Foreword by Elyse Fitzpatrick

ELIZA HUIE



Trauma AWARE

A Christian's Guide to Providing Help and Care

"Trauma is an emerging field where we seemingly learn more with each passing month. Theology is a timeless field where we want to remain faithful to our faith's foundations. In *Trauma Aware*, Eliza takes us by the hand to orient us to the experience of trauma in light of Christian theology; she helps us explore the timely in light of the timeless. As you process your own profoundly painful experiences or come alongside others doing so, this book will help you find God's comfort for life's most intense sufferings."

—**Brad Hambrick**, pastor of counseling at The Summit Church; author of *Navigating Destructive Relationships*

"Eliza Huie has written the book on trauma that our generation of Christian counselors has desperately needed. She deftly manages a Herculean task in taking a complex topic like trauma—who it impacts, what it is, how to care for those affected—all while remaining imminently accessible to the lay caregiver and the professional counselor. Readers will come away sobered, educated, and encouraged to walk the hard path with those whose lives have experienced trauma, but they will also come equipped with a hope that restores beauty for ashes."

—**Jonathan D. Holmes**, executive director, Fieldstone Counseling

"If you've ever wanted to help someone who is hurting, this book is for you. In these pages penned by an author who lives out what she writes, you will find biblical truth, clinical precision, and practical counsel that will enable you to wisely and compassionately help (and not further hurt) people who are hurting. And in the process, you may (like me) find yourself deeply helped amidst your own hurts."

—**David Platt**, lead pastor at McLean Bible Church, Washington, DC; author of *Radical* and *Something Needs to Change*

"We can all greatly benefit from Eliza's well-rounded and God-glorifying approach to trauma. Through these pages, she explores, very practically, the good gifts given us in science, medicine, and psychology so that God may be more glorified in us, body and soul, and that we receive the best in him. She artfully turns an investigation into the dark place of trauma into hope in our loving Savior, Jesus. Patients and providers at my practice benefit from resources like this to learn how best to steward their minds and bodies as they work through traumatic experiences."

—Dr. Adam O'Neill, PA-C, DMSc, psychiatric physician assistant and owner of Adam O'Neill & Associates LLC, Washington, DC.

"In a fallen world filled with brokenness, understanding trauma is crucial. In this accessible and engaging resource, seasoned counselor Eliza Huie defines trauma and its impact on the body, mind, and soul. With compassionate skill and researched wisdom, Huie offers practical ways to love our neighbors with informed grace and gospel truth. I will return to *Trauma Aware* again and again—highly recommended."

—Eric Schumacher, podcaster; songwriter; author of *The Good Gift of Weakness* and *Ours: Biblical Comfort for Men Grieving Miscarriage*

"*Trauma Aware* provides a wealth of information for Christian helpers who want to learn about trauma and its effects on the body, emotions, mind, and soul. Eliza Huie shares biblical wisdom and practical expertise to spur churches toward becoming safe spaces where trauma survivors can experience healing. This book is a must-read for pastors, ministry leaders, counselors, and people-helpers of all kinds."

—Beth M. Broom, LPC-S, executive director of Christian Trauma Healing Network; contributing author to *Caring for Families Caught in Domestic Abuse: A Guide Toward Protection, Refuge, and Hope*

"Eliza Huie draws from her extensive clinical and theological experience to provide the reader with a clear and balanced understanding of the subject of trauma. She uses easy-to-understand terms to show how trauma impacts the brain and the body. Her book does an excellent job of defining what trauma actually is and distinguishes it from events in life that are discouraging, hurtful, even terrible, but don't qualify to be labeled as trauma. Additionally, *Trauma Aware* provides great practical tools that the reader can use immediately when assisting a friend, family member, or church member."

—Tim Sanford, MA, LPC, clinical director, Focus on the Family Counseling Services Department

"The church has needed this book for a long time. In a practical and accessible style, Eliza Huie offers expert advice on how to care for people who have experienced trauma. *Trauma Aware* engages scientific research, draws on current trauma literature, and grounds itself in God's Word to offer an expanded framework for joining people in their trauma recovery. I already know I will be recommending this book over and over again."

—Esther Smith, LCPC, director of Christian Trauma Counseling; author of *A Still and Quiet Mind*

"In *Trauma Aware*, Eliza helps to foster a heart of compassion and comfort for those of us seeking to be 'conduits of care' for individuals who have experienced life-changing and traumatic circumstances. She equips us with biblical truth and with a posture of humility to listen, to respond graciously, and to care deeply. Every Christian should read this book—either as one wanting to help others or one seeking to better understand their own hurt. This book provides a salve of hope and healing through Christ for a broken world. Lord, come quickly!"

—Jeff Dalrymple, executive director, Evangelical Council for Abuse Prevention

"Eliza Huie's *Trauma Aware* offers a profound exploration of the complexities of trauma through a biblical lens. With compassionate wisdom, she guides readers to understand how trauma can impact our lives and how God's grace can heal. Filled with practical tools and biblical insights, Huie equips individuals and churches to address the reality of trauma and seek wholeness. This is the book the church has needed for a long time on this issue."

—Jason Kovacs, executive director, Gospel Care Collective

"Trauma studies—and traumatized people—deserve the church's best efforts. In *Trauma Aware*, Eliza helps us minister to the whole person, body and soul. The book evidences her strong case knowledge, maintains a connection to biblical and theological reflection, and engages the broader field with readable surveys and constructive Christian wisdom. We all need to hear this healing calling: moving toward sufferers, bearing burdens, and so fulfilling the law of Christ."

—Rev. Michael Gembola, LPC, executive director,
Blue Ridge Christian Counseling

Trauma AWARE

ELIZA HUIE



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS
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To my mother—I love you.

Through you, I've witnessed the power
of God's redemption and grace.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would be remiss not to take this brief space to express my heartfelt gratitude to my family and friends—your continued encouragements and prayers along the way have been a true gift. I was able to finish this book due to your many prayers. A special thanks goes to my fellow counselors who have provided invaluable feedback on my writing, often at a moment's notice. Your thoughtful insights have been instrumental to this work. And to my husband, who endured many delays so I could write or edit "just one more paragraph." Your patience is a gift that made writing this a reality.

I want to give a special thank-you to Harvest House Publishers and their incredible team for their vision in recognizing the importance of this book. I have no doubt that your conviction that a book on this topic was long needed will be a blessing both to those seeking to help and those seeking to heal.

Last, to the brave hearts who welcomed me into their journeys and courageously shared their stories with me over the years, thank you. You have shown me what it means to enter into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, and in you I have witnessed the beauty of his redemption. You are the bravest people I have ever met.

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FOREWORD

Elyse Fitzpatrick

I recently sent off a text to my kids. It was entitled, "Trauma I've suffered in the last four years." That text was largely due to my reading of this wonderful book and *finally* deciding to face facts. More about that in a moment.

Who is Eliza Huie, the author of this book? Well, first, Eliza is my friend. Of course, that does not necessarily qualify her to help you learn about becoming trauma aware and informed. But it should tell you that she is a sister in Christ whom I respect and am thankful for. She has dedicated her life to helping those who need a wise, professional, careful, kind, and most of all, Jesus-loving counselor. And, while doing so has been the motivating joy of her life, it has not come cheaply. Aside from the cost of her extensive training, she has chosen to follow sufferers into the fire as they face and wrestle through the trauma they have endured. Why should she expose herself to the horrors faced by others? Because she loves.

In Eliza's ministry to the hurting, she believes it is right to approach each individual as an *embodied soul*. That means that any form of counseling that looks solely to address the soul (though important) while ignoring the body is often both futile and uncharitable. It is

futile because it ignores the ways in which the soul and the body unconsciously and unceasingly interact and influence each other. Yes, I am a soul. But I am also embodied, or as Paul put it, I am "clothed" with an earthly "tent" (2 Corinthians 5:1-4).

I do not simply *have* a body. I *am* a body. And the circumstances that I experience I experience as both an immaterial soul (mind, will, emotions) and as a physical body with a brain that processes, encodes, and remembers events. Those who ignore the interplay between the whole self (soul and body), while trying to be helpful, will ultimately struggle to bring wholeness to the very people they seek to serve. We are reactive bodies.

In addition, I do not simply *have* a soul. I *am* a soul. Any method of help that fails to see that there is an immaterial, spiritual dimension to who I am will also fail to bring the wholeness I need. As an embodied soul, I need the living water that comes only from Jesus Christ as he pours out his Holy Spirit upon me (see John 7:37). I need to hear his Word that brings life, and I need to know what it means to be both forgiven and counted righteous by faith. Every day, those who have suffered trauma and, indeed, all of us, are thirsty and need a deep drink of that life-giving water. We are thirsty souls.

We are embodied souls. Not only is it futile to try to help sufferers while ignoring either aspect of this reality, to do this is also uncharitable. It is uncharitable to speak only to the immaterial soul about matters of faith if we ignore the truth that souls are also clothed with a physical body that acts and reacts, often in ways outside of our immediate awareness or control. And it is uncharitable to treat suffering people as though there is nothing more to them than what can be seen and touched.

We are more. We are more than what can be seen. We are more than what cannot be seen. We are embodied souls. Visible and invisible. Quantifiable and ethereal. Both parts acting and interacting in

symbiotic union. Even when those aspects seem to conflict with each other, it is clear that God has made us an exquisite creation!

Eliza has thought deeply about that intricate interplay. And that's what makes me so glad she has authored this book for you (and me). Throughout the carefully researched chapters, you will see how wholeness can be found and bestowed through wise and informed counseling. What a gift!

Now, back to that text about my trauma.

In 2020, my 97-year-old mother died. Although she did not live with us, I was responsible for her care and was with her often, increasingly more so as the end drew nearer. Although Richard, my older brother, had lived with her for decades, he was mentally unfit to be her caregiver. And so, much of 2020 was lived trying to answer the questions, "How's Mom today? Does she need anything?" Then, finally, as the end of the year approached, her health began to fail in more obvious ways, and I was with her daily. One day a hospice nurse noted that her blood oxygen level had dropped to 66 percent. We were advised to prepare for her imminent death. One of my sons, Joel, came over and, together with the family, we shared communion with her and sang "Amazing Grace" around her bed. She soon fell into a sleep from which she would never awaken here. Because we were amid the pandemic, our only funeral for her was a gathering with the family at her home. She was gone, but that was just the beginning of my difficulties.

In the months that followed her death, we had to clean out her home and sell it. From the proceeds of that sale, we bought a trailer for my brother to live in on our property. Then, eight months after her death, my brother suffered the first of two debilitating strokes, and once he was released from convalescent care, we had to find and move him into an assisted living space where he would be safe and properly cared for. My husband, Phil, and I would go pick him up frequently to take him to walk at a local park. During this time, I

had to arrange for his Social Security retirement benefits, Medicare and Medi-Cal, disability insurance payments, become his representative payee, and make sure that any unusual physical problems were cared for. Then, in September of 2023, less than three years after my mother's death, he died suddenly. I went over to his facility and sat on the floor by his body until the mortuary workers picked him up. That was one year ago this weekend.

Honestly, until I read Eliza's book, I never stopped to put that timeline together or to think about how I had been affected by the deaths of my mother and brother. I never stopped to think about how I had been deeply impacted by these losses, nor about how they had taken a toll on both my body and my soul.

What have I learned about how this trauma impacted my body and soul? What has this book helped me see? I am frequently on edge. I have discovered myself being physically guarding. I am fearful and hypervigilant. I startle often. While this might be the norm for some, it certainly is not the norm for me. I have also always been a person who enjoyed action movies, and onscreen violence never affected me. I cannot watch them now. I find myself feeling afraid and cowering in my seat when I watch the tamest of shows. Even though my mind and heart have been busy with other things, my body has not forgotten. My body remembers what my soul endured: Death is near and can appear at any time.

I am learning to breathe again. And yes, of course, I am going to pursue this further.

So, to Eliza's readers, I say, "I am so glad you are here. I am glad for the people you will help, and I am glad for the way you will be helped." And to Eliza, my friend, I say, "Thank you. Your labor of love is not in vain."

Elyse Fitzpatrick
Author and speaker



EMBARKING TOWARD HOPE

Our perceptions, emotions, and relationships are deeply—and sometimes mysteriously—shaped by the vast intricacies of our experiences, which are woven into the fabric of our life and imprinted in our mind, body, and soul. Life leaves an indelible mark on us and begs us to explore the interplay of our past, present, and future. When trauma becomes a part of our story, the impact can be so confusing and dismantling that it calls into question everything that was once held true. Even someone who loves and follows God can be deeply affected by traumatic events. Rather than permanently shaping our life in a negative way, this disruption can prompt the courageous confrontation of uncertainty, which can aid in discovering hope and resilience in the face of a shattered life.

For Christians desiring to help those who have experienced trauma, the impact of distressing events or circumstances needs to be understood with wisdom, compassion, and unwavering support. At times we struggle to care for people because we aren't sure how to recognize trauma. Other times we might see that trauma is the root of a person's suffering, but we don't know where to go from there. What

should care look like? What role does God's Word play? How can we be more aware of what is needed and helpful as believers when supporting others? If you have asked any of these questions, you are not alone, and you are holding the right book.

In navigating the important intersection of faith and trauma care, my purpose is to foster an understanding of trauma, provide practical insights anchored in God's Word, and guide you toward becoming trauma-aware helpers, pastors, counselors, mentors, and friends. This book will equip you with the tools to extend compassionate help, recognize the nuances of trauma, and ultimately walk alongside others with empathy, grace, and the transformative hope found in Jesus.

When Trauma Comes Close

Consider the experience of Tianna, a single woman in her mid-forties. Her story could easily be the story of anyone in your church or circle of friends. Tianna had always been a faithful member of her local church. She attended services regularly, volunteered at church events, and was actively engaged in her small group. She seemed to always have a smile for everyone, and her kind heart was felt by many. But after a series of distressing and traumatic events in her life—including being unexpectantly let go from a job she loved in a downsizing reorganization, and a terrifying house fire a few weeks later—her friends noticed her disposition was changing. Thankfully she was physically unharmed by the fire, but she now feels fearful and hypervigilant much of the time. She is especially fearful at night and has nightmares about the fire often. In addition, the job loss was abrupt and humiliating in how it came about, and left her feeling insecure, rejected, and deeply hurt. Almost eight months later, she still struggled to cope with overwhelming emotions of grief, anxiety, fear, and even depression.

Tianna's friends and fellow church members saw her slowly withdraw from social activities and struggle to function in her daily life, but they felt powerless to help. Beyond praying for her, bringing her meals, and sending her notes of encouragement, they didn't know how to respond to her pain or how to provide the support and care she seemed to need. Some even wondered if she was discontent. Tianna had shared that God had provided a fully furnished apartment for her to live in while her house was being renovated and insurance was covering the costs. However, she couldn't shake the feeling that something bad was about to happen. This led to her feeling distracted and anxious. She found part-time work, and despite taking a cut in salary, was able to make ends meet on the smaller wage. An elder in the church asked Tianna whether she had considered that she might be ungrateful for God's provision. Her friends sought to remind her of God's sovereign plan and questioned why she was pulling away. They didn't understand why she was struggling so much, and neither did Tianna.

Sadly, Tianna's story is all too common. Many Christians, although well-meaning, are ill-equipped to provide effective care and counsel for those who have experienced emotional and psychological trauma. When trauma comes close to people they care about, some may feel uncertain about how to approach the subject, while others worry about saying or doing the wrong thing. They may not even know what to look for or how to determine whether trauma is impacting someone they care about.

What to Expect

This book is written for Christians who want to become trauma aware and learn to provide compassionate care for those who have experienced trauma. It offers practical guidance and biblical wisdom for how to recognize the signs of trauma and how to provide support

and care as you walk alongside someone on their journey to healing and restoration.

In these pages, you will hear stories of individuals who have experienced trauma and the ways in which they were helped by those who cared for them. Many of the stories, which are composites, are based on my years of experience as a counselor and a supervisor of counselors. My approach to care has been formed by the deep convictions I hold in the Christian faith, my expertise as a licensed clinical mental health provider, and my nuanced approach to biblically faithful counseling. Shaped by my study of Scripture, my clinical experience, and my heart to see the church equipped, *Trauma Aware* is meant to provide you with a practical approach to understanding trauma, which I trust aligns with the heart of God. Through exploring the complex nature of trauma, its effects on the mind and body, and how it can impact a person's faith and relationship with God, you will become more compassionate and understanding to those suffering from traumatization.

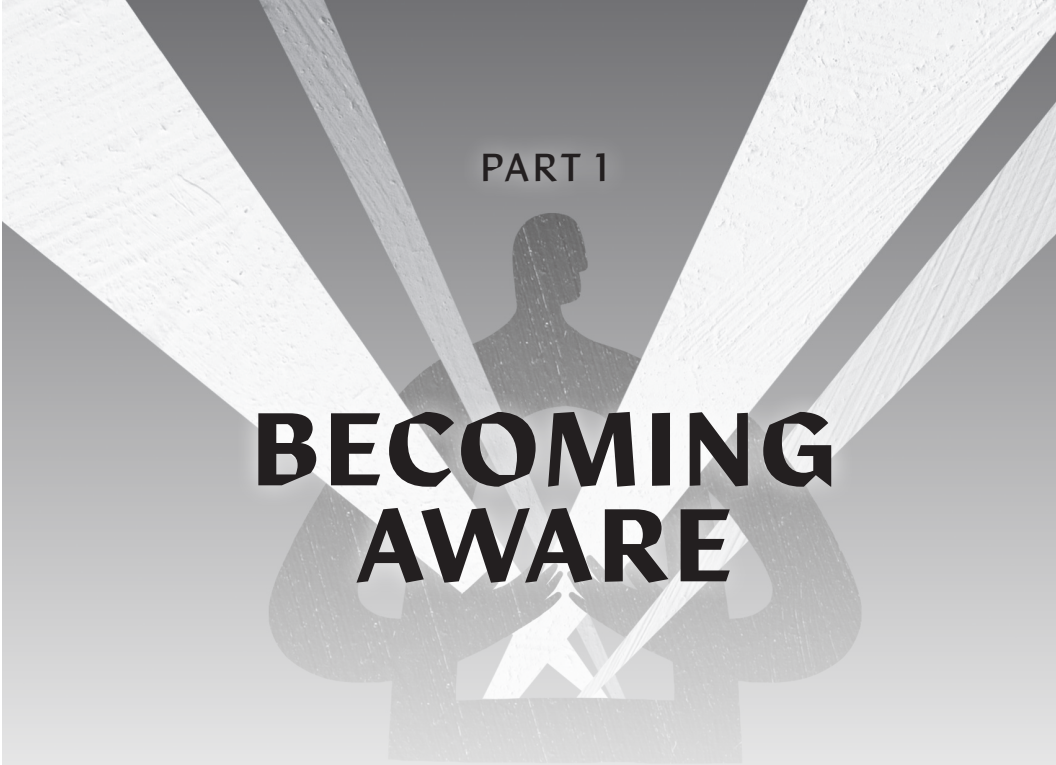
If you are a Christian who wants to make a difference in the lives of those who have experienced trauma, then this book is for you. What you will learn will transform the way you care for others. By becoming trauma aware, you will be able to better support people who have suffered traumatic circumstances, offer hope amidst their pain, and be a light in their darkness. Developing trauma awareness will prepare you to provide compassionate care and support to those who have endured life's most challenging circumstances, and to empower them on their journey toward healing and resilience. As you dig deeper into the pages of this book, you will discover valuable insights and practical strategies that will not only transform your understanding of trauma, but also ignite a profound sense of compassion and purpose as you encounter stories like Tianna's.

One final note as you start this book: I stumbled into the world

of writing—I am an accidental author of sorts. While I hadn't anticipated I would write a book on this topic, my hope is that I'll adequately share with you the wealth of experience I have acquired from years as a licensed counselor, particularly within ministry contexts. This has not only given me a distinct perspective but has also allowed me to hone my expertise on this topic, providing me the opportunity to share insight not often found among Christian resources. With that said, I approach the pages ahead with a blend of humility and confidence born from a genuine passion for and practical involvement in the subject matter. I pray that God would use the skills and experience he has given to me to help others. This book is an invitation into a conversation that I trust will be insightful as well as accessible.

I make no claim that this book is exhaustive. My goal was not to create an all-encompassing work, but rather, for this to be an accessible, informative, and useful resource for those who want to learn more about how to identify trauma and care for those affected by it. Every chapter and section could have easily been expanded into its own book. More can and should be said on the topics covered here. But I hope and pray this book will make a great starting point for those who desire to learn how we can care for those touched by trauma.

This work stands as my heartfelt contribution, not boasting in its sufficiency but aspiring to extend compassionate wisdom and practical help. I hope it plays a role in raising interest in this topic, which is often overlooked in the church. May it be a catalyst for deeper understanding, empathy, and most importantly, action in our collective journey of supporting those affected by trauma. If you make it all the way to the final page, let me thank you in advance for hanging in there with me—I hope you come away feeling that you are more attuned to the profound impact of trauma and better recognize the pressing need to address it within the context of the church so that we become and stay trauma aware.



PART 1

BECOMING AWARE

The scope of trauma care is vast and varied, encompassing a spectrum of approaches that address the individual's physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering. While it's common for Christians to prioritize spiritual care, an exclusive emphasis on this aspect may limit the effectiveness of overall care. A more well-rounded approach acknowledges the impact of trauma on the body and other areas that make up the whole person. Awareness of how trauma manifests in various facets of an individual's life equips friends and caregivers to provide more holistic and effective support.

Even so, crucial assistance for trauma survivors lies within the realm of God's compassionate care. In the forthcoming pages, you will discover insights to enhance your awareness of the impact of trauma. This awareness will equip you to extend support to those in need of care, which, anchored in the truths of the Bible, expresses God's love.

Care of this kind necessitates a humble reliance on the Lord as you seek his wisdom in areas that may elude your full understanding.

Becoming more aware of trauma and its impact is a vital pursuit for Christians. A good starting point involves exploring the complexities of the body and brain. Drawing from the wisdom of our Creator, the guidance of his Word, and insights from science and medicine, you will be amazed at the remarkable resilience of human beings. But more than that, as you engage with this exploration in the upcoming pages, I trust it will cause you to marvel at God's intricate design of the human body. I am confident that this journey will strengthen your conviction that trauma awareness is essential for the church, equipping us to provide thoughtful and effective care.



CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

When I was five years old, my brother ran me over with his bicycle in an intentional act of sibling rivalry. What started as a standoff on one of the trails of our forested property ended with my injury. The single-track path was big enough for only one of us, and we were both unwilling to move off the clear-cut trail onto the uncleared shrubbery and weeds to allow the other to pass.

My brother came down the trail on his bike as I went up it on foot. I squared my stance and jammed my hands on my hips for extra emphasis, even though we were about to meet. He continued to approach with increasing speed and force, daring me to challenge him. It was a challenge I readily accepted! I asserted my dominance in a clear, single-word command, which I shouted with defiant authority: "Mooove!"

My demand fueled his determination to win this dual and his seven-year-old legs pumped the pedals of his bike even faster—his little sister would not have the last word. I didn't think he would actually run me over. But he did. Well, mostly. I abandoned my position and dove off the path just as his front tire grazed my knee. I was not seriously hurt, but the unfortunate encounter threw me off the trail

as he whizzed by. It wasn't the scrapes I received on my skin that hurt most, but rather, the blow to my pride.

My only consolation for the humiliating defeat was that our mother took my side. I was, after all, the only one bleeding, and he was supposed to have watched out for his younger sister (even if she did instigate the crime by being annoyingly bossy). This moment in my childhood might have been completely forgotten by the passing of time except for a small scar that remains on my knee to this day. I recovered from the wounding—my knee probably healed faster than my pride—but the scar on my body is the link to the memory of what happened that day on the trail.

The Wounds of Trauma

In many ways, our bodies tell the story of what happened to us. The wounds of life can leave visible scars, like the one on my knee from my unsuccessful dual with my brother, while emotional wounds leave their mark in other ways. Distressing and difficult circumstances can mark us with internal pain or emotional damage. Although visible scars may fade, when the hurts of past situations don't diminish with time, we may find ourselves experiencing the effects of trauma.

Trauma is a term that comes from a Greek word (τραῦμα) that literally means "wound." This is a good description of what trauma is: a wound. A deep wound. A wound sometimes invisible to others. Trauma is an injury that can be misunderstood and requires specific care to heal. One's healing from the wounds of trauma is best aided by the wise and humble attentiveness of another, someone who is willing to create a safe place for the traumatized. Like the scar on my knee, wounds do heal when given the appropriate care. The scar may remain, but the pain no longer stings. Similarly, even when it comes

to emotional wounds, the healing process has much to do with the type of care one receives.

Psychological Trauma

There are various types of traumas, and this book will concentrate on what is known as psychological, or emotional, trauma (terms that can be used interchangeably). Psychological trauma is not isolated to one specific type of event. The many categories into which trauma is divided certainly demonstrate this. For example, sexual trauma, medical trauma, complex trauma, attachment trauma, religious trauma, and betrayal trauma are just a sampling of the most common types of psychological traumas. These can also overlap and intersect, and the effects can vary from person to person.

In the pages ahead, you will be given a clear definition of psychological trauma as well as hear stories that will bring to light the true nature of its impact. These accounts, which I mentioned are composites, are based on years of personal experiences in helping others. The stories will help to provide a clear understanding of the extensive impact of trauma. It is my utmost priority to approach this topic with compassion, to illuminate the far-reaching effects of trauma, and to offer biblical hope to those who may have experienced trauma.

While this book mainly focuses on psychological trauma in general, it is important to acknowledge various subtypes of this trauma that also deserve attention. Though these subcategories of emotional trauma are not exhaustive and are explored only in brief below, this information serves as valuable insight for supporting individuals who have experienced these forms of psychological or emotional wounding. This foundational awareness will equip you to approach the broader landscape of trauma with a more informed perspective that provides you with an awareness of the various categories of trauma.

Generational Trauma

Generational trauma or intergenerational trauma refers to the lasting impact of difficulties faced within families over multiple generations. The theory is that the traumatic magnitude of the situation can be transmitted to the younger generations. This can be manifested in many ways. For example, a great-grandfather who was beaten or regularly humiliated in his younger years because of the color of his skin could develop a deep sense of hopelessness that his condition might never change. He cannot change the color of his skin, after all. To cope with this hopelessness, he would simply accept whatever came to him. This hopeless acceptance might be seen in future generations as passivity or apathy as it relates to improving their circumstances, or it could also be seen in a lack of ambition about the future.

Other examples of generational trauma have been investigated in the children of Holocaust survivors. For example, a young woman who was placed in a concentration camp in Germany may have learned to cope by "cutting off" her emotions. Because of this, she may interact with others in an emotionally distant fashion even after the traumatic situation ended. As she builds a family of her own, the coping that kept her alive during the war may show up in emotional detachment when things get hard at home. When her children experience painful emotions, she may tell them not to cry or avoid talking about what is upsetting, and instead, she may focus on changing the situation that caused the distress. This approach teaches her children to avoid or suppress the emotional pain that may make relationships tumultuous to navigate, to say the least.[1] This model continues for future generations, inferring that feelings should be suppressed.

Not only does the trauma that a person experienced have the potential to impact generations to come, but the ideology of the victimizers can also be passed on to future generations.

Consider what researcher J.P. Gump shares regarding slavery in

America: "There is little in slavery that was not traumatic: the loss of culture, home, kin…sense of self, the destruction of families, through the sales of fathers, mothers, offspring, physical abuse, or even witnessing the castration of a fellow slave."[2] Traumatization did not end with slavery for Black Americans. What is now known as racial trauma continued to be propagated through prejudice after freedom was granted. This prejudice was equally dehumanizing through the enacting of Jim Crow laws. While the civil rights movement paved the way to expose continued racism in America, Black people still faced traumatic realities in day-to-day life. Racial prejudice remains in some of the people and the systems of a country largely shaped by enslavement and discrimination. We are learning that these traumatic experiences were perpetuated from one generation to the next and the ongoing impact can extend to communities as well.

Race-based and generational trauma is not isolated to African Americans. Racial oppression began early in America with the mistreatment of Native Americans. After the Spanish brought the first slaves to the Carolinas in 1526, the brutal treatment of people based on race became prevalent with dreadful acts of genocide and displacement against many Native American tribes. Racial trauma continued with the discrimination of ethnic Jews, Muslims, Asians, and others and it lingers to this day in hate crimes and prejudice against immigrants and refugees. The effects of racial trauma are palpable, lingering in the lives of those who have experienced it, and passed down through generations despite the passage of time.

Complex Trauma

Complex trauma has to do with the amount of time a person was exposed to a stressful or adverse situation. The trauma-inducing situation often begins in early childhood and involves interpersonal

relationships, specifically relationships where there should be a trusting and nurturing connection. Unlike typical emotional trauma, complex trauma is characterized by repeated and chronic incidents such as abuse or neglect. Taking an Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) assessment can help determine whether complex trauma may be a factor in an individual's life. This assessment quantifies exposure to various adverse experiences during childhood and provides insight into the potential long-term impact on a person's emotional well-being. However, it is important to note that while the ACE assessment provides valuable insight, it should not be used as a diagnostic tool, and an evaluation by a qualified professional is essential for accurate diagnosis and appropriate care. For more information on the ACE assessment, see Appendix B at the back of this book.

Complex trauma can lead to difficulty in forming secure relational attachments and can also have a negative impact on a person's ability to regulate their emotions. Complex trauma often has a more profound and enduring impact compared to trauma caused by a single isolated event. It brings its own unique challenges. Effective care for individuals with complex trauma will often require a counselor who can recognize the unique challenges posed by prolonged exposure to adversity and is trained in trauma-informed approaches.

Supporting someone with complex trauma requires patience, empathy, and understanding. Friends, family members, or helpers can be supportive by being a reliable presence who listens and supports the person while being willing to work at a pace most tolerable for the one who has suffered the trauma. If you are walking with someone for whom complex trauma is a reality, you also want to be seeking out consultation for yourself so you know how to care for them well. Pray for wisdom and pray for them regularly. If they are open to it, pray with them and welcome them into a community where they can find acceptance and grace.

Religious Trauma

Religious trauma refers to the psychological or emotional distress stemming from harm done either in religious communities or through religious teachings. Unlike general emotional trauma, religious trauma involves harm caused by religious beliefs, practices, or communities in which rigid doctrines, spiritual abuse, or judgment were expressed.

Distinctively, religious trauma has a negative impact on a person's view of self and of God. This kind of trauma deeply impacts their worldview and their trust of those in positions of spiritual leadership as well as religious institutions and systems. People who have experienced religious trauma often have deep questions related to faith and spirituality that may lead them to turn from beliefs they once firmly held.

Christians whose intentions may be to offer comfort can sometimes add to the distress of one who has experienced religious trauma by offering pat answers to the person's struggle. Hastily saying things like, "You need to forgive and forget," or "This is all in God's plan," or "You just need to find the right church" can prove unhelpful or even detrimental. That's because these types of responses oversimplify the impact of religious trauma and imply that a simple faith is all that is needed to resolve deep wounds. Forgiveness, trusting God, and connecting to a community of believers are important and yet these topics must be approached with wisdom. It's essential for believers to care for those impacted by religious trauma with sensitivity, acknowledging the complexity of their experiences and avoiding simplistic answers that may inadvertently cause further harm.

Vicarious Trauma

Another type of psychological trauma worth mentioning is vicarious or secondary trauma, which can happen when someone is exposed

to another person's trauma. This is common among first responders, medical doctors, therapists, and caring friends or family members of a trauma survivor. Vicarious trauma refers to the emotional impact experienced by people who are indirectly exposed to the trauma of others. This trauma often occurs in those whose role is that of caregiver, mentor, counselor, pastor, or friend to a person who has endured trauma. These helpers absorb the pain and suffering of others.

The pain of people's stories has an impact on helpers. Regardless of your role, if you sit with someone and hear the atrocity of their story, you are permeable and you will be affected. This absorption of a person's story can cause you to have your own doubts. It can also cause you to experience emotional distress and impact your own sense of well-being. Hearing someone process their experience of being in an automobile accident might cause vicarious trauma that may result in increased anxiety while driving or pervasive thoughts about potential accidents. Similarly, learning about someone who has survived a violent assault may lead to heightened fear in seemingly safe situations, nightmares related to the details of that assault, or an increased overall sense of vulnerability.

Because empathetically engaging with others' traumatic experiences has the potential to traumatize those in caregiving or supportive roles, it is essential to be mindful and proactive in self-care. Vicarious trauma can lead to compassion fatigue or burnout, and helpers must be proactive in caring for themselves as they care for others. Enter conversations prayerfully. Spend time in the Word meditating on who God is and his faithfulness to take care of his own. Prioritize spiritual disciplines and rhythms that emphasize truth and hope to counterbalance the discouraging and dreadful stories you might hear when walking with those who have endured trauma. In the resource section of this book, you will find the Compassion Fatigue and Burnout Assessment that I created to assist helpers to gauge how

well they are doing as they care for others (see Appendix C). Take the assessment whether you are feeling symptoms of vicarious trauma or not. Retake it regularly if you are in the role of helper or caregiver for those who may have experienced trauma.

As you can see, trauma is a complex and multifaced topic. As we delve more deeply into an understanding of what trauma is and how it can manifest in people's lives, we will focus specifically on psychological trauma, regardless of its origin. Let's begin by briefly surveying the history of trauma in the field of psychology.

Trauma's History

Before the year 1980, there was no official diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The most common diagnosis of its kind was nicknamed *shell shock* and was given mainly to men suffering from the long-term effects of war. In her book *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman explains, "The soldier who developed a traumatic neurosis was at best a constitutionally inferior human being, at worst a malingerer and a coward." She goes on to state, "Some military authorities maintained that these men did not deserve to be patients at all, that they should be court-martialed or dishonorably discharged rather than given medical treatment."[3]

Women were also treated poorly and often exploited as "objects of study,"[4] leading to compounding traumatic experiences. In fact, the earliest psychological term used to describe what we now recognize as trauma was *hysteria* and, sadly, the treatment lacked understanding and compassion.[5] It is believed that *hysteria*, a word derived from the Greek word *hystera*, which means "uterus" or "womb,"[6] is the first mental health disorder attributed to women and characterized by extreme excitability and emotional overflow.[7] The connection between hysteria and hysterectomy is likely not missed here, and

sadly, one prescribed cure for hysteria in women was removal of the womb, which was thought to be the source of the problems experienced. Women who experienced trauma exhibited disturbing symptoms ranging from extreme emotions to catatonia often occurring after the woman experienced sexual exploitation or rape. The attention given to them by experts was often rooted in curiosity or psychological exploration rather than compassion.

Hysteria was also recognized in men and significant shame was attached to both women and men given this diagnosis. Galen of Pergamon, an ancient Greek physician, noted that "hysterical passion is just a name but varied and innumerable are the forms which it encompasses."[8] The diagnosis of hysteria meant "that the individual is suffering from some persistent form of wickedness, perversity, or weakness of the will."[9] Considering the context of a cultural era where the equality of women was drastically incongruent and the promotion of a machismo characterization of what it means to be a man was propagated, social pressure often caused sufferers to retreat into silence and stigmatization. This left them feeling unheard, disbelieved, and shamed. Sadly, the earliest forms of treatment were not only exploitive but also reckless. Patients were given shaming threats and punishments in efforts to provoke change. Herman shares the reports of a soldier who, unable to speak due to traumatization, was treated with electric shocks to his throat and told to "remember you must act as the hero I expect you to be."

Herman describes how societal pressure influenced the psychiatric field to change the focus away from understanding the traumatized. As "medical interest in the subject of psychological trauma faded," the presences of long-lasting psychiatric patients "became an embarrassment to civilian societies eager to forget."[10] But trauma does not dissipate with silence; instead, it grows. People continued to suffer alone with the memories of the horror they experienced.

It was not until the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 that significant changes began to occur. The distressing symptoms experienced by combat veterans served as a catalyst for trauma research as the post-traumatic effects of soldiers became the focus for understanding trauma. But traumatization existed long before this and psychology now affirms that reality. Marc-Antoine Crocq, a French psychiatrist and leading expert in generalized anxiety disorder, wrote a scholarly article on the history of psychotraumatology and cited many early historical and literary sources that give depictions of trauma. He started the article recognizing that civilization's earliest literature acknowledged the psychological impact that witnessing atrocities such as war and death can have on people. In proving his point, he quoted the Bible, stating, "We are reminded in Deuteronomy 20:1-9, military leaders have long been aware that many soldiers must be removed from the front line because of a nervous breakdown which is contagious." He then cites this:

> When you go out to war against your enemies, and see horses and Chariots and an army larger than your own... the officers shall speak further to the people and say, "Is there any man who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go back to his house, lest he make the heart of his fellows melt like his own."[11]

The purpose of this biblical instruction was not to affirm what is now known as psychological traumatization; however, it does demonstrate that God understands our frame and he recognizes that when we see and encounter terrifying situations—for instance, horses and chariots and armies larger than our own—it has an impact on our experience. It has the possibility to not only make our own heart faint, but the hearts of those around us as well. A better understanding of

trauma can help us know how to respond to people wisely and compassionately. We do not need to repeat the history of the past when it comes to our approach to trauma. We can learn from it and take a humble approach of embracing that sometimes there is much more going on than we know or understand.

We tend to judge what we don't understand. This was the case for early trauma sufferers. Doctors judged that trauma victims were fragile people who had a frenzied temperament, or they viewed them as a diagnostic curiosity that challenged their clinical skills. Society judged them as an embarrassment to be kept out of sight and out of conversations. Even the church has judged trauma victims as being unfaithful Christians or unbelievers, often causing ostracism. In the thirteenth century, the church embraced the "theory of demonical possession leading to treatment by exorcism and finally torture."[12] Remnants of this approach remain in religious thought today and lead to painful stereotyping and marginalization of those who experience traumatization. Certainly spiritual warfare exists, but there is great error in casting judgment upon someone without a careful consideration of all possible factors.

The stigmatization is not only external. Trauma survivors judged themselves as weak and unable to explain or control their distress. This often led to them feeling "hopeless" and being "dead inside." What was needed was for them to be seen as people whose suffering was worthy of compassionate attention.

With the early years of psychological care marked by practices and methods that were often unhelpful and reckless, and with the field of psychiatric research and care casting sufferers in a negative light, the treatment of psychological trauma lacked empathy or overall respect and honor for the patients. At the same time, the church was also uncertain of what to make of trauma survivors, treating them as people who lacked self-control, were uncooperative, or even

demon possessed. To top it all off, at that time, the care and research of trauma focused mainly on how to stop the symptoms that manifested physically. The treatments then were often counterproductive, making matters worse for the patient and sometimes even retraumatizing survivors. Nothing addressed the inner dimensions of injury. There was little concern for what might have happened to them to cause the distressing symptoms.

Much has changed in the clinical world today. Psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors have grown significantly in their understanding of trauma. There have been remarkable changes and advancements in psychological care based on clinical research, which has led to more sensitive therapeutic approaches.

Will the church follow a similar path? For more than half a century, the church has been essentially uninformed and ill-equipped to offer care to trauma survivors. Despite advancement in biblical and Christian-based counseling models, trauma has remained a subject of mystery—and sometimes suspicion—and faith-based resources have been few. Often the priority of personal holiness can cause pastors, lay counselors, and helpers to be hesitant to label something as trauma when it looks similar to sinful behavior. A female church member who chooses to watch the Sunday gathering online might be viewed as forsaking the assembly for not being physically present when it appears she has no justifiable reason to watch from home. The teen who will not look the pastor or youth leader in the eye when they talk could be seen as disrespectful to spiritual leadership. The man who gets distressed when someone is sitting in his regular seat is seen as angry when he moves around the sanctuary rapidly looking for a new seat. The student who struggles to stay in his class or connect socially may be seen as noncompliant or socially awkward.

While each of these could look like a willful or stubborn response, a greater understanding is gained by learning more of the story. The

woman is triggered because church is where she was repeatedly sexually molested as a child. She longs to be in church with others, but when she has attended, fear has gripped her through the entire sermon—to the point she's struggled to recall what she heard.

The teen who avoids eye contact lived with a highly abusive and ranting father until his mother fled with the teen to keep him safe. He remembers receiving a severe beating for looking his father in the eye, a gesture his father told him was not only disrespectful but also a challenge to his authority.

The man who appears angry is no longer comfortable sitting anywhere he cannot see the exit after surviving an active shooter incident in his office building.

The student was adopted at four years old. The country he came from was known for cold and distant caregivers and his orphanage was no exception. He was given only minimal attention beyond feeding and bathing when needed. Social and relational connection do not come easily for him. Though he is now in high school, he struggles with distressing social anxiety and can only tolerate limited amounts of social interaction.

We must always take sin seriously, but if we are going to change how the church cares for the traumatized, we must expand our understanding of what besides sin might be driving people's actions. We must become compassionately curious people who avoid assumptions and seek to learn more. Christians must become invested in people's stories, and we must become more aware of other potential factors at play. Helpers must become students of trauma to usher in needed change. Reading this book is one step in that direction. I believe more than ever that the church desires to grow in trauma awareness. The need for resources on the topic of trauma will continue to be in demand, and I hope this book is just one of many that you, as a helper or friend, might read.

Thankfully, improved methods of care and research continue to change in the psychiatric world as well. Positive traction for trauma survivors started to be seen after 1980 when the American Psychiatric Association added PTSD to the third edition of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III).[13] Since that addition, there has been an increasing emphasis on comprehending the effects of trauma, as well as a growing effort to provide compassionate care and assistance to those who have experienced it. Much of the research is focused on how the brain is impacted by trauma and how symptoms are experienced physically, emotionally, and relationally. But the brain is complex and memory networks are just shy of mysterious. To say we are still learning about trauma will likely be a statement that will ring true for decades to come.

With improvement in psychiatric care and advancement of a more compassionate approach to trauma care developing, Christians now have more opportunity than ever before to improve their understanding of trauma and trauma care. Every encounter with trauma is an opportunity to show the love of Jesus to those who are suffering. It is an opportunity to affirm that the God who created them does not condemn them for having physical and emotional responses to terrible situations, but rather, he understands.

Every encounter with trauma is an opportunity to show the love of Jesus to those who are suffering.

Becoming trauma aware will require a compassionate and holistic approach to people. We may not fully comprehend the experience of a trauma survivor—in fact, they may not fully comprehend it either—but we can seek to learn. In gaining more knowledge about trauma and learning a person's specific story, we can prevent further

emotional harm and exemplify a kindhearted response, much like the way Jesus loved and cared for those who were in deep need of help. This is an approach that will require us to embrace a Christlike demeanor toward sufferers, while at the same time acknowledge that we are all learners in the process. Let's begin with a deeper dive into what trauma truly is and expand our understanding of how it manifests in our lives.

The Impact of Trauma

The word *trauma* and various forms of the word (*traumatic* or *traumatized*) are, at times, tossed out flippantly in conversation to overstate the impact of certain relatively minor events. People will say they were traumatized when they receive a bad haircut, were asked to introduce themselves in front of a large group, or when they lost or misplaced a sentimental object. While everyone's experiences are unique, and what may seem insignificant to one person may be more significant to another, these circumstances, though upsetting, embarrassing, or frustrating, are likely not going to cause lasting emotional distress.

The American Psychological Association describes trauma as "an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster."[14] This definition, however, is often expanded to include the more comprehensive experience that trauma sufferers face. Professor Preston Hill, influenced by psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk, describes trauma in a concise yet accurate way when he says trauma is an "inescapable stressful event that overwhelms someone's coping mechanisms."[15] The simplicity of the definition captures it well. Trauma overwhelms us and leaves us unable to cope.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), however, offers a more robust definition, which can also be very helpful in understanding trauma. While I appreciate simple

definitions, such as those offered by Hill and van der Kolk, this one will better serve you in understanding what is meant when the word *trauma* is used in this book. They define trauma as resulting "from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as *physically* or *emotionally* harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's *functioning* and *mental, physical, emotional, mental,* and *spiritual* well-being"[16] (emphasis added).

From this definition and the emphasized text, you can see that traumatic events impact the whole person. Trauma can wound both physically and emotionally, and the signs of traumatization can manifest in many areas of a person's life. This definition also emphasizes that the impact is lasting and distressful.

Judith Herman, again in her book *Trauma and Recovery*, goes further in explaining the impact of trauma on a person. She states,

> Traumatic events called into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim's faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis.[17]

As you read that description, can you see how what she is describing could mean that even a steady Christian might question things they firmly believe when trauma hits? Trauma can cast deeply held beliefs into the shadows of doubt.

Another word that will be helpful for us to understand is *traumatization*. Traumatization is a term used to describe the negative impact

a traumatic event or series of events has on a person's life. Traumatization captures the state in which a person is now living, taking into consideration their exposure to trauma and the various ways trauma impedes their capacity to function optimally in their daily life. Experiencing a traumatic event does not necessarily mean that a person will become traumatized. We will discuss why that is in future sections of this book. The experience of trauma and its impact on an individual's well-being can vary significantly. It is essential to recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to addressing the effects of traumatization.

Trauma can cast deeply held beliefs into the shadows of doubt.

One last explanation is that of the phrase *trauma response*. When you think of a trauma response, you may have in mind certain behaviors or thought processes that are mainly negative. Maybe you think of someone hyperventilating or becoming physically agitated. Or maybe you think of someone becoming paranoid or hypervigilant. You might think of reactions or thoughts that need changing and are unhealthy. Allow me to redefine your understanding of a trauma response.

When someone goes through a traumatic experience, in order to survive, they must do something. Maybe it is resisting an attacker (fight), running from a burning building (flight), or pretending to be asleep when a drunk parent comes home (freeze). Any of these choices could be different based on the circumstances faced, but whatever is done is done for survival. That is resiliency at work—adapting in whatever way is needed to endure. Their response to the trauma keeps them alive. So now when a current situation triggers

a memory or emotion experienced in the traumatic past, the body goes back into survival mode. Committed to keeping the person alive, the body seeks to provide whatever was needed previously when the trauma first happened.

When seen in this context, we realize a person's trauma response is a way of adapting for survival. It is the body's way of choosing to survive once again. To put this as a colleague of mine once did, sometimes our body doesn't get the message the war is over. This is in part because the body doesn't always distinguish between the distress caused by the memory or the distress triggered by the actual event and will activate this survival response either way, even when there is nothing presently threatening the individual. In essence, an actual threat, a perceived threat, and a remembered threat can get the same reaction from the body. That is a trauma response.

From these definitions and descriptions, we can see the impact trauma can have on a person's life. What you've read up to this point may have resonated with you in connection with your own life or the life of someone you care about, and you may be wondering what can be done. This book will guide you into a better understanding of what it means for Christians to understand trauma and what help looks like for the sufferer. As you read, be prayerfully open to what the Lord might teach you about your own story or the story of someone who has gone through trauma.

Looking again at the definition of trauma from SAMHSA, and recalling that traumatic events "violate the victim's faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis," then the church ought to set out to learn all it can about trauma and how to help survivors. The church ought to be the place where people turn when their faith is given a painful blow. Traumatized people are helped when the church learns what trauma is and how it affects the lives of those who have experienced it. But definitions are not

enough. There are unique reasons why believers need to understand trauma, and we will look at those reasons in the coming pages. In doing so, we will continue to expand our understanding of trauma. But let me first clarify who this book is for.

A Note to My Readers

While this book will benefit both the helper and the sufferer, it is written primarily for those who are walking with others and who desire to be more informed and educated about trauma. You will find both biblically and scientifically based direction to help you better prepare to care for the traumatized, and if you are someone who has been through trauma, I believe you will find help and hope here as well. This resource is an attempt to help the church, the body of believing brothers and sisters, better understand trauma. But I am certain that some will be reading this to better understand their own story of trauma. With that said, before we go any further, allow me to briefly address both of these readers.

To the fellow helper:

This book aims to equip you to become a helpful part of the healing process for those who have experienced a traumatizing event or situation. Whether you are a friend, family member, mentor, pastor, counselor, or whatever your relationship to the trauma sufferer, you have the potential to offer comfort and support. You don't need a formal degree or a certification to make a difference in the life of a person with a trauma story. However, it is essential to be well informed regarding the impact of trauma, well informed about how trauma might manifest in someone's life, and well informed about how to respond with

empathy and compassion. *Trauma Aware* will provide you with just that. I have prayed for you, trusting you will become a better helper through what you read here.

To the sufferer:

If you have picked up this book as one who has experienced trauma, I am so glad. I hope and believe you will find the content of these pages of great benefit. But let me make one significant suggestion: Let me encourage you to seek the support of a trusted friend or mentor by asking them to read this book together with you so that you have a companion to walk with you as you process what you are learning. Go slowly and allow yourself time to do this processing. If you are a follower of Jesus, you are never alone and you can trust God to help you and care for you. May the words of Isaiah 42:3-4 encourage you:

> He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the dimly burning flame. He will encourage the faint-hearted, those tempted to despair. He will see full justice given to all who have been wronged. He won't be satisfied until truth and righteousness prevail throughout the earth, nor until even distant lands beyond the seas have put their trust in him (TLB).

Welcome to this journey. I have prayed for you.