



# Bible-Based Trauma Healing



AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY

# Bible-Based Trauma Healing

The **Trauma Healing Institute** at American Bible Society delivers Bible-based trauma healing programs and resources to help restore individuals and societies devastated by war and other horrors. Here's an overview of our approach.

**O**ur Trauma Healing programs equip local church leaders with biblical and mental health resources so traumatized people can experience the life-changing message of the Bible. Through multiple partnerships we provide training, accountability, implementation, reporting and assessment to make these programs effective in bringing God's healing Word to people in dire need.

## Facing up to trauma

Trauma refers to the effects on human beings of disruptive events like war, genocide, criminal activity, sexual abuse, human trafficking, inner-city violence and natural disasters. People are traumatized when they are overwhelmed with intense fear, helplessness and horror in the face of death or the threat of death.

Trauma can come by *direct experience* (as victim or perpetrator), by *witnessing* someone else's suffering, and even by *hearing* of someone's trauma. Little wonder that we want to turn away from stories of trauma. Even the statistics are overwhelming and make us feel helpless. But statistics are made up of human stories, experienced one by one. While turning away is an understandable response, we know that Jesus never took that path, and neither can his followers.

Traumatized people would also like to turn away from their pain. But not only can they not forget it, often they are unable or afraid to speak of it, leaving their wounds to fester. Each person experiences the pain of trauma in their own way, but we can recognize and even predict some of the ways they will respond when trauma is left untended. Victims relive the memory of their trauma and face a nearly inevitable disruption of sleep, health, emotions, relationships and hope for the future. They face a crisis of faith. Trauma

becomes a barrier to belief in God's goodness. If these symptoms last more than a month, they indicate post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Dr. Diane Langberg, co-chair of our Trauma Healing Advisory Council, says that trauma stands out not because it is rare but because it is overwhelming. She has noted four themes.

- ❑ Trauma overwhelms normal human coping.
- ❑ Trauma is difficult to put into words.
- ❑ Trauma shatters dignity.
- ❑ Trauma destroys choice.

Trauma is experienced not only by individuals but by families, churches, communities and even nations. Those who suffer directly and those who witness are all affected. And we are all tempted to deny or to ignore.

**The Lord is near to those who are discouraged; he saves those who have lost all hope.**

**Psalm 34.18 (GNT)**

## Recognizing healing

Helping people respond to trauma requires addressing all four of these areas, as well as resisting our natural impulses to denial. The process of healing begins when we can name the trauma and its causes. The act of naming has itself been shown to trigger the first stages of relief, allowing a person to fully feel their pain.

But to heal from the pain of trauma, people also need a new framework for understanding and dealing with the world and their experience, a voice to speak truthfully about the past, a renewed sense—of source—of dignity and worth, and the recovery of the ability to choose in areas big and small. They need a

restored relationship with the God of the Bible.

We have a vision for birthing restored individuals and societies. For people who participate in our programs, restoration includes the end of silence and shame. It also involves an end to cycles of violence and revenge as they begin to move from “victim” to “survivor” and beyond, sharing healing with other victims and perhaps working for justice in their societies.

## Curriculum and approach

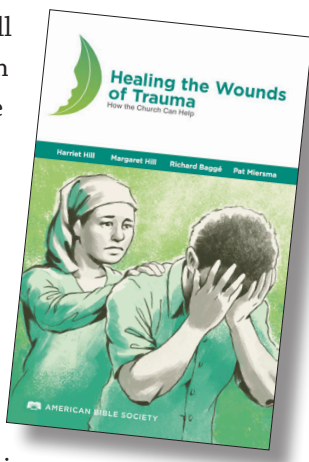
Our core program is based on a workbook called *Healing the Wounds of Trauma*, which was developed by four authors then on staff with SIL in Africa. One is a psychiatrist, one is a professional counselor, one is a translation and Scripture Engagement consultant and the other is a missiologist. Co-author Dr. Harriet Hill now works with American Bible Society and directs the Trauma Healing Institute.

The book was developed in Africa in 2001 and has been in regular use since then. It is now in its third revised edition (2013). It provides basic mental health concepts within a biblical framework, using Scripture passages and composite real-life stories to help people connect the teaching with their circumstances. It has been used with thousands of pastors, counselors and traumatized people.

Dr. Hill says that trauma is a wounding of the heart, and healing heart wounds happens best in the heart language. This is one reason materials are now translated in whole or part into more than 150 languages.

The book has eleven chapters. Five of these are “core” and the others are selected for each session as needed. There is a separate edition for children, editions for earthquake victims and other special needs, and a story-based version for those without written language or with no Scripture in their heart language.

Trauma Healing Advisory Council Co-chair Dr. Phil Monroe is one of many to note the value of lament in healing from trauma. Lament is a significant theme in



## Lesson Titles

1. If God loves us, why do we suffer?
2. How can the wounds of our hearts be healed?
3. What happens when someone is grieving?
4. Helping children who have experienced bad things
5. Helping people who have been raped
6. How can churches minister amidst HIV/AIDS?
7. Caring for the caregiver
8. **Response: Taking your pain to the cross**
9. **How can we forgive others?**
10. How can we live as Christians amidst conflict?
11. Looking ahead

the Bible, and bringing our pain to God is an act of profound faith. Just as the biblical book of Lamentations ends with a question, the curriculum helps traumatized people resist superficial solutions. Through the use of small-group conversation and activities including composing original laments and drawing, the book helps people express their pain without getting stuck there. Then they are invited to bring their pain to the cross of Christ for healing. Once healed of their trauma, they are often able to forgive and eventually to be reconciled with those who have inflicted the pain.

## How the program works

The program uses a cyclical, four-stage process that builds in leadership development and evaluation. Selected participants are invited to become leaders for future sessions—an intentional multiplier effect.

Type of Session	Audience focus	Time
<b>Convening</b>	Gatekeepers	1 day
<b>Equipping</b>	Caregivers	2 week-long sessions plus follow-up
<b>Healing</b>	Victims	Ongoing
<b>Community of Practice</b>	Leaders in trauma ministry	1–3 days

**Convening:** The national Bible Society or another hosting group invites regional and national leaders to experience the program. Then they decide if this is something they want to integrate into their ministry.

**Equipping:** Local leaders have an opportunity to experience healing of their own trauma while they are trained to facilitate sessions in their communities. They

return for an advanced training session after they have led two or more local healing sessions.

**Healing:** Trained facilitators lead trauma healing sessions in their local communities. They use a small group format, covering the lessons at the group's pace.

**Community of Practice:** Administrators, mental health professionals, and trauma healing facilitators gather to share experiences, identify challenges, strategize, participate in professional development, and pray together. This can occur on global, regional, national, or local levels. Face-to-face meetings are complemented by virtual support via a private area on the Trauma Healing Institute website.

### **Partnerships and accountability**

Where possible, ABS works first with **national Bible Societies** who provide leadership for the program in each country to help interested churches and organizations incorporate Trauma Healing into their ministries.

We work creatively with many other **NGOs and ministry partners** to bring holistic interventions to play. While trauma healing and related emotional and spiritual care are consistently missing components in areas of conflict and poverty, they are only part of a holistic ministry response. Traumatized people need assistance including food, housing, clothing, medical attention, income and justice, and ABS (in association with the national Bible Societies) coordinates our programs with other groups who can meet those needs.

We work with an independent **Trauma Healing Advisory Council** to ensure that our Scripture-based trauma healing programs uphold the highest standards of biblical scholarship and mental health practice. The council is co-chaired by Dr. Diane Langberg (chair of the executive committee of the American Association of Christian Counselors) and Dr. Phil Monroe (Professor of Counseling & Psychology at Biblical Seminary) and speaks into program design, curriculum materials, training, research and related disciplines.

*For more information on Bible-based trauma healing, contact us at [TraumaHealing@americanbible.org](mailto:TraumaHealing@americanbible.org).*

The **Trauma Healing Institute** at American Bible Society equips local churches around the world in Bible-based trauma healing so they can care for people with deep emotional and spiritual injuries caused by war, domestic violence, natural disasters and other traumatic events. The Institute is a Mission Resource Centre for the United Bible Societies. Our programs serve the whole church: Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant.



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