



Beyond Trauma



A CATHOLIC GUIDE FOR SPIRITUAL FIRST AID

WHAT'S INSIDE

If you have survived a traumatic experience, this booklet can help you with **practical ways** to care for yourself and your loved ones. It also can help you recover emotionally and spiritually from the trauma you experienced.

■ *The Bible passages in this booklet can be a source of comfort and hope as you go through the process of healing.*

If your traumatic experience has left your life in disarray ...

Start with the practical tips on page 6. These are the best ways people have found to deal with shock. Save the rest until you are ready.



You can read this booklet and **reflect on it on your own**, but the experience will be even more helpful if you are able to go through it with a friend or small group.

Beyond Trauma: A Catholic Guide for Spiritual First Aid

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First edition. July 2020

ISBN 978-1-58516-912-2 / ABS Item 125031

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Thanks to the following contributors: Harriet Hill Ph.D., Marilyn Goerz Davis, Phil Monroe Psy.D., Dana Ergenbright, Heather Drew LPC, Peter Edman, Michael Carotta Ed.D.

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Institute**

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Resource provided by:



AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY

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A CATHOLIC GUIDE FOR SPIRITUAL FIRST AID

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

Spiritual first aid helps people recognize common spiritual and emotional reactions to trauma. Like physical first aid, it is intended to start an ongoing process of care. This guide can point people to skills and resources that will aid in recovery. It uses principles and exercises adapted from the program model of the Trauma Healing Institute.

The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful.

■ **Pope Francis**



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WELCOME

Your world may have turned upside down. Here are some basic practices that will help you recover more quickly.

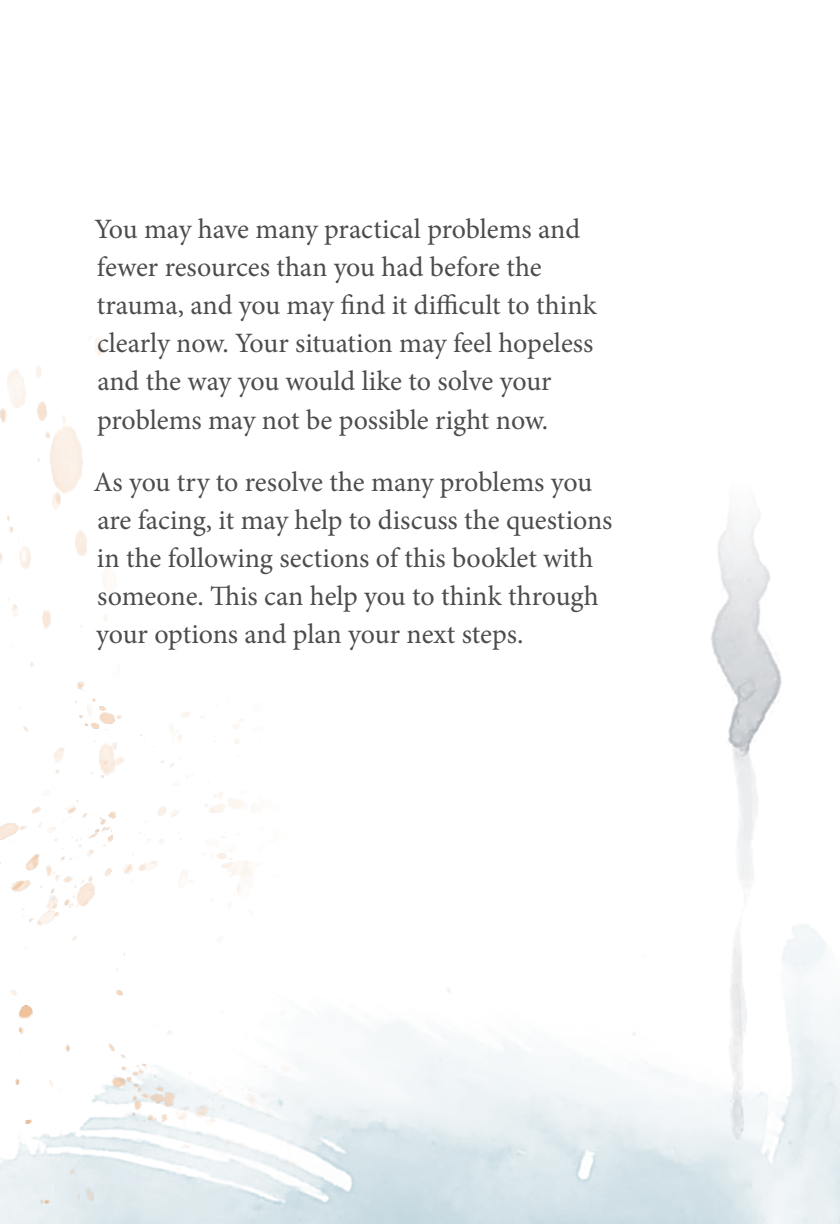
- Do your best to take care of your body, by trying to eat well, get enough sleep, and exercise. If you have trouble sleeping, getting more exercise or doing more physical work during the day may help reduce stress and allow you to sleep better.
- Look for ways to connect with others, even if you feel like being alone. It will help you recover. Isolation will slow your recovery.
- Be willing to ask for help if you need it, and to accept the help that is offered.
- Reestablish routines where you can, especially with children. This reduces the feelings of chaos the trauma created.

- Complete small projects and tasks. This can help restore some sense of control and order.
- Avoid making major decisions, as much as possible. Be aware of how you are using alcohol, sleep aids, or other things to cope.

After a traumatic experience, you may not want to pray or read the Bible for a while. Don't let that add to your worries. It is a normal reaction and does not mean that you have lost your faith. Other people will pray for you, and God understands, as the verse below reminds us. Give yourself time to recover.

*As a father is kind to his children,
so the LORD is kind to those who honor him.
He knows what we are made of;
he remembers that we are dust.*

■ PSALM 103:13-14 GNT



You may have many practical problems and fewer resources than you had before the trauma, and you may find it difficult to think clearly now. Your situation may feel hopeless and the way you would like to solve your problems may not be possible right now.

As you try to resolve the many problems you are facing, it may help to discuss the questions in the following sections of this booklet with someone. This can help you to think through your options and plan your next steps.

Life is a journey. We all know that life is a journey, along different roads, different paths, which leave their mark on us. We also know in faith that Jesus seeks us out. He wants to heal our wounds, to soothe our feet that hurt from traveling alone, to wash us clean of the dust from our journey ... Jesus comes to meet us so he can restore our dignity as children of God. He wants to help us set out again, to resume our journey, to recover our hope, to restore our faith and trust ... to all of us he stretches out a helping hand.

■ **Pope Francis**

Why am I feeling this way?



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SOME COMMON FEELINGS

If you have gone through a traumatic experience, you may feel like you were knocked off your feet emotionally and spiritually. This is normal. The writer of Psalm 42 tells God it feels like “chaos roars at me

like a flood” (Psalm 42:7 GNT).

Sometimes people try to seem strong on the outside and hide the chaos they feel on the inside.

This can slow your progress.

It’s healthy to be honest about how you are feeling about yourself, about others, and about God.

*Accepting
what
happened
will help
you to heal.*

1. When things go wrong, **you may look for someone to blame**—yourself or someone else. This is a way of making sense of what happened, but it isn’t helpful. Accepting what happened will help you to heal.
2. If others were affected by the traumatic event, **you may feel guilty** that you suffered less than they did. This is a common response.

**God cares
for you.**

What happened was not your decision. God has a purpose for the remainder of the days given to you, and God cares for you.

*When my bones were being formed,
carefully put together in my mother's womb,
when I was growing there in secret,
you knew that I was there—
you saw me before I was born.
The days allotted to me
had all been recorded in your book,
before any of them ever began.*

■ PSALM 139:15-16 GNT

*“Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin?
Yet not one of them falls to the ground without
your Father's knowledge. Even all the hairs of
your head are counted. So do not be afraid;
you are worth more than many sparrows.”*

■ MATTHEW 10:29-31



Whatever your level of trauma, it is your pain and it hurts. Even if others are suffering more than you are, don't try to convince yourself that your pain doesn't matter.

Accept your feelings each day and ask God for what you need.

You may have gone through the same experience as others, and yet your reactions may be quite different. There is no need to compare.

Personality, resources, relationships, finances, past experiences, and other factors all affect how we respond.

And don't be surprised if you react differently from day to day, or if stronger reactions surface later after the initial shock fades. Accept your feelings each day and ask God for what you need.

Whenever we feel worried about how we'll make it through the day, we can ask God for what we need, as Jesus taught us to pray: "Give us today the food we need" (Matthew 6:11 GNT).

*The thought of my pain, my
homelessness, is bitter poison
I think of it constantly
and my spirit is depressed.
Yet hope returns when I remember
this one thing:
The LORD's unfailing love
and mercy still continue,
Fresh as the morning, as sure as the sunrise.
The LORD is all I have,
and so in him I put my hope.*

■ LAMENTATIONS 3:19-24 GNT

- 3. You may feel ashamed** about the way you are reacting to the trauma. If you need to accept help from others, you may feel embarrassed to be in a position of need. This is especially true if you are used to taking care of your own needs or if you were usually the one helping others. Remember that it is not your fault you are in this situation. Others likely do not think less of you for having difficulty. And God is not ashamed of you. Allowing others to help you

can strengthen your relationships and even help you make new ones. You may also find yourself beginning to rely more on God than before.

*In you, LORD, I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame.*

■ PSALM 71:1

SOME COMMON BEHAVIORS

Besides the feelings already mentioned, it is common for people to be traumatized by painful experiences. People typically react to trauma in three main ways:

- 1. You may relive the experience**, either in nightmares or in flashbacks during the day. When this happens, accept the feelings and remind yourself of the truth: you are not in the traumatic situation again. You are here, now.
- 2. You may find yourself avoiding things** that remind you of the event. These may be places, smells, people, media, or topics of conversation. Avoiding can make your world very small. To

avoid feeling the painful emotions, you may stop feeling at all and become numb inside. Or you may use drugs or alcohol, or work all the time, or eat too much or too little. The writer of this psalm wanted to avoid his terrifying emotions: he wished he had wings like a dove to fly away and find rest.

*I am terrified,
and the terrors of death crush me.
I am gripped by fear and trembling;
I am overcome with horror.
I wish I had wings like a dove.
I would fly away and find rest.*

■ **PSALM 55:4-6 GNT**

Notice how you are feeling. When you want to avoid something—a place, smell, person, topic, or feeling—try to use some of the calming activities described in Section 2 of this booklet. Little by little, when you are calm, you can begin to face some of the things that are so difficult for you.

3. You may be on alert all the time, because you are more aware that bad things can happen suddenly. You may feel tense and overreact to things. At times, your heart may beat very fast. You may have trouble sleeping. You may be startled by loud noises. If you are on alert all the time, you will wear out your body. You may have physical effects like stomachaches, headaches, or other illnesses. Be patient and do your best to care for yourself to help your body heal. If you feel a wave of panic washing over you, try to concentrate on something peaceful and slow your breathing. Count your breaths or focus on objects around you that are not connected with your fears, such as floor tiles or the branches of a tree. This can help you stay present and calm.

*Pay
attention
to your
feelings.*

After a traumatic experience, you may be more emotional than usual or act in ways that are simply not like you. And with all this going on inside, you may find it difficult to concentrate. You are not going crazy.

These are normal reactions to trauma. However, if your reactions are so strong they keep you from carrying out your responsibilities, find someone who can help you like a counselor, your doctor, or someone on your parish staff.



For Reflection

1. How has the traumatic experience changed your life?
2. Which of the typical reactions to trauma are you experiencing?
3. If you have children, how have they been affected by the trauma?

WHAT HELPS CHILDREN?

Children are affected by trauma as much as adults are, but **they may show it differently**. Small children may not have words to describe how they feel, and they may think they are responsible, even though this is illogical. They may go back to behaviors they grew out of long ago, like bed-wetting or thumb-sucking. They may be fearful and clingy. They need to be comforted. Help them to recognize that these behaviors are normal and temporary responses to trauma.

Children also react to the adults around them.

Their recovery from trauma will be more difficult if caregivers are overwhelmed by their own pain.


Caregivers may misunderstand children's needs after a traumatic experience. They may think children need to be disciplined more or may punish them out of frustration. They may think that children should be seen and not heard or that children will bounce back without help. Such responses make things worse. Children need to be reassured and listened to. They need to express their emotions, in words, in art, or in play.

In this Bible story, Jesus shows how much he values children and that they deserve special care and attention.

Some people brought children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples scolded the people. When Jesus noticed this, he was angry and said to his disciples, "Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I assure you that whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it." Then he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on each of them, and blessed them.

■ **MARK 10:13-16 GNT**

How can I calm these strong emotions?



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▶ CALMING YOUR EMOTIONS

After a traumatic experience, you may feel very anxious, angry, or afraid. You may never have had such strong feelings before. You can learn how to calm these emotions so they don't control you. Here are some ways.

- 1. Do something small that engages your mind, like calling a friend to see how they are, taking a walk, or playing a game.** Allow yourself to do these things as soon as you notice strong feelings rising up in you. This is not wasting time; it will help you heal.

Do something you enjoy with other people.

Do not forget your friends or your father's friends ... A nearby neighbor can help you more than relatives who are far away.

■ PROVERBS 27:10 GNT





Two are better off than one, because together they can work more effectively. If one of them falls down, the other can help him up. But if someone is alone and falls, it's just too bad, because there is no one to help him. If it is cold, two can sleep together and stay warm, but how can you keep warm by yourself? Two people can resist an attack that would defeat one person alone. A rope made of three cords is hard to break.

■ ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12 GNT

2. Think of a scene that makes you feel peaceful.

It may be a scene from where you grew up, or a beach or forest. It may be a scene from a story about Jesus. You might remind yourself of God's love. Get quiet inside and imagine being in that scene. Go there in your mind whenever you begin to feel that strong emotions may overwhelm you.

*“The mountains and hills may crumble,
but my love for you will never end;
I will keep forever my promise of peace.”
So says the LORD who loves you.*

■ ISAIAH 54:10 GNT

3. Repeat a short inspirational phrase or Scripture.

Ask God to show you a word or words that are meaningful to you—for example, “Lord, be with me,” “Heal my heart, Lord,” or “The Lord is my shepherd” (Psalm 23). Repeat this prayer throughout the day to remain calm and centered. This is the Catholic prayer practice of aspirations.

4. Breathe deep breaths.

God gave us our first breath and every breath we take (Acts 17:25). The mystics remind us that God is as close to you as your breath. This breath God gives us can calm us when we are crumbling under the weight of worry. Breathing deeply increases the supply of oxygen to your brain and helps you feel calm and connected to your body. It also quiets your mind.

Try to practice deep breathing for five minutes, three or four times per day. It may take effort at first and you may find it tiring. But continued practice will make this calming way of breathing easier.

Practice breathing from the diaphragm.

- Get into a comfortable position, either on a chair or lying down. With your knees bent, focus on the feeling of your feet or body touching the ground. Release any tension you notice in your shoulders, head, and neck.
- Place one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach, just below your rib cage.
- Breathe in slowly through your nose so that your stomach fills with breath against your lower hand. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.

- As you breathe out slowly through your nose or through pursed lips, feel your lower hand move back toward your spine as the air is released. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible. Imagine this exhale takes with it any stress in your body.

You can also do this exercise with children to help them calm themselves.

The LORD bless you and keep you!

*The LORD let his face shine upon
you, and be gracious to you!*

*The LORD look upon you kindly
and give you peace!*

■ NUMBERS 6:24-26

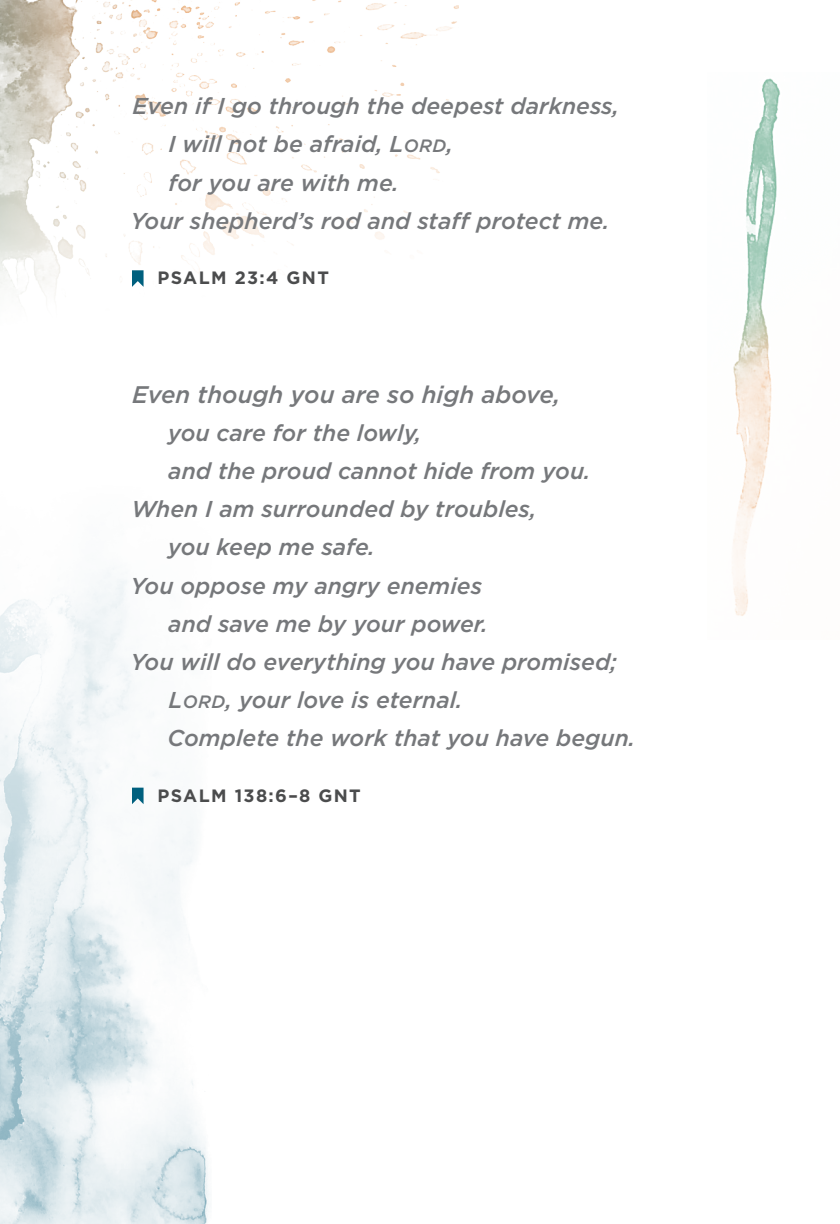
5. Container exercise

Sometimes we can be overwhelmed by what we have experienced but we are not in a situation where we can express our feelings. This exercise can be helpful.

Close your eyes, or just look down at the floor so you are not distracted. Imagine a big container. It could be a big box or a shipping container. Imagine a way to lock the container, like a key or a padlock.

Now imagine putting all the things that are disturbing you right now into the container: big things, small things—everything that is disturbing you. When they are all inside the container, imagine closing it. Now imagine locking the container and putting the key somewhere safe. Do not throw it away. When you are ready, open your eyes and look up.

Later, find a time when you can get quiet. Imagine that you take the key, open the container, and take out the things you have put inside one by one. If you can, do this with a person you trust who can help you talk about these things. Do not leave them in the container forever!



*Even if I go through the deepest darkness,
I will not be afraid, LORD,
for you are with me.*

Your shepherd's rod and staff protect me.

■ PSALM 23:4 GNT

*Even though you are so high above,
you care for the lowly,
and the proud cannot hide from you.*

*When I am surrounded by troubles,
you keep me safe.*

*You oppose my angry enemies
and save me by your power.*

*You will do everything you have promised;
LORD, your love is eternal.
Complete the work that you have begun.*

■ PSALM 138:6-8 GNT



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For Reflection

1. What has helped you to relax?
2. Did the container exercise help you? If yes, how?

Why do I feel so sad?



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THE GRIEF JOURNEY

*We need
to grieve
our losses
to recover
from them.*

A traumatic experience brings with it many losses. Whenever we lose something or someone, it is normal to feel sad, and that feeling may last for a long time. It is helpful to understand that this is part of the grieving process. The book of Ecclesiastes says:

*There is an appointed time for everything,
and a time for every affair
under the heavens.*

*A time to give birth, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time
to uproot the plant.*

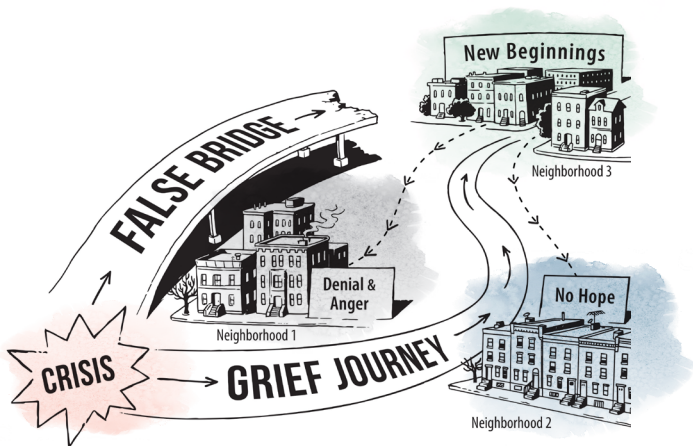
*A time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to tear down, and a time to build.*

*A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance.*

■ ECCLESIASTES 3:1-4

We need to grieve our losses to recover from them. Grieving is like going on a long journey.

This illustration shows how you might feel along the way:



1. Neighborhood of Denial and Anger:

You may be in shock and feel numb. You may deny that the loss happened. You may be angry at others, at yourself, at God. You may often be thinking “if only” you had done this or that, you could have prevented the loss. You may forget to eat. You may cry a lot.

2. **Neighborhood of No Hope:** You may lack energy, and not want to get out of bed or care for yourself. You may feel there is no reason for living. You may want to end your life, or kill the pain with drugs, alcohol, or some other addiction. You may feel guilty for the loss, even though you could have done nothing to prevent it.
3. **Neighborhood of New Beginnings:** You will feel new life inside you—energy, plans, hopes, wanting to be with others again. You remember what happened but don't feel the pain like before.

People, your culture, or voices inside you may try to get you to skip the hard work of grieving. They may say things like, “Be strong!” “Don't cry.” “Rejoice! Your loved one is with Jesus!” These things can lead you to try a shortcut. We refer to this as the “**false bridge**” because it promises to make your grieving shorter and less painful, but it will not bring you to the Neighborhood of New Beginnings.

*It takes
courage
and energy
to grieve.*

To get to the Neighborhood of New Beginnings, you need to feel the pain of your losses.

Beginning again involves changing the parts of your old identity that are related to what you lost—for example, the mother of _____, the husband of _____, the owner of _____. Our minds are fast to understand this process, but our hearts are slow. It takes time for the wound to heal. Knowing that you are on a journey can help you be patient with yourself and others, but it won't take the pain away.

You may go back and forth between these neighborhoods as you grieve, and you may go at a different pace than others. This is normal. But if you feel like you have been stuck for a long time without making any progress, you may need help.

Grieving takes a lot of courage and energy. You may find you are exceptionally tired, like the person who wrote this psalm.

I am worn out, O LORD; have pity on me!

Give me strength;

I am completely exhausted

and my whole being is deeply troubled.

How long, O LORD, will you wait to help me?

Come and save me, LORD;

in your mercy rescue me from death.

I am worn out with grief;

every night my bed is damp

from my weeping;

my pillow is soaked with tears.

I can hardly see;

my eyes are so swollen

from the weeping caused

by my enemies.

Keep away from me, you evil people!

The LORD hears my weeping.

■ **PSALM 6:2-4, 6-8 GNT**

The Paschal Mystery refers to Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. It has long been a core element of Catholic spirituality and a model for processing trauma. It points to a key rhythm in life: like Christ, we too will experience suffering, loss, and a new beginning.

Life will bring us pain. We will experience various kinds of deaths. But with every ending there will be a new start. Every dark night will be followed by a dawn. Winter will turn to spring. The Paschal Mystery of Christ does not promise us that we will never be hurt. It promises us that God will be with us and will help us get through our seasons of pain. We need to participate with God in this process.

These things can help you grieve in a way that leads to healing:

- Talk about what happened and how it makes you feel. Express your anger and sadness.
- Understand that it is normal to grieve, and that the process takes time. You will not always feel like you do today, and your feelings may vary day to day. When you feel sad, think about what loss may be causing that feeling.
- When you feel sad, think about what loss may be causing that feeling.
- If the body of a loved one cannot be recovered, arrange a service to publicly acknowledge the death and remember the person's life.

- Eventually, when you are ready, bring your pain to God. The more specific you can be about your losses, the better. For example, you may have lost a loved one, but also an income, companionship, respect, or security. Bring these losses to God one by one.



For Reflection

1. What losses have you experienced?
2. How would you describe your grief journey?

WHAT HELPS CHILDREN?

- Reunite families if it is safe to do so.
- Reestablish routines if possible.
- Listen to children's pain. Help children talk about their pain by encouraging them to draw and then asking them to explain their drawings to you.
- Tell them the truth about the situation in simple terms. Children know more about what is going on around them than adults realize. They tend to fill in missing information in whatever way makes sense to them.
- Younger children often can express their feelings through play rather than by talking; it helps them work out the pain they experienced. Parents can ask them about what they are playing and how they feel about it.

- Especially in times of trouble, families should find some time each day to talk together, to pray together about what has happened, and to learn encouraging or comforting Bible passages.
- Help teachers and school administrators understand what has happened to the child.
- Teenagers have different needs. They may need some privacy or time with their peers, especially after a traumatic event.
- Teenagers need to feel useful, especially when their family is going through difficulties. Doing things that help their family survive can remind them that they are valuable.

How can my wounded heart heal?



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DEALING WITH PAIN

Think of the pain in your heart like a heart wound. As the Psalmist says, the pain hurts to the depths of our hearts.

*But my Sovereign LORD,
help me as you have promised,
and rescue me because of the
goodness of your love.
I am poor and needy;
I am hurt to the depths of my heart.
Like an evening shadow
I am about to vanish;
I am blown away like an insect.
My knees are weak from lack of food;
I am nothing but skin and bones.
When people see me, they laugh at me;
they shake their heads in scorn.
Help me, O LORD my God;
because of your constant love, save me!*

■ PSALM 109:21–26 GNT

Compare this pain in your heart with a physical wound, like a deep gash. How is a heart wound similar or different?

- A physical wound is visible.
- A physical wound is painful, and sensitive.
- It needs to be treated.
- Any dirt or bacteria needs to come out.
- If it's ignored, it may get infected.
- God heals but he uses people like mothers, nurses, doctors.
- It takes time to heal.
- It may leave a scar.

We need to take care of the wounds of our hearts so we can recover.

After a traumatic experience, you need to take care of the wounds of your heart so you can recover.

To treat a heart wound, you need to express your pain. **Find someone you can tell your story to**, someone who is able to listen without making you feel worse. That person needs to keep what you share confidential, and listen to you without trying to fix you, or give you quick solutions, or compare your story to theirs. Choose this person carefully. Often people who have good intentions try to tell you how to fix a problem. You may need to remind others when you need them to just listen and understand rather than trying to advise you.

*A person's thoughts are like water
in a deep well, but someone with
insight can draw them out.*

■ PROVERBS 20:5 GNT

*No one who gossips can be trusted with
a secret, but you can put confidence
in someone who is trustworthy.*

■ PROVERBS 11:13 GNT

Don't let anyone pressure you to tell your story if you don't feel comfortable or ready to do so. You may need to tell your story bit by bit over time. Like a bottle of soda that has been shaken, you may need to let out the fizz little by little to keep from overflowing. You may also need to retell your story many times in order to accept what has happened and work through

*You need
to express
your pain.*

different parts of it. As you share, tell what happened, then when you're ready, move on to how you felt while it was happening, and finally focus on the part that was the hardest for you. Even Jesus shared his pain with his friends.

Jesus took along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to feel sorrow and distress. Then he said to them, “My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch with me.”

■ MATTHEW 26:37-38

You can also **express your pain by drawing**. And you don't have to be an artist! Just get paper and pen or markers, get quiet inside, and let the pain come through your fingers onto the paper. Don't worry about whether it is a good picture or not. Then think about what you see in the drawing.

Telling your story and being listened to sounds so simple, but it will help you heal. Hearing others tell their stories can help too, by reminding you that you are not the only one who has experienced trauma. At the same time, it will help them heal, and you will be able to offer comfort to each other.

Here are **three questions** that you can use as you listen:

1. What happened?
2. How did you feel?
3. What was the hardest part for you?

Often as people talk about an experience, they begin to understand their own thoughts and feelings better. They may come to realize that how they have been thinking about the situation is not helpful. The Bible tells us: “Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts” (Proverbs 4:23 GNT).

Sometimes when we reflect on a difficult time, we become aware that God has helped us through it in some way. God also comforts our hearts and is the source of healing.

The Bible tells us that as we are comforted, we can become a source of healing to others:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God.

■ **2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4**

LISTENING EXERCISE

Doing this exercise can help you begin to tell your story and experience how that feels, as well as help you to develop skills to listen to others tell their story. Find someone who is willing to do this exercise with you. As this is a short exercise, each of you should think of a small painful experience rather than a large issue. Before starting, agree to keep what was shared confidential. For ten minutes, one of you shares while the other person listens, using the three listening questions. Then switch roles. When you have finished, reflect on these questions.



For Reflection

1. Did the listening questions help you clarify your feelings? Did they help you think differently about your experience? Explain your responses.
2. What was it like to share your story with someone else in this way?

How can I relate to God in this situation?



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TELL GOD HOW YOU FEEL

Be honest with God! Tell God exactly how you feel. God already knows, so talk about it freely. Do you feel abandoned by God? Angry? Pour out your pain to God.

There are many examples of people expressing their feelings to God in the Bible. These are called “lamentations.” Did you know that there are more lament psalms in the Bible than praise psalms?

In a lamentation, people call out to God and tell him their complaint. “Why didn’t you protect me? Where were you? How long will this suffering

***Be honest
with God.***

last?” They tell God what they want him to do—sometimes just that he look at what has happened. Sometimes they remind themselves of how God helped them in the past, or how

God helped his people in the Bible. This can spark hope. A lamentation is often what faith looks like in hard situations. It is a sign of faith that God is listening, cares, and has power to help.



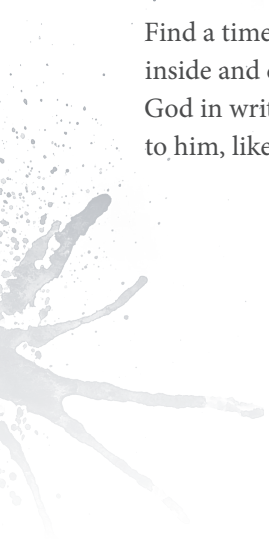
While a lamentation can have more parts, these are the three most basic ones:


- Address God
- Complaint
- Request

Of these three parts, the complaint is what makes it a lamentation.

Read the psalm of lamentation on the next page. Do you see the three parts?

Find a time and place when you can get quiet inside and compose your own lamentation to God in writing or song. Pour out your pain to him, like the writer of the psalm did.





*How much longer will you forget me,
LORD? Forever?*

*How much longer will you
hide yourself from me?*

How long must I endure trouble?

*How long will sorrow
fill my heart day and night?*

*How long will my enemies
triumph over me?*

*Look at me, O LORD my God,
and answer me.*

Restore my strength; don't let me die.

Don't let my enemies say,

"We have defeated him."

Don't let them gloat over my downfall.

I rely on your constant love;

*I will be glad,
because you will rescue me.*

I will sing to you, O LORD,

because you have been good to me.

■ PSALM 13 GNT

TAKING YOUR PAIN TO THE CROSS

So far, you have explored your reactions to trauma and loss. You have experienced telling your story to someone and being heard. And you have expressed your pain to God in a lamentation.

Now we will focus on the spiritual foundation of our healing and bring our pain to God, whose own Son experienced enough trauma for all humanity and whose Spirit brings us healing today.

Jesus taught us,

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

■ MATTHEW 5:3-4

And he said,

“Come to me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.”

■ MATTHEW 11:28

In Section 4 we looked at how it was God’s will that Jesus would suffer, die, and rise again. Because of this, we are enabled to go through our own suffering, loss, and renewal. Now we will explore the power of that Paschal Mystery by bringing our pain to the cross of Jesus.

For this exercise, you’ll need paper or sticky notes, a pen, a crucifix, and some quiet time. Read through the exercise first to prepare.

Get quiet inside and ask God to show you any pain and suffering that you are carrying in your heart. Spend time in God’s presence. Write down the things that come to mind. You will be well aware of some. Others you might not have realized you were carrying.

When you feel your list is complete, bring it to the cross. Thank Jesus for his sacrifice on the cross to free us from sin and heal us. Ask him to heal your wounded heart.

When your time at the cross is complete, destroy the paper in some way that is meaningful to you—burn it, tear it up, shred it. This physical act helps signify that your pain is now with Jesus.

Let the Spirit bring you healing and peace.



A large, stylized red letter 'Q' is centered on a horizontal red line that divides the page. The top half of the page features abstract watercolor splashes in shades of grey and brown, with some dark spots and a vertical streak on the right side.

Q

For Reflection

What was it like for you to write a lamentation
or take your pain to the cross?

Looking to the future



0	Welcome	6
1	Why am I feeling this way?	11
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CONTINUING TO HEAL

Your recovery from trauma will take time and go in stages. When you are in the middle of difficult times, it may feel like things will never get better—that the grief and problems will go on forever. Remember that in this world things are always changing, and changes can lead to something better.

Keep reviewing the list in the “Welcome” section at the beginning of this booklet (page 6). You may discover things that are helpful to you that you can add to the list.

Find ways to stay connected with others.

When things have settled down, you can reflect more deeply on your experience. Consider joining a trauma healing group. If there's not a group in your area, invite others who have experienced trauma to form a small group. You might meet only once or set up a regular meeting schedule. You can help each other continue to

heal when you share your experiences and ask each other the listening questions in Section 4 (page 49). If you organize a group, be careful not to wear people out with long meetings or by having participants share so much detail that it upsets others. Healing comes little by little over time.

Over the centuries, the church has developed many spiritual disciplines to help us exercise our spiritual muscles and grow in our experience of God's presence and in relationship with others. You can find out more about these disciplines and make them a part of your life.

For example, the early Christian monks developed **Lectio Divina** as a structured way to experience the Presence of God in the Scripture. To benefit from this practice, find a time you can spend silently with a passage in God's Word (or go online to find video and audio versions you can join in with). Then follow these steps:

1. **Read.** Read the verses aloud, slowly and carefully, realizing that God is speaking through the sacred text. Imagine the scene, and notice the feelings evoked by the text.
2. **Meditate.** Considering the phrases or images from the reading that caught your attention, ask yourself what the text is saying personally to you. What insight, comfort, or challenge is God offering you?
3. **Pray.** Respond to God who has spoken to you in the text. In words of thanks, praise, repentance, confusion, concern, or petition, speak to God from the heart.
4. **Contemplate.** Just rest in God's presence. Trust God to work within you. Stay in silence and savor the Holy Spirit.
5. **Act.** Determine how you can let the power of God's Word have an effect in your life.

In addition to Lectio Divina, consider these spiritual practices:

- Contemplative prayer
- Aspirations (one-line prayers)
- Ignatian spiritual exercises
- Eucharist and reconciliation
- Prayer and fasting
- Daily readings from the Lectionary
- Bible study
- Singing
- Journaling
- Keeping company
- Works of mercy
- Self-care

Whatever happens to you, God
will be with you through it.

*God is our shelter and strength,
always ready to help in times of trouble.
So we will not be afraid,
even if the earth is shaken
and mountains fall into the ocean depths;
even if the seas roar and rage,
and the hills are shaken by the violence.*

■ PROVERBS 11:13 GNT

***One day, God
will wipe away
all tears and
remove all
suffering.***

During difficult times, look for the ways God provides shelter and strength. Take time to remember the small and large ways God has helped you in the past. And remember

that one day, God will wipe away all tears and remove all suffering.

*He will wipe every tear from their eyes,
and there shall be no more death
or mourning, wailing or pain, for
the old order has passed away.*

■ REVELATION 21:4

Until that day, God invites you to express your feelings to him. He is always listening.

Over time, your prayers may change, from prayers of lament to prayers of praise. And you may find yourself praising God one minute and lamenting to him the next. That's okay.

This song of praise from the Bible may inspire you to write your own.

*I love the LORD, because he hears me;
he listens to my prayers.*

*He listens to me
every time I call to him.*

*The danger of death was all around me;
the horrors of the grave closed in on me;
I was filled with fear and anxiety.*

*Then I called to the LORD,
"I beg you, LORD, save me!"*


*The LORD is merciful and good;
our God is compassionate.*

*The LORD protects the helpless;
when I was in danger, he saved me.*

*Be confident, my heart,
because the LORD has been good to me.*

*The LORD saved me from death;
he stopped my tears
and kept me from defeat.*

*And so I walk in the presence of the LORD
in the world of the living.*



*I kept on believing, even when I said,
“I am completely crushed,”
even when I was afraid and said,
“No one can be trusted.”*

*What can I offer the LORD
for all his goodness to me?*

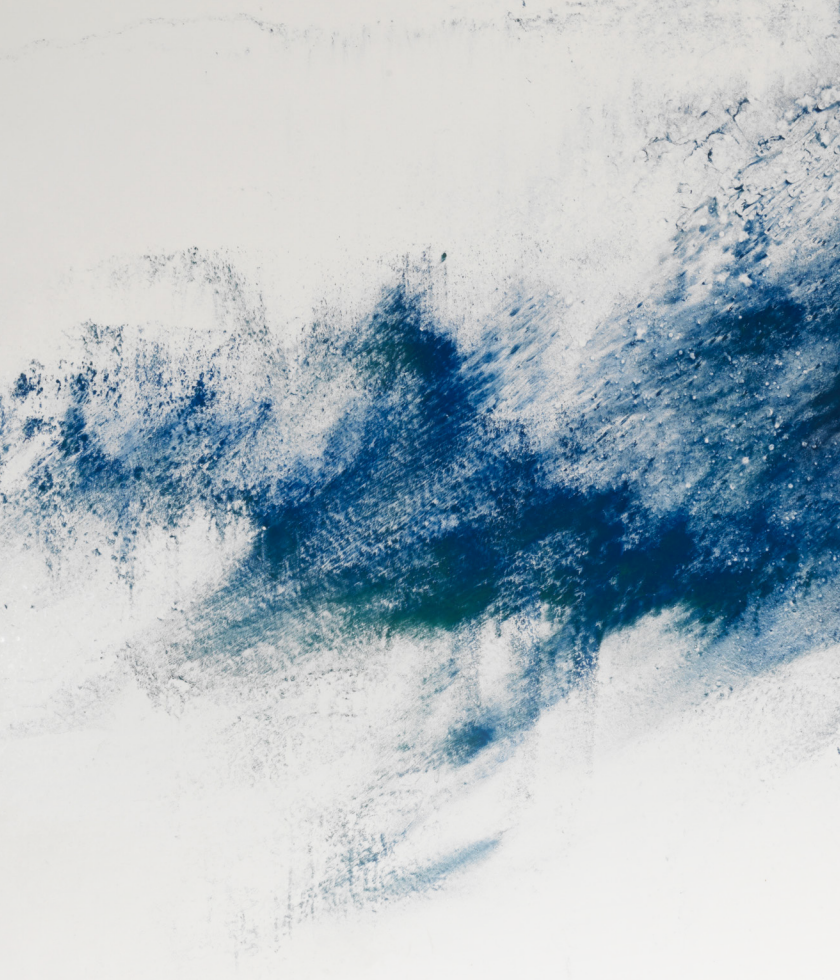
*I will give you a sacrifice of thanksgiving
and offer my prayer to you.*

■ PSALM 116:1-12, 17 GNT



For Reflection

1. What is one thing that has helped you as you went through this booklet?
2. What is one thing you can do to continue to move beyond trauma?



**Trauma Healing
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