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ON THE POWER OF SCRIPTURE IN THE HEALING OF TRAUMA

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October 14, 2020

THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE is the most common trauma suffered by Americans, followed by the betrayal by a trusted person, domestic abuse, and sexual abuse, a new study commissioned by the American Bible Society (ABS) found. Add to this the society-wide coronavirus pandemic and the ongoing crisis sparked by racial inequality; and, not to forget, unemployment and poverty, all in the run-up to a bitterly contested election. The country is traumatized, as is the whole world, of course.

The ABS study—“Trauma in America”: Understanding how people face hardship and how the Church offers hope”—was conducted by the Barna Group, the long-time research partner of the ABS. It is a superb, comprehensive examination of the role, actual and potential, of churches and the power of Scripture in bringing comfort to traumatized individuals.

Distinguishing among the experience of practicing and non-practicing Christians, as well as non-Christians, the study in effect is a manual for Church leaders on how to understand the nature of particular traumas and how best to respond to people who are in pain. Included are suggestions, for example, on how to delicately introduce the role of forgiveness. The research carefully tracks the impact of trauma on people’s faith and trust in God.

Turns out pastors and priests can do a better job in making it known to worshippers that trauma counseling resources are available, in the parish or diocese. Only 26 percent of Protestant pastors have made such mention. It is also the case that 75 percent of committed Christians who have suffered trauma have not turned to their local church, but a majority is open to doing so in future. Of those who have turned to their local faith leaders, 79 percent are seeking comfort, while 78 percent are seeking a healing of the heart.

The study speaks of the “universality of trauma: that to be human is to endure and, by God’s grace, to flourish through the macro and micro traumas we call life.” Ultimately, suffering can bring us closer to God if we accept our circumstances. In his foreword to the research report, Barna Group President David Kinnaman recounts the trauma of his wife’s brain tumor and how he Googled “suffering” in the Bible. That journey into Scripture brought him to the point that he could say: “We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it ... but as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead.



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“God doesn’t waste our suffering. He walks *with us* through traumatic experiences and trauma-filled seasons—and though I have since experienced his presence and ongoing work for myself, it was making that discovery *first in the Bible* that was a comfort in those painful days.”

The study leaves no doubt that those who turn to Scripture fare better than those who do not. It reports that: “Traumatized people who have a pattern of frequent Bible use also are happier with where they are in the healing process” and “people who start reading the Bible are more likely to experience relief than those who stop reading.”

In the Bible, people encounter the face of God in the person of Jesus Christ, the ultimate healer and fighter for justice. He invites us to live life to the full. All are called to be touched by him in our innermost self, where we hurt the most. He brings us hope, the key factor in the healing process.

Scripture is as reservoir of wisdom that teaches us to live a happy life, even amidst suffering. A deep faith, nourished by Scripture, gives us both internal and external resources that give hope and bring healing. Scripture speaks first and foremost to the human heart with messages from God—messages with the power to heal broken hearts. Let us embrace God’s words.

Regarding the big picture, the pandemic does not merely call for drugs, but for the emotional and spiritual comfort of victims and those who lost loved ones, a profound, deeply human need so well-articulated in the ABS study. May Scripture—with its cosmic, timeless vision of reality, and lessons of how to care for creation— leave the confines of church, so to speak, and become balm for a nation wounded in so many ways.

Mario J. Paredes is CEO of SOMOS Community Care, Inc., one of 25 Performing Provider Systems that operated under the mandate of New York State’s Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment (DSRIP) program.

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