

HEALING AND PREVENTING TRAUMA

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HEALING TRAUMA

My personal theology of suffering and understanding of the affects of trauma have developed significantly as a result of my recent deployment experiences. Like most chaplains, I was exposed to the writings of Saint John of the Cross, Henri Nouwen, and others who experienced pain and suffering and wrote on the experience of growing in faith as a result. During seminary, I also met Pastor Wally Magdangal, a man who was persecuted in Saudi Arabia for leading an underground church. He was imprisoned, tortured, and sentenced to death just because he was a Christian leader. I was unaware of how Christians suffered in the world today. I became curious about this and became aware of how undeveloped my theology of suffering was. In my comfortable world, I grew up knowing little of suffering. Surely no government or people were persecuting me for my faith. I knew nothing of death, torture, intense physical and emotional pain, depression, and the look of evil, except the textbook definitions. In seminary, my eyes were opened to the reality that suffering is part of life, especially the normal Christian life. I knew trials would come. I knew in some way, God could take suffering and make it into something good. However, I lacked the experience of significant suffering and facing evil to speak confidently about the matter. Little did I realize how quick that would change when I entered the Army after 9/11.

My wife and I understood that life in the Army would result in separation, trials, pain, and suffering of all sorts, not to mention the possibility of injury or death. This was sobering, but the calling and leadership of God brings peace for such uncertainty. In time, my first deployment came. I experienced homesickness, doubt, fear, loneliness, inadequacy, physical and emotional pain, and helplessness in ways I have never imagined. My first 45 days in theater included leaving my wife and children for war, news of my mother's diagnosis with breast cancer, my

unit's first KIA, ten other accidental and combat-related deaths, and my personal encounter with an IED blast near Fallujah. Following the injury and with a lack of understanding of what was happening in my body as a result of the trauma, I experienced the symptoms of mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI) and depression. Following my redeployment, a surgery, and the death of three extended family members, I experienced the symptoms of mild post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). I sought professional, mental, emotional, and spiritual help.

With the help of God and other people, I found a healing path. A significant transition took place- the painful thoughts and experiences from Iraq, which once seemed to control me, transformed into memories of the past. I now embrace those memories as a source of power and comfort, so I may connect with and help other people. I believe this is what God would have us do with our painful experiences (2 Cor 1). As a result of my own journey, my personal and vocational life have been revived and I have been able to connect with and help others now more than ever. I believe this is what spiritual leadership looks like. I believe all people, including spiritual leaders, will experience pain and suffering just because they are human and live in a broken world. I believe God is ready and able to redeem painful situations and suffering to teach us and to help us mature. I always believed, but now understand on an experiential level that suffering is not necessarily punishment for sin and shortcoming and I believe the lessons to be learned from suffering are not understood immediately, but are processed over time. The rest of this paper will detail how this experience has informed my understanding of suffering, outline my healing path from trauma to wholeness, and identify a holistic approach to position ourselves for resiliency when life's traumatic events come.

My unit, 1-501 Parachute Infantry Regiment, was deployed southwest of Baghdad in October 2006. I was late in joining my unit due to a last-minute knee surgery but by mid-

December I was well enough to travel, and I arrived in Baghdad around 22 December 2006. While awaiting transportation to our FOB, our battalion suffered its first KIA. I had not yet arrived and now I had to plan and perform a memorial ceremony in addition to Christmas services. I arrived on FOB Iskan Christmas eve. Christmas day came, and with it, two more KIAs. I felt like I was thrown into a fire. I had not finished my first memorial and two more were queued up. There was survivor ministry. There were questions from Paratroopers and questions of preparedness and adequacy filled my mind, as I was the only chaplain on our small FOB. The New Year brought us more death. A truck flipped into a canal and the crew drowned. Additionally, five Paratroopers on our FOB were betrayed by Iraqi Police in Karbala and executed by insurgents, and a Paratrooper with our B Company was killed by a sniper in Kharmah. In addition to ministry concerns, I was also dealing with my own issues. Homesickness began working in me and intensified when I received word that my mother was diagnosed with cancer. Responding to one crisis after another, it was difficult to establish a rhythm and consistency in my work. This was my first month.



The memorial display for those killed in Karbala, Iraq on 20 January 2007

Shortly thereafter, I was asked to travel with my assistant to an outpost near Fallujah for a worship service and survivor ministry for those in a platoon of B Company who had just lost a trooper to sniper fire. We arrived in Kharmah and linked up with B Company on 3 February at an austere outpost. I was told when I arrived that the troopers were a couple kilometers away on a platoon-sized patrol base. Their platoon was due a supply run, and on the evening of 4



The Geronimo Unit Ministry Team: SPC Jemell Garriss and CH (CPT) Dan Hardin

February, my assistant and I rode with that convoy.

We traveled very slowly down one of the most dangerous routes in the area and approached the dirt path leading to the outpost. The first vehicle turned off the paved road onto the access road. Our vehicle followed and activated the sensor of an

improvised explosive device (IED). The right side of my face burned and instantly swelled up. The blast cut my chinstrap and removed my helmet and eye protection. Debris in my eyes impaired my vision. Flames, flying rocks, and shrapnel produced burns and cuts on my head and right leg. My assistant, Sergeant Jemell Garriss, found me, carried me to another truck, and directed the medics to tend to my wounds. We all survived the blast and I eventually returned to our FOB, beaten up and bloodied, but thankful I was alive. The night of 4 February, 2007 began a new chapter in my personal experience and understanding of pain and suffering.

I did not understand it at the time, but I began to experience the symptoms of mTBI. My vision became very sensitive to light, and my hearing to noise. I had headaches but thought they were related to the light and the fact my head hurt from my wounds. I also noticed that I seemed a bit more absent-minded than usual, but I attributed this to the



Moments after the IED attack in Kharmah, Iraq, 4 February 2007

stress of my first month and the wounds. I also noticed people around me saying odd things like, “Damn Chaplain, what did you do to get God pissed off at you?” and “Chaplain, if you are getting hit, we are all screwed” and “Chaplain, get right back out there into the fight as soon as you can.” Thoughts went through my mind such as, “Yeah, what did I do, God, for you to allow this to happen to me?” and “God, don’t you hear what they are saying? Don’t you realize what they are thinking about You... about me?”

Although I never bought into “prosperity theology” but I began to wonder if I was infected by it as I questioned God on such manners. Looking back, I can see how immature my theology of suffering was. C.S. Lewis notes the “universal human feeling that bad men ought to suffer” (Lewis 1996, 91). It is true that according to my flesh, I deserve suffering, pain, and death. But in Christ, I am a holy one, a child of God and called a saint. I wondered if God was punishing me, or perhaps he had his back turned on me, tending to other matters. This is an example of a logical fallacy that is common in our culture. It is called the appeal to consequences of belief. When broken down, it goes like this: “X” is true because accepting it has positive consequences. So as it relates to suffering, here is what I believed: “I am experiencing times of peace, blessing, and protection because I am being good. Therefore, being good produces times of blessing. Conversely, if I misbehave, then I will receive punishment. Therefore, if I am in a hardship or time of suffering, I must have misbehaved and deserve it.”

Not only is this argument a logical fallacy, it simply is not consistent with the testimony of Scripture. Examine the story of Job in the Bible- a righteous man who suffered tremendous loss. It is interesting to note how suffering and pain can reveal all sorts of flaws in what people believe about our world, ourselves, and our belief (or non-belief) in God. If this is true for me, a seminary-trained professional, how much more is it true for the young combatant working out

his recent conversion to faith? What about those brought up without knowledge and faith in God?

More importantly for chaplains, what about the non-believer and his conventional, distorted wisdom about God in times of suffering? I have heard these Soldiers say, “I am too far from God. He would never accept me. I am a hopeless case, and the proof is all this pain and suffering in my life and around me. See, God is mad at me!” And in part, there may be truth there. However, what they miss is God’s great love and immediate presence to accept, forgive and heal. These Soldiers, and as I have shown, at times myself, disqualify themselves based on logical fallacies and distortions of truth. But thanks be to God that what appears hopeless is often the avenue of God’s grace.

As spiritual leaders, we must be prepared to be used of God to be that avenue of grace during times of pain and suffering. Paul says in 2 Timothy 1 that he suffers pain, imprisonment, and hardship. This comes from the man who wrote half of the New Testament and was used of God to turn the first-century world upside down for Christ. This comes from the man who taught the Christian Church about the doctrines of grace and forgiveness. He also calls Timothy to join him in suffering (2 Tim 1:8, NIV). Is this self-justification or madness? Neither. It is commentary on the normal human life, especially the life of a follower of Jesus Christ. So suffering comes to all people, including Christian leaders. It is part of the universal human experience. It is not necessarily a sign of sinfulness.

Until my personal encounter with trauma, I had head knowledge of suffering and pain, but little experience. Peter says, “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you” (1 Pet. 4:12, NIV). I was not surprised it happened, but I was very surprised at the intensity and depth of the feelings and

thoughts that came with suffering. My challenge was to make sense of what was happening and to find God in the pain and suffering. Unfortunately, I had limited experience and mental compartments to make sense of the suffering.

Looking back, I can see how God was refining me and helping me develop my theology of suffering. C.S. Lewis said, “Pain insists on being attended to” (Lewis 1996, 91). God took the pain inflicted by evil men to help me understand His healing and grace and attend to other deeper issues in my life. Bad things happen to all people, even chaplains. God is there to make something noble and worthy come out of the pain so that all things, even painful things, can truly work together for good. I believe the good He works out is for the benefit of those we serve in the chaplaincy- the Soldier and his or her family. My spiritual disequilibrium began when I entered the theater of combat operations and was in full spin the night of February 4, 2007 when I experienced the physical, mental, and spiritual pain from the IED.

On the outside I healed well, and for a couple months I thought I was good-to-go. But around July 2007, I noticed I was irritable and losing motivation. I began to verbally snap at



LTC Balcavage presenting the Purple Heart, May 2007

people and withdraw from social contact. I did the bare minimum I could to fly low and go unnoticed. I called my Chaplain buddy, Kim Norwood, who was in Kuwait at the time, and told him how I was feeling. He said it sounded like I was experiencing depression. My unit PA and buddy, Captain Craig Sink, asked me how I was doing, and I told him. He also said I was experiencing depression. What? I was not laying around crying, curled up in a fetal position! They both explained, “That’s not how depression typically

works in men.” So Craig gave me some anti-depressants for the remainder of the deployment, and I thought I would be good-to-go as soon as I got out of theater. We both thought this was transient and temporary in nature.

I had never experienced depression and did not understand those who wrestled with it. Dustin Shramek writes, “Experiencing pain and grief is like falling off a cliff... as we fall we see one and only one tree from the rock face... This tree is our holy God” (Piper 2006, 189). This truth can be seen in the Psalms of lament. The Psalms of lament took on new life and meaning for me. They said exactly what I felt on the inside. Someone finally seemed to relate to my situation, and it was none other than God almighty. Even though I could not ‘feel’ him, I knew his back was not turned to me. I believe this is what held me together in my darkest moments. I also rediscovered I was not alone in theater. Many continued to come to me seeking consolation in their suffering. I felt I had little to offer at that time, but each time I shared the Psalms of lament (such as Psalm 13, 18, 42, 55, and others), I saw their hearts soak it in and the spark of hope ignite within them. I learned that suffering has always been a normal part of the human experience.

When we redeployed, I stopped taking the medication. For the first month or so, I really did feel better and I thought more clearly. I now see this as the normal ‘honeymoon’ effect following a long, traumatic separation. It is a common, temporary experience. By the New Year, additional stressors came into my life. I endured another painful knee surgery, and within a



Reunion, Thanksgiving 2007

forty-day period of time, three family members died. Additionally, I was struggling with raising teenagers and readjusting to the busy schedule of family life and garrison duty. Again, I found myself becoming more angry, withdrawn, and unmotivated. Depression returned. I could not go to sleep, and when I did, I woke up several times through the night. As time passed, sexual intimacy in my marriage began to suffer. I was physically incapable of sexual activity and I did not understand why. This aggravated my depressed feelings and motivated me to withdraw further from my wife. Other symptoms of PTSD arose: survivor guilt, intrusive thoughts, hyper-vigilance, and a general mental fog. I kept most of my thoughts and feelings to myself, but it was becoming increasingly difficult to hide from my wife, children, and friends. I finally said to myself, “Here I go again. I am depressed. This feels worse than when I was in Iraq. I need help.”

I went back to Craig Sink and told him what was happening. He prescribed sleep medication and an anti-depressant then looked at me and said, “You need to talk to mental health and I am putting in a consult for you.” I thought, “Oh no, not that! The Airborne Infantry will chew me up!” But deep down I knew he was right, so I humbled myself and spoke with a psychiatric nurse practitioner and a psychologist. Ironically, the anti-depressant made the sexual dysfunction worse. After talking with my doctor, I discovered this can happen and the healing process takes time. So I decided to stick with the program and endure short-term pains for the long-term benefits.

The process of cognitive behavioral talk-therapy was helpful and similar to techniques I used in my counseling practice. With their help, I began to understand what was happening in my body, why it was happening from a physiological perspective, and how to cope with it. I am convinced of the place of secular help. Without it, I believe I would not be as far along on my

healing journey as I am. I believe Soldiers, including the non-religious ones, could benefit from secular help. However, I firmly believe if we fail to address healing the spirit, we are destined to limp through life when we could run.

Some secular, non-religious traumatologists such as Babette Rothschild (Rothschild 2000, 91) and Peter Levine (Levine 1997, 58) seem to indicate that addressing the soul / spirit of the person is an essential ingredient to healing. They do not offer a spiritual model or a particular faith-formula for wholeness, but they acknowledge spirituality as a crucial element to address. This should not come as a surprise for the person of faith. However, we often are left wanting when looking for a practical way to help someone, or more importantly, ourselves, when trauma comes.

I decided to address the spiritual dimension in the context of a small group. I knew I needed to connect with others, so I spoke to a local pastor who was experienced and skilled at inner spiritual healing. This course of action built upon the foundation of medications and talk-therapy and provided much help. I also opened up all lines of communication with my wife. Marriage demands openness and intimacy in communication, but due to my fears I chose to withhold much of my thoughts and feelings from my wife. This only aggravated my situation. When I chose to let her in my inner world, I found more help and support.

It was at that time the Chaplain Annual Sustainment Training (CAST) came to Alaska. My Brigade Chaplain, Pat Bailey, asked if I would be willing to share my sacred story at CAST. I agreed, and for the first time, I stood before a group of people and told them the whole story: facts, thoughts, and feelings. Some in the audience laughed at parts of my story... parts I did not think were funny. I felt naked and exposed. Later that day, two chaplains came to me and said, "Thank you for sharing. That was encouraging." Most of the chaplains seemed to avoid me, as if

not knowing what to say. One chaplain came to me the next morning and spoke really loud and really slow, “how... are... you... doing... today... chap... lain... Har... din?” I thought, “Wow, my own people are treating me like this, and we are supposed to be the experts?” I was a bit discouraged, but I also felt a bit freer and less alone since many now knew of my situation. I chose to press on and continue to talk to others about my suffering and pain.

Later that month, I participated in a spiritual inner healing seminar hosted by the Anchorage Vineyard Church. Again, I shared my sacred story, determined to hold nothing back. In that community of support, respect, and dignity, I was positioned to experience the overwhelming healing power of God’s presence. I discovered that things from my past were aggravated by my experiences in Iraq. When I dealt with the former, the latter was addressed with ease. I had developed an image of God with His back turned to me. Because of my distortions of truth and prior wounds, I believed God was at best unaware of my pain or at worst, indifferent. It was in the context of a caring, skilled, grace-filled, Christian community that I found truth, healing, and freedom. Henri Nouwen writes,

A Christian community is therefore a healing community not because wounds are cured and pains are alleviated but because wounds and pains become openings or occasions for new vision. Mutual confession then becomes a mutual deepening of hope, and sharing weakness becomes a reminder to one and all of the coming strength (Nouwen 1996, 165).

In Christian community, God’s truth resonated in my spirit. His peace came in and removed the fear, anger, bitterness, and pain. Suddenly, for the first time, I felt the fog lift. I felt alive again and I could laugh. The sexual problems disappeared and renewed intimacy came into my marriage. Every symptom of PTSD with the associated intense emotions ceased. I continued my appointments with the psychologist and psychiatric nurse practitioner. They were amazed at my healing and monitored me for about a month before declaring significant progress had been

made. They said I no longer needed their assistance. It was through suffering and pain that I discovered the power of unhealed wounds and the power of distortions of truth I believed about God and me. This power negatively affected my entire being. And it was through a loving Christian community that I experienced the matchless power of God's love and grace. God's power trumped the wounds and lies. It was there I found healing for my wounds and freedom from the lies.

I am certain any type of compassionate community would help one suffering from stress or the effects of trauma. I am certain secular support groups can offer help. However, I believe any effort that fails to address the spiritual dimensions of the hurting person is a partial, incomplete effort. Trauma affects people physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Healing endeavors must touch each of those dimensions as well. I believe the context of community provides the best platform to touch each of those dimensions. Peter Levine, commenting on how shamanistic medicine calls to the soul of the traumatized to return to community says,

Come back to your country; to your people... to the Yurt... Come back to your father... to your mother." A crucial parameter in the healing of trauma is reflected in this simple poetry. The welcoming support of friends, relatives, families, or tribal members is needed to coax the spirit back into the traumatized body. Shamanism recognizes that deep interconnection, support, and social cohesion are necessary requirements in the healing of trauma... In acknowledging our need for connection with one another, we must enlist the support of our communities in this recovery process (Levine 1997, 59-60).

While I do not advocate shamanism, this does illustrate the importance of both spirituality and community from the perspective of the secular, professional community. Spirituality and community are the staples of the ministry. No one wants to feel alone navigating the storms of trauma. Community is essential. I believe a competent, compassionate, and spiritual community is the best way to find the healing path.

Subsequently, I began to feel driven and passionate about sharing my sacred story with my community of Paratroopers. I set up six seminars and used the Army's 'Battlemind' material as the vehicle to share my story: four talks for Paratroopers, one for spouses (my wife came and spoke with me to share her perspectives on my struggles), and one talk for leaders.

The talks were well received and normalized what many said they were experiencing. At least ten Paratroopers I know were encouraged to step out and get help. Leaders approached me and said they had fresh understanding about how this stuff works and now see it as an issue of wounding, not weakness. Spouses came to me and expressed relief that someone was talking



A moment of remembrance at the 4/25 BCT (ABN) Spartan Memorial, Fort Richardson, AK

about this. They felt like they were silently suffering while everyone else appeared good-to-go. This is the fruit of healing suffering and pain. This is the good that can come from evil. Over a year had passed from the initial trauma, and now I was seeing the fruit God grew out of the pain and suffering. I could remember and it did not hurt like it

once did; the trauma no longer lived 'present tense'.

Healing is a process. It demands attention and intentional care for the body, the mind and thought life, the emotional self, and the spirit. All of this must take place in the context of a community. That community had to respect me, treat me with dignity, and treat me like a wounded Soldier rather than a weak freak. I would be remiss if I also did not acknowledge the

importance of having a strong desire for wholeness. Healing from suffering and trauma demands the will to be whole. Peter Levine says, "...you initiate your own healing by re-integrating lost or fragmented portions of your essential self. In order to accomplish this task, you need a strong desire to become whole again" (Levine 1997, 61). I have learned how important it is to desire healing and get to the place of not caring what others think or how much it may cost my pride to find healing.

The more I wanted wholeness, the easier it was to find it. And the more I share my sacred story, the more I experience God's Word: "The God of all comfort comforts us in our sorrow so that we may comfort others with the comfort we have received" (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

Concepts in my head have sunk into my heart, concepts like Henri Nouwen's 'wounded healer'. Again Paul says, "But you have observed my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, my



Sharing my sacred story with my peers at the Chaplain Captain's Career Course, August 2008

faith, my patience, my love, my endurance, and my persecutions and sufferings" (2 Tim 3:10ff). Paul used everything, including suffering and pain, to teach others how to mature in the faith. I have seen this truth active in my ministry since I have shared my story. As a result, compassion has come into my ministry like never before... and my Soldiers sense it. My life and ministry have been revived. I can now say what happened to me in Iraq, although it was meant for evil, has transformed into something very good. One of those good things is a better understanding of

the importance for self-leadership, care, and development. This is even more true for those who lead others. Looking back and after much reflection, I can now see there is much that can be done to lessen the affects of trauma.

PREVENTING TRAUMA

In combat, everyone is stressed and stretched. Everyone is touched by trauma, pain, and suffering. But leaders have a burden that is greater than those who do not lead. They experience all that and more. Their focus is not only on the mission, but also on those they lead. They are responsible and accountable for the organization in addition to themselves. When someone is hurt or killed, they carry the weight of personal and organizational pain. Leadership is challenging and draining.

Army leaders know the importance of personal disciplines, like physical training, and how they relate to effective leadership. One might be able to get by and neglect a good work out for a day or two. But after a while, the effects of atrophy set in and the weakness becomes a liability obvious to all. In a similar manner, other personal disciplines play an important role in the effective leader. One could neglect them briefly and all may look well. However, neglecting personal development and taking care of the various dimensions of our self will result in our own destruction and it will be just as obvious to all.

Resiliency

I believe the greatest thing we can do to position ourselves for bouncing back from the stress of combat is to get into the habit of taking care of each dimension of our being with an intentional plan. Resiliency is like a green branch on a plant. Resiliency demands flexibility in the branch. When the branch is not flexible, it breaks. When our intangibles are not flexible, we

break emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Combat and persistent operations will bring pressure and push us to our limits. Homesickness will come. Death and destruction will come. Injustice, evil, and pain will come. Physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion will come. These pressures are real. When will we break? I believe our flexibility comes through intentional planning and providing health for every dimension of our being.

That motivation is the goal of this section of the paper. As we nurture the plant and keep it watered, it will stay green and can bend when the wind comes. Failure to nurture the plant will dry out the branches and when the wind comes, they snap. The winds of deployment and life stress will come to each of us. While we are deployed, people we know back home will suffer, accidents will happen, some may die, disease will be discovered, diagnosis will be made, relationships may end or change, children will grow, some kids may act out inappropriately, finances will change, and this does not even begin to address the stress the Soldier experiences in the area of operations. How we tend to our inner garden determines the degree of health and resiliency we can experience.

Before I discuss personal development in more detail, I would like to differentiate between taking care of ourself and selfishness. I believe self-care is the starting place for resiliency, effective leadership, critical thinking, and ethical decision-making. Successful accomplishment of the mission and going the distance in life demands a habit of taking care of ourselves. So why does it seem so many leaders put others first to the point of neglecting self? Why are so many young leaders leaving our Army burned out? Why are so many of us floundering with our deployment-related stress and having difficulty leading ourselves to health? I believe we fail to take care of ourselves for many reasons. Ignorance, misplaced priority, exhaustion, pride, ignorance, and laziness top my list of excuses. I am sure there are more. One

reason I have observed is fear-based. Leaders can be so afraid of keeping up appearances that they hide and neglect areas needing development.

Alternatively, leaders can be so consumed with ensuring others are good-to-go that they neglect their own sleep, food-intake, and times of contemplation. Perhaps they take accountability too far and are afraid that if they don't personally know all and are personally involved in all things, then they will fail. It is as if we took the old courtesy of eating after all our troops have eaten and distorted it. It is as if we say, "I am willing to sacrifice myself and never eat to ensure others are being taken care of." Do we feel conflict with the Army value of selfless service and self care. We should not. Taking appropriate care of ourself is not selfishness. It is an essential discipline that, like physical training, empowers us, prepares us, and gives us the resources to endure hardship and accomplish the mission of life.

Personal development and care is not synonymous with personal comfort. Like physical training, it's fruit can feel good. But personal development is never performed just to feel good or at the cost of others or the demise of the mission. It is the way to best help others and accomplish the mission. What if the leader never checked himself or herself? What if the leader was so busy checking all the others that he or she never checked their kit before crossing the line of departure? That would be unacceptable. And the same is true for anyone, especially the leader, who fails to manage the affairs of their internal world first.

The Body

The obvious place to start in developing a plan to take care of ourselves is to leverage what we are already doing and build from there. In the Army, we conduct and perform physical training. We take care of our bodies. Our body is the first dimension to address in developing a holistic plan of personal development and self care.

Cleanliness. It is amazing to me how different I feel and think when I shower and change clothes after conducting military operations. The grit and funk of the day soaks in our clothes and skin. The odors remind us of the discomfort of the day. The dirt, grease, sweat, and bloodstains irritate our senses and unnecessarily distract us. Shedding the funk, scrubbing down the body, and dressing in clean clothes changes our outlook and makes us feel better. All the pain and suffering of the day are still there, but now we have an emotional reserve to tap into to deal with them. If I try to deal with problems while I am dirty, my problems feel bigger and worse than they really are. I am convinced this simple process following traumatic events can help position Soldiers for health and resiliency. We need mental clarity and emotional space to process life's events. A clean body and uniform goes a long way to making space for that work.

Sleep. In my earlier M1-tanker days, I heard the lie that says, "All you need is four hours of sleep. Any more than that and you are lazy." Twenty years later, I still see this lie crippling our leaders and Soldiers. For sure, mission sometimes demands more time than we have in a day and we must function on little sleep. That should not become the norm. Our training centers often condition us to get by on limited sleep. But remember, we are only 'in the box' during those exercises for about two weeks. I would argue, nearly anyone could 'get by' in that environment for two weeks. In a persistent fight, like the long deployments we currently face in the Army, loss of regular and uninterrupted sleep produces rapid degrading of somatic response and thinking ability. Professional studies liken the affect of sleep deprivation to alcohol intoxication on the areas of ration and decision-making (CNN, 2008). We can get by for a day or two on little to no sleep. But we cannot sustain that pace for long.

The frightening thing these studies reveal is how quickly our thinking ability and reacting time degrade. There is a measurable degradation of mental and physical performance after one night of poor sleep. Bottom line, according to many medical and psychiatric experts, all people need about seven hours of uninterrupted sleep each night at regular times in order to be at peak performance, mental clarity, and alertness. I was personally amazed at the volume of similar advice when performing the simple Google search on ‘recommended sleep’. The overwhelming majority of experts say the same thing- 7 to 8 hours. Leaders must demand their Soldiers sleep well and they must practice it themselves. If our sleep is interrupted by difficult dreams or insomnia, we should seek the help of other professionals to address the problem, rather than avoid the problem by keeping busy and neglecting sleep. There is little else that can deteriorate our ration and ethical decision-making ability quicker than sleep issues.

Food and hydration. We literally are what we eat: health in, health out... garbage in, garbage out. Most forward operating bases have an all-you-can-eat glutton feast available every day. Combat operations demand higher calories, but they do not require a daily diet of hamburgers, French fries, and caffeinated energy drinks. The best thing we can do is eat healthy, eat small portions, and eat often. Follow these rules: when you are hungry, eat; eat whatever you want from a healthy menu; eat consciously, that is, think about the signals your body sends your mind while you are eating; and stop when you first sense you are satisfied. Additionally, stay hydrated! Drink water in sips continuously. Remember, the water you drink for today is used to hydrate your body for tomorrow. You can only assimilate so much water into your body’s cells in a given time, so do not think drinking a liter of water all at once will help you hydrate your body’s cells as well as sipping that same liter over the course of an hour.

Exercise. The Army has expertise on physical training. Do it. Do it regularly. Do it vigorously. If you are not up to speed on staying fit, see your commander or First Sergeant. They will be happy to provide you the accountability and professional guidance to pursue fitness. The benefits of physical fitness are well documented and I need not spend a lot of time here since the Army values and practices it regularly.

Breathing and Heart Rate. When we control our breathing, we can control our heart rate. When the emotion spikes and our heart rate increases, we are more likely to think erratically and follow the emotion. Following emotion leads to trouble. We say and do things we later regret. Controlling our breathing not only lowers our heart rate, but it relaxes our body and mind. Dr. Terry Wardle, a professor of spiritual formation at Ashland Theological Seminary, taught me a method of breath control. First, sit down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes and breathe in through the nose. Breathe in deeply and fill up the lower, ‘belly’ part of the lungs. Continue to intake air and fill up the top, ‘upper chest’ part of your lungs. Hold it for three seconds. Then release all the air in your lungs with mild resistance until they are empty. Repeat this process about five times. Focused breathing reduces heart rate, stress, and brings clarity to the mind. Practice this before sleep and after awaking and any other time you feel the stress and heart rate on the rise.

The Mind

The next dimension of our being I will address is care of the mind. There are several disciplines, many of which come from the Christian tradition and other religious traditions,

which brings calm and focus to the mind. Peace of mind enables us to think quickly and accurately. Mental clarity helps us make hard decisions quickly.

Silence and Solitude. Christian writer Henri Nouwen comments on the importance of silence and solitude:

To bring some solitude into our lives is one of the most necessary but also most difficult disciplines. Even though we may have a deep desire for real solitude, we also experience a certain apprehension as we approach that solitary place and time. As soon as we are alone, without people to talk with, books to read, TV to watch, or phone calls to make, an inner chaos opens up in us. This chaos can be so disturbing and so confusing that we can hardly wait to get busy again. Entering a private room and shutting the door, therefore does not mean that we immediately shut out all our inner doubts, anxieties, fears, bad memories, unresolved conflicts, angry feelings, and impulsive desires. On the contrary, when we have removed our outer distractions, we often find that our inner distractions manifest themselves to us in full force. We often use these outer distractions to shield ourselves from the interior noises. It is thus not surprising that we have a difficult time being alone. The confrontation with our inner conflicts can be too painful for us to endure. This makes the discipline of solitude all the more important. Solitude is not a spontaneous response to an occupied and preoccupied life. There are too many reasons not to be alone. Therefore we must begin carefully planning some solitude. (Nouwen 1981, 82)

I have found this true in my life and in the lives of some of the leaders with whom I have worked. The pace and intensity of our work quickly fill up our minds and demand attention. But the very thing that causes the noise also keeps us from attending to the noise if we allow it. The only way I know to combat this resonating effect is to make time to regularly get alone and be quiet. There I can capture the thoughts and slowly release the pressure that has built up. When I do this habitually, I find there is more space in my mind to handle that which life and ministry send my way. Learning these disciplines is a life-long process and demands persistence and patience.

Meditation. Some people I know are scared of the word meditation. The word conjures up reference to eastern mysticism that is foreign and frightening to some Americans. This word in my opinion is really no different than the word prayer. What you do with it is what matters. The object of the action is what matters. Meditation simply means thinking intently or intensely on one thing. The Bible calls believers to meditate on God's Word. So to meditate on God's Word means to think intently or intensely on scripture. One could meditate on anything. In the chaos of thought under stress, having the skill to focus on one thing is advantageous. Regardless of what we say or think, we really cannot multitask in the true sense of the word, especially on critical, complex tasks. Our culture and media bombard us, our technology distracts us, so the need for focus through meditation is real. Meditation can bring mental clarity and peace.

Visualization or Sanctified Imagination. Dr. Terry Wardle teaches his students how to mentally retreat to a 'safe place' in order to do the work of healing trauma. I found this exercise helpful. After relaxation breathing, he invites the student to pray and ask God to sanctify and protect his thoughts. He then directs the student to allow a mental picture to develop that is safe, peaceful, and serene. Remember the movie Happy Gilmore and Happy's 'happy place'? Well, it is something like that. Once you can retreat to a safe place, you can focus on issues, find wisdom, and recharge. When I retreat to my 'safe place', I invite the presence of Jesus Christ to come. Seated next to me I tell him my fears, frustrations, concerns, and hopes. I find it to be a vivid form of prayer. Call it 'High-Definition' prayer, if you will. Regardless of the time spent, I find myself refreshed and mentally relaxed upon leaving the safe place and returning my full attention to that which is before me.

Attending to Dreams. Dreams are fascinating. There are some who would have us believe our dreams are nonsense and are related to the type of food we ate at diner. Others, like Dr. Karl Jung, believe dreams are psychologically significant. I believe they can be a significant source of wisdom. You know you better than anyone. Once we learn to process the language of dreams, we can find meaning. Dreams use symbols to communicate. Our subconscious speaks in the language of symbols. So a dream of a dark shadowy intruder breaking into my house stealing all my jewelry is probably not a premonition. Rather, it could be the subconscious way of saying, “hey dude, you have an issue (intruder) in your life (house) that is threatening (stealing) your relationship (jewelry).” The key to unlocking dreams is to ask, “What does each symbol or character in my dream mean to me?” and “What is going on in my life right now that demands attention?”

Sometimes people you know will appear in your dreams. Most of the time, your subconscious picked that person because they represent a characteristic or trait that is relevant to the symbol the dream is rendering. Most of the time, the dream has nothing to do with them. When we fail to deal with important issues in our waking states, our subconscious often uses our sleeping states to communicate the issue. It uses the dream in its attempt to get our conscious attention. If we fail to listen, it can escalate the dream into a nightmare if the issue is critical. When we deal with the issue, the subconscious has served its purpose and the dream or nightmare ceases.

There are several good primers on understanding the wisdom in our dreams. I recommend *Every Little Dreamer's Handbook*. It is concise and simple to understand. Additionally, I recommend a professionally written dream-symbol dictionary. It is interesting to note how many symbols that appear in our dreams are trans-cultural. Animals often represent

emotion: stubborn as a mule, angry as a bull, sly as a fox, flighty like a bird, etc. Dreams of public nudity are typical when we feel exposed or scrutinized in a particular area. Dark, shadowy figures are a common representation for a part of our inner world that is alienated or wounded. I also recommend caution. Remember, it is your dream, but your subconscious will not direct you to do harm to yourself or others. It may use the symbol of death to communicate the need for a habit or behavior to cease. Any life decision or important matter should not be made solely on subjective, perceived wisdom from dreams. While you should journal them and listen, do so in the context of others who care for you and who are skilled. Journaling and referencing professionally written resources should provide much help in understanding your dreams.

One more thing, if you can not remember your dreams, make sure you are getting seven hours of sleep, put a pen, paper, and flashlight on your night stand, and when you go to sleep, expect you will dream and desire to wake up when you do. You may be surprised at how quickly you begin to recall your dreams. Remember, everyone dreams every night. If this interests you, study up on dreams and begin to record what you dream.

Capturing Thoughts. There is wisdom in the Christian scriptures that says, “Cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” What this means is we have the capacity to capture those ‘random’ thoughts that pop in our minds. They do not have to control us. We can capture, contain, and control them. We can then evaluate where it may have come from and what to do with it. That is hard to do when it is active and loose in our mind.

I have found it easy to visualize a clear glass mason jar. When a stray thought pops in my mind that is trying to demand attention or distract me from what is most needed at the moment, I mentally grab it by shutting my eyes, raising my hand, and grabbing it like I was snatching a fly out of the air. I then mentally place that thought in the jar and I close the lid and put it on the shelf of my mind. Physically, I write the issue down. I will come back to it and deal with it at the right time. I am not ignoring it or forgetting about it. It is there in the clear jar demanding attention. But it is not loose and active. Remember, we cannot multitask the important stuff. So contain the thoughts, prioritize them, and deal with them individually. This can clear up the spaghetti mess of thoughts in our heads and bring focus.

The Emotions

The next dimension of our being that I will discuss is a challenging one for Soldiers, especially some men. That is, how we handle our emotions. Few things in our inner world are as powerful as emotion and few things can be as scary. Most people can identify primary emotion, like happy, angry, and love. Beyond that, we sometimes have difficulty putting a name on what we feel. One trooper said to me, "I feel happy, sad, good, angry and blah... that is about it and I mostly feel angry." Unfortunately, when we do not understand our emotions and we do what most of us do- stuff them down- they often get balled up into one emotional mess. Additionally, the complexity of our emotion is often not explored, questions do not get answered, and the feeling usually reduces to frustration, anger, and numbness. When we learn to embrace emotion as a potential source of wisdom and we learn to handle them and listen to the message, they usually run on down stream and we can continue mission. When we ignore them or stuff them, they usually entrench into the dark corners of our inner world only to surface later in other circumstances. Emotions have been called the messengers from the front lines of our inner

world. They come to us to tell us what is happening around us and are meant to motivate us to justice or action. So how do we listen to the messenger?

Recognition. The place to begin in gaining emotional intelligence is to build a vocabulary. Perform a Google search on ‘emotion list’ and you will find links to lists of emotion words, often sorted for you in primary, secondary, and tertiary lists. This will help us to put a name on how we feel. The first step in recognizing the messenger is to know its name. Not knowing how to name or describe how I feel is very frustrating and generates more emotion, typically anger.

Asking Why. In human relations, asking why can generate emotion. When dealing with emotions, asking why is essential. When you have recognized the emotion and said, “I feel betrayed” ask your self, “Why am I feeling betrayed? Why am I feeling betrayed now?” The more you can explore those questions and find simple answers, even if they are obvious, the quicker the emotion passes and you can move on to finding a solution to the issue. It is important to verbalize how you feel. Literally say out loud, “I feel _____ and I feel that way because_____”. Even if no one is around, it helps you. You are letting the messenger and your subconscious know the conscious mind got the message, thank you very much.

Calmly Talk to Others. When you have strong feelings and you recognize the messenger and answer the why question, you are then positioned to talk to someone else about how you feel. I first learned this from Dr. Scott Stanley’s book, *Fighting for Your Marriage*, where he describes a method for communication when emotions are involved. He calls it the X-Y-Z tool (Stanley 2001, 9999). If the other person did something that produced the emotional response, use the

three-step tool to calmly communicate how you feel. Remember, they may be unaware of how you are feeling. The tool works as a formula: “When ‘X’ happened, and you / I did ‘Y’, I felt ‘Z’.” For example, you could say, “Yesterday when I read over the cell phone bill (X), and I saw strange numbers on your line (Y), I felt jealous and threatened (Z). The other then may say, “Right, those numbers are the new phones my sister’s picked up last month.” Using the X-Y-Z tool kept us from assuming and putting the other on immediate defense. It left the door open to them to explain the oddity and showed respect.

How different would it be if we said, “Hey, what the heck is going on? I know you are cheating on me! What else could all these calls to and from this number mean?” What a fool we would be to run down that road. Regardless of the response of the other, when we use the X-Y-Z tool, we have a positive control over our words and find that the initial messenger served its purpose. In the example, we confronted the other person in a way that produced a positive outcome. That initial emotion can now flow on down stream. If the other said, “Well, yes, you caught me,” then you have a whole new set of emotions to handle and new action to pursue. At least the initial emotional messenger has left the tent of your interior tactical operations center.

Journaling. Keeping a personal journal that records events and the feelings associated with them is a good way to get the emotion out of the inner world. We can then look at it from a more objective view and do the work stated above. Journaling also enables us to track things over time and follow up on issues we cannot handle right at that moment.

The Spirit

The final dimension of our being I will address is the spirit. We are spiritual beings. Remove the senses, dive below the will and emotions, and we arrive at the core of who we are-

the spirit. In addition to addressing the other dimensions of our being, the website www.hooah4health.com also has links to nurture the spirit. The Army and Department of Defense recognize the importance of nurturing the spirit. Title 10 of U.S. Code authorizes chaplains by saying, “There are chaplains...” for performing worship services. As I stated earlier, secular traumatologists, the PhD-level experts, freely confess that an essential ingredient for health, especially in attempts to healing trauma, must include touching the spirit of a person. Therefore, recognizing the need to tend to our spirit is important. So how do we take care of our spirit?

Dialogue with the Divine. Prayer is talking with God. Prayer is all about what we think and how we feel and it is the best thing we can do for inner health. Confession simply means agreeing with God about what is true. When we are open and honest with the Holy One about the state of our body, mind, soul, and spirit, we are performing an act of confession and its affects are liberating. Richard Foster’s book on *Prayer* is a wonderful primer on various forms of prayer. It will broaden your understanding and practice of prayer. I found it useful during deployment, as I needed different ways to express the intensity of what was happening in my world.

Grieving. Deployment taught me the power of the Psalms of lament. Did you know there are more Psalms of lament in the Bible than there are Psalms of praise? I think that speaks well to the human condition. Dr. Terry Wardle teaches how to construct a personal Psalm of lament in his book, *Healing Care, Healing Prayer*. Basically, read through several Psalms of lament, such as Psalm 13 or 42. Listen and notice the emotion. Notice the intensity of the language directed toward God. Dr. Wardle uses an illustration of a longbow, arrow, and target to illustrate what to

do with intense emotion, like grief. The bow represents our life, the arrow represents the emotion, and the target is God. The target is not other people. If we fire our emotional arrows at other people, they get hurt. If we pull back on the bow and release the energy without locking in the arrow, we break the bow. So feel free to confess to God what is thought and felt. He has big shoulders and can handle it. Next, begin to write on paper our own Psalm of lament using Scripture as a model. It is important to not censor the language and content. Next, take the written lament and go to a private place and read it out loud to God as a prayer. Following this process allows us to reach into the spirit and grab the emotional ball and give it to God. It makes room for God to begin or continue to heal the spirit.

Lectio Divina. Divine reading is an ancient, prayer-full way of approaching God through Scripture. It can make scripture come alive. Take a very small amount of scripture, like one verse. Read it out loud very slowly several times. Next, read it again out loud and listen to the one word or phrase that leaps out and make note of it. Next, read it again slowly out loud and identify the emotional feeling you feel as you read it. Write that down. Read it again slowly and listen for the command of God or instruction. What is God saying to me in light of this scripture? Write it down. Finally, read it one more time slowly and take the information you wrote down and turn that all into a prayer. You will find the scripture changing you, speaking to you, and you will find yourself easily memorizing another scripture.

Spiritual Community. Connecting with and participating in a group of people on a similar spiritual journey is powerful and has many benefits. There you will find people who you can really get to know, who can look out for your best interests, and who can pray for you.

Community fosters closeness, accountability, and mutual support. Community is the context of ministry and it is the place where spiritual gifts operate. Community comes in the form of worshipping communities, fellowship groups, small study groups, prayer groups, and discipleship groups. Everyone needs to be plugged into some group. When I was at my worst in Iraq, I had a desire to flee community. My situation degraded the further I ran. When I plugged into community, my spirit was nurtured, I had a different perspective, and I found healing for my wounds. Spiritual community, especially corporate worship, can bless the soul, lighten the load, and bless others.

Developing and Executing a Plan

A personal development plan ought to address each major dimension of our being, an assessment of understanding and health in each area, and a set of goals to work toward for each area. I suggest using a matrix format. It is easy to create and review. For a starting point, I suggest use of the four major areas mentioned in this paper: body, mind, emotions, and spirit. Within each category, list each of the italicized subdivisions listed in this paper (i.e. Dialogue with the Divine, Grieving, Lectio Divina, and Spiritual Community for the major area of the Spirit). For each major and sub category, assess yourself and state goals. An assessment of 0 to 10 works for me; numbers seem less threatening than words. Your goals should be in bullet-form and achievable. Start with an action-word. A goal for prayer might be, “Spend 5 minutes in silent prayer daily in addition to my normal verbal prayer discipline.” A goal for Spiritual Community might be, “Attend worship services at least weekly and attend small-group Bible study through the deployment”. The following table illustrates what part of a plan may look like with the area, initial and quarterly assessments, and the goals:

Spirit	0-10 Assessment INIT Q1-Q2-Q3-Q4					Goal
Silent Prayer	4	5				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Foster's book on "Prayer" by Q2 • Pray silently at least 5 min each day • Pray with eyes open (no sleeping!)
Lectio Divina	2	3				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice Divine Reading with Jesus words in Matthew 5 – 6 the next 3 months • Journal insights from Divine Reading daily
Spiritual Community	7	7				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend weekly worship services • Participate in group Bible study weekly • Start an accountability group within next month

When compiling the plan, ensure you research the resources needed to make it become a reality.

Anticipate obstacles and develop plans to address each obstacle. If accountability has been an obstacle in the past, figure out how to negotiate that obstacle to position yourself for success.

Take your written plan and review it with someone you trust. Ask them for their opinion about your areas of focus, does it seem doable, and is it too much or too little. Finally, ask several people to read your plan and hold you accountable to it.

Decide how and when you will start to implement your plan. Some people like to ease into the pool. Others like to jump into the pool. It does not matter if you have a phased approach to implementation, or you radically start doing it all. What matters is starting. As you being, you will learn what is reasonable and what is pie-in-the-sky. Adjust the plan as you go and keep going. Don't quit. Keep it up for at least a month and a half. As you persevere, you will develop a new habit.

Periodically review your plan, update it, re-assess and continue to work it. I review my personal development plan quarterly. Mark your calendar with an appointment to spend time reviewing and revising your plan.

Final Words

Wise, successful, effective leaders develop, employ, and refine personal and professional development plans. Taking care of ourself and our inner world is the starting place for effectively leading others. If our house is in disorder, we cannot rightly help others tend to their house. When we neglect our inner world and development, we reveal misplaced priorities, immaturity, and poor self-discipline. Worse yet, over time, we become ineffective leaders and our people suffer. All Soldiers deserve outstanding leadership. The place to start is self-leadership. Failing to lead ourselves well can lead to a bottle-rocket work ethic. For a while, we launch with a scream and lots of energy. All those who watch say, “Ooh, ah, look at them go!” Then, at the apex with the fuel exhausted, we explode with a bang. Long deployments and persistent conflict require more than bottle-rockets. The key for going the distance starts with self-care and self-leadership.

Resilient leaders have plans and processes to take care of themselves. They bend far under pressure. Others see this, not knowing the details of their plan, and marvel. They think the leader is a machine. They are not machines; they are well-watered plants. Time and discipline has nurtured the inner-garden and it can weather the storms of life. Not only can it weather the storm, it produces much fruit for the benefit of others. Be that resilient leader. Take care of yourself.

Wisdom and maturity demand we take care of ourselves and attend to our basic needs. When we do, we are able to take care of others and be effective in our mission. When health comes into us, it can flow from us to others. The tone of our organization can change quickly when leaders find center. As chaplains, we are charged to provide spiritual leadership. We need

to take care of ourselves so we teach and model what right looks like. It is where effective religious support starts.

Every Soldier is responsible for his or her inner health, just like every Soldier is responsible for his or her own physical fitness. Each of us must have intentional plans to strengthen our entire being. As we do, we will weather the storms of life with greater resiliency. Sometimes our best efforts will not be enough. Every Soldier who has experienced pain and suffering must appropriately share their story to find healing. Unfortunately, the tendency of some leaders is to hide their suffering and pain. Pride and fear of being misunderstood are real roadblocks to wholeness in the military culture as they keep us from appropriately sharing our pain and struggles. I believe spiritual leadership demands everyone, especially leaders, share his or her sacred story of suffering and pain at the right place and time. I believe this example can help others overcome the cultural barriers to openness. Chaplains work in the military culture and understand the barriers of pride and fear, but we should not be so conformed to it that we lose our distinctive, spiritual perspective on matters like suffering and pain.

Every chaplain should be comfortable with their inner world, for it is there pain and suffering operate and it is from there that grace, healing, and comfort flow to others. In the chaplaincy, we are surrounded by many hurting 'others'. Every chaplain should know what his or her faith says about suffering, pain, inner healing, and how to touch the spirit of a Soldier with the power of God. Every chaplain should feel free to lower the facade and be authentic in a culture saturated in machismo, masks, and pop-culture notions of manliness. Every chaplain should have a strategy for addressing inner wounds and be comfortable working cooperatively with other healing professionals, valuing their contribution to the hurting individual.

I believe the Chaplain's Corps has an opportunity of a lifetime before it: finding its definition in something that is squarely in its lane: connecting hurting people to God. No other institution can do that; no other is commissioned and expected to do that. We have the possibility to see the greatest spiritual revival among service members because the need is great. Chaplains are spiritual leaders charged with bringing the good, healing news of God's grace into the suffering of our contemporary operating environment. Let us be faithful to the call. The Bible says, "But where sin (*and I would say 'suffering'*) increased, grace increased all the more" (Romans 5:20, NIV). Chaplains who have a healthy, biblical understanding of pain, suffering, and healing and a protocol for positioning people for wholeness are God's agents for increasing grace.

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