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HOW TRAUMA AFFECTS THE WHOLE PERSON

Trauma is a side-effect of events that happen to us which are beyond our control. A traumatic event can be anything from a road accident or falling down stairs to sexual abuse or the sudden receipt of bad news. None of us can ever plan for such events and by their very nature we are always unprepared for them.

There can be both short-term and long-term consequences of traumatic events. How we are affected by them can depend on a wide range of factors, including the severity of the incident, the local circumstances, who was involved and our attitude towards them, our temperament, our physical fitness and resilience, our emotional well-being, our upbringing, our age, former experiences, our spirituality and personal wholeness in Christ.

An incident which may have been very traumatic for one person, could be of little consequence to another. Two people of the same age may fall down the same flight of stairs and suffer identical physical injuries. The one who slipped and fell because they were carrying too much is less likely to carry trauma into later life than the one who slipped and fell because they were trying to escape the attentions of an abusive father. Two boys may fall off a boat into shallow water. The six-foot teenager may finish up sitting in the water laughing at his predicament, but the five-year old may be beneath the surface, face down in mud, inhaling water and fighting for his life. Years later the teenager may not even have any memory of the incident, whereas the five-year old may as an adult have a chronic fear of water, never learn to swim, suffer regular panic attacks and finish up with breathing problems all his life.

Medically speaking, a trauma is the physical damage that is incurred by an organ of the body through an injury. I took my son ten-pin bowling and was careless enough to drop a bowling ball on my foot. When I limped into Accident and Emergency at 1.00am in the morning the nurse on duty wrote on her admission form, "Trauma to the left big toe". I tried to correct her by saying, "No, my big toe is broken, the only trauma I experienced was through having done something so stupid in front of my son!" But technically the nurse was right. It is the part that is affected by the injury that suffers the trauma. But that statement invites a much wider question. How can we be so sure that when we have a physical injury, the consequences are limited to the physical realm and that other parts of our being are not also affected by the injury and, therefore, traumatised?

Mothers instinctively know the answer to this very basic, but important question. A three-year old may suffer one of the hundreds of minor injuries that are part of life's rich learning

experience! In the rough and tumble of play the child falls over and bangs their forehead on some concrete. The child instantly bursts into tears and runs to Mummy. Mummy opens her arms wide, takes the child onto her lap and “kisses it better”! There is absolutely nothing physically therapeutic in that kiss, but its effect is usually instant and dramatic. The kiss does not speed up the rate of physical healing, but the love and security of mother’s love almost instantly removes the trauma from their hurting child’s inner being! If Mother pushed the child away and refused to show care and love to such a young child in its moment of need, then the crying would go on much longer and the inner trauma would be at the root of an unhealed memory.

God created us with spirit, soul and body. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23 Paul expresses concern that his readers should be whole in all three. While we may use the words spirit, soul and body to describe three distinct and different aspects of what God created when he made man, in reality whatever happens to one part affects the other. During life they are indissolubly joined. It is only at death that the body is separated from the rest of man’s being.

It is impossible for one part of our humanity to experience anything which the other parts are not also involved in or affected by. A person may train their body to be supremely fit and win a gold medal at the Olympic Games. When the medals are handed out, the neck of the body may be used to hang the medal on, but the person whose body has run the race receives the praise. No athlete would say, “Oh, don’t praise me, it’s my body that did it!” The medal was actually won by a remarkable team effort of spirit, soul and body!

If we, as God’s creation, therefore, are so much joined together as spirit, soul and body, cannot the spirit and soul also suffer the consequences of physical trauma? And cannot the body begin to suffer when trauma of a different nature affects the soul? Without doubt the answer to these very important question is a resounding Yes.

It was when we first realised, for example, the extent of damage there can be to the inner man (spirit and soul – especially the emotions), through injury or suffering of the outer man (body), that God taught us an incredibly profound healing principle. Through prayerful application of this principle, we have seen a great deal of physical healing take place – often from the consequences of events that took place many years earlier. For, in reality, even though we talk of the human being as comprising spirit, soul and body these three are deeply inter-related, and anything that happens to one will have an effect on the other.

The medical profession is quite correctly trained to treat the traumas that affect the body. After an accident it is their immediate responsibility to take emergency action to save and preserve life, followed by restorative treatment. But what are the further consequences of these traumas if the inner being is not treated with the same care and attention to detail as the medics give to the body? They can range through life-long fears, emotional instability, suicidal tendencies and physical disability.

Lynda was a young woman who suffered from all of these symptoms. Life had become intolerable for her and she had lost hope. When we first met Lynda she was 26 years of age, registered disabled with the Australian Government, receiving a life-time disability

pension, in constant pain, suffering severe side-effects of her medications, very depressed and suicidal. When asked if we could pray for her she initially refused. She had been prayed for so many times already, without effect, that she did not want to run the risk of finding out once more that God didn't answer prayer.

She told us her story of how three years previously she had been mountain walking at night with her church youth group. No-one had warned her of the dangers of the particular path they were on. She took a step off the pathway and fell off the edge of a cliff into a ravine, falling 35 ft through open space before landing on the rocks below. Her back was broken in four places and it was ten and a half hours before she was lifted out on a stretcher by helicopter. What a trauma! The doctors did everything they could possibly have done at the time, and also in the subsequent years. But three years later nothing more could be done for her medically. Her only option was to try and live with the consequences of her accident for the rest of her days.

Gently we began to explain to Lynda how when we suffer physical injury, we are also injured on the inside. Her body had been broken by the fall, but whatever had happened to her body had also happened to her spirit and soul. We told her a few stories of how others had been healed physically when God had brought healing on the inside. We explained how the body (the outer man) is often a reflector of what is happening on the inside (the inner man), and that it is sometimes impossible for the body to be fully healed until the person on the inside has also been healed.

We shared with her from the Scriptures how Isaiah prophesied that one of the ministries of Jesus would be the "healing of the broken-hearted". When she understood that the word for broken used here in Isaiah 61:1 actually means "shattered into separate pieces" and that not only had her body been broken by the fall, but that her heart (her spirit and soul, her inner being) had also been shattered, she began to understand what must have happened to her in the accident.

Slowly the light of hope began to dawn in her eyes and she came to a place where she was not only willing to be prayed for once more, but willing also to let others share in what God was doing, so that they could learn at the same time. We had met Lynda at a special conference for Christian medics. She was there because she had been a nurse. When it came to the time of prayer, therefore, she was surrounded by dozens of medical workers ranging from anaesthetists to pain consultants, from surgeons to physiotherapists!

They all watched as God worked a miracle in her body before their very eyes, and healed her of the trauma which was locked on the inside. We asked God to expose the pain that lay in Lynda's broken heart. She instantly fell to the ground, lying in the position she had been in when she fell off the cliff. It was as if part of her inner being was still lying at the foot of the cliff - shattered, traumatised but un-noticed and, therefore, unhealed. We spoke love and gentleness into her spirit and soul, we asked Jesus to begin to heal her on the inside. We took her through forgiveness of those who should have warned her of the danger.

Whenever people go through severe trauma, there is a danger that their extreme vulnerability at that time will be used by the enemy to hold them into demonic control. This had happened in Lynda's case - she was gripped by fear on the inside. We delivered her

of the spirits of fear and infirmity that had taken advantage of her traumatised state. We also had to deliver her of things which had taken advantage of subsequent traumas she experienced through sometimes frightening hospital treatments.

When we had prayed everything the Lord led us to pray, we then blessed some oil and anointed her for physical healing. With all those medics we watched in amazement as God poured his Holy Spirit on her and we saw her broken body being put back together by the hand of God. The body is normally a natural self-healer, but Lynda's body had been prevented from being healed by all the consequences of trauma that had been locked on the inside at the time of her injuries.

Shortly after this Lynda caused consternation in the Sydney pensions benefits office. Never before had they had someone who had been affirmed (by three separate doctors) as being disabled for life, then ask to come off her pension because she was healed! Five years later Lynda fulfilled what was previously an impossible dream. She found God's man for her life, got married and is now looking forward to having a family!

God truly is a worker of miracles. But as we pray for people it is important that we also do our part in bringing healing to his hurting people. So often when a person is suffering physically, people only pray for the healing of the body. But when the condition has origins which are related to traumatic events, then it is important to pray for the broken heart and not just for the broken body. The body cannot be fully healed while it is still reflecting the inner pain of unhealed trauma.

When praying for people who have been traumatised, it is also essential to have a right understanding of the possible need for deliverance. Satan is no respecter of persons and he will use every possible opportunity to gain access to a person's life through the demonic, no matter who they are. The more traumatic the event the more vulnerable a person is. Those incidents which carry with them the worst traumas to the inner man are usually those which have been done deliberately by someone who should have been in a position of spiritual covering and protection. When parents, close relations, teachers, ministers and others whom a child would naturally want to trust are the source of the abusive trauma, then the consequential damage and related demonic influence is always greater.

In the area of sexual abuse, the inner trauma is sometimes only exposed when a person gets married. Painful memories, raw emotions and the demonic can all be brought to the surface through the expectation of sexual fulfilment. Physical sexual relations can then become a time of intense fear and panic. Instead of being a source of joy and fulfilment, they are destructive of the very relationship that the victim most desires, and also needs as part of the healing process.

In a short article like this it is not possible to go into greater detail about how to bring healing to those who have been damaged through abuse, but the principles of healing the consequences of trauma, be the trauma caused by an innocent accident or deliberate abuse are fundamentally the same.

When Jesus brought healing to the epileptic boy, he asked his father, "How long has he been like this?" (Mark 9:21) That is an important question, for the answer can lead us to

pray for the right thing. Perhaps the largest single reason why people are often not healed is because the wrong thing is being prayed for!

A lady came for prayer wearing a neck brace and asking for prayer for her asthma. It was tempting to anoint her with oil and pray for physical healing, but God prompted me to ask the Jesus question! "Thirty three years" was her instant answer! "How old are you," I asked. "Thirty six." "So what happened when you were three years old?" I responded. "I was in a small plane landing on an Indonesian island. The plane crashed, everyone else was killed, but because I was a child I had been strapped into a seat and survived."

Immediately I knew what to pray for. I asked God to bring healing to the terrified child on the inside – the child whose chest had been crushed by the seat harness as the plane had hit the ground, and the child whose neck had been thrown forward at the moment of impact. It was as if that broken-hearted and traumatised child was still lying in the remains of the plane on that remote island. We spoke love and encouragement into her heart, asked Jesus to begin to heal the inner pain – especially the loss of relatives who had been killed. We asked her to forgive those who had been responsible for the accident. We told the spirits of fear and infirmity, that were holding the body into the symptoms some thirty years later, to leave.

There was a deep deliverance and a profound healing. Normal movement in the woman's neck was restored and for the first time for as long as she could remember she could breathe deeply once again. She knew that asthma was a thing of the past. God had healed her of the trauma on the inside, leaving her body free to receive the healing that she was longing for. We have seen hundreds of people healed in this way. When God heals us on the inside then we are free to receive His healing on the outside.

Finally, just a word about those who begin to suffer physically because of unresolved trauma and inner pain. When, for example, a mother receives news of the sudden death of her child in a road accident, the mother has not suffered physically at all. But the inner pain is immense and it is through our body that we actually express the pain – often through seasons of tears and even, in a case as severe as this, wailing. But for some people such news is so traumatic that they are unable to cope with the shock, the heart is broken, the pain is never expressed and it all gets locked away on the inside. The inner grief, which is a consequence of the trauma, begins to affect the physical well-being. It is now being said by some medics that they believe unresolved grief can even be a primary cause of cancer.

One lady with a broken heart shared with me how her young daughter had died in a fire. She described the burning house so vividly that I assumed this had only just happened. But when I asked for more information, I discovered her daughter had died fourteen years previously. Unless God had come to her on that night and mended her broken heart she would have lived the rest of her days in a heart-broken, traumatised condition. Who knows what the secondary physical consequences might have been?

Unresolved trauma lies at the root of far more sickness and infirmity than perhaps anyone previously understood. It is so important that we allow the Lord to heal us on the inside as well as ask Him for healing on the outside!