

A BRUISED REED

Vietnam Veterans, ghetto children, victims of war-torn countries, automobile accidents, and an interminable litany of traumatic events, may suffer long after the trauma has ended... they may have suffered for years, and perhaps decades in silence. The victims of early-life traumas may never even know that they have an *engramic* aberration that psychiatrists call “*Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*” (or P.T.S.D. for short) until someone points out the symptoms to them. Oftentimes, the coping strategies that a person uses to deal with the trauma, has integrated itself into their personality un-noticed. This is called a “*valence*”, which is defined in Dianetics as “*a false identity assumed unwittingly*”.

For purposes here, we will use the commonly used names, to avoid confusion. What is known as “*Delayed-Onset PTSD*” is particularly troublesome, because it often is exacerbated by a number of other traumas with vaguely similar elements. The victim may or may not have presented any symptomology, or may have used a variety of coping strategies ranging from being abusive and/or violent, to withdrawal into the emotional numbing of drug and/or alcohol abuse. I believe that these people are the ones spoken of by the prophet Isaiah:

“A bruised reed shall he [God] not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth”.

– Isaiah 42:3, Matthew 12:20 KJV.

I am a Vietnam veteran, and I'm one of the spiritually “walking wounded” that came out of that conflict. I came home without a scratch, but I was emotionally wounded by being so young and ill prepared for the experience of witnessing so much death, and for having an 8 year-old boy bleed to death in my arms. He looked at me with his big almond puppy-dog eyes, and I felt that I let him down; I didn't know how to handle the grief. I could never could put it to rest.

After a while, I had forgotten WHAT was bothering me; I had buried it that deep! Fortunately, I'm not as badly bruised as some of my fellow vets. From several years of “therapy” that made things much worse, and a few days of pastoral counseling¹ that helped tremendously, along with extensive study of the subject of emotional trauma, I wrote a thesis on PTSD and a book on my experiences in Vietnam. Writing has enabled me to “get a handle” on my issues, and “talk about” (on paper) things I had never told anybody, for fear “they would never understand”. Writing also had two other collateral benefits: A manuscript for a possible best seller, and the opportunity to help others with this problem. I believe that PTSD has 2 major components: **1)** spiritual, and **2)** intellectual (or mental). Unfortunately, being intelligent and spiritual is a distinct disadvantage, which is validated by the lament of King Solomon, in scripture:

“For in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow”. – Ecclesiastes 1:18 KJV (This scripture is where we get our obverse saying, “*Ignorance is Bliss*”.

You see, the spiritual component is the “mechanism” (if you will), by which the guilt or self-conviction comes about. The “program”, if I may be permitted a bit of literary license here, according to the Bible, is built into all of us:

“Thy Word I have hid in my heart; that I might not sin against thee”. – Proverbs 119:11 KJV

The conviction is strongest among those who have the highest moral values, or who develop stronger values as they grow up, mature, and become more spiritually conscious. This “development” can cause guilt to

¹ Pastoral counseling via Dianetics “auditing”, combined with Biblical counseling by a Christian (Baptist) pastor.

arise, which never bothered the person before, or trigger intellectual rationalizations that lead to the false perception of culpability known as “survivor's guilt”, and considered intractable by psychiatry.

The intellectual component is the other enemy here. If you have PTSD or suffer from Survivor's Guilt, it is far more intractable in an intelligent person, in my humble, unqualified opinion. The cure is not complex; it just takes someone trained to know what to look for in the therapy session pattern. The Bible tells us:

“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding”. – Proverbs 4:7 KJV

The intellect is what enables a veteran, or trauma victim to construct increasingly complex rationalizations about why they are culpable for some atrocity, war crime, or death of a platoon member; the interminable litany of *“what if”* and *“if only”* of Survivor Guilt, which many professionals say, is an intractable condition. I even read a book by a noted Ph. D., which advocated convincing the patient that his moral convictions are wrong so that his conscience wouldn't bother him anymore. To extrapolate and state simply what was being proposed was to say to the patient, *“... it's OK to betray a friend – if it means saving yourself”*. This idea is contrary to scripture:

“Greater love hath no man than this; that he lay down his life for his friends”. - John 15:13

If the only solution to Survivor Guilt is that I must convince myself that it is permissible to betray my friends, then I'll live with my PTSD, thank you. Fortunately, there IS a cure for the condition, but it can only be found at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Post-Traumatic Stress – especially when accompanied by Survivor's Guilt is a spiritual conflict. It is, I believe, a defect in *“the Word”* that is *“hidden in our hearts...”* it is the effect of a relentless and often cruel conscience that knows right from wrong, driven by Satan, who acts as a relentless and unscrupulous District Attorney, indicting us for transgressions – guilty or not (that is why scripture calls him *“the accuser of the brethren”*).

The “Word” that is “wired-in” does not tell us that there is forgiveness and absolution for that guilt whether we are truly guilty or not, and that the forgiveness and removal of the burden is free for the asking:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”. – 1 John 1:9 KJV

Of course, there always remains the dilemma of the ubiquitous question: *“If kindness and mercy is God's nature, then how can He allow so much suffering to exist?”* I believe the question can be answered when one places life in THIS existence in perspective with life in eternity.

Even the (theoretical) cosmological distances and archaeological ages are infinitesimal in comparison, so it is only our perspective as mortals, that makes it seem that God is cruel, sometimes, because *“look at all the suffering that goes on in the world”*. We can only learn of these things – we can only put these things into their proper perspective through faith. God calls some of us to Him in what may seem to be very strange ways. We may be bruised, but we are not, by any means broken.

A spiritual condition is “wired into” us at birth. This conscience can only be de-activated by the emotional shutdown known as “emotional numbing”, or “flat affect”, as it is called by psychiatrists; what the scriptures call “a hardened heart”. Alcohol and drugs provided a temporary refuge from the conviction – like being “out on bail”. Eventually, we must appear before the Judge; eventually, we must all come to terms with what we've done; it would be wise to have the best defense possible – to be absolved from all our sins as though they never happened:

“... for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more”. – Jeremiah 31:34b KJV

If God himself will not remember our sins, why should we labor over them? If there is a cure for a spiritual problem, then the only way to be healed is to have faith. This is not as easy as it sounds, because intellect gets in the way. Ultimately, you must know that your salvation is real; that it is not something that is “purely in your imagination”, as Satan would have you believe. “Faith” is not easy to come by in a “scientific” world that tries to convince us that all of this – all of what was created by the Word of God, just happened “by accident”.

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen...” – Hebrews 11:1 KJV

Reading the next two verses will convince you that the “Big Bang” theory is by no means a new idea. It happened by the will of God.

In order to start to heal from this emotional and spiritual injury, the victim needs closure. Often the transgression underlying the problem happened years in the past, and there is no way to make amends to those who were harmed. However, there **IS** something that you can do to mitigate the pangs of guilt without convincing your conscience that *“it's OK to betray a friend, if it saves your hide”*, as some psychiatrists will advocate.

For the asking, your sins and transgressions have been forgiven and paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ. Symbolic atonement is something each vet and each trauma victim can do to relieve the helpless feeling that comes with Survivor's Guilt. You may have been helpless when the traumatic incident happened, but you are not helpless now! As a human being, with the faults and limitations we have, we must seize the opportunity to do good whenever and wherever we can. We help ourselves when we help others:

“For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe unto him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up”. – Ecclesiastes 4:10 KJV

“And whoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward”. – Matthew 10:42 KJV

The time for healing has come. We may be bruised, but we are not broken. In the trials of life, we are tested in the fire, purified, and tempered. In each other we have strength when we ask God to bless us. PTSD must be treated holistically – it is a “mind and spirit” thing. Trying to rationalize without treating the spiritual injury avails us nothing – it has proven itself to be an exercise in futility. To heal the soul – where the core of the injury lies, requires the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, in which we have great abundance and grace. It is up to us to accept our own pardon, which has been secured for us on Calvary's cross.



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