

**Master's Thesis:**

**Overcoming Trauma-Related Fear**

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The ambition of this paper is to identify an effective and integrative strategy for overcoming trauma-related fear. The proposed method includes primarily a blend of spiritual, cognitive behavioral, and exposure techniques to overcome fears. The gradual reprogramming of beliefs through healthy thinking, life-giving relationships, and improved self-image through Christian identity, form the basis for ministering to someone suffering from the effects of trauma. Most people benefit from the help of a minister, counselor, or friend on the healing journey.

Because beliefs help shape human experience, suppositions regarding existence present a superior imperative to life itself, and to a greater extent, determine understanding of reality: ontologically, psychologically, and spiritually. Life experiences filter through the perceptual lens that is fashioned by beliefs that inform responses. Faith in God and the Christian worldview support a healthy thought life. The biblical narrative presupposes spiritual laws and universal principles that govern humanity, offering contextual evidence for the need for salvation from a fallen world. In the earthly experiential plane, integration of thoughts into worldview can either help or hurt, create a robust barrier from the onslaught of contrary ideas, or afford the costly influence of cursory assumptions. In a given day, a person thinks thousands of thoughts. Some thoughts are integrated into the psyche, while others are forgotten, and some haunt and torment like disembodied spirits. The purpose of this discussion is not to determine the origin of such influence; rather, to view holistically the importance of

beliefs as a foundation for thought, and the interconnection of this dynamic to fear.

Psychologists have gone to great lengths to define trauma. The classification of traumatic experiences into categories and subsets and the application of numerical value, has done little to quell the pain of sufferers. For all this effort, traumatic experiences contribute to the modern problem of anxiety, and the fear-based behaviors prevalent today. Fear hijacks thought, and sabotages peace in a cyclical mechanism that ensnares sufferers in physical and emotional unrest, and compounds guilt and shame. Trauma often interferes with the peace that is promised through Christ, bringing about contrary experiences that disrupt the mind.

From the biblical perspective, the enemy mocks God and brings chaos upon all creation, distorting, destroying, and robbing life of the idealistic heavenly purity portrayed in the Garden of Eden. Spiritual attacks infiltrate the earthly plane through various means, but quite often the mind is the entryway of demonic affliction. Spiritual warfare involves adversarial forces, that seek to impose power in opposition to God onto the inhabitants of the earth. Emerging from the invisible realm, these demonic forces afflict the human inhabitants of the earth in attempt to prevent the embodiment of godly ideals. These demonic forces represent the ultimate effort to thwart the great commission.

Unsavoury and traumatic experiences like abuse, loss, accidents, and other tragedies are the byproduct of a fallen world, that predispose a person to trauma-based

fear. The fear mechanism is one way the enemy prevents humanity from advancing the Kingdom of God. When a person is paralyzed by fear, God's will may be impeded on earth to varying degrees. The degree of the impediment varies and may play out within the context of a microcosmic scale or in some cases, the macrocosmic. The individual first suffers within the scope of their unique reality and existence. Perception of the self becomes distorted as the enemy prevents a person from living from their true identity in Christ. This suffering expands from the individual context into the interpersonal by interfering with the individual purpose in the macrocosmic connection for all of humanity to be reconciled to the creator. As the individual suffers, the corporate body also suffers. God's reconciliatory purpose for humanity is thwarted, paused, distracted from, and even destroyed by traumatic events. People live out of a worldly image instead of being Christlike.

From this contextual backdrop, trauma comes about in an imperfect reality, where innumerable overlapping mechanisms of causality impose upon one another, intentionally and unintentionally. Existence in the material world presents an unjust reality, predisposing sentient beings to the intrusion of unpleasant experiences of various origin, and the potentiality of associated thought distortions. Such conditions come about in often unpredictable and strange circumstances, and other times through mundane parameters. Trauma arises in conjunction with other organisms, objects, and places experientially in alliance with sensory information that leaves a lasting impact.

The wounds originate from something that happened, or something that did not happen, but not in a vacuum.

Barbara Moon, in her book *Joy-Filled Relationships*, describes two primary types of trauma as identified by the *Life Model*, Type A and Type B traumas. Type A trauma is the result of neglect of any kind. Such trauma is found in the longstanding results of not receiving proper love and care during the early developmental years. Unmet needs, like not having shelter or the presence of a parent in the home for example, may result in Type A trauma. Type B trauma on the other hand represents the terrible things that happen to a person, like physical abuse, the death of a loved one, or illness. The emphasis from Moon's perspective, is the relationship between maturity and trauma as it pertains to attachment theory. Trauma happens in relationship to others and often during early psychosocial development. <sup>1</sup>

Barbara theorizes that the necessary receipt of proper care during early childhood development, contributes to the kind of attachment bonds formed between caregivers and child, borrowing from the earlier work of Margaret Ainsworth. From here she shares the work of Dr. Jim Wilder's *Life Model*, that presents the ability to thrive on a spectrum based on attachment, with the associated feelings connected to various parts of the limbic system. A sense of belonging happens in the attachment center known as the thalamus. The amygdala, decides what is good or bad in the environment,

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<sup>1</sup> Moon, Barbara. *Joy-Filled Relationships*. (E-Book: Barbara Moon, 2012), 29-30.

and can cause a person to be either life giving or self-centered. The cingulate helps a person to synchronize with God and others, or share mutual mind, which brings peace, joy and forgiveness. Mutual mind in essence, is sharing a similar state of mind with someone else, often with eye contact the produces joy. Maturity is built in the pre-frontal cortex, where the personality base operates and determines identity. The left and right hemispheres together develop the understanding and explanation a person has for their reality. <sup>2</sup>

Attachment theory and the brain levels are helpful as a basis for understanding the development of trauma-based fears and anxiety disorders in general, and can be applied for inner healing and personal growth. Early childhood trauma is generally accepted as a contributing factor in correlation to adult sufferers of mental health disorders, especially anxiety and depression. The relationship between trauma and disease in general is indisputable.

The primary emphasis of Moon's work is on maturity, which is one lens through which to view mental, emotional and spiritual health. She theorizes that positive gains in these areas are attributed to various activities that increase joy and connect to Christ. The greatest application from her standpoint can be found in attachment to God, and in application through Immanuel Prayer. Such application requires a Christian worldview

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<sup>2</sup> Moon, Barbara. *Joy-Filled Relationships*. (E-Book: Barbara Moon, 2012), 42-45.

and a basic belief system founded on the word of God, which provides a solid foundation for change.

However, this work is limited insofar as the precise application to specific phobias or in the case of complex post-traumatic stress disorder for example. The application remains in her process of suffering well, but offers only a big picture glimpse as to how to effectively cure trauma-based fear. The complexity of trauma is limited by this particular theory that relates trauma to developmental maturity, which is not always useful in every situation. Not every fear is based in attachment problems or stunted maturity in a particular area, although this knowledge is helpful in understanding how relationships strengthen a person's willingness to face fears, trust others, and even God. Future relationships can fill the gaps where past relationships were suboptimal. In essence, attachment makes a person feel loved, accepted, and most importantly, not alone. Relationships heal but might not offer the entire answer to overcoming very specific issues especially as it pertains to trauma-based fear.

Whether trauma happens early in life or not, diverse elements complicate the resulting damage from these experiences. The effects of trauma are not entirely incidental, or damaging solely to the individual sufferer, as other people suffer as well. Trauma inhibits, paralyzes, confuses, confounds, and clouds the mental space. Hearts are broken and lives are shattered because of traumatic experiences, and such hits on an individual life also affect the corporate body of Christ.

Regardless of the expediency of an unpleasant experience, the fear might grip and transform individuals, groups, and even nations for countless years. World wars exemplify the shift from spiritual peace to unrest, the aftermath of which have set the stage for dictatorships, massive mind-control, and abandonment of spiritual values. Beliefs in this environment rapidly shift, as people search for a scapegoat or attempt to solve problems through unhealthy means, in reaction to intense emotions. Unmitigated emotional responses tend to be rooted in fear.

Fear as a pure emotion is entirely harmless, and serves to protect an organism from injury or death. The beliefs one has about a specific experience eliciting the emotion however, might produce harm or danger. Beliefs typically begin as thoughts that stand out as significant to an individual, that can influence everything from perception of reality to reactions to the environment. What happens immediately after a traumatic experience is as important as the interpretation in forming a response to the significant event. This is true for nations but also for the individual.

Mitigating factors in the effects of trauma might include immediate emotional support during, or right after, a triggering event. Words of encouragement that appropriately address the fear, rooted in truth, without creating a false story. Such assistance might come in the form of a loving, reassuring caregiver, or in the sincere, unwavering validation from a stranger, or in the heartfelt speech of a national leader. A prayer to invite Jesus into the pain can alleviate the emotional discomfort in the

moment and remove fear. Words spoken to the person, regardless of the source, can be integrated into the internal narrative about a negative experience, and buffer potential long-term experience of trauma-based fear, as exemplified by the development of phobia, generalized anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and even depression. The bad beliefs associated with an experience can be mitigated, assuming such provisions are available to a person.

Individual Christian worldview protects against the negative outcomes associated with traumatic events. Reliance on God and scripture, and the strength of beliefs, provide resilience to negative experiences and tolerance for severe pain. Faith in God, and the Christian perspective can be a positive lens through which to view bad experiences, as integral to the encompassing theme of earthly suffering. This depth of philosophical understanding requires spiritual knowledge that can be accomplished to varying degrees during a lifetime.

In general, the Christian worldview prepares the believer to expect trouble here on earth. At the same time, faith points to the promise of a future perfect realm without suffering or death—a grand vision for creation that infuses hope. The power of hope at times, in love of God and the faith in His promises, might be the only thing that keeps a person alive. Even with the hope of the gospel Christians experience worldly troubles. People are overcome by the effects of an unpleasant experience, while being

surrounded by the loving family of God, possessing deep biblical knowledge, and faithfully accepting biblical principles as truth.

Jim Wilder in his book, *Renovated: God, Dallas Willard, & the Church That Transforms* writes:

“Trauma and deprivation hinder or block the development of maturity by teaching us to be enemies rather than God’s family. By healing through the Holy Spirit, these blockages to maturity are removed. Fellowship with the rest of “our people” trains our brain to grow what has been missing. With a loving attachment that will not let us go, we can develop a fully formed, joyful, and Christlike character.”<sup>3</sup>

Trauma, from this perspective, blocks a person from understanding their identity in God’s family. God alone can heal this deficiency through His loving presence. The Body of Christ offers nearness to God that heals trauma. Individual willingness to engage with the spiritual family in meaningful interactions allows healing to transpire. This necessitates transparency that is so often met with shame and fear of rejection, abandonment, and judgment. The unwillingness to move beyond surface level conversations thwarts the necessary exposure to reveal the deeper innerworkings of a person’s heart. Secrets obscured by darkness require the light of God’s truth. Shame is a mechanism of the devil to ensnare humankind into isolating mechanisms like guilt, self-

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<sup>3</sup> Wilder, Dr. Jim. *Renovated: God, Dallas Willard & the Church that Transforms*. (East Peoria: Shepherd’s House, Inc.: 2020), 90.

hate, and false persona, that lock away the pain from others. In many cases a person trapped in this circumstance may not even talk to God about their problems.

Christians suffer from anxiety disorders just like anyone else, despite the Bible's repeated treatment of fear. Biblical literature interweaves scripture consistently in opposition to fear. From one interpretive perspective, fear might be seen conclusively in conjunction with lack of faith. While the essence of this perspective transmits an intrinsically philosophical, theological truth, the recitation of scripture in effort to resolve an immediate problem might be met with resistance. Such helping methods can push someone away and produce the opposite of the desired outcome. A specialized level of combined intellectual and spiritual wisdom is necessary in the employment of any mode of healing. The same is true in the application of scripture from a biblical contextual narrative to a present-day real-world problem.

Oversimplification denies the numerous factors that form the complex, multifaceted, mind-body-spirit connection, and ignores the complexity of unique, individual suffering. Christian beliefs, scripture included, are helpful in healing, and serve as a useful component in a holistic approach. However, merely speaking truth about a problem and expecting an issue to disappear negates the power of experience to impress on the biological system to create a natural response, and at least in the short-term, bypass logic. In Pavlov's study of dogs, the salivation in response to a bell was clearly not intended by the animals, but a byproduct of the association with the

oncoming expectation to stimuli: food. When two stimuli are paired repeatedly, the response is reinforced. Such can be said of the child who is hit in the face every time it speaks, as the father shouts obscenities and stifles its freedom of expression. In time, the very sound of escalated voices might create bodily discomfort, extreme fear or panic, and eventually result in the fear of men altogether. To an onlooker, such exaggerated response to stimuli might seem unwarranted or absurd, but the neurochemical reaction of the frightened child is logical when viewed through an objective lens. Knowing the historical context and the development of the fear response, yields to a better understanding of the observed outcome.

In any case, the faith and fear mechanism could be viewed interpretatively and manipulated, to apply scripture to circumstance. From this perspective, in application to the example above, the child's subconscious expectation of pain in the presence of men might be interpreted as an act of faith. Said plainly, she is faithfully expecting men to comply to her preconceived notion to act in a certain manner. From this interpretive standpoint, the subject presents a lack of faith in the possibility of the circumstance to not fulfill this expectation. Another conclusion from this perspective might attack the girl's perceived lack of faith in God. This critical assertion is unhelpful, and contrary to healing. The placement of fault on the child, even vicariously through the philosophical interpretation of lack of faith, is illogical at best, and insensitive to the call of the Christian to Christlikeness.

This method of cut and paste application of scripture takes a contextual biblical statement and attempts to apply it to non-biblical circumstance. Passing judgment on another person's suffering drives people from the religion. Humans do not possess God's power to view a person's entire life, heart, and mind, and therefore cannot conclude that lack of faith is the source of their pain. Alternatively, a superior conclusion might be that the fallen nature of the material realm offers the preponderance of pain throughout life, and Christians are called to share in this burden for the world. Partaking in suffering presents an enormous component of the call to Christendom.

Quite often, fear as an experience in relation to Christianity might be brushed off as a sinful lack of faith in God, as a dismissive means of eluding a pervasive problem. Whether for lack of skill, unwillingness to extend tangible help, or pure laziness on the part of an individual or the collective body of the church, all too often the experience of fear is interpreted as moral failure. The undercurrent of such judgment strengthens the wall of shame that prevents individuals from seeking necessary help.

Trauma in general presents a complex area of study, and especially in application. Getting to know individual stories requires patience, and motivation to understand the pain of another. Acquiring the required trust alone to procure detailed information from someone poses several problems. Sometimes traumatic experiences are forgotten, while other times the images are so vividly forged into the memory that

the details haunt and recur in flashbacks or nightmares. In some instances, the first-person information might be unreliable, except that it is meaningful to the perception of reality for the individual, and in application to their present condition. All the same, complications to the apprehension of uniquely personal stories, and experiential trauma abound. Simply telling someone to trust God more, for example, in general is great advice, but is lacking in a specific, practical approach to a problem. The statement attempts to correct without offering a hand; like telling someone what is wrong without explaining what is right.

In broader perspective the biblical narrative consistently encourages its characters not to fear. The point of this effort is to build individual confidence in pursuit of freedom from fear, and should not be interpreted as criticism of the experience of fear itself. Blaming the individual for a feeling is nonsensical. However, contending with someone to take responsibility for their response to a stimulus is a reasonable supposition, and can be taught. Fear is a primitive emotion that humans have dealt with since the beginning of time. The garden narrative shares that two original humans hid from God, and one of them explained to their creator why he was afraid.<sup>4</sup> Later in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus experienced fear to the point of sweating blood, a rare condition known as hematohidrosis. Despite intense emotions, Jesus continually sought the father regarding his situation, and chose to courageously follow through with his

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<sup>4</sup> Gn 3:8-10 (New American Standard Bible)

mission amid the dreadful feelings he experienced in his human condition. He pushed through and accomplished his objective here on earth. This behavioral model can be used as an example, and perhaps the greatest, as to the benefit of ultimately overcoming fear. Throughout his life Jesus engaged in continual connection to the Father, and to a lesser extent, he maintained reliable connection to his followers due to their sin nature. He talked to the Father about everything, and modeled the steadfast communication Christians can benefit from with Him, and with each other today. This model proves especially helpful when dealing with trauma-based fear.

Considering Jesus' experience, God clearly understands the emotional components of fear, the nature of trauma, and the totality of the human condition. Therefore, fear might be reasonably viewed as an emotion to push through, to conquer and overcome, instead of shaming or denying. A more accurate application of scripture then from the faith-based perspective remains the pursuit of God in all things, including a healthy thought life, faith through prayer and action, inner healing, emotional freedom, and confidence in oneself as a child of God. Adopting a healthy Christian worldview will serve to strengthen a person through exposure to difficulties during a limited lifetime. A robust faith-based perspective protects an individual from believing the pain here on earth is permanent, instead treating it as part of the uncomfortable reality of enduring worldly chaos until God's promises are completely fulfilled.

Mishandling trauma-related fear distorts the painful reality of circumstances through ineffectual means, and compounds such matters with introduction of tangential trauma. Most people at some point in their life will experience trauma, even at the hands of the church or other Christians. Although not all traumatic experiences develop into disordered thinking or formal diagnosis of an anxiety disorder, there can still be long-lasting consequences. After a traumatic experience, faith in God can be challenged, and even lost, especially when religion is involved.

The corporate body of Christ shares the responsibility to care for the wounded and brokenhearted. This is the call of the Christian life—to serve and tend to the needs of others. Sometimes the Christian family surrounding a person compounds the suffering, instead of alleviating the pain. When fear is met with criticism, and the anxious person is accused of lacking faith, the results can be devastating. Ridicule produces and reinforces shame, driving a person further into their affliction. Self-blame resulting from such careless use of language, contributes to the already troubling mechanisms of guilt and shame in augmenting anxiety. Shame pushes a person deeper inward, down into a private, internal, and often chaotic world. Obsessive thoughts and inward focus feed the neurosis of anxiety. Thought formations like “what will people think,” and “what if” thinking fuel generalized anxiety.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Liebgold, Howard. *Freedom From Fear: Overcoming Anxiety, Phobias, and Panic*. (New York: Kensington Publishing Corp., 2004), 31.

Shame surrounding personal fears explains why people often choose to suffer in silence. Fear creates an isolating internal world, shadowed by the confines of thought. The loneliness empowers the anxiety, and may come to define a person, as they over-identify with the emotion. Self-blame presents a frightening component of fear, as a person sinks deeper into the guilt while coping with ongoing discomfort. Guilt can result from the self-imposed life restrictions from fears, and the sense that their missing out has let others down. Not being at ease due to anxiety, while weathering the ongoing criticism and misunderstanding (either real or assumed) from other people, amplifies the guilt. Even the slightest perception of rejection or ridicule can send a fearful person into a downward spiral of obsessive thoughts and depression. Anxiety sufferers are adept at blaming themselves for perceived inadequacies, at the inability to function according to social expectation. The dangers of such experiences may lead to additional feelings of self-hatred and doom, and even suicidal ideation as a means of escaping what appears to be a futile, inescapable burden.

Unchecked fear shapes a system of distorted beliefs about reality, that contribute to the maintenance of fear and negate the cure. Many people have mistaken beliefs about themselves and reality in general. From the Christian perspectives, these are lies the enemy uses to keep a person from embodying their true identity in Christ. Identifying these lies allows a person to come against them with the truth. Consistently affirming the truth over time will shift the belief through positive affirmations.

Sometimes these beliefs are so deeply-rooted that they must be contested with repetition of truth, from multiple sources. A person might intellectually accept something, yet continue in a belief and associated behavior aligned with the lie. Such beliefs must be challenged and uprooted, as they were ascribed to the person at some point in the past. This might happen as a result of conclusions drawn from an adverse experience, or through the adoption of beliefs of other people. Challenging lies can be done alone or with the help of a trusted friend or minister. <sup>6</sup>

Sometimes distorted thoughts present an obsessive quality. Obsessive thoughts often drive fears and energize unhealthy behaviors. When isolation increases, time pondering problems and finding ways to refrain from fear-provoking stimuli also increases. Avoidance reinforces fear and prevents healing, by ensnaring the sufferer in the safety of not having to feel the discomfort of anxiety or panic. The sufferer comes to believe that by avoiding the fear they are protecting themselves, because of the peace they feel when away from fear-provoking stimuli. Quite often during the initiating trauma, they felt unprotected, vulnerable, not in control or completely alone. Trauma teaches a person how to protect themselves, remain in control, and how to avoid experiencing the same pain again. The comfort experienced when away from the fear-provoking stimuli becomes a replacement for what was missing during the initial

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<sup>6</sup> Bourne, Edmund J. *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*. (Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 2005), 196-202.

emotional injury. Avoiding the memories and using distraction is yet another means of maintaining the pain of traumatic experiences. Sometimes the avoidance can be paired with other unhealthy coping mechanisms like addictions and risky behaviors.

Scientifically, avoidance is learned behavior. A person simply feels better when away from the things that provoke fear. If avoidance and the accompanying relief occur repeatedly, then this behavioral pattern becomes ingrained.<sup>7</sup>

Conscious or unconscious means of preventing pain and discomfort becomes the sole objective in the maintenance of fear. From the experiential standpoint, this stance presents a logical conclusion of a trauma-based fear, although fighting it tends to increase the pain over the long run. The brain strives to protect the organism from environmental cues perceived as unsafe, and issues warning signals to other parts of the body in the face of impending threat. For example, although it might not be absolutely true that driving a car is always dangerous, most would agree there are inherent dangers in operating a motor vehicle. Those dangers become more real once one has experienced a terrible accident. This is increasingly true if that accident involved the death of a loved one, the loss of a limb, financial ruin, or perhaps all these things at once.

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<sup>7</sup> Sheehan, Dr. David V., *The Anxiety Disease*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1986), 50-53.

In the case of complex trauma, when several traumatic things happen in succession or simultaneously, the effects of such experiences might be far-reaching and difficult to unpack. If a person comes to believe something is dangerous by whatever mechanism, the power of that belief to ignore logic in the present, is driven and supported by the biochemical emotional response. The limbic system rapid fires during the initial traumatic event, and the intensity of such experiences might have the unintended effect of being exquisitely seared into the memory, and even a person's DNA. The brain attaches meaning through the emotional response to one or more of the surrounding sensory elements from the experience. The individual may believe, to varying degrees, that conclusion to be absolutely true. Traumatic events produce supporting experiential evidence that bad things happen in the world. The brain believes this possibility more readily than it may when encountering something entirely unrelated. Trauma can strangely teach the brain to connect even loosely related sensory information to a triggering event, and create a fear response with a similar chemical reaction.<sup>8</sup>

A component seldom discussed in connection to trauma is the importance of trust. Broken trust impacts emotions, mindset, and every aspect of health. A sufferer may no longer trust particular situations, environments, persons, or the world at large.

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<sup>8</sup> Leaf, Dr. Caroline. *Who Switched Off My Brain? Controlling Toxic Thoughts and Emotions*. (Southlake, TX: Caroline Leaf, 2007), 21-42.

Mistrust embodies fear, and experientially damages a person and their willingness to act in faith. Trust injuries may be inflicted throughout life, and are not limited to one-time events. Babies are entrusted to parents when they enter the world, and remain entirely dependent on the persons who care for them. As persons develop, they ideally learn that others will provide for some of their emotional, physical, and psychological needs. Emotionally healthy children come to rely on themselves to care for some of their needs independently.

Throughout life, people are designed to live in community where varying levels of trust are helpful and often absolutely necessary. In Christianity followers are taught to philosophically rely on God for all of their needs. Yet God still uses other people to provide for those needs, even supernaturally. When trauma happens, trust in some areas of life have been altered or entirely destroyed. In cases of child neglect, where needs were seldom met by caretakers, the foundation of trust can be nonexistent. Healing mistrust presents uniquely challenging considerations. From a therapeutic standpoint, the sufferer must first come to believe that healing is possible, and decide to trust the chosen practitioner, counselor, pastor, or layperson. In general, the relationships established in a person's life, to a great extent will determine their maturity and healing. The character, beliefs, and qualities of the people an individual surrounds themselves with will influence outcomes. People empower one another to grow, enable in stagnation, downgrade morality or mindset, contribute to trauma, or

become complacent, passive observers of lifestyle and life in general. In Paul's first New Testament letter to the people of Corinth, he asserts that bad people corrupt others.<sup>9</sup> Trusting the right people is just as important as trusting in general.

Doctors Henry Cloud and John Townsend discuss the importance of connection to God in their book, *How People Grow*. In fact, they pose that getting back to God is the first step towards healing. Once the relationship with God is restored, the faith community plays a critical role in helping a person to re-establishing trust and spiritual formation. These elements are of vital importance and create a wholesome environment for personal growth and transformation.<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, moving beyond trauma-based fears and coinciding beliefs, and learning to trust begins with faith in God. Inviting God into the pain is a critical step in moving forward from the past, and opening the heart to receive healing. Jesus offers humanity the safest place to experience difficult emotions without complications. Although the power of the spiritual family in an individual's life can be transformational, the prominence of God in their midst provides the ultimate source of healing. Jesus is the healer. He may not be mentioned in the calculated steps,

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Cor 15:33 (New American Standard Bible).

<sup>10</sup> Cloud, Dr. Henry and Dr. John Townsend. *How People Grow*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 36-40.

disciplines, and implemented programs on the journey to wholeness. Nonetheless, as the creator of causal reality, He empowers every good element in the realm of creation.

Unfortunately, not every perspective aligns with God's vision for humanity. Distorted perception of self and God within the faith are a problem. Unhealthy identity often coincides trauma, and increasingly so in absence of relationship with the divine. An atheistic worldview presents an impediment to healing. Although faith in Christ is not a requisite for healing, there are inherent difficulties to healing in absence of a spiritual foundation.

Reconciling therapeutic activities to a weak or unsubstantiated worldview might lend towards nihilism, and magnify the emptiness of existence without God. Having no basis for an action is simply grasping at empty air repeatedly, hoping to catch something invisible and nonexistent. Believing in methods and systems is vain faith in the temporary peace and healing allotted for a lifetime. Such temporal gains cannot quell the soul cry. The inner longing for reconciliation to a God yet unknown persists, even after application of worldly methods for healing. The sin problem and its burdensome weight, with the quandary of the experiential question, maintain a persistent anxiety that longs for absolute truth.

Herein presents the trouble with an unstable, ambiguous, relative, and uncertain worldview. An individual might adopt new behaviors, heal trauma, and grow from their pain, but the deep inner peace acquired in spiritual, supernatural recognition of

God, will persist as a longing within the spirit. An understanding of absolute truth, and the knowledge of identity as part of a grandiose plan of reconciliation for humanity, becomes the means by which a person can achieve healing beyond temporal, material interests. Eternal healing through Jesus Christ is the ultimate undoing of trauma-based fear, as it brings about a turning over of fate, and shines the intensity of heavenly light into the encroaching, ever-present earthly darkness. The constant light of truth ministers the ongoing substance of mental, physical, and spiritual fertility—the sacred, cosmic, creationary elements as source material. The Edenistic presence of heaven through the power of Christ alive within each believer energizes infinite, universal healing.

Embracing the Christian worldview fosters understanding of true identity and the deeper overlapping concepts from the spheres of existence. Someone thinking from another perspective, can only partially engage in the potential for emotional freedom in love. Belief in Jesus Christ as the savior of the world is the foundation of all healing. Individuals suffering with trauma-based fear need the gospel of Jesus Christ to overcome their pain. One of the greatest contributions to healing all anxiety is the presence of God that offers unmatched safety.

The love of God permeates the world through His imagers, who magnify Him through their words and deeds. Unconditional love and acceptance, when experienced through another human, connects an individual to the very heart of God.

Demonstrating love to someone suffering with trauma-based fear ushers in the relational attachment beneficial for healing. Consistently receiving someone with a sincere, loving smile and a warm heart increases feelings of acceptance and happiness. Love becomes the life flow that ultimately heals a broken heart, mind and spirit.

In the book, *Living From the Heart Jesus Gave You*, the authors eloquently write:

*“Recovery is facing and embracing all of the pain in our lives, so that we will gain maximum growth: learning lessons, gaining power, and looking for ways to help others do the same. Those are the goals of recovery, a destiny that is beyond what any person could achieve alone. It takes other people’s loving involvement in order to develop our maturity, and it takes God’s redemption to bring something good out of our pain. He is working in everything for our good so that we have something extraordinary to give to others.”<sup>11</sup>*

Facing the pain of trauma often requires the acceptance of what cannot be controlled. In relationship with others a person grows through love and encouragement, and finds the inner strength to act in faith, instead of listening to fear. This is the role of the minister, counselor, or friend—to gently guide and love people into the truth of love.

Love can be received through different actions. As each person is uniquely fashioned by God, individual life experience, natural temperament, talents and gifts, develop into a remarkably singular essence. Viewing a person from this perspective, affirms the necessity of an individualized approach in healing trauma-based fear. The

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<sup>11</sup> Friesen, James G., E. James Wilder, Anne M. Bierling, Rick Koepcke, and Maribeth Poole, eds. *Living from the Heart Jesus Gave You*. (East Peoria: Shepherd’s House, Inc., 2013), 72.

relational components from one individual to the next should be acknowledged. There are various approaches and methods helpful in producing positive outcomes, with the understanding that individual needs warrant special attention, as the details of a particular person and their story present a significant factor in applying trauma recovery strategies. Handling such plans of action with individualized love and attention bring results.

Challenging the absolute truth of convictions can be helpful in reframing the narrative about the past. In a clinical setting, this may involve returning to triggering events and coming against the conclusions drawn from the adverse experience, while the person remains in the memory. Uncovering evidence contrary to the trauma-based fear, might help to alleviate fear-provoking thoughts about the danger of the stimuli.

An example can be found in a case study of a functional agoraphobic, that became fearful in the mere memory of a panic attack experienced at a favorite restaurant. Although in the past the person ran out of the restaurant in fear of losing their mind, during the memory the minister reminded him that if that panic attack had been dangerous for his sanity, he would not be cognizant of the experience or in a clear frame of mind to recount the story. This minor shift in recounting his history significantly reduced his anxiety, and helped him to upgrade his interpretation of events. He previously concluded that he almost lost his mind from fear. The conversation reframed the experience as the day he *chose* to believe his panic was

dangerous. In reality, this event was just an uncomfortable experience, and he was in absolutely no danger of losing his mind. The only threat that particular experience posed was the present effect on his perception of reality, and its contribution to his fear-based behavior. That experience was only meaningful because he believed it to be.

During the initial trauma, he did not ask for help from his family or invite God in through prayer. Instead, he ran outdoors in hopes of alleviating the discomfort. He reinforced his fear of being away from the comfort of home and in public spaces in general by his actions. From that experience and others like it, he came to believe that the symptoms from the rush of adrenaline in his body were dangerous. Such conclusions have driven his avoidance behaviors for years. He avoids talking about his anxiety because he has fear of the fear. Patterns of avoidance prevent healing, and keep a person stuck in fear. Healing requires a willingness to experience some discomfort, with the knowledge that the feelings of fear and panic will eventually subside. Feelings are very real to the person, but they are not inherently dangerous. Facing fear in gradual and consistent increments of exposure is the cure. This might begin with just going into the memory, sharing it with a trusted person, and then eventually applying the same strategy in real world scenarios. Doing this with Christ brings about deep, lasting healing, as Christ is always available to a person in absence of other human beings. He comforts and protects someone during the difficult practice involved in

facing fear-provoking stimuli. Christian counselors or ministers can also share the love of Christ alongside such a person to bring His loving presence into the pain.

When Paul wrote his New Testament letter to the Philippians, he implored the people to ask God for help. Context is important in understanding intention, but Paul's passage offers fairly simple, reasonable advice, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and pleading with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."<sup>12</sup> He advises people essentially to take their worries to God, being thankful, or generally possessing an attitude of gratitude. The application of such advice means to shift from warily thinking about everything that could go wrong, and instead being thankful about what is going right. Such thinking upgrades wellbeing. Gratitude increases satisfaction with circumstance and lends towards acceptance of reality and self. Appreciation is diametrically opposed to emotional pain, and improves thought life.

Inviting Jesus into problems, rather than denying their existence or attempting to deal with them alone, shifts the focus from self, and edifies a sense of belonging. Asking for help and being honest about needs is a first step towards healing, even if a person chooses to take these steps alone with God. Christians have the Holy Spirit to comfort them in their time of need, and unlimited access to the love of God. Belief in God brings

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<sup>12</sup> Phil 4:6-7 (New American Standard Bible)

a greater awareness to the spiritual aspects of reality and negates the deception of the flesh. A person is more than their feelings or trauma, and faith-based identity and belonging alleviates some of the pain of trauma-induced anxiety.

Further, challenging the thoughts behind the fear works to change beliefs. In some cases, an individual might come to intellectually accept the absurdity of the fear, and still experience varying levels of discomfort at the mere thought of the object of fear. A great example is the fear of flying. That fear may originate from the fear of enclosed spaces, and not from being in the air traveling to a destination. Clearly, having experienced an emergency landing in a plane or another traumatic event while flying adds complications to the recovery from this specific trauma-based fear, that require consideration as part of an integrative strategy for healing. Nonetheless, starting to think differently about the experience of fear, and taking Jesus along during exposure, is a helpful way to move towards freedom.

The simplest form of exposure begins with thinking of the fear-provoking stimuli with increasing frequency, as part of the process of gradual exposure. A more complex or multi-layered fear might require more than one plan for exposure, based on the specifics of each fear. Allowing the trauma sufferer to develop and write out the exposure hierarchies for each of their fears is a fantastic way to empower them to have control of their recovery. An exposure ladder plans out the steps one must take to finally face a fear, from the least fear-provoking to the most fear-provoking. Relying on

a safe person during this process, to consistently encourage, congratulate, and assist with reaching goals guides an individual to the objectives without undue pressure. This also prevents the person from going back to the familiar patterns of avoidance behavior.<sup>13</sup> As mentioned previously, Jesus can be this person for someone, but more often than not, retaining a physical person for support is helpful in the short-term.

Such a support person at least initially, especially in absence of a supportive friend and family network, can be incredibly helpful. The spiritual family can provide for the emotional needs for a person that fosters trust and confidence. An important forewarning for a support or safe person is the possibility of the trauma sufferer using their presence as a crutch, and not advancing to the point of facing fears alone. Progress with the help of someone represents a positive outcome, but only a partial form of recovery from a trauma-based fear. Advancement should not be forced but encouraged. The sufferer must determine their own willingness to move forward in their recovery, accepting full responsibility.

An enormous threat to recovery is the lack of self-esteem and confidence frequently found in anxiety sufferers. This problem can be misinterpreted as the absence of love and emotional support in the present. However quite often such issues originate with specific trauma, childhood neglect, or overbearing parents. Individuals

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<sup>13</sup> Marks, Dr. Isaac M. *Living with Fear: Understanding and Coping with Anxiety*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1980), 199-210.

who experienced a suboptimal childhood, often carry many unmet emotional needs into adulthood. Such individuals do not believe in their own capabilities, and are at risk for developing mental health disorders and other illnesses. Exposure to physical, emotional, and sexual abuse complicates matters. These issues tend to stagnate or decline without intervention.

Dealing with specific trauma-based fears exacerbates the toxic shame endured during development years, which further tarnish self-image. The guilt and self-blame from perceived failures from anxiety bring depression. Anxiety sufferers experience these complex emotions especially in response to criticism like, “get over it” or “stop panicking.” They might even judge themselves. Their internal voice so often condemns them before they even attempt anything. This attitude of failure and incompetency impairs their sense of well-being and willingness to challenge their comfort zone. Ironically such persons are incredibly uncomfortable in their own skin. Sometimes the self-esteem component must be addressed before an individual is willing to change. Improving self-esteem and taking steps towards inner healing produce optimal results when facing fears. Persistently working towards recovery requires confidence and persistence, with the burden of an exhausting emotional battle with anxiety.

There are several strategies for improving self-esteem, beginning with affirmations, practicing gratitude, and exercise. Moving the body undoubtedly increases blood flow to the brain and improves general well-being. Simply adding short

and long-term goals, paired with a daily routine, creates a sense of accomplishment. Tracking and celebrating small achievements on a regular basis enhances general attitude and personal outlook, and increases awareness for capacity to manage and produce results in life. These exercises are not meant to be performance-oriented, but a means of personal discovery and growth. Utilizing a journal or digital tracker to record daily reflections and moments of joy serve as concrete proof in the value of life. Over time such small steps can be helpful in shifting mindset and improving self-esteem. Used in relation to self-directed tiers for exposure, such methods work to track progress and increase momentum towards positive outcomes.

Cognitive distortions are automatic thoughts that supply a negative pattern of thinking. They tend to be self-defeating, demanding, and demeaning. Such thinking reinforces low self-esteem and prevents a person from loving themselves completely. Some common distortions include: assuming, shoulds, fairy-tale fantasy, all or nothing thinking, overgeneralizing, labeling, dwelling on the negative, rejecting the positive, unfavorable comparisons, catastrophizing, personalizing, blaming, and making feelings facts. Psychologist, Albert Ellis, developed a cognitive model that explains the process that inhibits good self-esteem. This model begins with A, an activating event, then moves to B, the belief about it, then moves to C, the emotional consequences. This model demonstrates that what a person believes about an event leads to the feelings

about it. The solution to this problem is challenging the distortions as they arise and reformulating beliefs.<sup>14</sup>

Comparison in particular from the list of distortions, is a self-esteem killer and extremely bad habit. Negative thinking in general prevents a person from seeing possibilities, and this is especially true when thinking about what others have in comparison. Individuals suffering from fear might be prone to a self-defeating attitude and comparing themselves to others. This orientation to the world is unproductive and contrary to a Christian worldview. All people contribute uniquely to reality with their lives. Babies and pets are loved and accepted without the ability to offer much to the world besides their existence.

These principles, when applied to a fear sufferer, introduces God's loving view of humanity. This Christian perspective fosters wellbeing and cancels out the necessity for performance to receive love and acceptance. Accepting fear as an emotion, and seeing it as something to be experienced, removes its illusion of power. A small change in perspective can improve how a person approaches their pain.

For example, if a person stopped harshly judging themselves for anxiety, they might gradually stop avoiding circumstances that illicit a fear response. As beliefs about the self and reality change, the comfort of familiarity is less satisfying than the

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<sup>14</sup> Schiraldi, Dr. Glenn R. *The Self-Esteem Workbook*. (Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 2001), 39-51.

possibility for growth. Self-acceptance is at the core of healthy self-esteem. Seeing God as accepting is compatible with this advancement in perspective. Through acceptance of God's love, the larger spiritual narrative becomes implemental in the willingness to change core beliefs.

Helping a person to see themselves as a child of God comes about through proper teaching, and the spiritual revelation of their existence as part of a larger, collective objective—the reconciliation of mankind to their creator. Fostering an understanding of Jesus Christ, through mature interpersonal relationships, builds self-worth and encourages spiritual identity. As perspective broadens and beliefs transform, the heart becomes open to receive love, and to mature through loving perspective. The family of God, and the church, ideally provide an enriching community that fosters a sense of belonging, where individuals receive love, prayer, and relational healing. Shame cannot withstand the acceptance a person experiences in the love of Christ, and the power of such love compels a person to move deeper into authenticity, and therefore to release their pain to others.

Interpersonal transformations can be informal and difficult to measure, as they happen through the unconditional love a person receives through the Christian spiritual family. There are however, some useful tools to advance such growth, that build on the foundational love provided by God. Inner healing endeavors to unpack the pains a person has endured in a lifetime. A fantastic tool to engage in such growth is

through various prayer techniques. There are several modalities that utilize scripture and the spiritual family to lead people back to God. The burden from trauma-based fear is often heavy and depressing, and the release of that burden in the presence of others, allows the penetration of supernatural healing love. Confessing hurts allows the light to shine into the darkness, and invites the power of corporate prayer to transform. Where deception has taken root, ministers can speak against the lies, affirm scriptural truth, and guide a believer into repentance as well. A bad childhood story might be replaced with a loving biblical perspective, that changes the way a person sees themselves and their circumstances. Other approaches, like guided visualization with Christ, opens a person to view the past through a different lens. This shift can be facilitated creatively through private or corporate prayer, by inviting Jesus into memories. Two-way prayer is a means of conversing with God, and receiving insight about reality that is deeply personal and transformational.

Revisiting the past in a way that increases empathy for oneself and for all associations to a traumatic event, might rapidly progress an individual towards healing trauma-based fear. From a larger perspective this is yet another means of forgiveness. At the core humility lowers a person down from a place of judgment and towards a deeper awareness of the human condition. This brings into view the individual unique capacity for sin. The past is fixed, but the thoughts about it can transform to bring healing through conformity to Christ. Forgiveness releases an individual from

condemning beliefs about the past that frees them in the present. Such freedom brings openness to change and heals mistrust.

People pray for instant deliverance from their problems, then blame God for their suffering when He does not immediately produce the desired results. Although supernatural, instantaneous healing happens, more often a person must work towards goals and contribute proactively in order to achieve measurable results in their life. Becoming upset at God, oneself, or at another is natural, but getting stuck in such a state produces unforgiveness. This behavior is an excuse to remain in current circumstance and avoid facing the trauma-based fear.

Growth is painful and many people prefer familiarity and comfort over expanded consciousness that might challenge their present state. At the core of many issues is the unwillingness to forgive, and bitterness generates a self-fulfilling negativity cycle that drives bad thoughts and behavior. Lack of forgiveness and blame inhibit growth and healing. They foster a victimhood mentality, and ensnare an individual in a sinister and dramatic power play, that delivers barren, unpleasant consequences.

There is secondary gain from remaining in a seemingly disempowered position. From there a person stagnates, looking to be rescued and relying on someone or something to blame for their position. In such a state, a person might attract others who willingly partake in the roleplaying. Avoidance of responsibility and the discomfort of facing problems directly and consistently, works against improvements to emotional

reactions and the healing of trauma. The person fans the flames of their pain in hopes of being rescued again from the responsibility—the freedom to respond in a healthy way—and instead relies on others in a codependent state. This edifies the ego without addressing the true source of pain and moving towards resolution.

Sometimes part of the solution to overcoming trauma-based fear, is arresting the negative tape that plays in a person's head. An individual has the power to shut down this nasty chatter, but may not know it. Sometimes those voices speak evil and negativity over a person. At times they represent a recording from past traumatic events or a flashback. They might be specific and obsessive, as in the case of intrusive, fear-provoking thoughts. These include thoughts of hurting someone or the fear of using a weapon and acting out a murder scene for example. The chatter might share absurd ideations about going crazy, being watched, or others finding out about their anxiety. The obsessive quality to such experiences makes a person feel out of control or like they could go completely crazy.

Part of what magnifies the fearful thoughts is the internal war against them. This form of avoidance does nothing but inflate the dread of their invasion, and in turn makes the experience increasingly miserable by provoking the fear response. There are two simple approaches to dealing with thoughts, either accepting and facing, or challenging them. Acceptance will look more like observation, as though viewing a science experiment. An individual takes note of what is happening, but does not

attempt to interfere with outcomes. The internal dialogue and point of view with this method, should creatively shift from first person to third person. This is a form of psychological distancing, which is a means of viewing and experiencing thought intrusions as though they are coming from a foreign source. Such an exercise in externalization might dramatically improve a person's sense of well-being, in spite of fearful ideations. This reduces the urge to stop them which in many cases, can be absolutely counterproductive.

Challenging thoughts can be easier if they are coming from an imaginary externalized source as well. A helpful method is to view the voice as a frightened five-year-old child, who simply needs a parent to speak truth over its poorly-conceived beliefs. The person facing their fear might formulate responses to the externalized fear messages, and talk back to them internally. Another visualization might view the scary voices as a comical imaginary friend. Dr. Liebgold, M.D., in his work with individuals with phobia, panic, and anxiety, called this disembodied voice the "boo." He maintains that a boo has three identifiable characteristics: it always lies, exaggerates, and catastrophizes.<sup>15</sup>

Talking back to the fear can be helpful, but many people still experience panic attacks, especially as they expose themselves to feared stimuli. The initial fear is when

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<sup>15</sup> Liebgold, Howard. *Freedom From Fear: Overcoming Anxiety, Phobias, and Panic*. (New York: Kensington Publishing Corp., 2004), 30.

the thoughts happen and the person has the opportunity to arrest the progression to a panic attack. The interruption of panic typically happens as the result of how the person initially deals with the very first feeling of fear. Using the talking back method is helpful in many cases. Nonetheless, even armed with prayer, positive thoughts, and a sense of humor, panic can happen. This is where floating through the panic is helpful for someone during an exposure, and especially one that does not offer the possibility for retreat. A great example would be facing the fear of flying on a plane. Once the person is on the airplane, they will have to push through any emotional turmoil that arises. Despite all of the acquired practice up to that point, being on the plane might trigger panic, and the dreadful symptoms that come along with the experience.

Such a circumstance gives credence to the willingness to float through the feeling, and not fight it. Fighting anxiety is a form of avoidance, and prolongs the pain. In the moment, it keeps the intensity of the feeling for a greater period of time. In the long term, it exaggerates the perception of danger and duration of the pain, hence reinforcing it. With the onset of panic, a good practice is to let it wash over at the highest intensity, and float through it, as a means of dissipating the feeling as quickly as possible. By facing the fear, one experiences it rather quickly and accepts the discomfort. In time the feeling subsides and the panic is over. <sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Weekes, Dr. Claire. *Hope and Help for Your Nerves; End Anxiety Now*. (New York: Penguin Random House, LLC), 24-25.

Before embarking on a healing journey, it is important to look to biological sources of disease and their potential contributions to anxiety. Undoubtedly, allergies and sensitivities, vitamin deficiencies, blood sugar issues, and poor nutrition, all contribute to brain chemistry. Further, underlying conditions for example affecting the thyroid or heart may produce symptoms analogous to those of panic. An important component in addressing trauma-based fear is consulting a physician to check for issues in these areas. Nutritional issues can be corrected, and once a person is cleared for underlying conditions, supportive nutrition might also improve mood. Fear sufferers must take into account the overlap of biological components with the spiritual and emotional.

Certain foods support the brain and others deplete or inhibit the necessary chemicals that serve as precursors to the production of neurotransmitters that contribute to mood. Stabilizing blood sugar and boosting cortisol with a protein-based diet are great steps towards improving health. Changes to diet can reduce general anxiety and balance mood to a point that a person is more willing to face pain and move towards the cure. Many people suffer from low cortisol as a result of adrenal burnout, from high stress living and poor diet. GABA and serotonin levels tend to be lower in individuals suffering with adrenal fatigue, with a connection to anxiety and

burnout. These issues can be addressed with nutritional support and the introduction of safe exercise.<sup>17</sup>

The importance of exercise and good sleep cannot be overlooked when addressing trauma-based fear. Getting sunlight and fresh air daily is a great way to boost mood and general well-being. Relaxation exercises, deep breathing, vagus nerve stimulation, essential oils, and meditation can also alleviate stress. Exposure to heavy metals and toxins, in addition to excess medications should be reduced or completely eliminated. Supporting the body with basic supplements like vitamins, magnesium, probiotics and omega threes can reduce symptoms of dis-ease.<sup>18</sup>

Another consideration is the power of sound to bring inner peace, healing and relaxation. Christians engage in corporate worship of Christ in song, and sometimes supernatural healing takes place during this time. Music in general has the power to transform emotions and state of mind. Just as God spoke the universe into being, sound in general created by words or other means have the power of creation and destruction.

Dr. Gaynor, in his work, *The Healing Power of Sound*, shares the results of cellular research on the effects of sound on cancer cells by Fabien Maman and Helene Grimal:

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<sup>17</sup> Ross, Julia. *The Mood Cure: The 4-Step Program to Take Charge of Your Emotions Today*. (New York: Penguin Group, 2002), 77-99.

<sup>18</sup> Scott, Trudy. *The Anti-Anxiety Food Solution*. (Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 2011), 144-164.

“He and Grimal examined through microscopic photography the effect of low frequency (30-40 decibels) sound on human cells. In Maman’s words, ‘The goal of these experiments was to observe the effect of sound in the nucleus and the electromagnetic fields of human cells.’” Using a camera mounted on a microscope, Maman and Grimal studied the inner structure of both healthy human cells and uterine cancer cells as they reacted to various acoustical instruments, e.g., gong, xylophone, acoustic guitar, and the unaccompanied human voice, for a duration of twenty-one minutes. Maman found that the most visibly dramatic results occurred when he sang musical scales into the cells: “The structures disorganized extremely quickly. The human voice carries something in its vibration that makes it more powerful than any musical instrument: consciousness.... It appeared that the cancer cells were not able to support a progressive accumulation of vibratory frequencies. As soon as I introduced the third frequency in the sequence, the cells began to destabilize. But the other instruments, particularly the gong with its rich complement of overtones, also caused the cells to disintegrate and ultimately explode. Based upon his findings within the laboratory, Maman then conducted experiments with two breast cancer patients, each of whom toned for three and a half hours a day over the course of month. In one case, the tumor vanished. The second woman had surgery to remove the tumor, whereupon it was discovered that the tumor was ‘reduced and completely dry.’ In the absence of metastases, the malignancy was excised and the patient made a full recovery.”<sup>19</sup>

Although the focus of this paper is not on the healing of cancer, but the healing of trauma-based fear, the implications of this account in application to any illness are obvious. Sounds, words, and thoughts have the power to transform, and scientific findings support these truths. Reducing anxiety and healing the mind with sacred song and sound aligns with the power of worship, the singing of the biblical Psalms, and speaking God’s word out loud. Dr. Gaynor writes, “No fewer than nine studies using electroencephalogram measures show that various forms of sound and music slow our

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<sup>19</sup> Gaynor, Dr. Mitchell L. *The Healing Power of Sound; Recovery from Life-Threatening Illness Using Sound, Voice, and Music*. (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 136-137.

brain waves, most notably increasing the amplitude of alpha activity, which is associated with psychological and physical relaxation.”<sup>20</sup>

At the core, relaxation over time, even in the presence of fear-provoking stimuli is the ultimate objective. Conditioned responses and their associations can be reprogrammed with practice. Supporting such endeavors with connection to God, a spiritual family, improved self-esteem, new ways of thinking, gradual exposure, prayer, proper self-care, relaxation techniques and even sound, can bring about change. Over time practice with exposure fosters a new automated response that reflects the transpired. Setbacks are expected, but improvement is a realistic goal with proper time and commitment.<sup>21</sup>

Patience is often deficient for the loved ones of a person suffering with trauma-based fear. Frustration and misunderstanding are commonly experienced when dealing with the complex issues of a family member. From the outside the problems seem simple and even unwarranted. Often, the family desires an individual to be fully restored or fixed, and might even push them towards pharmaceutical support. Although medicine certainly has its place in supporting change, it does not address the underlying source of pain. Psychiatric drugs offer a component of assistance, but

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 162.

<sup>21</sup> Peurifoy, Reneau Z. *Overcoming Anxiety, From Short-Term Fixes to Long-Term Recovery*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1997), 186-187.

should not be seen as an instant fix. The alleviation of symptoms can be used as an opportunity to address the trauma.

A common misconception is that a person can instantaneously heal all of their trauma, hurts, and fears, in just one or two counseling or ministry sessions. Some key ideas to remind everyone involved may sound like, “Your family member has experienced this problem for many years, so it may take time to notice measurable improvements. Your person needs love, encouragement, and support right now more than anything.” Things might get worse before they get better, especially when an individual embarks on their healing journey. Increased anxiety, nightmares or flashbacks, and emotional volatility might appear during this time. Talking about a traumatic experience repeatedly allows the person to fully grieve their past. Such affects can be seen as part of the process.

Family members help most when they love the person stagnated by trauma-based fear, but do not enable. Getting unstuck can be a difficult possibility to consider for a person that is comfortable with their poor coping mechanisms, beliefs, behaviors, and associated fears. Often growth and change require the relinquishing of something, and that can awaken new fears. People become accustomed to their way of being in the world, and letting go of past hurts and healing, might leave an empty space in their heart where the pain once occupied. Family members that affirm their loved one’s self-worth and capabilities, will accomplish more than attempting to force change. Asking

open-ended questions and listening to understand, opens conversations that present opportunities for shared insight. This might even uncover details of circumstances, specific traumas, or fears that family members can pray about. The power of corporate prayer to reveal compassion for suffering can open hearts to transformation.

The information divulged during such times can lead to the development of a joint plan of action. In some cases, this might require some form of intervention, that lovingly confronts the pervasive issue in the presence of family and friends. Allowing the individual to contribute to their own healing can invigorate some momentum towards change. What seems like a small gain to the family, might be an enormous victory for the individual. Celebrating the little things, gently inspiring towards reasonable goals, and sharing in victories, fosters a sense of fellowship that improves relational trust.

Ultimately, change is up to the individual. Free will represents an enormous component in receptivity to seeking and receiving help for trauma-based fear. A person must first believe change is possible, or at the very least, have someone in their life willing to believe for them. Hope inspires through the transcendent love of Christ that persists, regardless of human consideration and recognition. Hoping, with love, and open arms, heart, and ears is the best way to help a person in need. Carl Roger's unconditional positive regard, reveals the heart of Christ that family members and counselors can embody to bring about lasting change.

In no way should a counselor or family member attempt to force someone to face their trauma-based fears. Disrespecting boundaries or attempting to manipulate a person into healing is unethical. Downplaying or comparing pain is a terrible way to minister to someone and will do more damage in the long run than simply treating a person as an individual. A counselor should never say to a client, "If you only loved God more, prayed more, and read your bible more, you wouldn't have these problems." No person has the right to criticize another's walk with Christ. Christians do best when they walk in servitude, without attempting to control those around them.

Shifting the view of fear to encompass the historical, creationary perspective bestows insight. Mankind has contended with fear since the fall, and such line of thinking puts the issue into perspective. Nobody is entirely immune to the effects of trauma, and deepening understanding of the human condition reveals the necessity for compassion, love, and encouragement, as portrayed in the biblical image of Christ.

Healing fear takes commitment to overcoming the past, and the willingness to experience some discomfort as part of the process. The biological mechanism of trauma-based fear cannot be ignored. There's a clear connection between biology, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. The primitive biological fear programming attempts to protect a person, when environmental stimuli signal danger, arousing difficult, fearful feelings. Quieting this reaction in most cases takes time, practice, consistency, and repetition.

Accepting the fear-provoked discomfort in the moment, and allowing time to elapse is a critical step in ultimately overcoming fear.

Processing trauma-related fear necessitates patience, and the willingness to push through pain with self-directed, controlled exposure. Inviting Jesus into the process, forgiving the past, and opening the heart to the loving support of a spiritual family, encourages an individual to commit to the cure. As a person comes to believe in their own self-worth and capacity to succeed, their willingness to work towards goals increases. Belief in God, in oneself, and general worldview support lasting change. Ultimately strategized exposure is the objective in overcoming fear. The only way out of the pain is back in. The discomfort of paradoxical truth sometimes leaves a person longing. As the soul yearns, healing remains possible.