

USE OF THE DAVIDIC PSALMS IS AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO COUNSEL MILITARY
PERSONNEL WITH POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

BY

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ABSTRACT

Counseling is part of a pastor's call. He is to rightly divide law and gospel to nurture and sustain God's people in the one true faith. Not all counseling is the same. Sometimes trauma is involved and affects people in negative ways. This counseling can be done with any appropriate portion of Scripture. Not every counselee will have the same story. Their fears, cares, and concerns will most likely be different.

There are pastors in WELS churches who are counseling men and women in the military. Research included surveys that were sent to these pastors. Their responses will remain anonymous. The military section of society is unique. They may be taken for granted. Few seem to take the time to consider what warfare can do to a person. Soldiers may relate to King David. He endured combat, a whole lifetime of traumatic episodes. Every soldier who deploys comes back home with some ill effects of the war zone engrained on his memories and minds, some who are diagnosed or will be diagnosed with disorders. The purpose of this thesis is to recognize challenges associated with counseling military personnel, and to propose a counseling model using David's psalms.

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INTRODUCTION

The term Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has been officially recognized for only thirty-five years. In 1980, PTSD made its way into the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III). It is not to say PTSD suddenly appeared in 1980. Psychological professionals began noticing an increase of irregularities in behavior and thought from soldiers who were involved with combat in Vietnam. Such findings among veterans resulted in extensive research geared toward trauma experienced in warfare.

Each war the United States has been involved with is an entity unto itself. Each one is unique due to different opponents on foreign soils, or due to the unique stated purpose of a given war. Preserving democracy and fighting against terrorism are just two examples of what wars have planned to accomplish. Iraq is not Vietnam. Korea is not Europe. Differences between these wars seem to abound. Where do the similarities start?

What all wars have in common is combat. There is always an enemy to fight, regardless if he is in a trench sixteen yards away, or hiding in the Vietnam jungle six yards away. It could be that the Iraqi a soldier gave water to during the day will be the same man who detonates an improvised explosive device (IED) at night. The tension, turbulence, and anxiety caused by combat can change a person. Residual effects may linger long after combat's initial trauma had taken place. And there seems to be no end in sight for future wars. Multiple generations have been defined by the gruesome, atrocious things heard, seen, and done while fighting to survive.

Yet, not everyone truly understands what it feels like to experience combat, or being the spouse of someone with such an experience. Anyone can read about a soldier's rage-filled fight with a loved one, or listen to how a marriage ended because a spouse feared for her life. Reading about it and living with it are drastically different. Either way, stories like that pull at my heart strings. Is it because this topic is somewhat personal? All I can do is read doctor's observations and diagnoses, letters sent in the past, or listen to others tell stories of a time I really have no recollection of, and definitely not an understanding of war or post traumatic stress disorder.

To this day I still have had no military experience nor faced combat of any kind. But there are men and women who have, and who are coming to WELS congregations for healing, for comfort, and for a different kind of family other than their military family. In many cases, PTSD is a problem that comes along with requests for comfort, stability, and peace of mind. Is

there an effective way to counsel someone with PTSD as a pastor? Are there specific portions of Scripture that can help with this complex issue?

By no means am I advocating pastoral counseling to the exclusion of professional, Christian counseling. Pastors do not have to take on solving behavioral or emotional problems on their own. Certainly God will work through the proclamation of his Word. But, if issues come up during counseling that are far beyond the expertise of the pastor, clergy need not be afraid to refer them to the experts. They have had more in-depth study and expertise in such matters. Their skill is beneficial for all parties involved.

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod churches in the vicinity of military installations have a unique blessing and a marvelous opportunity to reach out with the gospel. This is a true statement, but how do the barriers fall down? Military life may be one of the most distinct in our culture, and difficult to break into from civilian life, the “outside” world. Ultimately, we are all the same: infected with sin, deserving of punishment for that sin, and in desperate need of a Savior from sin. Through faithful proclamation law and gospel, the Holy Spirit will work in their hearts to assure them of forgiveness, life and salvation. The God of compassion and mercy is with them each and every day. What a joy it will be to share this good news with warriors who have no visible wounds of war, but wounds that influence the mind, unseen wounds that can destroy trust, personality, and faith.

The purpose of this thesis is multifaceted in its coverage of post traumatic stress disorder. Some historical framework for the phenomenon known as PTSD will be provided, as well as how it has taken on new meanings from 1980 up to the present day. A number of treatment possibilities for PTSD will also be explored. Their effectiveness is truly hard to accurately measure. Events and experiences in King David’s life along with his symptoms and feelings will provide parallels to similar experiences of modern era soldiers. The source and object of David’s faith, strength and trust helped him immensely. The same can be true of warriors wounded by PTSD. Some have argued that David himself suffered from PTSD. This thought is neither confirmed nor denied by Scripture. It need only be mentioned.

In this thesis, the author proposes that the use of David’s psalms can be an effective way to counsel military personnel with post traumatic stress disorder. This research in PTSD, 1 & 2 Samuel, and select psalms of David will enrich and equip those who come into contact with

people who have gone through combat, and may aid the counseling of those with such a complex ailment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are numerous websites, articles, and books dedicated to topics such as counseling, PTSD and King David, yet not many of those sources combine all three of those topics. Narrowing David's works to his writing of the psalms, the events behind them, and applying them to counseling usually never happens. However, there is no shortage of material that links counseling to spirituality or religion.

A book by Jay Adams, entitled *Critical Stages of Biblical Counseling*, highlights the importance of counseling that is biblically based and focused on Christ. Adams makes a good point by explaining that the counselee should sense an atmosphere in which he will be counseled according to Scripture. What is shared with him is God's truth. It is not something the pastor has made up in his own mind. Rather, proclaim God's truth without fear, and without dulling the sword of the Spirit. His point is a fantastic reminder to take to heart, but counselors and pastors are sinful human beings. They can fail in their efforts at counseling. Handle that failure straightforwardly. Show humility and honesty. Transparency might lead to a trusting relationship and an atmosphere conducive to sharing how issues and troubles have begun to ruin spiritual life in Christ.

Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger echoes similar thoughts about Christian counseling. Ministers of the gospel can offer a steady, sturdy, compassionate and loving God to all who have gone through trauma. We ourselves cannot redeem traumatic loss, but we place our hope in the one who can and does, Jesus Christ.¹ Foundations laid on God stand the test of time. His Holy Spirit enables sturdiness and strength in the face of adversity and sin.

However, not everyone is convinced this is true. In David Benner's work, *Care of Souls*, there is an argument set forth claiming religious faith is more a part of the problem than the solution. Pathological dynamics once entangled with faith have less than pleasant outcomes.

¹ Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, "Bearing the Unbearable: Trauma, Gospel and Pastoral Care," *Theology Today* 68 (2011): 8-25. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*; Internet; accessed November 16, 2014.

Promises of glory and peace in the next life casts gloom and negativity on one's present life. If this is the case, Benner argues a person would be better off without religion.²

Without deployment, combat, and war, soldiers would probably be better off. In the past few decades, scores of pages in books, magazines, and journals have been filled with thoughts, insights, and advice on the phenomenon that is PTSD. There is no shortage of books about the destruction of soldier's personal lives due to traumatic stress from combat situations either. There seems to be more of a cultural awareness now than there was thirty years ago.

The *Handbook of Post-Traumatic Therapy*, written by Williams and Sommer, revealed how loss plays into the eventual development of post traumatic symptoms. Pain from bearing the blame for someone's death can be too much for anyone, and especially a soldier who may play a role in multiple deaths during a single deployment. Ultimately, everything varies from person to person. Symptoms and signs can be vastly different between men in the same regiment. Therefore treatment must also be different. Williams and Sommer explain by saying, "Treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder must be flexible; it varies with client needs and level of development and helps integrate traumatic material into the past while building a new framework by which to view the present and the future."³

Combat stress has a tendency to distort a soldier's recollection of his traumatic experience. So, the question must be raised: What are PTSD veterans telling themselves about their traumatic experience?⁴ Some of the facts might be accurate. Other details may be anything but the truth. Anger, alcohol or seclusion are often covers for deeper, darker feelings of shame, worry and regret. And how will you know if someone feels like this? Listen and build a relationship of trust that fosters a willingness to share traumatic events from the past.

Nothing is simple. Life is full of sin-caused complications and contradictions with words and actions. PTSD is full of contradictions as well. Reactions that mental health professionals label a symptom is something necessary for survival in any war zone. Perspectives on PTSD are numerous and intriguing. Some feel that the term PTSD should not even be used. Definitions

² David G. Benner, *Care of Souls* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 57.

³ Mary Beth Williams and John F. Sommer, eds. *Handbook of Post-Traumatic Therapy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 551.

⁴ Walter F. McDermott, *Understanding Combat Related Post Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Publishers, 2012), 40.

have a tendency to be deficient because they cannot specifically describe all the emotion behind trauma.⁵ At times, those who write the definitions have no personal experience with trauma. PTSD is uniquely challenging in many ways, especially in a counseling setting.

If no one can understand what a soldier went through, whom does he relate to? Whom does he rely on for strength and encouragement? Many authors have hinted at the idea that King David is someone soldiers can relate to. He certainly experienced combat multiple times against the Philistines alone. He endured threats on his life, and ultimately, was a warrior. Mark Healy backed this opinion when he wrote, “Whatever the validity of the accounts, it seems most likely that David came to the court of Saul as a professional soldier. Within a short time he began to make a name for himself as a great warrior, to such an extent that his own reputation began to outshine that of Saul.”⁶ David does fit the mold, as far as experience is concerned, of modern era soldiers, but this does not mean every soldier out there will automatically relate to King David.

Counseling soldiers with PTSD certainly must be a challenging situation. Pastors who have encountered such people recognize that challenge. I am grateful for pastors and laymen who took the time to share their experiences whether it was through surveys, interviews, or suggested reading lists. Two books, both by Edward Tick, were recommended as must reads for this thesis project. Reading them both was time well spent. *War and the Soul* detailed the history of warfare from Israel to Iraq and how mindsets toward warfare had changed. He also talked through potential causes of PTSD with experience and research to back up his claims. *Warrior’s Return* evaluated how well the United States welcomed back its veterans. Other cultures and their traditions were evaluated as well. Tick does a fine job emphasizing the point that soldiers are not the same after combat, and civilians cannot expect them to seamlessly integrate back into their previous lives. I would share the opinion that these books should be read.

PART 1: WHAT IS POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)?

Trauma

PTSD is not limited to soldiers who have been in combat. Warfare may very well be the first thing that comes mind when one hears the acronym. Other forms of trauma cannot be

⁵ Charles Hoge, *Once a Warrior Always a Warrior* (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2010), xii.

⁶ Mark Healy, *Warriors of the Old Testament* (London: Brockhampton Press, 1998), 65.

overlooked either. What might be sources of trauma in life? Death of a family member, parents divorcing, accidents, natural disasters, and abuse of any kind can be deeply etched in people's minds. Events like these can reformulate their attitudes about God, themselves, and the world they live in. Traumatic events can become problematic to natural life functioning.⁷ Interestingly, not everyone develops PTSD from traumatic events. Are certain people more or less likely to be negatively affected by life events?

Who is at risk? Is there a specific PTSD gene in some and not in others? Any event or string of events can lead down the road toward traumatic stress. Even then, the likelihood of getting PTSD depends on many factors. Possible factors include: severity of the trauma, intensity of your reaction to the trauma, whether or not injury occurred, death or injury to someone close to you, how in control you felt, and how much support was received following the event.⁸ No amount of research or study can prove without a doubt that any particular person might develop PTSD. Is PTSD a sign of weakness? Some of the most in tune, dedicated and strong military soldiers have developed PTSD. Labeling it a weakness is out the window.

One reason for such a development might be a difference in resiliency. How well a person bounces back from adversity can indicate if posttraumatic stress will be an issue. In addition, childhood abuse or neglect, or those with close family members who have mental health problems may be more predisposed toward PTSD after a traumatic event. The presence of alcoholism in the family is also a great influencer. Some suffer temporary or minor symptoms that never develop into PTSD. For others, symptoms may emerge twenty to thirty years after the initial traumatic event occurred. The fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V) sheds some light on its development as well. It states, "PTSD can occur at any age, beginning after the first year of life. Symptoms usually begin within the first 3 months after trauma, although there may be a delay of months, or even years, before criteria for the diagnosis are met."⁹ In the end, no one truly knows or can explain if such a complex stress disorder is predetermined for some people and not for other people.

⁷ Neil T. Anderson, Terry E. Zuehlke and Julianne S. Zuehlke, *Christ-Centered Therapy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 97.

⁸ Laurie B. Slone and Matthew J. Friedman, *After the War Zone: A Practical Guide for Returning Troops and Their Families* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2008), 157.

⁹ American Psychiatric Association, "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," in *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th ed.* (London, England: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013), 276.

Combat trauma is a combination, an accumulation of trauma that can happen daily in a war zone. War changes people in unexpected ways, as David Philipps says, “Trauma is an injury of impact: fearing death, witnessing an attack with mass casualties, seeing women and children killed, handling dead bodies, witnessing or committing atrocities, being injured in an attack, feeling helpless or unable to counterattack, and killing – each can cause a traumatic combat stress injury.”¹⁰ Soldier’s wounds strike deep into the heart of man.

The Term

The term post traumatic stress disorder is a fairly new way to describe something soldiers have experienced most likely since conflict or war started in this world. Depending on what period in history you look at, you will find all kinds of different terms for what we now label as PTSD. Jacob Mendes Da Costa was the first to study and report on this diagnosis. Two terms were used somewhat interchangeably during the American Civil War: “Soldier’s Heart,” and “irritable heart.” “Use of the former term might stress physiological conditions, the latter psychological, a distinction we seem to have lost today.”¹¹ The First World War brought about “shell shock” or “hysteria.” During both the Second World War and the war in Korea, the term became “war neurosis” and “battle fatigue.” As American veterans started returning home from Vietnam, it was dubbed “Post-Vietnam syndrome.”¹²

PTSD as we know it resulted from the influx of Vietnam veterans who were seeking help from Veterans Affairs hospitals across the country. The need arose for a diagnostic concept to frame treatment. In 1980, PTSD officially entered the lexicon by being part of the third edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III). Members of the Association classified PTSD as a stress and anxiety disorder comprising numerous symptoms that appeared after traumatic events beyond any normal

¹⁰ David Philipps, *Lethal Warriors: When the New Band of Brothers Came Home* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 87.

¹¹ Edward Tick, *Warrior’s Return: Restoring the Soul After War* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2014), 100.

¹² Penny Coleman, *Flashback: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Suicide, and the Lessons of War* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 19.

experience.¹³ The names have changed over the years, but the wounds they describe have been consistent: war can cause mental disruption that alters life.

If PTSD just alters life, why does there need to be any additions or modifications to the definition found in the DSM? We know the condition changes people, but leaving a description like that leaves room for much more to be desired. Post traumatic stress disorder is classified by human beings that want to “fix” people. If there is a label attached to mental symptoms, then maybe a professional can help relieve their suffering. A sense of order in a complex world makes afflictions like PTSD appear fully manageable.

Hearing about the “science” behind PTSD appears to make it easier to understand. There is a structure in the brain which has been called the center of emotion, the amygdala, as well as a structure dealing with memory, the hippocampus. “With PTSD, the amygdala and hippocampus operate in opposite directions, hence are overstressed, and...often bring the biophysical system into hyperawareness...Their experience is being filled with raw feelings – feelings of rage, of hate, of despair, of pain and loneliness.”¹⁴

Sure, this definition might be easy to understand, yet it can be interpreted by some to be far too expansive. Their reasoning is that too many people can claim to have gone through trauma, resulting in a PTSD claim. Criterion A of post traumatic stress disorder in DSM-V describes trauma: an event that is either life threatening, could lead to serious injury, or rape.¹⁵ “However, the diagnosis has been broadened by allowing incidents that consist only of hearing about trauma, which could expand the prevalence of PTSD.”¹⁶ By broadening the meaning of trauma, most people in world could hypothetically qualify as a sufferer of PTSD. Is this a realistic problem for psychologists around the world to deal with? More than likely, the answer is no, because the majority of claims may be denied due to such an influx of requests.

Another layer to the proverbial onion of PTSD might be the forensic overdiagnosis of PTSD. Before 1980 no such term existed. What category would it have been placed in? How was

¹³ Tick, 97.

¹⁴ Daryl S. Paulson and Stanley Krippner, *Haunted by Combat: Understanding PTSD in War Veterans Including Women, Reservists, and Those Coming Back from Iraq* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007), 51.

¹⁵ American Psychiatric Association, “Post traumatic Stress Disorder,” 271.

¹⁶ Joel Paris, *The Intelligent Clinician’s Guide to the DSM-5* (New York: Oxford Press, 2013), 125.

it explained? Sometimes it was misused as a catchall for any post combat bad behavior such as fights, driving under the influence of alcohol, or enduring failed relationships. Symptoms like visual flashbacks had been mistaken for schizophrenia, mood swings as signs of bipolar disorder, and trust issues viewed as symptoms of borderline personality disorder.¹⁷ Drug dependence also gets in the way of a proper diagnosis. Young men who dabbled in narcotics before serving in Vietnam might have gotten themselves deeper into dependence during their tour of duty, and continued their downward spiral upon returning to the United States.

In other veterans, the signs of PTSD were undetectable to the human eye. Symptoms lie in wait beneath a calm and collected exterior until they explode, similar to an IED. Depending on where and when the bomb detonates, some soldiers are injured while others escape without a scrape. “Like an IED blast, PTSD can cripple some soldiers and leave others in the platoon untouched. And just like an IED, PTSD can look like something else... symptoms can include heavy drinking, drug use, emotional numbness, and aggression.”¹⁸ All of this adds to the mystery surrounding who will suffer from PTSD, when it will reveal itself, and how behavior will be affected when it does come.

One more explanatory item should be made at this time. Post traumatic stress (PTS) is different from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). A person dealing with stress after a traumatic event does not have PTSD unless he or she receives that particular diagnosis from a licensed psychiatrist. Their symptoms must meet all of the criteria included in the most up to date DSM description of PTSD. In another light, dropping the “disorder” might reduce potential stigmas against anyone with war wounds.

Positive Potential

So far, PTSD has received mostly negative remarks due to its perceived debilitating nature. However, there are soldiers as well as psychiatric professionals that see positive potential stemming from the wounds of war. We are now dealing with something referred to as post traumatic growth.

¹⁷ Aphrodite T. Matsakis, *Loving Someone With PTSD: A Practical Guide to Understanding and Connecting with Your Partner after Trauma* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 2013), 31.

¹⁸ Philipps, *Lethal Warriors*, 103.

By nature people do not want to be defined by adversity in their life. They want to push through the negative emotions and emerge on top, better than before. A strong push can be made to become stronger, physically and mentally, than the day before, or stronger than when trauma initially occurred. Stress is not something foreign to the civilian population. It can be felt worldwide. Mental roadblocks and difficult decisions can surface daily in anyone's life.

Now imagine what stress might be like away from your home, family and country. Danger and death can lurk behind every Afghani or Iraqi building in a war zone. Bombs can blow up a Humvee without warning. Situations in combat with severe danger and stress motivates your body to respond. Those responses are normal when life is endangered. War causes pain; it hurts and lingers. "It causes wounding to the deepest dimensions of our humanity. These wounds carry pain that will not and should not go away. In this sense the invisible wound is not negative, certainly not a disease. A war-traumatized person is not mentally ill but a wandering soul..."¹⁹ Soldiers might fight off feelings of isolation, dejection, and being misunderstood for many years. As a result of war, military men and women come home different. War's effects have a profound impact. Not experiencing some of those feelings following war zone contact would be abnormal.

In an attempt to make combat stress appear manageable and common, some experts have referred to it as a normal response to abnormal circumstances. This theory is based on two assumptions: (1) the incident that causes the PTSD is "abnormal"; and (2) all of the reactions seen are within the limits of a normal response to such a stressor.²⁰ I cannot say for sure how I would personally react in a war zone, but I would certainly actively try to avoid danger and death at all cost. My actions could be classified as a disorder. So how can something be both a normal reaction and a disorder at the same time? An answer has escaped many generations. Academics question the existence of post traumatic growth. Veterans of combat can look back at that time and tell themselves they changed for the better to make sense of a senseless tragedy. Growth cannot be measured. What they are getting at is post traumatic growth cannot be a real

¹⁹ Edward Tick, *Warrior's Return: Restoring the Soul after War* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2014), 56.

²⁰ Bessel A. Van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane and Lars Weisaeth, eds., *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society* (New York: The Guildord Press, 2007), 78.

phenomenon or something that can be objectively defined. Each warrior can say his past combat has caused positive growth.

Will you be the one to tell a veteran his experience must be purely negative, and the thought of his combat being positive is ridiculous? Take him at his word. Generally, there has been an acknowledgement among veterans that their deployment(s) had brought new skills and strengths. Erin Finley wrote, “Many felt more confident, more assertive, and more appreciative. They placed a higher value on their home country, their freedom as citizens, their health and safety, and their families.”²¹ As the United States military transitioned to an all-volunteer force they could equip troops with positive and necessary values for their military as well as civilian lives after service. Lifelong military members are proud to represent their country on behalf of others. They deploy so others will not have to. A career officer said, “I had seven tours in Iraq and Afghanistan so seven of you [civilians] would not have to go.”²² Honor, pride and loyalty motivate those in the military to fight for what America stands for against all enemies. They would have it no other way.

A New York Times article adds a wrinkle to the idea of post traumatic growth with a paradox. Many people grow even as they suffer. Coping with trauma is complex. The way trauma molds people is complex. Growth and suffering can happen simultaneously. There is no reason the one-at-a-time rule should come into play. Recently, an Army-wide program called Comprehensive Soldier Fitness was initiated to help soldiers become more resilient and to help them recognize trauma can change them for the better.²³ Everything hinges on change. Veterans coming back stateside are often faced with the question: “What changed in you?” A multitude of therapies are available to alleviate post traumatic stress.

Therapies

²¹ Erin P. Finley, *Fields of Combat: Understanding PTSD among Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 66.

²² Tick, *Warrior's Return*, 16.

²³ Jim Rendon, “Post-Traumatic Stress’s Surprisingly Positive Flip Side,” *New York Times*, March 22, 2012, accessed October 27, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/25/magazine/post-traumatic-stress-surprisingly-positive-flip-side.html>.

Today's world is filled with all kinds of therapies and treatments for combat related trauma wounds. Each one varies in success from individual to individual. There is not a one-size fits-all therapy that works on everyone. Symptoms can vary drastically as well. For this reason treatments need to be different to make an influence on those who struggle to find peace because of war. Deciding on the right treatment is tough. "PTSD is a complex and multidimensional latticework of symptoms, memories, events, responses, and beliefs, and treatment hinges on these complex intersections."²⁴ Since posttraumatic stress is so complex in nature, I do not intend to insist on a certain type of therapy. After all, I have no experience with any of the following types of treatment methods. Also, the focus of education at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is not to develop psychologists, but pastors. However, I do believe brief exposure to these therapies can be beneficial.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive behavioral therapy has been proven useful and employed by professionals to help combat veterans, as well as civilians, sort through any trauma. The premise is a focus not on the traumatic event itself, but how the individual thinks about the event. "Why me?" is a common question asked. Their assumption is that bad things should not happen to good people. A cognitive therapy response would be: "The reality is that you are just as likely as anyone else to have bad things happen." There is purpose behind a rather harsh sounding response. It is designed to disrupt veteran's emotions so they might be willing to rethink their belief that bad things should not happen to them.²⁵ An additional overarching goal would be to foster the foundation of a positive self-image, an attitude that does not avoid problems, but attacks them directly. Accepting that life can be unfair and unjust is a step in the right direction. Reducing stress through muscle relaxation and deep breathing exercises also plays a role in this therapy.

Mind-Body Therapy

In order to reduce anxiety and depression from trauma, mind-body therapy encourages survivors to observe their thoughts and feelings rather than judge them. Elements of yoga and

²⁴ Paulson, *Haunted by Combat*, xvi.

²⁵ McDermott, *Understanding Combat*, 46.

Buddhist meditation are combined to bring mind and body into balance. Repeating positive phrases while tapping acupuncture points might also help eliminate any causes of distress.²⁶ Achieving oneness with yourself is the idea behind mind-body therapy.

Evenly Suspended Attention Therapy

Sigmund Freud focused his therapy thoughts on how a counselor listens to his counselees. His idea is an interesting one; one that deserves some thought and discussion.

Freud's method of evenly suspended attention is described in the following way:

Noting the common tendency to focus attention during a conversation on things that strike us as most relevant or interesting, he suggested that we listen with a somewhat softer, more diffuse focus. The goal of such listening is to be open to the experience of the other with as little focusing of attention as is possible. The risk of concentration during conversation is, according to Freud, the risk of hearing only what we already know and being open to that which we have already anticipated.²⁷

The desire to listen well during counseling cannot be emphasized enough. Counseling does no good if you do not take the time to show you care enough to listen to their concerns and fears.

Miscellaneous Therapy

Fully describing each and every kind of therapy in its own subsection would go beyond the focus of this thesis. This section will briefly mention other various notable therapies.

“Exposure therapy involves confronting patients over and over with what most haunts them, until they become desensitized to it.”²⁸ Is desensitization the same thing as healing? Nightmares and recurring flashbacks could possibly cease, but the heart of their issue with trauma may be untouched. Soldiers are already at risk of being desensitized to death because of their time surrounded with killing in a war zone.

Other psychotherapists have found another way to surround veterans with their trauma for “healing.” Modern technology has allowed computers to generate an artificial recreation of their combat trauma. During the simulation, veterans can discuss with the psychotherapist what

²⁶ Matsakis, *Loving Someone*, 206.

²⁷ Benner, *Care of Souls*, 138-139.

²⁸ Jeneen Interlandi, “A Revolutionary Approach to Treating PTSD,” *New York Times*, May 22, 2014, accessed October 27, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/25/magazine/a-revolutionary-approach-to-treating-ptsd.html>.

he or she is thinking and feeling while simultaneously reliving the combat trauma. The end goal of virtual reality is to help them reprocess the trauma and cope with upsetting memories.²⁹

So far, only the realm of psychologists and psychotherapists have been mentioned. The United States military is no slacker either when it comes to supporting veterans of war. An option can be the Army Wounded Warrior Program, which offers to help soldiers transition to civilian life. Like many things, though, the system can be abused. According to one soldier a brother in ministry talked with indicated he felt only ten percent of folks in the program actually needed to be there. Those who really needed the help tended to view such a program as a potential career-ending move. The Warrior Transition Battalion, which also offers assistance to soldiers, has been considered a den of abuse rather than a place for peace and help.³⁰

Many opportunities for assistance have been offered by our military after something traumatic has happened in warfare. Would it not be wise to offer such assistance before, or immediately after a traumatic war event has occurred? There have been efforts to do just that. Preventing decreased troop capability appears to be the number one goal in what has come to be known as frontline psychiatry. Proponents of the frontline method emphasize the need to deliver services as soon as possible and as close as possible to the front lines. Soldiers need to be returned to functioning and their military role as soon as possible.³¹ The never ending need for effective soldiers in combat continues.

Getting help for soldier's needs on the frontline has not always been such a priority. Doctors, chaplains or psychiatrists were not always available immediately after an ambush or intense firefight. Managing stress was on the shoulders of the soldier alone. A Vietnam veteran was asked if there was a combat stress doctor available to regularly visit his battalion. He said, "The only combat stress doctor we had was Jack Daniels."³²

²⁹ McDermott, *Understanding Combat*, 154.

³⁰ Anonymous survey, received October 22, 2014.

³¹ Victoria M. Follette and Josef I. Ruzek, *Cognitive-Behavioral Therapies for Trauma* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2006), 438.

³² Philipps, 11.

Shift in Cultural Views

Our nation's military seems to spare no expense today when it comes to taking care of veterans and their needs, whether physical or mental. Respect is given to those who faithfully defended the freedom we so deeply appreciate. Being honored for serving in war is probably appreciated by veterans as well. Yet all too often a four letter acronym changes everything. PTSD has become problematic to some civilians. Veterans with PTSD have been linked to tragic car accidents while driving under the influence, and murder in some cases, throughout the United States. Post traumatic stress disorder has become a bad word to the ears of many that marks a mental disease requiring medication and countless trips to the psychiatrist to be "fixed."

American culture can be quick to demonize and stigmatize veterans dealing with psychological and moral suffering, which is unseen. Stigmas are hard to eradicate as well. "The stigma against PTSD remains frequent and destructive. It encourages shame, deters healthy sharing and processing of emotions, and interferes with care seeking."³³ Attitudes are vastly different for veterans coming home with amputations or burns. How can someone be demonized who has lost a limb for his country? More compassion can easily be directed toward a soldier with a physical handicap than is directed toward a soldier with mental irregularities to deal with.

Historically, top tier generals and commanders could not fathom soldiers being unable to perform due to mental issues. Naturally, it was assumed, these men were only trying to fake their way out of duty. At best their issues were viewed as a weakness, and at worst, deceitful cowardice. Beginning around the end of the Vietnam War, veterans with known mental issues had been referred to as ticking time bombs highly trained in guerilla warfare. The same could be said of modern day veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Taking a look at historical views on shell shock, post traumatic stress, or however you refer to it, leads nicely into how a soldier might view seeking help for himself or herself. Mindsets of the military engrained upon troops does not bode well for seeking out help. Admitting to any kind of weakness is not the manly thing to do; after all, there is strong then there is Army strong. Selections of the "Soldier's Creed" from the United States Army website may decrease willingness to admit any problem. These phrases include: I will never accept defeat. I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my warrior

³³ Finley, 173.

tasks and drills. I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy the enemies of the United States of America in close combat.³⁴ Army value and honor is nothing to downplay or degrade, yet they may lead to such intense pride that going to any VA hospital is off the table of options indefinitely. Misunderstanding the soldier can be an easy trap to fall into.

Understanding

Once the fabric of American culture understands what a soldier is trained to do and how he is to operate in a war zone, then an appreciation of their service takes shape. Concern for their mental welfare follows on its heels.

Laurie Slone fantastically describes an acronym, BATTLEMIND, which helps a soldier survive in combat situations. “B” stands for buddies versus withdrawal. Soldiers rely on each other to stay alive. Naturally, a tight knit bond develops between brothers in arms. They become the only family you know away from home. “A” is accountability versus controlling, which means everyone is accountable for gear, weapons, actions, and fellow comrades. The first “T” represents targeted versus inappropriate aggression. Soldiers must be ready to act in an environment where the focus is to kill or be killed. The second “T” refers to tactical awareness versus hypervigilance. In combat survival depends on being aware of your surroundings at all times and immediately reacting to sudden changes. “L” represents lethally armed versus locked and loaded. In a war zone, carrying weapons is mandatory and essential. “E” represents emotional control versus detachment. Mental toughness is considered to be essential while emotional expression is discouraged. Unfortunately, such a mindset makes you appear emotionally detached, numb or uncaring. “M” is mission operational security versus secretiveness. Mission details are shared only with those who need to know. Combat experiences will only be understood by unit members, no one else. “I” equals individual responsibility versus guilt. In combat, your responsibility is simply to survive while doing your best to keep your friends alive. “N” refers to non-defensive versus aggressive driving. IED infested highways and byways necessitates a driving style employing fast, rapid lane changes, and keeping other

³⁴ “U.S. Army,” Army Values, accessed December 3, 2014, <http://www.army.mil/values/soldiers.html>.

vehicles at a distance to avoid danger. “D” represents discipline and ordering versus conflict. Survival in combat zones depends on discipline and obeying orders.³⁵

BATTLEMIND makes perfect sense in combat situations. Each letter’s meaning combines to create a mindset conducive to survival when soldiers’ lives are consistently threatened. Soldiers who have deployed to war numerous times will most likely have BATTLEMIND deeply engrained on their worldview and behavioral patterns. For this reason, mindsets geared toward battle are hard to break after the soldier comes home. Things that trigger dangerous situations in combat often carry over to civilian life. Barriers and obstacles pile up between a soldier and his family, or a soldier and his community.

Family Tension

Leaving strong friendships formed in times of war is a crushing blow to the soldier. Fears, doubts, and problems were shared with fellow brothers in arms. They understood. They shared the very same experiences day in and day out. Being open and honest with anyone else, even family, was met with serious reservations. At home the soldier is solely responsible for every daily operation. No one else cares if the job is done right.

Constant awareness of one’s surroundings, hypervigilance, comes home with the soldier as well. Recent operations in the Middle East have exposed soldiers to a war in three hundred and sixty degrees. There are no distinct battle lines. Insurgents can ambush at any time and from any direction. Men, women and children are all potential combatants and can bring devastation. Large groups of people can indicate a suicide bomber will strike soon, or sniper fire will come. Once home, anxiety and fear can come from large crowds in shopping centers for example. There is no time to check the perimeter, or to become aware of what’s happening behind you. Isolation at home with weapons at hand seems preferable even though there is no reasonable threat for miles.

When a soldier suffers, his family suffers. Combat makes it necessary to shut down all emotion. Sometimes emotion cannot be powered back up again for family. Showing no emotion at all gives the impression that the veteran does not care about anyone but himself. Emotional attachment can be a factor that makes a marriage stronger, or relationships with your children

³⁵ Slone, *After the War Zone*, 57-62.

better. Without it husband and wife can gradually drift apart. Children can become alienated from their parents.

Whether veterans realize it or not, their lack of care and concern for their families is problematic. Their post traumatic stress is infectious and cumulative. Family members are at risk for developing PTSD since they are in constant contact with someone who struggles to manage a post trauma and post military life. Outbursts of anger spring up suddenly and for no apparent reason. To make matters worse, the family might not have a clue what his anger triggers are. Living life always on edge and in fear of another outburst can be traumatic for the family. Encouraging loved ones to “just get over it” is easy to say, but offers no helping hand. Their suffering is not acknowledged. Loneliness, isolation and loss of self-worth begin to escalate. Togetherness and love make an impact. A tight knit, cohesive family allows healing to begin and hopefully continue in the future.

Summary

Thus far, there has been an understanding that trauma can take many forms under varying circumstances. The history of what now is referred to as PTSD sets the stage for research in the future. Modern technology has been employed in therapy alongside frequently used standards of therapy to help veterans of war and active duty military members. Post traumatic stress undoubtedly causes unique stress and tension within families. I imagine caring for soldiers with PTSD is a challenge, but a worthwhile challenge to introduce, guide or remind these men and women of God, who cares for them and will never leave them.

PART 2: DAVID’S LIFE STORY AS WARRIOR AND KING

Part 1 was essentially an overview of trauma, PTSD, therapy, and the family unit as they converge in soldiers of our military. The focus narrows to a man that had experienced just about everything a modern day soldier would experience in war. We will now take a look at the life of King David, trauma and all. The basis of this study of David will focus on highlights from 1 Samuel fifteen through the end of 2 Samuel.

Story behind the Story

Israel's second king, David, is an intriguing figure found on the pages of Holy Scripture. His life has been laid out in the open for people of all time to hear about. Frankly, not all of it was honorable in God's eyes. Yet who am I to expect perfection from such a distinguished member of the Savior's human family tree. You and I know well the sins David fell into. His story of deliverance, repentance, and restoration is credited to God Almighty who is in control of all things for his people. David's legacy lives on to this day because God wanted us to read about it and learn from it. Dr. Steven Hokana describes him by saying, "David, frequently called King David the Great, is a multifaceted person whose actions, both good and bad, are displayed clearly for all to see in the Old Testament. David is a man that touches the lives of God's people for thousands of years through his Psalms, kingly edicts, political savvy, and bitter mistakes."³⁶

Before David could rise by way of God's rich blessings, someone would need to fall by way of God's rejection. The nation of Israel desperately wanted to be like all the other nations around them, yet they were without a king. So, they asked God for a king and he delivered by giving them King Saul. Over time Saul again and again rejected the Word of the Lord. Eventually, he would be rejected as king by the Lord for not completely destroying the Amalekites. Saul spared their king, Agag, and plundered the best of everything they could find. The prophet Samuel confronted Saul with his rejection of the Lord's command, but Saul claimed he intended to offer his plunder to the Lord as an offering. Saul expressed regret, but it was too little too late. His kingdom would be torn from him and given to one better. God's decision was firm and unwavering. The Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind (1 Sa 15:28-29 paraphrase).³⁷ God's will would be done.

Humble Beginnings

The next order of business was to anoint a new king over Israel. The Lord sent Samuel to the town of Bethlehem to anoint one of Jesse's sons. Even at this point Saul's jealousy was a

³⁶ Steven C. Hokana, "A Pastoral Care Model for Combat Veterans that Suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Using Written Confessional Prayer for Healing" (Doctorate Dissertation), 71.

³⁷ Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *1 & 2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 120.

concern. Samuel was fearful that Saul would hear about his anointing task and kill him. Violent acts from Saul would be forthcoming.

Samuel searched among Jesse's sons for the new king, finally settling on a son with a fine appearance. Physical appearance was thought to be a nice outward quality for a king to have. But, Israel needed a ruler with more than just a fine physical appearance. The Lord favors what is in the heart of a man. David was a shepherd and described as ruddy with an acceptable appearance and handsome features. His occupation was nothing special for the time period; it was a common, ordinary job. But from the very day he was anointed king, the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power. He was called a warrior as well in 1 Samuel 16:18. God was with him.

A Warrior Emerges

David began serving Saul at the same time Saul was being tormented by an evil spirit sent by the Lord. Soon after, the Philistines show up on the scene to wage war with Israel. One bold soul from the Philistine camp dared to curse God. His name was Goliath. Saul along with his whole army were terrified of this juggernaut of a man. David volunteered to take on Goliath by himself. This probably marked his very first military combat experience. For David, this conflict was no different from fighting off and killing lions and bears who attacked his flock of sheep. Why? The Lord had protected him then and would protect him against Goliath. Fear could have gotten the best of David. He could have given up hope with God, but his faith shined brightly. The author Chrisholm makes this comment:

As frail human beings, who are so easily influenced by our physical senses, we are prone to let the challenges of the present swallow up what we have learned in the past and paralyze us. David's faith does not allow this to happen. He remembers how God has delivered him from powerful predators, and he is convinced that the past will be repeated in the present...He realizes that it is the Lord who empowers him for battle and gives him the nerve and presence of mind to use his training and weapons effectively.³⁸

Goliath was no match for David who came against him in the name of the Lord who promised to be with David and gave him the victory.

³⁸ Robert B. Chrisholm Jr., *1 & 2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 120.

No matter what King Saul commanded of David, he was successful in everything he did. All the while Saul grew jealous and angry toward David. Without warning Saul was second fiddle to David. Saul's disdain rose up so much that he decided to pin David to the wall with his spear. I find it hard to believe David could forget Saul's attempt to kill him. It must have been a traumatic experience. David eluded round one of Saul's death threat. In round two, Saul decided to have Israel's enemies kill David instead. The young warrior was made commander over one thousand men. Surely he would succumb to defeat and death Saul thought.

Triumph followed David even more. Saul tried to keep his sworn enemy even closer by offering one of his daughters in marriage. David declined and Merab was given in marriage to Adriel. Option two was Saul's other daughter, Michal. The fact that she is in love with David solidifies Saul's scheme. She would be a snare to David. Saul's price for Michal was a hundred Philistine foreskins. There is no way David would escape this death sentence! Who could successfully retrieve that many foreskins? "However, this price, involving the killing of the Philistines (it is unlikely that they would agree to voluntary circumcision), is fully paid, and David achieves his ambition."³⁹ David went above and beyond Saul's request by bringing him two hundred Philistine foreskins. David's success now surpassed all of Saul's officers.

Eventually, Saul abandons indirect plans to kill David and takes on the challenge himself. In 1 Samuel chapter nineteen, Saul tells his son Jonathan, a close friend of David, and all his attendants to kill him. Another spear from Saul was directed David's way. He got the hint this time. The time came for David to flee. Michal helped her husband escape sure death at the hands of Saul's men. In the process, David had to abandon two of the most significant people in his life, Jonathan and Michal. Their separation might very well have caused David to grieve and to worry for their well-being. Would life be worth living under those circumstances?⁴⁰ David's possible worry proved to be accurate since Saul threw a spear at his own son when he defended David's honor. Saul's action was a telling sign as to how far he was willing to go to eliminate David, his arch enemy.

³⁹ Mary J. Evans, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 88.

⁴⁰ Robert D. Bergen, *The New American Commentary Volume 7: 1, 2 Samuel* (New York: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 213.

Jonathan had a hunch his father was extremely bitter toward David, but needed to hear it directly from Saul. A covenant was established between Jonathan and David to ensure that Jonathan would warn David if danger was coming his way. Danger was imminent, so David sought out Ahimelech, a priest, at Nob for assistance. Ahimelech provided consecrated bread for the men, and gave David the sword of Goliath. From Nob, David fled to various cities, forests, and caves to stay one step ahead of Saul's pursuit. In the midst of fleeing, David received a devastating report from Nob. Saul had given an order to kill all the priests of the Lord. Doeg the Edomite viciously carried out his request, not satisfied with killing only priests. He wiped out the entire city of Nob: men, women, children, infants, cattle, donkeys and sheep. David could assume responsibility for all the deaths in Nob because the people had helped his company out.

In spite of all the chaos and death surrounding David, he still knew to whom to turn, the Lord. David asked the Lord if the Philistines attacking the city of Keilah would be delivered into his hands. He inflicted heavy losses on those Philistines. The Lord then revealed Saul would soon arrive, and the people of Keilah would hand him over to Saul. David was able to escape since a Philistine raiding party diverted Saul's attention. David had much to be thankful for. His friends and Philistine enemies were used by God to ensure his very life. "In the midst of grave danger, David experiences God's guidance, encouragement, and protection. While God grants David direct revelation, he also intervenes providentially, using Jonathan to encourage David and the Philistine raiding parties to divert Saul's attention away from David so that he might escape."⁴¹ Again, God was watching over David amid perilous circumstances.

An episode in En Gedi appeared to be an opportunity for David to end his conflict with Saul quickly. Saul went to relieve himself in the same cave David and his men were hiding in. Over and over David's men encouraged him to take Saul's life while he had the chance. He refused to lift a finger against the Lord's anointed king. David left Saul's life in God's hands. God would remove Saul in his own time. David must have had second thoughts about killing Saul. What warrior in battle would let an enemy live so he would have another opportunity to take his life? David knew the Lord's promises well. The Lord would be with him and strengthen him in all his endeavors.

Conflict and combat followed David everywhere he went. Fleeing to different deserts and caves took its toll on David's squadron. They were in need. Conveniently, they were in the

⁴¹ Chrisholm, 155.

vicinity of Nabal at Carmel. David sent some men to Nabal to see if he would be favorable toward them. It was not meant to be. Nabal declined to help out strangers. Rejection did not sit well with David. He had four hundred men come with him to eliminate every single male in Nabal's household. Evil came out of the good word David sent to Nabal. David resolved to give Nabal some of his own medicine. However, the Lord moved Abigail, Nabal's wife, to intervene and stop David from carry out his craving for revenge. Such actions would make sense for Nabal, but not for the future king of Israel. Much blood had already been spilled as a result of David's actions as well as by his own hand. Heaping more blood on from Nabal's household was not necessary. God took care of Nabal by striking him so that he eventually died. Then David took Abigail to be his own wife. We are also informed that David was separated even further from Michal, who was given to another man by Saul.

The only stable thing in David's life had been Saul's relentless pursuit to end his life. No place in the land could be considered a true home to David. Continual combat, fleeing, and loss had begun to define David. Saul's pursuit had become so relentless that David resorted to seek relief by living in the land of the Philistines. David offered his services to Achish and functioned as a mercenary and a border guard. David's skill set as a warrior and commander would no doubt benefit the Philistines and bolster their military. But David never intended to and would not attack any town of Israel. Instead he raided the Geshurites, Girzites, and Amalekites all of which were most likely allied with the Philistines and Israel's enemies. David kept the truth hidden from Achish. He ensured the secret by not allowing a single man or woman to live. Achish trusted David to this extent: He believed David would remain his servant forever. Was it wrong of David to conceal his true intentions of destroying Israel's enemies? Commentator Francesca Murphy says, "David deploys subterfuge when in enemy territory, pretending to be a honorary Philistine, and uses it not only to his own advantage, but also to the glory of God. Recent critics are right to notice David's deviousness, but wrong in their assessment of its moral tonality."⁴² The Lord continued to deliver David's foes into his hands.

David was delivered from an event that undeniably would have caused conflict in his mind. Philistia, with David on their side, was ready to go to war against Israel. Achish rightly questioned David's loyalty, fearing David would turn on him in battle. They were sent back to Ziklag. What they found upon returning to Ziklag would traumatize them and profusely increase

⁴² Francesca Aran Murphy, *1 Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 250.

their stress levels. The city had been attacked and burned. Their wives, sons, and daughters were taken captive by the Amalekites. Obvious tension arose when much thought was given to stoning David. Yet in this trying time, David found necessary strength in the Lord his God. David and his men set out after them with the Lord's blessing. Battle raged from dusk until the next evening. No one got away from David and his men. David took care of the task Saul failed to carry out – destroy the Amalekites.

Meanwhile, King Saul completed his fall from God's favor by ending his own life against the Philistines on Mount Gilboa. Jonathan also died by the sword in battle. When David heard the news he mourned for the loss of the Lord's anointed and his close friend Jonathan. These were traumatic times for the future king of Israel.

A New King is Crowned

After the period of mourning over Saul was over and relative peace came across Judah, David asked the Lord if the time was right to return to the towns of Judah. The Lord's timing for David was just right. David was directed to Hebron where the men of Judah anointed David king over the house of Judah. For forty years, David occupied the throne of Israel. What lies ahead for David would not be easy or comfortable, but filled with tragedy, sin, and suffering.

Almost immediately a war started between the houses of David and Saul. Chapters two through four of 2 Samuel provide all the details for this bloody battle between houses. Disloyalty and death overshadowed David being crowned as king. Ish-Bosheth (Saul's son) was set up as king by Abner (Saul's cousin and army commander) in opposition to David. Joab (the son of David's half-sister Zeruah) killed Abner for taking his brother Ashahel's (David's nephew) life at the battle of Gibeon. Then, for reasons unknown, Recab and Baanah had an issue with Ish-Bosheth reigning simultaneously with David. These raiding party leaders had no qualms about killing Ish-Bosheth as he slept. As proof of their triumph they cut off his head and took it to David so they might be commended and praised. I am sure they were surprised by David's reaction. "So David gave an order to his men, and they killed them. They cut off their hands and feet and hung the bodies by the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-Bosheth and buried it in Abner's tomb at Hebron" (2 Sa 4:12). More and more blood was being shed at the command of king David.

To confirm his kingship and dominion, David needed to eliminate with the sword the Jebusites who were occupying Jerusalem at this time. God directed David to success in this endeavor. For David, it was a sign that God had indeed firmly established him as king over Israel. However, God gave no promise that David would reign in peace. Many of David's actions brought misfortune and condemnation on himself. In Jerusalem, David took more wives and concubines. "His growing attention to women will escalate and culminate in his devastating affair with Bathsheba."⁴³ Seeds of trouble had been planted.

King David had no idea about what sins he would fall into later in his reign. Life appeared to be going well. Jerusalem had been reclaimed. The Ark of the Covenant was brought in from Abinadab's house. God gave David rest from all his enemies around him. Time could be spent pondering God's gracious deliverance and protection. Combat was put on the back burner for the time being. David was surrounded by wondrous blessings from God: family, peace, kingship, and a palace. His God had no house to dwell in. David would diligently take up the task, but it was not meant to be. His God had other plans. A covenant was made. David was promised an everlasting kingdom for his house. The Savior would come from his family line.

Consistently, David was reminded of the Lord's guiding presence in his life. He had indeed been with David in all of his endeavors. 2 Samuel chapter seven contains the covenant God had established with his servant David. It marks a highpoint in David's life, a time for rejoicing and praise for a God like none other. Peaceful rest from war soothed his soul, for now. Shortly, the carnage would continue.

Combat Highlights

God allowed David to defeat and subdue the Philistines to the point that they were no longer an immediate threat to Israel. Philistia was not the only other country in the area. Numerous other nations rose up to battle the warrior David and his lauded army. He was at the mountaintops of his military career. Defeat did not seem to be an option with the Lord Almighty at his side protecting him. His empire grew. "The summary of David's conquests shows him at the height of his power, ruling over a vast territory, from the Euphrates in the northeast to the

⁴³ Chrisholm, 200.

Egyptian border in the southwest.”⁴⁴ New and upcoming empires always seem to be the target of attack. The same was true during David’s ascension to fame, glory, and power. Surrounding nations needed to know they could not match a nation aligned with God.

Moab did not stand a chance. David defeated them. He also happened to seek refuge in Moab for his parents during his exile from Israel. David did more than defeat Moab. “He made them lie down on the ground and measured them off with a length of cord. Every two lengths of them were put to death, and the third length was allowed to live” (2 Sa 8:2). Any future plans Moab had for attacking Israel had to be put on hold. David made sure there were not enough soldiers left alive to gather any kind of army. Some explain David’s cruel treatment of the Moabites as payback for killing his parents. Scripture is silent on the matter.

There were peaceful relations during David’s reign. An example was the Ammonites. When David heard their king had died he sent a group to express sympathy to the king’s son, Hanun. Charges of spying came from Hanun, not thankfulness. He sent them away with beards half shaved and holes in their clothing. Humiliation did not sit well with David. Joab and the entire army of fighting men was deployed to strike back. Ammon knew it was in deep trouble. Twenty thousand Arameans were hired. The king of Maacah pledged a thousand men. Twelve thousand men from Tob volunteered to fight as well. The Arameans fled and so did the Ammonites. Only the Arameans regrouped for another strike. This time they met David and all Israel. They fled again, but not before David killed seven hundred of their charioteers and forty thousand foot soldiers along with Shobach the commander of their army. Peace with Israel now seemed preferable to warfare.

Indiscretion

Life for David the warrior and king was fulfilling. God had protected him in numerous battles and conflicts. Israel’s enemies were paying them tribute. Utmost respect was shown to its military prowess. David’s name had become synonymous with fame, honor, respect, and his loyalty to the Lord. Israel’s borders were expanded. All was well for the moment. “Generally speaking, the days that followed were peaceful and prosperous for David and his people. But, as David was to learn, sometimes the greatest test of our spiritual health and strength comes not in

⁴⁴ Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 633.

days of adversity but in days of prosperity.”⁴⁵ David’s test came when he had too much time on his hands. Where did all this time come from? 2 Samuel 11:1 gives us the answer: “In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.” One sleepless night in the palace quickly escalated to a sinful act of lustful desire.

From the roof of the palace David set his eyes on a bathing Bathsheba. His desire took over. He ignored the fact that this woman was Uriah’s wife. It did not matter because he was busy fighting for Israel. Bathsheba was pregnant. Sin flowed freely from that point on. David tried to hide his indiscretion by bringing Uriah back to Jerusalem. He refused to go home to his wife. David sent Uriah back to battle with his own death sentence in hand. Joab willingly carried out David’s request for death. David took Bathsheba as his wife after her period of mourning was over. David’s actions displeased the Lord. He should have recognized that fact, but did not. You would be hard pressed to find any form of remorse or guilt in David’s heart or mind. Joab’s messenger sent word to David – Uriah is dead. Part of David’s message back to Joab was, “Don’t let this upset you; the sword devours one as well as another.” Obviously, Uriah’s death did not phase David at all. David’s emotions had been shut down.

David needed a wake-up call, really, a call to repentance. Nathan, the prophet, exposed David’s sins. Finally, David repented and was restored to God’s favor. The Lord was willing to forgive his repentant servant, David, but forgiveness does not mean all consequences are eliminated. The child conceived by David and Bathsheba died. David humbly accepted this discipline from the Lord. His attitude showed itself when he went to the Lord’s house for worship. A restored and reconciled relationship with his heavenly Father must have felt like a heavy burden being lifted from his war torn shoulders.

Family Misfortune

Even with this newly reestablished relationship other weighty afflictions would pile up on David. One of the most heartbreaking for David was probably his son Absalom. Thoughts of dissent and rebellion began after Amnon raped Absalom’s sister, Tamar. David was furious when he heard the news. We are not told David did anything about it. His leniency as a father might have spurred Absalom to give a kill order for Amnon. After the fact, Absalom decided to

⁴⁵ John R. Mittelstaedt, *Samuel* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), 225.

flee. He stayed in Geshur for three years. Immediately upon his return to Jerusalem, Absalom actively sought to take the throne from his father David by rebellion. David might well have said, “Absalom, rise up against me,” because he sidesteps calling Absalom to repentance and justice. He welcomed his exiled son back with open arms. Soon, Absalom had enough Israelites riled up and was proclaimed king in Hebron. David knew what he had to do to avoid bloodshed in Jerusalem – flee. The king left with his entire household, but leaves ten concubines behind to care for the palace. This took place to fulfill Nathan’s prophecy of adultery in the open for all eyes to see. Absalom’s rebellion would never be completed. He died in battle against his father’s men. Joab drove three javelins into Absalom’s heart to end the conflict.

Rebellion had grown in popularity apparently because of Absalom’s example. A man from Benjamin, Saul’s tribe, named Sheba tried his hand at getting rid of David as king. Joab halted his plans with a siege of Abel Beth Maacah. One wise woman approached Joab in order to save her city from destruction. She convinced the town to cut off Sheba’s head and throw it over the wall of the city. No more rebellion. Not quite no more battles.

Once again the Philistines enticed David and Israel to battle. This time was different for David. We are told he became exhausted. We are not told what exactly caused his exhaustion. He might have been tired of fighting the Philistines over and over again. Was being a warrior too much for David to handle? Strife in his family could be the culprit. Maybe his exhaustion was a combination of all the above. Yet David’s life experiences and his faith led him to sing a song of praise to the Lord. The major theme of this song is the Lord’s protection and deliverance.

Summary

In this section we have considered David’s life story as found in 1 and 2 Samuel. Special attention was placed on all of the traumatic events that played out in his life, both before and after his reign as king over Israel.

David endured countless attempts on his life from Saul, neighboring nations, and his own son Absalom. A good portion of his life was devoted to fleeing for his safety. Entire towns and priests of the Lord were put to death because of him. He rejected his God by committing adultery and murder, and lying about it. David’s entire life was a constant war zone. Amid all the trauma, David was set apart by God. David loved the Lord. Despite his human failure, the Lord loved David. His dynasty would endure forever. How then can David’s story be applied to the veteran

with PTSD? Can anything be attributed to David that helps those ravaged by war? How might a pastor utilize the psalms of David in counseling sessions?

PART 3: DAVIDIC PSALMS – A MODEL FOR COUNSELING PTSD

In this section, we will address a practical and useful way to incorporate David's psalms into potential counseling situations with those dealing with combat related PTSD. The pastor's role will be discussed briefly, as well as other pertinent topics. David knew what it felt like to be in a war zone. He was a decorated warrior and commander. His story may be applicable to today's modern soldier as well as to veterans of war.

Unique Niche

The role of a pastor provides the unique privilege of counseling. He has a unique niche in society. He is the provider of something that secular psychologists do not bother with - comfort and relief from the pages of Scripture.

Before the fame and the crown, David was a shepherd. He cared for his sheep. He led them to food and water. He protected them from danger. It is no secret that pastors function as shepherds in a similar way. "One of the most powerful biblical images for one who cares for the souls of others is the Old Testament image of the shepherd... They are characterized by compassion, courage, and a mixture of tenderness and toughness."⁴⁶ The image a pastor projects is important. Is he concerned about your struggles and questions? Is he approachable and willing to listen? Is he viewed as a man who knows what God's Word says about a particular issue? These characteristics help break down potential fear involved with sharing trauma stories from the combat zone.

Recognize that no one can fix the past. Believe that by God's grace people can be released from the pain and hurt of the past. Soldiers face situations in combat that a pastor more than likely has not and will never experience. Is it necessary to have identical experiences as a soldier? No. He or she will share with you what hurts the most from their past. Acknowledge your limitations too. It is impossible to be an expert in all things. We simply cannot fix everything. We are not trained mental health professionals. What we can do is share comfort

⁴⁶ Benner, 25.

from God. “As we begin to understand the hurt and pain they feel, we will become less preoccupied with our own attempts to fix, solve, or convert. Instead, we will find ways to stand with family members in their needs and weaknesses, and share with them the strength and sufficiency that comes from God.”⁴⁷ We are the human tools God uses to share his truth and grace to heal the distressed and hurting.

We may be God’s human instruments to comfort with his word, but not every soldier willingly comes to a civilian pastor. I understand that mindset. There is no way I could possibly relate to engaging with the enemy, or making a split second decision to squeeze the trigger. I do not fit the military mold. I am not a veteran of war. Paul Ziemer gives valuable insight into this military versus civilian mindset:

“The reality is that you and I do carry a combat patch. It is not attached with Velcro; it is etched into our hearts. Sometimes, we represent this patch by means of a cross. The cross may show up in the form of a logo on our business card, or engraved upon the cover of our Bible, or many another format... We come to minister to souls, not in our own name or on the basis of our experiences. We come to bring Jesus to wounded souls. It’s his patch that we point to. He knows. He understands. He has the power to heal. He won not just a battle. He won *The War*... We are veterans of spiritual warfare. We are survivors – by the grace of God. And, just like the souls we come to tend, we are still in the midst of battle.”⁴⁸

Just because I am a civilian does not mean I cannot relate to the soldier. I can relate because I am a sinner, just as he or she is. The power of the Word of God applies to all people.

Suffering Soldiers

I do not assume to know exactly what soldiers go through during combat. Coping mechanisms can vary. Reactions can be different for everyone. The following discussion has taken shape due to research and interviews.

All soldiers bring something back home from their involvement with combat. Guilt and self-blame often appear together. Soldiers may feel intense guilt for not spotting an IED soon enough. That Humvee would not have been hit if I had seen the bomb ten seconds sooner. The soldier winds up blaming himself for the casualties that day. It is inconceivable why my buddy

⁴⁷ David A. Paap, *Caring for Military Families Facing Separation, War, and Homecoming* (St. Louis: Stephen Ministries, 1991), 16.

⁴⁸ Paul C. Ziemer, “No Patch?” (place of presentation unknown, December 9, 2010).

died and not me.⁴⁹ “The reason that survivor’s guilt can hold so much power over us has to do with how painful and confusing it is to come to terms with a tragic loss of this magnitude on an emotional and rational level.”⁵⁰ Maybe the situation was completely out of their control, but they assume complete responsibility anyway. Can you fathom being fifty feet away from your best friend when he is hit and seriously wounded? Who can forget mutilated bodies hanging in the trees as you walk along Vietnam’s roads? James Johnson wrote, “Few Americans who have not been in combat have ever even touched a dead body, much less put a buddy in a body bag and made sure you got all the body parts stuffed in properly.”⁵¹ We cannot begin to comprehend the evil things they saw. Soldiers with such pictures burned into their memories lost something that will never return, or if it does, will never be the same again.

What gets lost in warfare? Examples include, but are not limited to: compassion, innocence, security, human connections with others, and limbs. Voids left from these losses are filled with detachment, avoidance, numbing, terror, shame, and helplessness. Feeling detached from the rest of the world is common. Avoiding sleep seems better than enduring another intense nightmare of combat. I will avoid sharing my trauma with family so they do not have to worry about me. If they really knew what happened to me they could be emotionally injured as well. Emotional numbing emerges toward death, or the feelings of other family members. Danger lurks behind every closed door and around every corner. Some troops feel that they have sinned or committed a religious wrong, even if they were following orders.⁵² Disillusionment can develop toward commanding officers and the government.

Troops suffer moral trauma through killing opponents defined by the government as enemies but posing no threat to America. Culture that views wars as unjust directly affects the men and women who fight in those wars. They too can begin to question if American involvement will do any good for this or that country. Lives are being lost by the thousands all because of government’s decision to declare war. Lack of support from government agencies after returning home complicates the problem further. Veterans are often denied claims for

⁴⁹ Anonymous survey, received November 6, 2014.

⁵⁰ Hoge, 240.

⁵¹ James D. Johnson, *Combat Trauma: A Personal Look at Long-Term Consequences* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 35.

⁵² Slone, 98.

benefits from war related mental instability. Government gives the impression they want veterans to go away and fend for themselves. In some circumstances, the effects of combat trauma have been written off as just an illusion. Any government agency cannot help them.

The government seems to be unfair and unsympathetic toward a soldier's suffering. Therefore, God seems to be unfair and unsympathetic toward a soldier's suffering. How could a loving God allow the terrors and atrocities soldiers have seen? There must not be anyone who is able to provide protection. Events that cannot be explained by religion drive many away from that religion. Asking God "Why?" might cross soldier's mind, but another part of them says, "Why bother?" God is not going to answer. Maybe, there is no God to ask. Soldiers who discredit God's power and presence in their lives isolate themselves to an internal danger zone filled with trauma-related thoughts and feelings. The apparent fact is: God abandons his people. Hope and trust seem to be gone for good.

Difference Maker

As David often realized, God does protect and deliver his people. Trust in him turns life around. Hope has been restored by God's gracious gift of his Son sent to save us. God is faithful to his promises. He has never broken any of them. "If God in Jesus Christ descends into the worst hell imaginable in order to deliver us from the hells we inflict upon one another, then such a God is worthy of our trust."⁵³ Jesus bears what fragile, fallen human beings cannot – the sin of the world. Troubling decisions in times of conflict have been removed forever. Our Savior alone takes it all away. Our God makes all the difference in the world. The power of his Word transforms believers. We are new creations in Christ. God has not abandoned us. Feelings of uselessness, worthlessness, and despair are replaced by the redeeming, healing love of Christ.

Identifying with David's Psalms

Trauma is complex. Life in general can get complicated because of sin. Combat trauma does not make life any better. Willful rebellion against God's commands will please your sinful desires for a while, but are still accountable for that uprising against God. King David went through it all. Only by God's grace did he remain king. That same grace was shown to David

⁵³ Hunsinger, 19.

when he repented of his sins to Nathan the prophet. He felt the inevitability of death, enemy strength, and betrayal. He questioned God. Yet he also found strength in God during those instances. David pours out his heart and soul in his writing. “His Psalms reveal a man, warrior, and king in confusion, despair, loneliness, and spiritual collapse. They also reveal a person of deep faith who sometimes felt Divine presence and favor, in distress sought its renewal, and through life gave it praise.”⁵⁴ All these things can rise against modern soldiers as well.

With that being said, which psalms should the soldier turn to for relief, comfort, forgiveness, safety, and assurance of salvation? Specific psalms might come to mind right away, ones you have used in the past. Rather than simply listing Davidic psalms and commenting on their contents, I have compiled various characteristics of God into topics. These characteristics are drawn specifically from the following Psalms: 3, 13, 16, 18, 23, 27, 38, 41, 54, 61, 62, 71, 103, and 138-145. Certainly, other Davidic psalms may be used. The list is not exhaustive. Any psalm of David may be effective because it is from God. To a certain extent, a psalm’s effectiveness depends upon the individual and how clearly a passage relates to him or her.⁵⁵ God guides, protects, and sustains his people through all trials of life, including PTSD.

God Answers Prayer

Pain from war-related traumatic events can cause anyone in the military to doubt the effectiveness of prayer. Maybe, a prayer was spoken before departing to engage the enemy, but atrocities and death ensued anyway. God did not intervene. He did not protect my brothers in arms. Therefore, he must have ignored that prayer, or, he must not exist. One message might come to mind for a soldier: God wants nothing to do with me. He knows the kind of killing I have been involved with. Why would God bother to hear what I have to say? After all, I am the personification of evil in this war zone. Disheartened warriors may dismiss the wonders of prayer that David details in many of his psalms.

David must have been downcast and dismayed as he fled from his own son, Absalom. Many people amidst the rebellion were convinced; God would not deliver David this time. Absalom’s uprising appeared well planned. He succeeded in turning the people of Jerusalem

⁵⁴ Tick, 115.

⁵⁵ Anonymous survey, received November 7, 2014.

against his father. In this period of danger, David could easily have relied on himself, or on the mighty men in his company. He could have written off God's presence and his ability to answer prayer. Yet David declares, "To the Lord I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill" (Ps 3:4). The Lord had certainly heard David's prayer. David demonstrated confidence that his God would not fail to answer his prayer. Wounded warriors can have this same confidence knowing God will hear and answer their prayers in, before, and after battle.

The outcome of prayer may not always be what a soldier expects. He may grow impatient with God's lack of action. Emotional turmoil due to the battlefield can erupt in distress and anguish in daily life. Similar strong emotions were evident in David, especially in Psalm 13. David cried out "How long?" to the Lord four times. There is an intensity to his emotions. Anxiety, confusion, and distress weighed David down to the point of despair. David was tempted to think God had forgotten about him.

Amidst engaging the enemy in battle, soldiers might share David's discouragement. God has delayed any action in response to their prayer for protection. Brothers in arms will not be returning from this battle. Conflict and loss of life seem endless. Has God lost his touch? Does he really have power to answer prayer? God's purposes are not always evident. However, despair and anxiety do not have to last forever. Comfort and calmness do come from God. Joel Petermann reminded us all of this when he wrote:

So often our prayers fly to the Lord with great urgency because we see a 'life-or-death' situation before us. We pray with great earnestness because we fear that time will run out on God's power and ability to help. When God delays and the situation worsens, we almost feel ourselves begin to give up on the Lord. Perhaps we stop praying because we feel the situation has slipped beyond God's reach and he will no longer be able to help. If only he had answered us sooner! How small our faith sometimes is! But the power of the Father-King has no limits. Even death itself is under his total control. Therefore, we need to pray with complete trust and confidence in his promises. He hears every prayer that is offered in Jesus' name. If God hears, then for Jesus' sake he also answers. Of this we can be absolutely sure.⁵⁶

The Lord hears and answers the prayers of his faithful people, soldiers included. The Lord's power and ability to help has no end. Rejoice in the Lord. Trust in his unfailing love. He hears your prayers. He is always with you.

⁵⁶ Joel V. Petermann, *Prayer: An Audience with the King* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2001), 140.

God does not abandon his people. David knew this well. David's prayer for protection from death in Psalm 16 reveals his confidence and faith in his Lord either in life or in death. Verse one says, "Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge." David also knew his Lord would not be abandoned in the grave. His Lord's body would not decay. Because Christ has fulfilled the words of this psalm, it is possible to adapt the words of this psalm a soldier's prayer. In life or in death, the believer is comforted, knowing that the Lord provides protection and promises to answer prayer.

Pray continually. Call on the name of the Lord in any and every situation. King David's life was filled with traumatizing situations. At times, the only thing he could do was pray to the Lord. Soldiers may find that the only thing they can do is offer a prayer to the Lord. Remember how the Lord has rescued you in the past. "In prayer, we benefit from reminding ourselves of occasions when we have asked God to protect us and God has indeed delivered us, because this builds up our confidence to ask for God to do that again and our conviction that God will do so."⁵⁷ Pray for the Lord's protection. Pray confidently.

Where combat is constant and the threat of death is an ever-present reality, there is a light shining in that darkness. Keep contact with the Lord open in prayer on the battlefield of foreign lands. The Lord hears the warrior's prayer even from the ends of the earth, as Psalm 61 indicates. Each day of deployment can bring challenges and difficulties into the life of a soldier. Psalm 61 is appropriate to pray for those in danger far from home and cut off from like-minded believers. Crises will undoubtedly come with consistency, but the Lord is constantly present, and in his compassionate kindness hears the soldier's prayer.

Compassion comes from God. Compassion does not come from the wicked or the ungodly. The enemies soldiers fight do not have a nice track record of showing compassion. There may be a real temptation to deliver heinous retribution to the enemy for brothers whose lives have been taken. A soldier's motivation or mindset behind killing the enemy cannot be known unless he or she reveals it. Eliminating the threat of enemy attacks is what soldiers have been deployed to do. Opposing the enemy is not wrong. It is also something David prayed to the Lord about in Psalm 141. "David is determined to practice and to encourage what is good. He is

⁵⁷ John Goldingay, *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms: Volume 1 Psalms 1-41*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 401.

equally determined to oppose evil and evildoers relentlessly. His chief weapon in this battle is prayer.”⁵⁸ One of the soldier’s spiritual weapons is prayer.

Prayer is powerful and effective because requests are addressed to God. Even in the face of dangerous and disastrous combat, both past and present, God hears and answers prayer. When situations appear hopeless, when no one seems to care for anyone’s life, God is there. David felt the same when he wrote, “Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life” (Ps 142:4). David does not wallow in this state, but calls out to the Lord, knowing he will hear and answer his prayer. The Lord will hear and answer the prayers of his people who are soldiers.

A man by the name of Hugh Scanlen composed a prayer that may be beneficial to those dealing with the experience of war. His prayer, entitled *Veteran’s Prayer*, reads as follows:

O God, as I begin my walk out of the darkness
and turmoil of conflict,
give me the strength to find a lasting and gentle existence.
Give me the desire to treat all living creatures with respect.
Help me to do no harm for the remaining days of my life.
May I accept who I am now –
not who I have been in the past.
Help me to remember and to dim –
not forget – the tragic past.
Take my experiences and teach me to use them
to understand others
wherever I go. To ban fear, hate,
and violence from my thinking.
Let me understand how one person can make
the world a better place.
Show me the reasons I am still here and what I am to do.
Give me the strength to face the time I have left here
to reconnect with humanity. To feel and give love.
O God, make me whole again.
Amen.⁵⁹

The Lord is good. His love endures forever. His faithfulness continues through all generations.
Pray to the Lord. He hears you.

⁵⁸ John F. Brug, *A Commentary on Psalms 73-150* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), 473.

⁵⁹ Tick, *Warrior’s Return*, 235-236.

God Brings Deliverance

David's life could be described as one of deliverance. The Lord had delivered him from animals that attacked his sheep, from Goliath, Saul, and numerous neighboring countries. Deliverance is one of many themes David brings out in his psalms. He looks back on occasions when the Lord delivered him. He asks the Lord for deliverance from current problematic enemies, and looks forward to future deliverance as well. Since the Lord delivered David, we too can have confidence the Lord will deliver us from danger as well.

David clung to God's promise of deliverance even when his enemies tried to discourage him in Psalm 3 by saying, "God will not deliver him" (Ps 3:2b). Doubting God's deliverance could have been the easy thing for David to do. He could have fallen into the temptation to doubt God as he fled Jerusalem from the rebellion his son Absalom had started, but he did not. He knew that from the Lord comes deliverance. David endured a copious amount of warfare. The Lord had delivered him from the hands of his enemies.

Deliverance from the burden of sin had also been given to David. Adultery, lust, and murder had at one point taken control of David. Every preventative step to conceal his sins was taken. It took the prophet Nathan's visit to highlight just how much he had strayed from God. The sins David committed placed a dark shadow over his relationship with God. Martin Luther describes David's dark time by saying, "For he who has enemies and wanders through the valley of the shadow can see no light, that is, he has neither comfort nor hope but is forsaken by everybody, and everything is black and dark before his eyes, even the beautiful, bright sun."⁶⁰ David did emerge from the darkness of his sin through forgiveness. Nathan brought to David the assurance of deliverance which brought peace and joy to his heart. In forgiveness, "the psalmist is enjoying a serenity so deep that not even the shadow of death can disturb it."⁶¹ David relied on God's deliverance.

A soldier might feel his actions in war were too sinful for God to forgive. Comfort and hope can escape the veteran years after such actions were carried out. Some unspeakable act could have been carried out because of a direct order from a superior. No matter the circumstances, deliverance from sin comes for any soldier who is sincerely repentant.

⁶⁰ Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., *Luther's Works Volume 12: Selected Psalms I* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 167.

⁶¹ John F. Brug, *A Commentary on Psalms 1-72* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), 290.

Transgressions have been removed as far as the east is from the west. They are wiped away. War trauma can be almost impossible to forget. Maybe it never happen. But God’s goodness, love, and grace can bring comfort and healing for any sinner bought with the blood of the Lamb. God delivers them from all their troubles.

Veterans of war, those dealing with PTSD, reflect on their experiences from time to time. Negative memories of past actions can come back. Maybe the fondness of friendship comes to mind as well. Many acts of deliverance from God are there too. David’s eighteenth psalm could remind veterans of the deliverance God had provided for them during their time of service. Psalm 18 can become the soldier’s song of thanksgiving for God’s deliverance. The counsel that comes from God’s Word, from his deliverance, calms troubled hearts.

God Provides Protection

War is death. Some soldiers are surrounded by death more frequently than others. Some do not return home from war. Others do. Guilt can weigh down a soldier who survives combat. It can lead to the question: “God, why didn’t you protect my brothers in arms?” No one can perceive or understand the mind of God and his ways. But God does not fail to provide protection. David definitely knew the Lord protected him in battle. He regularly refers to God as his shield, rock, fortress, stronghold, and strength. Beautiful mental pictures of God’s protection have been painted for us by David.

David did not allow the number of foes surrounding him cloud his view of the Lord. Prior to battle, David could probably see vast armies coming toward Israel for battle. Such a view could have overwhelmed him. After battle, David may have relived split second decisions that resulted in more death on the battlefield. These decisions could have kept David up at night, knowing sleep would bring flashbacks of war’s brutality. However, he knew the Lord would be his shield. He remembered the Lord’s unfailing love and his promises of protection. He could lie down and sleep in peace because God was his shield.

Safety was David’s in the Lord’s presence. The Lord is a stronghold that no attack of man or of the devil can overcome. He is the solid rock on which believers stand. He is a rock of refuge to whom David could always go. Difficult times in David’s life served to remind him that he could not endure by himself. “He [David] renounces trust in his own power when he

confesses that God is the rock who is higher than he is. God will raise him up to a place of shelter that David could not reach on his own.”⁶² No enemy becomes overwhelming.

David’s warfare was both spiritual and literal. War was carried out by David against the Philistines as well as against the devil’s constant temptations to disregard God’s promises of protection. The Lord is a stronghold for all who trust in him. “The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?” (Ps 27:1-2). David did not have to fear his foes. The Lord would provide him with protection wherever he went.

Proclaim the comfort of Christ’s protection to the soldier. Direct the soldier’s eyes to the great mercy displayed in the cross of Christ. Assure him that salvation is secure through Christ. All the various enemies faced in war pale in comparison to the Lord who is your shield, rock, fortress, stronghold, and strength.

God Leads, Restores, and Guides

Civilian life, to a certain extent, is consistent. People have a regular routine throughout their day. Life in a warzone may be just the opposite. Inconsistency can rule each and every day. Attacks come almost at random. Fear may grip the soldier strongly. “Imagine trying to go through a day where every minute is a potential opportunity for physical or emotional disasters. One never knows when the final blow will come or where it may come from.”⁶³ In combat there is no consistency. Avoiding death may be what guides a soldier.

In Christ, there is consistency. He leads soldiers through the valley of death. He restores their souls. He guides them with gospel truths which give spiritual life and peace. Ultimately, Christ leads to a perfectly prepared heavenly home. Henry W. Baker’s stanza reinforces the perfect restoration of the soul in heaven. He wrote, “Where streams of living water flow, my Savior gently leads me; And where the verdant pastures grow, with food celestial feeds me.”⁶⁴ The Good Shepherd guides and leads soldiers with his goodness and love all the days of their lives. He binds their wounds and heals them according to his will.

⁶² Brug, *Psalms 1-72*, 576.

⁶³ Janet J. Seahorn and E. Anthony Seahorn, *Tears of a Warrior: A Family’s Story of Combat and Living with PTSD* (Fort Collins, CO: Team Pursuits, 2008), 80.

⁶⁴ Stanza two of Christian Worship hymn 375 – *The King of Love My Shepherd Is*.

Give up trying to lead yourself out of the pit of despair. Trust in God to guide you. Share David's reliance on the Lord as he wrote, "Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul" (Ps 143:8). The Lord will lead you out of trouble and into the joy of his presence. Allow his Word to instruct and guide you throughout your life. Soak in the divine instruction and guidance God, through David, gives in his psalms.

God is...

God is reliable. He keeps his word. "God has disposed all things and ordered all things for our salvation. He foretold it before we existed, he has fulfilled it in our time, and what he has not fulfilled yet, he will. We hold fast to him as one who keeps his promises."⁶⁵ God knew you before you were created. He knows you now. In his mercy he makes you alive. His almighty power triumphs over all things. "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve" (Ps 103:8-10a). The Lord showers undeserved love on those who fear, love, and trust in him. The soldier of war can rely on God to keep his word. "Thus is the endless chain of grace complete. Sin is forgiven, its power subdued, and its penalty averted, then we are honoured, supplied, and our very nature renovated, till we are as new-born children in the household of God."⁶⁶ The words and works of God are truly wonderful.

God is love. He cares for his entire creation, soldiers included. He is personally involved with the salvation of each soul. His Son bore the weight of sin on the cross. His death declares us not guilty of sin. Praise God for his everlasting love.

God is an equipper for battle. The United States government surely trains men and women well for battle. Grueling training is part of the program for any soldier who wants to serve. Yet, give God the glory for the skills he has blessed you with, as well as the government who honed those skills. David knew God was behind his training. In Psalm 18 he says, "It is God who arms me with strength...He trains my hands for battle" (Ps 18:32a, 34a). To God you owe

⁶⁵ Thomas C. Oden, Craig A. Blasing, and Carmen S. Hardin, eds., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture Old Testament VII: Psalms 1-50* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 325.

⁶⁶ C.H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: An Expository and Devotional Commentary on the Psalms, Volume IV: Psalms 79-103* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), 450.

all military skill, strength, and courage. Training for war turns up in Psalm 144 as well. David penned these words: “Praise be to the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle” (Ps 144:1). God blessed David, a mighty warrior, with valuable skills needed on the battlefield. David also reminisced of the protection he received from God in Psalm 140 when he said, “[You] shield my head in the day of battle” (Ps 140:7b). David knew he always had the Lord’s protection on his side. David found his source of hope, comfort, joy, and even victory in the grace of his Lord God. David is an excellent example of a believer who had to use the sword in battle.⁶⁷ The Lord equipped David for war. The Lord equips you for war. The Lord comforts you in the aftermath of war.

Bridging the gap.

As we discuss effective ways to counsel military personnel, there will be challenges to overcome. To some troops, civilian pastors simply cannot understand them. If by chance, pastors carry ministry to the armed forces, get to know them. Listen to their stories. Understand the difference between a military “base” and “post.”⁶⁸ Trusting relationships are the best ones to have so that people feel comfortable sharing their combat trauma from three months ago to thirty years ago. Do some research on PTSD to get a grasp of its basic meaning. There is no need to go beyond the role of pastor. Finally, share God’s law and gospel from either Davidic psalms or elsewhere in Scripture. Show soldiers the love God has for them. He alone can bring peace to war torn lives.

CONCLUSION

The title of this thesis is “Use of the Davidic Psalms is an Effective Way to Counsel Military Combat Veterans with Post traumatic Stress Disorder.” The nature of PTSD is immensely complex. There is no shortage of material on the subject. A working understanding of the disorder is helpful to clear up common misconceptions about traumatic stress and its aftermath. Post traumatic stress can occur after any incident that traumatizes.

⁶⁷ Anonymous survey, received October 20, 2014.

⁶⁸ Anonymous survey, received November 22, 2014.

Through my research I came across questions that were not able to be addressed in this thesis. Perhaps they will provide a starting point for future research. Can the soldier relate more with Job and his suffering rather than David? What are the ramifications of veterans who see themselves in King Saul? Can long-distance killing using drones cause PTSD? Edward Tick, in his book *War and the Soul*, poses an interesting question on page 3: “Does the wound we call PTSD result from violent combat in all times and places?” Each of these questions could yield intriguing insights.

Combat related PTSD is a narrowed focus. Veterans saw, heard, and did things in combat that left them feeling alone, depressed, victims of an unpopular war, and even angry at God. Thoughts arose that if God existed, he would not have let what was seen happen. King David’s example is one way to go about counseling military personnel with PTSD. They may relate to him, or they might not. No matter what the case may be, pastors will still use God’s Word to guide any counselee through law and gospel, sin and grace. You do not have to sign up for military service today in order to understand the military mindset. You do not have to start taking classes tonight in order to become a psychologist. As complex as PTSD is, the use of the psalms is a simple, clear, and powerful tool that can break through the barriers of any sinful human heart because it is the Word of God. Sometimes, what people need is something clear and simple when so much complexity is swirling around in their lives.⁶⁹ Faithfully share the truth of God’s Word. His Holy Spirit will work wonders.

⁶⁹ Anonymous survey, received November 8, 2014.

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