LEADER'S GUIDE

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Women, War, + Trauma

-Armenia-

A SELF-GUIDED STUDY FOR THE WOMEN OF ARMENIA SEEKING STRENGTH, COURAGE, AND HEALING IN THE MIDST OF WAR

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REBOOT

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REBOOT RECOVERY
OVERCOMING TRAUMA TOGETHER

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A LITTLE ABOUT REBOOT RECOVERY...

REBOOT Recovery is a US-based ministry to those who have experienced the devastating effects of trauma. When REBOOT began in 2011, we focused on combat trauma. Within a few years, we branched out to address first-responder trauma (fire, law enforcement, emergency medicine, etc.). Now we have expanded to include *all* types of trauma, regardless of its origin. We have combined the best practices of the medical and mental health communities with timeless principles from the Bible to help people construct a personal environment that gives God optimal access to their body, soul, and spirit for the purpose of healing.

Trauma was your personal intersection with the brokenness of the world. But *recovery* is your personal intersection with the loving and powerful heart of God.

REBOOT first came to Ukraine in 2015, and in 2019 we conducted a REBOOT Leader Training Conference in Kyiv. Now there are REBOOT leaders and REBOOT groups in many places around Ukraine. We wrote this manual for our first training mission to Armenia in January of 2024 – the first of many, we hope, to bring hope and healing from God to Armenians.

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Translations used in *Women, War, + Trauma* –

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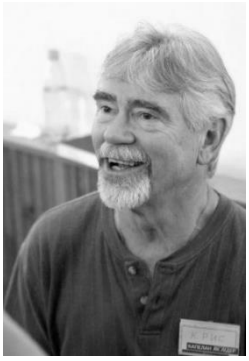
REBOOT RECOVERY
OVERCOMING TRAUMA TOGETHER

Authors of *Women, War, + Trauma*



Chris Adsit

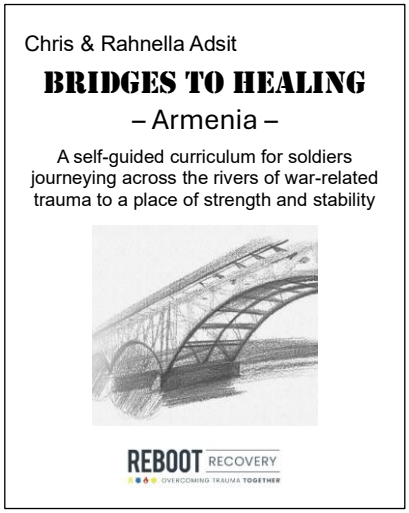
International Resource Coordinator for REBOOT Recovery; national & international speaker, author/co-author of many books, manuals, and training curricula on trauma: *The Combat Trauma Healing Manual, When War Comes Home, The First Responder Healing Manual, REBOOT First Responder* curriculum, *Bridges to Healing: Ukraine, Bridges to Healing: Africa,* and others. Chris has been in full-time Christian work since 1974. Since 2008, he and Rahnella have trained hundreds of chaplains, counselors, pastors, and military personnel all over the world in the REBOOT approach to trauma healing. He has been married to Rahnella for 46 years at this writing, living in Eugene, Oregon.

Rahnella Adsit

International Coordinator for REBOOT Recovery; national & international speaker, author/co-author, including *When War Comes Home* and *The Combat Trauma Healing Manual*, *First Responder Healing Manual* and *REBOOT First Responder*. For many years she had a private pastoral counseling practice for those who have been traumatized. She's a grandmother of four and mother of four, including a US Army combat veteran, a firefighter, the wife of a Marine combat veteran Lt. Colonel, and the widow of a husband who died suddenly. Rahnella is a cancer survivor, brain hemorrhage survivor, twin birth survivor (!), and watched her home burn to the ground. Our family has known its share of trauma!

Marshéle Carter

Wife, mother, grandmother, and former 30-year military spouse of a US Navy SEAL. Marshéle is the co-author of *Wounded Warrior, Wounded Home: Hope and Healing for Families Living with PTSD and TBI* (2013)*, When War Comes Home* (2008), and is the author of H*ope for the Home Front and its companion Bible study (*2006). She has served as an advocate for veterans' issues at the national level, speaking with U.S. senators and congressmen as well as health councils and organizations on behalf of combat veterans and their families. Today, she is a professional writer and university educator, living in Phoenix, Arizona.



Companion Book for Soldiers: *Bridges To Healing*

The sources of trauma are very diverse. But the trauma one encounters when involved in armed conflict can be severe and last a lifetime if not addressed intentionally. The Adsits have constructed a manual for Armenian soldiers that will help them understand many of the issues associated with combat trauma, such as: the physiology of trauma impact, PTSD, true and false guilt, bitterness and forgiveness issues, grieving your losses, constructing a healing environment, rebuilding your traumatized identity, the role of God in trauma healing, and more. But beyond that, as a soldier applies the principles in this book in partnership with faith in the God who heals, he or she will experience strengthening, relief, and healing that will flow into all areas of their life.

Cover Art for *Women, War, + Trauma*

Painted by British street artist "My Dog Sighs" on a building in Cardiff, Wales, he wanted "to express his sadness and anger over the Russian invasion of Ukraine." Though the colors in this art belong to Ukraine, we felt the emotions evoked by this painting are shared by all women who must endure the adversity and suffering of war.

General Principles for Leaders

[Be sure to read this section before your first meeting!]

Overall philosophy for these manuals

Even though the best environment in which to address trauma and to facilitate healing is in a small group situation, these manuals were originally written for a "solo" application. When a country is at war, we can't expect people to gather in small groups for multiple weeks when they are being bombed, fleeing the country, in combat, or experiencing electrical blackouts. Therefore, we wrote these so that people could work through them on their own as they had the opportunity. We made the manuals available in both print and electronically, so people could download them to their phones or computers. But we also know that it is possible for some people to meet in small groups on a consistent basis. So this "Leader's Guide" is meant to aid those who would like to lead a small group through the manuals.

Who is doing the teaching?

You, as the group leader, are not the *only* source of wisdom and knowledge for the group! Keep in mind that there are five learning dynamics that we hope to see in a group study like this. Participants can learn…

1. From the manuals.
2. From the group leader.
3. From each other during discussion times.
4. From the Word of God as scripture is presented in the manuals.
5. From the direct action of the Spirit of God on the participants' hearts and minds.

There are hundreds of approaches to dealing with Post-traumatic Stress, and virtually every one of them involves "talk therapy," that is, helping the trauma sufferer to remember their traumatic experiences, to not stuff them down, but instead to talk about them in an environment where they feel safe, unjudged, and understood. This is why we want our leaders to avoid taking up too much time "sermonizing," and try to motivate the group members to talk. **If they are talking, you're winning!**

Most of the actual content that we hope to get to the participants is contained in the manual. Let the curriculum do the work! But we could go even further and point out that it is God and His Word which are actually going to do the healing and transforming. So count on the Word to do the ***true*** work! Any time the curriculum takes you to a place where you can get the participants to read and consider Scripture, be sure to do it! It's profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness! (2 Timothy 3:16)

My job versus God's job

As it says in Exodus 15:26, "I, the LORD, am your Healer." This should be a great relief to us as group leaders. The healing of the participants is not our responsibility! It's God's! He's the only one who can do it anyway! We're not The Healer, but we can be "bridges" to The Healer. Our job is to create an environment that will give God optimal access to the participants' body, mind, and soul for the purpose of healing. Then God does the healing.

Every chance you get, try to help them shift their hope and expectations to God – not to you, or to the group, or to the manuals, or to medicine, or to counselors. Sure, those things all help to make a positive environment for healing. But help them see that God is the One who will make the biggest differences in their life.

An important note about discussion times

As was mentioned before, group members can teach each other and learn from each other. They have specific experiences and insights that can benefit other members of the group. This – and the fact that talking about their experiences is therapeutic – is why we put so much emphasis on the discussion times. Most of what you'll find in this Leader's Guide are questions that are designed to stimulate discussion. And whenever a group member shares something that others find beneficial and insightful, it helps to restore a sense of usefulness and honor in the one who shared – something that many traumatized people need.

When you notice group members starting to get involved in the discussion, and there is animated give-and-take between them, and you find yourself not having to say much to guide the discussion, again, things are going perfectly!

Share your life

While we don't want the group leaders dominating the discussion times, we DO want you to share your life and the insights you've gained when the time seems right. We also encourage you to be a good example in terms of vulnerability. Be willing to share the difficulties you have experienced in the past – or are presently experiencing. Show them that it's OK to not be totally OK. God can do great things in and through a person despite their weaknesses. We are ALL in-process.

Being a good listener

Since we are encouraging you NOT to talk too much and trying to motivate the group members to talk more, it would be helpful if you were skilled at *listening!* If you are a good *listener*, it shows that you value the opinions and input of the group, and they will respond by becoming good *talkers*.

- Be an **ACTIVE** listener. Make it your goal to understand what they are saying. If you are unclear, rephrase in your own words what you think they're saying.
- Be an **ENCOURAGING** listener. Give affirmation to their comments. "Excellent insight!" "I think that was a truly *profound* thought." "Great answer!" "Thanks for sharing that – I want to write that down."
- Be a **TOTAL BODY** listener. Believe it or not, a *large* part of your communication is non-verbal. So watch your body language!
    - **Negative**: crossing your arms or legs, leaning back in your chair, reading something else (even the manual!) while they speak, checking your watch or phone.
    - **Positive**: leaning forward, nodding your head at appropriate moments, jotting down comments they made.

LEAD the group – don't just read the manual

- Even though we have formulated a *ton* of great discussion questions in this manual, don't be lazy and just read them to the group. Take time before the class to become so familiar with the chapter and each question that all you need to do is to glance at the question and then ask it in your own words. It's FINE if your group members think that you thought up the questions on your own! We (the authors) don't mind! The people in your group need to see <u>you</u> as their <u>leader</u> – not as a simple question-reader. They want to know that (a) you are familiar with the content and (b) you are leading them somewhere you've been before.
- If you are working through a translator, you might think that it would save time to just have the translator read the questions as you point them out in your manual. But that makes your group members wonder how invested *you* are in the material. Go ahead and share the questions in your own words and language, and let the translator translate them. Otherwise, the "feel" is that the translator is leading the group.

Time

- **How long should each group session last?** One hour is pretty typical. If you've got a group that is particularly unified and talkative, you might go for an hour and a half or even two hours. But it's up to you and your group. However, remember the old "entertainment" advice: "Leave them hungry and wanting more." Alternatively, you might decide on one hour, but let the group know that you'll stay around after the meeting to talk more with anyone who wants to. This sometimes adds another 30 minutes to an hour to your time together!
- **How many sessions (weeks) should we plan on?** There are 14 chapters in this study. But it is likely you will not be able to cover one chapter each week. You may need to spend two weeks on each – or sometimes even three! If your group members are ok with sticking with it for the entire

half a year, they will get the most out of it. Alternatively, you might suggest that the group goes for a specific time (say, 12 weeks), take a break for a couple weeks, then resume where you left off. It's easier for people to commit to 12 weeks than to half a year! The objective is NOT that they "get through the material." Rather, that the material "get through to them."

Troubleshooting

- **Silence after you ask a discussion question**.
    - If it was a good question, relax. People need time to think.
    - Ask a backup question; clarify it; ask it another way.
    - DO NOT fill the silence with a sermon! If you do, each time you ask a discussion question, group members will just sit there silently, knowing that in a few seconds, YOU will launch into another sermon. So WAIT instead! Make them think, "Well, if one of us doesn't speak up, we may be here all night."
    - Call on individuals who look like they might have something to say. "What do you think about that, Sofi?"
- **When someone gives a "wrong" or strange answer**.

  Without criticizing the person or saying he or she is "wrong" (this could shut down future participation from that person, and perhaps from other group members too), steer the discussion back to solid ground by saying something like:
    - That's a very interesting point of view…
    - I hadn't thought of it in those terms before. I'll have to give that more thought…
    - What do some of the rest of you think?
    - I can see why a person might think that way (or come to that conclusion).
    - [And then transition with…]
        - Here's something I've often heard about that subject… or
        - Let me share something I've often heard about that subject… or
        - I would love to look deeper into that idea, but we need to get back on track here – could you and I talk about it some after the meeting?
- **The difficult question**
    - Admit that you don't have an answer, but that you'll research it.
    - Ask if other group members might have some insight into it.
    - Ask if someone in the group (or even the questioner) would research it and report back next week.
- **The non-stop talker; discussion dominator**
    - Direct your questions to other members of the group. "Let's hear what Daniel has to say about that."
    - Sit next to the talkative one and minimize eye contact.
    - Go to him/her privately and say, "You are really a pacesetter when it comes to the discussion times. But we need to figure out a way to draw some of the more shy ones out. What would you suggest we do?" Hopefully it will occur to him/her that, if he/she talks *less*, others might talk *more*.
- **The non-talker**
    - Ask direct, low-risk questions of him/her that could be answered comfortably.
    - Sit where you can maintain good, encouraging eye contact with them.
    - Give positive feedback whenever they DO speak.

- **Going on discussion tangents**
    - First, make sure it really is a tangent, and not the Holy Spirit taking the discussion where HE wants it to go.
    - Say something like, "This is an interesting topic, but since we are focusing on "Identity" today, let's get back to that. If we have time later, we'll return to it."
- **Disagreements and Conflict**
    - Don't let the conflict make you worried. Often, they aid learning.
    - Identify the two opposing views and discuss the pros and cons of each. But always bring it back to, "Let's see what the Bible says about it…"

A few more practical tips

- Pray for every member of your group every day. You'll be amazed at how their responsiveness to your leadership and teaching improves.
- Come early and welcome people in.
- Honor your group participants by starting and finishing on time.
- Be the last one to leave, making time to talk with those who need to talk.
- Provide refreshments of some sort – even if it's only cookies and juice. But the more effort you make on this, the more the group members will appreciate it. After a few weeks, ask group members if they would volunteer to bring the refreshments.
- Schedule appointments between meetings for those who need extra attention.
- Meet with your leadership team every two or three weeks for review, troubleshooting, improvement, and prayer.
- Contact each member of your group once a week between meetings, either by phone, text, email, or a visit. Those mid-week "touches" make a big difference!
- Consider doing at least one event with your group during the weeks you are meeting. It may be a recreational event, a service project, having a special dinner, movie night, a hike, etc. Be creative!

How to begin your first meeting

- Start the meeting by first introducing yourself (if participants don't know you well). Don't go into a long biography about yourself. Otherwise, everyone in the group will do the same when it's their turn, and you'll eat up the first half of your meeting time! You might just share:
    - Your name
    - Where you live
    - What kind of work you do; occupation (by the way, mother and wife is a FINE occupation!)
- Go around the group and ask participants to introduce themselves. Let them know you're not looking for an extensive biography, just a few sentences that follow the same points above.
- One other element of the Introduction time you should consider: ask them to also answer one "Ice-breaker" question. Here are a few suggestions (choose one that you feel would be most appropriate for your group). [Consider using these Ice-breaker questions to start each of your weekly meetings in the future.] Have each person answer the same question:
    - Who was your hero when you were growing up?
    - If you could vacation anywhere in the world, where would it be?
    - What is your favorite movie of all time?

  - What is your most valued physical possession?
  - If you could sit down and talk with anyone in the world, living or dead, who would it be?
  - What is the weirdest food you've ever eaten?
  - In one (or two) sentences, why did you decide to come to this group?
- Tell group members what to expect.
  - There are two valuable components in what we'll be doing together. One is about the information and insights you'll get from your **manuals**. The other is about the information and insights you'll get from **each other** during discussion times. BOTH are important!
  - So our basic format is that I'll ask someone to read a few paragraphs in the manual, we'll pause, and then I'll pose a discussion question that pertains to what was just read. You may feel shy at first about joining the discussion, but as you all get to know each other and feel more of a bond, it'll get much easier. Remember: what you share in the discussions could be VERY helpful to other group members!
  - Most people who have experienced trauma want to stuff down the memories of their traumatic experiences. They DON'T want to talk about them because it makes them feel very uncomfortable. That's totally understandable. But mental health professionals have recognized for years that one of the most therapeutic things a person who has experienced trauma can do – as hard as it may seem – is to talk about those experiences in a safe place with people they know won't judge or misunderstand them. This is called "processing" those traumatic memories.
  - In your manual, as you encounter blanks to fill in or exercises to respond to, I encourage you to use your pens and do the work!
  - You'll receive benefits from this course based on what you are willing to put into it.
  - Turn to the page that lists the "Participation Rules" (page 7 in the Field Guide; page 12 in this Leader's Guide). *[It's up to you whether you'd like to read them to the group yourself or go around the group and have each member read one. Make sure they understand all the terms used.]*

Introduction: There is a way . . .

Field Guide pg. 6

Most nights, Alex has horrible nightmares. They jerk him from his sleep and he looks around wildly, trying to see who is about to attack him. He grabs the knife he keeps handy and points into the darkness, ready to slash. His wife Karina runs from their bed as fast as she can, in case he mistakes her for an enemy. Alex's heart is beating like a drum, his breath coming in rapid gasps, his eyes frantically searching the darkness for the Azerbaijani soldiers who have come to kill him.

But after several minutes, Alex comes to his senses. There are no enemy soldiers, no threats, just a great sadness replacing the panic that was in his heart moments earlier.

He slumps down on his bed and can't keep from weeping. His wife hesitantly re-enters the room and then sits beside him and puts a comforting arm on his shoulder. Alex thinks about how life was before the invasion . . .

"We are lost," he cries. "We are so far away from the peaceful home and town we used to live in. I can't work. I can't sleep. I'm always afraid someone is coming to kill us. I'm a terrible husband to you Karina, a useless father to my children. And I can't seem to do anything about it!" With that, he kicks the chair next to the bed, sending it flying across the room.

He looks at his wife through his angry tears. "I'm sorry, Karina. I just want to go back. I want to go *back* to how things were before the fighting began, before our parents were killed and I was wounded, before God forgot about us. But I don't know how to get back there. There are too many rivers in the way that are too wide to cross. If I could only find the way back . . ."

Karina wept with Alex, because she felt the same sadness, the same hopelessness, and she had no idea what she could say to her husband to take away his pain.

Alex and Karina – like hundreds of thousands of other Armenians now scattered far from their homes – are experiencing the devastating trauma of war. You are probably reading this because you have experienced it too. With the way things are across Eastern Europe today, it's unlikely you will ever be able to go back to the way things were before war disrupted your life. But don't despair – you *can* make a journey to a *new* place of healing, strength, stability and peace. **There *is* a way.**

The traumas you have experienced may have robbed you of your peace, your joy, your ability to love, your hope, and many other things – at least for the moment. But despite your current circumstances, you *can* find these things again! Like Alex in the story above, you may think God has abandoned you. He has not! We know it must seem like it sometimes, but as you will read in this manual, God has been walking with you through all of the fires you have encountered. He's with you now, and He wants to help you make that journey to the place of healing.

Our brothers and sisters of Armenia, we grieve with you over all you have lost – physically, emotionally and spiritually. But take courage. Many people are praying for you as you read this. And the Spirit of God is also sitting beside you right now, eager to walk with you to your place of healing.

With Christ's love,

Chris & Rahnella Adsit – June 2024

Participation Rules

Field Guide pg. 7

1. Confidentiality

Anything said in our group stays in our group. Trust takes time to build but only moments to destroy. DO NOT talk to non-group members about who else is in the group or anything that was said.

2. Zero rank

Out there, you might be a big deal or a nobody. In this group, we are all equals, working toward a common goal, helping each other out.

3. Faith

While we don't hide that we are a Christ-centered organization, we are not affiliated with any specific church or denomination. People of any faith or no faith are welcome here. We will respect each other's faith convictions.

4. No comparisons

Each person experiences stress and trauma differently. What is traumatic for one person is just another day on the job for someone else. We are all wired differently and have unique life experiences. Comparing trauma experiences to decide if mine was better or worse than yours is unproductive and even harmful. Focus on what God is doing in <u>your</u> life.

5. Share your mind

Have the courage to share what's on your mind or what you're feeling – it's part of your healing process. The more you share, the safer you and everyone else will feel here, and the sooner you will experience healing.

6. Share the air

But moderate your sharing. Make an effort not to dominate discussion times; let others in. Avoid long, detailed descriptions of your experiences. Get in, make your point, get out.

7. Listen

Actively, deeply, honoring and affirming all contributions.

8. Don't criticize

Show grace and mercy to other group members – just as God has shown you.

9. Don't interrupt

You may have a valuable pearl of wisdom to share, but wait your turn.

10. Honor

Look for opportunities to honor and affirm each other during and between meetings.

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Field Guide pg. 9

Women, War, & Trauma – Chapter 1

How Can a Good God Allow Such Evil?

By Chris Adsit

Objectives of this Chapter: *[Leader: this is just for your information – you don't need to read it to the group, but you can if you want to!]*

- To give group members confidence that – even though they can't totally understand it – God is a loving, all-powerful God who can bring good out of evil and who will do so for them.
- To help group members understand that the origin and engine of evil in our world today is not God, but evil men who are abusing the free will God has given them.

[Have someone read the first section, including the opening verse, up to "How Did Evil Get Here?"]

***You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good…* (Genesis 50:20)**

"If there is a god, then he is either crazy, bad, or weak. No good god would allow the atrocities that have happened. If you believe in god, you are deluded."

This is a message that someone put on my Facebook page after I had been urging people to pray for God to save and protect Ukraine as it was being attacked by Russia.

Was this person right? Is it true?

Many of you reading this chapter have seen and experienced unimaginable tortures and atrocities at the hands of Azerbaijani invaders. Surely these questions have occurred to you – regardless of how strong your faith is.

Since Russia began their full invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, I have been posting prayers on my Facebook page from the Bible for people to pray. There were dozens of verses asking God for protection and victory against enemies. Many of you also prayed those prayers. And yet, many Armenians have died. Many were injured. Many were assaulted, raped, and tortured. Many lost their homes, their loved ones. Did God ignore all those prayers? Was there no God listening?

It's normal and natural for us to ask these questions. Most of us have heard that the Bible presents God as "supremely good" and "supremely powerful." But if God is so good, certainly He wouldn't want these horrible things to happen. And if He's so powerful, He certainly would be able to stop them. So why doesn't He?

People have struggled with these questions for centuries. We probably won't be able to resolve them in this short chapter, but we can at least let you know that there ARE answers, and give you some strong anchors to which you can tie your faith.

- By a show of hands, how many of you here have struggled with these questions?
- Have you gotten any answers? Have you come to any conclusions about this topic?
- If you haven't gotten any answers, what has this done to your faith? Are you still able to believe in an all-good and all-powerful God, even when you observe all that is happening to Armenia?
- That is the main issue that this chapter will be addressing.

  [Leader: if you feel comfortable, and if you have had this experience, share a time when you personally struggled with that "dark night of the soul" when you questioned whether God was good or that He even existed.]

[Have someone read the next section "How Did Evil Get Here?" up to "Down Through the Centuries..."]

How Did Evil Get Here?

When God made man, He loved everything about us at a depth and with an intensity that exceeds our understanding by infinity. His love isn't the sentimental, sugar-sweet, human love that we see in the movies or daydream about. It's a love that is wise, selfless, and freeing. It has eternity in mind, not just the present.

And because of His love, He's not going to *force* people to do anything. He gave us "free will" – the ability to make choices. He's not interested in a race of puppets that will do what He says only when He pulls the right strings. He *loves* you, and what He passionately longs for is *your* love sent back to Him of your own free will. If we are forced, it's not love at all. It's *physics:* simple action and reaction.

Field Guide pg. 10

So from the very beginning God has deeply desired that we would decide on our own to respond positively to His loving proposals. Unfortunately, the first man and woman – Adam and Eve – abused their free will and decided to do something that was expressly against God's rules. They stepped out from under God's protection, and decided to obey their enemy instead of God, thinking it was to their advantage. It wasn't. As a result, death entered our experience and the Earth has existed in a "fallen" state since then. A separation was set up between man and God, and men continued to make choices which were against what God said would be best for them. He gave them free will, but part of that "gift" was that they would also have to suffer the consequences of their bad choices. And if their choices affected those around them, they would experience those consequences too.

- So, what role would you say "free will" played in the introduction of evil into our world?

  [You may want to have someone read the story of the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:1-19, for the benefit of those who may not be too familiar with it.]
- When in this story did Eve decide to abuse her free will, and disobey God?
- What motivated her to do this? *[The lies of Satan, and her own desire for things forbidden by God.]*
- This is a report of how sin entered the world. But how does it also describe how sin has entered every one of our lives at some point in the past?

  [So whether we are talking about the "original sin" of Adam & Eve, or our own personal sin, we see that it wasn't God who was the bringer of evil in the world, but actually, WE WERE.]

[Have someone read the next section "Down Through the Centuries…" up to "How Can You Know…"]

Down Through the Centuries, How Have We Responded?

Jesus told a story about how He was going to be rejected as King, even though He rightly deserved His people's allegiance, and despite His plans to bring peace and prosperity back to mankind. Instead, those who should have been grateful to Him murdered Him. (Mark 12:1-8).

His story came true a few days later. *"Away with Him! Away with Him!"* the crowd screamed. *"Crucify Him! We have no king but Caesar!"* (John 19:15). The people didn't want God – or His Son – as their ruler, so they killed Him. But this was nothing new. People have been rejecting God's rule in their lives since the time of Adam and Eve. Mankind said "No" to God at the first opportunity, and we have individually been saying "No" ever since. But God still reaches out in love and says, "I'm here. Won't you let me be your Covering, your Guide, your Sustainer, your Companion, your Comforter?" But every one of us at one time or another has said, "No, You may not. I would prefer to be in charge of my own life. I don't want to be answerable to You. Leave me alone. I'll do as I please."

God didn't change His mind about respecting our free will. He granted our wish. He backed off. But not very far. He's always there, always ready to respond, always reaching out – but out of our way. "We don't need Him – we can handle things just fine by ourselves."

How "fine" are we handling things by ourselves? Powerful men who have rejected God's influence in their lives are the reason Armenians are suffering so badly today. These men believe that their personal power is something they can use to get whatever they want regardless of who they hurt or kill, regardless of what cities or countries they destroy. This philosophy has been the tragic foundation of history for thousands of years.

As Joseph Stalin said, "When there is a person, there is a problem. When there is no person, there is no problem." So in 1932 he unleashed the Holodomor on Ukraine, and 7 to 10 million Ukrainians were no longer a problem. In 1914-15, Armenians posed a problem for the Turkish authorities, so they decided to carry out genocide, destroying 1.5 million Armenians. The Aliyev clan is guided by the same philosophy.

According to historian Will Durant, there have only been 268 of the past 3,421 years in which a major war wasn't raging somewhere on Earth. Apart from God, the history of mankind has been one of selfishness, war, conquest, and oppression. These facts lead us to a very important conclusion: *Your current difficulties are due to the sinful actions of men – not God.*

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It is ironic that many people tell God to get lost, He complies, and then people get mad at *Him* for their troubles.

- According to what was just read, the evils of this word are traceable to man abusing his free will to go against his Creator's commands, contrasted with God honoring His promise to give people the freedom to make their own choices and experience the consequences, whether they are good or bad. And yet so many blame God for all the difficulties in the world. Is this logical? Logical or not, have you ever felt like blaming God for tough times that <u>you</u> experience? Tell us what happened.
- It has been said that "rebellion" is our basic drive to be in control – regardless of who is <u>supposed</u> to be in control. Aren't we all, therefore, guilty of rebellion against God? I often go to great lengths to try to control things, without a thought as to whether or not God wants to control them Himself. What are your thoughts on this?

- Let me read Psalm 5:4,5 (ESV): *"For You are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with You. The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all evildoers."* What do these verses say about whether or not God tolerates evil in Himself or in people?
- He will judge and stomp out all evil eventually, but why doesn't He do it right now?

  [Because of His patience and mercy. 2 Peter 3:9 – "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance."]
- The trauma that we are experiencing right now here in Armenia – is it something that God is doing, or is it something that a man is doing?

[Have someone read the next section "How Can You Know that God…" up to "2. God grieves with you…"

How Can You *Know* that God is Good and that He Can Help You?

1. Suffering is not unusual. It is universal – even for God.

Because we live in a fallen world, *everyone* has experienced the consequences of the harmful actions of evil people. What is God's attitude toward this? He's not like the Greek or Roman "gods" who were entertained by watching human suffering while they remained untouched in their heavenly throne rooms.

Instead, God took on the form of a man – Jesus Christ – came to earth, and experienced suffering to its fullest extent. He was born into violence and poverty. As an infant, He and his parents barely escaped a paranoid king who committed genocide on every baby boy under the age of two in an effort to kill Him. He was a refugee in a foreign country during much of his childhood. As an adult He was homeless, discriminated against, hounded, criticized, misunderstood, and opposed by powerful leaders. Eventually – though He was completely innocent – He was betrayed by a close friend, arrested, wrongfully accused and convicted, tortured, mocked, crucified, and put in a borrowed tomb. However, the greatest news in all of history are the three things that happened next: our sins were paid for, reunion with God and eternal life was made possible, and Jesus rose from the dead, confirming that He was indeed God the Son.

God brought GREAT good out of the most unjust act ever committed. In addition, we can never say to God, "You just don't know what I'm going through." Yes He does. He's been there. For this reason we can agree with what Hebrews 2:18 (AMP) says about Jesus – *"Because He Himself has suffered in being tempted, He is able to help and provide immediate assistance to those who are being tempted and exposed to suffering."*

- The verse at the end of this section (Hebrews 2:18) says that Jesus was tempted – or "tested" (same word) – so that He could help us when we are tempted or tested. Besides being a good example for us when we suffer, why would God the Father want to expose God the Son to suffering and testing when He was in human form on earth?
- Let me read Hebrews 5:8 – "*Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered."* He learned things through His trials that could not be learned any other way – even the Son of God!
- Why do you think God allows us to be tested? *[To expose what is in our hearts, and to teach us things that can only be learned through suffering.]* What do you think are some things that "can only be learned through suffering?

- Let me read Psalm 11:5-7 to you. It's all about God testing both the righteous and the wicked.

  "The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup. For the LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face."
- What happens to the wicked when they are tested? *[Judgement, pain, torment.]*
- What happens to the righteous? *[We see His face, He doesn't turn His back on us, etc.]*
- I think we have all observed that no one on earth is exempt from suffering. But have you ever thought about God Himself suffering? How has He suffered?

[Have someone read the first 3 paragraphs of the next section "God grieves with you…", up to the paragraph that begins with "Jesus wanted Martha to…"]

2. God grieves with you over your suffering and loss.

Though it may not seem like it at times, God has been right there with you through all of your adversity. With each pain and each loss you experienced, He felt that pain and grieved that loss. His heart is breaking over the same things that are breaking your heart.

You may remember the story in the Bible of the time Jesus' good friend Lazarus got sick and died (John 11). Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha, had tried to get Jesus to come and heal him before he died, but Jesus delayed. When He finally did arrive, Lazarus had been dead for four days. Mary, Martha, and all the villagers were mourning the passing of this great man. As Jesus saw how sad they were, and how much they loved and missed Lazarus, it moved Him to tears. It's the shortest verse in the Bible, but it is packed with insight about God: "Jesus wept." (John 11:35) He didn't just get a little misty-eyed. He *wept.*

Jesus was about to perform His greatest miracle to date: He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead. You would think He would just shake His head, smile, and tell them, "Quit crying. Cheer up. Don't be sad. I'm going to do a miracle!" But He didn't. Instead, His emotions got the best of Him because He tapped into the deep heartache everyone present felt. You see, death wasn't supposed to be part of our experience when God created us. The Bible says that God set eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11), which makes the seeming finality of death so strange and unnatural to us. Jesus wasn't crying because He too missed Lazarus. He was grieving because all Lazarus' friends were experiencing something that never should have touched them: death.

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- When someone close to you has died, do you just make a mental note of it and say something like, "Well, we've all got to go sometime" and get on with your day? Or does it feel deeply unnatural and odd? Since everyone does indeed die eventually, why does death seem so out-of-place and wrong to us?

[Have someone read the rest of this section, up to "3. God is an expert at bringing good out of bad."]

Jesus wanted Martha to believe something about Him: not simply that He was able to raise her brother from the dead, but that *He Himself* was the resurrection, and the giver of life. He wanted her to understand that He was the one sent from God to banish death once and for all, and to swing open the doors of heaven so that anyone who wanted could enter! He said to her:

> *I am the resurrection and the life; the one who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?* (John 11:25,26)

This day was going to be an amazing day – a man was going to come back from the dead! But Jesus knew that one day He would eliminate all suffering and death. What he was going to do for Lazarus was relatively insignificant compared to what He was going to do for all mankind. He didn't want Martha to see Him only as the raiser-of-my-dead brother. Lazarus was eventually going to die again anyway. He wanted Martha – and all of us – to understand that He was going to eliminate all sorrow, pain, and death, forever.

Mary and Martha had a fervent wish: that their brother would not die. But Jesus allowed Lazarus to die so that He could give them something far greater than reversing the sickness in Lazarus' body. He wanted them to see Him as the Lord of life and conqueror of death for the whole world! He grieved deeply with them in their sorrow, but He wanted them to understand that eternity without sickness and death is what they really wanted!

There is no doubt that you also have many fervent wishes right now regarding people or things you have lost or are losing. All of these losses are because of the misused free will of either you or evil people who don't care about you, and these choices will bring negative consequences. God must allow those losses to occur – and it makes Him weep. But He also knows what He's going to do about it before too long. And He hopes that you will continue to believe in Him, and trust Him through this difficult time, just as Mary and Martha did. Martha's response to Jesus – even before He had raised her brother from the dead (John 11:27 NIV):

> *Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.*

- Since Jesus' long-term plan is to eliminate all sorrow, pain, and death forever, how could knowing this shift our perspective on the suffering and death in this world?
- Mary and Martha deeply desired that their brother would not die. But Jesus knew that they actually wanted something else even more. What was that?

  [An eternity without sickness and death. This is what we all want deep down, and this was the experience we were originally created to have.]
- Does this mean we should not grieve our losses, or feel great sadness when we lose a friend or relative?

  [No! The grief associated with separation and loss is built into us by God. It's normal, natural, and expected. If even Jesus grieved, certainly we should too.]
- God must allow those losses to occur – and what does it make Him do?

  [Weep. But He also knows what He's going to do about it before too long.]
- Rather than to marginalize Martha's grief, and rebuke her for her lack of eternal perspective, Jesus ministered to her in three ways. Can you identify them?

  [He empathized with her pain; He gave her words of hope; He gave her a chance to respond, to talk.]
- We can do these same three things when we encounter someone who has suffered a great loss.

[Have a couple of people read this section, up to "4. God does not want anyone to suffer..."]

3. God is an expert at bringing good out of bad.

Romans 8:28 says, *"We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."* Please note that this scripture doesn't say that every element will be good, but after everything is finished, it will be good.

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It's like when you bake a cake. Not every ingredient tastes good. Imagine taking a mouthful of flour or baking soda, swallowing a raw egg, or drinking a glass of vegetable oil. But when all the ingredients are mixed properly and baked in an oven, the finished product is *very* good.

A person might ask, "How can God bring GOOD out of the unspeakable BAD of war?" We're not trying to minimize or marginalize your personal suffering. We understand how horrendous it is. And we're not saying that God condones or desires war. Nevertheless, He can bring *good* out of it. How?

- He can use wars to reconfigure world powers, eliminating aggressive, evil regimes. (Example: Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan in World War II).
- He can use the difficulties of war to strengthen individuals. The only way for a person to gain strength is through adversity. (Example: if an athlete wants to make a muscle stronger, he must put a load on it; if he does nothing, it will only get weaker.)
- He can cause people to grow in kindness, compassion, unity, and love within a group of oppressed people that pull together to help each other (example: most Armenians willing to sacrifice greatly for each other during this current war).
- He can use the seeming hopelessness of war to turn people's eyes to Him, increasing their faith and deepening their relationship with Him (*"The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."* Psalm 34:18). As King David wrote after experiencing great adversity: *"It is good for me that I was afflicted, so that I may learn Your statutes."* (Psalm 119:71)
- He can use the severe challenges of war to help people become who they were meant to be (many examples: school teachers and office workers transformed into heroic soldiers fighting for their country; Ukrainian wives, mothers, and grandmothers courageously and sacrificially protecting their families at great personal expense).

But all of this comes at a terrible price. It's not God who requires this price – it's due to a set of catastrophic conditions that evil men have instigated by the misuse of their free will. But since the atrocities and afflictions of this fallen world are going to happen anyway, God factors it all in and – in the midst of the chaos – creates new life, new strength, new *goodness.*

Think of the example of Joseph in Genesis 37-50. From the time he was a boy, he suffered one undeserved difficulty after another at the hands of his brothers and various government officials because of the misuse of their free will. He was thrown in a pit by his older brothers and left for dead, then sold into slavery to Egypt. He was falsely accused of rape, imprisoned for years, and forgotten by fellow inmates after he helped them get free. But eventually – after Joseph had given Pharoah God's interpretation of a dream he had – he was released, appointed as the second most powerful man on earth, saved most of the world from a devastating famine, and brought his estranged family from Canaan to Egypt, where they prospered. This chapter's opening

verse is what Joseph said to his malicious brothers after all this had happened: "*You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."* (Genesis 50:20)

God knew way in advance what Joseph's brothers were going to do to him, but He also knew how He was going to bring *great good* for Joseph and even for the rest of the world despite those sinful actions.

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- Let's take a few minutes now and think about the war. But rather than to think about all the difficulties and horror it has produced, let's consider some of the good that has come out of it. You might think, "Can anything good come out of a war?" Two thousand years ago, people used to say, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46) Well, Jesus Christ did! What is some good that you've see produced in your life since the war started?

[Have a couple of people read this section, up to "The Take Away."]

4. God does not want anyone to suffer, but He has eternity in mind.

He cares *so much* about your suffering that He chose to suffer *for* you, not only to help you today, but so that eventually you could spend eternity with Him in a world without suffering.

This "eternal perspective" can give us the hope and energy to go on despite the great hardships we experience. The Apostle Paul was *very* familiar with personal suffering. Because of his commitment to Christ, he had been imprisoned, beaten, flogged, and whipped countless times, stoned and left for dead, shipwrecked three times, and subject to untold danger and pressure from many different directions for years. And yet, when he compared the adversity of his life with what he was going to experience in eternity, here's what he said:

> *For our light, momentary affliction (this slight distress of the passing hour) is ever more and more abundantly preparing and producing and achieving for us an everlasting weight of glory [beyond all measure, excessively surpassing all comparisons and all calculations, a vast and transcendent glory and blessedness never to cease!], since we consider and look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are visible are temporal (brief and fleeting), but the things that are invisible are deathless and everlasting.*
> *(2 Corinthians 4:17,18 AMPC)*

So even though God loves us and does not want anyone to suffer, He obviously allows it – even among those we think would be His "favorites." Every believer in the Bible suffered, including Jesus Christ. And in each case, we see that their suffering was not the final word. It was a means to a great and glorious end:

> *And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace Who has called you to His own eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will Himself complete and make you what you ought to be, establish and ground you securely, and strengthen, and settle you*. (*1 Peter 5:10 AMPC)*

According to Jesus, the goal of our existence isn't a nice, happy, pain-free life on Earth. It's *relationship with Him* for eternity. As Jesus prayed to His Father in John 17:3, *"This is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."*

Your choice is whether to experience life in a very imperfect world in relationship *with* a perfect God who loves you and wants to care for you during great adversity, or experience life and all of its adversity *without* Him.

- How many people do you know who have never suffered adversity?
  [If you think you do know someone, just wait a while. Something will come along, unfortunately!]
- God does have eternity in mind. But some of the things that are treasured in Heaven will not be found in pleasant places. Big diamonds and emeralds are found in dark, muddy places. Many of God's eternal riches are in similar places.
- Let me read Isaiah 45:2,3 for you – *"I will go before you and make the rough places smooth; I will shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars. I will give you the treasures of darkness, and hidden wealth of secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the LORD, The God of Israel, who calls you by your name."*
- What treasures has God shown you in the dark times of your life, where you found the "hidden wealth" God had reserved for you? This might be during the present war, or at some time earlier in your life.

[Have a someone read "The Take Away."]

The Take-Away

God has said in His Word that He will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). This is a settled fact that you can count on. Despite the afflictions and devastation you may be experiencing at the moment, know that you are not alone, and that God has plans to use all of it for your good eventually. May God give you the strength, resilience, and faith to be patient with the process He has you in.

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- What is one new thing that you have learned in this chapter that will help you better understand how a loving God can allow such adversity in our lives?

[Have a someone read the Closing Prayer.]

Prayer

Father, I feel surrounded by so much evil. I've fled from it as best I could, but it still seems very present, even here. As Jesus taught us to pray, "Deliver us from evil." I know that on my own, I am no match for my spiritual enemy, Satan. But I also know that with You beside me, Satan is no match for you and me together! Help me to sense Your mighty presence. Help me to fight in the ways you have taught me in your word. Help me to keep my spiritual armor on. Help me to see You bring good out of all the evil that has come upon me. And give me the confidence to know that You and I WILL be victorious in the midst of this fallen world!

In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

LEADER'S GUIDE

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Women, War, & Trauma – Chapter 2

Facing Fear with Faith

By Marshele Carter & Chris Adsit

Objectives of this Chapter: *[Leader: this is just for your information – you don't need to read it to the group, but you can if you want to!]*

- To help participants understand the debilitating effect that fear can have on a person in a long-term crisis situation, and to gain a sense of confidence in themselves and in God by understanding the power of faith and having conviction about God's sovereignty in their lives.
- To help normalize the experience of (a) difficulties and crisis in one's life and (b) God's ability to bring them

[Have someone read the opening verse.]

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. (2 Timothy 1:7 NKJV)

- Could someone describe what a "spirit of fear" looks like?
- If we are experiencing a "spirit of fear," where do you think it come from? What kind of "spirit" does God say He will give us?
- The Amplified Version of the Bible gives an expanded translation of "sound mind": "Abilities that result in a calm, well-balanced mind and self-control." Could someone contrast this with the description that was just given of a "spirit of fear?" How would a person react differently to trauma if they were controlled by "power, love, and a sound mind?"

[Have someone read "Julia's Story."]

Julia's Story (Not her real name)

For Julia and Aleksey, tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan have made them anxious for decades. But they tried to live as normal a life as possible anyway. They got married, moved into a flat in Stepanakert, and started a family. But September 27, 2020, changed everything for them and for everyone they love. Sirens and explosions heralded Azerbaijan's invasion. For several days and nights they and their children hid in their home. Jets and missiles roared over the city, shaking their building. Explosions followed a few seconds later, jolting their bodies and spiking their fear. They soon moved to a bomb shelter beneath the city. While the sounds of war echoed above them, Julia avoided the dark, terror-filled eyes of her children and those around her. In the black of night, she could only lay still, hold her children close, and pray for God to protect them for one more day. As conditions worsened, Julia and Aleksey made the difficult decision that she should leave Stepanakert and take their children west to Armenian territory.

They were forced to leave everything behind, but somehow, Julia's fears followed her to Yerevan. She wrestles with severe anxieties day and night. She worries about Aleksey, who

is serving on the frontlines. She watches her children play quietly. She knows they are afraid, too, no matter how hard she tries to protect them from the constant uncertainties and horrifying headlines. She waits anxiously for her husband's calls, sometimes hearing nothing from him for many days.

She worries about her father and several older relatives who chose to stay behind in Stepanakert. Immobile and in need of protection, they are in worse danger than ever. But now, there is little to zero chance for them to leave the city. She fears they will not be able to get the food and medicine they need. She has no way of knowing how they are because there is no phone connection for them.

Her fears surround her, baring their teeth at her like a pack of hungry wolves. Her anxiety feels paralyzing. The war has brought devastation, death, and now, this unshakable fear of what tomorrow might bring.

- What were some of the things that Julia was worrying about? *[Leader: if you have access to a white board, write down Julia's worries as people respond.]*
- What are some of the things that <u>you</u> worry about? *[Write these on the white board too.]*
- Is "worry" the same as "fear?" How are they different? How are they the same?
- Which "worries" could Julia do something about? Which ones were beyond her ability to control?
- What could you say to Julia to help her not to be so negatively affected by these worries and fears?

[Have someone read the next section: "Fear Defined and Disarmed" <u>up to</u> "A Worthy War to Wage."]

Fear Defined and Disarmed

Call it worry. Call it concern. Call it cowardice, paranoia, PMS, nerves, anxiety. Whatever the label, these doubts boil down to a defeating spirit of fear. We are a prime target for this crippling spirit. The more we dwell on our list of fears, the longer and more entwined the list grows.

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God understands our tendency to revert to fear. He understands our short-term capacity to remember His Word, because He repeats Himself numerous times on the matter! The terms "fear" or "afraid" are used at least 524 times in Scripture, including the fear of God and the fear of man. Some of the first recorded words of Adam are *"I was afraid… so I hid."* (Genesis 3:10). The world was pristine and fresh when fear won first place in the destructive emotions we humans would experience. It is no coincidence that some of the last recorded words of the Lord Jesus are, *"Do not be afraid…"* (Revelation 1:17). Between <u>Genesis</u> and <u>Revelation</u>, God says, *"Do not be afraid"* 44 times and *"Do not fear"* 60 times! More than 100 times He reminds us to fear nothing but Him.

The dictionary defines fear as "anxiety caused by real or possible danger or pain." Fear is a deceptive and lethal weapon often used by our enemy, the devil. He carries a quiver full of flaming arrows. Their tips are laced with paralyzing poison. There is good news though! The "Department of Divine Defense" has issued a tried-and-true counter-weapon to protect against Satan's arrows of anxiety. It is *the shield of faith*. God says,

> *Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one."* (Ephesians 6:16 NIV)

We are self-defensive by nature and design. We all carry a shield of some sort. Yet, each of them is full of weak spots and gaping holes that bare our soft underbellies to the enemy…all but one shield—the shield of faith. There is room on our arm for only one shield. We must choose wisely which shield we will use.

- Think about when Adam said, "I was afraid… so I hid." What was he afraid of? *[If no one can remember, read the passage in Genesis 3: 8-13. He knew he had disobeyed God, and was going to be in trouble with Him.]* When someone is afraid, how do they normally respond? *[They hide, self-isolate, run to safety, take a defensive stance or action, avoid people, avoid possible consequences, etc.]* What motivates them to respond in this way? *[Mainly self-preservation.]*
- Why do you think God found it necessary to "command" us not to fear 104 times in the Bible?
- If God has commanded us to do something, does this mean that our response is an act of our will – that we can choose to either obey or disobey it? And if so, how can we come to a place where we can simply say, "OK God. Because You have commanded me not to fear, I will obey You, and will stop fearing. I choose to no longer be anxious, or worry about things turning out bad." Is this realistic?
- If it's not realistic, what are we supposed to do with this command? *[Or maybe it IS realistic – what do group members think?]*
- What role does "faith" play in this process of overcoming our fear?

[Have someone read the next section: "A Worthy War to Wage" up to "Faith's Fuel..."]

A Worthy War to Wage

Keeping the faith can be a real struggle. The Apostle Paul told his young disciple Timothy to "fight *the good fight* of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12). This tells us that facing and overcoming fear will involve a fight, but it is a worthy war to wage.

When our hearts melt with fear, we can flee to God. We can run into the mighty fortress of His Word, into the strong tower of His Name. The moment we are in His arms, we feel the poison of fear begin to drain from our spiritual veins. God lovingly reminds us…

> *There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.* (1 John 4:18 NIV).

His Spirit embraces our spirit and brings us to the point where we can say…

> *The LORD*[1] *is my light and my salvation--whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.* (Psalm 27:1,3 NIV).

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[1] Whenever you see the word LORD or GOD (all capitalized) in scripture, that is a translation of the sacred name of God: "*YHWH*." In Exodus 3:13-15, God appeared in person to Moses and commanded him to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. Moses asked God what His name was, so he could report back to the leaders of Israel. God answered *"I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"* That name became so sacred to the Israelites that they wouldn't even speak it or write it. So they used the four letters YHWH whenever they needed to write His name. Eventually, no one knew the exact pronunciation of this word. In later centuries Jewish scholars added the vowels from "Adonai" (Hebrew for Lord) between the four letters and came up with "Yahweh." There are actually more than 80 names for God in the Bible (such as Adonai, Elohim, El Elyon, El Roi, El Shaddai, etc.) But YHWH is His most personal and sacred name. Therefore, whenever it appears in scripture it is written in all capital letters, so we'll know it's being used.

And again…

> *God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.* (Psalm 46:1-3 NIV).

In the moments of panic, we can take inventory of our weapons, remember that the almighty God of the universe is our ally right beside us, and thrust the Sword of the Spirit (the word of God) in Satan's face:

> *I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you."* (Genesis 26:24 NIV).
>
> *Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."* (Deuteronomy 1:21 NIV).
>
> *Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. The LORD your God, who is going before you, will fight for you.* (Deuteronomy 1:29, 30 NIV).
>
> *When you go to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the LORD your God…will be with you.* (Deuteronomy 20:1 NIV).
>
> *Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not be terrified or give way to panic before them. For the LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory.* (Deuteronomy 20:3, 4 NIV)

- So apparently, from what we read in this section, maintaining an attitude of faith is not as easy as rolling off a log. It could involve a *fight.* Fights aren't easy, and they can be painful. How much do you think this fact keeps us from responding to our crises and difficulties with faith?
- We talked about how we have a tendency to run and hide when we are afraid. Where is the one appropriate place to which we CAN run and hide in crisis? Why is this recommended?
- But won't God consider us weak and immature if we go running to Him whenever we feel afraid? *[No! He knows that there are many challenges in this world that exceed our capability to handle. So He wants us to come to Him so that He can fight the challenge WITH us.]*

  [Note: It was the mighty warrior/king David (no weakling wimp!) who was urging us to run to God as our refuge when we're in trouble – because he always did! And Almighty God in Deuteronomy identified Himself as the place to run to when you need someone to fight with you against the things that make you afraid.]

[Have someone read the first six paragraphs of: "Faith's Fuel…" up to "Think of just a few experiences…"

Faith's Fuel: Knowing that God is in Control

In the popular movie *"The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel,"* one of the main characters is Sonny Kapoor, who is the young, optimistic owner of the hotel in India that is central to the plot of the movie. Sonny is always trying to cheer everyone up and helping people see the positive side of whatever difficulty they might be in. He demonstrated the kind of simple, settled confidence that believers should hold when he said to one of his friends in crisis,

"Everything will be alright in the end. And if it's not alright, it's not the end!"

As you observe the challenges you are currently facing, your enemy may be whispering to you, "It's all hopeless. Look at all you've lost. You'll never return to how things are. You don't have the resources to overcome your problems. Life as you know it is over. You have slipped between the fingers of God's hand. Give up. Curse God and die" (as Job's wife counseled him to do when he experienced disaster – Job 2:9).

Hold on to Sonny's perspective – because it is profoundly Biblical! As God's Word tells us:

> *We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28).*

Your life may not be "good" right now. But God's promise to you is that He is busy working things out right now to *make it good!* Your "good" is on its way! Wait for it! Expect it!

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- Did this movie ("The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel") play here in Armenia? If so, did any of you see it? And if anyone did, what was your impression of Sonny?
- Even if none of you saw the movie, why do you think Sonny's philosophy about enduring hardships is so valuable to believers?
- I'm not sure about Sonny's faith perspective, but we have the perspective that the all-powerful God of the Universe is in charge of our lives. How do you think this should affect our faith?
- Would any of you feel free to share some of the things your enemy is – or was – whispering to you that were designed to use your fears to depress you, paralyze you, or cause you to abandon your faith?

[Have someone read the first paragraph, and then go around the group having each person read one of the bulleted experiences in the list. Stop at the end of the list, just before "On the contrary…" After each person reads their bulleted point, have them – or anyone in the group – Answer this question…]

- What did this person experience later as a result of their having faith in God, and waiting on Him to pull them through their difficult time? Or what would NOT have happened if they'd given in to their fears and given up?

Think of just a few experiences of faith-filled people in the Bible, and how their confidence in God's sovereignty helped them to keep moving forward. What if they had given up early, while their "good" was still on the way?

- What if Noah got tired of building the ark at Year 25 of the project, and walked away, finally realizing that what God told him to do was just too crazy?
- What if Abraham became confused about his childless wife when he was 98, and concluded that God was wrong about his offspring being as numerous as the stars?
- What if Jacob, after he fled to the wilderness to escape his brother's intention to murder him, looked at his dire circumstances and abandoned his faith in God?
- What if Moses at age 75 made plans to spend the rest of his life as an obscure shepherd in the wilderness, since it's all he'd known for 35 years?
- What if Ruth had fallen into a deep depression after her father and husband died, leaving her destitute in Moab, and became convinced that life was over for her and her mother-in-law Naomi?
- What if childless Hannah, cruelly mocked by her husband's other wife who had several children, concluded she had no purpose in life, and contemplated suicide?
- What if David had decided to move to Africa, rather than to spend the rest of his days trying to avoid King Saul's attempts to capture and murder him?

- What if, on the Saturday after Jesus' disciples had witnessed His crucifixion, they all decided to return to their homes and their former occupations?
- What if Peter, after Herod had started killing the disciples and had thrown Peter into prison, concluded his life was over and questioned his faith in Jesus?
- What if Paul – after numerous imprisonments, beatings, whippings, stonings, shipwrecks, dangers from rivers, robbers, Jews, Gentiles, false brothers, frequently going without food and water, frozen, and boiled[2] – began wondering if he had chosen the wrong occupation, the wrong faith?

[After all the above bulleted points have been read and people have responded to them, have someone read the next two paragraphs, up to "The Eternal Perspective Eclipses Fear."

On the contrary, each of them recognized that God was sovereign and in control of their lives, and their faith kept them following God, and put each of them in a perfect position to receive the amazing blessings He had in store for them. As the Bible says about Abraham:

> *Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness. (Romans 4:19-22)*

- In what way was Abraham "fighting the good fight of faith" regarding the promise God had given him? How easy or hard do you think it was for Abraham to continue believing this promise, even though it had been many years since it had been given? What do you think he might have needed to fight against?
- Each of you is probably in a difficult situation right now – maybe even a crisis situation. I'd like a few of you to describe your current situation, and then share a faith-based outcome that you want to begin believing God for. This would be the "good" that you are waiting on God to bring and believing Him for – what you are willing to "fight the good fight of faith" for?

[Have someone read the first two paragraphs of the next section, up to "Our husband, our children, our health…"]

The Eternal Perspective Eclipses Fear

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The current war with Azerbaijan has brought with it many trials and crises – which are all opportunities to learn to trust and fear only God. You might remember the story of Job in the Bible. He was a godly man who, through no fault of his own, lost almost everything he owned, including his family. But rather than give in to crushing grief, anxiety, and rage toward God, he had this perspective and faith-filled attitude…

> *"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."* (Job 1:21)

- How could Job have been so unemotional and objective about all of the horrendous traumas he had just experienced? *[He had complete confidence in God's sovereignty. He might not have known what God was doing in the present, but he knew what God had done in the past – and He had always done good.]*

[2] See 2 Corinthians 11:22-28.

[Have someone read the next four paragraphs, up to "As we read in our opening scripture…"]

Our husband, our children, our health, our home, and our future are gifts from God for this life only. We can learn to let go of all that is dear to us here and commit them to God's protection. The safest place for our treasures is in God's hands, not ours.

The number of our days was ordained, determined before even one of them came to be. The amount of danger we face in no way changes God's sovereignty. In contrast, the dangers serve to keep our wills on the altar as we realize that we can't control all the forces in our lives, or the future. But God can. When we fully commit our lives to Him, we find it easier to relax and not fear, having faith that He is in control, and that He will cause all things in our lives to work together for good. Things may not be "alright" at the moment – but it's not the end!

Only God's presence can guard our hearts, so we rejoice that the Lord is near and remember that He said to not be anxious, fearful or worried about anything! That includes danger, pain, the unknown, things that go bump in the night and even death. He can handle it all FOR US!

> *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* (Philippians 4:6-7).

- One of the main reasons Job could accept the catastrophic events that took so much from him was because he realized that his "possession" of them was only temporary – while he was on this earth. But he understood that eternity was still ahead of him, and he would once again be reunited with all that had been lost to him – if not literally, at least figuratively. What are some of the things (or people) you have lost, and how do you think you could be reunited with them in eternity?
- How do you think this mindset could affect your level of anxiety if you experience even more trauma in the future?
- According to the above verse (Philippians 4:6,7), what is the "antidote" for anxiety? *[Presenting our requests to God. Or, as 1 Peter 5:7 says in the Phillips translation: "You can throw the whole weight of your anxieties upon Him, for you are His personal concern."]*
- What do you think it means to "let go of all that is dear to us here and commit them to God's protection."? How does one "let go" of their children? Their husband? Their home? Their country? Does this mean we become passive toward them, and stop doing everything we can to protect them from harm?

[Have someone read the next four paragraphs, up to "The Take Away."]

As we read in our opening scripture, our brother Paul, inspired by God, wrote, "*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."* (2 Timothy 1:7) It is a decision of our will to release all that is dear or unclear to us to God. Each time we do, we sense God's approval and are comforted. There are times, however, when we cannot find the faith that our circumstances require. We can be reassured that when we are without faith, He is still faithful.

> *Even when we are too weak to have any faith left, he remains faithful to us and will help us, for he cannot disown us who are part of himself, and he will always carry out his promises to us.* (2 Timothy 2:13 TLB)

Jesus alone is *"*the champion who initiates and perfects our faith*."* (Hebrews 12:2 NLT)

Fear flees in the presence of faith. The war has brought fear and death. Jesus offers us hope and life. Only He is our Protector and Mighty Warrior.

- Based on the three verses we just read, the faith to move forward is not something we have to depend exclusively on ourselves to produce. How do those verses show us that faith is something that God will help supply?
  - *2 Timothy 1:7 – God gives us the spirit of power, love, and a sound mind that forms the basis of our faith. Our faith is a gift from Him. See also Ephesians 2:8 – "…you have been saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God…"*
  - *2 Timothy 2:13 – Even when our faith is weak, God remains faithful to us, which should give us hope and faith to carry on even in the worst situations.*
  - *Hebrews 12:2 – God is the one who "initiates" our faith, and the one who also develops and perfects it. He wants to see our faith grow and strengthen even more than we do!*

[Have someone read "The Take-Away."]

The Take-Away

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> *So keep a firm grip on the faith. The suffering won't last forever. It won't be long before this generous God who has great plans for us in Christ—eternal and glorious plans they are! —will have you put together and on your feet for good. He gets the last word; yes, He does!* (1 Peter 5:10 MSG)

- What are some things we can do to "keep a firm grip on the faith?"

[Have someone – or you – read the closing Prayer.]

Prayer

Lord Jesus, these are very dark days. Life as we knew it has been destroyed. Lord, in the dark days that followed your death, Your disciples must also have felt that all was destroyed. Their plans and dreams of a bright future with You came crashing down around them in a matter of hours. Their hearts were crushed beneath the weight of Your death. They certainly could not see the way ahead.

You told them in advance that everything would soon be different for them. The familiar would not exist ever again. You told Your friends that the difficulties ahead would demand that they believe Your words, act on Your words, persevere, and overcome. Thank You, Lord, that in their most frightened, isolated times, You showed up. You gave them glimpses and brief conversations with You that renewed their hope and faith.

Lord, I am afraid. Please help me to believe Your words. Help me to trust that You are with us and that You will care for our needs. Help me to believe again that You are good and that you will keep your promises to us. Lord, please calm my heart and mind. Please guard me with Your peace that surpasses all understanding.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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Women, War, & Trauma – Chapter 3

Family, Friends, and Faraway Places: The Sacrifice of Separation

By Marshéle Carter & Chris Adsit

Objectives of this Chapter:

- To help participants who have had to flee their homes due to the war address their feelings of loneliness and separation from their loved ones left behind.
- To give all participants a strong sense that, because of their relationship with God, they are never truly alone. God is there, and there are Christians in their current location who could provide support if they seek them out.
- To equip all group members – refugees or not – to better address feelings of loneliness and separation in fellow Armenians who have had to flee their homes.
- To help participants gain the perspective that God can – and will – use this time of separation to strengthen them psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually.

[Have someone read the opening verse – Psalm 68:6 - and the "Note."]

God sets the lonely in families. **(Psalm 68:6 NIV)**

Note: This chapter is especially for Armenians who have had to flee their homes for safety. Nevertheless, if you are not a refugee or an Internally Displaced Person, you will also benefit from this chapter as it helps you understand what your fellow homeless Armenians may be dealing with, give you insight as to how you can encourage them, or prepare <u>you</u> for a time when you yourself might have to flee from your home. Even if you have not needed to flee, this chapter will encourage you about the pain of separation you may be feeling regarding those who have had to leave your home, village, or city, due to the war. Spouse? Children? Parents? Friends? Your pain of separation from them is real, but it can be overcome.

- How many of you in this group had to flee your home due to the war?
- *[Directed to the ones who have fled:]* If you feel up to it, I'd like to ask if you would share with us what happened as you had to flee. You might want to share…
  - What led up to it?
  - How did you prepare ahead of time to leave?
  - Have you had to leave relatives or close friends behind? How are they doing?
  - How have you (and your family) been doing since you had to leave?
  - Have you sensed God's working in your life or your family's life during this time?
- *[If you have no refugees in your group:]*
  - Do any of you know of individuals or families who have had to flee their homes? What was their experience? How are they doing now?
  - What do you think are some of the difficulties refugees might be struggling with? *[Think of all three realms: physical, psychological/emotional, spiritual.]*
  - What kinds of questions do you think they might be struggling with about God?

[Have someone read "Sophia's Story" and the paragraph following it, up to "Leaving, Separation…"]

Sophia's Story

Sophia lies on her mattress in the makeshift shelter in Masis, scrolling social media sites for any sign of online activity by her family and friends. She is weary from constantly checking her phone for texts, emails or missed calls from them. She has not heard from or about her parents and grandparents, who stayed behind, since she and her children fled westward for safety.

She can't sleep. The silence and separation from loved ones will not let her rest. She opens her photos in her phone to find comfort in the images of the lives they were forced to leave behind forever. She pauses with a photo of her grandmother standing with her son on his 8th birthday a few months before the Azerbaijan invasion. Her grandmother is radiant, smiling and celebrating the day. Sophia has no way of knowing if she has survived the onslaught. She tries to comfort herself with the reminder that her grandparents survived a world war and other battles. She prays that they will survive the present nightmare, too.

And to make matters worse, her relatives in Baku don't believe anything she has shared with them about the realities of the invasion. They dismiss her videos and photos as fabrications and lies. She feels betrayed and abandoned by those across the border who are caught up in the war of misinformation.

She hasn't heard from her husband in over a week. She pulls her sleeping children closer to her and tucks the thin blanket around them and herself. Tears slip down her face onto the pillow. She misses her husband desperately. He and her brother were not allowed to evacuate but stayed put to defend Armenia. She's at a loss, not knowing how to best support them.

The war has ripped her world apart. She is haunted by the constant uncertainty. She fears she will never see her loved ones again. She has never felt so alone.

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The reality escapes most of us that our loved ones are not in our hands at all as we presume; however, trials and miles magnify this truth for us who are taken away from friends and family. We must acknowledge God's sovereignty in their lives and entrust them to His care. This is another act of faith that we must be willing to make, as was talked about in the previous chapter. It may not be easy, it may not be logical, it may not be emotionally satisfying. But in the Kingdom of God for a child of God, doing this bring you the peace and confidence that you seek. The apostle Paul said, *"Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day."* (2 Timothy 1:12) If we can entrust our *eternal destiny* to God, surely we can believe Him to care for and meet the needs of those we must leave behind.

- What are some of the things that Sophia was worried about? *[Have them scan the story again silently if they need to take inventory on all of Sophia's issues.]*
- What words of encouragement could you give Sophia?

[Have someone read the first paragraph of the next section, "Leaving, Separation, and God's Plans."]

Leaving, Separation, and God's Plans

When the Lord told Abram, *"Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you"* (Genesis 12:1), he promptly obeyed and went in faith, *"So Abram left, as the Lord had told him…"* (Genesis 12:4) When Jesus called His first disciples, Peter and Andrew, saying, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." (Matthew 4:19), they pulled their boats ashore, dropped their nets, and left everything to do so. James and John not only left their boat and nets but even left their father behind in order to follow Jesus (Matthew 4:22).

- How was Abraham's "leaving" his city of Ur different from an Armenian having to leave their home?
- How are these two "leavings" similar?
- What are the differences and similarities between Peter and Andrew's "leavings" and Armenians having to flee their homes?

[Have someone read the next three paragraphs, including the verse.]

We must also place those we care for, worry about, and love so deeply into His hands. We cannot simultaneously lay down our will and continue to carry around our worries too. Worry, sorrow, and heartache are heavy baggage on the journey Jesus charts for us. All the trials caused by our separations are intended to mature us, strengthen our faith, and make us more like Jesus, not to destroy us.

The comfort in it all is that Jesus knows exactly how we feel. He left His Father in Heaven to come here to Earth. From the instant of holy conception in Mary's womb until He surrendered His spirit on Calvary, Jesus enjoyed only one face-to-face visit with His "family," the Father and the Holy Spirit, on the day of His baptism in the Jordan River (Luke 3:21,22). For 33 years, He worked, persevered, loved, obeyed, and endured all of God's will for His life. Surely, He understands the longing of wanting to go home! Yet He left everything to do God's will – including the One He loved most. I am comforted to know He will never require us to endure anything He hasn't already experienced.

> *For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* (Hebrews 4:15,16)

- How was Jesus' leaving heaven and His heavenly "family" different from an Armenian leaving home?
- How was Jesus' leaving similar to an Armenian's leaving?
- What can an Armenian refugee do to have the same mindset that Jesus had regarding being separated from His home, and his family?

[Have someone read the rest of this section, up to "Living in a Parallel Universe."]

God gives that "grace to help in time of need" by providing a "family" for us everywhere we live. As the Bible promises in this chapter's opening verse, *"God sets the lonely in families."* (Psalm 68:6). Mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters in the faith are miraculously and beautifully

interwoven into the fabric of our lives. They are there for you even in exile – if you will only look for them!

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Though our earthly families are priceless to us, they are temporary. Only God's family is our true and lasting family. Jesus said,

> *"Who is My mother and who are My brothers?"* And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, *"Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother."* (Matthew 12:48-50)

It's comforting to know that He has a grand family reunion scheduled. The homecoming will not be cut short, interrupted, or delayed by anything, but will be only the start of an *unending* celebration.

- If you are a refugee, can any of you share a story about how God has given you a new "family" in your new location?
- For the rest, what are some of the things you or your church are doing to work with God to help provide a new "family" for those who come to your area fleeing the war?
- If any of you have traveled internationally – or even extensively within Armenia – can you share any stories about how you encountered people who felt like "family" even in a very distant place and a different culture?

[Have someone read the next section, "Living in a Parallel Universe" up to "Being in the Minority…"]

Living in a Parallel Universe

Most importantly, our experiences living away from home either as a foreign refugee or an Internally Displaced Person draws striking parallels to every Christian's challenge as believers living in an unbelieving world. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are no longer citizens of this world, *"but our citizenship is in heaven."* (Philippians 3:20). We are described as…

> …a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God… (1 Peter 2:9,10 NKJV)

We are foreigners on Earth! All of us who are in Christ are only passing through this place. As one philosopher has said, "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience."[3] In everything we say and do, we represent our homeland, which is Heaven, the place where God Almighty is enthroned, where our citizenship is recorded permanently and where our Savior is currently putting the finishing touches on the place He has prepared just for us.

"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors" (2 Corinthians 5:20) wherever we go. The English word "ambassador" is from the Latin word *ambactus*, meaning "servant." As servants of the Lord Jesus…

[3] Quote from the French philosopher, theologian, and paleontologist Pierre Teihard de Chardin.

- We have been carefully selected before creation (Ephesians 1:4)
- We are dearly loved (Ephesians 5:1)
- We are held in high esteem by our King (Luke 12:7)
- We live as aliens in a foreign land called Earth (1 Peter 2:11)
- We represent the nation – God's kingdom – called "Holy" (1 Peter 2:9)
- We are the forward deployed spokespersons for the government of the King of kings, representing His limitless authority (Matthew 28:18-20)!

- These six points are all great "perks" of being a servant and ambassador of God's Kingdom. Can you think of any other perks of this position?
- What do you think are some of the normal responsibilities of a country's ambassador? *[Leader – write down their responses on a white board or in your own notes.]*
- Looking at each of these responses, how are they similar to our responsibilities as ambassadors of the Kingdom of God?
- For those of you who are refugees, has being separated from your home given you a stronger sense of heaven being your true home, and increased your focus on your heavenly citizenship? In other words, has your time as a refugee motivated you to walk with God more closely and be more prepared for your time in heaven after this life? If so, in what ways?
- What difficulties have you encountered as you have tried to live as an ambassador of the Kingdom of God?

[Have someone read the next section, "Being in the minority…" up to "Fighting Lonely Feelings…"]

Being In the Minority Doesn't Mean You Are Alone

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If we are refugees fleeing the war, we are in the minority wherever we find ourselves. Our strength doesn't lie in numbers any longer. This means the next-door neighbors, the store owners we do business with, and the children our kids play with are often of different backgrounds, races, nationality, customs, and language. We feel that we are the oddity. Every conversation and every transaction is a draining cultural and linguistic challenge. Frustrations mount. Loneliness creeps into many days, weeks, and months.

The same happens to Christians who are brave enough to live and to work ***in*** the world and who choose not to be ***of*** it. We are tempted to think that we are alone, that we are the only one left who loves God and lives to serve Him. At a very low point in the prophet Elijah's life, he, too, felt very alone. *"I am the only one left,"* he told God, *"and now they are trying to kill me, too."* (1 Kings 19:14). Elijah was not truly alone because God was standing right there with him. God had great news for Elijah in that lonely moment, *"Yet, I reserve seven thousand in Israel – all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him."* (1 Kings 19:18).

God has promised that even as the minority we will ***never*** be alone. Jesus said, *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Matthew 28:20). We are mistaken when we conclude that we are the only one left who is devoted to God. Down through the centuries, God has always preserved a group of believers called a "remnant." He knows we need folks of like-faith and like-mind. He knows we need the encouragement and refreshment that come from relationships with other believers. These believers are in every nation of the world. We can pray to find and link up with other believers. God will orchestrate it in His perfect measure of time. Interestingly, it was right after Elijah's lowest, loneliest moment that God brought Elisha into his

life, a man who became his successor and his "son" in the Lord (2 Kings 2). As long as God is in it, our lowest, loneliest points can be the prelude to a great, big blessing. Remember this when you feel outnumbered and lonely! As we noted in chapter 2, God works all things out for good to them that love Him. Our "good" is coming, and it may be just around the next bend in the road!

- In the second paragraph of this section, it mentions "being *in* the world but not *of* the world." What do you think that means? *[A suggestion: insulated from the world, but not isolated from the world.]*
- Have you ever felt alone and abandoned, as Elijah did? Did God do anything to change your mind about that?
- Those of you who have had to leave your homes, what have you been doing to try to connect with a new "family" in your new location?
- Do you think that God has reserved a "remnant" of committed believers here in Armenia? Why or why not?

[Have someone read the first paragraph of the next section, and then go around the group with each person reading one of the seven verses provided. After each one is read, ask the group (or the one who just read the verse) to answer this question:]

- "What is it about this verse that might comfort someone who is feeling separated and alone, and help them to know they are not alone, that God is right there with them?"

Fighting Lonely Feelings with God's Word

Our emotions, our spiritual enemy, and our human logic may taunt us, trying to make us conclude that we are alone, isolated, and separated from both God and friends. But this is not true. Down through the centuries people of faith have relied on what God has told us in His word about His constant companionship. When they have felt alone and afraid, they turn to God because they know He will bring them the comfort, encouragement, and safety of His Spirit.

- *And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. (John 14:16-18 NKJV)*
- Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. Relieve the troubles of my heart and free me from my anguish. (Psalm 25:16,17 NIV)
- "For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake, *b*ut My favor will not be removed from you, nor will My covenant of peace be shaken," *s*ays the *LORD* who has compassion on you. (Isaiah 54:10)
- For I am the *LORD* your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, "Do not fear; I will help you." (Isaiah 41:13 NIV)

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- *Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or in dread of them, for the LORD your God is the One who is going with you. He will not desert you or abandon you. (Deuteronomy 31:6)*
- He heals the brokenhearted *a*nd binds up their wounds. (Psalm 147:3)
- I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: *b*ecause of the *LORD*'s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The *LORD* is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." (Lamentations 3:19-24 NIV)

[Have someone read the next section, "Keep the Home Fires Burning…" up to "Homesickness…"]

Keep the Home Fires Burning in Your Children's Hearts

If you have had to flee your home because of the war, and are currently living in temporary quarters either in Armenia or in some other country, it's important to remind your children often of our homeland and where your loyalties lie, no matter where you live. Likewise, as Christians, we have the God-given responsibility to our children of passing on knowledge of our Heavenly home, Who lives there, and exactly how to get there. We are entrusted with the stewardship of modeling our Heavenly homeland's ways and customs for our children to learn and to imitate. We are also commanded to introduce them to Jesus, so they can have personal knowledge of and lifelong rapport with Him. When it's time for them to go "home," they will wrestle with fewer fears of the unknown and the unfamiliar.

- Is there anyone in the group who has had to flee their home with their children? How have you tried to keep the memory of your home alive in your children's hearts?
- What are some ways that we can help our children get a picture of the heavenly home we are destined for? Have you been able to introduce each of them to Jesus? How did that come about?

[Have someone read the next section, "Homesickness Is a Good Sign," up to "Travel Light…"]

Homesickness Is a Good Sign

Homesickness is inevitable when living in a foreign land, but it's a good thing. It's evidence that our hearts are somewhere else – back home. The same is true for us who are not "at home" in this world. The longer we walk with God and the more we think about His Word and His ways, and spend time talking with Him, we will have an increasing desire to be where He is.

- For those who have had to flee their homes: on a scale of 1 to 10, how "homesick" are you? How much has this feeling kept you from living a normal life in your current location?
- For all group members: how often do you think about the heavenly home God will be taking you to? If it's not very often, or not very intense, why do you think that is?

[Have someone read the next section, "Travel Light…" up to "Hold Hands…"]

Travel Light. You're Just Passing Through

Every autumn, the Jews celebrate the giving of the Mosaic Law and God's faithfulness to them during their 40 years of wilderness survival in the desert. Every Jewish family, hotel, and restaurant builds "sukkot," which are outdoor booths, tents, or shelters, under which the people eat all their meals for eight days. This is why this celebration is called "Sukkot" or "The Feast of Tabernacles." It reminds them of God's provision during their forefathers' homelessness and scarcity of water and food in the desert.

Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles. He "tabernacled" with us and was the "tent" of God's presence among us for 33 years. He "passed through" on His way to the cross and taught us to trust God's provision as we follow Him.

All the emphasis on treks and temporary shelters during this celebration underscores the truth that we, too, are just passing through here. We, too, are destined for a Promised Land: our eternal home in Heaven. We are to travel light, partnered with Christ until we arrive safely home.

- Have any of you here ever taken part in the Jewish "Sukkot" ceremony? What was it like? What impact did it have on you?
- When you are camping or backpacking, why is it so important to limit the amount of supplies you take with you?
- Read Hebrews 12:1 (ESV):

  Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.
- What is some of the unneeded, excess weight that we Christians often try to drag along with us as we trek through this life?

[Have someone read the next section, "Hold hands…" up to "The Take Away."]

Hold Hands and Stick Together

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Refugees and outsiders in general learn to form meaningful friendships quickly. There is no time to waste. We *need* each other. Pride and pettiness fall by the wayside, and we get on with the business of being good neighbors. Most differences dissipate and lose their power to divide people who are facing similar challenges.

The same should be true of any community of believers. We are in this thing together. Our time here on earth is brief, and we *need* each other. There is no room for grumbling or guarding our pride. Instead, we should get on with the business of being good neighbors to each other.

- For the refugees in the group: how easy or how hard was it for you to make new friends in your new location? Is there anything you can share that made that process easier for you?
- As residents of a country at war, how important have you found it to be to maintain good friendships with others in your area? Have you found that – because of the stress and anxiety that the war has produced – it's easier to avoid pride, pettiness, and grumbling – or harder? Can you share some examples either way?

[Have someone read "The Take Away."]

The Take-Away

We are not ***of*** this world any more than Jesus was ***of*** this world. We are strategically placed here, protected from the evil one, set apart by the truth and sent *by Christ Himself* into the world to live and speak that truth (John 17:14-18) wherever we live…

Blessed is the man whose strength is in You,
Whose heart is set on pilgrimage.
As they pass through the Valley of Baca [bitterness and mourning]
They make it a spring;
The rain also covers it with pools.
They go from strength to strength;
Each one appears before God in Zion. (Psalm 84:5-7 NKJV)

- The Take-Away says that we have been strategically placed where we are in this world by Jesus Christ Himself. If this is true, what strategy do you think Jesus had in mind when he specifically placed *you* where you currently live – whether you are a refugee fleeing the war, or you have lived in the same place all your life. Why are you where you are right now?
- The verse we just read describes God's pilgrims (us) passing through the "Valley of Bitterness and Mourning." What effect are we supposed to be having on this "Valley" as we pass through? Do you think the church in Armenia is having this kind of effect?

[Have someone read the Prayer, or read it yourself.]

Prayer

Lord, thank You that you were with us when we took shelter. Thank you for watching over us. You were with us, going ahead of us and alongside us, as we made our way to safety. You are with us now, too. Thank You that you've promised never to leave us or abandon us. Thank You that You've promised to provide for our every need every day.

Lord, thank You that You are here with us in this unfamiliar place, surrounded by people we don't know, unsure of what lies ahead. You know how we long in our hearts to return home and to see the ones we love and miss so deeply. Thank You that You will care for them and for us through it all. Thank You that have plans for us, plans to help us and not to harm us, plans to give us hope and a future.

Stay close to us. Help us to find comfort and strength to face each moment. Help us to stay close to You. Thank You that we are never truly alone because You are always with us. You were with us in our hiding places. You are with us now in this place. You will never leave us.

In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

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*Portions of this chapter were adapted from *Hope for the Home Front* by Marshéle Carter.

LEADER'S GUIDE

Women, War, & Trauma – Chapter 4

Dealing With True & False Guilt

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By Chris Adsit

Objectives of this Chapter:

- To help participants understand the difference between "guilt" and "shame," where they come from, and how they can either be destructive or constructive feelings.
- To help participants understand the differences between "false guilt" and "true guilt," and how the first leads to depression and death while the second leads to safety and salvation.
- To give participants practical and productive ways of dealing with false guilt and responding to true guilt.

[Have someone read the opening verse.]

Therefore there is now no condemnation at all for those who are in Christ Jesus.
(Romans 8:1)

- This verse says that there is "no condemnation" for those who are in Christ Jesus – meaning Christians. But does that mean that Christians shouldn't feel guilty about it when they do wrong? What is the difference between "condemnation" and "guilt?"

  ["Condemnation" refers to God's eternal judgment, being "condemned" to eternal separation from Him. "Guilt" refers to the negative feedback God gives us in our spirit when we violate one of His laws. It's meant to be remedial – to help us get back on the safe path.]

[Have someone read "Karine's story" up to "These are the anguished words…"]

Karine's story

It was Sunday morning. I really wanted to sleep late. But something woke me up suddenly. At first my husband and I thought it was just firecrackers as we laid there listening in silence. But then we both realized that no! It was gunshots!

We jumped out of bed and ran down the hall to where our children were sleeping. It wasn't easy to wake them up – and they certainly did not understand what was happening.

"Quick! You must get up!" I spoke in a panicked whisper. "Get dressed! We are going to Grandpa's house!"

"Right now?" sleepy little Mary asked. "I want breakfast! It's too cold!"

"No – we have to go right now!"

It's strange that in this moment of crisis, I was thinking about the wet slippers I had put on. I had washed them yesterday, and they still weren't dry. It's like my mind was trying to think about anything but the horror that had just entered our city.

We ran to my father's house which was just down the street. He had a cellar that would provide some relative safety for us.

Later, when the gunshots had ceased, my husband was called to come in to work. I took the children back home and gathered warm clothes for them. Then I was called back to my job too. In the meantime, my mother called and urged me to let my brother take our children to a safer place out of the city. I went back to our house to meet my brother and talk with our children. I was torn. Should I stay here, or go with my children? I finally decided to stay, and urged my eldest daughter to take care of little Mary. I told them we would follow them soon – but we couldn't.

Two months later, because our jobs were so crucial, we were still stuck in our town. My husband was half-broken with me and kept telling me to go join the children. But I thought that if I left, I would be betraying him, my parents, and the others who depended on my work. I had already betrayed my children by not going with them. They were small. They needed me. But I left them alone. And what about our friends who took our children in? They must be such a burden for them. It seemed that, no matter what I decided, it would be wrong. I felt horrible.

- What would you say were some of the "sins" that Karine committed in this story?
  [The point is, none of her actions or choices were sinful. They were difficult decisions she had to make, and she is tormented by the possibility that she had made the wrong decisions. But she did not sin; she did not break any of God's laws. The "horrible" feeling she has is not coming from God.]
- In hindsight, are there any decisions that Karine made that you would have made differently? Do you think she should be held accountable and punished somehow for the decisions she made?
- What does it tell you about a person's mental challenges during a crisis when Karine was thinking about her wet slippers as she was trying to get her children to safety?

[Have someone read the next three paragraphs, through the parts about "Guilt" and "Shame."]

These are the anguished words of so many Armenian women right now. As humans, we have all been hard-wired to feel **guilt** and **shame** when we think we have made a wrong choice that may have hurt others. However, there is an important difference between the two.

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Guilt is feeling bad about something we have done, or not done.

Shame is feeling bad about who we are.

- Do any of you struggle with feelings of guilt or shame over decisions you had to make, or things you had to do, or thoughts you had when you were experiencing the trauma of the Azerbaijani invasion?
- Would anyone feel confident enough to share your experiences with us?
- Where would you say your feelings of Guilt or Shame are coming from? Do you think they have any purpose?

[Have someone read the next section, up to "False Guilt."]

Feelings of guilt can actually be a *good* thing. When we violate our own sense of right and wrong, something inside us lets us know about it. Many of us think it is God, who has written His standards on our hearts. We call this our "conscience" (see Romans 1:19,20; John 16:7-11). If we followed our consciences perfectly, we would be obeying all of God's commandments. God gave us our consciences and His laws because He loves us. He wants to let us know what's good for

us, what's bad for us, and where the boundaries are. They are like the rough sand and gravel at the edge of a highway – letting us know when we're drifting off the road and heading for danger.

However, as mentioned in Chapter 1 we all have free will. And from time to time we decide it would be in our best interest to disobey both our conscience and God's laws and explore the territory off the pavement. It always turns out bad, and our sense of guilt ramps up.

But guilt that is unaddressed will eventually turn into shame. ***What we did*** becomes internalized and begins to define ***who we are*** in harmful ways. We begin to consider ourselves inferior, incompetent, and not worthy of anyone's love, forgiveness, or respect. We feel vulnerable and full of self-doubt. Our self-assessment becomes: "I am a defective person." This leads to depression and despair. We might even redirect our shame as anger, frustration, and accusations toward others – even to those who are trying to help us.

This is why it's so important to take the initiative and deal with the guilt we feel, rather than to try to ignore it and let it turn into shame.

In Karine's story above, do you think she did anything wrong? Did she make any "sinful" choices that would be in opposition to the laws of God? Most of us wouldn't think so. She had to make some very difficult decisions between options that would be hard on herself and her family. It's not like she was choosing between vacation destinations. This was life and death, wrapped in uncertainty, with no clear indication if her choices were going to turn out good or bad.

This highlights a very important distinction: there is a difference between "false guilt" and "true guilt." As Valorie Burton wrote, "True guilt is a Spiritual Guide. False guilt is a Spiritual Detour."

Let's look at them separately and learn what we should do about them.

- According to what was just read, how can guilt feelings actually be a good thing? Why does God allow them?
- When we feel guilty about something we have done, what happens if we decide not to do anything about those guilt feelings?
- How do you think "True guilt" is a Spiritual Guide, while "False guilt" is like a Spiritual Detour?"

[Have someone read the next section about "False Guilt," through the first point, "1. Ourselves."]

False Guilt

When we feel guilty about a choice we've made, and yet we have not violated any laws of God, this is false guilt.

Guilt (true or false) says to us, "You've done something wrong." But the question we must ask in return is, "Says who?"

The *source* of our sense of guilt is very important to know. It will be a clear indicator of its truth or falsity. Here are the three potential sources of *false* guilt…

1. Ourselves. Many people have overactive consciences that will condemn them for things they actually had no control over. It is the result of an unhealthy self-preoccupation rooted in unrealistic expectations about what we should be able to do. Sometimes it is the result of fear that we might have made the wrong choice. We reproach ourselves because we could not see the future and control all the variables.

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This is a problem for many high-achievers. They set impossibly high standards for themselves and when they can't measure up, they feel like failures. "I'm not good enough. I'm a fraud. People will find out what a loser I am."

This may have been Karine's problem. Was it realistic for her to think that she could take her children to safety – a *good* choice given the probability of war overtaking them – and *not* have to leave her husband and her parents, *not* have any negative consequences for her kids, *not* caused more work for her friends who took her children in? No. But for some reason, *she* thought it *was* realistic to think that way, and now she is weighed down by guilt.

- You may have heard the expression, "Sometimes I am my own worst enemy." Some of us are extremely hard on ourselves and are constantly self-criticizing internally. Are there any of you that sometimes feel that way?
- *[If there are some…]* Can anyone give us an example of what that self-criticism is like? Has that practice proven to be helpful to you, or a hinderance?

[Have someone read the next two points, <u>through</u> the two paragraphs on "2. Others" and "3. Satan."]

2. Others. People can be so cruel. Having no regard for the stress they may be putting on you, they make demands, have expectations, and are ready to condemn you if you don't deliver. If you are a "people-pleaser" you accept those demands and do your best to live up to them. And if you can't, you also accept their condemnation. Fear of disapproval is a strong motivator in many people. "If you have asked me to do this, you must think that I can. I will prove you right! I can do it all!" But when you find that you ***<u>can't</u>*** you feel guilty that you have let your friends down, and it adds more damage to your self-esteem.

3. Satan. The enemy of our souls will work in concert with the first two sources mentioned above. He knows our vulnerabilities and our response tendencies. Jesus said that Satan comes only to "steal, kill, and destroy" (John 10:10). He wants to steal your joy, kill your dreams, and destroy your identity as a beloved and totally accepted child of God, and he will use false guilt to do it.

He is called "the accuser of our brothers and sisters" in the Bible (Revelation 12:10). Satan's very name is Hebrew for "accuser, adversary, or slanderer." He will use your own voice in your head and the voices of others to accuse you of failure, poor judgment, and incompetence. And his indictment won't be logical or fact-based, it will be emotional. He will make you think, "I *feel* guilty, so I must *be* guilty."

- Have any of you ever had an experience where a family member or acquaintance criticized you harshly for a decision you made? Were their words to you helpful or not? How did they make you feel?
- Have any of you ever harshly criticized yourself because you weren't able to live up to expectations others had for you, or because you weren't able to live up to a commitment you had made? Was that self-criticism helpful or harmful?
- What role do you think Satan had in "fueling the fire" of your self-criticism and false guilt?

[Go around the group and have each person read one of the "Examples of False Guilt." Ask them to put a mark next to any of the examples that they have experienced in the past.]

Examples of False Guilt:

- **Guilt over fight/flight/freeze response.** "I always thought I was so brave. But when the soldiers came to our building, I just panicked and ran away! I should have done *something!*"
- **Competency Guilt.** "If only I had thought of all the contingencies. If only I had been smarter, and put it all together quicker in my mind, my family wouldn't have suffered."
- **Lose/Lose Guilt.** "If I had taken time to find transportation for our elderly neighbor, it would have slowed down my family's escape. But who else could she depend on? I know our area was bombed shortly after that, and my family could have all been killed. But what about my neighbor? Is she dead or alive? If only I could have helped her too. How do I live with myself if she was killed?"
- **Helplessness Guilt.** "We have no income, no home, only the clothes on our back, and one suitcase. I *have* to provide for my kids – but I'm doing a terrible job of it! If only I had saved more money or had more time to prepare."
- **Role and Responsibility Guilt.** "It was my job to get my family to safety. But the soldiers stormed our building so fast, and I couldn't find my daughter. She was raped. I failed to do my job. It's my fault this happened to her."
- **Survivor's Guilt.** "Why did I survive when others died?" "My friends in the east have no electricity, no water, no food. I and my family are safe and well-supplied here in Romania. But I feel terrible because my friends are suffering."
- **Survivor's Euphoria Guilt.** "I feel ashamed about it, but I can't help thinking, 'I'm so glad I didn't get killed.' How can I feel *good* when others died?"

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- Would anyone like to share their experience with one of these examples of False Guilt? *[Here are a few follow-up questions you could consider asking…]*
  - Do you feel that the guilt you were feeling was from God, or from some other source?
  - Does that feeling of guilt still hinder you?
  - Did the guilt you felt motivate you in any positive ways?

    [Of course, this <u>can</u> happen. It depends on the mindset and positive outlook of the person. But if all the guilt does is make you feel like a failure, it is definitely false and destructive.]

[Go around the group again and have each person read one paragraph or bullet point in the next section, up to "How Can You Survive…"]

In each case listed above, there is *no guilt* as far as God and His laws are concerned, and no moral factor in any of the decisions that were made. In each case, the feeling of guilt was based on a false premise.

- You can't punish yourself over your flight/fight/freeze response. God has given us a set of very focused reactions that activate when we are threatened with bodily harm or death in order to keep us alive. We can't control these responses – they are involuntary, like breathing or heart function. They are uncontrollable *reflexes*. They're *not* moral choices that you should be judged for – either by others or by yourself.

- The "if onlys" of Competency, Lose/Lose, and Helplessness Guilt are irrelevant. In hindsight we may be able to see other options, but in the moment of crisis you *can't* see them all. You did your best, and no one – reacting at *that* moment and under *those* conditions – could have done any better. You could wish that some magical solution would have presented itself in the middle of it all, but it didn't. That's reality – not your fault!
- Leaders and parents simply *can't* protect everyone they oversee at every moment - especially not in the chaos of war. The potential for disaster surrounds them all the time. Multiply that by all the variables in the environment, the will of the enemy, and the will of those they are "responsible" for, and you can see the impossibility of guaranteeing safety for all. You are not God, that you could control all of those factors simultaneously.
- You shouldn't feel blame because you survived while others didn't – you had nothing to do with that. There's no way you could have controlled all the conditions surrounding your traumatic events, or the disastrous experiences of your friends or family. And any euphoria you feel because you escaped tragedy is an involuntary function of your lower brain. It is *not* due to a lack of compassion or love for those who suffered.

In all of these cases, it's normal to feel sad, angry, and frustrated about how things turned out. But don't turn that emotion in on yourself. You aren't at fault for those very unfair and unfortunate events. Remember that you have a spiritual enemy who will try to manipulate the memories of those disasters in order to weaken and destroy you.

- Let's revisit some of the "False Guilt" experiences that some of you shared. What was the "false premise," thinking error, or lie that was at the heart of each one? *[If they can't think of any personal experiences with False Guilt, go over a few of the examples shared in the list and try to identify the false premise or thinking error.*

[Have someone read the first section below about "Faith" up to "Facts."]

How Can You Survive the Ruthless Attacks of False Guilt?

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Faith. If you believe your guilt feelings prove that you are bad or unworthy, the enemy is winning. Your self-condemnation will keep you from gaining wisdom from your experiences and hinder you from turning your pain into purpose. Instead, you'll see guilt as proof you have no purpose.

Recognize God's sovereignty in your life. The fact that you survived a disaster should tell you that there is a *reason* you survived. *Find that reason.* Look forward, not backwards. You are so valuable to God and to those around you. You survived in order to help others and to be a blessing to them. Understand that you are not perfect, all-knowing, and some kind of Superwoman. But you are stronger than you think, resourceful, and God is making you more resilient through these negative experiences. Use what He has built into you for the good of others.

Start visualizing and talking about a positive future. This is the essence of faith. Focus on positive possibilities. It will increase the likelihood that what you hope for will become real. As the Bible says in Hebrews 11:1 (TLB):

What is faith? It is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead.

- Some of you have survived some pretty difficult circumstance. Looking back, can you think of a reason why God brought you through that experience, why you survived? Do a little imagining: what plan could He have for you?
- How could thinking about <u>these</u> things help you overcome the harmful effects of false guilt?

[Have someone read the next section on "Facts" up to "Change your inner dialogue."]

Facts. Remember that God *loves* you. His strongest desire is to *help* you, not to harm you. You might be thinking, "Oh, but you don't know the things I've done." It doesn't matter. If you have given your life to Christ, the fact is you are loved, forgiven, and *accepted!* As the Bible says in Romans 8:33-39 (TLB):

Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for His own? Will God? No! He is the one who has forgiven us and given us right standing with Himself. Who then will condemn us? Will Christ? No! For He is the one who died for us and came back to life again for us and is sitting at the place of highest honor next to God, pleading for us there in heaven. Who then can ever keep Christ's love from us? When we have trouble or calamity, when we are hunted down or destroyed, is it because He doesn't love us anymore? And if we are hungry or penniless or in danger or threatened with death, has God deserted us?

No, for the Scriptures tell us that for His sake we must be ready to face death at every moment of the day—we are like sheep awaiting slaughter; but despite all this, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ who loved us enough to die for us. For I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from His love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels won't, and all the powers of hell itself cannot keep God's love away. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, or where we are—high above the sky, or in the deepest ocean—nothing will ever be able to separate us from the love of God demonstrated by our Lord Jesus Christ when He died for us.

- How does meditating on the fact that God loves you – no matter what – help you to counter feelings of false guilt?
- When you think about God's opinion of you, do you see Him as usually critical of you, disappointed in you, judging you for your faults? Or as your loving Father, who is <u>for</u> you, who forgives your sins, and who wants to help you?
  - If the former, why do you think this is? *[Make the point that the opposite is true! The <u>fact</u> is that He is definitely the latter!]*
  - If the former, what is the false premise, thinking error, or lie that is the foundation of that thought?
  - If the latter, how would this help you to overcome the effects of false guilt?
- How does the passage we just read (Romans 8:33-39) relate to the opening verse of this chapter (Romans 8:1)?

[Have someone read the next section on "Change Your Inner Dialogue."]

Change your inner dialogue. Listen to how you talk to yourself. Rehearsing and repeating self-blame is the biggest barrier to feeling inner peace. We are often our own worst critics. Shut down the conversation when you start hearing those criticisms! Start giving yourself some good news! Leave the past in the past. Learn from your mistakes and move on. As Nelson Mandela once said, "I never lose. I either win or I learn." And as the Apostle Paul wrote, *"…this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on…"* (Philippians 3:13).

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- Let's say your "inner voice" starts telling you, "You *know* you shouldn't have bought that dress for yourself. It was too expensive! You're so vain and prideful! That money could have been spent much more productively elsewhere! All you care about is yourself!" How could you change that inner dialogue?

[Have someone read the next two paragraphs on "Ask God for help" and "Talk it out."]

Ask God for help. When you recognize how false guilt is dragging you down, ask God to remove it from you. Keep bringing it before Him in prayer and let Him take that burden off your shoulders. That guilt is not accomplishing anything. God doesn't mean for you to carry it – and *no one else* wants you to either. Jesus said, *"Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."* (Matthew 11:28).

Talk it out. Find someone to share your struggles with. They don't have to be a professional counselor, just a good listener whom you trust. Talk to them when you're feeling that toxic false guilt and shame. Hearing your own words is often enough to restore a positive perspective, and hearing your friend's supportive feedback counteracts the feelings that shame creates.

- If you ask God to remove your false guilt, how confident are you that He would actually help you be rid of it? How does the strength of your faith factor into this action?
- Why do you think it could be very important to find someone you can "talk out" the false guilt you may be struggling with?
- Who can you think of that you would feel comfortable with sharing the struggles you are experiencing regarding false guilt? Could it be someone in this group? If you can think of someone, write their name down in your manual next to this section.

[Have someone read the first part of the "True Guilt" section, up to "What Should We Do…"]

True Guilt

There is one more potential source of guilt: God – letting us know we're drifting off His safe highway into dangerous territory. This is when feelings of guilt are a *good* thing.

The Bible tells us that *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:23). This isn't talking about the fake sins listed above. It is describing a foundational characteristic of every human. We have all said no to God – multiple times – and disobeyed what we knew He wanted us to do. And the trend continues.

So if you feel like this sometimes – guilty – welcome to the human race!

What is God's objective in giving us these feelings of guilt when we violate His laws?

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. (2 Corinthians 7:10)

While false guilt does nothing but shove us toward depression, despair and death, true guilt brings us to a place of recognizing our disobedience, prompts us to take action to change, and delivers us to a safe and blessed place. No one regrets that!

- Could anyone share a time when you did something wrong, you felt God's conviction and correction, and it motivated you to repent and once again get right with God?
  - *[Leader: do a little thinking ahead of time so you can be ready to share an example of this from your own life in case no one responds right away. Your sharing might "prime the pump" on other people's sharing.]*

[Have someone read the first part of the next section – just the part on "1. Confess" up to "2. Repent."]

What Should We Do When We Sense True Guilt?

1. Confess. The word "confess" comes from Greek (the language in which most of the New Testament was written) and means "to say the same thing as." When God points out that you have done something wrong, such as, "Darya, you stole that money," you confess by saying the same thing: "Yes, it's true. I stole that money and I agree it was wrong. Please forgive me." The Bible gives us a great promise concerning this:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

- Several faith traditions direct people to confess their sins to a priest. This is a fine discipline and provides great accountability, but do you think it is absolutely necessary to involve a priest in this? Can we not confess our sins directly to God, since it is He whom we have "offended" by our disobedience?
- God already knows that we have sinned. What good does it do to "say the same thing as" to Him? We aren't giving Him any new information. Why is it important?
- If we <u>do not</u> confess our sins to God, and are therefore not forgiven, what are the consequences of this?

  [Don't let the group stray into "Well, you lose your salvation and go to hell." If we are born-again Christians, and have therefore been given eternal life, our life with God is just that – <u>eternal</u>. But as Christians, when we sin (and we all <u>will</u> sin) and don't feel like confessing it and repenting of it, it constricts and weakens our relationship with God (doesn't <u>end</u> it), and we don't experience all the abundance, guidance, and comfort that God wants to give us. We will talk about this more in chapter 11 in the section about the Holy Spirit, and in chapter 14 – "If I Should Die Tonight." Other good passages on our eternal security: John 3:16,36; 5:24; 10:27-29; Romans 8:33-39, which we read earlier.]

- *[Have someone read the next section on "Repent" up to "The Take Away."]*

2. Repent. This word also comes from Greek and means "to turn around and go the other direction." While "confess" has to do with action that takes place in the spiritual realm between you and God, "repent" refers to action that needs to take place in *this* dimension. It's not enough to tell God, "Oops, sorry. I blew it. Forgive me," and then repeat the same act again and again. That's not true confession anyway, because if you were really agreeing with God that it was wrong, you would at least try to stop doing it.

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Bottom line: God is not merely looking for your agreement with Him about your sins. He's interested in changed *action.* Your actions will validate your intentions. When this happens, it clears the way for God to bring His healing to you unhindered. To repent may even mean that you

need to provide restitution for the sin you committed. To show true repentance, Darya needs to give back the money she stole.

The guilt feelings may or may not lift immediately, and you may not experience victory over your sin right away. Strong habits are hard to break, and it may take some time. But don't give up! Notice how Jesus directed us to be *persistent* in bringing our requests to God:

*"So I say to you, ask and **keep on asking**, and it will be given to you;*
*seek and **keep on seeking**, and you will find; knock and **keep on knocking**,*
and the door will be opened to you." (Luke 11:9 AMP)

- Why is it so important to include "repentance" to our approach when we realize that the guilt we have been feeling is coming from God? Why isn't "confession" good enough?
- If your guilt feelings do not lift immediately after confessing and repenting, how would that make you feel? What should you do about it? *[Keep on asking!]*

  [The Amplified Bible version quoted above is a more accurate translation of Luke 11:9. Just as they do in the original Greek language, Jesus' words highlight that we are not only to ask, seek, and knock, but to keep on asking, seeking, and knocking. This is an important part of walking by faith – to keep on believing God and being persistent in our prayers even when we don't see immediate positive results. For more on Jesus addressing the need for persistence in prayer, see Luke 11:5-10 and Luke 18:1-8]

- *[Have someone read "The Take Away."]*

The Take-Away

We all experience guilty feelings from time to time. Rather than ignore them, and simply hope they go away, first ask God to help you know if those feelings are false guilt or true guilt. Then deal with them accordingly, either by countering the deceptive attacks of false guilt with faith, facts, etc, or responding to true guilt through confession and repentance. Letting those feelings remain buried and unaddressed will result in *worse* consequences later on. As the opening verse of this chapter says, God no longer condemns you if you belong to Him. So if you're feeling condemned, check the source!

- What is the most important application that you will take from this study today? Take a minute and look back over this chapter before you answer.

- *[Have someone – or you – read the Closing Prayer]*

Prayer

*Father, please give me discernment between true and false guilt as they enter my mind. When I have truly done wrong, I welcome your gentle (or even not-so-gentle) correction, because I want to show my love for You through my obedience. Help me to recognize your conviction, and to repent of anything that displeases You. But when my enemy is taking advantage of me and accusing me of actions that were not against Your will, help me to understand and not allow him to ruin my peace. Help me to disregard the voices of my acquaintances when they are wrong about me. And help me to even recognize when I'm telling myself lies about the rightness or wrongness of my actions. I want to be able to hear and respond **only** to Your loving voice of conviction and correction. Thank You for loving me so much! In Jesus' name, amen.*

LEADER'S GUIDE

Women, War, & Trauma – Chapter 5

How Has Trauma Impacted Me?

By Chris Adsit

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Objectives of this Chapter:

- To help group members understand the physiology of trauma reactions
- To inform group members about the spectrum of trauma reaction symptoms
- To give group members the opportunity to self-assess their trauma symptoms
- To help group members understand how and why God has programed us to react when confronted with dangerous situations
- To give group members practical ways to deal with a flashback in themselves or others.

[Have someone read the opening verse.]

I am overwhelmed with troubles and my life draws near to death. (Psalm 88:3 NIV)

- Would it surprise you to know that this verse was written by King David, the mighty warrior who was said to be "a man after God's own heart"? Would you expect such depressing talk from such a man of God?
- Have you ever felt like this? What was going on with you at the time?

[Have someone read the opening story about Lia and the paragraph after it.]

Lia's Story

I grew up in Nagorno-Karabakh, living most of my life in the city of Shusha. We were a happy family – not without our challenges, but nothing out of the ordinary. My husband had a good job, our kids were doing well in school, and our apartment was comfortable. We had many plans and dreams for the future and expected to live out our lives in peace and relative prosperity. That is, until the Azerbaijani blockade began in 2020.

You need to understand that the things I have experienced over the past few months have been beyond anything I could have imagined even a year ago. These horrible things can't be happening! On September 21, 2023 we had to quickly leave our apartment with only two suitcases – with no assurance that we'd ever be able to come back to it. My husband had to report for duty to maintain security at the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Every day I am afraid that he will be killed – THEN what would our family do? As we were trying to escape Shusha, we were shot at by Azerbaijani soldiers, and two artillery shells landed very near us. I felt the explosions and saw the shrapnel and debris landing all around our car. I was terrified that my children and I would be killed.

Now we are in Yerevan – a very nice older couple has taken us into their home, and we are extremely grateful. But I am still very afraid. I am not sleeping much at night – I just can't

handle the nightmares. Even though I am hundreds of miles from any fighting, I keep thinking that an Azerbaijani soldier will jump out from behind a parked car or doorway and begin shooting at me! Sometimes when I'm driving, it feels like I'm back on the road through the Lachin corridor, and I start driving crazy – way beyond the speed limit. It terrifies the children.

Why is this happening to me? Why can't I realize I and my kids are safe now, and just get over it?

What this woman is describing is heart-breaking, but common among those who have experienced trauma in the context of an armed conflict – which we refer to as "war-related trauma." She is reporting a set of symptoms that result from actual or threatened death or serious injury causing an emotional reaction involving intense fear, panic, helplessness, or horror.

- What were some of the emotions that you think Lia was feeling during this time?
- Can any of you identify with Lia?
- If any of you had to flee your home during the war(s), can you share with us what happened, and what emotions you struggled with during that time?

[Have someone read the next section, including the bullet list of ten causes of trauma reactions and the paragraph after the list, up to "Trauma Spectrum."]

What Causes Trauma Reactions?

A psychological shock or any kind of horrific event that makes a person think that they could be severely injured or killed can trigger a trauma reaction. Being in a war will certainly do it, but these reactions can be produced in a number of ways besides war:

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- Physical assault; carjacking
- Sexual abuse; rape
- Kidnapping; being held hostage
- Terrorism
- Torture
- Natural disasters (fire, flood, earthquake, avalanche, etc.)
- Man-made disasters (Chernobyl, arson, building or bridge collapse, etc.)
- Severe accident
- Receiving devastating news, such as a diagnosis of a life-threatening illness (for yourself or a loved one)
- Witnessing threatening, mutilating, or deadly events

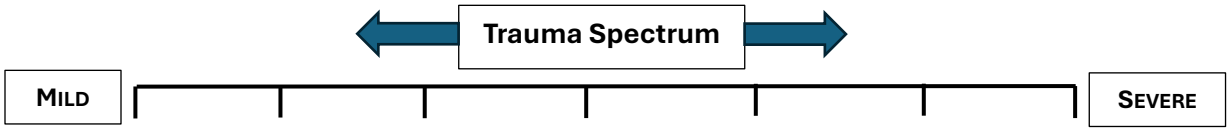
Trauma reactions can become especially severe or long-lasting when the trauma comes from an intentional human act, rather than from an accident or a natural disaster. In addition, enduring several traumatic events can have a cumulative effect. For instance, if a person was abused as a child, then witnessed a sibling die or was involved in a bad car accident, and then found herself in the middle of a war, it's more likely that person will develop trauma reactions and it could be more severe than others who endure only war-related trauma situations. Psychologists call this "Complex Trauma."

- You've all experienced war-related trauma. How many of you have experienced one or more of the additional traumatic events in this list – things that may have occurred even before the current war?
- How have those previous traumas made your war-related traumatic experiences even more difficult?

[Have someone read the next section about the "Trauma Spectrum" up to the paragraph just before "1. Intrusion (or Re-Experiencing) Symptoms."]

Trauma Spectrum

Two people who experience almost identical traumatic experiences can be affected quite differently. Think of trauma reactions as a spectrum. Where you land on that spectrum is determined by numerous factors, such as your previous life experiences, your psychological and physiological makeup, your personality type, your spiritual convictions (or lack thereof), the intensity and duration of what you experienced, among other issues. What severely impacts one person for a long period of time may have only a passing effect on another.



The "Mild" end of the trauma spectrum may include symptoms such as:

- Difficulties getting back into a "normal" mindset after trauma
- Frustration with spouse, children, friends, new circumstances
- Feeling distracted
- Difficulty focusing on tasks at hand
- Feeling agitated, irritable, jumpy
- Sleep difficulties

At this end of the spectrum, these symptoms don't interrupt a person's lifestyle to any great extent and go away in a few hours or days without much attention or therapy required.

- As we just read, the symptoms that are at the "Mild" end of the spectrum will usually go away within a few hours or days of a bad experience. I'm calling it simply a "bad experience" because it may not really rise to the level of what we would call "trauma" if the symptoms go away so quickly and easily. But if these same symptoms persist for more than a couple of weeks, we would consider your experience farther to the right end of the spectrum
- Can you think of a few examples of this "Mild" level of bad experiences in your life? Would you like to share them with the group?

- Now we will look at four classes of trauma symptoms that are at the "Severe" end of the spectrum. I'd like four volunteers who would read each class of symptoms. As they are being read, put a mark next to any symptoms that you have experienced in the past, or are currently experiencing.

  [Have four different people read the four classes of "Severe" symptoms on the next two pages, and a fifth person read the final two paragraphs of the section, up to "Disorder or Injury?"]

The "Severe" end of the spectrum is much more complicated. It could include symptoms that psychologists classify in four major areas and may persist for weeks, months, even years if not treated:[4]

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1. **Intrusion (or Re-Experiencing) Symptoms:** Memories and images of the traumatic events may spontaneously intrude into your mind, causing intense or prolonged distress or physiological reactions.

    - Nightmares
    - Sleepwalking, sleep fighting
    - Unwanted daytime memories, images, thoughts, daydreams
    - Flashbacks, feeling like you are reliving the traumatic event in real time
    - Being fixated on the traumatic event; living in the past
    - Spontaneous dissociative episodes (the present world seems to vanish, and you are suddenly back in the place of your traumatic experience)
    - Panic attacks, undefined distress, dread, or fear

2. **Avoidance Symptoms:** You try to avoid situations, people or events that remind you of your trauma. You feel numb, emotionless, withdrawing into yourself trying to shut out the painful memories and feelings.

    - Intentionally avoiding anyone, any place, or anything that reminds you of the traumatic event
    - Physical/emotional reaction to things that remind you of the traumatic event
    - Self-isolation, dread of social interaction
    - Anxiety in crowds, traffic
    - Very reluctant to talk about your traumatic event
    - Substance abuse to "numb" yourself (drugs, alcohol, food)

3. **Thinking and Mood Alterations:** You may be unable to recall key features of the traumatic event; have a very negative self-image and/or world view and strong negative emotions. You may be unable to show appropriate affection and emotions which causes friends and family to feel rejected by you.

    - Reduced cognitive ability (slow thinking, confusion, poor problem-solving, poor memory)
    - Inability to recall key features of the traumatic event(s)
    - Persistent, negative, trauma-related emotions (fear, horror, anger, helplessness, depression, despair, guilt, shame)
    - Persistent, negative, distorted self-image ("I am bad.")
    - Persistent, negative, distorted view of the world ("The world is out to get me.")
    - Persistent, distorted blame of self or others for causing the traumatic event(s)

[4] The four major areas and descriptions are from the American Psychiatric Association's reference book: *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – Text Revision, Fifth Edition (DSM-5-TR); American Psychiatric Association Pub. Inc.; March, 2022; www.APPI.org.*

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- Lack of interest or motivation regarding employment, recreation, former hobbies, sex, exercise
- Relationships that were once close and even intimate are now strained, cold, distant, requiring too much energy to maintain
- Neglect/abandonment of personal care, hygiene, nutrition
- Emotional numbness, flat, can't get happy or sad, feeling "dead" inside
- Inability to trust others

4. **Arousal and Reactivity Alterations:** Fearing further trauma, you are always on the alert, jumpy, angry, irritable, and find it very difficult to sleep.

- Anger, irritability, disagreements quickly escalate into hot arguments, shouting, physical fights, rage
- Hypervigilance (always on guard), always feeling like you need to be armed with a knife or gun
- Easily startled, reacting to loud noises, jumpy
- Substance abuse to "un-numb" yourself – you would rather feel "too much" than nothing
- Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep; insomnia; night sweats
- Accelerated heart rate, rapid breathing, heart palpitations for no good reason
- Physical fatigue
- Question/abandon faith; feeling of being betrayed or abandoned by God; mad at God
- Homicidal thoughts
- Suicidal thoughts, attempts
- Anniversary reaction (becoming anxious nearing the monthly or yearly anniversary of the traumatic event)
- Becoming addicted to adrenaline (taking unnecessary risks; dangerous behavior)
- Self-mutilation, cutting, excessive tattooing (just to feel *something)*

No one has all the symptoms listed above. You may have a few from one category, a few from another, none from another, etc. Every one of us is wired differently, and the symptoms we develop will be a unique mix. Also, it is possible that these symptoms may not show up until months or even years after your traumatic event. This is called "delayed onset."

Just because your trauma reactions are at the "severe" end of the spectrum doesn't mean you are not as strong or brave as others. It's all a matter of physical and psychological responses that you have very little control over.

- I'm sure that most – if not all – of you put check marks next to several of the symptoms listed. Would any of you be willing to share one or two of your symptoms that concern you the most?

[Have someone read the first two paragraphs in the next section, up to "If You Are Struggling with…"]

Disorder or Injury?

Those who experience symptoms at the "Severe" end of the spectrum for more than a month are said to have "Post-traumatic Stress Disorder" (PTSD) by psychologists. However, a growing

number of professionals prefer the term **"Post-traumatic Stress Injury" (PTSI)** – which we agree with. When applying the term "Disorder" to an individual, it implies that he or she merely has a psychological problem – "It's all in your head." Yet it has been known for many years that this condition is more than that. It is true that there are psychological components, but the root cause is actually a biological trauma that affects the nervous system, and therefore affects a person's mindset, behavior, and reactions. There are also spiritual elements that we will be discussing throughout this resource.

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Referring to someone as "disordered" can stigmatize them, have a strong negative effect on their self-image, cause others (and themselves) to think they are "broken" beyond repair, and make them reluctant to take the initiative to heal. But we all understand that an "injury" can heal. For these reasons, we will use the term **Post-traumatic Stress Injury** throughout this resource.

- Would it bother any of you to be labeled as "Disordered" because of the trauma you have experienced *[as in "Post-traumatic Stress Disorder]?*
- How does identifying your condition as "Injured" rather than "Disordered" change your self-perception?
- How do you think it would change the self-perception of a soldier?

[Have someone read this list of seven facts about PTSI in the next section up to "A God-Designed Defense Mechanism"]

If You Are Struggling with War-Related Trauma or PTSI, You Should Know . . .

- PTSI is not rare or unusual. It is a *common* reaction to an *uncommon* event.
- Hundreds of thousands of men and women all over the world are struggling with it just as you are.
- It is *normal* to be affected negatively by war, pain, atrocity, and horror.
- Facing death changes a person – it would be *abnormal* if you were not affected. It shows that you are human and that what happens in war matters to you.
- You are not weak, cowardly, or strange – you are very literally *wounded.* You are *injured.* Wounds and injuries can be *healed*.
- PTSI has been called a wound of the soul and a wound of the identity.
- If a person was shot in the foot, you would not expect them to be able to run and jump any time soon. In the same way, a person with a wound to his or her *soul* will also be out of action for a while. Healing takes time.

- Which of these seven facts is new to you – something you hadn't heard or considered before?
- Which one gives you the most comfort and encouragement?

[Have someone read the next section up to "But No Matter Who You Are…"]

A God-Designed Defense Mechanism

One of God's top plans when He created us was that we would be equipped to defend ourselves and survive in a wide variety of dangerous situations. To this end, He equipped us with an amazing set of danger-response mechanisms.

There is a place in our brains called the brain stem or lower brain. This part of our brain controls all automatic life functions, such as our breathing, digestion, and heartbeat. The brain stem will always override our higher brain – the part of our brain that we think with, make decisions with, etc. For instance, it doesn't matter how badly you might want to do it, you cannot make your heart stop beating just by thinking about it. You can hold your breath for a little while, but before long your lower brain once again takes over and *forces* you to breathe.

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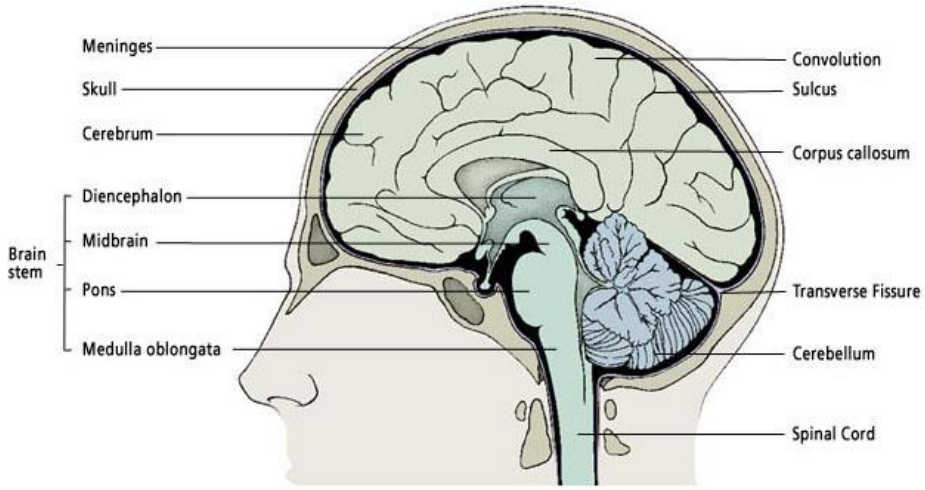

When we encounter something that we feel threatens our life, a flood of hormones is dumped into our blood stream. Our lower brain commands our heart to beat faster, our lungs to pump harder, and gets the rest of our body ready to either fight or run. Thousands of small muscles in our arms and legs tighten up, sending blood away from our skin and into our muscles for endurance and quick movement. Because of this, if our extremities are wounded, we won't bleed as badly. We get a surge of energy, strength, and quickness. Suddenly we can run, jump, kick, or punch like we never have before.

But something else happens deep inside our brains, too. It's like an alarm goes off and drowns out our normal tendency to analyze what's happening or to get emotional about it. It screams, *"Less thinking, more action!"* Our brain starts recording very strong and clear memories of what is happening, probably so that we will remember this event and avoid it in the future.

If the danger continues to threaten us, our brain stem takes over completely. It's live-or-die time. With this part of our brain in control, nothing else matters. It automatically directs the rest of the body in very complex but focused ways to do whatever it takes to survive.

- Have any of you experienced a trauma so severe that your brain and body have clicked into the defense/survival mode described in this section? Would any of you like to share what happened?

  [If no one responds, skip the three other questions below and ask:]

  - Why do you think it's important for our brains to scream at us, "Less thinking, more action!" when faced with a traumatic crisis?
  - Referring to the last paragraph, what do you think can happen when we come to "live-or-die" time? What sort of actions might a person do at this point to try to stay alive?

    [Possible answers: go berserk in fighting, run away, abandon comrades in order to get to safety, freeze…]
- What did it feel like when your body shifted to that defense mode?
- What did it feel like after the threat and danger had passed?
- Would you say that these defense mechanisms may have minimized your injuries, or kept you alive?

[Have someone read the next section up to "Getting Stuck in Crisis-Alert Mode"]

But No Matter Who You Are, It's Important to Know Two Things:

1. God gave you this reactive pathway so that you would be able to do whatever was necessary to survive. It kept you alive. God knows that when our lives are threatened this behavior needs to come out or we could die. At that point, all the analysis, dignity, intelligence, and politeness in the world is absolutely useless.
2. No matter how hard you might have tried, you couldn't have stopped this reaction. Can you stop your heartbeat just by thinking about it? No. Neither are we able to control ourselves when our brains have clicked into this mode. It's nothing to be ashamed about.

If you are currently experiencing war-related trauma or PTSI, there are many reasons to take hope! For *years* people who have studied victims of overwhelming stress and trauma have been amazed by the resiliency of these survivors. Refugee camp occupants, prisoners of war freed after years of captivity, terrorized hostages – so many are eventually able to cope and experience victory, rather than spiraling into a pattern of defeat. Many war trauma survivors have actually used their experiences to strengthen and enrich their lives – and the lives of others. God can enable you to rebuild your shattered life, career, and family – even as you wrestle with the bitterest of memories.

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- Do any of you feel embarrassed by what you did during these self-defense trauma reactions? Many soldiers do, but many non-soldiers could too. If so, the section we just read is to try to help you understand that your reactions were normal and good, because God programmed them into you to keep you alive.
- Because of the trauma you have experienced, you may feel depressed and a bit hopeless right now. But on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 meaning "No way possible" and 10 meaning, "I'm positive it will happen," put a number on how likely you think that eventually you will come to a place of strength, stability, and be able to strengthen and enrich the lives of others.
- No matter what number you picked, I firmly believe that all of you could pick 10! It may not seem like it right now, but God is very good at using bad experiences to bring about good results!

[Have someone read the next section, up to "What To Do with Flashbacks…"]

Getting Stuck in Crisis-Alert Mode.

You might be saying, *"OK, the crisis is over now. God's danger-response mechanism worked, and I survived. So why can't I move on? Why do I keep reliving what happened?"*

Often, a trauma survivor can go through a short period of recovery time and return pretty close to "normal." But if the traumatizing event was very violent and life-threatening, or if there were multiple events, the brain doesn't want to leave this crisis-alert mode. Your brain knows that it just had a very close call, and it is determined to be ready to react if the danger comes by again. Good idea – except if it gets *stuck* in that mode, which is essentially what PTSI is.

Whenever your brain senses that it's getting near the "scene of the crime" via some sensory trigger (such as a smell, a sound, a sight, a memory), it quickly opens up the photo album it created during the earlier traumatic event and puts on an intense show to remind you that you don't want to go there again! *"Are you nuts!?? We almost died when we were there last time! Get away!"*

If one doesn't process the traumatic event later in a safe place by talking about it with someone, allowing the emotions that were suppressed to come up and be experienced, analyzing them, getting angry about the injustice of the experience, but then releasing that anger and bitterness, they will stay stuck in this condition indefinitely.

- This is a condition that is very concerning for a lot of people who have experienced trauma. The danger has passed, the person is in a safe place, but her body and mind wouldn't let her relax and move on. It sometimes can even produce what we call "Flashbacks."
- Can any of you identify with this experience? Have any of you ever had a flashback? Would you like to share your experience with the group?
- It may be that none of you have ever had a formal "flashback," but I'm sure there are times when memories of your trauma come back to you, and your anxiety spikes. What are some of the things that "trigger" these memories and anxieties in you?

[Have one or two people read the next section, up to "What Do We Mean by 'Healed'?…"]

What To Do with Flashbacks or Panic Attacks

If a certain person, place, thing, or memory sends your mind back to your trauma event in a way that makes you feel you are actually experiencing it again, there are several things you can do to bring yourself back to the reality of the present. You can also use these techniques to help others who are panicking:

- **Pray,** asking God to open your eyes and help you see the truth of where you are.
- **Employ "Grounding Techniques,"** meant to help your mind realize where you truly are, and that you are *not* back in the place of your trauma event. These involve using your five physical senses:
    - Look around you and quickly "inventory" what you see. List things out loud, such as "I see my bed, my desk, a window, a tree outside, a bookshelf, my dog…" Name people who are with you, or people in photographs you see.

- Run your hand across the carpet, wall, grass, a tree trunk. Tell yourself what you're feeling – out loud: "This is the wall in my bedroom." "This is the grass in front of my house."
- Play some of your favorite music – loud! It doesn't have to be soothing, it just needs to be familiar.
- Put some mint or lemon or some other strong flavor on your tongue. Smell it. Taste it.
- Hold an ice cube in your mouth or hand, or thrust your hands or feet into very cold water.
- Inhale some of your favorite perfume, a flower, cloves, or some other strong smell.

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- **Breathe deeply, intentionally.** When a person is panicking, they often forget to breathe or breathe too quickly and the lack of oxygen makes their body panic even more. Try one of these breathing techniques:
  - **4-7-8 breathing:** Inhale through your nose for 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds, exhale through your mouth for 8 seconds. Count in your mind.
  - **Box breathing:** Inhale through your nose for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, exhale through your mouth for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds.
  - **Alternate nostril breathing:** Place your right thumb over your right nostril. Inhale and exhale 8 times through your left nostril. Repeat on the other side.
- **Move.** Walk around, stretch, dance, clap your hands, jump up and try to touch something high, do deep knee bends, rub your hands on your legs. Breathe deeply while doing these things.
- **Recite a positive affirmation**, such as "I'm OK. I'm in control. I'm here in _____, not in _____. I'm safe. This will pass."

- All of these practices can help a person come out of a flashback. Let's try one of the breathing exercises right now – the 4-7-8 breathing.

  [Go through the exercise three or four times, counting out loud for them. Inhale through the nose, exhale though the mouth. Afterwards, ask them how it made them feel. Did they find it relaxing, calming?]

[Have someone read the next section, up to "The Take Away"]

What Do We Mean by "Healed?" What Can We Hope For?

We talk of being "healed" from war-related trauma. What does this look like? Will you ever become symptom-free? To be honest, it's not likely. The trauma you experienced is part of your personal history. It is a bell that can't get "un-rung." You will probably always feel a sense of loss, grief, pain, and anxiety as you think back to your times of trauma. But it doesn't have to rule your life. You can come to the point where PTSI is no longer "driving the bus" – you are! You can come to the place where your symptoms are muted, and far less intense and no longer life-controlling.

At that point, the pain you feel when you recall your traumatic experiences can become something like a memorial to what – or who – you have lost. As your trauma symptoms lose their power, they can become a positive reminder that *you survived,* and you are an experienced, resourceful person who can help others who are in crisis.

- It's important to define terms to have realistic expectations. By "Healed," do we mean "No more trauma symptoms"?
- What is the main thing we are working towards in our trauma healing? *[That our symptoms are muted, and no longer control us.]*
- Of what benefit is it to only have our symptoms muted, and not totally gone? Why could this be part of God's plan for us?
- How would the following scripture passage be relevant to this question?

  Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Corinthians 1:3,4)

[Have someone read "The Take Away."]

The Take-Away

Whenever a person experiences trauma, he or she will be hit in three ways: physically, mentally, and spiritually. We deal with the physical wounds with physical solutions, the mental wounds with good, sound principles of psychology, and the spiritual wounds in ways that engage our Creator and Comforter. But no matter what, it's important to know that God has anticipated *all* of these wounds and has devised effective ways to deal with them long ago – even while He was creating us. Whether you are at the "Mild" end of the Trauma Spectrum or the "Severe" end, what will *not* help is to remain passive, do nothing, and just *hope* they go away. In that scenario, they will likely get worse. "Hope" is nice, but hope is not a strategy.

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Take action! Take the initiative! Intentionally cooperate in the healing process with your Healer!

What are some ways you can do what this Take-Away advocates? How do you plan to "Take Action?'

[Have someone (or you) read the closing Prayer.]

Prayer

Father, as You say in Your Word, "I am awesomely and wonderfully made." (Psalm 139:14). I praise You for Your amazing creativity when You designed and built me – and especially for the danger response system You have given me. Thank You for giving me the ability to respond quickly and efficiently to life-threatening situations. But now I need to move past those experiences. I need for You please to help me come to a point where the symptoms of my trauma no longer have such a strong influence on my life. Bring me to a place of strength, stability, and healing – physically, psychologically, and spiritually. Help me to know Your peace once again. Let me know what I should do to cooperate with Your plan for my healing.

In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

LEADER'S GUIDE

Women, War, & Trauma – Chapter 6

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Derivative Stress: When Trauma is Contagious

By Rahnella Adsit

Objectives of this Chapter:

- To familiarize group members with the concept of "Derivative Stress," including the conditions of "Secondary Traumatic Stress," "Caregiver Burnout," and "Compassion Fatigue."
- To lead group members through a self-assessment exercise to
  (a) help them become familiar with the various symptoms that Derivative Stress can produce and
  (b) to determine their own current level of stress.
- To help group members develop a personal strategy for healing from Derivative Stress.
- To give group members a practical way of warding off Derivative Stress through deep breathing exercises.

[Have someone read the quote by Dr. Stamm below, and the next two paragraphs after it.]

There is a soul weariness that comes with caring.
From daily doing business with the handiwork of fear.
Sometimes it lives at the edges of one's life,
brushing against hope and barely making its presence known.
At other times, it comes crashing in,
overtaking one with its vivid images of another's terror
with its profound demands for attention; nightmares, strange fears,
and generalized hopelessness.

~ Dr. Beth Hudnall Stamm, PhD

Are you feeling that "soul weariness?" Honestly, right now, I am feeling the weight of that. We are living in perilous times in which, at every turn, we are faced with unrelenting human suffering from war, including: separation of families, destruction of homes and communities, rape, torture, injuries and death.

Caring for others is emotionally, spiritually and physically demanding. Secondary Traumatic Stress is a result of being indirectly affected by someone else's firsthand trauma. The deeper our relationship is with that person, the more likely their trauma will infect us and we may find ourselves experiencing symptoms similar to Post-traumatic Stress. These symptoms can be subtle and insidious, so in this chapter we will focus on identifying the problems and defining the conditions known as **Secondary Traumatic Stress**, **Caregiver Burnout** and **Compassion Fatigue**. Next, you will be provided a self-assessment tool to help you measure your level of

stress. After that, I will help you create your own strategy of compassionate self-care. Svetlana's struggles were severe, but maybe some of you could relate to them…

Before we get to Svetlana's story…

- How many of you can identify with the "soul weariness" described by Dr. Stamm in the opening quote? Can you describe your experience with it? What events have brought you to this place?
- How would you describe the difference between Primary Trauma and Secondary Trauma? Could anyone give an example of each?

[Have someone read Svetlana's story, up to "Defining the Problem."

Svetlana's Story

I was a nurse working in a hospital in Artsakh. The Azerbaijani invasion of our country was only a few days old, and we didn't know what to expect. If war came to our area, we wanted to at least be able to provide first aid for the wounded. We did all we could to prepare. But besides the threat of war, people were already having difficulty finding food because of the months-long blockade, so everyone was weak, cold, and their immune systems were already quite suppressed.

Then one day, as the fighting got closer to our city, the war victims began flooding in. I was becoming overwhelmed, not only by the number of cases, but also by the variety of injuries – gunshot wounds, broken limbs, missing limbs, burns, deep contusions, lacerations, concussions, sprains, dislocated joints, and more. There was no pause and no rest. One of my nurse friends was devastated when her two brothers were brought in, one already dead, the other one dying shortly after arriving.

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Adding to the chaos, dozens of people were crowding in searching for missing relatives. Meanwhile, our staff was being diminished at the worst possible time. One of our doctors was hit by a sniper. One of our nurses who desperately wanted to come in to the hospital to help finally made it in – by ambulance, because she had been shot in the back.

Then, a week into the fighting, the gasoline depot at Berkadzor exploded. Over 200 were killed, and hundreds injured. The flood of casualties we had seen in the past week was nothing compared to the tsunami of burned and mutilated people that we now had to deal with. The conditions because almost unbearable. The floors were slippery with blood and furatsilin solution (antiseptic). With the noise of emergency medicine, the shouted commands of medical personnel, the pained groans and screams – it seemed like I was in hell.

We could never have anticipated this level of tumult. After only a couple of hours, we simply ran out of medicine and supplies. People began dying one after another – there was nothing we could do. It broke my heart.

A few days later my family and I left Artsakh. No matter how much my mind and heart wanted to return to the hospital to help, my feet simply refused to go. I had seen enough pain and death in those few days to last a lifetime. My depression became very deep. I feel like I left my soul in Artsakh. How can I even *hope* to know happiness again?

- Had Svetlana been in the actual fighting? Had she been physically wounded or injured? *[No.]* Then what was her problem? Why was she having such a hard time?

  [Svetlana was experiencing Derivative Stress. The pain and trauma of those around her were affecting her at a deep psychological and spiritual level.]
- What do you think was the biggest frustration for Svetlana during this time?
- Can you identify the physical, emotional, and spiritual stresses and trauma Svetlana experienced?
- Svetlana eventually left her homeland. How did she describe her reason for leaving?

  [She was tired of seeing so much pain and death. She could not find peace. This is a very common outcome for someone who experiences Derivative Stress for a long period of time. They feel desperate about needing to get away from the chaos and get to a place of peace.]

[Have someone read the next section up to "Derivative Stress."]

Defining the Problem

As humans, we have a fundamental need to name things. It helps create order in our world and gives us at least some feeling of being in control. For example, let's say you have pain in your lower back and you know something is physically wrong with you. You finally make an appointment with your doctor, she does an examination, perhaps runs a series of tests, and then she gives you a diagnosis: "You have a herniated disk." Isn't it a relief to know that there truly is something wrong with you? You weren't imagining it, and now that you know what it is, with the help from your doctor you can now develop a strategy to deal with it. That's what I am hoping to provide for you today – by naming what you are experiencing, you can develop your own strategy so that you can start on your own personal journey to healing.

There is an increasing amount of study being done on conditions known as Secondary Traumatic Stress, Caregiver Burnout and Compassion Fatigue. For the purpose of brevity, my husband Chris and I combined these three conditions under one category, **Derivative Stress.**[5] This is a non-medical term describing strong, long-lasting emotional reactions which pull their impact from trauma that happened to another person. When you think about it, if you truly care for someone, their pain *should* impact you! As St. Augustine wrote:

Anyone who looks with anguish on evils so great
must acknowledge the tragedy of it all;
and if anyone experiences them without anguish,
his conditions are even more tragic
since he remains serene by losing his humanity.

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- Have any of you heard the terms in this second paragraph: "Secondary Traumatic Stress, Caregiver Burnout, Compassion Fatigue, and Derivative Stress?" If so, what is your current understanding of them?
- How would understanding these terms help you to be better able to address your trauma, or the trauma that your friends and family might experience? *[They might not know anything about them right now – and that's ok. They'll learn about them in the next section.]*
- Would anyone like to put St. Augustine's quote into modern language? What is the point he was trying to make?

[5] Non-medical term coined by authors, Chris and Rahnella Adsit, intended to encompass the three familiar and medically well-defined conditions that are listed.

[Have three different people read the definitions of the three conditions in the next section, up to "Derivative Stress Symptom Inventory"]

Derivative Stress comes in three forms that are very similar, but have subtle differences:

1. **Secondary Traumatic Stress** – Is the natural consequence of caring between two people, of whom one has been initially traumatized and the other is negatively affected by the first person's traumatic experiences. The second person (who may be you) can have symptoms that mimic the other person's Post-traumatic Stress symptoms,[6] or you can exhibit your own symptoms of stress.

2. **Caregiver Burnout** – This comes as a result of failing to practice self-care habits. The consequence of this is that it will increase your levels of stress, which will impact your health. Over time, the likely outcome of not taking care of yourself is burnout. Burnout is a state of emotional exhaustion that results from your perceived sense of failing, wearing out, or feeling totally used-up due to too many demands on your energy, strength, or resources.[7] This can be characterized by physical, mental and emotional exhaustion, depleted energy, depersonalization, lowered work efficiency, decreased motivation, pessimism, cynicism and apathy.[8]

3. **Compassion Fatigue** – Is the combination of Secondary Trauma and Burnout. The doorway is our empathy. It comes from a deep awareness of the suffering of another, coupled with a fervent wish to relieve it.[9] It is the result of absorbing *their* pain and internalizing *their* emotions. The outcome of this is feelings of hopelessness, a lessening of compassion, a pervasive negative attitude, and the development of new feelings of incompetency and self-doubt when the observed suffering cannot be relieved.

- Could someone tell us the differences between these three conditions?
- How does someone come to the point of suffering Secondary Traumatic Stress?
- How does someone come to the point of suffering Caregiver Burnout?

  [Make the point that this is a problem when people don't exercise proper self-care. It is preventable if the caring person will just recognize that they can't "do it all," and must put limits on what they commit to. In addition, they need to exercise basic physical, psychological, and spiritual self-care protocols.]

- How does someone come to the point of suffering Compassion Fatigue? How can our empathy – normally a very *good* thing when it comes to caring for others – become dangerous to us?

  [Make the point that this is a problem when people internalize the pain of those they are trying to minister to and want desperately to relieve it. We must realize that God is the only one who can truly heal the deep pain of trauma. If we are so compassionate that we think we can take on the role of their healer, we will fail and then look down on ourselves as inadequate and even foolish, having not lived up to our expectations. Through our love, consistency, and open discussions with them, we can create a context for God to have optimal access to their souls for healing, but we must not think it all depends on us.]

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[6] Dr. Charles Figley (Ed), *Compassion Fatigue – Coping with Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder in Those Who Treat the Traumatized* (NY: Brunner-Routledge, 1995). p. 11

[7] *Causes and Symptoms of Caregiver Burnout.* https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/about/community_health/johns-hopkins-bayview/services/called_to_care/causes_symptoms_caregiver_burnout.html (2022).

[8] C C. Maslach & M. P. Leiter: "Stress and Burnout: the Critical Research," *in C.L. Cooper (Ed.), Handbook of Stress Medicine and Health* (Lancaster: CRC Press, 2005). pp. 155-172

[9] Dr. Charles Figley (Ed.), pp. xv, 2,3,14,15.

[Have someone read through the "Derivative Stress Symptom Inventory" opening paragraph, and then have various people read through each cluster of symptoms. Encourage participants to check off any symptoms they have experienced in the past six months. Stop after each cluster to ask if anyone has any questions or needs clarification about anything listed in that set.]

Derivative Stress Symptom Inventory

In professional literature, each type of stress has a fairly well-defined set of symptoms, but there is a lot of overlap between them. In this chapter, we'll combine the symptoms of the three forms of Derivative Stress into the following list. It doesn't matter at this moment that you know which specific "brand" of stress you are experiencing. But it will be useful to know how strong it is currently affecting you. They are organized into six general classes of symptoms. Put a check mark next to any that you are experiencing.

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EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS

- ❑ Feeling powerless
- ❑ Anxiety
- ❑ Guilt, shame
- ❑ Anger, rage, irritability
- ❑ Survivor guilt
- ❑ Shutting down
- ❑ Numbness
- ❑ Fearfulness, dread, horror
- ❑ Helplessness
- ❑ Sadness, depression
- ❑ Feeling worthless
- ❑ Hypersensitivity
- ❑ Emotional roller coaster
- ❑ Overwhelmed
- ❑ Depleted
- ❑ Bottled up emotions

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

- ❑ Shock
- ❑ Sweating
- ❑ Rapid heartbeat
- ❑ Breathing difficulties
- ❑ Aches and pains
- ❑ Dizziness
- ❑ Impaired immune system
- ❑ Chronic lack of energy
- ❑ Sleepy all the time
- ❑ Poor self-care (i.e. hygiene, appearance)
- ❑ Gastrointestinal distress

COGNITIVE SYMPTOMS

- ❑ Diminished concentration
- ❑ Confusion
- ❑ Forgotten appointments
- ❑ Chronic lateness
- ❑ Loss of meaning
- ❑ Decreased self-esteem
- ❑ Nightmares
- ❑ Flashbacks
- ❑ Apathy
- ❑ Rigid, uncompromising
- ❑ Disorientation
- ❑ Thoughts of self-harm
- ❑ Brain Fog
- ❑ Thoughts of harming others
- ❑ Preoccupation with trauma
- ❑ Self-doubt
- ❑ Perfectionism
- ❑ Minimization (nothing really matters)

BEHAVIORAL SYMPTOMS

- ❑ Impatient
- ❑ Irritable, moody
- ❑ Withdrawn
- ❑ Regression (reverting to an immature level)
- ❑ Sleep disturbances
- ❑ Appetite changes
- ❑ Nightmares
- ❑ Hypervigilance
- ❑ Elevated startle response
- ❑ Substance abuse (drugs, alcohol/food)
- ❑ Loosing/forgetting things
- ❑ Accident-prone
- ❑ Self-harm behaviors (i.e. self-mutilation, cutting, eating disorders)
- ❑ Compulsiveness (i.e. over eating, gambling, sex, spending, workaholic, thrill-seeking)

INTERPERSONAL SYMPTOMS

- ❑ Withdrawn
- ❑ Feeling vulnerable, unsafe
- ❑ Decreased interest in intimacy, sex
- ❑ Mistrust, suspicious of others
- ❑ Isolation from friends
- ❑ Need to control others
- ❑ Loss of personal control and freedom
- ❑ Changes in parenting (i.e. overprotective, abusive, critical, disinterested, etc.)
- ❑ Intolerance
- ❑ Loneliness
- ❑ Projection of anger or blame
- ❑ Verbally, emotionally, physically abusive or combative

SPIRITUAL SYMPTOMS

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- ❑ Doubts concerning one's values or beliefs
- ❑ Feeling angry or bitter toward God
- ❑ Feeling far from God, unloved, abandoned
- ❑ Weak in faith
- ❑ Feeling God is unresponsive or unconcerned
- ❑ Feel like God is punishing me
- ❑ Pervasive hopelessness
- ❑ Have a God complex (think it's your job to fix everybody)
- ❑ Neglecting spiritual disciplines
- ❑ Questioning the meaning of life

[Have someone – or you – read the following final paragraph in this section.]

Obviously, this symptom inventory will not give you an official diagnosis from a professional regarding your level of Derivative Stress, but seeing a counselor is hard to do in a time of war! I've shared this long list of symptoms, not to make you feel overwhelmed, but to help you see that your symptoms are a normal response to the stressors you are encountering as you care for traumatized people. Doing this exercise will give you a general idea of the mildness or severity of your current level of stress so that you can develop your own plan for compassionate self-care.

- Let's do some quick counting just for fun! Count the number of boxes you checked. Who has checked the most boxes? …Congratulations! You have won today's Derivative Stress High-Achiever Award!
- We don't mean to make light of what can be a very serious matter. But we hope you see that – from the number of boxes that people checked – Derivative Stress can be a quiet, insidious condition that can sneak up on *anybody* and affect them before they realize what's happening. The authors have been amazed to know that many people in full-time Christian ministry have often said to us after completing the inventory, "I checked almost every box!"
- Were any of you surprised by the number of boxes you checked? What do you think that means?
- Look over your inventory and put a special mark next to <u>three symptoms</u> that bother you the most. (You'll use these three symptoms in the next exercise.)

  [Give them a few minutes, and then ask if a few people would be willing to share the three symptoms they came up with.] In the next section, we'll be looking at some practical ways to counter these symptoms.

[Leader: read the paragraphs in the next section and take the group through the "Strategy" exercise one subsection at a time. Give them a few minutes as they think through and fill in their blanks.]

[When the exercise is complete, ask if there are any who would like to share their "Strategy" with the rest of the group.]

Developing a Strategy for Recovery

Dealing with stress is no simple mater. As my friend Andi, who was a combat medic during the Iraq war told me, "Rahnella, you MUST take care of yourself first, because you are no good to anybody dead." There is no magic wand, and no simple plan that will restore you to your pre-stress status. It will take hard work, intentionality, and commitment on your part. In partnership with God, you can do this! Never forget that *He is your Healer* (Exodus 15:26) *and awesome in power* (Psalm 68:35)! Let's get to work!

- Look over your list of symptoms. Which three concern you the most?
    1. _____
    2. _____
    3. _____
- For each of those three symptoms, write out a goal statement – how you would like to be function regarding that issue with the next two to four months. It doesn't have to be something you achieve through your own effort. What would you like to see happen? What do you want to see God do?
    1. _____
    2. _____
    3. _____
- List what resources you will need (and can find) to help you accomplish your goals:
- List potential hindrances to reaching your goals:

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- Share your goals with an accountability partner who will coach you and help you keep your commitment: Who will that be?
- Last step - activate your plan! Make sure you regularly evaluate your plan with your accountability partner. Daily commit to your goals in prayer asking for God's help and guidance, and don't forget to notice and appreciate the changes you are making! That awareness is a gift from God which will positively contribute to your well-being.

Would someone like to share the "Strategy for Recovery" they came up with?

[Have someone read the first three paragraphs in the next section, including the passage in Mark 12:28-32 up to "Most messages on these verses…']

Managing the High Cost of Caring

I have been in full-time ministry for more than 45 years! Loving and caring for others has brought me much joy, it has increased my empathy, compassion, and personal growth, and of course, there are the eternal, heavenly rewards! But, like our savior Jesus, it has also given me deep wounds and I bear many battle scars. If there is one thing I could pick to pass along to you that has helped me the most, that would be for you to learn the spiritual discipline of **"practicing the pause."**

In the midst of our daily battles, it is so easy to become busy Marthas (Luke 10:38-43): taking care of everything and everyone, neglecting ourselves and our relationship with God. The war with Azerbaijan continues and the adrenaline rush has faded, and now the deeper works begins. Recently, I read something I think is profound by Bruce Crowe on Facebook, he said: "Relationships, community, no matter what we find ourselves DOING, we are only sustained by BEING." How do we do that? In the gospel of Mark, Jesus gives us a clue in a conversation He has with a Bible teacher:

> *And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that He* [Jesus] *answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."* (Mark 12:28-32 ESV)

- In his quote, Bruce Crowe makes the point that "no matter what we are DOING we can only be sustained by our BEING." What do you think he meant by that?

  [That what we DO will always flow out of who we ARE. The closer we walk with Jesus, and the more we are transformed into His image, the better able we will be to DO what needs to be done.]
- What does Jesus' statement about the two greatest commandments have to do us being able to sustain our ministries and manage the cost of caring?

  [While loving God – and obeying Him – is #1, the second most important commandment is to love our neighbor – which is a good encapsulation of what ministry is all about. Keeping our relationship with God foundational in our lives is the only way to empower our ability to minister to others.]
- In addition, Jesus commanded us to love your neighbor "as yourself." This assumes that we would indeed love ourselves. But some of us don't do that very well. What are some important aspects of "loving yourself?"
  - What do you think could happen if we *don't* do these things?

    [It could lead to Burnout and Compassion Fatigue.]
- In light of this, how good are you at "loving yourself?" How do you need to improve?

[Have one or two people read the rest of this section, up to "The Benefits of Learning to Breathe Deeply."]

Most messages on these verses focus on the two commandments which are to love God and to love our neighbors. But it really begins with the scribe's question, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" In Hebrew, the word for commandment is *mitzvah* which means "command" or "duty." The root word of *mizvah* is *tzavta*, which means "connection." When we fulfill God's commands, we are strengthening our connection with God and with people. It strengthens our bonds of love.

In answering the scribe's question, Jesus replies with the beginning of one of the most important prayers in Israelite tradition, it is called the Shema or Sh'ma, referring to the first word in the prayer: "Hear," which is *Sh'ma* in Hebrew. It is their confession of faith which forms an integral part of their morning and evening prayer services.

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> *Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (Deuteronomy 6:4,5)*

Think about that. They stop to pray twice a day. Why do you think they do that?

Jesus responds to the scribe's question with "*Hear, O Israel*." Another way to translate this verse is: 'Stop and listen up, Israel!' In Hebrew, that listening means to allow God's words to sink in, provide understanding and generate a response. He wants us to hear and obey. Jesus continues His instruction with: "*The LORD our God, the LORD is one."* Another way to state it is 'Our God is YHWH, YHWH alone is God!'[10] The essence of what He is saying is this: we need to take the time to cultivate our relationship with God by stopping, listening and obeying. In John 14:21 it says: "*The one who has My commands and keeps them, that's the one who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him."* As we obey, Jesus says: *"I will reveal Myself to him."*

This passage also tells us something that is very important for some of us to hear, and that is: YHWH is God and we are not! If you are anything like me, a do-er and a fixer, this is great news! I think for us, the first step to keeping balance in our life is to recognize that we're not God, and that's okay. We don't have to put pressure on ourselves thinking that the world is depending on us to keep spinning!

So how do you carve out time to stop and listen? Don't panic! It's as simple as breathing!

We'll get into the issue of "Spiritual Breathing" in a minute. But before that…

- The point was made that we need to be intentional about setting aside time to "stop and listen." If we are not intentional about this, what do you think will happen?
- What are some ways that *you* set aside time to "stop and listen?"
- Besides our normally-scheduled daily devotions or going to church or Bible studies, we are now going to learn about a way to "practice the pause" and take some time to "stop and listen" spontaneously throughout the day.

[10] YHWH is the Hebrew name for Himself that God revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14. This is known as the "tetragrammaton" and it includes the four consonants of His name – no vowels. It means "I Am that I Am." It is God's most holy name for Himself – so Holy that the Jews wouldn't even pronounce it out loud. Hence, when writing it they only used the consonants so that no one would accidentally say it out loud. Most scholars think it is pronounced "Yahweh" or "Yahway."

[Have someone read the first paragraph of the next section and the bullet-point list, up to "The Where and When to Practice Breathing" (remind them they don't need to read the Bible references out loud).]

The Benefits of Learning to Breathe Deeply

When we are under stress we tend to breathe shallowly, so learning to breathe deeply provides us with physical, mental and emotional health benefits such as: managing our stress levels, helping us focus, relieving pain, improving our immunity, decreasing our anxiety, increasing our energy levels, and sleeping better. We call this "Spiritual Breathing." As you prepare to go back into the fray of battle, there are several reasons you need to stop, breathe, and learn to listen throughout the day:

- It prepares you for the battles in your life (Isaiah 26:3).
- It reveals His presence (Exodus 33:14, Deuteronomy 31:6).
- It will give God an opportunity to equip you and train you for the fight (Psalm 144:1-3).
- It opens the communication lines so you can receive His latest orders (Joshua 5:13-14).
- It offers you healing from the wounds of battle (Matthew 11:28).
- Best of all, enjoying God's presence pulls you out of all that "doing mindset" and into simply "being" who God created you.
- Last of all, if you don't hit the pause button, the button will hit you! In the midst of the battle, that's a bullet that can take you down!

- In Chapter 5 you were introduced to the concept of deep breathing exercises as a way to counter flashbacks and anxiety attacks. Deep breathing is also a very good way to deal with feelings of anxiety associated with Derivative Trauma.
- In this chapter we're going to learn a new way of controlling our breathing coupled with meditating on God and His presence.

[Leader: read the next three paragraphs, then take them through "The Breathing Exercise," praying the prayers while the group members focus on their breathing and your words. Go through the three steps three times.]

The Where & When to Practice Breathing: You can do it anytime or any place. For example, I practice the pause at the beginning of my morning devotional. I also do it at the end of the day when I go to bed. From time to time I practice it in the car or standing at the podium before I speak. I'm learning to stop when I feel tension in my body, or when I realize I have been so busy I haven't made time to cultivate my relationship with God. I'm embarrassed to admit, but sometimes I practice the pause sitting on the toilet! I am in desperate need for God, how about you?

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Instructions on How to Breathe Deeply: Get in a comfortable position. Breathe in slowly, inhaling through your nose, allowing your chest and lower belly to rise as you fill your lungs. Let your abdomen expand fully. Now, exhale slowly through your mouth. During the spiritual practice of breathing you will do this three times.

Directions for Practicing the Pause: Time to hit the pause button! It's quick and easy. It can take you as little as two minutes to finish this spiritual exercise. As you inhale, welcome and

receive God's presence into your life. When you exhale, release or let go of things like tension, worry, fear, sin, anger, etc. I will provide examples of how I pray for each breath. When you breathe, your time limit is how long you can breathe in or out.

The Breathing Exercise:

Step 1: First Breath

- Inhale: *Father, I welcome Your presence in my life. You are my light and glory.*
- Exhale: *I release all the darkness of worry and fear in my life.*

Step 2: Second Breath

- Inhale: *Jesus, I welcome Your presence in my life. I desperately need You.*
- Exhale: *Forgive me for not making our relationship a priority today.*

Step 3: Third Breath

- Inhale: *Holy Spirit, I welcome Your presence in my life. Empower me today.*
- Exhale: *I let go of my tendency to try to do everything in my own strength.*

- How did that feel to you? Would anyone like to share what they experienced while we were going through the exercise?

[Have someone read the next section, up to "The Take Away."]

Taking the Time to Listen

At the end of this breathing exercise, practice taking a moment to be silent. Learn to be quiet in your own soul and just listen. Then take pleasure in His presence as He reveals Himself to you. God revealed Himself to Job, when Job closed his mouth and listened (Job 40:4-6)! When I finish up my time with Him, I thank Him for loving me and I let Him know that I love Him too!

You are God's beloved and He desires you (Song of Solomon 7:10). YOU, for *who you are*, not for *what you do*! Jesus is calling you into fellowship with Him. Will you answer?

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.
Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me,
For I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.
For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.
(Matthew 11:28-30)

- Let's take a couple of minutes right now to do what we just read: "Take the time to listen." While our heads are bowed and our eyes are closed, try to not let your mind wander and just be silent before God, listening for His voice. When we're done, I'd like to hear from some of you what kind of impression God gave you.
- *[After two or three minutes…]* Would anyone like to share what God said or impressed upon you as you were in silence before Him?

[Have someone read "The Take Away."]

The Take-Away

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Trauma experienced by another person that you have interactions with can be very harmful. You may be a very kind, compassionate, generous, and self-sacrificing person – all of which are wonderful traits – but you must be diligent and intentional about monitoring and caring for your own physical, psychological, and spiritual needs. If you don't, you may put yourself in a condition where you are unable to help anyone else, because you yourself are experiencing secondary trauma, burn out, or compassion fatigue. But God is there to help you find the balance between sacrificial ministry and effective self-care. Remember: "You're no good to anybody dead!"

- What is the most important or impactful thing you learned from this chapter?

[Have someone read the closing Prayer.]

Prayer

Father, I see so many hurting people around me, and so many needs. You have put within my heart a desire to help as many people as I can, and I am grateful for your compassionate inspiration, and the example that Jesus set when He walked the earth. But I know I have limits. Help me to know those limits, and to use the wisdom and discernment You have given me to work within the boundaries that my personal resources and limitations have set. In areas where I am currently experiencing the effects of Derivative Stress, please heal me, help me find rest for my soul, and help me to know in the future the difference between the needs I see all around me, and the needs you have specifically called me to address. In Jesus name I pray, amen.

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Women, War, & Trauma – Chapter 7

Survival Tips for Protecting Your Family

By Rahnella Adsit

Objectives of this Chapter:

- To help group members understand how knowledge of weaknesses, vulnerabilities, strengths and skills can greatly increase the chances of survival in a crisis situation
- To show group members how to create a three-dimensional set of resources for survival that are internal, external, and eternal.
- To identify the character traits that need to be cultivated that will greatly increase the likelihood of surviving a crisis.

[Have someone read the opening verse in Proverbs 22:3.]

A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions.
The simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences.
Proverbs 22:3 NLT

- According to this verse, what is the difference between a "prudent" (or wise, careful, vigilant) person and a "simpleton?"
- As a prudent person, what precautions did you take when you saw the impending danger of Azerbaijani aggression?

[Have someone read the next two paragraphs about the "Mama Bear."]

My children affectionately call me "Mama Bear." Mother bears are known to be very protective of their cubs. If they perceive that you are a threat to them, they will get aggressive. You quickly learn to never get between a mother bear and her cubs because she can literally take your head off with a single swipe! While most humans will flee or freeze when faced with an imminent threat, mothers tend to fight to protect their children. It's a deep instinct that says, "I will do absolutely anything to protect my child," and for most of us that will extend to our spouses and everyone in our families.

Don't mess with the Mama Bear!

If you are a fellow Mama Bear or want to be, then this chapter is for you! In it you will learn how to create strategies that will help you plan, prepare and protect your family during times of war and other disasters. As we get closer to the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age, Jesus gives clear warnings of what is to come:

- Before we move on to the verses, what are the affectionate names that your children like to call you – and why do they call you that?
- What do you think about the idea of being called your kids' "Mama Bear?" Does that accurately describe you?

[Have one or two people read the next section including the Bible passage, up to "Building Internal Resources…']

You will hear about wars and reports of wars.
See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet.
For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom,
And there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.
All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.
Matthew 24:6-9 (ESV)

Birth pains are "pain with a purpose." The pain you experience in labor is caused by a process – the contracting of the uterine muscle, which opens the cervix, stretches the vaginal tissues, and allows the baby to be born. In the end, when your baby is placed in your arms you realize it was all worth it!

The pain you are experiencing right now as you face the horrors of war or other emergencies is also pain with a purpose. It is preparing you and your family for the challenges ahead (Matthew 24:10-45) which ultimately concludes with Christ's return as the King of King and Lord of Lords. As you read further into Matthew 24 you will find a promise from the Lord:

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Who then is the faithful and wise servant,
whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time?
Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.
Truly, I say to you, He will set him over all his possessions."
Matthew 24:45 - 47 ESV

Just as the master in this verse has set his servant to be the manager or keeper over his household, God has given you a special task also: He has appointed you as the "keeper of the home" (Titus 2:3-5 KJV). In case you think that is a demeaning job, in Psalm 121 it says that God is our keeper. He cares for us; He is our helper, defender, and protector. In our homes, being the keeper is our God-ordained role as women. It is a calling and a privilege, but it also carries with it a tremendous responsibility. However, you don't need to add another worry to your list of worries. God doesn't ask you to do something and then leave you to fend for yourself. He is with you, He will provide for you, and He will enable you to finish your assignment (2 Corinthians 9:8). With God's help, YOU'VE GOT THIS! (Philippians 4:13)

The protection of your family truly is a partnership between you and God. You have certain roles and responsibilities, and so does God. Your responsibilities have to do with accessing **internal**, **external**, and **eternal** resources.

- What are some of the tasks and responsibilities that you feel are important for you as the "keeper" of your home?
- How difficult are these tasks and responsibilities during a time of war? What complicates them?
- The section we just read says that the difficulties you are currently suffering from are very similar to the pains of childbirth, "pain that has a purpose." What do you think is God's purpose in allowing the pain you are experiencing now?

[Have someone read the first paragraph and the three spiritual virtues.]

BUILDING INTERNAL RESOURCES FOR SURIVIAL

How do you manage your home in times of war? The key to understanding this is to remember that your "doing" flows out of your "being." It begins within your heart. To meet the challenges ahead you need to cultivate these three spiritual virtues:

1. Being a faithful servant
2. Learning to serve others with wisdom
3. Developing prudence in your life

Let's look at them one at a time:

- Before we go into the three spiritual virtues, let me just point out that the Bible says that everything we do comes from our heart, so we must guard it diligently (*Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.* – Proverbs 4:23). So our "actions" really come from our "being," reflecting what's in our hearts. Note that each of these virtues start with the word "Being." How do you think we can get these "Being" character qualities into our hearts and lives?

[Have someone read the next section about being a "Faithful Servant," including the five points.]

1. Being a Faithful Servant (Mathew 24:45) – Who doesn't long for the day when Jesus will say to them, *"Well done! You are a good and faithful servant. You've been faithful over a little. I'll put you in charge of much. Come, celebrate with me"* (Matthew 25:23 CEB)? Notice that Jesus doesn't emphasize how much you are doing, or how much you have, but what you have done with what you have been given. What you do, you do in obedience to Christ and with the right motivation. That is, you *"work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men"* (Colossians 3:23 ESV). Jesus is looking for those who will be faithful; people who choose to be available (John 15:8); those who will remain open and teachable (Proverbs 9:9), and those who are flexible in whatever situation God has placed them (Philippians 4:12-14).

What are the benefits of being faithful to God? The Bible says:

- God will preserve, protect, and guard you (Psalm 31:23; 97:10; Proverbs 2:8).
- God promises to remain faithful to you, even if sometimes you are not faithful to Him (2 Timothy 2:13).
- God will richly bless you (Proverbs 28:30).
- God will strengthen you (2 Thessalonians 3:3).
- God will guide you (1 Corinthians 10:13).

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- The word "faithful" can be a little vague, especially when we try to apply it to our relationship with God. Maybe it helps if we think in terms of being "faithful" or "loyal" to our spouse. What does "loyalty" to your spouse look like? When you got married, you probably swore to be faithful to your husband. What did you mean by that? How can each example of being faithful to your husband be applied to being faithful to God?
- *[To go a little deeper – if you have time – have people in the group look up and read the verses listed with each point.]*
- How would being faithful to God benefit your family?

[Have someone read the next section about being a "Wise Servant," including the five points.]

2. Being a Wise Servant (Matthew 24:45) – What is wisdom? The simple answer: "Wisdom is the appropriate application of knowledge." It is more than having knowledge or information; it is the capacity to know how to use that knowledge effectively. Wisdom also gives you the capacity to understand life from God's perspective.

How do you get wisdom? The Bible says:

- Wisdom begins with loving, respecting, and obeying the Lord (Proverbs 9:10).
- You must desire wisdom with all your heart (Proverbs 2:4).
- The Lord offers wisdom freely; however, you must first ask Him (James 1:5). Solomon asked God for wisdom and *"God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore"* (I Kings 3:8-13; 4:29).
- You gain wisdom from reading and studying God's word (Proverbs 2:1-2).
- You will grow in wisdom as you seek wise counsel from godly Christians (Proverbs 1:5)

- Judging by the five points presented in this section, is wisdom passively acquired or is it something to be intentionally pursued?
- I want to be a wise person. So what should I do?

  [If they need a little prompting, they can put some of the five points listed in this section into their own words. Or, to go a little deeper – if you have time – have people in the group look up and read the verses listed with each point.]

[Have someone read the next section about being "Prudent," including the seven points. Remind them that "prudent" describes someone who is "wise, careful, and vigilant."]

3. Being Prudent – "*A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions"* (Proverbs 22:3 NLT).

What are the characteristics of prudent person? The Bible says:

- As a prudent person, you will develop foresight and caution. Your actions will show care and thought for the future (Proverbs 22:3; 10:5). You will be careful about your choices, and you will learn to stop and think before acting.
- You will gain discernment (Proverbs 14:4; 13:8a).

- You will be wise in the use of information. You will double-check the facts from several sources before acting on them (Proverbs 12:23).
- You will be able to show wisdom in where, when, and to whom you speak (Amos 5:13).
- As a prudent person you will have a teachable spirit (Proverbs 15:5).
- As a prudent wife and mother, you are a gift from the Lord to your family (Proverbs 19:14). Those who God calls, He will equip (Hebrews 13:20-21).
- As a prudent person, it is important to gain the skills and experiences you need so that you will have good judgment in the use of resources God provides (Proverbs 4:7).

- According to the Bible verse at the beginning of this section (Proverbs 22:3), what is the main characteristic of a prudent person? *[When they see danger, they take precautions; they don't just <u>let</u> things happen, they <u>make</u> things happen.]*
- *[To go a little deeper – if you have time – have people in the group look up and read the verses listed with each point.]*
- We just read seven wonderful qualities that must be cultivated through a combination of our own efforts and God's direct action upon us. Look at the list again and decide what you most want to work on to develop. How will you do it?

[Have someone read the first three paragraphs of the next section, up to "Survival Tip #1: Plan."]

BUILDING <u>EXTERNAL</u> RESOURSES FOR SURVIVAL

At this writing, I meet with a group of Ukrainian women leaders via Zoom every couple of weeks to listen to their stories, and to provide counsel and encouragement. I would guess that like them, most of you are stressed beyond measure, fearing for yourselves and your loved ones, and you are also worrying about your community and the situation in your country. The direct and indirect threats of war are so enormous they are almost beyond comprehension. Fear can immobilize a person. Developing the core virtues of faithfulness, wisdom and prudence will help sustain you.

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The next section will help you overcome your fears by helping you organize and prepare yourself and your family for the challenges ahead. Acting on the following four survival tips will give you a sense that you have done all you could to be prepared. This will give you some measure of feeling in control and therefore hopeful. If you take the time to apply these principles <u>*now*</u>, you will have practical tools that will help you and your family to survive the unimaginable.

In most cases, we tend to think that in an emergency or crisis situation we should wait for the professionals to come to tell us what to do and to save us. We depend on our government officials, police officers, soldiers, or firefighters. In reality, it is you, your family and your neighbors who are first on the scene. Once you realize this, you will understand you don't have to be a victim and wait for others to save you; instead, you have the unique challenge and opportunity to be a rescuer or even a hero! Planning and preparing for potential threats will minimize the impact they could have on you and your loved ones. It will save lives, minimize losses, lower your anxiety, build resiliency, and reduce mental health issues after the crisis passes.

- Those of you who have been in situations where you have been subjected to attacks, shelling and power outages, which would comfort and motivate you more: (1) When the crisis hits, having to figure it all out on the run, and get your family to safety, responding to threats and challenges right away? Or (2) would you rather organize ahead of time, to be prepared for any eventuality, and to face challenges in a prepared and organized manner?
- Obviously, most would choose the second option. This section will help you do that.

[Have someone read the first paragraph of the next section: "Survival Tip#1: Plan", up to "Emergency Assessment."]

Survival Tip #1: <u>Plan</u>

Your emergency plan needs to include an actively maintained document which is reviewed often to provide you with all the procedures and information you need to prepare your family for war or other disasters. This includes listing potential threats, evaluating your strengths and weaknesses, being aware of your vulnerabilities, considering the opportunities presented, and determining what skills you have in times of emergency. If your husband is available have him do this separately. Afterwards, meet with him, compare your notes, and together write up your family plan. This also would be a great opportunity to involve your older children. Have them make up their own survival plan; when you meet with them it would open communication lines and prepare and train them to face danger in their future.

- Each of you is going to be writing your family's own personal "Emergency Plan" document over the next several minutes. The chart in your manuals is pretty small, so if you prefer, you might want to find another blank page in your manual to write down the assessments you make.
- Let's get into it.

[Have someone read the first point about "Threats."]

EMERGENCY ASSESMENT

<u>1. Threats</u>: This is where we ***<u>visit</u>*** the land of "what if's" (don't set up camp there!). The question you need to ask is: "What potential threats do I and my family face? What if *this* happens? What if *that* happens?" Gather data to assess what threats you could be facing. Assign each one a number value according to their probability of occurring.

> *Example*: My husband Chris and I had the opportunity to go into Iraq several years ago. We knew the worst-case scenarios included: capture, torture, sexual assault, and death by ISIS.

- What are some of the threats you and your family are currently facing, or could face in the near future? Write some brief notes about this in the "Threats" column of the table at the end of this section, or wherever you have decided to write your assessments.
- *[After giving them a few minutes to write…]* Would a few of you share what you wrote down?

[Have someone read the next point about "Strengths."]

2. Strengths: What strengths have you discovered as you have faced dangerous situations in the past? Knowing your strengths is just as important as knowing your weaknesses.

Example: Growing up on multiple continents exposed me to many dangerous situations. These encounters fine-tuned my ability to sense when I am in a dangerous place or near a dangerous person.

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- Let's take a minute and think about this. What are some of your personal strengths? What are you gifted with? What can you learn from your experiences so far? What personality traits do you have that would be useful in a crisis? Write all of this in the table in your manual.
- *[After giving them a few minutes to write…]* Would a few of you share what you wrote down?

[Have someone read the next point about "Weaknesses."]

3. Weaknesses: Knowing your potential weaknesses is also important if you want to survive. In crisis situations, what have you found to be your areas of weakness?

Example: I do great in a crisis, but afterwards I fall apart. Whenever possible I now make time after the event to process what I've gone through.

- What weaknesses have you discovered in yourself over the past few months or years? Can you think of ways to turn these weaknesses into strengths? Also write all of this down in the table in your manual.
- *[After giving them a few minutes to write…]* Would a few of you share what you wrote down?

[Have someone read the next point about "Vulnerabilities."]

4. Vulnerabilities: A vulnerability is not really a weakness. Knowing your vulnerabilities and doing something about them shows that you have courage. So the question is: where, when or how are you most exposed to the possibility of being attacked or injured, emotionally, physically, economically or environmentally?

Example: When Chris and I were in Iraq, we woke up in the middle of the night with an Iraqi man at the foot of our bed (he was a hotel employee delivering a message, but of course we didn't know that). The door to our room was a vulnerability. From then on we made sure that we secured the door in a way that NO ONE could get in without our permission.

- What are the vulnerable areas of your life that, if attacked, could quickly engulf you and cause hardship or great harm to you or your family? It could be your income, your job, your family status, a bad marriage that is not improving, a chance that is about to fall apart, your health, uncontrollable reactions to surprising events, etc. List these vulnerabilities in your manual.
- *[After giving them a few minutes to write…]* Would a few of you share what you wrote down?

[Have someone read the next point on "Opportunities."]

5. Opportunities: What can you do to prepare to meet these threats?

Example: In response to the man who entered our room in the middle of the night, I now pack an alarm that I can attach to any door that goes off with any movement of the door so we have time to prepare to face any threat.

- Look at the lists you've written so far in your manual. Can you think of some concrete things you can do to counter these threats, weaknesses, or vulnerabilities? Write some short notes in your manual.
- *[After giving them a few minutes to write…]* Would a few of you share what you wrote down?

[Have someone read the next point on "Skills."]

6. Skills: What skills do you bring to meet impending danger?

Example: I've taken basic first-aid classes, wilderness survival courses, and firearm training.

- Skills in this exercise are different from strengths because they are practices and disciplines that you have learned over time and become adept at applying them. These can be things like first aid, cooking, food canning, hunting, martial arts, painting, writing, mechanical repair, and more. List some of your skills in your manual.
- *[After giving them a few minutes to write…]* Would a few of you share what you wrote down?

Now it's your turn. One way you can do this is to make a grid for each person in your family that looks something like this:

THREATS	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	VULNERABILITIES	OPPORTUNITIES	SKILLS

- At this point you need to spend some time with your family and figure out a "Plan of Action." This is a difficult but very important task. The more you have discussed these issues with your family, the safer you will be if you find yourselves in another crisis. To be sure we're all familiar with each of these issues, let's read through the list in your manual out loud.

[Ask two or three people to read the opening paragraph and the thirteen points.]

PLAN OF ACTION

Planning for an emergency will help your family feel safe, but it does need to be age-appropriate. Once everyone fills out the above form to the best of their ability, schedule a time to meet first with your husband, then with each of your children or household members to talk and make a plan together. Survival is not just a product of luck, it takes work! Here is a list of questions you could discuss:

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1. Before talking with your children, you will need to address some issues with your spouse, such as: Do we need to write up a will? If both of us should get injured or killed, what happens to the kids? Who will be our children's guardian? What are our country's legal requirements for a guardian? Should we leave a copy of important papers with this guardian? If you have the time, it would mean a lot to your spouse and to your children if

you each write a special letter to each child, placed in a sealed envelope, in case something happens to you.

2. Where is the safe place in our home or building for each type of threat we are facing?
3. What are the escape routes to get out of our house or apartment? Out of each room?
4. If separated during an emergency, what is a meeting place that is near our home?
5. If we cannot return home or if we need to evacuate when we're not together, where can we meet that is outside our neighborhood?
6. What is our alternate route, if the first route is impassable?
7. In the event we are separated or unable to communicate with each other, who will be our emergency contact outside of our immediate area?
8. Decide on a good "secret word" that only your family members know, so that if any of them needs to verify that a message sent to them is truly from a family member, knowing this word will give them the security they need. Example: A stranger approaches your daughter and says, "Your mother asked me to come get you and bring you to her." Daughter: "Did she give you the secret word?" "Uhhh, no. She forgot to." "Then I am NOT coming with you!"
9. What is our plan for family members who have a disability or special needs?
10. What can we do to take care of our pets if there is an emergency?
11. What is each family member responsible for in the event of an emergency? Write out a master list and put it in a strategic, centralized area in your home - perhaps near your emergency bags?
12. Are there other family members or neighbors you can recruit and coordinate with? People helping people can be one of your greatest strengths.
13. List other questions you may want to ask.

- Can anyone think of any other questions that should be discussed? *[If so, add them to the list.]*

- As was mentioned earlier, it's one thing to <u>plan</u>, but another thing to <u>prepare</u> – to physically get ready as much as you can for possible dangers that could come your way in the future.

[Have someone read the first paragraph and the paragraph on "Pack a 72-hour "go bag."

Survival Tip #2: <u>Prepare</u>

It is often said: "Planning leads to <u>awareness</u>. Preparation leads to <u>readiness</u>." The truth is, you can plan all you want, but if you don't prepare, you won't be ready. There are some things you can prepare for, but there are many things that will be beyond your control. Someone else said, "Preparation does more than prepare you for what to expect; it puts you in position to handle what you didn't seeing coming." Here are a few ideas:

1. Pack a 72-hour "go bag" for each family member: In the event of an emergency, it is important to have the right supplies on hand. Preparing a 72-hour emergency "go bag" for each member of your family is the key to helping them survive for at least three days after a disaster occurs. In the middle of a crisis, sometimes our brains may not function as well as they usually do, and our thinking slows down as we work through shock or denial. Creating go-bags for each member of your family ahead of time will help push each one of you more quickly into action. In chapter 13 – *Parenting in Times of War* – there is a section on what to put in a child's emergency go-bag. To be effective, each bag (a backpack would be ideal) should not be more than 20-25% of each person's body weight. Here is a list of recommended items you could include in yours:

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- Before we get into the long list in your manual, let me ask: have any of you packed a "go bag" for yourself or your family members? If so, what are some of the things you have put in it?
- We won't take the time to read through the list in your manuals right now, but it has some good ideas on what to put in your bag. When you get home, look at the list and start packing things for your bags.

- Water
- Weather appropriate change of clothes
- 7-day supply of medicines
- Eyeglasses
- Pet food
- Nonperishable food
- Personal hygiene items
- Whistle
- Important documents
- Permanent marker
- Blanket/sleeping bag
- Flashlight/headlight
- Face mask
- Computer/tablet/phone
- Cash and change
- Garbage bags
- Ear buds
- Map with meeting places marked
- Extra batteries
- Hand sanitizer
- Charging cords/batteries
- First aid kit
- Family members' contact information

[Have someone read the rest of this section, up to "Survival Tip #3: Practice."]

2. Important Documents: If possible, keep them in a waterproof bag or box - something you can grab easily. This can include: copies of your driver's license, passport, birth certificates, medical records, prescription list, bank and credit card account numbers and customer service telephone numbers, insurance information, wills, marriage certificate, school records, etc. It is also very important to gather the list of each other's phone and computer passwords and have it in a secure place.

3. Update items: With the change of seasons, renew and bring up to date everything you have packed, such as: refresh water supply, change out clothes to meet the season's needs, update contact list, etc.

I have a packed emergency "go-bag" to take with me whenever I travel and adjust it according to where I'll be. For instance, in Iraq I added a pair of hiking boots and extra water bottles. It comforted me to know that if I couldn't get a flight out of Iraq, I had the means to walk out.

- Regarding the "Important Documents," would it be advisable to just have copies in your go bag, or originals?
- If you don't put originals in your go bag, where would you keep them?

[Have someone read the next section on "Practice."]

Survival Tip #3: Practice

This is an area that people often neglect, but it is critical in minimizing the risks to your lives. Rehearsing ahead of time helps everyone know what to do and when to do it, which will help relieve everyone's anxiety and keep everyone calm. Practice also helps everyone to avoid the senseless waste of time panicking; it moves everyone quickly through shock and denial into action. In a critical moment, there is little time to plan and no time to learn. Practicing also exposes the weaknesses in your current plans and preparations which will give everyone time to adjust accordingly – which can actually save lives.

The terrorist attack on the Twin Towers at the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001 not only highlights the importance of planning and preparing, but also the extreme value of *practicing*. Rick Rescorla was head of security for Morgan Stanley Dean Witter, a multinational investment management company headquartered at the World Trade Center. In 1993, terrorist tried to take down the Twin Towers by exploding a bomb in the basement parking lot. Afterwards, Rescorla trained the firm's employees how to deal with future potential terrorist attacks. They not only planned and prepared, but they also ***practiced***. The company employees trained for eight years, including surprise drills and building evacuation exercises. When the terrorists attacked again in 2001, this discipline of practice saved the lives of more than 2,700 employees. Only 10 people from their company died. Rescorla taught the employees that the best way to get the brain to perform under extreme stress was to repeatedly run it through rehearsals beforehand.

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Your fight-flight-freeze reaction to danger is an involuntary response which exists to keep you safe and prepares you to face, escape, or hide from danger. But there are times when we need to override those responses, and this can be done through your planning, preparing and most importantly, practicing beforehand. This is crucial to your family's survival.

- What are some safety procedures that you and your family already practice?
- Based on the issues that we have discussed today, what are some things that you would like for your family to begin practicing?

  [Tell them to feel free to look back over their manuals to remind them of the issues and suggestions that were presented.]

[Have someone read the next section on "Recover."]

Survival Tip #4: Recover

When our book, *The Combat Trauma Healing Manual* was first published, Chris and I attended the Houston Freedom Festival, which celebrated an American holiday called Veterans Day – a day in which we honor U.S. military veterans. Our staff team knew I was a trauma pastoral counselor, so whenever a soldier was experiencing symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress, I was called on the scene to help. It was an exhausting time. I was running around from soldier to soldier when my friend Andi, a combat medic, saw me. She told me, "Rahnella, I get it; you understand how my time serving as a medic has affected me. But I look at you and see that same look a medic gets when they are overwhelmed with the number of causalities surrounding them." And that's when she ordered me to sit down and to take a five-minute breather because as she had

told me before, "We medics have learned that we're no good to anybody dead – and neither are you. You ***must*** take care of ***yourself*** above all else!" She was right!

Taking time to recover is important. Sometimes it will only be that five-minute breather. Doing this will give your body time to rest, slow down your breathing so that it will bring up your oxygen levels, which in turn will help you focus on the task ahead. An added benefit is that it will give you a moment to pray. Scheduling an extended time to process what you have gone through within the first 36-hours after a crisis event will lessen its long-term impact on you and will expedite your healing. If you want to stay in the battle, this self-care strategy is crucial, because Andi's admonition is true: you are no good to anybody dead.

- Can any of you think of a time when, because of the crisis you were in and the needs that surrounded you, you pushed yourself to the point of exhaustion and still pushed yourself to keep going? *[If so…]* Would you like to share with the group what happened?
- How did this affect you over the next few hours or days?
- Is there any way you could have created a recovery period that would have been helpful at the time?

[Have someone – or a couple of people – read the next section on "Building Eternal Resources."]

BUILDING IN ETERNAL RESOURCES FOR SURVIVAL

When you have prepared all you can ahead of time, you gain a certain sense of freedom. When God gives you an assignment, it will open doors to adventures you never dreamed of, which will give you more opportunities to see God's hand at work in your life and in those around you. I guarantee you, it's an exciting life to live by faith and obedience!

A couple of years ago I took a take a trip to Israel – this time to visit my daughter, son-in-law and my new grandson. One day I felt called by the Lord to take a spiritual trek to Jerusalem to spend a day alone with Him. So, with little knowledge of modern Hebrew, I downloaded an Israel Railways phone app, hopped on a train, and followed instructions, only to find that I got off the train in the middle of nowhere. I needed help. There was only one man working at the train station, and he didn't speak English. So I looked throughout the building, even in the bathrooms, and couldn't find another person. I sat on a bench next to the railroad track, assessing the situation, asking the Lord to guide and protect me.

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As I was praying, I felt someone sit down next to me, I opened my eyes and there was a young woman! I asked her where she came from and did she speak English? She said, "Yes, I am from New Jersey" (which is one of the states in America). And she was also fluent in Hebrew! She helped me hire a car, came with me to the airport, and helped me get on the right train to Jerusalem. To this day I believe she was an angel sent from God. I even asked her if I could touch her just to see if she was real!

Mama Bears, as you face various trials remember ***you are never ever alone***! God is not only a resource, He is your source for all that is good and for all that you need. Give God a call through prayer, and then watch how He chooses to answer. His provisions come in big or small packages; sometimes they come disguised as a young woman from New Jersey!

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
And he will make straight your paths.
Be not wise in your own eyes: fear the Lord and turn away from evil.
It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.
Proverbs 3:5-8

- Planning, preparing, practicing, and recovering are all faithful, wise, and prudent ways to anticipate and defeat any threat that comes your way. But there are still many "wild cards" that life can throw at you, things you could never have anticipated. That's when it's a huge advantage to have a strong relationship with the God of the universe who can reach out and perfectly change your circumstances. He won't necessarily pull you out of difficult situations (although He can), but He will walk you back into a safer path that will make you stronger and bring Him glory.
- What are some of the ways that we can build these "Eternal Resources?"

[Have someone read "The Take-Away."]

The Take-Away

Many of us in Armenia have experienced crisis, trauma, chaos, and war. It is logical to assume we may have to experience these things again in the near future. For this reason, we *must* be faithful, wise, and prudent in preparing ourselves and our families ahead of time to meet the challenges of future emergencies. We can decide ***right now*** whether we are going to be prudent and take precautions, or be a simpleton – continuing on blindly and suffering the consequences, as our opening verse tells us. We need to acquire ***internal, external, and eternal resources*** in order to be fully prepared. And more than just planning and preparing, we need to ***practice*** our plans, so that in a crisis our families will respond quickly and efficiently, thereby staying safe and alive.

- What is the most important or most helpful thing you have learned in this chapter?

[Have someone – or yourself – read the closing Prayer.]

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I pray for grace, strength and courage to meet the challenges ahead. Lord, I know that You don't always give me what I want, but You will always supply what I need. Help me to fulfill my assignments from You. When my time does come or when your return, may I hear from you: *"Well done! You are a good and faithful servant. You've been faithful over a little. I'll put you in charge of much. Come, celebrate with me."* Amen!

LEADER'S GUIDE

Women, War, &Trauma – Chapter 8

Finding Light in the Darkest Grief

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By Marshéle Carter, Chris & Rahnella Adsit[11]

Objectives of this Chapter:

- To give group members a sense that they are not alone in their difficulties, that their grief is common and good, and that God will take them through their time of darkness and accomplish constructive things in their lives as a result of their trauma, grief, and eventual healing.
- To show group members that there are productive and unproductive ways of grieving.
- To share some practical tips to group members about how to grieve their losses in productive ways.

[Have someone read the opening verse in Psalm 34:18.]

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. (Psalm 34:18)

- Many of you here today have come with broken hearts and crushed spirits. I wonder – even in this difficult condition – if any of you can say that you still feel the Lord's closeness?
- It seems that, while going through difficulties, we often feel that God is very close to us, walking with us through the "valley of the shadow of death," comforted by His rod and staff, like in Psalm 23. But other times He seems to have left – gone on vacation or has more important matters to pay attention to. Have any of you ever felt like that? Why do you think our perceptions vary so much?

[Have someone read "Valentina's Story," up to "Loss and Grief."]

Valentina's Story…

We were living in Artsakh when the Azerbaijani invasion began. A few days later, when the fighting calmed down a little in our area, I found my children and we went to the airport. This is where the Russian peacekeepers had directed us and other displaced Armenians to go. On the first day, hundreds of people began crowding in. Then thousands. By the fourth day, there was absolutely no room, and nowhere to go. The Russians simply told us to leave. "Let your own government give you asylum. There's no more room here. We can't help you."

Then they informed us that the road to Armenia was open once again, and we could leave that way. I quickly returned to our home and gathered a few precious things: pictures, important documents, some food, shoes for my daughter, and a photo of my husband who was killed during the 44-Day War of 2020.

We were hoping to go back to our town, where my uncles and husband are buried, all of whom died in war. Well, really only my husband's hands are buried there, because that's all they found of him.

[11] Much of the content of this chapter is from *When War Comes Home* co-written by all three of us.

After traveling for three days we finally reached Armenia. As we crossed the border, one of my children said, "Mom, we have lost papa for the second time." At first I didn't understand what he meant. But then he said, "We have now also left his grave."

The grief of losing my husband, my home, my friends, my children's innocence, my sense of safety and security, even my husband's grave – with all of this I cannot find rest.

- I'm sure that many of you have suffered many losses too. Some may not seem as catastrophic as Valentina's, but for some of you your loses might even be worse. This will be hard, but I'd like for us to go around the room and each one of us share one to three words that describe something that you have lost since the war started. You don't have to go into details right now. You might say something like, "a friend," "my husband," "a parent," "a child," "my home," "my job." It might be a precious possession, your inner peace, your dreams, self-confidence, faith, ability to love, etc. Tell the group whatever is lost or seems to be missing right now. You could name several things. By naming your loss, you'll be better able to accomplish the difficult work of grieving over it.

  [After everyone has shared, ask the group if they would let you pray for them – not for each one and their individual losses, but for the collective grief that all the group members share. Alternatively, ask two or three of the group members to pray for the group.]

[Have someone read the next section, up to "The Purpose of Grief."]

Loss and Grief

Valentina had something worth loving – and so did you. For many of you, the war took that away. "Grief is love not wanting to let go," wrote Rabbi Earl A. Grollman[12]. This is why Valentina's heart hurts so much. Solomon wrote in Song of Solomon 8:6, *"Love is as strong as death."* As Irish writer Frank O'Connor points out, when we feel a great sense of loss "it means that we had something worth grieving for. The ones I'm sorry for are the ones that go through life not knowing what grief is."[13]

"Chaplain Ray" Giunta writes: **"Grief is the normal process of natural emotions and feelings which are uniquely experienced after any loss of any relationship."**[14] Grief is normal. We are designed to grieve. God invented it. God experienced it when He walked this earth as a human.[15] ***Everybody*** experiences it. We all experience grief differently, but we all experience it.

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"Jesus wept." (John 11:35)

The word "grief" comes from the Latin verb meaning "to burden." That's exactly what grief feels like, doesn't it? A heavy load that you wish you could set down – but you can't.

Grief is always triggered by a **loss** of some sort – losing someone or something we had an attachment to. Grief has different levels and intensities. We grieve a little when a favorite pair of jeans is ruined and we have to throw them away. We grieve a little more when our personal computer crashes and we lose hundreds of cherished photos. More profound grief comes when a beloved pet dies, when a treasured relationship ends, when dreams we've held for the future evaporate, or when someone we love passes on.

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[12] Rabbi Dr. Earl A. Grollman – quote found in www.DailyCelebrations.com.

[13] Frank O'Conner – quote found in www.gaia.com.

[14] "Chaplain Ray" Giunta, *Grief Recovery Workbook*, (Integrity Publishers, 2002). p. 63.

[15] More example of Jesus' grief: Matthew 26:37,38; Mark 3:5; Luke 19:41.

- In the first paragraph, Frank O'Connor said that he felt sorry for those who go through life not knowing what grief is. Would you agree with that? Why would he say that?

  [If you grieve the loss of someone or something, it proves that you had love for that person or thing. No grieving, no loving – a very hollow life.]

- When we grieve over the loss of someone or something, we are responding like God has responded. Is it surprising to you that even God grieves? Can you think of an example of this?

  [It's right there in their books – "Jesus wept" when His friend Lazarus died, and all his friends were heartbroken about it. This caused Jesus to cry in sadness.]

[Have someone read the next section, up to "Normal Grief."]

The Purpose of Grief

God built the grief response into us for the purpose of mentally, emotionally, and spiritually processing events that caused the loss. If we are not willing to face the grieving process, or if we try a short-cut, we'll be left adrift in our sea of pain, never reaching the shores of healing that the Lord intends for us.

It is said that tears are a way God has provided for sadness to leave our body. If we resist, our sorrow may never lose its intensity.

King David wrote: *"You have taken account of my wanderings; put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?"* (Psalm 56:8) God – in His infinite tenderness and love – not only takes note of your tears, He ***stores*** them. They are ***that*** precious to Him.

- How does it make you feel that your tears are so precious to God that He stores them?
- Have you ever known someone who – whenever their life was jolted by some great loss or catastrophe – they never had any emotional response, but instead just stuffed their reactions down and acted like it wasn't a big deal? Maybe they wanted to appear strong or impervious to difficulties. But what do you think the long-term effects of this will be?

[Have someone read the first two paragraphs of the next section, up to the bullet-point list.]

"Normal" Grief

C.S. Lewis, one of the greatest Christian philosophers and teachers of the past century, had his own trek through grief after his beloved wife Joy died of cancer. He kept a journal for many months after her death in which he wrote the following:

> "Grief still feels like fear. Perhaps, more strictly, like suspense. Or like waiting; just hanging about waiting for something to happen. It gives life a permanently provisional feeling. It doesn't seem work starting anything. I can't settle down. I yawn, I fidget, I smoke too much. Up till now I always had too little time. Now there is nothing but time. Almost pure, empty, successiveness." [16]

[16] C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (HaperSanFrancisco, 2001, 1961). p. 33

- Lewis said that grief was like "fear," "suspense," or "waiting." Can you identify with that? What word would you use to describe what grief is like?
- I'd like someone to read through the list of grief symptoms (including the extended list below the first 7 common ones). As they are read, check off any that you are currently feeling.
- When you're done, turn to the person next to you – or get into groups of three – and share the top two or three symptoms that concern you the most, or seem to be the most dominant. Then spend a couple of minutes praying for each other, that God would lift and remove these symptoms, and give you strength, faith, and endurance until that happens.

As you read through the following list of symptoms, check any that you are experiencing.

- ❑ **Fear.** You may fear that you will experience more losses, that you won't be able to handle the pressure that now exists.
- ❑ **Anger. You might not even know why you are angry.** It doesn't have to be logical. Your anger might be seething just below the surface for a long time.
- ❑ **Weeping.** You may cry. Then cry some more. And more. And just when you think you couldn't possibly have any more tears to cry, you cry some more.
- ❑ **Guilt.** *If only I'd . . . What if . . . I should have . . .* Hindsight and regret could dominate your thoughts for a while.
- ❑ **Loneliness.** You may feel that no one can understand what you're going through now – and that no one wants to, either.
- ❑ **Blaming.** *This is so unfair! Where's the justice? What did we do to deserve this? Somebody has to be held accountable!*
- ❑ **Running away/numbing.** You may look desperately for an "escape hatch." *There must be a way out of this!* You may try drugs, alcohol, work, travel, ministry, sex, food, shopping, gambling – anything to get your mind off the difficulties.

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Other symptoms may include:

- ❑ Loss of appetite
- ❑ Loss of sexual desire
- ❑ Dehydration
- ❑ Memory lags, mental short-circuits
- ❑ Unexplained aches and pains
- ❑ Sleepiness, fatigue, lethargy
- ❑ Sleeplessness
- ❑ Nightmares
- ❑ Hyperactive
- ❑ Feeling abandoned
- ❑ Loss of faith in God
- ❑ Frustrated
- ❑ Overly talkative
- ❑ No desire to talk
- ❑ Feeling out of control
- ❑ Emotionally overloaded
- ❑ No feeling

- *[After the list has been read…]* Now let's turn to our neighbor (or get in a group of three) and share the top two or three symptoms that concern you most. Then, take a moment to pray for each other, as I said a minute ago, that God would lift and remove those symptoms, and give you strength, faith, and endurance until that happens.

*[In the next section, have someone read the first paragraph and the 17 points under it (or break the list up and have several people read it) and the last paragraph after the list up to **"How TO Grieve."**]*

- As we read through this list, put a checkmark next to each coping action that you do from time to time when grieving. Afterwards, I'd like to have a few of you share which ones you have to deal with the most – so we can recognize that these behaviors are pretty common to us all!

How NOT to Grieve

Sometimes, we will do *anything* rather than to undertake the hard work of grief. This may make us feel a little better temporarily, but it doesn't move us out of our desperation. Following is a list of ways people attempt to cope with their situation without facing their grief – check any that you think you might do from time to time.[17]

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- ❑ **Act out** – giving in to the pressure to misbehave.
- ❑ **Aim low** – to what seems more achievable.
- ❑ **Attack** – beat down whatever or whomever is threatening you.
- ❑ **Avoid** – stay away from anything that causes you stress.
- ❑ **Compensate** – make up for weakness in one area by gaining strength in another.
- ❑ **Deny** – refusing to acknowledge that the event occurred.
- ❑ **Displace** – shifting an intended action to a safer target (like kicking the dog).
- ❑ **Fantasize** – escaping reality to a world of unachievable wishes.
- ❑ **Idealize** – playing up the good points of a desired action and ignoring downsides.
- ❑ **Identify** – copying others to take on their desirable characteristics.
- ❑ **Intellectualize** – avoiding emotions by focusing on facts and logic.
- ❑ **Passive aggression** – getting your way by pointedly avoiding what is expected.
- ❑ **Projecting** – seeing your own undesirable characteristics in others.
- ❑ **Rationalize** – creating logical reasons for self-destructive behavior.
- ❑ **Regress** – returning to a child state to avoid problems or responsibility.
- ❑ **Suppress** – consciously holding back unwanted urges while ignoring the root cause.
- ❑ **Trivialize** – making something small when it is really something big.

If you recognize any of these behavior patterns in yourself, you first need to see them for what they are: hoped-for shortcuts to restoration which won't get you there at all.

- *[After the list has been read…]* Now let's take a few minutes and I'd like as many of you as would like to share with the group which coping action you seem to have to deal with the most. If possible, maybe you could share an example of how you experience this in your life. How do you think these coping actions have helped you process the trauma you have experienced? *[We're assuming they have not helped much at all!]*
- If these coping actions don't seem to help, why do you think we keep engaging in them?

[Have someone read the next section, including the seven stages of grief, but stop before the final two paragraphs which starts with "You may not hit all of these stages..."]

[17] This partial list of coping mechanisms was taken from www.changingminds.org under their "Explanations/Behaviors/Coping" tab.

How TO Grieve

Elizabeth Kübler-Ross was a Swiss physician who did groundbreaking research in the area of grief. Her book *On Death and Dying* has been a classic for decades. In her studies she found that there is a pattern that most people experience when they encounter a life-changing trauma or crisis. Over the years we've come to realize that this cycle applies to just about any kind of significant loss and the resulting grief.

This cycle of emotional states is shown on the chart below. It demonstrates the roller-coaster ride of activity and passivity as the hurting person wriggles and dodges in his or her desperate efforts to cope with the trauma, avoid change, and finally be reconciled to it.

The person starts out in a state of relative stability and then the bomb goes off. Over unspecified periods of time, he or she progresses through these stages (not necessarily in this order:

- **Immobilisation stage** – Shock; initial paralysis after being exposed to the crisis or trauma. It takes a while for the enormity to register and sink in. Jaw drops, breath catches, can't decide what to do next.
- **Denial stage** – Trying to avoid the inevitable. *No! This can't be happening!* Or, *It didn't affect me; it's not that bad.* Or even: *It never happened. I just imagined it.*
- **Anger stage** – Frustrated outpouring of bottled-up emotion. *Life sucks!!* Rage seething below the surface at all times; lashing out at anyone for the slightest reason; blaming others; sometimes cold, icy anger; self-isolating to avoid blowing up.
- **Bargaining stage** – Seeking in vain for a way out. Making promises to God if He'll fix things; setting conditions for healing, like: *When my husband returns to normal, then I'll get better too.*
- **Depression stage** – Final realization of the inevitable. A very sad time, but also the turning point, because the griever is finally resolved to the fact that he or she won't be able to restore life to the way it was. It's the staging area for victory.
- **Testing stage** – Seeking realistic solutions. *Maybe I should try getting out more. Maybe I should talk with someone about my situation. Maybe I should start exercising again. Maybe I should join that Bible study I heard about.*
- **Acceptance stage** – Finally finding the way forward. They are now fully acknowledging the trauma or crisis. *It was bad – real bad – but I survived. I'm going to make it. My world changed, but I can live in this new world. I could even prosper.*

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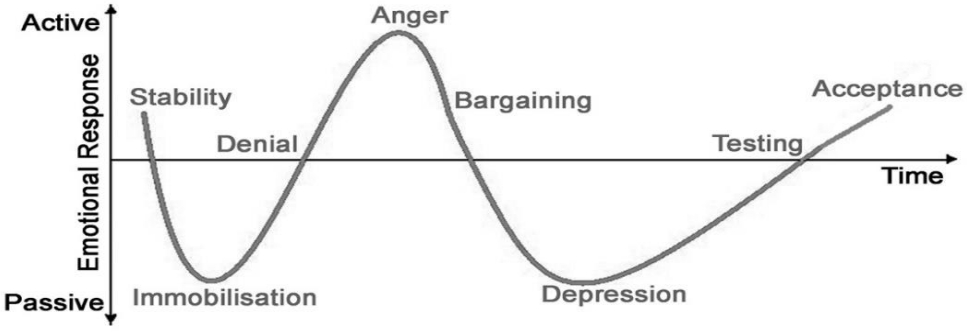
The Kübler-Ross Grief Cycle:



- As you think about the trauma you have experienced, and the grief you feel now over your loss, which of the stages in the Kubler-Ross Grief Cycle best describes your current state of mind?
- What are some of the experiences you have had in this stage?

[Have someone read the final three paragraphs in this section, up to "Good Grief."]

You may not hit all of these stages. You may skip a stage and then go back to experience it later. You may whiz through one stage and sit in another for a long time. You may find yourself going back and forth between a couple of stages or looping around to various stages willy-nilly. Some would say it ought to be called "The Kübler-Ross Grief Scribble" and looks less like a nice, neat "cycle" and more like this:

No one can say for sure how you will deal with your particular trauma, given your unique wiring. *Everyone is different!* But as we've stated before, there is one very important reason why God is taking you through your current affliction:

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> *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.* (2 Corinthians 1:3,4)

- How many of you can identify with the "Kubler-Ross Grief Scribble" rather than the "Cycle?"
- So, according to 2 Corinthians 1:3,4 which we just read, what IS "one very important reason" why God takes you through affliction? *[So that you will be better able to comfort others who are experiencing affliction and trauma, due to your first-person experience and insight.]*

[Have someone read the first paragraph of the next section about "Good Grief," and someone else read the first point in the section: "Remember where God is."]

Good Grief

When we've experienced a traumatic event, grief is what we *feel*. Mourning is *what we do about it.* It is the action side of grief, the externalizing of our internal pain. And Jesus Christ – who knows *everything* – says that when we do it we are blessed and *will be* comforted. Here are a few principles to keep in mind as you work out your grief through mourning.

> *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."*
> – Matthew 5:4

- **Remember where God is**

  The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. (Psalm 34:18)

  Because of your wound, you've got God's attention in a special way. He is a compassionate God, always ready to help the one who is suffering, ready to aid anyone who will let Him. *Count on that!* You can expect Him to be present and responsive to your needs during this time. He is your best friend who says, "If you need anything, don't hesitate to ask!" And He means it.

  Ask Jesus to enter your pain with you. Close your eyes and feel Him coming up behind you, wrapping His big arms around you and holding on tight.

- I'd like for us to take a couple of minutes, close our eyes, and do what is described here.
  [After they have closed their eyes, quietly read the last paragraph out loud, a phrase at a time: "Ask Jesus to enter your pain with you… Feel Him coming up behind you… wrapping His big arms around you… and holding on tight." Let Him pull the pain out of your body, soul, and spirit into His. After a few moments, close with prayer, thanking God for the peace He can bring to those who grieve.]
- What did you feel during that?

[Have someone read the next point about "Remember the past and remain optimistic."]

- **Remember the past and remain optimistic**

  "How hopeless the naked wood of a fruit tree would look to us in February if we had never seen the marvel of springtime." – Lilias Trotter[18]

  Though what you are currently enduring may be the worst experience you've ever had to slog your way through, it's not the *only* trauma you've known. Think back to the times God has sustained you in the past. Elisabeth Elliot, whose missionary husband was murdered by primitive natives in Ecuador, wrote: "The death of wintertime is the necessary prelude to the resurrection of springtime."[19] Spring *will* come.

[18] Quote by Lilias Trotter, missionary to Africa from 1888 to 1928. Found in Elisabeth Elliot, *A Path Through Suffering* (Servant Publications, 1990).
[19] Ibid, p. 41.

- We've all been through plenty of winters before. And we've also loved the beautiful springs that follow them. Every year. Year after year. Spring has always followed winter. It's one of the great rhythms of God's creation. The spring of God's healing and restoration will also follow the winter of pain and grief you are currently experiencing. What do you think you could do to **hasten** the coming of that spring?

[Have someone read the next point about "Aim steadily at faith's target."]

➢ **Aim steadily at faith's target**

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Ask yourself this question: "What do I have faith in?" How did you answer? Assuming you didn't say, "Nothing," perhaps it was like one of these:

- "That God will bring me out of this depression."
- "That I could quit drinking so much."
- "That I can get past my anger."

These are all great faith *goals* and excellent requests to make to God, but they aren't what you put your faith in. If you do – and they don't come about – what happens to your faith? The only answer to the question, "What do I have faith in?" should be "God." Whenever we tie our faith to our circumstances or to a particular desire, we take God off the throne of our life and set ourselves up for great disappointment.

- So, what's the difference between "faith goals" and the "object of our faith?"
- What's the danger of turning a specific experience or desired outcome into the object of our faith? What's the danger of turning that experience or outcome into a validation (or non-validation) of our faith?
- What should be our attitude instead?

  [Make it clear that we are certainly not saying that we should not pray for specific needs we have or outcomes we desire. The point is that we need to always remember what we learned from Jesus about prayer – "Not as I will, but as YOU will, God." We leave the results to God. He is the one we look to and trust to bring about the best outcome.]
- See if you can finish the second part of this sentence: "Sometimes we may be trying very hard to get God to change our circumstances, while God is using our circumstances to _____." *[…change us.]*

[Have someone read the next point about "Don't try to go it alone."]

➢ **Don't try to go it alone**

Grief is hard on a person and mourning is difficult work. Effective grief work is not done alone. Don't try to be the pillar of strength to everyone around you. You'll crumble. Be sure to find a few people you know you can count on to be there for you when you need them. Death and grief expert Dr. Harold Ivan Smith writes:

> "Grievers cannot extricate themselves from their cistern called grief. They need a rope. Grievers need someone on the other end to pull. But they really need individuals to pad the ropes – not with pat answers or spiritual clichés or even Scripture promises, but with hope."[20]

[20] Dr. Harold Ivan Smith in *When Your People Are Grieving* (Beacon Hill Press, 2001), p. 38. Dr. Smith speaks widely on the subjects of grief and death, and conducts "grief gatherings" around the U.S.

- This is difficult, isn't it? Most of us don't want to admit we have any weaknesses, or that we're struggling, or that we might need some help or someone to lean on. Think about it for a minute. Who do you know that you could talk to and tell them about the difficulties you are experiencing without jeopardizing your personal sense of honor? Someone you know understands you, and would not judge you? Write their name in the margin of this chapter.

[Have someone read the next point about "Do something with your anger."]

➢ **Do something with your anger**

When anger is bottled up indefinitely, it morphs into bitterness. And, as we learned earlier, that bitterness will spread beyond the borders of your life. It's okay to be angry. It is a normal, reasonable emotion when we are confronted with unjust, hurtful, or grievous events. It is recorded in the Bible that Jesus Himself became angry on a few occasions (Mark 3:1-5; Mark 10:14; John 2:13-16). But it's what we ***do*** with that anger that can lead to sin.

The Bible says in Ephesians 4:26 (NIV) – *"In your anger do not sin."* When you feel the anger rising within you, first remove yourself from the physical cause of your anger if you can (e.g., if it's a person, leave the room; if a locational trigger, go somewhere else). It's like removing fuel from the fire. No fuel, no fire. Go for a run; work out, punch a pillow; dig a garden; scrub the kitchen floor; rake some leaves. Or if you're able, do something truly constructive: go help someone who needs it.

- What do you do when you feel anger rising in you? How do you keep it from boiling over?

[Have someone read "The Take-Away," up to the Prayer.]

The Take-Away: Grief and Eternity

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Part of growing strong and mature is learning how to fully experience the distressing events of life, embrace them, mourn them, release them, and be able to move on. Here's what Jesus wants to do for you:

> The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me…
>
> To console those who mourn in Zion, *t*o give them beauty for ashes,
> The oil of joy for mourning, *t*he garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
> That they may be called trees of righteousness, *t*he planting of the LORD,
> That He may be glorified.
>
> (Isaiah 61:1-3 NKJV)

The Lord Jesus Christ says to you today…

I see everything. I see the devastation and death that your enemies have brought on you and on the ones you love. I don't want you to be surprised at the painful situation you are experiencing. I want you to trust Me. I want you to rejoice that you share in My sufferings. Your enemies hate you because they do not know that God sent Me. They hate you and hurt you without reason and without cause. I see every injustice. I am not causing you this pain

and loss. The evil one and those who walk in darkness have caused this suffering for you and the ones you love. I want you to remember My word, My promise that I am with you. I will never leave you. I will provide for you. I will repay your enemies in My perfect time. Today, trust Me. I am here with you. I will make a way for you. You can do all things through Me. I love you.

- According to the scripture we read above (Isaiah 63:1-3), what is on Jesus' heart to do for you?

[Have someone – or you – read the closing Prayer.]

Prayer

Heavenly Father, my soul feels shattered from what I have gone through. I am depressed, weary, empty, angry, and – in many ways – hopeless. But I have faith in You. I have seen You take me through very difficult times in the past, and I know that You are always with me. You bring Spring after every Winter. Please increase my faith. Help me to be patient with the process You are taking me through. Help me to experience the comfort of your Holy Spirit, and the comfort offered by my friends who love me. Help me to remember that you will soon bring spring to the winter branches I am looking at now. Please restore to me the joy of my salvation.

In Jesus' name, amen.

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Women, War, & Trauma – Chapter 9

Who Am I? Truth for a Traumatized Identity

By Marshéle Carter, Chris & Rahnella Adsit[21]

Objectives of this Chapter:

- To help group members recognize how trauma can open the door to a negative, destructive self-perception through the agencies of Satan, the world system surrounding us, and our own negative self-talk.
- To counter Satan's lies with the truths of God found in His Word.
- To give group members a stronger, more confident, and faith-filled perception of who they *truly* are.

[Have someone read the opening verse: John 1:12.]

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name. (John 1:12)

- According to our opening verse, what does it take for a person to become a child of God?

  [By receiving Christ and believing in Him. "Receiving" and "believing" are equivalent, as they both result in a person becoming a child of God. If you receive Christ, you obviously believe in Him. And if you believe that He is who He said He is, you are receiving or welcoming Him as your Lord and Savior.]
- How would you define "a child of God?" What are some things that would characterize a child of God?
- How "permanent" are these characteristics? Will they come and go? Can we lose our status as "a child of God?"

[Have someone read the opening story: "Leaving My 'Self' in Artsakh" and the paragraph after the story, up to "Truth vs. Lies."]

Leaving My "Self" In Artsakh

Things had been getting worse for months. We gave ourselves hope that if we could just endure this period, and overcome the difficulties that the Azerbaijanis were bringing, maybe later the end would be good. But day by day the situation worsened. People were starving. There were fights for bread, and it was very difficult to find hygiene items and baby food.

On September 19, the shooting started. The noises startled us, and my husband, children, and I quickly ran down into our basement for shelter. But we thought, "Our lives are over. This is where it will all end." At least our family would die together. I truly couldn't imagine how we would ever get out alive. Perhaps it will be an artillery shell through our roof, perhaps foot soldiers storming down our stairs. But somehow we survived. The terror my family and I felt during those hours still haunts us today.

[21] Much of the content of this chapter is from *When War Comes Home* co-written by all three of us.

On September 25 we left Stepanakert. We traveled 22 hours – many delays, hungry, exhausted, children crying. As we approached the Hakar Bridge, we began to panic, wondering if they would allow us to cross or not. Would we die here, or would we be saved? I have never had to think such thoughts!

When we finally crossed the bridge, it was as if we were reborn. We felt saved! But on the other hand, the loss of our homeland was suffocating us.

I left my "self" in Artsakh and I will probably never find it again. I left everything there – my mother's grave, my house, my entire childhood, my homeland. I left everything there and I will not find it here.

It's true that we are orphans without Artsakh. But Artsakh is also orphaned without us.

Sad times make us unrecognizable even to ourselves. Our broken hearts cause important information to fade in and out of focus. Traumatic experiences can cause our own identity to come under fire. In our determination to survive each day, we stuff our identity into our back pockets and misplace our God-given uniqueness and value. We need an updated understanding of who we are and how we have changed. And we need daily reminders of what never changes.

- Can any of you identify with the writer of this story? Has your self-perception changed since this latest conflict started? How do you see yourself now, compared to how you saw yourself before the crisis started?
- Why do you think our self-perception changes when we go through a traumatic experience?
- As was referred to in the last line above, what are some of the things about us that never change – which we sometimes need to be reminded about?

[Have someone read the next section, up to "Traumatic Stress and Identity."]

Truth vs. Lies

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There are lying voices and subtle forces that are peeling back your edges, scarring your self-image, and making the information you believe about yourself unrecognizable. There is a big difference between who your enemies say you are and who God your Father in heaven says you are. A correct, healthy understanding of who we are is important to Him – and *crucial* to us.

While God spends a big portion of His word repeatedly reminding us who He is, He spends another big portion of His word telling us who WE are! He defines us over and over and over and over, because He wants us to walk in the victory of that true identity.

"Identity theft" is nothing new. It's not a 21st century crime recently ushered in by high tech. It is actually older than dirt. Identity theft began before creation. The prophet Isaiah tells us that Satan wanted to assume the identity of the Most High God (Isaiah 14:14). But since he failed miserably in this attempt, he has made it his mission to mess with *us*, the ones who actually *are* made in the image of God.

Earthly identity theft happens when a "person knowingly uses someone else's personal identifiers without legal authority with ill intent to gain something of value." Or simply put, identity theft is when someone illegally takes on YOUR identity.

Spiritual identity theft is letting someone or something convince us that we are someone we're not. Simply put, spiritual identity theft is when we are tricked or forced to take on an identity OTHER THAN OUR OWN.

Spiritual identity theft happens when we allow the enemy to persuade us to act like someone much less than what our Maker has said we are. Satan issues us a false identity. His objective is to keep reality unrecognizable to us. He wants us to forget the truth that we are redeemed, re-created, royal children of the living God (John 1:12).

- Why do you think it's such a big deal to Satan to strip you of your true identity, and make you question or forget who you really are?
- If you are confused about your own identity, what other things might you be confused about?
- Consider these potential truths about a person. How would Satan try to change them, and make a person believe the opposite?
  - A loving, considerate mother… *[Suggestion: a hate-filled, impatient, distracted mother.]*
  - An intelligent person…
  - Someone whom God loves…
  - Strong, resilient…
  - Brave, courageous…
  - Conscientious, responsible…
  - Resourceful, able to handle any challenge…

[Have someone read the next section, up to "Self-perception Assessment."]

Traumatic Stress and Identity

When a person experiences traumatic stress, her self-perception is often shaken to the core. While she used to see herself as rational, self-sufficient, adaptive, strong, and worthy, she now questions those assessments. They are often replaced by feelings of fear, confusion, powerlessness, and helplessness.

The effects of this negative transformation of your self-image don't remain in the psychological realm. They bleed into your behavior too – your plans, activities, priorities, reactions, values, hopes, dreams, ambition, social interaction… the list goes on and on.

- So, when a person's self-perception is damaged, and no longer reflects the truth about them, it affects them deeply. But how does it also affect those around them – spouse, children, friends, co-workers?

[Leader: Read the first paragraph in the next section yourself, up to the Self-Perception pairs.]

Self-perception Assessment

Dr. Steven Stosney[22], an international authority on trauma and victimization, has developed a very useful template that will help you assess your current self-perception – how positively or

[22] Opposed pairs of core values/core hurts are found in Dr. Steven Stosney's *Manual of the Core Value Workshop* [Copyright 1995, 2003 Steven Stosney] and in other publications of his. For a fuller explanation consult his website: www.compassionpower.com.

negatively you view yourself. Dr. Stosney's normal approach goes much deeper, but some of the elements are useful here. There are eight dynamics of self-perception listed below:

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- Let's take a minute and do this Assessment. Put an "X" on the line between the matched pairs that best describes your current opinion of yourself.
- At the end of this chapter, we're going to re-visit this Assessment and see how it has changed.

Positive Self-Perception		**Negative Self-Perception**
Regarded	----------	**Disregarded**
Important	----------	**Unimportant**
Forgiven	----------	**Accused/Guilty**
Valued	----------	**Devalued**
Accepted	----------	**Rejected**
Powerful	----------	**Powerless**
Lovable	----------	**Unlovable**
Connected	----------	**Separated**

[After they have spent a few minutes doing the above exercise, have someone read the next three paragraphs in this section, up to "Exposing Your Enemy's Deception."

Obviously, all the negative voices in your life want you to be as far to the right side of these traits as possible, which keeps you in a vulnerable position. If that's where you are at this point, it's because you have been fed lies. Here's what the Son of God says about Satan:

> *He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.* (John 8:44 NIV)

As the Chinese warrior Sun Tzu wrote, *"All warfare is based on deception."* Satan has been practicing his deceptive tactics for eons. He has been observing you since you were a child. He knows just what to say to deceive you. His objective is your destruction (1 Peter 5:8), which will diminish the Kingdom of God and grieve the great heart of the King.

- I'd like a few of you to share which of the Positive characteristics you feel best about, and which of the Negative characteristics you are most concerned about in your life.
- Why do you think Satan would want to deceive you into thinking you are more like the Negative column than the Positive one? What victory has he won if he can get you to think of yourself so poorly?
- Why do we tend to believe the lies of our enemy? Why don't we naturally recognize them and reject them?
- Can you think of any recent events that prompted you to move your self-assessment so far to the right?

[Have someone read the first two paragraphs in the next section, and also <u>up through</u> Deception #1: "DISREGARDED."]

Exposing Your Enemy's Deception

The lies in this section were spawned by Satan. He will whisper them to your subconscious at your most vulnerable moments. You will be reminded of incidents in your past that validate them. He will contextualize them in your traumatic events. He will reinforce them with messages

bombarding you from the world system that surrounds you. And before long, he will have you telling *yourself* the lies.

Following are **eight deceptive traps** your enemy has set for you. Consider whether or not you've heard them before. Each lie will be followed by the countering **TRUTH** that God wants you to hear.

Deception #1: DISREGARDED

Lies of the enemy:

- You are a nobody.
- No one cares about you. Why should they?
- You don't deserve the respect that others get.

Maybe those exact words weren't used, but after our world has been turned upside down, many of us hear and swallow these lies. When you hear these lies, you look at your situation, you look at how people respond to you, you consider your own failures, and you resign yourself to the "apparent truth" of those lies.

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God wants to give you *true* information that counters Satan's deceptions. Your traumatic stress has changed you – that's the kernel of truth. But to say, "Because I've changed and I'm not functioning as I used to, I am worthy of disregard" is an absolute lie and needs to be opposed by God's truth.

Not only is His Word *true,* but it is also *living and active* according to Hebrews 4:12. That means that it's not just words that some ancient prophet scribbled on paper several centuries ago. It continues to live today. As you read those words, and as the Holy Spirit energizes and breathes life into them, they are the words of God being spoken directly to *you,* right where you are.

- Have any of you ever heard any of those three lies from the enemy? If so, why did you think they were the truth?
- Think about one of the times you heard and believed one of those lies. We just read that every lie must have an element of truth in order to be effective. What was the element of truth that convinced you to believe that lie?

  [Leader: before the class, think about a time when this happened to you, and be prepared to share it if the participants need a little prompting.]

[Have someone read the next section about "Your TRUE Identity: REGARDED."

Your TRUE Identity: REGARDED

You are a friend, sibling, child, and heir of the King of the Universe! He has had plans for you even since before He created Adam and Eve. You are ***loved*** and ***highly regarded!***

- [Jesus speaking:] *I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you.* (John 15:15 NIV)
- *So now Jesus and the ones He makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them His brothers and sisters.* (Hebrews 2:11 NLT)
- *Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are His child, God has made you His heir.* (Galatians 4:7 NLT)

- So, in each of these verses we just read, what is God saying is true about who you really are?
  Suggested answers:
  - *First verse: We are His friends.*
  - *Second verse: God is our Father and Jesus is our brother.*
  - *Third verse: I am a child of God, and His heir.]*
- How do these three verses prove that, contrary to Satan's lies, we are highly regarded?
  [Encourage them to underline or write the answers in their Field Guides.]

[Have someone read the three lies of the enemy in the next section "Deception #2: UNIMPORTANT."]

Deception #2: UNIMPORTANT

Lies of the enemy:

- Your input is unnecessary and unwanted.
- You're just a little fish in a big pond.
- Go sit on the sidelines.

- When you heard those words coming out of (the reader's) mouth, how did they make you feel? Do you feel like maybe there is some truth to them? Like maybe they <u>*are*</u> accurate? Why do we think that way?

[Have someone read the next section about "Your TRUE Identity: IMPORTANT."]

Your TRUE Identity: IMPORTANT

- *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.* (John 1:12)
- *You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth.* (Matthew 5:13 MSG)
- *You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world.* (Matthew 5:14 MSG)

Not only do you hold important positions as an eternal child of God; not only has He called you as His seasoning and His light on the earth; but you also are being trained and qualified for unique future leadership in Christ's Kingdom on earth as His child and heir.

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Jesus was wounded, and all those who follow Him also receive wounds – as you have. Down through the ages, the men and women who were significantly used by God were wounded in some severe way. You have been through the Refiner's fire – and may still be in the middle of it. There are evil forces doing their best to propel our world into chaos. The Bible predicts that in the end times society will crumble and treacherous times will ensue – and those times are at hand. Who better to lead us through those traumatic times than people like <u>*you?*</u> You've been to hell and back. You're <u>*important*</u> now, but as you are more fully restored to health, you will prove to be <u>*invaluable*</u> in the coming times.

- Let's look back at those three verses again and ask this question after each one: "What is the truth that this verse is saying about who you really are?"
- How do you think your particular traumatic experience has made you better qualified to be a leader, and has made you more important than ever to the Kingdom of God?

Deception/Truth #3 through Deception/Truth #8

[For each of the next six Deception/Truth sections, have someone read the three lies of the enemy, and then have someone (or you) read the scripture verses one at a time. Ask the group to share their insights about what each verse is saying is true about a follower of Jesus. Encourage them to underline or write the answers in their Field Guides. As God brings any follow-up questions to your mind after each Deception/Truth section, feel free to ask them! Then have someone (or you) read the concluding paragraph(s) after each Deception/Truth.]

Deception #3: ACCUSED/GUILTY

Lies of the enemy:

- You really blew it and need to be punished.
- You're unforgivable.
- You can't be trusted.

Your TRUE Identity: FORGIVEN

- *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* (Romans 8:1)
- *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (*Romans 5:1)
- *Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.* (Hebrews 10:17 NIV)

God has forgiven believers in Christ of all our sins. He has removed them as far as the east is from the west. He remembers them no more. We are clean. We are free from sin and its shame and guilt.

* * * * * * * * * * *

Deception #4: DEVALUED

Lies of the enemy:

- We don't need you or want you.
- You're not good enough.
- You don't have what it takes.

Your TRUE Identity: VALUED

- *The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness."* (Jeremiah 31:3 NIV)
- *Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.* (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 NLT)
- *For God knew His people in advance, and He chose them to become like His Son, so that His Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And having chosen them, He called them to come to Him. And having called them, He gave them right standing with Himself. And having given them right standing, He gave them His glory.* (Romans 8:29, 30 NLT)

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So, we were known and loved by God, chosen by Him to become like Jesus Christ, called by God to come to Him, given right standing with Him, and finally given *glory.* I'd say that's all quite *valuable!*

* * * * * * * * * *

Deception #5: REJECTED

Lies of the enemy:

- You are a failure.
- We want someone better than you.
- You're not qualified.

Your TRUE Identity: ACCEPTED

- *To the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.* (Ephesians 1:6 NKJV)
- *As you come to Him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* (1 Peter 2:4,5)

The "living Stone" is Jesus Christ, who was rejected by mankind (when He was crucified), but always chosen and precious to the Father. In the same way, you were selected by God to be part of His spiritual construction. So not only are you accepted by God, but the sacrifices you're making, all that you are offering up to God, He also regards as totally acceptable!

* * * * * * * * * *

Deception #6: POWERLESS

Lies of the enemy:

- You are weak; damaged goods.
- Can't you do *anything* right?
- Someone is always going to have to take care of you.

Your TRUE Identity: POWERFUL

- *For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.* (2 Timothy 1:7 NKJV)
- *You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.* (1 John 4:4)
- *For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.* (1 John 5:4,5 NIV)

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You probably don't *feel* particularly powerful these days. You may feel powerless to accomplish basic goals, control your anger, take care of your kids, sleep, conquer your

depression, etc. But your weakness is only temporary. When Jesus was taken into custody, tortured and crucified, He seemed *very* weak. But it was only temporary. In fact, He had massive *latent* power during that entire ordeal. The power was there, just not being used – and for good reasons. You have that same latent power. Begin asking God to help you release the latent power that He has placed within you. He wants to! Just ask Him!

* * * * * * * * * *

Deception #7: UNLOVABLE

Lies of the enemy:

- Who would ever love you? You have no redeeming qualities.
- You're so ugly and boring.
- You are beyond being loved – by God, by your husband, or by anyone.

Your TRUE Identity: LOVABLE

You are of infinite worth. God was so much in love with you that He was willing to sacrifice His Son to redeem you from your sins. Even if you were the only person on earth, He would have done it for you!

- *For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 8:38,39)
- *Greater love has no one than this, that a person will lay down his life for his friends.* (John 15:13)
- *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* (Romans 5:8 NIV)

How much love would it take for you to be willing to die for someone else? It happens from time to time, and it always amazes us. How could someone be *so* selfless?

But would you be willing to die for someone who had betrayed you? You would have to be an incredibly loving and forgiving person to die for someone like *that*. And yet, that's how bad we were – and worse – when Christ died on the cross for us. *That's* how much He loves us.

* * * * * * * * *

Deception #8: SEPARATED

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Lies of the enemy:

- You are alone and you should stay that way.
- No one wants you around; can't you go someplace else?
- You shouldn't be such a bother to other people.

Your TRUE Identity: CONNECTED

You are connected in two realms…

Connected to God:

- [Jesus speaking:] *I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.* (John 15:5)
- *For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.* (Galatians 3:26)

Connected to the Body of Christ – other Christians:

- *All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.* (1 Corinthians 12:27 NLT)
- *You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.* (Ephesians 2:19 NIV)

* * * * * * * * * * *

[Leader: After you and your group has worked through the eight Deception/Truth pairs, read the following paragraph.]

As you work through your difficulties, there will be times when you feel alone, rejected, unlovable, devalued and unimportant. That's when Satan will do all he can to affirm those thoughts. We need to recognize his tactics. He's using deception to move you closer to despair and defeat. He is **lying**. Counter his lies with the truth.

- A very powerful way that we can counter the lies of Satan as he tries to tell us who we are, is to frequently affirm what GOD says about who we are. This next section in your Field Guide is a summary of the eight Truths we just finished discussing. I'd like us to go around the group with each person reading one of the Truths and the three statements under each one (you don't need to say the verse references). As we do so, if you're not the one reading out loud, read along silently, and absorb deeply the TRUTH about who you are.

This Is Who I Am

REGARDED

- I am a friend of the Almighty God of heaven and earth. (John 15:15)
- Jesus is not ashamed to call me His sister. (Hebrews 2:11)
- I am chosen by God, holy and without fault in His eyes. (Ephesians 1:4)

IMPORTANT

- I have been rightly called a child of God. (John 1:12)
- God has made me His salt and light in the world. (Matthew 5:13, 14)
- I am an eternal being. (John 3:16)

FORGIVEN

- I am no longer condemned. (Romans 8:1)
- I have been justified before the righteous Judge. (Romans 5:1)
- God no longer remembers my sins. (Hebrews 10:17)

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VALUED

- God loves me with an everlasting love. (Jeremiah 31:3)
- I am God's temple, bought at a great price. (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20)
- God knows, chose, called, justified, and glorified me. (Romans. 8:29, 30)

ACCEPTED

- I am accepted in Christ. (Ephesians 1:6)
- I am a chosen, costly, living stone in God's building. (1 Peter 2:4, 5)
- I have bold, unrestricted access to God's throne of grace. (Hebrews 4:16)

POWERFUL

- God has given me the spirit of power, love, and a sound mind. (2 Timothy 1:7)
- God's Holy Spirit in me is greater than any unholy spirits in the world. (1 John 4:4)
- I am born of God and believe in Jesus – I am an overcomer. (1 John 5:4, 5)

LOVABLE

- I am loved by God and *nothing* will keep us apart. (Romans 8:38, 39)
- I am loved supremely – enough for God to die for me. (John 15:13)
- I am loved unconditionally, *even* when I sin. (Romans 5:8)

CONNECTED

- I am intimately attached to Christ and bearing fruit. (John 15:5)
- I am a member of God's eternal family. (Galatians 3:26)
- I am an eternal member of God's Kingdom and household. (Ephesians 2:19)

The more often you meditate on these truths, the more they will positively influence your self-perception. A traumatized identity needs <u>truth</u> in order to heal.

- I would encourage each of you to declare this list out loud ***<u>daily</u>*** for the next week, and then to make it part of your devotional time at least once a week after that. I think you'll notice a ***<u>big</u>*** change in how you see yourself. I would also encourage you to write or type it out and keep it in your Bible so that you can access it easily and frequently. Satan will do everything he can to make you forget these truths, and to ignore this list, and thereby make you forget (again!) what is true about you. Don't let him do it! Be proactive! Plan ahead for his attack!

  [Leader: Consider typing out and copying the "This Is Who I Am" list ahead of time and passing a copy out to each of your group members. In this way you will be <u>sure</u> they have it!]

- Now I'd like you to turn back to the Self-perception Assessment you took a little while ago near the beginning of this chapter. Look where you put your "X" on each line. Has that assessment changed? If you feel differently about yourself now, just put a straight up-and-down line on the continuum where you feel you are now. *[It could look something like this:]*

- Would some of you who changed your assessment on one or more of these characteristics share with us why you changed it? What's different now?

- Let's take a minute and put today's date next to your Self-perception Assessment. As I mentioned before, read and (even better) proclaim out loud these Truths about who you are every day for one week. Then retake the Self-perception Assessment again. I can almost guarantee you that you will feel very differently about yourself! And you don't have to stop after a week. Renew these truths in your mind and heart at least once a week.

[Have someone read "The Take Away."]

The Take-Away

Your traumatic experiences may have shaken your self-identity to the core. You may no longer have the confidence and positive opinion of yourself that you once had. Satan would like to redefine you and *keep* you depressed and discouraged. He's a liar and has no good future in mind for you. But God also wants to let you know who you are, and HE KNOWS THE TRUTH! Listen to Him!

- What are you going to do in the future when Satan starts telling you lies again about who you are? (…because he ***will*** keep trying to make you believe those lies…)

[Have someone – or you – read the closing prayer.]

Prayer

Lord, thank You that my relationship to You has no expiration date. When I look at my photo, help me to remember that You see past the face I wear for others. You created me and know the real, eternal me.

Whenever I'm asked for my documents, I will thank you that I am not just a number to You. I belong to You and am a citizen of heaven. Help me to remember that ultimately Jesus is my only sponsor who always makes intercession for me.

Father, thank you for the new identity and privileges that are mine as your child, because of what Jesus has done for me. The blood of Your Son authorizes me to countless blessings and uniquely defines how You see and value me.

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Thank you that my God-given identity and privileges in Christ will never fade or be taken from me, no matter how many difficult times Your plan for my life includes.

In Jesus' Name, amen.

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Women, War, & Trauma – Chapter 10

God's Strategy for Defeating Your Enemies

By Chris & Rahnella Adsit

Objectives of this Chapter:

- To clarify who our enemy is in the battles we are currently fighting – physically, emotionally, and spiritually.
- To help group members gain insight on their physical enemies (the "horses" in this chapter's main illustration) and how to fight them using the spiritual weapons God has given us.
- To help group members gain insight on how to put themselves in the strongest position to fight their enemies in the spiritual realm (the "riders" in this chapter's main illustration) – both defensively and offensively.

[Have someone read the opening quote from Sun Tzu below.]

If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.
If you know yourself but not the enemy, in every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat.
If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.

Sun Tzu –*The Art of War*
(Chinese General, 544-496 BC)

Sun Tzu didn't mention one treacherous option: knowing the enemy but not yourself.

- First, in an actual battle, what do you think could happen to an army that has good intelligence on its enemy, but didn't have a realistic idea of the assets their own army had, or did not have?
- Secondly, as we consider fighting against our spiritual enemy – Satan and his demons – what trouble could a person get into if they were well-informed about Satan's assets, but didn't know about their own God-given spiritual assets?

In this chapter, we're going to make sure you have a good grasp on ***both*** your enemy's battle plans, as well as your own assets, armor, tactics, and weapons.

[Have someone read the next three paragraphs, including the Bible verse up to "Fighting the Wrong Enemy."]

There are wars raging all over the world at this present moment. What we see and hear is horrific. There are invading armies leaving a path of destruction: killing, looting homes, and leveling whole cities. Worse, they are committing unspeakable horrors such as massacring civilians, and raping and torturing innocent women and children. Loved ones are being separated from one another, often not knowing if the others are dead or alive. People are losing their homes, families, and their communities. It is hard not to despair and be sucked into the vortex of darkness. But we must not forget that in all this devastation our greatest threat is found not in the things we can see, but in the things we cannot see. The Bible says:

> *For our struggle is **not against** human beings, **but against** the rulers, authorities and cosmic powers governing this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm. (Ephesians 6:12 CJB)*

In all conflicts, nothing will guarantee defeat more completely than forgetting who our real enemy is, and nothing guarantees victory better than a strategy that takes out the leaders of the opposing force. Our true adversaries don't carry rifles or drive tanks; it is the spiritual forces of darkness *behind them* that bring about destruction and death. They must be fought with the battle plans and gear that God has provided.

- Understandably, we tend to focus on the soldiers that are invading our country as our enemies. And though they are certainly accountable for the horrible things they have done – as an army and as individuals – they aren't our true, ultimate enemy. Who is?
- You probably won't get out on the physical battlefield to fight enemy soldiers, but what do you think about the fact that you can fight the forces behind those soldiers wherever you are? Even right here, right now? How can it be done?

[Have someone read the next five paragraphs of this section, "Fighting the Wrong Enemy," up to the paragraph that starts, "Biblical Principles about How to Deal with the HORSES."]

Fighting the Wrong Enemy

In the early 1500's the Spanish invaded present-day Guatemala seeking to conquer the Mayan people and claim the gold-rich region as their own.

> *"The Mayans – who fought with bow and arrows – were known to be brave, fierce warriors. But the invading Spanish soldiers had a distinct advantage because they wore armor, and they had horses and guns. Horses were unknown in the Western Hemisphere at that time. So when the Mayans saw one of these swift-footed beings with an armored appendage on top, they thought it was all one creature.*
>
> *They aimed at the horse, not realizing that the real enemy was the soldier astride the horse. Their arrows felled the horses in great numbers, but the armored soldiers jumped from their mounts and shot the native warriors with their muskets. The Mayans were massacred by the hundreds, and the Spanish easily seized control of the entire region."*[23]

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This is a great illustration of spiritual warfare! The Mayans were defeated because they failed to recognize the real enemy riding on the horse's back – and that's often what happens to us. When another person confronts us with their evil intentions, we need to remind ourselves that they are not our biggest threat, they're only the horse!

Horses with their riders are invading your country, and anyone who has been around a horse knows they aren't exactly harmless. You must be wary of them because at any moment they may kick you, bite you, or trample over you! But don't forget about the "humans" controlling the horses;

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[23] *"A Woman's Guide to Spiritual Warfare."* by Quin Shever and Ruthanne Garlock, Servant Publications, Ann Arbor, Michigan (pg. 36, 37)

they can be far more dangerous! When you need to protect yourself and your loved ones, there are Biblical principles to follow. This list is by no means comprehensive, and it is not a simple "do or don't" list. In each case, you need to ask God for His wisdom and direction in personally applying these principles.

- What would you say is the point of this story about the Mayans and the Spanish?

  [The importance of focusing on our true enemy. The horses were impressive, but it's the riders who were the ones directing the horses and who could kill you. The Mayans were defeated because they were focused on the wrong enemy.]
- But this is not to say that the horses (which represent the enemy soldiers who have attacked Armenia) should be ignored. They are the direct cause of many of your current difficulties. So let's look at some principles we can apply in our fight with our human invaders…

[Have someone – or several people – read the next section, including the 10 bullet points about the "Biblical Rules of Engagement." Tell the reader(s) that they don't have to read the verse reference after each point – those are there for future individual study.]

Biblical Principles about How to Deal with the <u>HORSES</u>

While the Mayan's main problem was the Spanish soldiers, they couldn't ignore the horses. As powerful and swift as they were, and considering how they were used to such great effect by the soldiers, the horses were dangerous too and had to be dealt with. In the same way, even though your primary problem has to do with the forces of darkness, you also must act wisely toward the humans that those forces are animating. The enemy combatants in your country are the horses in this illustration.

The Bible says there is *"a time for war"* (Ecclesiastes 3:8). God will teach you *how* to fight (Psalm 144:1-3; Psalm 18:34), and He will tell you *when* to fight (Nehemiah 4:11-18). Our God is a warrior (Exodus 15:3), and the Lord of Armies (Hosea 12:15). If He is calling you to fight, there are some **Biblical rules of engagement** to follow:

- You have the right to defend yourself and your loved ones (Exodus 22:2-3; I Timothy 5:8).
- You have the responsibility to defend the vulnerable (Psalm 82:4: Deuteronomy 22:24-27).
- You are to rescue those who are being slaughtered (Proverbs 24:11).
- You have the right to protect your loved ones and your property (Exodus 22:2-3; Nehemiah 4:14; Luke 11:21; Luke 22:36).
- You are not to commit murder (Exodus 20:13; Matthew 5:21) There is a difference between killing someone in a just war and murdering them. When you *must* kill, you do it to protect yourself or others and eliminate a mortal threat. When you murder somebody, your intention is solely to kill them for your own private purposes, and you plan it out ahead of time.

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- You are encouraged to ask God to judge and bring justice to your enemies. For example, David prays against those who hate him without cause (Psalm 69:4). Jesus, who is called Faithful and True, will righteously judge and make war with those who are wicked (Rev. 19:11; Revelation 21:8).

- It is normal to feel hatred towards those who do evil. Anger is part of the grief cycle. In Scripture, it says that God hates the wicked and those who love violence (Psalm 11:5). God also hates: haughtiness, lying, killing the innocent, plotting evil, racing to do wrong, a false witness, and someone who sows discord (Proverbs 6:16). Sin has a rippling effect. May we all grow to hate sin – in ***our*** lives and in others.
- As a servant of God, He may use you to carry out His righteous judgment on the wrongdoer (Numbers 31:3; Esther 8:11; Psalm 94:16; Romans 13:4).
- *If possible*, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with your enemies (Romans 12:17-18; Ezekiel. 33:11).
- Resist the urge to take vengeance on your enemies; you are to leave that up to God. He can do it much better than you can (Romans 12:19; Isaiah 42:13; Proverbs 24:29).

- Are there any of these "Rules of Engagement" that you disagree with? Any of them you have questions about and would like the group to discuss?
- Obviously, we are allowed to do everything we can to defend ourselves, our families and our friends from harm. But here is another tactic we can use against the "horses…"

  Abraham Lincoln was the famous American President who served during the Civil War in the US in the 1800s. He once made this profound statement about how to destroy our enemies during the height of the fighting between the North and the South: "Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?"
  - How could it be possible to make the invading soldiers our friends?

    [Suggestions: prayer; looking for opportunities to return good for evil; showing mercy when there is an opportunity; encouraging and helping enemy soldiers who want to defect; helping refugees from other countries fleeing the war; showing kindness to the spouses of the enemy soldiers; other ideas?]
  - Some have said, "I know that Jesus tells us we must forgive and love our enemies, but honestly, I'm not ready to do that yet." In our opinion (the authors) this is totally understandable! Are there some of you that also feel this way? If so, what do you think might change that in the future?

[Leader read the first two paragraphs of the next section up to "Know Your Enemies."]

Biblical Principles about How to Fight the RIDERS

In Paul's first letter to Timothy, he tells him to *"fight the good fight"* (I Timothy 1:18). Later in his second letter he says: "*Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 2:32). YOU are a soldier in a midst of a cosmic battle between God and His forces, and Satan and his forces, and you are called to fight (Eph. 6:12-18). In this section you will learn how to identify your enemies, know your assets, neutralize the threats, and live in a place of freedom, safety and victory.

At this point, we would like to introduce you to ***The Cross Illustration***. You will find it at the end of this chapter (page 95) *[page 123 in Leader's Guide]*. It is a picture of what we will be referring to throughout this chapter. There is the Kingdom of Light, and there is the Kingdom of Darkness. You are either taking a stand on the high ground, seated *"with Christ Jesus in the heavenlies"* (Ephesians 2:4-7), or you are seeing defeat because you are living in enemy territory, under the powers and authorities of darkness. There is no middle ground. In this section you will learn how to identify your enemies, prepare for battle, and defeat them.

- Turn to the last page of this chapter (p. 95) and let's look at ***The Cross Illustration***. Here are some of the main things to notice in this illustration *[Leader: you could either study The Cross Illustration and then explain each element in your own words, or simply read what is written below.]:*
  - **At the top** you see "The Kingdom of Light." **At the bottom** you see "The Kingdom of Darkness." You are either taking a victorious stand on the high ground seated *"with Christ Jesus in the heavenlies"* (Ephesians 2:4-7), or you are experiencing defeat because you are living in enemy territory, heavily influenced by the powers and authorities of darkness. There is no middle ground.
  - **Lower left:** These are the components of the enemy's forces that he uses to attack you: Satan and his vast army of demons, the Worldly System that Satan has corrupted, and the Flesh – our sinful human nature.
  - **Lower right:** This highlights *"the works of the flesh"* (Galatians 5:19) – the part of us that responds positively to the influences of Satan, the world system, and our flesh. This is what our Old Nature produces as we follow Satan's wishes for us. *[Have someone read the list of qualities under our "Old Nature."]*
  - **Upper left:** These are the new qualities we have received from God as we became united with Christ and became *"seated with Christ Jesus in the heavenlies"* in contrast to our Old Nature's "works of the flesh." These include our "New Nature" (with the fruits of "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control"*), our "New Identity" *("children of God"), and our* "New Purpose": (*"saved by grace through faith so we could do good works as His creations*.")
  - **Upper right:** God's Spiritual Armor – what He has given us so that we can withstand the attacks of the enemy. *[Have someone read the list of the components of our armor.]*
  - **Center of the Cross:** The way a person can escape from enemy territory is through faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. This involves confession, repentance, renouncing Satan and his plans, and submitting to Christ as Lord and Savior. This immediately transports a person from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of the Son of God (Colossians 1:13) enabling him or her to be victorious in their fight against all the things that seek to traumatize and destroy them.
- Are there any questions about this illustration?
- How does knowing the principles represented in this illustration help people to be in a stronger position to fight against the things that are trying to defeat them?

[Have three people read the "Know Your Enemies" section, up to where it says, "So how do you fight?"]

>>Know Your Enemies

So, who are your enemies? The Bible says that you are fighting on three battlefronts:

1. **The Infernal Enemy**: the spiritual forces of darkness
2. **The External Enemy**: the evil world system, created and supported by Satan
3. **The Internal Enemy**: the flesh (your old nature)

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1) **The Infernal Enemy:** You are fighting against the spiritual forces of darkness, which are *supernatural* enemies. Satan is called the *"prince of the power of the air"* (Ephesians 2:2). Jesus also called him the *"ruler of this world"* (John 12:31). It does not mean that he rules the world completely, but it does mean that God has allowed Satan to have significant authority and to operate in this world within the boundaries He has set for him. The Bible says that our foremost enemy is not *"flesh and blood,"* but a spiritual one. Satan has an army. It has a command structure. And he has a vast communication and control system (Ephesians 6:12).
2) **Your External Enemy**: You are also fighting against the evil world system – the secular world. It is a world that opposes any effort by God to exert His influence or standards on

them. 1 John 2:15-17 NASB says: *"Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away and also its lust; but the one who does the will of God continues to live forever."* The cultural values that the world is promoting include a wide range of sinful standards and behaviors. These include:[24]

- **Hedonism** – The *"lust of the flesh."* The desire for physical pleasure is all important. The world says: "If it feels good do it."
- **Materialism** – The *"lust of the eyes."* The belief that possessions and physical comfort are the most important things in life. The world says: "You have needs – satisfy them."
- **Narcissism** - The *"boastful pride of life."* This is all about pride and status. The world says, "You are number one – and everyone should know it."

3) **Your Internal Enemy:** Another enemy you must fight against is your old sinful nature – your fleshly desires (Galatians 5:17-23; I Peter 2:11). It is so easy to get caught up *"in the snare of the devil"* (2 Timothy 2:26). When you sin, you are opening yourself up to *"following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air"* (Ephesians 2:2), and that means you have wandered into enemy territory (I John 5:19). Sin may give pleasure for a moment, but over time you might find yourself held captive by that sin (Galatians 5:17-21; Romans 8:13). Living in habitual sin exposes you to great danger! It weakens you, makes you vulnerable to enemy attacks, and you will find yourself living a life marked by defeat (James 4:17; Colossians 3:25).

In 1 Peter 5:8 it says: *"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."* Lions roar as a demonstration of their power and to protect their territory. Make sure that you are not living in his territory. If you have experienced trauma – that also makes you vulnerable. Your enemies know your weaknesses and all the wounded places in your life.

- There are three "battlefronts" mentioned in this section in which we are fighting. What are they?

  [Satan and his demonic forces, the corrupt world system, and our own natural tendency to sin (our "flesh").]
- Can you think of how these three can join forces and conspire to discourage a traumatized person and bring them to a place of complete defeat – maybe even suicide? Think of an imaginary story where the three work together to defeat a person.

  [To help get the group thinking, give them this scenario: how could the three forces conspire to prompt a woman to steal some money from a neighbor? How could this later lead that woman to want to commit suicide?]

[Have someone read the next section starting with "So how do you fight?" up to where it says, "Strategy for Defeating your Enemies." Remind them that they don't need to read the Biblical references in the text.]

[24] From "What's Influencing Your Worldview?" - Daily Hope with Rick Warren - November 11, 2021 - Daily Hope with Rick Warren, Daily Devotional (lightsource.com)

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So how do you fight? Every battle strategist will tell you that "the high ground" is the most strategic place to fight from. If our connection with Jesus Christ is solid and uncompromised, we are on the high ground. See *The Cross Illustration* at the end of this chapter (p. 95) – notice the "High Ground" at the top of the page, in contrast with "The Kingdom of Darkness" at the bottom.

Your union with Christ is what makes you strong (Ephesians 6:10). It is in Him that you take your stand. Do you believe that He came to earth as a man (Hebrews 1:3)? Do you believe that Jesus died for you on the cross and that He rose from the dead and now sits at the right hand of the Father (Romans 8:34; Mark 16:9)? The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4*: "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved … that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures …"*

God raised Jesus *"from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet."* (Ephesians 1:20-22). All it takes is to believe in Jesus and to ask Him to come into your life. It is then that He will give you a new nature (Galatians 5:22-25), with a new identity (John 1:12) and a new purpose (Ephesians 2:8-10). Under His command He will train you (Psalms 144:1), equip you (Ephesians 6:10-18) and empower you (Ephesians 3:16,17) and then He will lead you on to victory. Are you ready to fight?

- Obviously, the preferred place in which to live and to fight from is on the "High Ground," in the Kingdom of Light (top of the illustration). Do you think it's possible for a Christian to slip back down to Enemy Territory, the Kingdom of Darkness? If so, how does that happen?
- How can a fallen Christian get back up to the High Ground? *[See "The Escape Route" in the middle of the illustration.]*

*[Have someone read the **Sun Tzu** quote and the paragraph after it.]*

>>Strategy for Defeating Your Enemies

"Victorious warriors win first and then go to war,
while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win."

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

The battle begins with *you*. Take a look at The Cross Illustration at the end of this chapter again. When you are walking in the flesh or in your old nature, whose kingdom are you in? You end up behind enemy lines (Galatians 6:7-8) in the Kingdom of Darkness. You can't fight from there! This isn't easy to say, but sometimes YOU are the horse, and the enemy might be riding you!

- What do you think it means that "victorious warriors win first"? When thinking about doing battle with Satan, what "winning" activities do you think a person needs to undertake first?

  [Could it mean "preparation?" Making sure you are armed with appropriate spiritual armor and indwelt, empowered and guided by the powerful Spirit of God?]

[Have a couple of people read the "Initial Assault" section, through the paragraph starting with "Renounce."]

1) The Initial Assault

This involves direct combat with enemy forces. Before you fight, we need to ask you: have you received Christ in your life? If you haven't before, now is the time (please see chapter 14 for insight on how to do this). This is how you "win first" before going to war. Receiving Christ into your life brings you *out* of the kingdom of darkness, and *into* the kingdom of light (Colossians 1:13). If you want to win, it begins here, at the foot of the cross. John 1:12 says that *"… as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name."* If you are stuck behind enemy lines, whether you are a believer or not, please know that He wants to pour out all of His love and forgiveness on you (Romans 5:8; 1 Corinthians 15:3-6; John 1:12; Ephesians 2:8,9).

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The next step in this battle is to ask the Lord to search your heart and reveal any unconfessed sin in your life. The Bible says in Psalm 139:23-24 ESV: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."* Proverbs 28:13 (NIV) says: *"He who conceals his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them will find mercy."* If you have sinned (and frankly, we all have), you need to take responsibility for it.

Here are three things you need to do to properly deal with your sin:[25]

- **Confess:** I John 1:9 NKJV says: *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* It is more than just telling God "I'm sorry," then walking away. To confess means to openly agree with God that you have sinned. And when you confess, you need to be specific. Ask God to dig out the roots of your sin, because only then will you be truly free. It helps if you actually write down the sins that God brings to your mind.
- **Repent:** Jesus Christ suffered the penalty for your sins so that you could repent. Repentance is a change of heart and mind. It literally means to "turn around and go the other way." It's seeing your sin from God's perspective, honestly looking at the choices you have made and the rippling effects of those choices, and feeling the weight of that. Repentance requires true brokenness. Jesus said: *"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance* (Luke 5:32)." When you repent it involves releasing your grip on your sin, turning away from it, and then going the opposite direction, turning to God for forgiveness, future help, and guidance. This is not hard to do when you know that you are loved by God, that you love Him, and that you want to get back into a right relationship with Him (Acts 3:19).

[25] For more on this subject, please go back to chapter 4 and re-read the section on dealing with "True Guilt" – pages 34,35 in the Field Guide.

- **Renounce:** Do you remember that in Proverbs 28:13 it says to "renounce" your sins? That means that it is important to tell someone (at least one or two people) about your decision so that they will provide you with accountability and encouragement, especially involving any big sins that you may have had a hard time letting go of.

- Why do you think it's so important to deal with your own sin before you try to fight your enemy?

[Have someone continue reading this section up to "Finishing the Job."]

When you follow God's strategy, He will forgive you and cleanse you from all your sins. *"Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord; "though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."* (Isaiah 1:18 ESV). Doing all this moves you from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light and removes all legal grounds for the enemy to hold you captive. James 4:7,8 says: *"Submit therefore to God. But resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you."*

How does one "resist the devil?" Simply defy what he is trying to get you to do. Note: you don't have to beat Satan to death. Simply resist him, and he *must* flee. If he's trying to get you to do "A," tell him, "No. I will not do that. I resist you in the name of Jesus Christ." You will be amazed at how quickly he stops his attempts at influencing you and quickly runs for an exit!

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Prayer: I want to thank You Father for giving me the secret weapon to victory: submission to You and resisting the devil. I humbly pray that You will bless me with the strength to resist the devil and all spiritual attacks from evil enemies. Help me to come nearer to You as I turn away from my sin, the temptations in my life, and all distractions. It is my heart's desire to live in complete submission to Your leadership. Help me to listen and obey.

Ephesians 5:8 says: *"And do not get drunk with wine … but be filled with the Spirit … giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."* Now that you are cleansed, drink in God's Spirit, and thank Him for your victory![26]

- After reading through these last couple of pages, what are some things you noticed about things WE need to do before we even consider battling our enemy?

  [Suggestions: Make sure Christ is in my life; get rid of any apparent sin in my life through confessing, repenting, and renouncing it, and receiving God's forgiveness; consciously and intentionally resist the devil; make sure that the Holy Spirit is controlling and empowering me.]

[Have two or three people read the "Finishing the Job" section, up to the paragraph that starts, "Practice telling your story…"]

2) Finishing the Job

With God's help and blessings, you have accomplished the task that lands you in the kingdom of light. The following measures will serve to give you time to put the finishing touches on your actions…

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[26] For more on the subject of the Holy Spirit, please see chapter 11 "Building Your Healing Environment: Elements 1 & 2," the section on "Element #1:The Holy Spirit – Your Divine Power Source" – pages 98-101 in the Field Guide.

- When we think about repentance, we might think it's only about "stopping" a certain behavior. But scripture is clear that repenting and bearing fruit go together. If you are sincere, your life will prove it. Examples:
    - Is there an individual that you need to forgive? The Bible says: *"And do not give the devil an opportunity to lead you into sin by holding a grudge, or nurturing anger, or harboring resentment, or cultivating bitterness." (Ephesians 4:27 AMP). "For if you forgive other people for their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you."* (Matthew 6:14 NASB).
    - Is there anyone to whom you need to provide restitution? Numbers 5:6-7 says: *"Any man or woman who wrongs another in any way and so is unfaithful to the Lord is guilty and must confess the sin hey have committed. They must make full restitution for the wrong they have done, add a fifth of the value to it and give it all to the person they have wronged.*" (Luke 19:1-10).

      We aren't saying that you need to follow the specifics of the Levitical Law contained in the Old Testament. Those laws aren't for today. But this law demonstrates that God's heart is that if you have wronged someone, you need to make it right. What is God asking you to do? Take a moment and pray about it, then write down what God has put on your heart.
- Be prepared for an attack from your enemies; they will come to test your resolve. *"Be sober and alert."* (1 Peter 5:8). As soldiers often remind each other as they go into battle: "Keep your head on a swivel!"
- At various times in the Old Testament, the Israelites set up a simple altar or memorial to mark the time and place where God did a powerful miracle. These "altars of remembrance" were built with "memorial stones" that served to remind them of God's provision, protection, guidance, and faithfulness (Genesis 12:6-7; 28:10-22; Numbers 16:39,40; Joshua 4:1-24). You can build a type of "memorial altar" too. This is a good idea because in our memories of past events, the details can get fuzzy. And if our history is fuzzy, it's hard to apply the lessons we learned *then* to *now.*

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  Your life is built up of individual "stones." They may be miracles you experienced, great battles God has won in your life, a difficult time God brought you through, answered prayers, etc. If you start collecting these stones, over the years you will create an altar of remembrance, a testimony of God's faithfulness, love, power, and trustworthiness. One way you can do this is to write these experiences down, constructing a "Journal of God's Faithfulness." Another way is to actually collect physical mementos from the site of the event (like the Israelites bringing rocks up from the bottom of the Jordan River where they crossed over into the Promised Land) and keep them in a safe place somewhere (A box? A special shelf?). When you are feeling defeated or uncertain about the future, bring out these "memorial stones" and recall what God has done for you in the past.

- What are other ways you can memorialize what God has done in your life?
- How has God carried you in the past?
- What is God doing for you right now? How will you mark this occasion?

- Let's take those three questions one at a time. Would anyone like to answer them based on your own experiences?"

*[Have someone read the next two paragraphs up to **"Reporting for Duty."**]*

- Practice telling your story about how God sustained you in the past. Your story is important because it is a GREAT way to tell others about Jesus. When someone doesn't care about what the Bible says about suffering, you will disarm them when you ask them, "May I share with you what God taught me through my pain?" Your story has purpose – and one purpose is to comfort others. 2 Corinthians 1:8 NIV says: *"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."*

Now that you have won the battle *within*, it's time to ready yourself for the battle *outside*, and report to your Commander, the Lord Jesus Christ. He has a job for you to do, are you ready?

[If you have time, ask one of the group members to share a "three-minute testimony" of how they came to Christ. (Prepare your "volunteer" ahead of time!) Point out how telling this story can be a great way to start a conversation about Jesus, and a way of encouraging and comforting a Christian who might have had their faith shaken by trauma. If you don't feel that anyone in your group is ready to share their story, be prepared to share your own.]

[Leader: read the opening sentences of the "Reporting for Duty" section, up to "My Declaration of Faith."

>>Reporting for Duty

As you prepare, it's a good idea to read Jesus' orders first. Take a moment to read Ephesians 6:10-18.

Like a soldier, this is an oath of enlistment – your "Swearing-In Ceremony" into God's Army. We regularly do this in our morning devotionals, and we encourage you to read this before making the commitment to serve Him today.

*[Have everyone stand up (if convenient) and lead them through the whole section including **My Declaration of Faith, My Oath of Allegiance**, and **My Preparation for Battle** – up to **"The Take Away."** Have them all read it together out loud. Remind them that they don't have to say the scripture references out loud, or anything in brackets.]*

My Declaration of Faith:

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. And we have already believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God." (John 6:68,69)

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My Oath of Allegiance:

I acknowledge Your total claim on my life. Help me to be Your representative here on earth. I hereby affirm that I am making myself available to:

- Go anywhere You want me to go (even if it means to stay)
- Say anything You want me to say (or not say)
- Give anything You want me to give (or not give)
- Do anything You want me to do (or not do)

I surrender my will to Your Lordship over my life. I trust that whatever You ask of me You will create in me the desire and ability to accomplish it through Your indwelling Holy Spirit. Lord, I shall gratefully accept everything that pleases You. Let Your will be done.

[By the way, Rahnella first declared this Oath to God in May 1978!]

My Preparation for Battle:

Lord, this day I offer You my allegiance and prepare to join You in battle against the rebellious demonic forces in order to help establish Your kingdom here on earth and in heaven.

Lord Jesus, You are my glorious King, You are the Lord of Armies (1 Samuel. 1:3). You are the Lord strong and mighty in battle (Psalms. 24:8).

Help me to grow in Your power and strength, through my union with You.

I know that my main struggle is not against humans, but it is against evil rulers and powers of this world, and it is against the spiritual forces of evil behind them in the heavenly realm.

I wait for Your orders Lord, ready to act at Your command and to do my duty as a soldier in Your army.

Therefore, I take up the spiritual armor and weapons of war You have provided so that I will be able to resist the evil that surrounds me. (Ephesians 6:13-17):

- I will stand firm, having You, who is the living **truth** buckled around my waist.
- I will put on the breastplate of **righteousness** that You have provided. Thank you for declaring me as one of Your righteous ones, and thank you that I don't have to be perfect, because only You are!
- I put on my sandals of **preparation and peace**, standing in readiness, strengthened and assured by the good news that in the end, we win!!
- I take up the shield of **faith**, which you will use to extinguish the flaming darts of the enemy.
- I put on the helmet of **salvation**, knowing that I have eternal life and that my mind is shielded from the corrupting influences of the evil one.

- Finally, I raise high the sword of your Spirit – your **Word** – with which I can defend myself and also push back the kingdom of darkness for Your glory! I will follow You, who is the Living Word, into battle.

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Help me to keep in constant communication with You, tuned to the frequency of the Holy Spirit. May I stay alert, praying vigilantly and persistently for all of God's people.

I now fight from a place of victory!

For You have already triumphed over our enemies. You have disarmed these evil, rebellious forces, putting them to shame (Colossians. 2:15), and You did all this through Your incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension where You are now seated at the right hand of the Father, far above all rulers, authorities, powers and dominions (Ephesians. 1:20-21). And I am seated *with* You! (Ephesians 2:6).

I am at Your command. Lead on my Lord and King!

Anoint me afresh with Your Holy Spirit.

May I fight with holy boldness, for I am made more than a conqueror through Christ who loves me (Rom. 8:37).

May I finish well and bring You glory!

[Have someone read "The Take Away."]

The Take-Away

The Bible says that we overcome Satan and his demons by *"the blood of the Lamb, the word of our testimony, and that we do not love our life even when faced with death."* (Revelation 12:11).

Daily putting on your spiritual armor makes **you** armed and dangerous! Will you join us and our Lord and King Jesus Christ on the front lines today? Will you make a commitment to pray this daily or weekly? If so, copy this prayer, sign, and date it. May it remind you that:

- You are in the middle of a cosmic battle and God has equipped you to fight (Ephesians 6:12-18)!
- Your best position to fight from is the high ground, "in the heavenlies," where the commander of the heavenly forces, Jesus Christ, rules and reigns (Ephesians 2:4-7).

Don't be afraid of them!
Remember that the LORD is great and awesome!
Fight for your families, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses!
(Nehemiah 4:14)

[Leader: you could put the following paragraph in your own words, or just read it…]

- All through the Bible we see that things get done in the spiritual realm through the spoken word. From God creating the universe in Genesis 1, to Jesus commanding demons to leave, wind and waves to stop, healing to happen, all the way to Revelation where Jesus is depicted as having a sharp sword coming from His mouth (Rev. 19:15), verbal pronouncements are seen as central in accomplishing God's will. Not muscle power or machinery or bombs or bullets, but our speech. Making these declarations aren't just rituals or psychological exercises meant to make us feel better. They are actually accomplishing important things in our lives, literally equipping us to not only survive the battles we encounter, but to triumph!
- Decide today to make these declarations on a daily basis, or at least weekly.

[Have someone – or you – read the closing Prayer.]

Prayer

The battle rages all around me – both physically and spiritually. Sometimes I feel like it will overwhelm me. But I remember how You have sustained me in the past, and I know you will sustain me now. Teach my hands to fight, as you did King David (Psalm 144:1). Give me the insight to fight the "riders" and not just the "horses." Help me know how to defend myself and others from the attacks of my enemy. Let me see the truth of what You have said in Your word: that I am MORE than a conqueror in Christ (Romans 8:37). May I finish strong and give You glory!

In Jesus' mighty name I pray, Amen.

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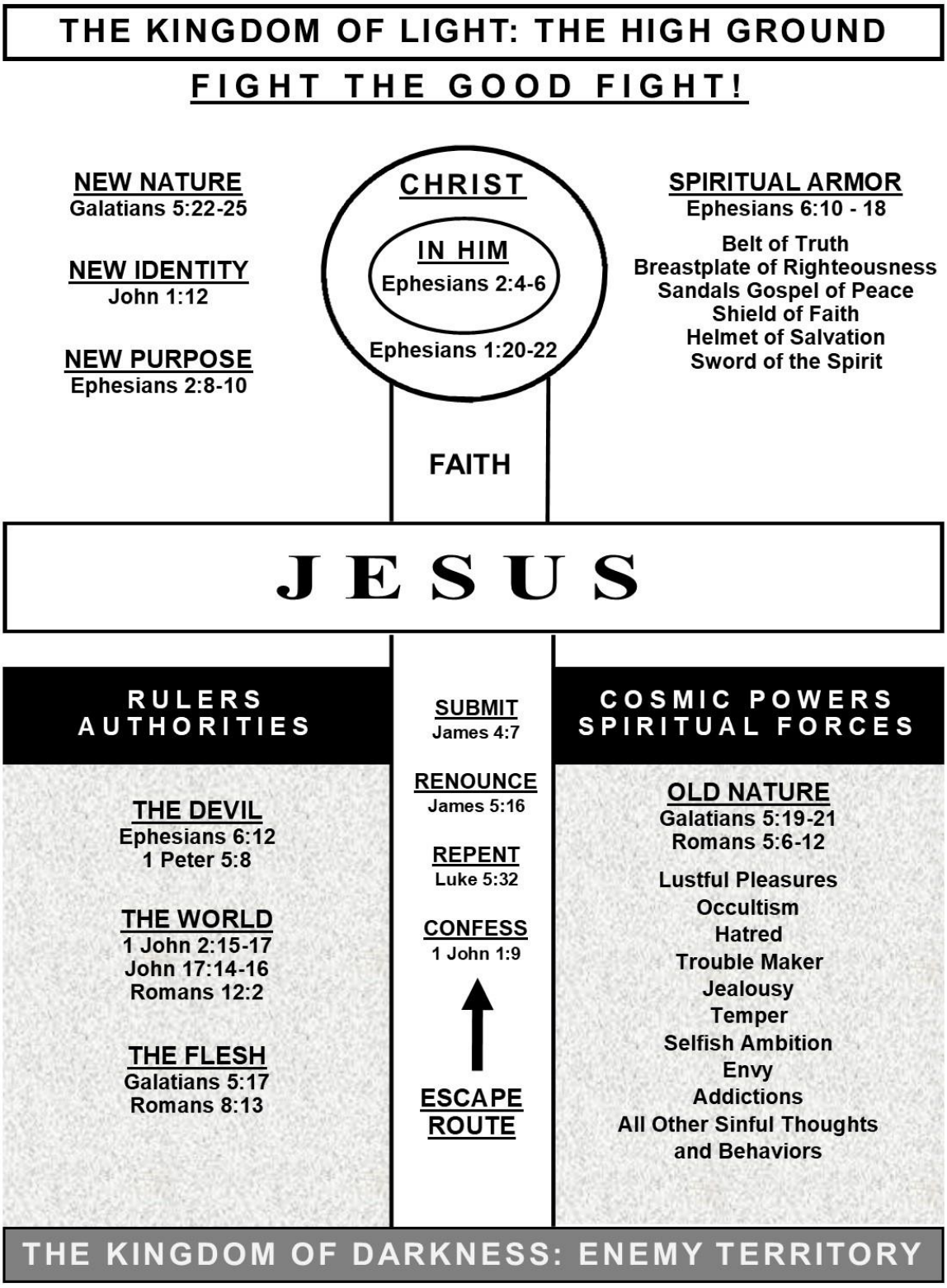
Additional Resources:

The Combat Trauma Healing Manual – Chapter 8: *"How Do I Fight? Rebuilding Your Defenses"* (English, Ukrainian, and Russian translations.)

When War Comes Home – Chapter 10: *"Who is The Real Enemy? Fighting Spiritually for Myself, My Husband and My Kids"* (English, Ukrainian and Russian translations.)


THE KINGDOM OF LIGHT: THE HIGH GROUND
FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT!
NEW NATURE
Galatians 5:22-25
NEW IDENTITY
John 1:12
NEW PURPOSE
Ephesians 2:8-10
CHRIST
IN HIM
Ephesians 2:4-6
Ephesians 1:20-22
SPIRITUAL ARMOR
Ephesians 6:10 - 18
Belt of Truth
Breastplate of Righteousness
Sandals Gospel of Peace
Shield of Faith
Helmet of Salvation
Sword of the Spirit
FAITH
JESUS
RULERS AUTHORITIES
THE DEVIL
Ephesians 6:12
1 Peter 5:8
THE WORLD
1 John 2:15-17
John 17:14-16
Romans 12:2
THE FLESH
Galatians 5:17
Romans 8:13
SUBMIT
James 4:7
RENOUNCE
James 5:16
REPENT
Luke 5:32
CONFESS
1 John 1:9
ESCAPE ROUTE
COSMIC POWERS SPIRITUAL FORCES
OLD NATURE
Galatians 5:19-21
Romans 5:6-12
Lustful Pleasures
Occultism
Hatred
Trouble Maker
Jealousy
Temper
Selfish Ambition
Envy
Addictions
All Other Sinful Thoughts and Behaviors
THE KINGDOM OF DARKNESS: ENEMY TERRITORY

LEADER'S GUIDE

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Women, War, & Trauma – Chapter 11

Building Your Healing Environment: Elements 1 & 2

By Chris Adsit

Objectives of this Chapter:

- To help group members understand the absolute necessity of being intentional and disciplined about five vital spiritual practices ordained by God that will help them heal from their trauma.
- In this chapter, to give group members motivation and practical ways to engage in two healing, strengthening disciplines: the Filling of the Holy Spirit, and engagement with the Word of God.

[Have someone read the opening verse: Luke 11:9,10.]

> ***So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened.*** (Luke 11:9,10)

- As we have read Luke 11:9,10, what does it tell you about how to get what you need from God? Will passivity accomplish this, or is Jesus stressing that something else is required? What is it?

  [Being active, intentional, seeking His help, stepping out in faith, going rather than staying.]
- What do you think will happen if a person disregards Jesus' words, and does not ask, seek, or knock?

[Have someone read the opening paragraph in this section, up to "The Essence of Healing."]

Every Armenian knows someone who has been wounded, injured, or killed in the war with Azerbaijan. Even you, as a woman trying to get your children to safety, or as a humanitarian worker, or as a member of the military, or someone just trying to survive – you too may have been wounded. But what many people fail to understand is that wounds that are received in the context of war are almost always more than physical. There are psychological and spiritual aspects as well. How can we reverse the effects that trauma has had on us in all three contexts?

- The first paragraph says that every Armenian has been wounded in some way. Let's go around the group and share in just a few sentences how we each have been wounded. Have you been wounded physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, or a combination? Has this happened recently, or sometime in your past – even in your childhood?

[Have someone read the next section, up to "For I, the LORD, am your Healer."]

The Essence of Healing

When the subject of healing comes up, we usually think about doctors. A doctor will ***do*** something to fix you: stitch you up, set a bone, give you some antibiotics, remove your appendix. But they're not really ***healing*** you. They are removing or mitigating destructive conditions and barriers in your body and adjusting your environment in such a way that the normal healing processes that God has built into every person can proceed unhindered.

God has set up certain principles that will optimize your physical, emotional, and spiritual healing processes. Two things are required: first you need to ***know*** the principles, and then you need to ***follow*** the principles. These principles are ***not*** things like, "Go to church three times a week, carry a Bible with you at all times, shower in holy water, and live a perfect life." The principles you'll be reading about in this chapter and the next have to do with establishing or deepening your relationship with God and giving Him optimal access to your wounded soul.

Sometimes God heals in a dramatic fashion – instantly! But usually He takes a more gradual, process-oriented approach. It's like how He would care for a young, injured tree: raining down life-giving water and energizing sunlight; bathing it with carbon dioxide for respiration; cool evenings and warm days for an invigorating rhythm; winds to strengthen its trunk. If the young tree wants to heal, it just needs to make sure it remains in the environment God has set up for it. If it decides it doesn't like getting rained on or sun baked, pulls up its roots and takes up residence in a basement, it will never heal.

In the same way, God has set up a healing environment for you. The longer you stay in that environment, the more healing you will experience.

- What does this section say is the difference between what a doctor can do for your body and what God can do? How are they similar?

  [A doctor does what he can to make sure you are in a condition where God's natural healing processes can take place; God can actually bring about healing. They are similar in that both a doctor and God employ certain processes and principles that will help you heal, and if we want to heal, we need to cooperate with them.]
- How is what God could theoretically do for a young, injured tree similar to what He could do to help *you* heal? God plays a part in the healing, but what do ***you*** have to do to make sure you heal?

  *[Cooperate with Him. Allow Him to create an environment of healing around you, and to **stay** **in** that environment.]*

[Have someone read the next section, up to "ELEMENT #1"]

"For I, the LORD, am your Healer." (Exodus 15:26)

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Building upon the foundation of Jesus Christ being your Lord and Savior (if you're still confused about this, see Chapter 14 which will describe how to begin a personal relationship with Christ), we want to share **five vital elements** that are crucial to your healing environment:

1. **The Holy Spirit – your divine power source**
2. **The Word of God – your divine nourishment**
3. **Prayer – vital communication with your Healer**
4. **The Christian Community – your divine incubator**
5. **Talk – your trauma-processing mechanism**

The effects of these elements probably won't be as sudden as we would like. But they ***will*** deepen and strengthen your connection to the Healer so He can accomplish His healing work in you.

- Why do you think each of these five "Elements" are so important to a person who wants to heal from trauma? *[Note: the phrase after each element gives a good clue.]*

[Have someone read the next section, up to "The 'Filling' of the Holy Spirit."]

ELEMENT #1: The Holy Spirit – Your Divine Power Source

Who is the Holy Spirit?

The Bible presents God as a "Trinity" – three-in-one. That is, God is affirmed to be the one-and-only God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 43:10; John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 8:4), and yet there are three distinct "persons" who are referred to as God:

- **God the Father – John 6:27**
- **God the Son – John 20:26-28**
- **God the Holy Spirit – 1 Corinthians 3:16**

One God presented in three different manifestations, each one with a separate and distinct function. All three Persons of the Godhead have existed as a unit since before time began – never beginning, never ending. But each has a different job.

In a nutshell, the Holy Spirit's function is to live within us, empower us, comfort us, heal us, transform us, help us communicate with God, and enable us to live a righteous and satisfying life.

- The concept of "The Trinity" is one that has occupied the inquisitive minds of philosophers and theologians for centuries. So we might not grasp it completely during this short Bible study today! But what we can say for sure is that – whether we understand it or not – the Bible definitely presents the concept from Genesis to Revelation: One God, three distinct "manifestations" all called God. Each of the members of the Trinity has a specific role. From what you've learned over the years, what would you say is a main role of each member: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit?

[Have someone read the next section, up to "Three Kinds of People."]

The "Filling" of the Holy Spirit

> *Don't be drunk with wine because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit.* (Ephesians 5:18 NLT)

In this verse, God gives us two commands, one positive, and one negative:

- Do not get drunk with wine.
- Be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Every Christian is "indwelt" by the Holy Spirit from the moment of salvation (1 Corinthians 3:16; 12:13; Romans 8:9) and His Spirit will never leave you. But to "be filled" with the Holy Spirit describes a different state. Someone who is "filled" with the Holy Spirit is being controlled, empowered, and directed by Him. The point of this verse is that, just as alcohol can control us in destructive ways, the Holy Spirit can control us in positive, constructive ways – if we allow Him to do so.

- Could someone summarize this section: what is the difference between being "indwelt" by the Holy Spirit, and being "filled" by the Holy Spirit? What does it mean to be "filled" by the Holy Spirit?

  [Every Christian is "indwelt" by the Holy Spirit. To be "filled" means to be controlled, empowered, and led by the Holy Spirit.]
- Is it possible for a Christian to <u>not</u> be "filled" by the Holy Spirit?

  [Yes. We know this is possible because it is a command, and we can choose to either obey or disobey a command. How much He controls, empowers, and guides us depends on how much we exercise our free will and <u>let</u> Him do so.]
- Is it possible for a Christian to <u>not</u> be "indwelt" by the Holy Spirit?

  [No. Once you have asked God to come into your life, He does so in the form of His Holy Spirit, and "will never leave you or forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)]
- When a person is "filled" with the Holy Spirit, what sort of differences will we see in that person?

  [Many things might be mentioned, but be sure to bring out the idea of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22,23)]

[Leader: read through the descriptions of the three kinds of people <u>up to</u> "Two Questions to consider."]

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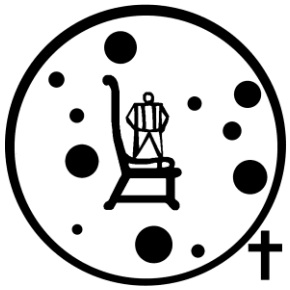
Three Kinds of People

The Bible talks about three kinds of people in 1 Corinthians 2:14-15 and 3:1-3:[27]

The Natural Man – *"Captain of my own soul!"*



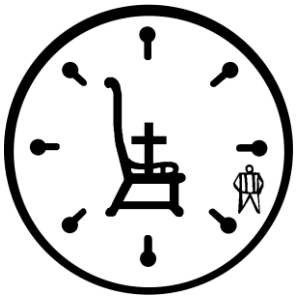
Self, on the throne or control center of his life.

† = Christ in the form of His Holy Spirit, is outside the life.

Circles = Activities, interests, priorities, and plans in discord with God's desires.

This represents the **non-Christian** who doesn't have a relationship with God. As he tries to direct his own life in his finite and usually self-interested way, it often results in frustration, despair, and discord with God's perfect plans for him.

The Spiritual Man – "Walking in faith and obedience."



Self dethroned, letting Christ be Lord of his life.

† = Christ is on the throne in the form of His Holy Spirit, guiding and empowering the Christian.

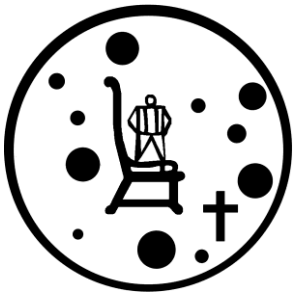
Circles = Activities, interests, priorities and plans in harmony with God's desires.

This represents a **Spirit-filled Christian** walking closely with God. Since God is all-powerful and all-knowing, He can ensure the Christian's life will harmonize with His plans for him, resulting in love, joy, peace patience,

[27] William R. Bright, *Have You Made the Wonderful Discovery of the Spirit-Filled Life?* (Orlando, FL: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1966,1995). Illustrations used by permission.

kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22,23) – among other things! No guarantee of a problem-free life, only one that is in harmony with God's plans.

The Worldly Man – "I can take it from here, thanks. Now, leave me alone."



Self is back on the throne, trying to direct his life again.

† = Christ still in the life but dethroned and not allowed to be Lord.

Circles = Activities, interests, priorities and plans in discord with God's desires.

This represents a **Worldly Christian** who isn't walking with God. As he ignores or disobeys God's directions, his life falls into disarray. Comparing frustration levels, dead-ends, and despair, it's difficult to tell the difference between the Worldly Christian's life and the non-Christian's life.

- Does anyone have any questions about this illustration? Did you understand each part?
- Which of these three circles represents a person who is "filled" with the Holy Spirit?
- If we observe the lives of a person represented by the first circle and a person represented by the third circle, would we be able to tell much difference between the two?
- But there is at least one very important difference between them. Can you say what it is?

  [Christ is in the life of Worldly Man, but not in the life of the Natural Man.]
- If a person has Christ in their life, how can they continue to act as they did before He came in?

  [He uses his free will to oppose what Christ wants him to do. And because God gave him that free will, He allows the person to go his own way, and to suffer the consequences of his decisions.]

[Leader: read the Two Questions and the paragraph after them.]

Two Questions to consider:

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1. Which of the three circles represents your life?
2. Which circle would you *like* to have represent your life?

If you would say that the first circle best represents your life, read Chapter 14 and find out how to bring Christ into your life and onto your throne. If you find that the bottom circle represents your life at the moment, and you would rather have it represented by the middle circle, here is a four-step plan that will help you make that move.

[Depending on the size of your group, and your relationship with members of the group, you can

(a) decide if you would rather have each member answer the two questions individually and out loud (if it's a small group and you know them well), or

(b) ask them to consider the answers to the two questions silently in their own hearts.

Whether you go with a or b, make reference to Chapter 14 for anyone who may still feel the first circle represents their life, and then say, "For those of you who want to find out more about how to move from the third circle to the middle circle, let's look at the four points following this."]

[Have someone read this next section on "Desire"]

1. Desire.

> *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.* (Matthew 5:6)

Search your heart. Do you "hunger and thirst for righteousness"? Do you truly *want* Jesus Christ as your Lord and the Holy Spirit on the throne of your life? Are you willing to obey what God tells you to do? Don't expect His power to flow unhindered if you are simply "putting on a show" or pretending. God looks at the heart, and He knows your heart perfectly.

- In the verse we just read, what does Jesus say is required to be "filled?"
  [A strong desire ("hunger and thirst for righteousness") is the only thing required.]
- What do you think this "desire" would look like?

[Have someone read this next section on "Confess."]

2. Confess.

> *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* (1 John 1:9)

The reason the Holy Spirit may be "quenched" (1 Thessalonians 5:19) in your life is because of sin – saying "No" to God and "Yes" to your unrighteous desires. In prayer, ask God to reveal any sins that have been disconnecting you from His plan and power. As He brings them to mind, agree with Him that those choices were wrong (that's the essence of confession). Ask Him to forgive you for each one – and He will.

- Theoretically speaking (not necessarily describing *you),* what are some of the things that might "quench" the Holy Spirit in a person's life?
- Ordinarily, how often should we confess our sins to God?
  [Any time He brings them to mind.]

[Have someone read this next section on "Present."]

3. Present (or Yield or Offer).

> *And do not present your members [body parts] as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God . . . For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. (Romans 6:13,19 NKJV)*

Most people associate slavery with demeaning oppression—and in almost every case it is. In the spiritual realm, Satan desires to enslave you to his will, which will lead to destruction. But God wants you to be "enslaved" to ***His*** will for your ***benefit***, leading to freedom from the things that tear you down, and a strong connection to the things that will build you up and bring you satisfaction, healing, fulfillment, and joy.

- What is it like for a person to be a slave to "uncleanness and lawlessness?"

  [If time, have someone read Romans 7:15-25 – Paul's fight with his own impurity and tendency toward lawlessness, due to being a human being. If the great Apostle Paul struggled with these issues, do you think we won't?]
- How do you think it could actually be beneficial for a person to be a slave to God's righteousness? What would this look like?

[Have someone read this next section on "Ask."]

4. Ask.

> *So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. Now suppose one of your fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?* (Luke 11:9-13)

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What astounding, superhuman exploits does this passage say you need to perform in order to "persuade" God to give you what you need? That was a trick question! Answer: simply ***ask***. Remember what was said earlier about our free will? God won't compromise your privilege of choosing. Since each of us makes willful choices to depart from His will, we need to make a willful choice to get "reconnected."

- Are there any questions about what we just read? If not, let's go on to the next section about "Asking To Be Filled." This is the main – and most helpful – point of this whole section on the Holy Spirit. It's the final step in moving from the third circle above, to the second one – where I think all of us want to be.

  [Leader: go ahead and read this next section to the group, including the prayer.]

Asking To Be Filled

When you pray to God, He isn't as concerned about your specific words as He is with the attitude of your heart. But sometimes it helps to express what is in your heart if someone else supplies the words for you. Here is a suggested prayer:

> *Dear Father, I need You. I hunger and thirst for Your righteousness, rather than for the garbage of the world. I want You to be my King and my Guide. But I confess that I have taken the throne of my life from Your control and have sinned against You. I've made many wrong choices. Please forgive me for this. I present myself to You in obedience, desiring to serve You rather than myself or my enemy, the devil. Please fill me with Your Holy Spirit. I step down from the throne of my life and give it back to You. I have faith that You have heard my prayer and have filled me with Your Holy Spirit. Thank you! Amen.*

[Leader: after you have read the above section out loud (including the prayer), decide if you'd rather have them say the prayer out loud with you, or have them say it silently while you read it aloud. Afterwards, ask the following question and observation…]

- How can we *know* that we have been filled with the Holy Spirit after asking Him to do so? What if we don't feel any different?
- *[Leader: here's an observation you could share…]* You may or may not feel different after praying that prayer. But we can't depend on our feelings. They come and go based on many variables. We can be sure He has filled us based on two things: His promise and his command. In 1 John 5:14,15 God says that if we ask anything according to His will, He promises that we shall have it. We are commanded in Ephesians 5:18 to be filled, so we know it's in His will. So we base our confidence on facts, not on feelings.

[Have someone read the first two paragraphs of the next section, up to "Benefits of Reading the Bible.]

Element #2: The Word of God – Your Divine Nourishment

When you received Jesus Christ into your life, you became a three-dimensional being, composed of a body, a soul, and a spirit. We know that our physical bodies need to be fed. Most people are regularly reminded of it by hunger pangs. But our souls and our spirits also need nourishment. Our soul – our will, intellect, understanding, emotions, etc. – is nourished by things like truth, beauty, love, knowledge, and friendships. Our spirit – the part of us that relates to God – is fed by the words of God: the Bible. As Jesus said in Matthew 4:4, *"Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes out of the mouth of God."* And as Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:2, *"As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby."* (NKJV)

A Christian who doesn't get a regular diet of God's Word will end up with an emaciated, weak, and sickly spirit. Perhaps you've seen photos of people being liberated from Nazi concentration camps at the end of World War II. If we could take photos of the ***spirits*** of some Christians today, they would probably look very similar to the physical bodies of those poor men and women who had been deprived of proper nourishment for so long. Don't let this happen to you! Be sure that you're getting a steady diet of God's meat and potatoes!

- This section says that God's Word nourishes our spirit – the part of us that relates to God. What are some of the different ways a person can "ingest" the Word of God?

  [Five main ways: listen to it, read it, study it, memorize it, meditate on it – or more precisely, meditate on what you listen to, read, study, and memorize.]
- How many of you feel like you ought to be spending more time in the Bible? What are some ways you could improve this situation?

- OK – this next part is going to require discipline and patience! You can see that there are two columns here. **Don't look at the right column!** Cover it over with a piece of paper, your hand, or something. I'd like five different people to read the Bible passage that's in the **left** column – one at a time. Then, **without peeking at the right column,** let's have a few of you share what you think that verse describes as a benefit of reading the Bible. Afterwards, someone can read what's in the right column and see if it matches our observations.

Benefits of Reading the Bible

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The following passages describe the benefits of studying and applying God's Word to your life. In the box next to each one you can read about at least one benefit mentioned in each passage.

Bible Passage	Benefit(s)
God speaking to Joshua: *Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.* **– Joshua 1:8 (NLT)**	As we study, meditate on, and obey the things God has told us in the Bible, and allow our priorities and commitments to line up with His, we will prosper and succeed in all that we do.
King David writing: *The law of his God is in his heart; his feet do not slip.* **– Psalm 37:31**	When God's Word has been stored away in our hearts (by studying, memorizing, and meditating on them), we'll always be on stable and solid footing.
King David writing: *How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to Your word… I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You.* **– Psalm 119:9,11(NIV)**	Hiding God's Word in our hearts (by studying, memorizing, and meditating on them) will help us to resist the devil, flee temptation, and stay pure before God.
Jesus speaking: *If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.* **– John 15:7**	As we keep God's Word in a prominent place in our minds and hearts, and keep Jesus on the throne of our lives, we will find that our prayer requests line up with God's will and are granted.
Jesus speaking: *If you hold to My teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.* **– John 8:31,32 (NIV)**	Knowing and obeying the teachings of Jesus – learning from Him as His disciples – will help us know the truth about the world, God, and ourselves, and set us free from any bondage.

[Have someone read the next section about "Your Personal Plan," up to "The Take-Away."]

Your Personal Plan

You know that if a person wants to be physically healthy and strong, he or she needs to take in good food consistently – every day. In the same way, a Christian needs to take in God's food – the Bible – consistently. Make a commitment to spend some time **every day** taking in God's Word. Mix it up – you can listen to a recording of it, read it, study it, memorize it, and meditate on it. Even if you can only find 5 or 10 minutes for this each day, it will be a ***huge*** help. It's not so much the ***quantity*** of time that you spend in the Bible, but the ***consistency***. Your spirit will respond very positively to this habit, and before long, you'll find that 10 minutes a day isn't enough. You'll want to spend 12 minutes. Then 15. Then 30. Etc. No one will force you into it – you will ***crave*** God's word more and more!

- Let's hear some ideas from some of you. What plan can you make to ensure that you are getting some consistent input of the Word of God? How will – or do you already – go about it?

[Have someone read "The Take-Away."]

The Take-Away – Keep Going!

In this chapter we've covered two of the five elements of your healing environment: the filling of the Holy Spirit and studying God's Word. We'll cover the next three in the next chapter. ALL FIVE are very important elements if you are intent on experiencing all the healing God has for you! If you leave even one of them out, you will slow down your progress. So, as Winston Churchill said to his people in England during World War II, **"When you're going through hell, keep going."** Don't quit!

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- So, let's covenant together to *keep going!* We'll see you back here next time!
  [Have someone – or you – read the closing Prayer.]

Prayer

Heavenly Father, my soul has been wounded, and I need Your healing. You know me inside and out. You know when I stand up, when I sit down, when I lay down. You know every tear that I have shed and all the trouble I've seen. Please heal me in every way that I need to be healed. Give me the insight, wisdom, and determination to cooperate with You in the process You have in mind to bring about my healing. I strongly desire to keep You on the throne of my life, looking to You for guidance, comfort, and power. I also desire to feast on Your Word, to take in all the heavenly nourishment that You know I need. Help me to be diligent and vigilant in my pursuit to stay in the healing environment you have provided for me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

LEADER'S GUIDE

Women, War, & Trauma – Chapter 12

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Building Your Healing Environment: Elements 3,4 & 5

By Chris Adsit

Objectives of this Chapter:

- As in the previous chapter, to help group members understand the absolute necessity of being intentional and disciplined about five vital spiritual practices ordained by God that will help them heal from their trauma.
- To give group members motivation and practical ways to engage in three more healing, strengthening disciplines: Prayer, engaging with the Christian Community, and Talking about their trauma in a safe, trusted, non-judgmental setting.

[Have someone read the opening verse: Matthew 11:28,29, and the three paragraphs up to "Element #3."]

> ***Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*** (Matthew 11:28,29)

In the previous chapter, we learned that doctors don't actually heal anybody. But their *contribution* to our healing is crucial, as they take away factors that hinder our health, and add other factors that allow our natural God-given healing powers the opportunity to function properly.

When the doctor stitches up our child's cut, bandages it, and gives us a week's worth of antibiotics for our little patient, we would be foolish to neglect keeping his bandage clean or giving him his pills. We might say, "Well, I don't mind giving him his pills – that's easy. But changing that bandage – ick! It's gross! And it's too much work. The pills will probably be good enough." Not wise. We should include as many elements of the doctor's good advice as possible!

It's the same principle when it comes to our psychological and spiritual healing from trauma. Jesus has told us that if we are weary and burdened and in need of rest, He will give us the healing and rest we need if we will only *come to Him* and apply what He tells us. We've covered two *very* important elements of a healing environment in Chapter 11 – **the filling of the Holy Spirit** and **studying the Bible** – but we can't skip over the final three: **Prayer, the Christian Community,** and **Talk**. Since our Heavenly Doctor knows what we need to restore our health, we would do well to listen to Him!

- A quick review of what we covered last session:
  - What is it that doctors cannot do?
  - What do they do that helps a person to heal?
  - How is what a doctor does similar to the spiritual disciplines we are studying in the last chapter and this one?

[Read the first two paragraphs of "ELEMENT #3" and the question: "Why do you think so many people…"]

ELEMENT #3: Prayer – Vital Communication with your Healer

When two people are in a relationship, talking together strengthens their bond while silence always weakens it. In your relationship with Christ, *prayer* is your conversation. As Bible teacher Rosalind Rinker wrote, "Prayer is a dialog between two people who love each other."[28] The more time you spend in prayer with the "Lover of our soul," the closer you will grow to Him and the more you will experience His love, power and influence in your life.

Ironically, most Christians don't spend much time at all in prayer. Ask any group of Christians how many of them think they should spend more time praying, and usually every hand will go up. But that doesn't have to be true about you!

Why do you think so many people are reluctant to spend much time in prayer?

- Let's do a little survey: By a show of hands, how many of you think that you pray too much – and need to cut back a little? *[Most likely, group members will smile and chuckle, but no one will raise their hand.]* How many of you would say that you don't spend as much time in prayer as you probably ought to? *[Probably every hand will go up – and yours too!]*
- Why do you think that most Christians spend less time in prayer than they feel they should?
- What do you think the purpose of prayer is?

[Have someone read the next paragraph.]

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One reason could be that people do not understand the purpose of prayer. Though God loves to answer the requests we make of Him in prayer, this isn't its only purpose. God is not a cosmic Father Christmas, existing only to grant us all our desires and make us happy. We must never forget that Christianity is not supposed to be merely a religion or a philosophy of life. It is a *relationship* with our heavenly Father. And in any relationship, there must be communication. We don't always benefit directly from the communication itself, but the communication produces a deeper relationship, which opens the door to *all kinds* of benefits.

- So based on what we just read in that paragraph, what would you say is one of the primary purposes of prayer?

[Have someone read the first paragraph in the next section.]

What Does God Want You To Pray About?

God loves you with a love that is more permanent, intense and pure than anything humans can imagine. Proverbs 15:8 says, *"The prayer of the upright is His delight."* And guess what – because of what Christ did for you on the cross, you are one of the "upright," and He is absolutely *delighted* with you – especially when you pray! Imagine Jesus Christ, sitting by your bed when you wake up, saying, "Good morning! I love you! I can't wait to hear your delightful voice! Say something – anything – please!"

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[28] Rosalind Rinker, *Prayer: Conversing With God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959). p. 23.

- Just like in the previous chapter, this will be another exercise that will require you to be disciplined and patient! **Don't look at what's in the right column!** Cover it up with your hand or a piece of paper. We'll have various people read each verse in the left column one at a time, and then give you the opportunity to share what you think the verse is suggesting we should pray for or about. It can be very freeing and motivating to know for sure how God has specifically told us to pray in His Word. **Note:** the verse may be giving an example of a certain type of prayer, or it may be giving a specific command or encouragement about prayer.

  [Have various people read the verse, and then have the group come up with ideas about what the verse is indicating we can and should pray for or about. Then have someone read the entry in the corresponding right column. Feel free to also ask, "Can you think of any other reasons we should pray besides the ones listed here?"]

Here are a few verses in the Bible that will give you some insight concerning what God wants to hear about from you:

Verse	What is being prayed *for* or *about*?
I love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. – **Psalm 18:1-3**	This pray-er (King David) simply wants to tell God how much he loves and appreciates all that He does for him. It's *worship* or *adoration.* It actually does *us* good to express our worship to God.
In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. **– 1 Thessalonians 5:18**	We should express our *thanks* to God for all He has done for us. We may not feel like thanking Him for every single thing we experience, but even when we are *in* difficult times, we can still thank Him for walking with us *through* it, and for what it will produce in us.
My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far away when I groan for help? – **Psalm 22:1,2 (NLT)**	We can pray when we're in trouble – even when we feel God has abandoned us. He hasn't, but He doesn't mind us expressing our alarm to Him. This was a prayer of both King David and Jesus Christ, so it must be OK!
If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. **– 1 John 1:9**	When we know we have done something that is contrary to God's law, we need to agree with Him about it (confession), and He will forgive us.
Give us this day our daily bread. **– Matthew 6:11**	We can bring our needs to God no matter what they are – even for mundane things like lunch. He knows we need food! Ask!
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. **– Matthew 6:13**	Our enemy (Satan) wants to devour us (1 Peter 5:8). God is against that idea. Continually ask Him to protect us from *all* our enemies.

[Have someone read the next section about "How God Answers Prayer" up to "Your Personal Plan."]

How God Answers Prayer

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God answers every prayer we pray in one of three ways: *Yes*, *No*, or *Wait*. Obviously, we would like to increase the percentage of "Yes" answers we get. Psalm 37:4 gives us some great insight into how to do this:

Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart.

When the Lord is our delight, when our attitude toward Him is one of love, acceptance, submission and a quiet confidence that He always knows what's best for us, when we're willing to allow His will to be done rather than what we might prefer, this gives Him unhindered access to our souls and spirits so that our desires *will* line up with His before we even begin to pray. Then we'll be able to pray boldly the way Jesus prayed, even when He knew He would be crucified the next day:

Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will. (Matthew 26:39 NKJV)

Too often we humans misuse our free will in order to act in ways that we think will be good but are in fact self-serving and at odds with God's desires. But when we submit our will to *His will,* LOOK OUT! That's when He can *really* do amazing things in us and through us!

- Obviously, we would like for God to say "Yes" to *all* of our prayers. Why do you think that He sometimes answers with "No" or "Wait?"
- What insight does Psalm 37:4 give us about how to increase the number of "Yes" answers to our prayers?
- In Matthew 26:39, Jesus asked His Father to keep Him from having to experience His torture, conviction, crucifixion, and death. There is no doubt that Jesus "delighted Himself in the Lord," and yet the answer to His prayer was "No." What does that tell you about God the Father's right to answer our prayers however He wants to?
- If this is the case, why should we make the effort to pray at all?

  [As mentioned earlier, prayer is communication with God, and necessary to maintain a viable relationship with Him. The purpose of prayer is not merely to get God to do what we would like. Plus, the process of us interceding or petitioning God in prayer helps to deepen our investment in what we are praying about. In other words, if <u>we</u> don't care enough about something to put that desire into words and bring it before the Father, why should <u>He</u> care about it?]

[Have someone read the next paragraph about "Your Personal Plan."]

Your Personal Plan

Add a few minutes of prayer to your daily time in God's Word. Again, even if you only spend five minutes in prayer it's an excellent start, and you will be *amazed* at what begins to happen in response to your prayers!

- What are some things you would consider doing to increase the amount of time you spend communicating with God in prayer each day?
- What issues might keep that from happening? What can you do about those issues?

[Have someone read the four paragraphs in the next section up to the paragraph starting "Here are a few verses" just before the "What Should Happen" table.]

ELEMENT #4: The Christian Community – Your Divine Incubator

You need a safe, comforting place where you can heal and grow stronger – even if you are a refugee away from your home or even in a foreign country. You need a place where wise and friendly people are looking out for you, helping you get the things you need, and keeping the storms and stresses of life away for a while. This is one of the main reasons God created the Church and has hopefully placed a few Spirit-filled friends in your life.

Most people who are in crisis or who have experienced trauma tend to self-isolate. This is the absolute worst thing you can do! It goes against the basic design objective of our Creator. Our friends were designed specifically for this kind of situation. Here's what God says about Christian fellowship:

> *Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.* (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 NLT)

God invented the Church to be like an incubator, a place where His children can grow, get strong, get healed, and become stable and independent. We're not necessarily talking about a building here, though that is often where "the Church" will be found. The Church is a living organism composed of Christians all over the world. The Bible refers to this as "The Body of Christ" as in, Christ is the head, and we are like His hands and feet, accomplishing His work on the planet.

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- In what ways is a church – when it's functioning as designed by God – like an incubator?
- Since the current crisis started, how difficult has it been for you to meet regularly with a church, or a group of Christians? What has caused this?
- What creative ways have you been able to think of that would keep you in regular contact with the Christian community despite the war?
- What is the best thing about your church, and how has it been helping you?
- Have you been able to participate in your church's ministry even during this time of crisis?

- This table that we're going to study next is about what the Bible says <u>should</u> happen within a Christian community or church. **Just like before, try not to look at the right column.** We'll have various people read the verse in the left column, and then give the group the opportunity to share what they think the point the verse is making about what should happen within the church community.

  [Feel free to also ask, "Can you think of anything that should happen at a church besides the ones listed here?"]

Here are a few verses that describe what should happen when Christians form a community that is determined to make a place where God can help and heal.

Verse	What Should Happen
As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend. **– Proverbs 27:17 (NLT)**	A knife cannot become sharp all on its own. It needs another iron or stone to grind it down, knock off the burrs and dents, and bring its edge to a point. Be a sharpener!
Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Get along with each other; don't be stuck up. Make friends with "nobodies;" don't be the great "somebody." – **Romans 12:15,16 (MSG)**	Engage your friends emotionally where they are. Humbly relate to them in a variety of ways. Whether they are grieving or rejoicing, Christians can enter into each other's emotions in ways that will build them up.
Those of us who are strong and able in the faith need to step in and lend a hand to those who falter, and not just do what is most convenient for us. Strength is for service, not status. Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, "How can I help?" **– Romans 15:1,2 (MSG)**	Christians in a community should always be looking for ways to help and serve each other. Mark 10:45 says that even Jesus, the Son of God, didn't come to earth to be served, but to serve others. It's a good example for us to follow.
But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. **– Hebrews 3:13**	Sin will do two things to you: it will <u>harden</u> you, and it will <u>deceive</u> you. But as we are engaged in honest, humble communication with other Christians, they can let us know when they see these conditions creeping up on us.
Let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. **– 1 John 3:18 (NLT)**	Talk is cheap. Christians shouldn't just *say* they love each other. They should demonstrate it with their *actions*. That will show the truth of what's in our hearts.

[Have someone read the four paragraphs in the next section about "What Happens Underground?" up to "Your Personal Plan."]

What Happens Underground?

In northern California on the west coast of the U.S. you can find majestic forests of giant Redwood trees. These are the tallest and most massive trees on the planet, many of them rising over 100 meters. Some have been around for over 2,000 years – since before the days Jesus walked in Israel! I know that Europe has some pretty impressive cathedrals, but as you walk among the Redwoods you'd think you're in the grandest cathedral on earth! You can't help but to be awestruck by their strength, endurance and tenacity.

But one thing you will never see is a single Redwood tree growing all by itself in the middle of a field. God has ordained that Redwood trees must always live in groves, because He is aware of their secret: *shallow root systems.*

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Unlike many large trees that have deep taproots, Redwood root systems grow laterally, and cover a huge area to efficiently absorb the small amount of rain that falls on their rocky habitat.

So, to keep from being blown over in the sometimes-wild northern California storms, Redwoods *interlace* their roots below the surface, forming a solid platform that stretches for hectares – even kilometers. When the storms blow down from the Sierra Nevada mountains, they remain standing because they hold each other up!

This is an excellent picture of how the Christian community is supposed to be. The world can be a stormy place from time to time – as every Armenian woman has experienced. Any Christian who tries to "go it alone" is vulnerable. It won't be long before difficulties are encountered that are more than they were designed to handle. This is why it is *crucial* for Christians to get deeply involved in each other's lives, interlace their "roots," and hold each other up during the storms that hammer them.

- Can any of you share a story where a fellow Christian "interlaced their roots" with yours, and held you up during a particularly difficult time in your life? How about a time when you took the initiative and interlaced your roots to help hold someone else up during a crisis?

[Have someone read the three paragraphs in the next section about "Your Personal Plan," up to "Element #5.]

Your Personal Plan

Undoubtedly, you are in great distress because of what you've had to endure due to the Azerbaijani invasion of your country. If you have had to leave your home, and if you have children to care for, every day must be packed with obligations, chores, inconveniences, problem solving, logistics, and effort. I'm sure that at the end of each day, you just want to lie down and sleep. And when the sun comes up, you'd rather just stay in bed – if only you could.

Probably one of the *last* things you want to do is put *more* effort into cultivating relationships with other Christians, plugging into a church, and taking your kids there on Sunday mornings. But the fact is, this would be time and effort well-spent. You need this group of fellow believers in your life for the purposes of encouragement, safety, accountability, and camaraderie. You need a herd. You need a tribe. You need a friend who will listen to you, understand your trials, and provide the emotional and spiritual support you need. Whether it is a formal church, a neighborhood Bible study, or just a group of Christian friends who get together informally once a week, you need them. And they need *you!*

Regardless of the hassle it may involve, find that local Christian community! Pray that God will lead you to a group of fellow believers if He hasn't already. And then make the effort to get involved with them.

- Who is your "herd" or "tribe?" If you aren't already having regular contact with them, what plans can you make to ensure that you stay consistently connected with them?
- What are some of the issues that are keeping you from consistent involvement with a church or other Christian community? How can those issues be overcome?

[Have one or two people read the first six paragraphs of this section, up to "The Bible advises us:"]

ELEMENT #5 – Talk: Your Trauma-Processing Mechanism

Earlier in this manual we talked about how God has given us amazing ways of surviving trauma physically, psychologically, and spiritually. One component of His survival system for us

has to do with a sudden ability to suppress our normal emotional reactions and situational analysis while in the middle of a traumatic incident so that we can focus on the threat, take action, and get to safety.

Sometimes we click into "fight" mode. Sometimes it's "flight." Sometimes it could even be "freeze." Sometimes it has to do with the ability to disregard incredibly shocking and gruesome events happening around us so that we can think clearly and get ourselves out of a dangerous situation. Sometimes it may even involve a dissociative episode where we convince ourselves that we're not really there – the trauma is happening to someone else, not me. There is an impressive cascade of hormones that trigger a constellation of physiological actions and reactions that enable us to do things we may never have even thought about before – but doing them *now* keeps us alive.

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It's good that we don't respond to these horrible events in normal ways in the moment they're happening. To do so could delay our escape and we end up dead. So God gives us the ability to shove our normal responses down in our minds and hearts – but only *temporarily.* The idea is that, once the threat has passed and we're in a safe place, we need to "process" those traumatic events, bring them from the past into the present, and allow the emotions and analysis that we had previously suppressed to come to the fore and be fully experienced. They won't just dry up and blow away. They must be dealt with.

But we don't *want* to think about them! AT ALL! They were horrible, traumatic, terrorizing experiences! Why would I want to bring them to mind now that they're in the past?

Experts in the field of traumatology almost unanimously agree: the trauma you experienced could control your life indefinitely unless you "process" it, and the best way to process it is to remember it and talk about it. There are around a thousand approaches to dealing with Post-traumatic Stress Injury, and almost every one of them involves "talk therapy" – talking about what happened.

You may think that simply talking about what you experienced wouldn't have much effect. But decades of professional studies and practice prove the opposite. And if a person chooses *not* to process their trauma and tries to keep the feelings associated with them suppressed, they may feel OK for a while. In fact, some traumatized people experience no symptoms at all for months or even years after the incident. But eventually, these memories insist on being dealt with and they will push themselves to the surface of the person's life, and they begin having the symptoms expressed in Chapter 5.

- According to what we just read, why does God allow us to "shove our normal responses down in our minds and hearts?" How does this benefit a person who experiences a traumatic event?
- What happens if we don't intentionally "process" these events after the trauma has passed, bringing them up to our conscious thinking and talking about them?
- Many of you have experienced a traumatic event (or several of them). How reluctant or eager are you to talk with someone about what you experienced? On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 equals "I WILL NOT talk about it," and 10 equals "I'm very eager to talk with someone about it," where would you put your number? Why would you put it there?

[Have someone read the next section up to "Talk – but to whom?"]

The Bible advises us:

> *Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."*
> (Proverbs 4:23 NIV)

The most difficult part of being traumatized is not the actual traumatic event that happened in the past, but the long-term effect of not being fully engaged in the present. As leading trauma expert Besser van der Kolk wrote,

> "In the long term, the largest problem of being traumatized is that it's hard to feel that anything that's going on around you really matters. It is difficult to love and take care of people and get involved in pleasure and engagements because your brain has been re-organized to deal with danger."[29]

Your heart and soul have been wounded, and what flows from a wounded heart will rob you of feeling fully alive and in control of yourself. As the above verse urges, *take the initiative.* Be pro-active and intentional about the condition of your heart. Being passive will only make things worse.

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- If you have been traumatized in the past (either recently or even a long time ago) and you haven't really gone through a period of processing that trauma through "talk therapy," can you think of any ways this "un-processed trauma" may have affected your life and your interaction with others?

[Have one or two people read this whole section up to "The Take-Away for Chapters 11 & 12."]

Talk – but to whom?

Obviously, as we have recommended throughout this manual, *talk to God*. He is the one who can actually *heal* the wounds of your heart and soul. Pour out your confusion, anger, fears, frustration, and desires to Him and tell Him how it's making you feel. He hears you; He sees you; He understands you; He wants to help you. He won't be offended no matter how "real" you are with Him.

In partnership with your prayers, it would be ideal if you could spend time with a counselor or psychotherapist who is trained in addressing trauma. But in your current unstable situation with limited means, plus the scarcity of trained trauma counselors in Armenia compared with the overwhelming need, this is probably not really an option right now.

Your next best plan (and who knows – it could be your *best* plan!) is to talk with a friend who knows you and understands what you've been through. The listening ear and kind heart of a good friend is a key element of God's healing plan for you. Your friends are *uniquely equipped* to be used by God to help you!

> *A friend loves at all times, and a brother* [or sister!] *is born for adversity.* (Proverbs 17:17)

Your objective in this is not necessarily to get insight and good advice from them. They probably are not trained in how to do this anyway! The objective is for you to simply be able to share your experiences – to get it out. You may want to find someone who is going through the

[29] Bessel van der Kolk, "Trauma, Development and Healing." https://www.psychotherapy.net/interview/bessel-van-der-kolk-trauma. (Author of *The Body Keeps The Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*).

same difficulties you are experiencing. You might even consider assembling a group of three to five women who would agree to meet together weekly and talk about your experiences. You will be *amazed* at how therapeutic this is for *all* of you!

Whether it's an individual or a small group, approach it openly and honestly with them. You could be the spark plug for healing! You could tell potential group members something like:

> "I have been learning about trauma healing, and the experts say that one of the things that will help the most is to talk about what we have experienced. I'm going to put together a group that meets every week and simply talks together. Would you be interested in joining? I know I need this, and I think we could really help each other."

Then, come together consistently for a period of time. Share your hearts. Listen. Encourage. Pray for each other. Share scripture that is meaningful and comforting to you. The rhythm of these weekly meetings will have a very positive effect. Neuroscientist Catherine Kerr talks about the great therapeutic value of consistently meeting – whether it's with a therapist or a group of positive friends:

> *"For some reason, if you go every week to therapy, you are going to get better. But you could talk about the weather! When we perform these "rituals" with a desire to get better, we often do. We now know that a lot of the positive therapeutic benefit from psychotherapy and from various pain drugs may come from that initial context; it often has nothing to do with the specific treatment that is being offered. It is really just about the person approaching a situation with a sense of hope and being met by something or someone that seems to hold out that hope***"**[30]

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- Do you think it would be a good idea to talk about your traumatic experiences with just anybody who will listen? Why or why not?
- How possible would it be for you to make an appointment with a trained trauma counsellor in your area to talk about what you experienced? What are the barriers to this for you?
- Do any of you have a good, faithful, trusted friend who would be willing to listen to you, and walk with you through a recounting of your traumatic experiences? If so, write their name down in the margin of your Field Guide. Pray about approaching them sometime soon and proposing that they become your "listener."
- What about the idea of putting together a group of women with similar traumatic experiences to talk about what happened to them. Would you be open to that idea?
- If you <u>do</u> ask a friend if they would be willing to talk with you about your trauma, what are some things that you think you should tell them (or ask them) before you start?

[Have someone read "The Take-Away for Chapters 11 & 12."]

The Take-Away for Chapters 11 & 12

As we've said in several places in this manual, if you want to experience healing from your trauma, it is *essential* that you *take action!* As a wise doctor will advise you concerning changes you might need to make in your lifestyle and environment, God has done the same. Keeping Jesus Christ on the throne of your life day-by-day, moment-by-moment is a foundational element.

[30] Catherine Kerr. Ibid.

Add to that consistent times of reading your Bible and praying, along with connecting with a local body of believers, and finding a trustworthy group of friends you can talk with about your trauma – these five elements will greatly accelerate your journey back to healing, strength, and stability.

…and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11:29)

- In these past two chapters, we have talked about five effective disciplines or practices that a person who wants to heal from their trauma needs to include in their environment. As a result of what we've covered, what is one thing that you are going to do starting tomorrow (or within the next couple of days) that relates to one of the five elements? If you have more than one thing that you have decided to do, feel free to share them.

[Have someone – or you – read the closing Prayer.]

Prayer

My Father, You have made a plan to heal me. Help me to listen to Your voice and follow Your plan as best I can. Help me to become very good at talking with You, and to make this practice a part of every day. Help me find fellow believers that I can bond with, so that I might be encouraged and encouraging. And especially help me to find a person or group of women that I can truly talk with – who will listen to me, and to whom I will listen, so that we might all heal together as we help to release each other's burdens. I pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

LEADER'S GUIDE

Women, War, & Trauma – Chapter 13

Parenting in Times of War

Field Guide pg. 113

By Rahnella Adsit

Objectives of this Chapter:

- To give parents practical ways of caring for their children during the crises generated by war.
- To give parents the perspective that beyond caring for their children's physical safety, they also need to pay attention to their emotional and spiritual needs.
- To help them be able to recognize symptoms when their children are over-stressed.

[Have someone read the opening verse: 1 John 4:18.]

There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear.
(1 John 4:18 MSG)

- According to the opening verse (1 John 4:18), "Well-formed love banishes fear." During times of crisis, you can count on your children being scared. The best antidote for this is your love. But don't wait until you're in the middle of a crisis to establish a strong relationship of love with your children! Love needs to be a well-established theme and baseline of your relationship with them long before disasters strike. What are some things you are currently doing intentionally to let your children know that you love them?
- What are some things you'd like to *start* doing to deepen your love relationship with your kids?

[Have someone read the next two paragraphs, up to "Who is the most important person…?"]

Being a mother is challenging in the best of times, but it can be extremely difficult to navigate during a time of war. Armed conflicts no longer take place on remote battlefields. They are fought where civilians are often caught up in the midst of the fighting and are routinely targeted. This has taken a brutal toll on children. As a parent, we struggle at finding balance between protecting our children's innocence and having to explain this new world to them. Though we wish it wasn't true, we can't always stop bad things from happening in our children's lives. But we can help our children learn to cope with their anxiety and develop inner strength and resilience so that they can meet the challenges they will face in their futures.

My parents modeled this to us as we were growing up. My dad's career led us to 26 moves on three continents by the time I was 21 years old. One of my earliest memories is when we were living in Germany. It was 1961 and I was 6 years old. Cold War tensions over Berlin were running high. We were the only Americans living in a German neighborhood, about 170 miles east of Berlin. On August 13th, East German soldiers strung up barbed wire sealing off the passage connecting East and West Berlin, eventually building the Berlin Wall. Those tensions bubbled over into our neighborhood. One day our neighbors surrounded our house and started shouting at us "Go home Yankees!" and other epithets. Then they began hurling plates at the outside walls of

our house. My father wasn't home, and we were scared. My dear mother, to comfort my brothers and me, told us that our neighbors were just welcoming us to the neighborhood, and then she had us crawl up onto the widow seat, wave at all our neighbors and shout out "danka schön, danka schön" ("thank you kindly") in response. This may have been the first time, but it was not the last time we faced precarious situations as a family.

- Can you think of some ways you are trying to build up your children's inner strength and resilience, like Rahnella's mother did with her and her brothers in Germany? These might be small and subtle ways, or big and dramatic, like in Rahnella's story.
- What are some other ideas you have heard of that parents are using to help their children become more resilient and emotionally strong?

[Have someone read the two paragraphs in the next section, "Who is the Most Important…"]

Who is the Most Important Person in a Child's Life?

From the start of a child's life, mothers and fathers are the most important figures of attachment. The relationship between a parent and child is a vital part of their physical, emotional, and spiritual development. In the midst of war, many children may find that their access to the care, empathy, and attention of parents who love them is regularly restricted or non-existent.

Because parents are so often focused on protecting and providing the basic necessities of their families they are sometimes emotionally unavailable to their children, or they may have been severely traumatized by the war themselves. This may lead some children to struggle with attachment issues which could create problems in the future as they are unable to emotionally connect with others. This is one of the reasons why it is so important – despite all the needs of others around you – that your children's physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being need to be your top priority.

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- Some of you have had to lead your families through more than one very severe crisis – and may still be in great difficulties even now. It's natural and expected that you would emphasize your children's physical safety in times like this, but what were you able to do to address their emotional and spiritual needs, and to keep a strong emotional connection with them?
- What other ideas can the group come up with to accomplish this during traumatic events?

[Have someone read the two paragraphs at the beginning of the next section, up to the table.]

How to Recognize Signs of Distress in Your Children

Studies have shown that children and families living in or fleeing from war have an increased risk of suffering from mental health challenges – even for years after the crisis is over. Children can have a wide variety of immediate and long-term reactions to adverse events in their environment. Your children can be very different even from each other in their reactions to stress.

Some signs of distress may not be obvious and they can vary significantly from child to child. Here are some of the negative reactions children may be exhibiting at different ages.

- Let's take a couple of minutes for you to study this table silently, and the two paragraphs after it. Think about what you have observed lately in your child or children. If you see any signs in this list that indicate difficulties they are experiencing, put a check mark next to them. If you have several children, instead of a checkmark, put the first letter of their name next to the sign.

AGE	REACTIONS		
0-3 years	• Clingy • Increasingly Irritable • Demanding • Frequent crying	• Regressing to younger behaviors • Hyperactive	• Increasingly fearful • Changes in sleeping and eating patterns
3-6 years	• Clingy • Increasingly irritable • Difficulties with concentrating • Progressively more inactive/hyperactive • Increased anxiety	• Regressing to younger behaviors • Increasingly fearful • Stops playing • Uncommunicative	• Changes in sleeping and eating patterns • Tries to take on adult responsibilities
7-12 years	• Frequent concern about others affected • Aggressive • Memory issues • Feeling guilty or blaming themselves	• Changes in sleeping and eating patterns • Restless • Unable to concentrate • Fixated on the event	• Becoming withdrawn • Increasingly anxious and afraid • Physical symptoms • Repetitive play
13-17 years	• Increasingly anxious and afraid • Self-destructive • Risk taking	• Aggressive • Deep grief • Feelings of guilt and shame	• Shows excessive concern for others • Feeling hopeless • Self-destructive

Other possible reactions:

- Physical reactions which can include: feeling tired all the time, dizziness, headaches, shortness of breath, stomachaches, and dry mouth.
- Serious reactions which may need specialized care, such as: severely anxious all the time, withdrawn or very quiet with little movement, hides from other people, doesn't respond or speak to others, overly aggressive and starting to hurt others, feeling confused or disorientated.

- One purpose of this group is that we help each other. I'd like one or two of us to share the signs that you have been seeing in your children, and together let's see if we can come up with some practical ways to counter those symptoms of distress.

  [Of course, you will want to make the point that saying daily prayers for your children regarding these issues would be very important.]

[Have someone read the first few paragraphs and quotes in the next section up to "1. First, take care of yourself."

Tips for Comforting and Supporting Your Children

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"He who is not every day conquering some fear has not learned the secret of life."
Ralph Waldo Emerson

During my nomadic childhood, my parents used the dangerous experiences we encountered to teach us multiple life-saving skills. We learned that it was okay to be scared, but they encouraged us to face our fears with courage and do what we needed to do to survive. They taught us to carefully assess threats and evaluate our options. They encouraged us to always be aware of our surroundings. They taught us the importance of listening to our instincts – that sometimes they were more accurate than the information we had in our heads. They taught us to embrace the hardships because they had things to teach us, and to accept those things we couldn't change or control. Basically, they taught us to see challenges in our lives as opportunities to grow. These lessons continue to bear fruit in me as an adult, as my husband Chris and I have had numerous occasions over the years to work in various dangerous and war-torn countries around the world.

Ane Lemche, a psychologist and child counselor with Save the Children, wrote:

> "What is happening in Ukraine *[or in any country at war]* can be frightening for both children and adults. Ignoring or avoiding the topic can lead to children feeling lost, alone, and more scared, which can affect their health and wellbeing. It is essential to have open and honest conversations with children to help them process what is happening."[31]

The rippling effect from the outbreak of war has created a lot of fear and anxiety for all of us, but there are many things we can do to help our children face their fears and grow into adults who live their lives with courage. Here are 6 ways to help your children:

- What were some unique elements of how Rahnella's parents raised her and her brothers? What were their objectives for their kids?
- How could you use your current difficult situation to increase your children's resilience, self-reliance, and optimism when facing big challenges?

[Have someone read the two paragraphs in this section, up to "2. Establish a weekly family huddle."]

1. First, take care of yourself

This might sound selfish to you, but your children are depending on you. It's natural as a parent to put yourself on the bottom of the care list, but it's not the best thing for your family – especially in a critical situation. Remember what happens when you board a plane? The flight attendant goes over the safety procedures; one of them includes putting on your oxygen mask. What do they say? "Place the oxygen mask on yourself first before helping small children or others who may need your assistance." If you don't follow this protocol, neither you *nor* your children will be safe.

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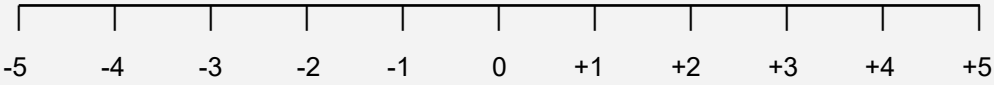
[31] Ane Lemche, Article: *Ukraine: Five Ways to Talk to Children About Conflict*. www.savethechildren.net/news/Ukraine-5-ways-talk-children-about-conflict-0.

Be aware of your stress levels and your feelings and find ways to manage them. Your anxiety can be contagious. Get the most credible information you can regarding the war and act on it appropriately. Find other adults to support you. Do not use your children as your sounding board or confidants – save that for your husband or peers.

- Does this first point seem a little self-centered and prideful? I thought we were supposed to put **J**esus first, **o**thers second, and **y**ourself last (the first letters of each word spells JOY in English). How do you reconcile these opposing philosophies?
- In an earlier chapter, we learned from the Iraq War medic that if you want to be able to take care of others, the first rule you must observe is: "First, take care of yourself - you are no good to anybody _____." *[Ask the group to finish the sentence if they can – the answer is "dead."]* What does that mean?

- Would you say that you are maintaining a healthy balance between helping others (including your family) and making sure that you don't get too stressed and exhausted yourself? Give it a number on this continuum:



Only taking care of **ME** — Balanced — Only taking care of **OTHERS**

[Draw the above diagram on a white board or a big piece of paper, or just describe it in your own words. Ask each member to share where they currently sit on this continuum.]

- Do you think you need to make some adjustments? How would you go about it?

[Have someone read only the first paragraph of the next section.]

2. Establish a weekly family huddle

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This is a time set aside to share the latest updates on the war, making sure it is age-appropriate. Keep it to the basics. Find ways to reassure without making false promises. It's a great opportunity to find out what they have seen or heard, to talk about their feelings, and review what you all need to do to reduce the risk of getting hurt.

- Have any of you ever tried to establish a regular weekly huddle with your family? If so, how did it go? What did you do?

[Have someone read the next sentence and the 5 elements of the Family Action Plan.]

To help allay everyone's fears I suggest you develop a **Family Action Plan** and review it each week, this should include:

- **Physical Activities**: This can promote health and decrease everyone's anxiety. Try to eat right, step outside to get a breath of fresh air, stay hydrated, and exercise by walking or jogging around the block, dance, or use an exercise video.
- **Mental Activities**: Keep your minds occupied. It is important to stick to a schedule, because during stressful times, your child especially needs the safety and security that comes from a regular routine. Plan family activities, play games, read books together. Schedule time for schoolwork. Limit screen time.

- **Soul Activities**: Incorporate art or music into your lives. This touches the creative side of your family's brains. It can bring beauty into your world and provide healthy ways to express your feelings.
- **Relational Activities**: This might mean sharing the burden by assigning them household chores. This will be beneficial to both the children *and* the parents (can I get an AMEN!?). It could mean staying on top of family conflicts or developing clear protocols on how to safely connect with family & friends.
- **Spiritual Activities**: This can bring your whole family comfort and strength. Help them work through spiritual concerns and needs. Pray together. Read the scriptures as a family. Attend church. Have a daily, age-appropriate devotional. Practice grace and forgiveness.

- Do you think these suggestions (like for instance, getting physical exercise, soul-feeding activities, etc) are just for the parents, or do you think your children could be included in them too? How?
- Under "Relational Activities," it mentions "developing clear protocols on how to safely connect with family & friends." What do you think that's referring to?
- What other things could be done during this weekly Family Huddle?

[Have one or two people read all of the next section, including the four bullet points, up to "2. Pack a 72-hour Emergency Go Bag."]

3. Develop a family emergency plan

This is the time to visit the land of "what if's" *temporarily,* but don't take up residence there ("What if *this* happens?" "What if *that* happens??"). Meditating on all the bad things that *could* happen can greatly increase your anxiety and sense of vulnerability. Think objectively about what emergencies you and your family need to be ready for. I would encourage you to discuss these issues with your spouse if he is available. Planning for an emergency will help your children feel safe, but it needs to be age appropriate. Here are some tips for creating your own emergency plan:

- **Escape Plan:** Make a "Go Bag" for each member of your family (see suggestion #4 below about how to make a "Go Bag."). Make sure that each family member knows where their Go Bag is and under what circumstances they are to grab it and go. It's not a toy – not to be played with.
- **Escape Routes**: Go through each room in your home (or wherever you are staying) with your children and determine what is the quickest and safest route outside. Make sure each member of your family knows the plan for each room. Practice the plan so they know how to act should they need to make a quick escape.

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- **Emergency Meeting Spots**: Choose three spots that every family member knows of in case you need to evacuate quickly, and you aren't all together at that moment. Agree on one place near your home, another outside your neighborhood, and one out-of-town location, such as at a relative's or a friend's house. Discuss under what conditions they should go to each of the three locations.
- **Emergency Contingencies:** You will also need to write up a list of questions that need to be addressed, such as what happens if one or both of the parents gets injured? What

happens with the kids? Do we need to write up a will? Should we write a "good-bye" letter for each of our children, just in case? The more work you put into this ahead of time, the safer everyone will feel. Sometimes the unknowns cause us the greatest fear.

- **Agree on a "Secret Word.**" There may come a time when you and your child or children are separated, and you need to get a message to them. But when the message or messenger gets to them, how do they know it's from you? What if a stranger approaches them and says, "Your mother told me she wants me to take you to her," but he is an evil person who is planning to kidnap your child. Your son or daughter can verify the legitimacy of the message if you have all agreed ahead of time on a secret "signal" word that only your family knows. Your child would ask, "If my mother sent you, she would have given you our Secret Word. What is it?" If they don't know, instruct your child ahead of time to start screaming as loud as they can, "HELP! THIS IS A BAD MAN! HE IS TRYING TO KIDNAP ME! SOMEBODY HELP ME!!!" Make it a word that is simple and easy to remember. Review the word frequently, and tell your children NEVER to tell it to anyone else!

- This section reminds me of the verse in Proverbs 22:3 (NLT): *"A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions. The simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences."* How many simpletons do we have here today? None? Good! Each of the points in this section give you very practical things to work through with your family to make sure that you all are prepared if disaster strikes.
- What are some of your thoughts about the three meeting spots for you family in case of an emergency? What would be some likely places at which you'd want to meet up with the other members of your family?
- What is one of the first things you plan to do with your family as a result of reading this section?

[Have one or two people read all of the next section, including all the bullet points, up to "5. Attempt to spend time with each child individually..."]

4. Pack a 72-hour emergency "Go Bag"

A list of what to include in an emergency bag is included in chapter 7 – "War Survival Tips," *[page 63 in the Field Guide].* Here are a few extra things to consider as you pack for your children:

- Don't be afraid to involve your kids in packing their own emergency bag. Generally, just like you, the more involved and prepared they are, the safer they will feel.
- Keep in mind the age and size of your child, and the weight of the bag. Remember: you are packing a bag for surviving 72 hours. Very small children can have a bag big enough to carry their blanket and favorite stuffed animal or doll, but not much more.
- Emergency Go Bag suggestions:
    - For your kid's bags, pick colors that are neutral or dark. You don't want them to stand out in the crowd, especially if you are running from gunfire.
    - Do something to help your child easily spot and grab their bag, such as: attach an emergency whistle to the outside of their bags, each with a different color cord or ribbon, so once they grab their bag you can quickly take it off and place the whistle around their neck.

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- Explain the purpose of everything as you pack the bag. You can say something like: "*We are attaching this whistle in case you get lost. It's only for an emergency. All you have to do is blow it, and when we hear it, we can find you! Let's practice blowing it."*
- Be sure to pack something that will keep the kids occupied (and distracted) like a coloring/activity/sticker book with crayons or magic markers, a deck of cards, small packs of Legos, books, etc. Add these things after you pack the bag with them so that they can get little surprises later. For older kids you might pack them their own phone/tablet chargers and/or a long-life rechargeable battery.
- Keep a "*must have*" list of last-minute items you (or other family members) need to grab. This can include: medications, glasses, phone chargers, or their comfort items that are a *must* to keep them calm during an emergency situation, such as: a favorite blanket, stuffed animal, doll, small toy, pacifier, or book. If possible, buy duplicates and have them pre-packed.
- Include some hard candy or a package of gum. This is an easy way to lift the spirits of the young (and the elderly).
- Include copies of identification – yours and your child's. If possible, keep them all in a waterproof bag. This should include:
  - Your name, address, and phone number
  - Your child's name and address (and phone number if they have one)
  - Emergency contact numbers
  - Your child's vaccination and allergy records or other pertinent medical information
  - A copy of their passport if they have one

- How many of you already have emergency Go Bags packed and ready to go? *[If any do…]* What are some of the things you put in them? Where do you keep them?
- In Chapter 7, "Survival Tip #2", instructions were given about putting together a "Go Bag" for each member of your family. Let's turn back to that page briefly (page 63 in the Field Guide: page 84 in the Leader's Guide). Take a minute to look over that list of what you should include, and see if you can think of any other items that ought to be on that list.
- Does anyone have any other thoughts about the Go Bags, what to put in them, where to keep them, etc.?

[Before reading the next section, refer to the title of it, and ask the following question:]

- For those of you that are in crisis mode – maybe you are displaced from your homes, or your husband has had to go fight in the war – what are some factors that might keep you from following this suggestion?

[Next, have someone read all of the next section, including the three bullet points, up to "6. Look for the Positive and Take Action."]

5. Attempt to Spend Time with Each Child Individually Every Day

Even if it's only for five minutes a day, this will prove to be a strong stabilizing and "grounding" habit, and help your child feel loved, heard, and attended to.

- **Be honest with your child**. When they have questions, try to answer them clearly at a level they can understand. Your child is aware *something* happened – ask your child what they know and what they want to know. Let them set the parameters of what you talk

about. Don't give more information than your child asks for. Encourage your child to ask questions at any time. Comfort them, but don't give false assurance, this only stokes the fire of their anxiety. Don't make promises you might not be able to keep.

- **Listen to your child's feelings and concerns**. Teach them they can have strong feelings but there are positive and negative ways to express them. Teach them how to express their feelings in a constructive way. Some children may show what they're thinking/feeling through their pictures, their play, or the little songs they sing. This can relieve stress, give you clues to their concerns, and open the door for talking about their feelings. Expect some acting out and regression, such as problems with potty training, sucking their thumb, whining, clinging, or temper tantrums. For older children you may see emotional outbursts, disrespectful behavior, slamming doors, shutting themselves in their rooms, etc. Be patient, set clear boundaries, and be consistent in your discipline.

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- **Include cuddle time**. – Physical touch, such as a hug, causes our brains to release a hormone called oxytocin. This can help all of you to feel good, and it strengthens your bond while lowering anxiety and fear.

- Do you find that your children want this exclusive time with you? Even your teens?
- What should we do when it seems that our children are reluctant to spend time alone with us?
- Can anyone share a particularly good time that you were able to spend with one of your children recently?
  - Something they said that was encouraging?
  - Some kind of a break-through?
  - A particularly insightful comment they may have made?
  - Something funny that happened?
  - Something you cried about together?

[Have someone read all of the next section, up to the "Prayer."]

6. Look for the Positive and Take Action

- **Look for the Helpers.** Point out that there are heroes and helpers who are diligently and selflessly working to make the situation in Armenia better. Encourage your family to share stories about how they saw people helping one another, then talk about ways you all can help others.
- **Reframe perceptions.** As humans, we have a negativity bias which can make us dwell on dark thoughts. This can affect our relationships, how we perceive people, and our view of our world. Negative words can hurt your children's mental and emotional health. Their own thoughts and how they perceive things can cause stress and anxiety. When it is appropriate, help them to reframe their negative or challenging situations in a more positive way, such as:
  - A scary experience or situation can be an occasion to have "another adventure."
  - Problems can become "opportunities to grow," "a chance to learn," or "a way to open doors to help others."
- **Help them to learn to "count their blessings."** The lyrics of the old song, "Count Your Blessings" by Guy Penrod, seem appropriate to include in this chapter, the chorus says:

Count your many blessings
Name them one by one
And it will surprise you
What the Lord has done
Count your blessings
Name them one by one
Count your blessings
See what God has done

Remember, in the midst of this crisis the greatest gift you can give your child is this: ***your love***. Your love is the antidote to their fear. "*Well-formed love banishes fear!"* (1 John 4:18 MSG)

- What "heroes and helpers" could you point out to your children? What would you say about them?
- The idea of "reframing perceptions" is a good way to help your children become more positive and optimistic, and to respond to difficulties with courage and creativity. (Examples in the Field Guide: another adventure, opportunities to grow, a chance to learn, etc). Can you think of some positive ways to reframe perceptions for your children in the following situations?
    - They aren't getting the kind of food they would like.
    - They are scared by the sounds of war nearby.
    - They don't feel like the clothes they're wearing are very fashionable.
    - They miss their friends back where they used to live.
    - They miss going to school regularly.
- How could you use the concept of "Counting your blessings" with your children? When could you do it?
- Could any of you put a tune to this little poem so we could teach it to our children?

[Have someone – or you – read the "Prayer."]

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I pray for my children as we live in the shadow of war and terror. Be our shelter and strength, our haven and hope. Please calm and comfort them. To be honest, I'm scared too, and I need discernment about what steps to take as I try to protect them. Change the hearts of those who cause suffering and bring an end to all violence. Thank you for your faithfulness!

In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

LEADER'S GUIDE

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Women, War, & Trauma - Chapter 14

If I Should Die Tonight…

By Chris Adsit

Objectives of this Chapter:

- To relieve group members of the anxiety and uncertainty that they may be feeling regarding what happens after they die according to the Bible.
- To share the Biblical gospel message with group members to be sure that they all understand how to become a Christian if they aren't already.
- To help group members understand the difference between being "religious," a "cultural Christian," or a member of a certain faith group, compared to having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

[Have someone read the opening verse, John 5:24, and the next paragraph, up to "Graveyard insights."]

[Jesus speaking:] ***Truly, truly I say to you, the one who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life****. (John 5:24)*

I wonder how often that thought – "If I should die tonight…" – has crossed your mind since the start of the first war with Azerbaijan in 1988? Or even in just the past few months? One doesn't have to be in the middle of a war to think about death and what happens afterwards. But to those whose country has been attacked by a neighbor, and who have personally known many who have died in the conflict and realize that tens of thousands of their country's men, women, and children have lost their lives because of it, the thought must occur much more deeply and intensely.

- We've spent a lot of time in our meetings together talking about how important <u>*preparation*</u> is. Could there be anything more important to prepare for than eternity? I'm sure that many of you have thought about what would happen if you should die during the conflict our country is experiencing. This chapter is presented to *make sure* you know what happens after death according to the Bible, and how to be completely prepared for it.
- Before we dive into this chapter, what are some of your thoughts regarding what happens after a person dies?

[Have one or two people read the entire "Graveyard Insights" story, up to "Would You Like To Know God Personally."]

Graveyard Insights

Simply going to a funeral or a graveyard in peacetime is enough to get one thinking about eternity. I recall an experience I had as a young man working in the oil fields far from home one summer. I had the day off but was homeless, so I strolled over to the town graveyard, looking for a place to relax for a few hours. As I sat in the shade of a small tree, I began looking at the headstone in front of me. It belonged to a person who had died decades earlier. As I did some

mental math on the year he was born, the year he had died, and the current year, it occurred to me that this person had now been dead longer than he had been alive.

It really set my mind spinning! I thought, "Of all the things this person ever did in his life, being born, growing up, playing with his friends, going to school, doing chores, falling in love, getting married, pursuing a career, having kids, building a home, traveling, retiring, living out his golden years… he had now spent more time rotting in this ground in front of me than all of those other activities combined." And he would continue to do so for a long, long time. For the first time in my nineteen years, I was struck with the brevity of life and the enormous finality of death. My next thought was, "Someday that will be true of me, too."

A hailstorm of thoughts and questions began pelting me. "What is it all for?? Wait! This man isn't really here in this grave – it's just his corpse. The real person is… where? Heaven? Hell? What has he been doing all these years since he died? Did he know where he was going? Forty-two years on this side of death, and now forty-five on the other… with *thousands* – no *millions* – of years ahead of him! This side was nothing in comparison! A tick of the clock. An eyeblink. What did he do to get ready? What can I do? What can *anybody* do?"

As a first-year college student, I had asked Jesus Christ to come into my life and be my Lord and Savior only a few months earlier. And the Spirit of God brought back to my mind the words I had recently heard one of our leaders say: "Other than hell, there are only three things that are eternal: God, the Word of God, and the souls of people. To the extent that you are involved with these three things, you are involved with eternity." I pondered: "Eternity, reaching through death to this side of the grave in only three forms…"

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From that time on, the focus of my life profoundly shifted. It's not that I became a monk or a religious fanatic of some sort. I simply decided that day to set my life priorities and perspectives around those three eternal things. And it made a world of difference.

I finally realized that Christianity was not just a *religion,* but a *relationship – with Jesus Christ.* And this relationship grew far beyond the "nodding acquaintance" I had experienced up until then, and transformed into a dynamic, life-long love affair. I began to understand what Jesus said in His prayer to His Father the night before He was crucified:

> *This is eternal life: <u>that they may know You</u>, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (John 17:3)*

The most important thing God wants for us is that we would *know Him.* And not to just know *about* Him, but to truly *know Him*. To the extent that we know Him, to that extent we are plugged into eternity, and our lives will reflect that harmony with our Creator – in both this life and beyond the grave. There are plenty of things we can pursue in this life, and I'm not saying they are sinful. But centering our lives around our relationship with God will bring us the most satisfaction and purpose possible, and put every other area of our life into proper perspective. As God has said:

> *Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and <u>knows Me</u>, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight. (Jeremiah 9:23,24 ESV)*

- This story mentions three things that are eternal: God, the Word of God, and the souls of people, and then says "To the extent we are involved in those three things, we are involved in eternity." Can you put into words how you are involved in each of those three things?
- What do you think is the difference between "being religious and a member of a certain faith group," and "knowing God?"
- Are there any of you who feel like you were simply "a religious person" for a number of years, but that now you can confidently say you "know God," and have a relationship with Him?
- How would you describe your relationship with God today?

Have someone read the next two paragraphs up to "PRINCIPLE 1…"]

Would You Like to Know God Personally?

As presumptuous as that may sound, yes – you *can* know God personally. He is so eager to establish a personal, loving relationship with you that He has already made all the arrangements. He is patiently waiting for you to respond to His invitation. You can receive forgiveness for your sins and assurance of eternal life through faith in His only Son, Jesus Christ.

The following four Biblical principles will help you discover how to know God and experience the abundant life He promised…[32]

- The things we are going to read in this chapter may already be familiar to many of you, but there may be others of you that will be hearing these principles for the first time. Many people who have *thought* they were a Christian for many years hear these Biblical principles and realize that they had an intellectual understanding of Christianity, but never understood how to begin an actual *relationship* with Christ. Let's go through these four principles and their associated Bible verses, and if you have any questions as we go along, we'll stop and address them.

Have someone read "PRINCIPLE 1…" up to "PRINCIPLE 2"]

PRINCIPLE 1: God LOVES you and created you to know Him personally.

- **God's Love:** *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.* (John 3:16)

- **God's Plan:** *The Lord appeared to me from ages past, saying, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you and continued My faithfulness to you."* (Jeremiah 31:3 AMP)

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What prevents us from knowing God personally?

[32] This is a version of *The Four Spiritual Laws,* written by Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ. Copyright 1965, 1988, Campus Crusade for Christ, Inc. Used by permission.

- How many of you have heard that first verse (John 3:16) before today? What has it meant to you in the past?
- What do you think of that statement? Do you think that God truly loves you? Why or why not?
- How would you say God shows His love for you?
- According to the first verse (John 3:16)…
  - Why did God give His only Son *["…so that everyone who believes in Him…" <u>two</u> reasons stated]?*
  - What does this verse say is necessary in order to have eternal life? *[Believe in Him.]*
  - What do you think it means to "believe in Him?"
- According to the next verse (Jeremiah 31:3)…
  - How long has God loved us? *[Everlasting.]*
  - Who took the initiative to begin our relationship with God?

Have someone read "PRINCIPLE 2…" up to "PRINCIPLE 3"]

<u>PRINCIPLE 2</u>: Man is sinful and separated from God, so we cannot know Him personally and experience His love.

Man was created to have fellowship with God; but because of his own stubborn self-will, he chose to go his own independent way and fellowship with God was broken. This self-will, characterized by an attitude of active rebellion or passive indifference, is evidence of what the Bible calls sin.

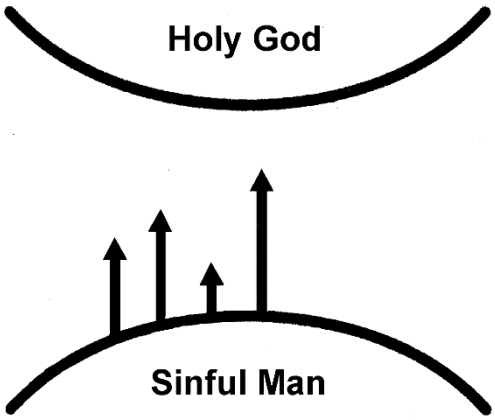
- **Man is Sinful:** *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* (Romans 3:23)

  The word "sin" was originally a Greek archery term which referred to how far an arrow landed from the center of the target – the "sin" of the arrow. Though we may have been trying to hit God's target of righteousness, every one of us has missed the mark.

- **Man is Separated:** *But your wrongdoings have caused a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.* (Isaiah 59:2)

  The wages of sin is death. [spiritual separation from God] (Romans 6:23a)

The following diagram illustrates how a great gulf separates God and man. The arrows illustrate that man is continually trying to reach God and establish a personal relationship with Him through his own efforts. These efforts take many forms, such as being a good person, having a positive philosophy, taking care of the environment, or being religious – but he inevitably fails. The gulf is just too great. It would be like trying to swim from London to New York City. The greatest swimmer of all time might go farther than anyone else, but he or she would still fall hundreds of miles short. The problem isn't with the lack of effort – it's the width of the ocean. No one can swim it regardless of how great their swimming ability is. It's the same with the gulf that separates us from God. None of us can ever be "righteous" enough to reach God, because His righteousness is perfect.



- The first paragraph says that a person's self-will is characterized by "an attitude of active rebellion or passive indifference." What would be examples of these two types of attitudes? *[Active: "I don't believe in God." "Stay out of my life God – I will do what I want to do, not what YOU say." Passive: "God, you go Your way, and I'll go mine." "Maybe God exists, maybe He doesn't. I don't really care, and I'm not going to think about it."]*
- Given the wars that are going on all over the world today, and the current conflict in our country, and considering the misery that Azerbaijan has brought upon us, are there any here that disagree with the statement: "Man is Sinful?"
- What are some of the ways that people try (and fail) to bridge the gap that exists between them and God? [*Suggestions: religion, being good, donating lots of money, going into ministry.]*
- Looking at the illustration, we see that man is continually trying to reach God and establish a relationship with him through his own efforts. How do we know that no one has ever been able to accomplish that? *[Isaiah 53:6 – ALL we like sheep have gone astray…]*

Have someone read "PRINCIPLE 3…" up to "PRINCIPLE 4"]

The third principle explains the only way to bridge this gulf…

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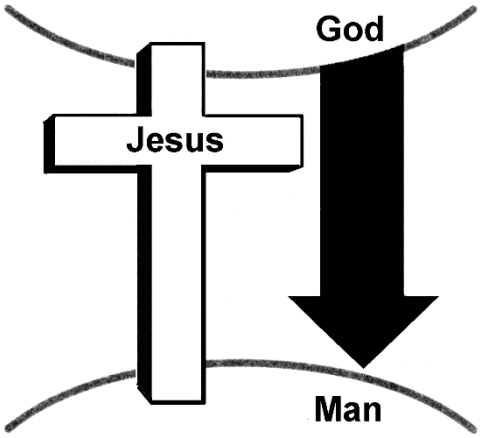
PRINCIPLE 3: Jesus Christ is God's only provision for man's sin. Through Him alone we can know God personally and experience His love.

- **He Died In Our Place:** *God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* (Romans 5:8)

- **He Rose From the Dead:** *Christ died for our sins… He was buried… He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures… He appeared to Peter, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred…* (1 Corinthians 15:3-6)

- **He Is the Only Way to God:** *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father except through Me. (John 14:6*)



The above diagram illustrates that God has taken the initiative and bridged the gulf that separates us from Him by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross in our place to pay the penalty for our sins. Because of Jesus' willing sacrifice of Himself, we can now experience a relationship with God.

- What is it that has kept man and God separated? *[Our sin.]*
- What was it that Jesus Christ accomplished when He died on the cross? *[He took our sin upon Himself and paid the penalty for it with His death – so that we wouldn't have to die spiritually for it. So for believers, when God looks at them at the final judgment, He will see no sin because Jesus took it all away.]*
- The Bible says that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. This is presented in the Bible as a literal resurrection after being dead for three days – not just a "spiritual" or "philosophical" resurrection. Why do you think it's so significant that Jesus rose from the dead?

  [There could be many great responses to this, but one very important one is that it demonstrated that He truly was the Son of God with the power over death, because He foretold that He would indeed rise from the dead. If He had not risen, it would have brought into question everything else He said about God, life, death, heaven, eternity, Satan, judgment, etc.]

Have someone read "PRINCIPLE 4" including the paragraph after the four bulleted points, up to the circles illustration.]

It is not enough just to know these three principles…

Principle 4: We must individually RECEIVE Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know God personally and experience His love.

- **We Must Receive Christ:** *As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.* (John 1:12)

- **We Receive Christ Through Faith:** *By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.* (Ephesians 2:8,9)

- **When We Receive Christ, We Experience A New Birth:** Read John 3:1-8 in your Bible to see how Jesus talks about being "born again."

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- **We Receive Christ by Personal Invitation:** [Christ speaking:] *Look! I have been standing at the door, and I am constantly knocking. If anyone hears Me calling him and opens the door, I will come in and fellowship with him and He with Me.* (Revelation 3:20 TLB)

Receiving Christ involves turning to God from self (repentance) and trusting Christ to come into our lives to forgive us for our sins and to make us what He wants us to be. Just to agree intellectually that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died on the cross for our sins is not enough – nor is it enough to have an emotional experience. We receive Jesus Christ by faith, as an act of our will.

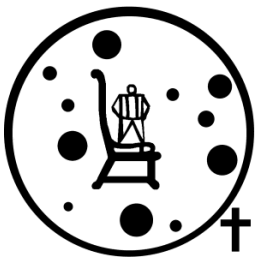
- According to the first verse in this section (John 1:12), what is the relationship between "receiving" Christ and "believing" in Him? *[They are used interchangeably here – to believe is to receive, and vice versa.]*
- What is it that we are supposed to <u>believe</u> about Jesus Christ?

  [Foundationally, two things: (1) that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and our Savior, and (2) that He rose from the dead. See the following two verses to summarize it…]
  - *John 20:31 – "These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is <u>the Christ, the Son of God</u> and that by believing you may have life in His name.*
  - *Romans 10:9 – "That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart <u>that God raised Him from the dead</u>, you will be saved."]*
- Why isn't it enough to simply agree intellectually with the first three Principles we've covered in this chapter and call it good? Why is this last principle so important?

  [Salvation requires us to <u>make a choice</u>. It involves our free will. Since it was by an act of our will that we each originally became separated from God, it is by an act of our will that we once again become reunited with Him.]
- Can we work for salvation? Can eternal life be earned? (Second verse: Ephesians 2:8,9).
- *[Have someone – or you – read John 3:1-8.)* What do you think it means to be "born again?" *[Jesus said that a person must be "born of water and the Spirit" (vs. 5). This refers to being born physically into the physical world ("born of the flesh" vs 6), but also the need to be born spiritually into the spiritual world – where the Spirit of God dwells. Obviously, we've all been born into the physical realm, which gave us temporary physical life. Jesus is saying that we now need to be "birthed" into the spiritual realm to gain eternal life. So it's not just about intellectually adopting a certain philosophy, it's about a new, second birth – which occurs when we put our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior.]*
- Referring to the fourth verse (Revelation 3:20), how has Jesus Christ been knocking on your door? Would someone like to share your story of how you sensed Jesus knocking on the door of your heart, you opened the door, and let Him in?

[Leader: Read the explanations about the two circles. Also mention: "These are two of the same circles you saw in Chapter 11."]

You have seen these two circles before in Chapter 11. They represent two kinds of lives:

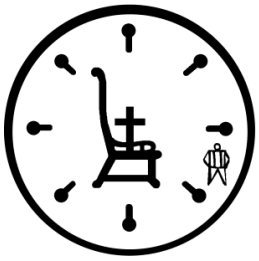


The Worldly, Self-Directed Life

Self is on the throne.

Interests, activities, priorities, and plans are directed by self, resulting in discord and frustration.

Jesus Christ is outside the life.



The Christ-Directed Life

Jesus Christ is on the throne.

Self is dethroned and yielding to Jesus Christ.

Interests, activities, priorities, and plans are directed by Christ, resulting in harmony with God's plan.

[Leader: Ask the two questions after the illustration.] Next are two very important questions to consider. Maybe a few of you could respond: which circle best represents your life right now? And which would you rather have represent your life?

- Which circle best represents your life?
- Which circle would you like to have represent your life?

[After everyone has shared who wants to, continue reading the rest of this section, up to "How to know that Christ is in your life."]

If you would rather have the second circle be representative of your life, you can receive Jesus Christ into your life right now by faith through prayer. God knows your heart and is not so concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. The following is a suggested prayer:

> *"Lord Jesus, I want to know You personally. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving me of my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be."*

Does this prayer express the desire of your heart? If it does, pray this prayer right now, and Christ will come into your life, as He promised.

- *[There are several ways you could proceed here…*
  - *You could pray the prayer out loud and ask anyone who would like to receive Christ to pray it along with you silently.*
  - *You could ask the whole group to pray it out loud in unison; some might be asking Christ into their lives for the first time, others might see it as a prayer of rededication.*
  - *You could ask people to consider this prayer personally, think about it tonight, and if they would like, to pray the prayer on their own and let you know of their decision later, so that you could be praying for them and helping to disciple them.]*

[Have someone read the whole next section, up to "An important reminder…"]

How to know that Christ is in your life

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Did you ask Christ into your life? According to His promise in Revelation 3:20, where is Christ right now in relation to you? Christ said that He would come into your life and have a relationship

with you so that you can know Him personally. Would He mislead you? On what authority do you know that God has answered your prayer? (The trustworthiness of God Himself and His Word.)

> *And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. The one who has the Son has the life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.* (1 John 5:11-13)

Imagine for a moment that I wanted to give you a 500 Euro bill. I take the bill and insert it in a book, close the book, and then hand the book to you. Would you complain and say, "Wait a minute. You said you'd give me 500 Euro, but instead you gave me this book!"? I did. But he who has the book has the bill – because the bill is in the book. In a similar way, he who has the Son has eternal life – because the life is in the Son. When you received Jesus Christ into your life, you also received *His* eternal life!

Thank God often that Christ is in your life and that He will never leave you.

> *He [God] Himself has said, I will not in any way fail you nor give you up nor leave you without support**. [I will] not, [I will] not, [I will] not** in any degree leave you helpless nor forsake nor let [you] down (relax My hold on you)! [Assuredly not!]* (Hebrews 13:5 Amplified – Classic Version)

God thought it was so important that you *know* that He would never leave you or forsake you, He had the writer of the above verse use a Greek phrase that is so strong, to translate it requires a **triple negative** to convey the certainty of His commitment to you! You can *know* that Christ lives in you and that you have eternal life from the very moment you invite Him into your life – because He promised it! He will never deceive you, leave you, or forsake you.

- What are your thoughts about whether or not Christ is in fact in your life right now?
- If you are *sure* that He is there, how do you know this?

  [Based on what God has said in His Word. Since Jesus said if I ask Him to come in, He will, and since I know that He is trustworthy and wouldn't lie to me, I have complete assurance that He is there.]

[Have someone read the next section up to "What happened?"]

An important reminder: don't depend on feelings

The promises of God's Word, the Bible – not our feelings – is our authority. The Christian lives by faith in the trustworthiness of God Himself and His Word. The Illustration below shows the relationship between **fact** (God and His Word), **faith** (our trust in God and His Word), and **feelings** (the result of our faith and obedience.

The classic train pictured above was powered by coal, which was stored in the second car. As coal was shoveled forward to the engine's firebox and burned, it produced steam which powered the train. Shoveling coal from the second car to the last car will not move the train at all. In fact, the train will run with or without the last car. However, it cannot run without the engine – the last car has no power to do that job. In the same way, we as Christians do not depend on feelings or emotions, but we place our faith (trust) in the facts – the trustworthiness of God and the promises of His Word.

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- Do you all understand this illustration using an old-fashioned coal-powered train?
- Some of you may feel that something very significant happened when you asked Christ to come into your life – and that's wonderful! But some of you may not "feel" anything different. The devil may soon put thoughts in your mind such as, "This isn't real. Nothing really happened. Nothing changed. It's just a bunch of religious propaganda." How will you respond to this?

[Have someone read the next section up to "Maintaining momentum."]

What happened?

The moment you received Christ by faith, as an act of your will, many things happened. Here are just a few…

1. Christ came into your life (Revelation 3:20; Colossians 1:27)
2. Your sins – past, present, and future – were forgiven (Psalm 103:12; Colossians 1:14)
3. You became a child of God (John 1:12)
4. You received eternal life (John 5:24)
5. You began the great adventure for which God created you (John 10:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:18)

[If you have time, and if Bibles are readily available to you, assign each group member to read one of the verses listed above. Have someone read the "thing that happened," and then have someone read the verse or verses associated with it. Remember: "Let the Word do the work!"]

- Are any of these occurrences news to you? Which one do you feel is the most significant to you personally?

[Have someone read the next section up to "The Take-Away."]

Maintaining momentum

Inviting Jesus Christ into your life is just the beginning! There was a time when you were a newborn baby, mystified and unfamiliar with your surroundings. It's a good thing your parents didn't say, "Congratulations! You are born! We hope you have a good life! We'll see you around!" No, they made sure that you got proper nutrition, sleep, clothes, love, training, and many other things. And as you cooperated with them in this process, you grew up strong and resourceful!

Now you are a baby a second time – a *spiritual* baby, who has just been born again (see John 3:1-8). Now is *not* the time to go passive, and just ***let*** things happen. God has a process of spiritual growth for you, and if you are interested in growing strong and resourceful as a Christian woman, be sure to cooperate with God in the process He has set up for you.

Chapters 11 and 12 in this book give you five important elements of God's process of healing and growth. Be sure to review those chapters and apply what you learned there!

- What do you think will help you personally to maintain momentum the most?

[Have someone read the "The Take Away" up to the "Prayer."]

The Take-Away

As an Armenian woman, it's likely your life has become filled with uncertainty during the past months or years. But there is one thing you *don't* have to be uncertain about, and that is what will happen to you after you die. And this isn't an issue that only pertains to death – it's also about your *life* in the midst of your present difficulties. God wants to walk with you through the "valley of the shadow of death" you are currently in. He is interested in a personal relationship with you because He made you, and He loves you. No one knows the day and hour of their death, but we can have peace about that subject as we stay close to God and have faith that He will see us through every difficulty we encounter – even if we come to our "final" difficulty: the end of our physical life. If you have established that relationship with Jesus Christ, and keep Him on the throne of your life, cooperating with Him in His process of healing and strengthening, you will be able to echo the prayer of the Psalmist:

> The Lord is my light and my salvation; *w*hom should I fear?
> The Lord is the defense of my life; *w*hom should I dread?
> When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh,
> My adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell.
> If an army encamps against me, *m*y heart will not fear;
> If war arises against me, in spite of this I am confident. (Psalm 27:1-3)

- On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 = "I don't believe this at all" and 10 = "I am 100% sure of this," how sure are you that if you were to die tonight, you would immediately enter heaven, and be with Jesus Christ eternally?
- If the number you chose is anything other than 10, what would it take to make you 100% sure your salvation was secure, and you are headed for heaven?
- How does knowing that your salvation is secure affect your life today, during the present conflict with Azerbaijan?

[Have someone – or yourself – read the final "Prayer."]

Prayer

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My Father in heaven – and also right here with me – I need to feel Your closeness, Your encouragement, Your strength, Your control. There are too many things that are uncontrollable in my life right now. But You are the God of the universe. I want to deepen my relationship with You. I want to know you – that you are the One who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. I want to be sure that I have opened the door of my heart, and let you in. I don't want to hold any doubt about that, so once and for all, I ask you to come into my life, and sit on my throne. I want to be ready for eternity, but I also want to be ready for whatever is going to happen tomorrow. Thank you! I pray these things in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

FINAL MEETING

Your final meeting should be a great time of celebration and honor. Plan on having a dinner, invite spouses and family members. Have each group member come to the front and say a few words about what they experienced during the time the group met, and then you should lead the group in prayer for that person.

It would also be appropriate to present each group member with a memento of some sort – a certificate (see next page for an example), a medal, a coin, a small carving – something physical that will remind him or her of their time in this group, and of all God did during that time.

Your next job – if it hasn't already been accomplished – is to get the group members involved in some sort of service to others. A great idea would be to encourage them to lead a Bridges to Healing group, or to assist you in your next one. Don't let them stop growing now! Keep them motivated to continue seeking the Kingdom of God

Here is an example of a Graduation Certificate you could make for your group members…

CERTIFICATE

of GRADUATION

This certifies that

Rahnella Adsit

has successfully completed

THE "WOMEN, WAR, + TRAUMA" COURSE

"The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy;
I have come that they may have life and have it to the full"
--John 10:10 --

REBOOT RECOVERY
OVERCOMING TRAUMA TOGETHER

November 27, 2023

Course Leader

"How can I go on?"

Trauma is nothing new to an Armenian woman. Since the very beginning of the last century, several countries have done their best to subdue, displace, enslave, or annihilate the people of Armenia. From the Metz Yeghern of 1915-23, when 1.5 million were massacred or deported and left to die in the Syrian desert by the Turks, to the first and second wars for Nagorno-Karabakh in the past few years, when tens of thousands of Armenians were killed or wounded or driven from their homes in battles against Azerbaijan.

Through all this, the women of Armenia have had to provide strength, stability, and courage for their families. When their husbands, fathers, and sons had to go off to fight – many of them never to return – the women had to step up to protect and provide for their families. Many of them still do.

You are in the middle of yet another war. And there is no telling what might be coming within the next few weeks and months from foreign invaders.

You are being hit physically, psychologically, and spiritually. We non-Armenians observe the incredible bravery, strength, and perseverance of your people. But we know—as we look back over the traumas we have suffered—that some days you wonder how you can go on.

We have written this manual for that very purpose—*to help you go on*. It is filled with practical tips, inspirational insights, and encouraging truths that will *make a difference* for you in your current situation. Have you ever thought about…

- How war trauma has impacted you physically, psychologically, and spiritually?
- How you can reconcile the idea of a good God that would allow so much suffering?
- How faith can drive away fear?
- How you can deal with guilt feelings you may have?
- How peace and light can be found in the darkness of grief?
- How you can help your family survive in the midst of such chaos and uncertainty?
- How war has negatively changed your self-image?
- How your soul wounds can heal?

All of these questions—and more—are addressed in this manual.

We know that many things have broken your heart and crushed your spirit in the past several months and years. But know that you are not alone. God sees you, and is there with you.

The LORD is near to the brokenhearted
***and saves those who are crushed in spirit.* — Psalm 34:18**

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