on rats. They received shock treatment on their feet, while they were exposed to the scent of cherry blossoms. Baby rats that were born to those rats were never shocked, but they still reacted to the scent for at least 2 generations. This is science confirming the Word of God.

Let's talk about epigenetics, which is modification of gene expression rather than alteration of the genetic code itself. To simplify, it means that in the natural, and in the spirit, we have genes on top of our genes that need the right stimuli or environment to activate it. Trauma is often the stimuli that activates this.

There are numerous testimonies of people who descent from Jews from the holocaust who suffered trauma response triggered by everyday events like taking a shower, even though they were never exposed to the trauma their ancestors suffered.

Poverty, that is going without the necessary resources in previous generations, may manifest in a very unhealthy response toward, or unhealthy relationship with money. Despite earning well, people experience feelings of never having enough, having to hoard resources, or being constantly stressed or fearful of suffering lack.

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Anger and Rage responses might stem from an ancestor who came from a war situation, suffered strong conflict, abuse, racism and so forth. It may manifest in an over-the-top rage response to triggers that should not cause such a strong reaction.

We often see this manifest as family traits, where a family is known as angry, nervous, shy etc.

An example of how these can manifest is a trauma response to poverty and food insecurity, where someone may feel very anxious when the cupboards are bare. The person with a trauma response over-shop, or over-stocks the cupboards and fridge even when there's no need to.

Collective Trauma

Definition: Trauma associated with groups, communities, countries and even the entire world.

The world has become very small...we are collectively traumatized by events that we wouldn't even have been aware of a few years ago. The internet, social media and mainstream media have become a vehicle for traumatizing billions of people at the same time. Even people in remote areas have access to smart phones and social media.

Let's have a look at how this presents:

People groups, such as first nations people, subgroups, or tribes of people in different nations, hierarchies etc. can suffer collective trauma on account of abusive behaviour or cultural practices, for example the caste system in India. In this context a person is considered more or less valuable and honorable on account of the caste they are born into. This can extend to colour, gender and so forth.

Looking out for #1 is a collective trauma response which says "I have to take care of myself at the expense of everyone else" – a total contrast to a Biblical world view. It has become a cultural response, especially in the West, but it is not God's way.

This leads to a survival-based response to "just do what I can, or need, to survive regardless of what I need to do". No-one is spared! Every race, every nation, and both genders have stories of trauma and a negative response to it. It's a snowball effect playing out over generations.

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Let me remind you of the curse that is still operating:

"And I will put enmity (open hostility) Between you and the woman, and between your seed (offspring) and her Seed; He shall [fatally] bruise your head, and you shall [only] bruise His heel."

Genesis 3:15 AMP

Let me also remind you of the remedy:

13 *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—* **14** *so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit[e] through faith.*

Galatians 3: 13, 14 ESV

The next collective trauma we have in common is the collective "Hum of Fear" in the atmosphere. As the world becomes darker, economies collapse, and wars break out we unconsciously we pick up on it and respond to it. We also contend with the spiritual aspect of this, as the spirit of fear attaches to trauma and soul wounds, compounding the effect.

Let's use the example of collective trauma after Covid:

Children grew up with masked people and didn't learn to read facial expression. When we consider that 70 – 93 % of communication is non-verbal we can see the enemy's strategy here.

The media spread fear far and wide to make money and social media became a vehicle for spreading fearful, untrue messages, which people shared without checking the facts

This led to severe trust issues as mixed messages, false information, lying politicians, etc. flooded our screens. Being trapped, isolated, stopped from working and providing for family, not attending births, deaths, wedding etc. added to the stress and trauma. This exposed every people group, nation and tongue equally.

A word about the media...they are more concerned about making money off advertising than reporting the news, therefore they are as over-the-top and sensational as they can be. This sort of reporting stirs up fear and is extremely traumatizing. Consider the language that is used to report the news. Words like "slammed", "bashed", "thrashed" etc. stirs up violent, aggressive images, does it not?

Our bodies respond to the constant threat by producing stress hormones which cause our immunity to go down and lead to sickness and disease, mental illness and death.

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The Importance of Safety

To heal from trauma, we must build a resource of safety. When people go through a traumatic experience they search for a resource of safety. A child calls for mum, a wife or husband might reach for their spouse, and an accident victim needs a paramedic.

Safety is essential for healing. A resource is anything, or anyone that makes us feel safe in the moment – it can be positive or negative.

Some form of safety resource is needed so that we can process unresolved trauma, or traumatic life experiences, and for many people that false refuge, or source of safety, is alcohol, wrong relationships, drugs and such.

As Christians, Jesus, Father and Holy Spirit, our church family and our natural families should be our safety resources but sadly many families and relationships are the reason we are traumatized in the first place.

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THE EFFECTS OF TRAUMA

THE NEUROSCIENCE OF TRAUMA

Have you ever felt your heart race before you could even think about why? Or found yourself going quiet and shutting down in a moment of stress, even when part of you wanted to speak up? These aren't character flaws or signs of weakness — they're your nervous system doing exactly what it was designed to do.

In this section, we're going to explore the science behind those responses. We'll look at how our body's automatic systems work, why they react the way they do under stress and threat, and what that means for the way we experience trauma. You don't need a medical background to follow along — the goal is simply to help you understand what's happening *inside* when life feels overwhelming.

By the end, I hope you'll have a new kind of compassion — not just for others, but for yourself.

I am going to start by listing some definitions.

Definition Autonomic Nervous System: the part of the nervous system responsible for control of the bodily functions not consciously directed, such as breathing, the heartbeat, and digestive processes. In other words, the things our bodies do without us having to think about it.

Definition Parasympathetic Nervous System: a network of nerves that relaxes your body after periods of stress or danger. It also helps run life-sustaining processes, like digestion, during times when you feel safe and relaxed.

Definition Sympathetic Nervous System: a network of nerves that helps your body activate its "fight-or-flight" response. This system's activity increases when you're stressed, in danger or physically active. This is the system that puts us in motion in times of stress or danger.

Definition Vagus nerve: The vagus nerve, also known as the vagal nerves, are the main nerves of your parasympathetic nervous system. This system controls specific body functions such as your digestion, heart rate and immune system. These functions are involuntary, meaning you can't consciously control them.

The vagal response (vasovagal reflex) is when stimulation of the vagus nerve causes symptoms such as light-headedness, sweating, and blurred vision. This can happen because of stress, pain, heat, having a bowel movement, or even standing too long.

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The Autonomic Nervous System

The autonomic nervous system is the part of our nervous system that works automatically — we don't have to think about it. It has two main parts: the *parasympathetic nervous system* and the *sympathetic nervous system*.

The Parasympathetic Nervous System

The parasympathetic nervous system helps us feel calm and safe. It has two pathways: the dorsal vagus and the ventral vagus.

The dorsal vagus has two modes. In its first mode, a person may completely shut down because of fear. They may feel disconnected from themselves and the world around them. This response is seen in both humans and animals.

In its second mode, a person may freeze or feel the need to please others in order to stay safe. This is also a fear-based response, shared by both humans and animals.

The ventral vagus is the healthy, calm state. When this pathway is active, a person feels safe inside themselves and in their surroundings. There is no fear. This is where we rest, digest our food, and connect with other people. This state is unique to humans and allows us to feel a warm, caring love for others.

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The Sympathetic Nervous System

The sympathetic nervous system is our alarm system. When we sense danger, it triggers the fight or flight response — meaning we either face the threat or run from it. This state brings feelings of fear, anger, and anxiety. It is a survival response that both humans and animals share.

The vagus nerve is connected to your vocal cords and the muscles at the back of your throat. Singing, humming, chanting, and gargling can activate these muscles and stimulate your vagus nerve. The Bible has something to say about this.

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

(Colossians 3:16)

speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, (Ephesians 5:19)

Psalm 95:1 Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. (Psalm 95:1)

I am often amazed at the wonderful way the Lord made us, and how the Word of God contains wisdom for every situation we face.

The nervous system gets trained by experience, from a very young age.

If the ventral vagus is not stimulated, we have trouble feeling safe

And when a child is not allowed to express anger, their nervous system is trained to shut down. As they recognise that there's no chance of fighting and/or winning developmental trauma is suffered.

It is encouraging to know that you can train the nervous system to come back to safe via healthy connections. In Greek it's called **storge** love, which is a nurturing, caring kind of love such as a mother has for her child. The nervous system will always overrule will power and therefor needs to be healed and regulated for a person to be whole and healthy and function is a healthy way.

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MEMORY AND TRAUMA

Explicit memory: conscious memories, images, sounds and smells around the event that happened.

Implicit memory: memories stored in the body (before 18 months of age) that will trigger an emotional response.

Hippocampus: The hippocampus is a small, curved structure located deep in the brain. It's a key part of memory — it turns short-term memories into long-term ones and helps with learning, navigation, and managing emotions.

When a person goes through a traumatic event, the hippocampus will prioritise secreting cortisol over storing memory, leading to distorted memories, and the hippocampus will store memories based upon importance.

When an event is linked to an emotion, the memory is solidified. Future prediction is based on experience. We filter reality and interpret events, therefore memories are not always real. In language we can interpret or translate from one language into another. To translate we say word for word what was said and to interpret we say what is meant, not what is actually said. In the context of trauma, we often say what was felt, not what really happened.

Memories are a subjective real experience for people. You may know the facts to be different, but in their minds their version of events is real.

This explains how some people may create false memories e.g. about abuse. Because there's a lot of unresolved emotion and/or feelings stored in the body, the brain creates memories to try and explain what happened and where the feelings are coming from.

IDENTITY AND TRAUMA

What does the Bible say about our identity? In Jeremiah 1:5 AMP we read:

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you [and approved of you as My chosen instrument], And before you were born I consecrated you [to Myself as My own]; I have appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

This tells us, as with Jeremiah, that the Lord is the One who creates us with purpose, for purpose. He tells us who we are, and what we were born for.

Trauma causes a false sense of identity. A loving upbringing where you are safe, nurtured, and feel that you belong trains the nervous system how to belong in the world – I become a reflection of my environment. The opposite is also true, especially in the first 3 years.

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For as he thinks in his heart, so is he (Proverbs 23: 7a)

We become who we think we are – core beliefs get stuck in the nervous system and psyche. Science therefore confirms scripture, something that is an unpopular thought in some circles.

Toxic, shame-based identity says, "everything is my fault" and the person who believes this lie is forever trying to fix everything. Many personality traits are trauma patterns playing out. The most important question we can ask ourselves or help people to answer for themselves is "who am I really when I am not trauma patterns replaying?".

Look at some examples:

If it wasn't safe to show anger as a child, I still fear anger or refuse to get angry when it's justified.

If your mother or father wasn't safe, loving and trustworthy you come to believe no man or woman is trustworthy and safe, so it shapes your personality. You are withdrawn from relationships, or you may become very jealous. The lie will cause you to make ungodly vows, perhaps to never trust anyone, or to always look out for yourself.

It is important to understand that the lies we believe stop us from having successful and happy relationships. The Lord makes it very clear that He wants to be a father to us, but these lies will make it impossible to believe the Bible when we read scriptures like these:

A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land. (Psalm 68:5, 6)

And, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (2 Corinthians 6:18)

RELATIONSHIPS AND TRAUMA

Definition Trauma bonding: a deep, unhealthy emotional attachment formed between a victim and an abuser, driven by cycles of abuse and intermittent positive reinforcement. This survival-based bond develops when a victim becomes dependent on the abuser, often defending them despite harm, making leaving incredibly difficult

Relationships bring up a lot of trauma responses and when a person is in relationship with an abusive person, a trauma bond forms. The person, in childhood, learns how to form bonds with the person that harms them, and as a result they tend to play out their childhood in their adult relationships.

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Exodus 20:5 says this: *"You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me."* This alludes to the principle that the sins we commit or are committed against us will continue to have an effect on the generations after us, unless it's brought into the light and dealt with.

When a person grows up with drama, anger, chaos and addiction they tend to attract this in their relationships. Their nervous systems are wired for this, and there is a spiritual component that cannot be ignored either.

Co-dependency become a problem. The person does not feel whole within themselves, and they are forever looking for someone to complete them. Often the other person feels the same, and the pressure, or burden becomes unbearable. In a ministry setting this may manifest as the person always seeking attention, prayer, counsel and affirmation.

Childhood trauma can cause someone to go into either victimhood or shut down mode. Such a person date or marry their abuser or toxic parent in different clothes, or they become the abuser or toxic parent.

This kind of trauma happens in relationship and can therefore only be healed in relationship.

WORLDVIEW AND TRAUMA

A worldview is our individual way of looking at or experiencing the world around us. It is often shaped by our interpretation of events, or how we understand it, rather than the actual experience.

When a person suffers trauma, they tend to see the world as an unsafe place. This can cause disengagement, or withdrawal from the world and the person then lives in a state of perpetual anxiety. They become hypervigilant, always on guard for any danger and they never feel at peace. I hope the reader is beginning to understand some of the "difficult" people in our communities a little bit better.

Some people are not trying to be difficult, or hard to get along with and work alongside, but rather they are people doing the best that they can, while constantly holding their breath, waiting for the bad thing to happen.

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HEALING FOR THE SHATTERED AND BROKEN-HEARTED

The biblical language for trauma is “broken-hearted” and “shattered”. Let’s read some scriptures that speak to this:

The Lord is near to the heartbroken and He saves those who are crushed in spirit (contrite in heart, truly sorry for their sin). Psalm 34:18 AMP

*A happy heart is good medicine and a joyful mind causes healing,
But a broken spirit dries up the bones. Proverbs 17:22 AMP*

A heart full of joy and goodness makes a cheerful face, but when a heart is full of sadness the spirit is crushed. Proverbs 15:13 AMP

The spirit of a man sustains him in sickness, but as for a broken spirit, who can bear it? Proverbs 18:14 AMP

A soothing tongue [speaking words that build up and encourage] is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue [speaking words that overwhelm and depress] crushes the spirit. Proverbs 15:4 AMP

As parents we also need to consider some scriptures:

Ephesians 6:4 “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger [do not exasperate them to the point of resentment with demands that are trivial or unreasonable or humiliating or abusive; nor by showing favouritism or indifference to any of them], but bring them up [tenderly, with lovingkindness] in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

And Colossians 3:21 Fathers, do not provoke or irritate or exasperate your children [with demands that are trivial or unreasonable or humiliating or abusive; nor by favouritism or indifference; treat them tenderly with lovingkindness], so they will not lose heart and become discouraged or unmotivated [with their spirits broken].

Inner healing and deliverance always go hand in hand. We need to expel demons, but we also must deal to the roots and wounds that give them access in the first place. Focusing on one or the other gives us an unbalanced approach, without any lasting, good fruit.

It’s the anointing that breaks the yoke of oppression. Jesus Christ Himself proclaimed it when He said *“THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME (the Messiah), BECAUSE HE HAS ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO ANNOUNCE RELEASE (pardon, forgiveness) TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED (downtrodden, bruised, crushed by tragedy), Luke 4:18 AMP*

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We have a promise that God will restore us, and He will pay us back double:

Instead of your [former] shame you will have a double portion;

And instead of humiliation your people will shout for joy over their portion. Therefore in their land they will possess double [what they had forfeited]; Everlasting joy will be theirs. Isaiah 61:7 AMP

It is safe to assume, the greater the attack, the greater the reward. God does not forget the faithful. However, when our hearts are wounded and lies have formed deep within, we will find ourselves doing things we hate to do, like the apostle Paul describes in Romans 7:15 when he writes "*For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.*" (ESV)

Addictions, food disorders, patterns of self-harm, relational issues etc. are fruits, not roots. In order to heal ourselves, or help someone else heal, we need to get to the root of the problem and kill it there. Often the root is not immediately obvious, therefore we need help from people who are trained and equipped in these areas.

We are called to love the Lord, our God with our whole heart and our whole mind...we cannot do that if we are broken-hearted and we have unrenewed minds. We need to deal with our hurts and the lies we believe so that we are able to love Him, and each other, like that.

If we don't deal with fear, anger or a sense of injury we can progress into hatred, which in turn can lead to severe spiritual bondage that can stretch into generations as it passes down the bloodline.

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DEALING WITH SHAME

CREATING A HEALING PLAN

A healing plan is a systematic structure that you construct around yourself to get well and stay well.

Here is a plan that can be followed as is or can be modified to create your own healing plan. The important thing is that you have a plan, and that you consistently work the plan.

People heal when stories are told in safe places. These are mature people you can trust, who will allow you to process your pain, encourage you, speak life to you and diligently pray for you.

You might not want to share with everybody, but you need to share with somebody.

This takes the edge off intense emotions and keeps trauma from settling in your physical body and causing pain. Recovery is highly emotional, and exercise relieves pain, rage, depression, mental wars, and a lot of other issues.

This keeps you grounded, especially if you have problems with dissociation. Go to bed at the same time, get up at the same time, eat at set times etc.

Plan for things that you enjoy, like a hobby or visit with a friend.

Christian counsellors have been trained to deal with deeper issues, like complex trauma.

Talk to a pastor, or spiritually mature, healed person who believes in you, champions you, and has faith in your recovery. Be careful who and what you come in agreement with.

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Seek out inner healing and deliverance ministry on a regular basis. There is a deeply spiritual side to complex trauma that must be addressed alongside the emotional side.

This is where you write out your ugliest feelings and memories as a form of emotional release. It's to be kept private.

Have absolute faith in God.

If God could raise Jesus up, He can raise you up. Remember, the journey will take time

Be kind to yourself.

Have empathy with yourself. You will have bad days...be good and kind to yourself on those days and do not condemn yourself on those days when you don't have it all together.

Make lists.

Make a list of things you won't let go of on your bad days...God, your marriage, your family, your life, your hope, your job, church, etc. Refer to this list on days when you feel hopeless and like giving up when the pain becomes intense.

Rest in God's promises.

As emotional as it is, it is still a faith battle that needs to be won in the spirit. Make it a habit to go back to God's promises and take comfort in the knowledge that His will is for you to be fully healed and restored.

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EPILOGUE

You made it to the end of this book — but in many ways, this is not an ending at all. It is a beginning.

If these pages have stirred something in you — a recognition, a grief, a tentative flicker of hope — then the Holy Spirit is already at work. That stirring is not accidental. It is an invitation.

Healing is rarely a single moment. It is a journey walked one courageous step at a time, often two steps forward and one step back, in the company of a God who never tires of you and never gives up on you. There will be days when the process feels unbearably slow, when old patterns resurface and old voices grow loud again. On those days, return to this truth: *you are not who your trauma says you are*. You are who God says you are — known before you were formed, set apart before you drew your first breath, held by a love that no wound, no word, and no broken season can undo.

The Church is on a journey too. We are learning, collectively, to become the safe place the world so desperately needs — a community where the broken are not hidden away in shame, but welcomed in, sat with, and walked toward wholeness. It will require humility. It will require patience. It will require us to be willing to look honestly at our own unhealed places before we reach for someone else's. But it is worth every uncomfortable, holy moment of it.

To the church leader who picked up this book hoping to better serve their congregation — thank you. The shepherd who tends their own wounds tends their flock with far greater grace.

To the counsellor or ministry worker pressing into this territory — you are doing sacred work. Do not grow weary.

To the person who read every page quietly, wondering if healing was really possible for someone like them — it is. It absolutely is. Jesus did not come to patch you up and send you on your way. He came to make you whole. And what He begins, He is faithful to complete.

There is a balm in Gilead. There is a Physician who never loses a patient. And there is a version of you — free, rooted, fully alive — that is worth fighting for.

The journey continues. Keep going.