

DEVELOPING RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF DIFFICULT MEDICAL MISSIONS

..so that we can preach the gospel in the regions
beyond you.. (2 Cor. 10:16)



Purpose

- ▣ To consider the long-term effects of engaging in medical work in a missions context, which most often takes place in austere conditions.
- ▣ To discuss the basic differences between PTSD, post-traumatic grief, and moral injury.
- ▣ Understand the fundamental purpose of involving ourselves in the suffering of others.
- ▣ To consider what approaches to self-care are the most effective for our unique personality.

Resilience

- “The capacity to accurately perceive and respond well to stressful situations.” (1)
- “The ability to bounce back from adversity, to bend and not break under extreme stress; to persevere in spite of ongoing stresses.” (2)
- Is “characterized as a set of good outcomes that occur in spite of serious threats to adaptation...” (2)

- ▣ Sieg, Diane (March, 2015) “7 Habits of Highly Resilient Nurses”. Sigmanursing.org
- ▣ Meichenbaum, Donald, “Resiliency Building As A Means To Prevent PTSD And Related Adjustment Problems In Military Personnel”

Context

- ▣ Roughly 50-60% of adults in the U.S. are exposed to traumatic event, but only 5-10% develop PTSD or clinical problems.
- ▣ Most SP staff is exposed to the medical side at some point. Non-medical are not immune.
- ▣ Many staff are either long-term or respond repeatedly over time, compounding the exposures of suffering.
- ▣ “When evil is unleashed, the man who does the most will always feel the worst, just as the man who feels the worst often stands the best chance of doing the most.” (Romeo Dallaire)

PTSD

- ▣ A deep pain and suffering that is unrelenting in the soul, causing significant disruption in the life of the sufferer. Significant symptoms of insomnia, guilt, anger, family strife, addictions, lostness, emptiness and malaise are manifest and often denied by the sufferer. There can be the feeling of “no way out” which may result in self-harm or suicide.

Moral Injury

- ▣ “Moral injury refers to an injury to an individual's moral conscience resulting from an act of perceived moral transgression which produces profound emotional guilt and shame, and in some cases also a sense of betrayal, anger and profound 'moral disorientation’.” (1)
- ▣ Litz, Brett T.; Stein, Nathan; Delaney, Eileen; Lebowitz, Leslie; Nash, William P.; Silva, Caroline; Maguen, Shira (December 2009). "Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans: A preliminary model and intervention strategy". *Clinical Psychology Review*. 29 (8): 695–706.

Moral Injury

Self-induced

- ▣ I take/omit an action that betrays/fails my intention.
- ▣ Medication/treatment error
- ▣ Lacking needed skill
- ▣ Becoming ill or weakened
- ▣ Losing perspective

Results in:

- Anger
- Shame
- Humiliation
- Fear of more failure
- Withdrawal
- Fear of failing the team/patients
- Embarrassment of uncontrolled emotions



Moral Injury

- ▣ Others-induced
 - ▣ Someone else takes/omits an action (or causes me to) that betrays what is normally considered “right”.
- ▣ Watching what seems to be errors or poor treatment.
- ▣ Being forced to take an action foreign to training or experience.
- ▣ Bedside conflict.
- ▣ Poor supply or equipment.
- ▣ Administrative limitations.

Results in:

- ▣ Anger
- ▣ Disappointment
- ▣ Confusion
- ▣ Loss of trust
- ▣ Feeling of failure
- ▣ Fear of future injury
- ▣ Loss of mission idealism
- ▣ Loss of control
- ▣ Disorientation of moral compass

Soul scars

The semi-permanent effect that involvement with human suffering has on the mind and soul of the caregiver. Healing happens over time, but new injuries create more scars; all of which makes noticeable changes in a person.

Resilience provides an endurance that minimizes the impact and has the power to prepare us adequately for the next round of suffering.

Traumatic grief is the effect of being part of the suffering, but does not impair or otherwise create long-term deleterious effects in our lives.

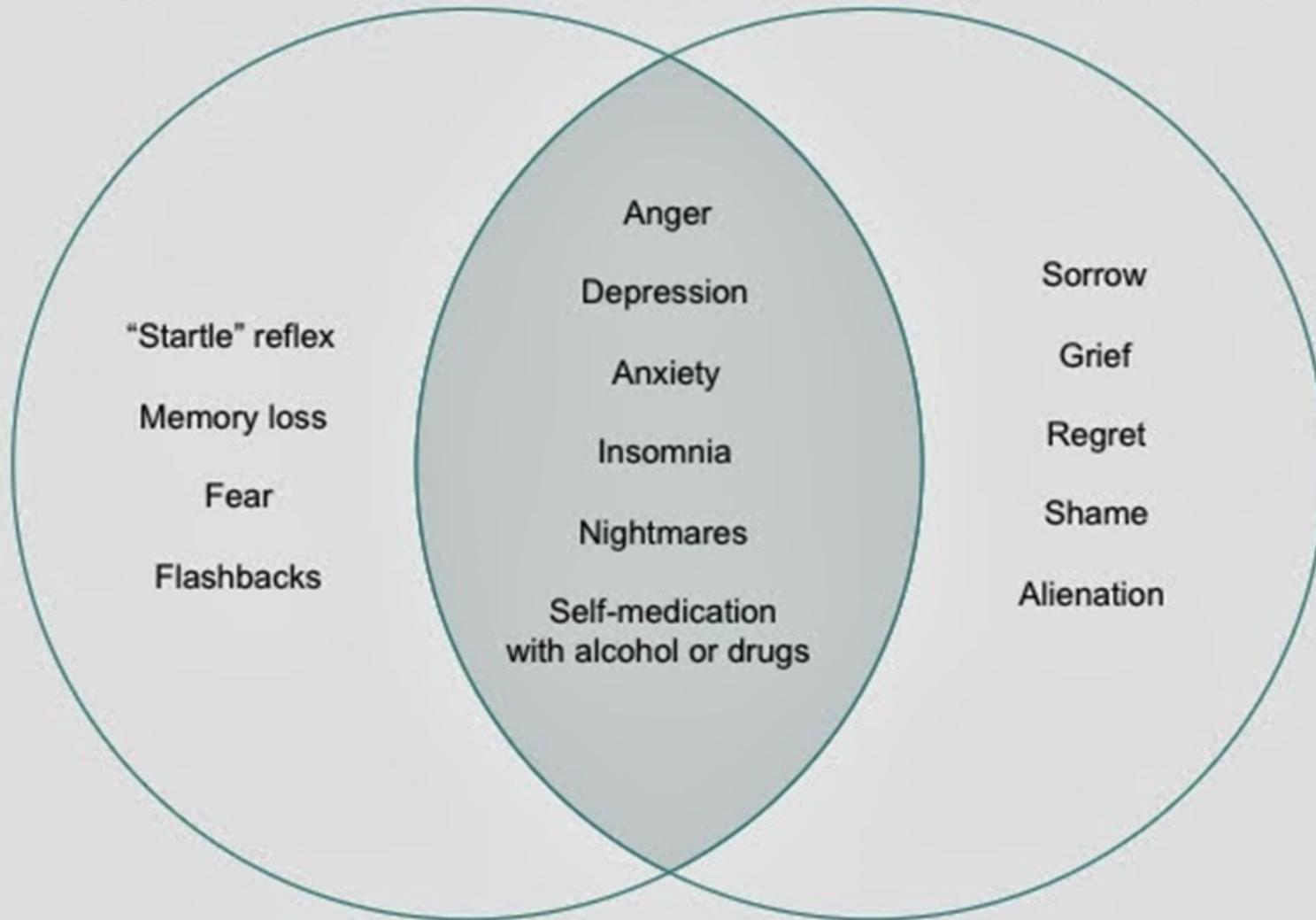
The Suffering Servant



PTSD

BOTH

MORAL INJURY



Source: The Huffington Post

Resilience confers endurance

- ▣ “the ability to continue forward and maintain equilibrium in the face of chronic adversity...to learn to live with ongoing fear and uncertainty and the ability to adapt to difficult and challenging life experiences” (Litz)



Posttraumatic growth

Exposure to traumatic events often improves the lives of people.

(Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006)



Growth provides preparation for future insults and traumas.

Biblical Perspectives

- ▣ Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Phil. 2:17
- ▣ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Eph. 2:10
- ▣ Isaiah 43:1-3
- ▣ The devil would like to devour us- 1 Peter 5:6-11
- ▣ Reasons to suffer on behalf of others:
 - To extend God's grace and hope.
 - To ease suffering.
 - For open doors for the gospel.

Relevant Questions

- ▣ Am I developing resiliency over time?
- ▣ Am I harmed beyond recovery?
- ▣ Is there any type of mission I am not fit for?
- ▣ Is my physical capacity ready for the mission?
- ▣ Do others in the mission perceive me as reliable?
- ▣ Would my family/friends/church say I show signs of resiliency?
- ▣ Am I protecting those around me from the darkness I have seen, or am I hiding my pain in unhealthy ways that re-injure me?

Self-Care

Reactive

- ▣ Balance of alone/ group time
- ▣ Healthy decompression
- ▣ Engage grief in the moment
- ▣ Keep connected to church
- ▣ Exercise, eat well
- ▣ Resist sleep medications
- ▣ Keep serving others
- ▣ Talk about your experiences
- ▣ Work through specifics
 - Reframe, let go, accept, be thankful, God is good

Proactive

- ▣ Stay in Scripture and pray
- ▣ Work on family/ marriage
 - Don't respond if troubled
- ▣ Deal with health issues
- ▣ Know your limitations
- ▣ Serve in your church
- ▣ Stay connected to the team
- ▣ Be as fit as possible
- ▣ Keep developing your theology of suffering.

Readings

- ▣ The Problem of Pain- C.S. Lewis
- ▣ Suffering and the Sovereignty of God- John Piper
- ▣ Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering – Keller
- ▣ Making Sense of God- Keller
- ▣ C.S. Lewis and Human Suffering- Marie Conn
- ▣ Surprised by Suffering – R.C. Sproul

References

- ▣ Calhoun, L.G. & Tedeschi, R.G. (Eds). (2006). Handbook of posttraumatic growth: Research and practice. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum Associates.
- ▣ Litz, Brett T.; Stein, Nathan; Delaney, Eileen; Lebowitz, Leslie; Nash, William P.; Silva, Caroline; Maguen, Shira (December 2009). "Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans: A preliminary model and intervention strategy". *Clinical Psychology Review*. 29 (8): 695–706.
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References

- ▣ Journal of Lutheran Ethics, August 2018, Larson, Duane; Zust, Jeff.
<https://elca.org/jle/articles/1242>
- ▣ Powers, Brian. May 2017, "On Scripture: Moral Injury-the Devil that Looks to Devour"