

3 Steps to Processing Trauma

One of Jesus' many names is Immanuel, meaning "God with us", which is a powerful reminder that human presence itself is an intervention. In a preoccupied world where authentic connection can feel fleeting or rare, do not underestimate the healing power that offering your presence with others can be. This choice to be present is especially important before offering words or solutions.

This month's tool covers a three step model of processing trauma. Keep in mind that these are not steps to be accomplished in a single setting, rather it is a roadmap to direct conversations towards the healing of past wounds which can sometimes take months or years.

The first step is sustaining a level of safety and centering within ourselves before offering it to others. The second step is to learn to not jump in to fix prematurely when someone is working through negative narratives that may have resulted from trauma. The third step is one of integrating faith by offering hope through the gospel and reminder of God's love which can melt away the shame and pain of trauma. When we can experience freedom from chronic shame, the healing process can begin as connection with others and God becomes preferred over isolation.

A Three Step Processing Model for Trauma:

Embody Calm and Get Present with Others

The ability to be present with another person and not hold an agenda is a key part of offering safety. Often, when our clients or congregants are visibly upset and hurting, the impulse to fix it and make it better can override this essential first step. When we as caregivers take the time to monitor our own physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing, Christ is the source of peace that allows us to sit with the discomfort and pains of a broken world. In our work as counselors and ministers, offering this centered presence can be a simple way to incarnate Christ. Practically, this means that caregivers need to be proactive about identifying how to be centered before inviting or leading others to that same reality.

Some questions that a caregiver can ask:

- How can I hold space for you in a way that is comfortable as you share your experiences with me?
- How can I be of support to you at this time?

Processing and Making Sense of the Narrative

God has made us to be meaning-makers and our brains naturally crave to understand the events that happen in our lives. Creating narratives to understand our past and present realities is a normal part of the human experience. Processing can occur consciously and unconsciously; it can even occur while we are sleeping!

As listeners to the events of our client's lives, we are partaking as witnesses to their journey of making meaning of themselves, God and the world around them. We should be ready to expect, particularly of traumatic events, that processing can result in narratives that are incomplete or seemingly stuck without hope. (ie: "I knew bad things always happen to me, I've always been a failure!") It is important to remain open and curious about this experience for the client and not offer our interpretations or unsolicited advice.


Some questions that a caregiver can ask:

- I am so honored that you would allow me to know you more. What is it like for you to share this with me?
- Can you tell me more about how these events shaped your internal beliefs about yourself/God?
- How have you managed to be so resilient despite what has happened in your life?

Integration as a Lifelong Journey

Often traumatic experiences leave a person with deeply embedded beliefs that are negative which need a radical encounter with the love of God. When we believe that God holds the truest narrative for our lives, His Word and Spirit become the very tools that facilitate the essence of this encounter which melts the painful messages held internally and reorients a person to see themselves through God's eyes.

It is often *after* the experience of the power of presence and freedom to process (the first two steps), that someone processing trauma is more open to engaging with a new perspective of their experience. As caregivers, we are the ambassadors of God's love in this third step of the framework. We offer and choose to bear hope when someone is not yet ready to hope for themselves. Our kind words and invitation to connection can be the experience that allows someone to be open again to God's Word and perspective on their lives. Through collaboration



with the person healing from trauma, we can bring healing to help others find a corrective view of themselves as they seek God as their compass for their identity.

Some questions that a caregiver can ask:

- As I've listened to your experiences, it makes sense that you struggle with this belief about yourself (or the world around you). Is this belief still helping you in your current daily life?
- What do you think would be God's perspective about your life story as He has seen what you've been through?
- Can you bring what you have shared with me (this raw emotion and desire for healing) to God? How can I support you in this journey?

Be encouraged

As narratives are redeemed (how we view ourselves, others and God), lives will be transformed from the inside out and offer evidence of a new creation. This process testifies to God, the ultimate source of hope and healing as our Redeemer. He makes it possible to thrive and hold new meaning despite the hardships we face. Often, this transformation takes months to years in the therapeutic space, so I encourage you in your ministry role to not rush this process as we remember that this work is sacred. As we as caregivers hold space for those that are hurting, remember that this is a privilege to be invited to take a seat on the front lines of watching God be the Healer in the lives of others.