

Healing Together

A Facilitator's Resource
for Ecumenical Faith and
Community-Based Counselling



World Council
of Churches

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Fulata Lusungu Moyo



**World Council
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Publications

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Fulata Lusungu Moyo

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Acronyms

AACC	All Africa Council of Churches
CCN	Christian Council of Nigeria
CCSL	Council of Churches of Sierra Leone
FGM	female genital mutilation
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
HROC	healing and rebuilding community
PTSD	post-traumatic stress disorder
RPI	Restorative Practices International
SGBV	sexual and gender-based violence
SS	South Sudan
SSCC	South Sudan Council of Churches
STAR	strategies of trauma awareness and resilience
WCC	World Council of Churches

Foreword

This is a World Council of Churches (WCC) resource produced together with the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN), Council of Churches of Sierra Leone (CCSL), and South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC).

This process of walking, praying, and working together for trauma transformation and healing is framed within the WCC's Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. While the reality of trauma is nothing to be celebrated, God's loving gift of reconciliation – with Godself, other people, and the earth – gives us hope and forms the basis for our Christian ministry of transformation and healing. So, we celebrate this gift, and we acknowledge the people's agency and resilience that transform pain and bring healing. Visiting our wounds and acknowledging their existence lead to our commitment to all processes of justice and peace. Our commitment must therefore include accompaniment of the wounded as well as advocacy for change.

The focus in this manuscript on Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and South Sudan means that the diverse causes of the wounds include conflict (armed, ethnic, political, and post-conflict), poverty, sexual and gender-based violence, and disease including Ebola, HIV, and AIDS. Conflict includes that which uses religion and cultural identity as social markers of belonging and not belonging.

My prayer and hope are that this resource will become part of the important harvest of our journey together on this Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, also for WCC's upcoming 11th Assembly in 2021. To envision and promote reconciliation, unity and sustainable peace means that our wounded brothers and sisters need to be accompanied toward healing and wholeness. May Christ's love continue to move us to healing, reconciliation, and unity.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC General Secretary

Preface

This resource is one of the signposts on the WCC's Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. It focuses on the transformation of mindsets and oppressive systems. Accompaniment is key to building resilience for healing woundedness in Christian communities. Therefore, it is important and very intentional that this resource is rooted in the work of churches in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and South Sudan. Most people who are affected by trauma in these countries already have a deep respect for church-initiated accompaniment that continues long after the parachute-like donor-driven interventions are over.

Data collected on the existing responses to trauma clearly shows that the contextual realities of each of the three countries are crucial to the effectiveness of this work. This ecumenical resource should therefore be used as a road map rather than an instruction sheet. Councils of churches, churches, and ecumenical partners can contextualize this tool to address the historical, social-cultural, and spiritual complexities that contribute to the causes as well as the transformation and healing of trauma in their specific environment.

We are, therefore, very thankful to the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN), Council of Churches in Sierra Leone (CCSL) and South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) for our work together to produce such a resource. We are also very grateful to Bread for the World and Presbyterian Church (USA) for their partnership in offering the grant that made this project possible. As churches together committed to the ministry of healing and reconciliation, we are thankful to God, three in one, who calls us to such a ministry.

Prof. Dr Isabel Apawo Phiri
Deputy General Secretary, Public Witness and Diakonia

Endorsement

The process of developing this ecumenical resource for healing and transforming trauma has been a welcome and very timely initiative for our councils of churches. We had come to a stage where we needed a harmonized ecumenical response to the high demands of trauma among our Christian communities and beyond. The variety of existing approaches were becoming challenging for follow-up and measuring the impact. The many initiatives provided an ad hoc response to existing desperate needs but were often fragmented. There was often no follow-up and, therefore, no completion of the whole journey of trauma transformation and healing. This increased the dangers of re-traumatization and secondary trauma for both the cared-for and the caregivers.

The process of developing this resource not only addressed the above need, but also helped our councils of churches work together and find synergies with each other for continued collaboration. Trauma transformation and healing are part of our programmes on peace and reconciliation in each of our councils. As such, this collaboration will remain key to our common commitment to sustainable peace in Africa. So, we highly recommend this resource and pray that it will be adapted and used beyond our three countries. It could be valuable in many other corners of the world where people are denied dignity and fullness of life because their traumatic wounds have not been healed but have been accepted as normal. Our prayer is that God will use this resource for the healing of Africa.

Rev. Dr Wushishi Yusuf Ibrahim, General Secretary,
Christian Council of Nigeria

Mme Ebun James-Dekam, General Secretary,
Council of Churches in Sierra Leone

Fr James Oyet Latansio, General Secretary,
South Sudan Council of Churches

Acknowledgments

This ecumenical resource was produced after a data-collection process using individual and key informant interviews with church leaders and trauma transformation and healing facilitators in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and South Sudan between October 2018 and January 2019. After existing resources in each country were reviewed and gaps identified, a consultative workshop was organized in Juba, South Sudan. This workshop brought together 17 church leaders and facilitators representing the Christian Council of Churches (CCN), Council of Churches in Sierra Leone (CCSL) and South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC). This manual was developed using the data and experiences gathered from the above process.

We reviewed this resource and built the capacity to effectively use it in Abuja with 25 church leaders and facilitators representing CCN and CCSL and in Juba with 24 church leaders and facilitators representing SSCC and its partners.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is indebted to all the church leaders and facilitators who participated in bringing this resource to fruition. In particular, I want to mention the three general secretaries: Rev. Dr Yusuf Wushishi Ibrahim (CCN), Ms Ebum James-Dekam (CCSL), and Fr James Oyet Latansio (SSCC). Their acceptance, collaboration and guidance made this a successful process. I also want to acknowledge the following church leaders and facilitators who, along with the three general secretaries above, participated in the consultative workshop that shaped this resource: Rev. Dr Okechukwu Iro, Rev. Bulus Yahaya, Rev. Isaac Showers, Rev. Mary Kamara, Rev. Moses Jawara, Rev. Klero Onuha-Ingayo, Canon Rev. Emmanuel Natania, Rev. Fr Mark Kumbonyeni, the Very Rev. Kenneth Nwaubani, Archbishop Samuel Peni, Ms Bena Chobiu Mark, Ms Esther Ahmed, James Odong, Joseph Kido, and John Gbiaundore.

The participants of the consensus and capacity-building workshops are too numerous to mention, but their role in the verification process was crucial. I thank each one of them, and may the God who enables us to be wounded healers continue to guide our every step of this journey of accompaniment toward transformation and healing.

I also want to thank Bread for the World and Presbyterian Church (USA) for their partnership in making this project possible financially. No one deserves to live with the painful wounds of unhealed trauma. So together, we hold onto God's promises: "...your wounds I will heal" (Jer. 30:17).

Fulata Lusungu Moyo, PhD
Geneva, July 2019.

PART ONE

Preparing for the Workshops

Introduction

- Please read these introductory pages carefully before starting to use this resource.
- Only specifically trained facilitators should guide intensive breathing exercises. However, any facilitator can use simple breathing exercises without causing harm.

Who is this resource for?

This is a facilitator's resource for trauma transformation and healing, written for faith leaders to use with people of all ages. Africa is a continent with a young population and this resource is also appropriate for use with young people.

It is, however, more effective if collective community-based trauma healing workshops are arranged in age-specific groupings. Groups can be mixed in gender and types of community, but it is crucial to remain sensitive to age, as young people may not be able to freely express themselves in the presence of their elders.

While gender-mixed groups of adolescents can enable free participation of all genders (except, of course, in cases of trauma caused by sexual and gender-based violence), it might be more effective to separate genders of adults in certain traditional community contexts.

Why was this resource written?

Up to 80 percent of Africans are estimated to be traumatized as a result of violence, poverty, disease, natural disasters, and other causes. As a continent where the majority of the population are young people, Africa's adolescent population is particularly affected. Along with common causes of trauma, youth also experience many other struggles related to growing up. But this trauma often goes unaddressed, not only because sexual and gender-based violence become normalized, but also because of the lack of specific services and awareness.

This book addresses this lack. It is an important gift to enhance the role of churches to provide wholeness. This resource aims to address some of the major questions asked by wounded people:

- What is the value of my life?
- Who can I talk to about my struggles without being judged?
- What is the purpose and worth of my life amidst such suffering?
- How can I live without giving up hope?
- Where is God in the suffering I am facing?

The main objective of this book is to equip churches with the knowledge and skills to listen more effectively and with compassion as part of the journey toward trauma transformation and healing. This resource will help churches to create safe spaces where victims and survivors are able to do the following:

- Gain knowledge about woundedness and translate and share this knowledge in language understood by all ages to empower them to transform and heal.
- Share experiences and fears, and ask questions in an accepting and attentive environment as part of a narrative approach to painful memories.
- Create a resilient and interconnected community where (mutual) vulnerability becomes a relational resource, allowing people to accompany each other toward transformation and healing
- Embrace their freedom of will to find meaning and enhance their own meaning of life.
- Construct personal theologies and ethics of new life, hope, and transformation, where sacred texts (oral and written) are recited/read and reflected on for liberation and wholeness.
- Enfold spirituality, sacramental life, liturgy, and ritual that help integrate the body, soul, and spirit in the mystery of wholeness using transformative religious and cultural resources.
- Critically reflect on and contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 3, 5 and 16.¹

This resource and the workshop process do not provide a quick fix or solution to all pain and trauma. They offer additional tools for the process of accompaniment that faith leaders already provide to their congregants. Healing from trauma is a long process that is different for each individual.

What is this resource about?

This manual makes use of churches' spiritual resources. These resources are bastions of hope among the grassroots communities where these churches minister. As you will see in the "how" section, every session starts with an opening prayer. The reflections include sacred texts, both oral and written, especially from the Holy Bible. However, the facilitator should ensure that resources from other faith traditions are also included when the workshop is presented in interfaith communities.

1. SDG3 indicator 3:4: By 2030, reduce by one-third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being. Target 5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation. Target 5.3: Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early, and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

Adolescent participants can only be included in workshops if they have explicit permission from their parents or guardians. This is an ethical requirement in accordance with WCC's child protection policy.² This permission process ensures that parents are informed and children are protected. Compliance with the policy protects adolescents from additional traumatic experiences, including the risk of abuse by those who have power over them.

The facilitator needs to make sure that the workshop is a safe space for all participants to experience the healing processes of attentive, non-judgmental, and compassionate listening. Participants need to feel that there is time for them, and that their story and opinion matter.

Where and when can this resource be used?

The collective trauma healing sessions should be held in a space that is safe enough for participants with wounded hearts. Ideally, the facilitator should provide the opportunity for participants to describe what spaces they consider safe prior to the trauma transformation and healing workshop. The times and schedules for the workshop should be agreed upon by the facilitator and participants as well as other stakeholders.

How can this resource be used most effectively?

The trauma transformation and healing sessions should be held in the language (or languages) of the participants. If the language is local or vernacular, then the resource or parts of it should be translated into that language (languages) prior to the workshop. The sessions are meant to be highly participatory experiences, not a series of lectures or sermons.

For effective accompaniment and accountability, it is important from the beginning to create "family groups" of 5 to 8 members each. This will help build lasting trusting relationships and synergies for accompaniment beyond the workshop. These family groups will work together in all the group work throughout the workshop.

This resource has six sessions, including the post-workshop follow-up session. Workshops could be held in separate sessions (for instance, weekly) or over two full days. (The five workshop sessions add up to 15 hours and 20 minutes.) The post-workshop follow-up sessions can be organized with all activities running on the same day, or each activity can be organized separately in order to track the ongoing progress of transformation and healing. This post-workshop follow-up session is as important as the workshop itself. It provides continued accompaniment to complete the healing and avoid re-traumatization caused by an incomplete process.

2. For information on WCC child protection, visit: https://www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/files/wcc_commtmntchildren_UNICEF_ENG_PRODweb.pdf; for tools, visit: www.oikoumene.org/resources-children

If possible, each session should follow the same basic structure, as follows:

Opening Prayers: Each session starts with a short liturgy, with a prayer, reading/recitation of sacred text, or spiritual song/chant. This should last 20 minutes.

Reflection: Except for the first session of the workshop or series, the facilitator asks the participants to recall the issues covered by the previous session. This should take 5 minutes.

Activities: These are various participatory exercises in plenary sessions and small groups. These last between 1 and 3 hours.

Ice-breakers, refreshers, and recuperative exercises: Several of these short exercises (5 to 15 minutes) are included in the text. Facilitators should feel free to add more, if and when required.

Closing circle: The facilitator reviews what has been covered by the session, introduces the next session, and can ask someone to close the session with a song and prayer. This should last 10 to 15 minutes.

N.B.: Note that facilitators must acknowledge the potentially difficult nature of the material and encourage people to take breaks and ask for support as needed. They should also make clear that these sessions are only part of a journey of healing. Each session should include exercises, pauses for music, and other activities to relieve stress.

Definitions of Terms and Themes for the Sessions

Trauma

It is important that the facilitators establish the participants' understanding of the word "trauma."

In its dictionary definition, "trauma" (plural traumas)³ is a Greek word (originating in the 1690s) for "a wound, a hurt; a defeat." It comes from "trau-," an extended form of the root "tere-," which could also mean "to rub, turn," with derivatives that refer to twisting, piercing. The Greeks use of the term was confined to physical injuries. The concept of trauma as a "psychic wound, [an] unpleasant experience which causes abnormal stress" emerged only after 1894.

Nowadays, trauma refers to physical as well as emotional wounds. A traumatic event can leave psychosocial symptoms long after any physical injuries have healed.

The psychological reaction to emotional trauma can develop into post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This condition usually arises after an extremely stressful event, such as armed conflict and violence, natural disasters and displacement, or sexual or physical abuse, including sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflict and non-conflict situations or domestic context. The recognized symptoms of PTSD include depression, anxiety, flashbacks, insomnia, and recurring nightmares.

Types of trauma

Primary trauma: experiencing trauma symptoms in person or witnessing a traumatic event and responding with intense fear, helplessness, or horror.

Secondary or vicarious trauma: experiencing trauma symptoms as a result of observing (in person or through media) traumatic events or hearing disturbing stories from the people one is serving.

Shared trauma: many people experiencing trauma symptoms at the same time: for example, communities affected by natural disasters or facing a common enemy.

Trauma of the perpetrators, or participation-induced traumatic stress: symptoms of trauma caused by an act or acts of killing or similar horrific violence.

3. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trauma>.

Causes of trauma

Trauma can be caused by the following: ethnic conflict; natural disasters; all forms of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence; serious sickness and disease; loss and bereavement; kidnapping and other crime; social change and technological development; stigma and discrimination; and accidents.

Signs, symptoms, and effects of trauma

Physical: Headaches, lack of energy, physiological arousal, panic, jumpiness, muscle tension, sleep difficulties, chronic body pain, headache and stomach aches, poor self-care, disconnection from body/sensations, elevated blood pressure, nausea, and dizziness.

Emotional: Fear, anxiety, anger, depression, guilt, identification or attachment to the perpetrator, emotional instability and reactivity, sadness, hopelessness/helplessness, lack of motivation, and numbing.

Mental/Cognitive/Psychological: Confusion, hyper vigilance, suspiciousness, expectation that bad things will happen, intrusive memories, nightmares, flashbacks, poor memory, difficulty thinking or focusing, decreased attention, difficulty problem solving, and dissociation.

Spiritual: Anger toward God, loss of faith or turning away from one's religion, feeling unforgiven, and looking for magic.

Relational: Difficulties trusting others, problems with boundaries, withdrawal and isolation, apathy, aggression, clinginess, dependency, extreme independence, alcoholism, drug abuse, and intergenerational transmission.⁴

Responses to trauma

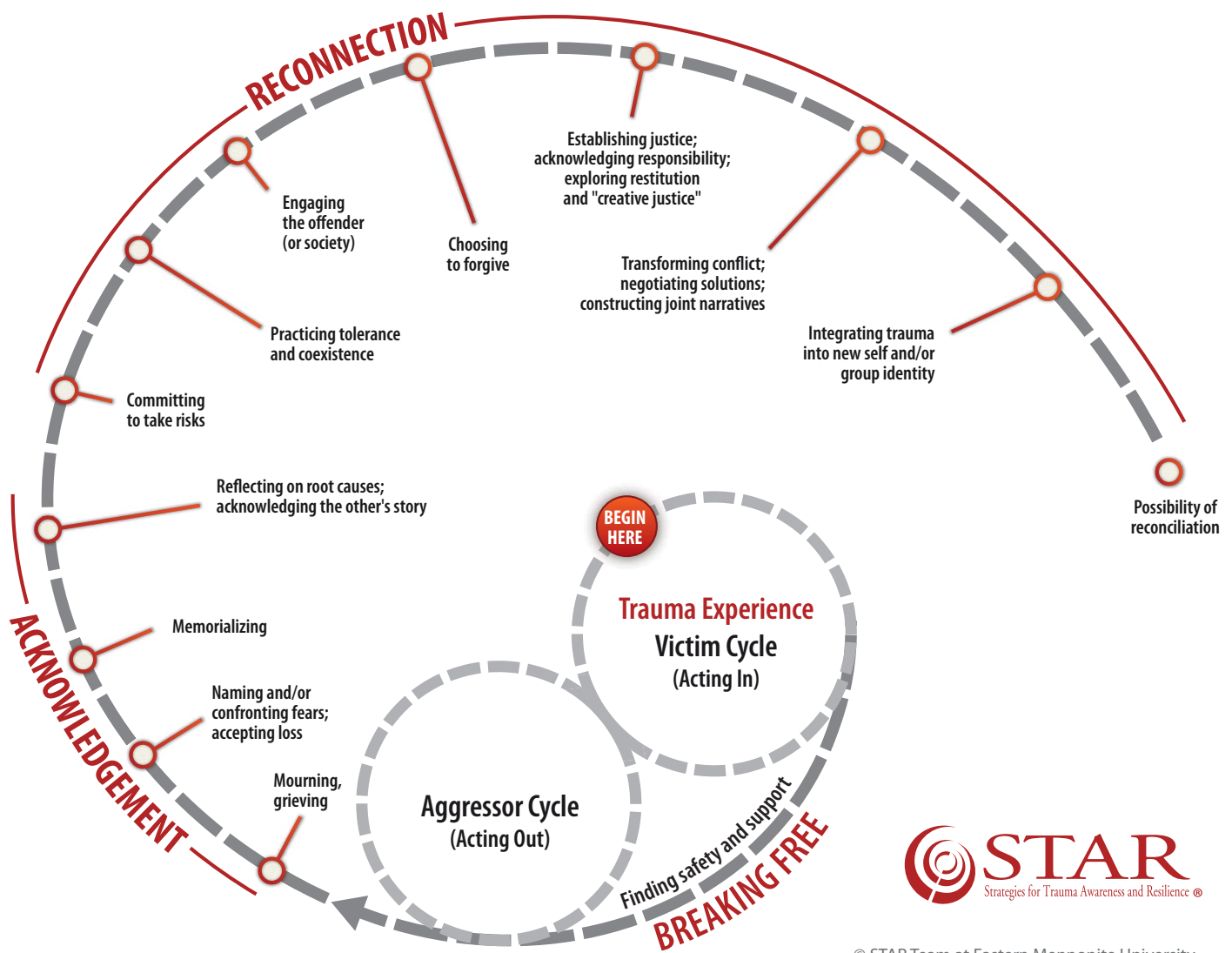
Responses depend on the following factors: the victim's age, environment, faith, spirituality, presence or lack of support from family and friends, health condition, degree of self-confidence, nutritional state, fatigue levels, etc.

The most common responses to trauma can be described as fight, flight, and freeze.

The strategies of trauma awareness and resilience (STAR) model, "Breaking Cycles of Violence, Building Resilience," pictured below, links unhealed trauma with conflict and cycles of violence. It draws on a body of evidence from disciplines including neurobiology, psychology, restorative justice, and conflict transformation.⁵

4. *STAR: Strategies of Trauma Awareness and Resilience*. Center for Justice and Peacebuilding. <https://emu.edu/cjp/star/> and Yoder, C. 2005. *The Little Book of Trauma Healing: When Violence Strikes and Community Security Is Threatened*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2005

5. Jessi Wolz, "Checkpoint, Trauma Awareness and Healing: A Step on the Path to Peace, DAI, April 10, 2018, <https://dai-global-checkpoint.com/trauma-awareness-and-healing.html>.



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Adapted from Olga Botcharova's model © 1998. Published in
Forgiveness and Reconciliation, Templeton Foundation Press, 2001.

Strategies of Trauma Awareness and Resilience

Grieving

The dictionary definition of grief is a “deep and poignant distress caused by or as if by bereavement.” A possible medical definition of grief is the following:

The normal process of reacting to a loss. The loss may be physical (such as a death), social (such as divorce), or occupational (such as a job). Emotional reactions of grief can include anger, guilt, anxiety, sadness, and despair. Physical reactions of grief can include sleeping problems, changes in appetite, physical problems, or illness.⁶

6. “Medical Definition of Grief,” *MedicineNet*, <https://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=24274>.

Symptoms of grief

Everyone grieves differently. The length of time spent grieving and the way grief is expressed depends on the person and culture. Symptoms include crying spells, restlessness and irritability, sadness, and difficulty concentrating.

How can we grieve in a way that brings healing?

Grieving takes time and energy. It is a journey that takes us through several steps and leads to healing. The Bible provides solace in this painful process:

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion – to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. (Is. 61:1-3)

The word of God above gives us encouragement and refers us to a place where we can derive strength. The exercises in these workshops can help us to understand, acknowledge, and journey through the process of grieving.

Anger

Anger is an emotional response to a grievance⁷. The grievance may be real or imagined. It may be rooted in a past or present experience, or it may anticipate a future event. Anger is usually based on a threat or a perceived threat due to a conflict, injustice, negligence, humiliation, or betrayal, among other things.

Anger is a completely normal, usually healthy, human emotion. In typical circumstances, anger is an emotion manifested when a normal person feels unhappy for various reasons.

But when it gets out of control and becomes destructive, anger can lead to problems at work, in personal relationships, and in the overall quality of life. It can make people feel as though they're at the mercy of an unpredictable and powerful emotion.

Poorly handled anger can have many consequences: physical health problems, headaches, sleeping problems, digestive problems, high blood pressure, heart problems, depression, poor decision making, problems at work, alcohol or other drug problems, and low self-esteem.

N.B.: This makes it especially important that participants understand the link between anger and trauma.

7. See Healing and Rebuilding of Communities (HROC), <https://healingandrebuidingourcommunities.org>.

Anger caused by trauma

Behavioral anger: This type of anger comprises aggressive and cruel actions.

Verbal anger: This type of anger uses words and not actions. It is mainly expressed through insulting words and hurtful criticisms, but it can still cause harm.

Passive anger: Passive anger is shown mainly through mockery or through avoiding certain situations.

Self-inflicted anger: This type of anger is directed toward a person's own body. People starve themselves or eat too much, or harm their bodies in other ways. They do this in response to a threat or to punish themselves for something they have done wrong.

Chronic anger: People with chronic anger are angry in general. They are angry with their lives, with themselves, with the people around them, and with the whole world. They don't necessarily have a definite reason for it.

Judgmental anger: This type of anger leads people to hurtfully shame the people around them – family, friends, and neighbours. They express their anger by putting others down.

Overwhelming anger: This type of anger is seen when the situation becomes too much for someone. They are quick to shout or lash out at someone or something. It is their way of relieving the stress and pain they are feeling.

Deliberate anger: This type of anger is shown by people who would like to gain control over a situation. They become angry when their plans are blocked by others. They use anger to gain power over somebody or something.

Restorative justice and forgiveness

Restorative justice is a concept based on the communitarian ethos prevalent in Africa. It involves a perpetrator's acknowledgement of harm and the victim's or survivor's acceptance of the acknowledgement. Justice is perceived in terms not of retribution, but rather of reconciliation. Often times, reconciliation and peace, rather than judicial justice, become the overriding goals.

Forgiveness is different from reconciliation. Acknowledgement is imperative for reconciliation. But forgiveness is often self-care for the offended so as to free oneself from bitterness.

Freedom is an intentional and voluntary process through which a victim undergoes a change in feelings and attitude regarding an offense. The victim lets go of negative emotions, such as vengefulness, and is able to wish the offender well.

According to the UC Berkeley Greater Good Science Center,

Psychologists generally define forgiveness as a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness. Just as important as defining what forgiveness is, though, is understanding what forgiveness is not. Experts who study or teach forgiveness make clear that when you forgive, you do not gloss over or deny the seriousness of an offense against you. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting, nor does it mean condoning or excusing offenses. Though forgiveness can help repair a damaged relationship, it doesn't obligate you to reconcile with the person who harmed you or release them from legal accountability. Instead, forgiveness brings the forgiver peace of mind and frees him or her from corrosive anger. While there is some debate over whether true forgiveness requires positive feelings toward the offender, experts agree that it at least involves letting go of deeply held negative feelings. In that way, it empowers you to recognize the pain you suffered without letting that pain define you, enabling you to heal and move on with your life.⁸

Forgiveness means letting go of the past and living in the present moment. Victims can move on to offering compassion and empathy toward the person who hurt them. It is the opposite of resentment and revenge. Forgiveness is a person's willingness to abandon their right to resentment, negative judgement, and indifferent behaviour toward those who unjustly injured them. It is not a sign of weakness; rather, it is a sign of strength and acceptance.

What forgiveness is not

Forgiveness is not easy or simple.

It is also not allowing harm to happen again by putting oneself back into vulnerable situations. It is not the absence of all pain regarding the offense. Denying pain will never make it go away. Forgiveness is not revenge or getting back at someone. Nor is it super spirituality. It is not saying that one can no longer talk about pain or that one can suppress pain. Forgiveness does not let the offender(s) off the hook, absolving them of any responsibility. Nor is it about feeling good about the past hurts or toward the offender.

Forgiveness is not forgetting. It is not dependent on the offender's request for forgiveness or being sorry for the offense. It is saying that it doesn't matter anymore. It is not a guarantee of reconciliation.

Forgiveness certainly is not a simple choice or academic decision.

Forgiveness cannot be willed or prescribed, and every individual's journey with forgiveness is different.

8. "Forgiveness Defined," *Greater Good Magazine*, <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/forgiveness/definition> .

Christian faith and trauma

The cross is the symbol of pain, vulnerability, and suffering. It is a sign of humility and obedience. It is also a source of hope for new life and victory over suffering. The cross is an image of salvation.

Using the symbol of the cross encourages those bearing trauma to hope that trauma will be swallowed up in victory. When Jesus walked on earth, he was able to reach out and heal and raise the dead. His own resurrection seals the hope that death does not have the final word. Resurrection has the final word.

The facilitator can encourage the Christian participants to pray. They can also invite them to the possibility of active membership of the church and Christian community of their choice

Communion: fellowship of sharing, a symbol of cleansing, unity and forgiveness. It is important for trauma transformation and healing.

Confession: a symbol of acknowledgement and cleansing, especially in connection to trauma experienced by perpetrators of injustice and violence. Forgiveness is an imperative to communion with God and with others.

Background, Language, and Theory

Background

This resource's background includes the following two stories to help unpack trauma awareness, transformation, and healing in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and South Sudan. The first brings out the trauma caused by injustice and violence, and the second captures trauma related to disability.

First story

My husband and I built our life together from scratch from the time we were married in the 1980s. I watched him cruelly killed when he tried to protect me from being gang raped by the Boko Haram militants. My husband's family dispossessed me of everything, including our joint bank account. This left me and my three children homeless and with no means of livelihood. My heart has bled since then. I did not know how to name and acknowledge this pain until I participated in a collective trauma healing session.⁹

Second story

You don't know how you came to this world. You don't know how you look when you are a baby until a certain age, when you realize you look different from other children. The day I asked my mother why I look different from other children, her expression changed. I immediately knew it was not a story she wanted to share with me. When I insisted, she broke down in tears.

This is what she told me: "You were born a normal healthy child like others. It was during the war and we, the women and our children, suffered severely. At a terribly bad point during the war four of my six children were sick – including you, the youngest. Your condition became critical for some months, while the war was raging. At one point, your breathing ceased and your legs and hands stopped moving. You were lifeless. I was helpless. I placed you on my chest and ran to a neighbour – an older woman who directed me to another village far from our own. There I met some good Samaritans. They collected you from me, took you inside, and asked me to stay away. They said my yelling was not helping your condition. When I could not stop, they brought out your lifeless body and gave me two options: either I go home and come back the next day or they would give you back to me to manage. I don't know how long you stayed in that state because it is not an experience I want to remember. It was ages – it was more than one day. I found a window

9. This is a story from one of the dispossessed widows I met during the "Walking Her-Story: Women's Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace" in northeast Nigeria, August, 2017.

to the room where they placed you. So I stayed there sobbing and peeping. You later came back to life. They finally released you to me and I went home. After some months, you developed a disability. It is hard for me to remember how you struggled to come back to life, how you struggled to breathe again. I take solace that you are still alive.

The first story above is like one of the many stories one hears, especially in northeastern Nigeria. The second is specifically included in order to make visible the trauma caused by disability. Though Boko Haram militants are not part of the context of Sierra Leone and South Sudan, similar stories of violence are common in these two countries, since both are post-war countries. The reality of our brothers and sisters who live with disability is global.

In the three countries where this resource was developed, almost every person involved had had a traumatic encounter on some level. Trauma is caused by different forms of injustice, natural disasters, diseases, and conflict (including post-conflict) experiences.

The realities of injustice and violence expose both men and women to traumatic experiences. But more women and girls are survivors of sexual gender-based violence (SGBV) than men and boys.

In some contexts, it is rare to hear such pain named as stress or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – only those exposed to and trained in trauma transformation and healing work would use this terminology. Instead, one hears phrases such as bleeding heart, wounded heart, lamenting heart, pierced heart, sadness, and oppressed.

Studies show a correlation between mental health and unaddressed trauma. Moreover, untreated trauma is connected to some causes of violence. Globally, women on average report a three-fold higher exposure to SGBV and are up to seven times more likely than men to identify SGBV as the principle trauma.

Women's far greater exposure to SGBV contributes to their higher incidence of PTSD. According to a study by Plan International, which targeted 249 girls between 10- and 19-years-old in South Sudan, one in four girls are suicidal largely due to the fear of being raped, beaten, kidnapped, or killed.¹⁰

Both men and women suffer PTSD; but due to several underlying factors, fewer women have access to PTSD treatment. The pilgrim team saw some evidence of existing responses to trauma in some of the churches it visited. But many of these responses were developed in the global North for the global South, and in some cases without the involvement of the concerned communities.

This resource is on trauma transformation and *healing*. This honours the Christian spirituality sustained by the hope that, whatever the situation, healing and wholeness is possible. The belief in salvation, holistic healing, and res-

10. "South Sudan Crisis Leaves Girls Feeling Suicidal," *Plan International*, May 29, 2018, <https://plan-international.org/news/2018-05-29-south-sudan-crisis-leave-girls-feeling-suicidal>.

toration gives Christian spirituality the zest to hold on to the hope of healing – even for trauma.

This hope is based in the Christian belief in a loving and faithful God who communes with creation as a community of three in one. This God is a just and healing God. We therefore hold onto the hope of healing despite the acknowledgement that, whatever the cause of a person’s woundedness, they will always carry scars of the trauma, even if they receive the most effective and efficient psychological and social support. These scars often bring the trauma itself to memory.

This resource is developed with the hope that, through accompaniment rooted in compassion, the power within can be evoked in a process of transformation and healing. In this way, in spite of living scars, people will be able to find meaning in life and live it in all its fullness.

This resource also insists on using the terms trauma “*transformation*” and healing, rather than trauma awareness and “resilience,” which is preferred by popular psychosocial discourse. This is not intended to undermine the importance of resilience on this journey. Rather, it is to intentionally call for transformation. It challenges churches and faith-initiated communities not to perpetuate trauma responses that put the burden of survival on the “victims” and survivors – as if to be resilient is to accept one’s woundedness as normal. While acknowledging the importance of inner resilience for the journey of healing, this resource, as part of the WCC’s Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, roots the process of trauma healing accompaniment in the churches’ commitments to just peace. It can only do this through the transformation of the systems and structures of oppression and violence that cause and nourish trauma.

Language and intergenerational communication challenges

As a resource in response to the challenges in three African countries, it is unfortunate that this book has to be written in a language from outside the African continent. Not only is it easier to communicate feelings of pain in an intimate spoken or unspoken language, but the majority of the participants this resource targets don’t have the English skills to communicate meaningfully or with the competence and confidence to be understood and to understand.

The fact that each of the three countries that contributed to developing this resource has a plethora of languages and dialects complicates the language challenges. For example, Nigeria has at least 500 languages, including Hausa, Edo, English, Fulfulde, Ibibio, Igbo, Ijaw, Kanuri, Pidgin English, Tiv, Urhobo and Yoruba; Sierra Leone has 23, including English, Krio, Limba, Mende and Temne; and South Sudan has 64 including Arabic (and Juba Arabic), Bari, Dinka, English, Madi, Nuer, Shiluk, and Zande. As a result, English is the only common language that is also used in formal education in all three countries.

Even when we accept English as a common language (despite its colonial roots), we face the challenge of intergenerational communication. In targeting adolescents, this resource demands that the facilitators learn what Fr Robert Igo refers to as “the art of listening with loving attention.”¹¹ Adolescents have developed their own coded English language, which requires the attentive listening skills of older people. This highly developed technological age means that even their written English is not easily accessible to those from outside their generation. For the churches to be life-giving in the context of the traumatized adolescents, they “need to be a listening, loving presence in ... [the] communities.”¹²

Theories behind this resource: Communitarian ethics of care and logotherapy

In each of the three countries, people’s daily lives are governed by an ethics of community. For trauma transformation and healing, this translates into a preference for collective (group) therapy rather than the individual psychological and social response often stigmatized as foreign and intrusive. This resource, therefore, frames the process of transformation and healing using the *African communitarian ethos*¹³ of accompaniment and care. The ethical framing of “I am because you are, since we are, therefore I am” is unpacked using Viktor Frankl’s logotherapy.¹⁴

Frankl’s ingredients of the freedom of will, the will to find meaning in whatever situation, and the meaning of life, help to articulate communitarian well-being, especially in a context where trauma is the reality of people’s lives. The deepest concern in a communitarian ethos is not to selfishly gain pleasure or accumulate power, but rather to realise the meaning of each life as part of the created whole.

That search for meaning is also the search for how we can contribute to make life meaningful for those we care about and are in community with. The freedom of will and the will to find meaning in every situation are tied into ensuring that our highest potential of being the best self can be reached by

11. Fr Robert Igo, *Listening with Love: Pastoral Counselling – a Christian Response to People Living with HIV/AIDS* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005), 6.

12. Igo, *ibid.*

13. In my southern African context, we refer to this communitarian ethos as *ubuntu*; some of the terms used in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and South Sudan include *Ana tare* (in Hausa, Nigeria), *onye aghala nwaneya* (in Igbo, Nigeria), *Wanfumbul* (in Krio, Sierra Leone), *Karo* (in Bari, South Sudan).

14. Viktor Frankl defines logotherapy as a treatment of the psycho-social patient’s attitude towards their unchangeable fate. Classified as existential psychiatry, logotherapy is a psychotherapeutic technique that is based on the considerations of human life’s existential potential – the realization of the meaning of life. For more, see *Man’s Search for Meaning* (London: Penguin Random House, 1959, 1962, 1984, 1992, 2004); and *The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy* (New York: Meridian/Penguin Group, 1969).

focusing on others' well-being rather than our own. By reaching out to others, especially those in need, we make that significant contribution that only we can uniquely make.

Frankl argues that the quest to find meaning in all forms of existence is core to finding a reason for living, even in the most difficult circumstances. When people discover the reason for their life, they gain the freedom of choice as to how they interpret what they are experiencing. When this happens and an individual realises that they cannot change the situation, they learn to change themselves so that suffering ceases to be detrimental and finds meaning.

Ana tare (in Hausa), *Onye aghala nwaneya* (Igbo) *Wanfumbul* (in Krio),
Karo (in Bari): "I am because you are since we are, therefore, I am"

In trauma transformation and healing, what really matters is not just the activities or exercises that are used. What matters instead are the human relations created, often sealed in a common experience and language. These mutual vulnerabilities are interpersonal and existential.

This encounter allows a space between what has happened and how a person responds to what has happened. This space gives that person the power to choose how to respond to pain. Such a response is often motivated, inspired, and nourished not only from within but by those who accompany them. Such a space, if safe enough, removes the shame of tears. The response of tears, combined with talk and time, bears witness to that person's greatest courage: to face suffering, and (in vulnerability and hope) to turn that suffering around in service of their meaning to life. People forget themselves by giving themselves to a cause to serve or to another person to love; the more human one is, the more one actualizes oneself meaningfully.

This is at the core of the African communitarian ethos: finding meaning of life in service and co-existence with others. This takes away Frankl's existential vacuum: that is, the feeling of emptiness and meaninglessness. As Friedrich Nietzsche stated, "He (sic) who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*."¹⁵

Two challenges of the African communitarian being are identity politics and growing urbanization. Some of the (post-)conflict in Africa is misconstrued in terms of politics of ethnic and religious identities. Urbanization also means that people, especially young people, are to some extent no longer governed by a common moral discourse. They are no longer dictated to by African social

15. Quoted by Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search For Meaning: The Classic Tribute to Hope from the Holocaust*, (London/Sydney/Auckland/Johannesburg: Rider, 1959), 7.

and cultural traditions.¹⁶ This notwithstanding, the fabric of the African communitarian existence is held together by the continuing sense of belonging with each other as communities of the interconnected and interdependent.

However, Africa's young people may feel a greater sense of belonging to their community in the social media than any traditional African grassroots community. This means that echoes of oral sayings and proverbs are not as relevant to adolescents, whose influences lie outside traditional African realms. So, for example, sayings such as, "If you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together" which carry sway for African communities need to be integrated into the coded language of African youth. The hope is that this resource can also help instil and imprint the positive communitarian ethos into the African youth.

The communitarian meaning of life is rooted in compassion (love). This is a capacity that enables the one who loves to encounter and embrace the other person in all their uniqueness. Logotherapy, as part of psychotherapy, is based on such an encounter of human beings, "of which one confronts the other with *logos*, that is, the meaning of being."¹⁷

This encounter allows a person to truly listen to the other beyond what Frankl calls "ontological deafness," thus giving meaning to each other's existence. Logotherapy, like communitarian ethos, therefore, is concerned not only with *ontos* (being) but also with *logos* (meaning). To say that "I am because you are and since we are, therefore I am" is to acknowledge the other person's life as well as give meaning to it.

In other words, it is to acknowledge that my life is worth living because you are part of it, and the meaning of your life is embroidered in mine, for we are in the service of each other as a community of respectfulness and care. Even African adolescents live within such a fabric of life, even though the world of social media seems to confuse them with its offer of more artificial global human community based on often-feigned online connections rather than meaningful physical and personal encounters.

The challenge of the African communitarian ethos with regard to woundedness and healing lies mainly in its very strength. Its fabric is woven together by

16. While this is true to a major extent, when it comes to the socialization of girls and women, certain social and cultural traditions still hold a great deal of power. For example, in Sierra Leone, whether girls are growing up in the city or not, most will still undergo the trauma of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM). According to the *28 Too Many* report, October 2018, there was slight reduction in the prevalence of FGM in Sierra Leone from 91.3 percent in 2008 to 89.6 percent in 2013, according to the Demographic and Health surveys. Prevalence is 94.3 percent in rural areas. The districts in the Northern Province have the highest prevalence, although prevalence is 75 percent or higher in all districts across the country (*Country Profile: FMG in Sierra Leone, June 2014, 28TooMany*, [https://www.28toomany.org/static/media/uploads/Country%20Images/PDF/sierra_leone_country_profile_v2_\(october_2018\).pdf](https://www.28toomany.org/static/media/uploads/Country%20Images/PDF/sierra_leone_country_profile_v2_(october_2018).pdf)).

17. *The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy* (New York: Meridian/Penguin Group, 1969), 8-9.

interconnectedness and interdependence. The desire to belong can easily lead one to become what Frankl refers to as a conformist, through desire to do and be what other people seem to do and be; or to become totalitarian by doing what other people expect or will one to do.

In the case of young people, their sense of being “cool” often can lead to uniformity and conformity. Both have potential to hinder trauma healing because they tamper with the very essence of freedom of will, will to meaning, and meaning of life that rather build on one’s uniqueness and specific contribution to life in the community.

In the cases of conformity and totalitarianism, facilitators of trauma transformation and healing have to find ways to show each participant that every person’s life has a unique meaning. When targeting adolescents, who often struggle with their own identity, facilitators might need to use exercises and skills that focus on respect for individuality to promote healthy self-esteem.

Though facilitators cannot identify for participants what their particular meanings are, they have to find ways to impart Frankl’s conviction. It is also in the communitarian ethos that life never ceases to have a meaning whatever the condition or circumstance. Frankl’s approach is that life itself is meaningful but that there are times when we lose the sense of that meaning because of our circumstances.

In the communitarian ethos, no one should face pain, struggle, or even the final life transition through death, alone. Even when it comes to guilt, the communitarian preference is restorative justice rather than punitive judiciary processes. This preference ensures that the whole process of accusation, confession, judgement, and restoration takes place in a community. Through the process of truth and reconciliation, the violated and violator are given the space to share their struggles and find a restorative solution together¹⁸ as a community of the interconnected and interdependent. So, when a person faces these tragic and negative aspects of life that cause unavoidable suffering, their sense of meaning, enhanced by the accompaniment of the community, can change despair to a triumph.

However, when it comes to accompaniment, it is important to acknowledge that there are sometimes cultural constraints imbedded in the realities of taboo issues, such as SGBV. In some cultural contexts, people will not talk about such violations in public. To start such conversations, facilitators might need to ask questions that assume these experiences are a reality of other people in the community. Or they might need to use their own vulnerability to such experiences to create a safe enough atmosphere for such a discourse to take place. This process of trauma transformation and healing, therefore, facilitates such

18. It should be noted that sometimes processes of restorative justice, especially when using the truth and reconciliation model, can end up sacrificing justice for peace. The Truth and Reconciliation process in South Africa is a compelling example of such a settlement.

difficult cultural conversation. It equips the wounded with the ability to break the silence around taboo issues and find meaning as unique individuals who are also part of a collective whole.

To enable an encounter that facilitates trauma transformation and healing, this resource is designed to create a safe enough space that each participant is confident they will be listened to with respect, patience, and love. To enhance the respect of individuality as an expression of freedom of will, will to meaning, and meaning of life, facilitators have to avoid comparing participants to each other or even to other people. This assures that their being is valued as their story of pain is listened to, and their worth is affirmed by a community that cares enough to create such a space and dedicate its time.

Frankl tells a story of a woman who wanted to commit suicide who phoned him at 3:00 am. Frankl talked with her for 30 minutes, until she gave her word that she would not take her life. When she visited him at the hospital the following day,

it turned out that not one of the arguments I offered had impressed her. The only reason she had decided not to commit suicide was the fact that, rather than growing angry because of having been disturbed in my sleep in the middle of the night, I had patiently listened to her and talked with her for half an hour, and a world – she found – in which this can happen, must be a world worth living in.¹⁹

This is the world that the African communitarian ethos espouses.

Within this context, this ecumenical resource for trauma transformation and healing offers five sessions. These sessions build on the importance of the participants' freedom of will, their will to meaning, and their search to find the meaning of their life in the process of gaining healing and wholeness from woundedness. As trauma transformation and healing is a journey, this resource uses the language of the journey.

19. *The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy* (New York: Meridian/Penguin Group, 1969), 4.

Structure and Methodology
of a Collective
Trauma-Healing Workshop

INTRODUCTORY SESSION

Workshop Guidelines

 **Time needed:** 2 hours, 45 minutes

Objectives:

- To welcome the participants and allow them to meet one another
- To give the participants a chance to share their reasons for attending this workshop and their expectation of it
- To develop ground rules for the safe and effective running of the workshop
- To foster a spirit of mutual trust and cooperation

 **Description:** Plenary sessions, small group discussions, and individual work

 **Material needed:** two flip charts, marker pens of different colours

Activity 1 – Introduction and opening prayers

 **Time needed:** 1 hour, 10 minutes

Activity objectives: By the end of this activity, the participants should:

- Have information about the process of trauma transformation and healing as framed in this ecumenical resource
- Be aware from the outset that this process is set within Christian spirituality

 **Materials:** Holy Bible

The journey

1. Introduce yourself as the workshop facilitator and any assistant facilitators who might be present. Outline the workshop overview and objectives.
Maximum 15 minutes
2. Hold a brief, lively liturgy with one song, opening prayer, and short reading and reflection – for example, Psalm 91 (see box below). **Maximum 15 minutes**
3. Ask the participants to form pairs, preferably with a person they have not met before. Ask each person to introduce themselves to the other for 2 minutes, mentioning especially why they are attending this workshop. They could use an adjective that describes them that starts with the first letter of their first name. For example, if their name is “James,” they can say “I am Joyful James.” The adjective helps the person to start finding meaning in

their own life – as a strength on this journey of trauma transformation and healing. Invite everyone into a circle and ask each person to introduce their partner to the whole group in a maximum of 2 minutes. It's important for the participants *to get to know each other and develop a level of trust*. Participatory introductions in pairs helps with active listening, an important asset in trauma transformation and healing. **Maximum 40 minutes**

4. Move on to setting ground rules.

God's Protection (Psalm 91)

You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust."

For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence;
he will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

You will not fear the terror of the night,
or the arrow that flies by day,
or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.

Activity 2 – Ground rules

 **Time needed:** 25 minutes

Activity objective: By the end of this activity, the participants should be able to identify ground rules that ensure a safe space so that participants can meaningfully contribute to the process of healing.

 **Materials:** flip chart and marker pens

The journey

1. The facilitator sets the context that every person is traumatized at different levels. Each session has the potential to remind participants of their own experiences and trigger various responses. Identifying some ground rules can help set the tone for a respectful, thoughtful, and safe discussion that maintains clear boundaries and respects confidentiality.
2. With everyone sitting in a circle, ask the participants to suggest guiding principles to be observed so that the workshop runs smoothly, safely, and comfortably for everyone. Ask someone to write these guidelines on the flipchart.

3. Ask for consensus so that these ground rules are observed by everyone. This will help the workshop run as successfully and effectively as possible. Indicate that new rules can be added according to need. Attach the guidelines to the wall so that everyone can see it as a reminder. Ground rules can include the following:
 - Be respectful of others and do not discuss personal comments outside of the training.
 - Be aware of the potentially upsetting nature of the material and take care of yourself and each other.
 - Respect for confidentiality is imperative, but be responsible in deciding how much personal information is appropriate to share.
 - Do not have side conversations, talk over others, or interrupt others.
 - Switch off mobile phones or at least put them on silent mode.
 - Step up, step back: If you haven't spoken or contributed, do so if you feel comfortable.
 - If you have been speaking and sharing a lot, let others take a turn. **Maximum 20 minutes**
4. **Refreshing exercise:** You can start a lively life-giving chorus.
5. **Facilitation methodologies:** Share some of the methods that you will use during the workshop. You can include the following:
 - **Individual reflection:** Participants write down or draw images reflecting their responses and then share with the group. This gives everyone an opportunity to collect their thoughts and may help them feel more comfortable sharing in a group setting.
 - **Family group discussion/or in pairs.** People are split into smaller groups (two, or five to eight people) to discuss a question or topic.
 - **Large group discussion.** A question or topic is addressed to the whole group and the discussion is facilitated by the presenter.
 - **A fishbowl participatory conversation:** Five chairs are arranged in an inner circle. The remaining chairs are arranged in concentric circles outside the fishbowl. For an open fishbowl, four participants are selected to fill the fishbowl, leaving one chair empty. The rest of the group sits on the chairs outside the fishbowl. The facilitator or chosen moderator introduces the topic and the participants start discussing the topic. The audience outside the fishbowl listens and observe closely. If someone from the outside circle has a question, they fill the empty chair to ask the question and be part of the conversation. The fishbowl can be alternated as much as needed so that every participant has a chance to be part of the conversation. **Maximum 5 minutes**

Activity 3 – Building trust and team spirit: Balloon bop game²⁰

 **Time needed:** 15 minutes

Activity objective: By the end of this activity, the participants should be able to build trust by working together cooperatively.

 **Materials:** a balloon

The journey

1. Check with participants whether they mind being touched by someone. This is crucial, especially for those whose trauma was caused by forced touch, including sexual violence. Make sure that every member of the group is able to participate. If there is someone who has a disability that challenges their effective participation, find an alternate, more inclusive exercise.
2. Start by having participants stand/kneel/sit in a circle while holding hands.
3. Drop the balloon into the circle.
4. The goal is for the participants to work cooperatively by moving together holding hands and to keep the balloon from hitting the ground.
5. Participants have to tap the balloon with knees, shoulders, heads, elbows, chests. They cannot use their feet and they must continue holding hands.
6. Ask them how they felt about doing this exercise. Ask also whether it contains any lessons about trust and team spirit for real life.
7. Close with a song.

Activity 4 – My strongest, most consistent feelings...

 **Time needed:** 40 minutes

Activity objectives: By the end of this activity, the participants should:

- Have gained awareness about what kind of traumatic manifestations they experience
- Be able to relax using the breathing exercises

 **Materials:** sticky notes of different colours, at least five for each participant; flipchart

The journey

1. Write a list of emotions on a flip chart. The list of emotions can include the following: fearful and afraid; angry; violent; sad and hurt; restless;

20. "Co-operative Games for Children with Special Needs," Disability Grants, <https://www.disability-grants.org/cooperative-games-for-children-with-special-needs.html>.

silent; guilty; unloved; lonely; resentful. Give each participant five stickers of different colours. Ask them to stick one sticker on the five top emotions that describe how they feel. After they identify the five emotions, invite them to talk about those in pairs. **Maximum 15 minutes**

2. The facilitator should be very alert and aware since this exercise has a very high potential to evoke upsetting memories. Call participants back to the plenary circle and invite those who are willing to talk to share their feeling about the exercise. **Maximum 15 minutes**
3. For the remaining minutes, invite them to do breathing exercises to help them relax. Invite participants to sit up tall in their chairs with both feet on the ground. Suggest that they close their eyes. Say (slowly and calmly):

Now breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out. Focus on your breath as it fills your lungs deeply. Observe your breath as it passes out through your nose. Breathe in, breathe out. In, out. If you feel your mind wander, just gently bring yourself back to your breath. In and out, you are alive, you are here. As you breathe in, breathe in life energy, breathe in good, and breathe in peace. As you breathe out, breathe out your pain, your anger, frustration, your tiredness. As you breathe in, let God's clean air soothe you and calm you. In and out.

Pause for a while, letting participants relax into their breath. Then gently say,

Now, feeling refreshed and calm, slowly prepare yourself and when you are ready, open your eyes and look around. Maximum 10 minutes

4. Ensure that participants are okay to move to the next activity.

Activity 5 – Closing circle, silence and prayer



Time needed: 10 minutes

Activity objective: By the end of this activity, the participants should be in touch with their own feelings and be ready for the journey of transformation and healing.



Materials: Holy Bible (in appropriate language)

➔ The journey

1. Invite the participants to stand in a circle for **2 minutes** of silence. Invite each participant to say one word that comes to mind after the breathing exercise and the different exercises before. **Maximum 7 minutes**
2. Suggest that it is possible to sing a song before the prayer. **1 minute.** You can use Psalm 88.

O Lord, God of my salvation,
when, at night, I cry out in your presence,
let my prayer come before you;
incline your ear to my cry.
For my soul is full of troubles,
and my life draws near to Sheol.
I am counted among those who go down to the Pit;
I am like those who have no help,
like those forsaken among the dead,
like the slain that lie in the grave,
like those whom you remember no more,
for they are cut off from your hand.
You have put me in the depths of the Pit,
in the regions dark and deep.
Your wrath lies heavy upon me,
and you overwhelm me with all your waves. Selah
You have caused my companions to shun me;
you have made me a thing of horror to them.
I am shut in so that I cannot escape;
my eye grows dim through sorrow.
Every day I call on you, O Lord;
I spread out my hands to you.
Do you work wonders for the dead?
Do the shades rise up to praise you? Selah
Is your steadfast love declared in the grave,
or your faithfulness in Abaddon?
Are your wonders known in the darkness,
or your saving help in the land of forgetfulness?
But I, O Lord, cry out to you;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.
O Lord, why do you cast me off?
Why do you hide your face from me?
Wretched and close to death from my youth up,
I suffer your terrors; I am desperate.
Your wrath has swept over me;
your dread assaults destroy me.
They surround me like a flood all day long;
from all sides they close in on me.
You have caused friend and neighbor to shun me;
my companions are in darkness.

SESSION 1

Woundedness (Trauma) and Its Manifestations

 **Time needed:** 3 hours, 20 minutes

Objectives:

- To raise awareness about what woundedness implies
- To identify the manifestations of trauma and their causes
- To provide the basis of building transformation by boosting the inner power of freedom of will, will for meaning, and meaning of life


Main activity of the day: Debriefing (sharing) (participants should be allowed to share their painful past).

Create family groups of between five and eight people.

Note: Consider ethical issues: ensure confidentiality, practice listening skills, ensure respect, and create an environment conducive to the sensitive nature of the exercise

Safeguards: The facilitator needs to put safeguards in place to protect already vulnerable people, the traumatized.

 **Description:** The sharing of the stories of pain in family groups, plenary sessions, and individual work

 **Materials:** printed image of erupted volcano or any other image that contextually symbolizes trauma (one for each family group, minimum of four copies); the Holy Bible

Activity 1A – Opening prayer and reflection

 **Time needed:** 20 minutes

Activity objective: By the end of this activity, the participants should be able to start the journey of trauma transformation and healing using familiar Christian spiritual resources.

 **Materials:** Holy Bible

The journey

1. Ask someone to start a song of lamentation and praise.
 2. Read and reflect on the psalm below (Psalm 69) or/and Isaiah 1:14-17; Psalm 91:4-6; Proverbs 1:33; John 10:10.
-

Psalm 69

Save me, O God,
for the waters have come up to my neck.
I sink in deep mire,
where there is no foothold;
I have come into deep waters,
and the flood sweeps over me.
I am weary with my crying;
my throat is parched.
My eyes grow dim
with waiting for my God.
More in number than the hairs of my head
are those who hate me without cause;
many are those who would destroy me,
my enemies who accuse me falsely.
What I did not steal
must I now restore?
O God, you know my folly;
the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you.
Do not let those who hope in you be put to shame because of me,
O Lord GOD of hosts;
do not let those who seek you be dishonoured because of me,
O God of Israel.
It is for your sake that I have borne reproach,
that shame has covered my face.
I have become a stranger to my kindred,
an alien to my mother's children

Activity 1B – Introduction to trauma and its causes



Time needed: 1 hour

Activity Objective: By the end of this activity, the participants should have gained awareness about their own woundedness on this journey of healing by being in touch with their feelings



Materials: an image of an erupted volcano, or any other image that can contextually symbolize woundedness enough copies for each group,.

Caution: It is not necessary to go deeply into the question of why God allows evil (theodicy) unless participants ask questions that demand such an engagement.

The journey

1. Invite the participants to form groups of four. Provide an image of an erupting volcano. Ask them to write down at least four things that can be destroyed by such an eruption. From their list, let them compare that destruction with the pain and destruction that trauma causes in a person's life. One question to address is "Why are we suffering?" (The facilitator should allow participants to share their thoughts).
2. The facilitator should be able to guide participants with biblical and theological concepts (if necessary, they can include the justification of God's goodness and power in the face of evil).
3. Ask: Are there any practical examples of what causes suffering? **Maximum 30 minutes**
4. Invite them back into the circle. Ask each group to share some of their discussion. Record some of the images and comparisons shared.

Trauma is likened to an erupted volcano: its destructive power sweeps away everything in its path.

5. Ask the participants if they know some of the manifestations of trauma. Ask one of them to record the information on the flip chart as they are called out. **Maximum 20 minutes**
6. Close with some breathing exercises and prayer. **Maximum 10 minutes**

Activity 1C – Trauma management

 **Time needed:** 1 hour 30 minutes

Activity objectives: By the end of this activity, the participants should be able to:

- Express their emotions while listened to, supported, and accompanied by their family groups
- Experience relaxation through the breathing exercises

 **Materials:** tissues for wiping tears

Activity: Family groups

Caution: Be ready to extend time in case participants need more time in family groups or alone. There might need for more private spaces.

➔ The journey

1. The facilitator identifies three other trained facilitators to lead each of the family groups.
2. Each facilitator reads Matthew 27:45-50 (or Psalm 22:1-31:

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

3. Talk, tears and time is often described as essential for healing. Using these 3Ts, the facilitator invites one family group member to share their story while others attentively and actively listen.
4. Where needed, sensitively probe with questions that help the one speaking to unpack their feelings of pain, fear, anger, etc.
5. Give participants permission to freely express their feeling and to lament like Jesus in the passage above. **Maximum 1 hour, 20 minutes**
6. Family groups come back to the plenary for breathing exercises.
7. Close with breathing exercises. Invite participants to sit up tall in their chairs with both feet on the ground. Suggest that they might close their eyes. Say (slowly and calmly):

Now breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out. Focus on your breath as it fills your lungs deeply. Observe your breath as it passes out through your nose. Breathe in, breathe out. In, out. If you feel your mind wander, just gently bring yourself back to your breath. In and out, you are alive, you are here. As you breathe in, breathe in life energy, breathe in good, and breathe in peace. As you breathe out, breathe out your pain, your anger, frustration, your tiredness. As you breathe in, let God's clean air soothe you and calm you. In and out.

Pause for a while, letting participants relax into their breath. Then gently say,

Now, feeling refreshed and calm, slowly prepare yourself and when you are ready, open your eyes and look around.

Maximum 8 minutes

8. Start a refreshing song that encourages movement. **Maximum 2 minutes**

Active listening is a communication technique used in counselling, training, and conflict resolution. It requires that the listener fully concentrate, understand, respond, and then remember what is being said. This is opposed to reflective listening, where the listener repeats back to the speaker what they have just heard to confirm understanding.

Active Listening Techniques

- Purpose: to get additional facts; to help the speaker explore all sides; to check meaning and interpretation; to show that others are interested and listening; to show that others understand how the speaker feels; to bring the discussion into focus.
 - The speaker feels the care of the family group. Active listening creates an environment where the speaker is given confidence to say things and to be in touch with emotions without fear of being judged.
 - It is important for the speaker to know they have been heard. The facilitator and family group members help the speaker to be in touch with their emotions, even those that were frozen. This process helps to start the healing process.
 - Active listening gives the speaker feedback on what they said and how it came across.
 - Active listening helps build a firmer and more trusting relationship for the future.
-

Activity 1D – Review of the session and closing ritual



Time needed: 30 minutes

Activity objective: By the end of this activity, the participants should be prepared for the next session that is emotionally difficult.



Materials: Holy Bible

➔ The journey

1. Ask for a volunteer to teach or start a song of lamentation or praise and thanksgiving.
2. You can ask one participant to read Psalm 23 (a psalm that assures God's accompaniment through the valley of pain).
3. Inform the participants that the following session may be very emotional.

N.B.: As a facilitator, you must be qualified or have experience facilitating the process of unpacking anger. You have to be very observant and be able to listen

attentively to participants. Clearly show that you are concerned and that you care enough to offer counselling where possible. If, as a facilitator, you are not a professional counsellor, then it is highly recommended that you make sure you can refer people to one.

4. If needed: Arrange to have a professional counsellor or a pastor with pastoral care experience available.
5. While singing “Yesterday I Learnt Something,”²¹ go around the circle inviting each participant to say one word that expresses what they learned from the previous session. **Maximum 10 minutes**

As preparation for the next session, ask six participants to get ready to enact three heavy emotions the following day. Make sure that you identify those participants that are emotionally more stable to do that. Work with them to prepare for the role playing.

21. The words are: *Yesterday I learnt something, yesterday I learnt something!* Then the facilitator points at one participant and asks: “What did you learn?” This was taught at the consultative workshop, Juba, May 1–3, 2019, by Rev. Klero Onuha-Ingayo, South Sudan.

SESSION 2

Grief, Fear and Anger in Relation to Trauma

 **Time needed:** 4 hours, 15 minutes


Objectives: At the end of this session, the participants will:

- Be in deeper touch with their feeling of grief, fear, and anger as part of reaction to loss that leads to transformation
- Start the process of building resilience from transformed woundedness

Instructions: It is important that participants deal with fear and anger after they have looked at grief. Both fear and anger can be major responses to grief.

Caution: Be alert in case there are participants who need special attention because of the emotional impact and memories aroused.

 **Description:** Working as individuals as well as in groups of four and in plenary session

 **Materials:** paper in different colours (one sheet for each person), crayons of different colours, flip chart, marker pens, adhesive tape

Activity 2A – Opening prayer and reflections

 **Time needed:** 30 minutes

Activity objective: By the end of this activity, the participants should be able to explore ways of trauma transformation and healing using Christian spirituality.

 **Materials:** Holy Bible

The journey

1. The facilitator asks the pastor to read prayers in preparation for the difficult session.
2. The pastor can read Psalm 23 again as part of the prayers. Other possible scripture readings are Haggai 2:6-9; Psalm 30:5; Matthew 11:28-30; John 14:1-4; Revelation 21:1-7.
3. Start a song that prepares the participants for the session: “Peace be Still, Be Still and Know That I am God,” “This World Is Not My Home,” or “Guide Oh Great Jehovah.”

4. The facilitator asks the participants to share in one word what happened in the previous session.

Activity 2B – Dealing with grief



Time needed: 1 hour, 55 minutes

Activity objectives: By the end of this activity, the participants should have:

- Gained awareness about the role of grief in trauma
- Created a space to take about the experience of loss as part of healing process

Methodology: Individual and family group process



Materials: papers, crayons, flip charts, marker pens

➡ The journey

1. Ask the participants to divide into their family groups.
2. Give each group several papers (at least one for each person), and a pack of crayons of different colours.
3. Ask each participant to pick up at least one paper.
4. Explain to them that sometimes simple artistic creation can help to unpack experiences of grief.
5. Invite them to use their paper and crayon to draw an image that expresses loss and grief for them. **Maximum 25 minutes**
6. Tell them to come back to their groups and share their drawing with their group. They can either create a joint image on a flip chart or keep their individual images. **Maximum 20 minutes**
7. Invite them back into the bigger group (plenary).
8. Ask the groups to share their images, if they wish. Do not force or push. Let those who want to share do so, without letting those who don't want to share feel judged. Do not compare the images in terms of better or worse.
9. Never try to force someone to open up; it is important to let a grieving individual or group know that you are there to listen if they want to talk about their loss. When appropriate, ask sensitive questions politely and invite the grieving person/group to openly express their feelings.
10. Acknowledge the situation. Be open to talk about how the grieving person really feels and let people who are grieving tell their stories. Be patient. Be genuine in your communication and be willing to sit in silence. Offer your support in short and long term, as needed. **Maximum 25 minutes**

11. Conclude by saying that all three – grief, fear and anger – are normal emotions. They can be a reaction to a perceived danger or threat, or a reaction to feeling hurt and loss. But there are constructive and destructive ways of responding to grief, fear, and anger. **Maximum 15 minutes**
12. Ask volunteers to role play on grief, anger, and fear. Give the other participants a **30 minutes** break so that the cast can prepare for the role play.

Activity 2C – Dealing with fear and anger



Time needed: 1 hour

Activity objectives: By the end of this activity, the participants should be able to:

- Acknowledge that fear and anger are inevitable responses to grief
- Explore the healthy and the destructive ways of managing and responding
- Understand the long-term consequences of responding poorly to fear and anger

Methodologies: role play, group brainstorm, and small group discussion

Note: There are detailed notes on fear and anger in Part One of this resource.

Storyline for the role play (if needed):

The Ishaku family was made up of Mr Ishaku, his wife (Abigail), and their four children. They were very happy subsistence farmers who lived in a small quiet community known as Zumgu. Zumgu village shares common boundaries with Romchi community. These two communities were in conflict over farmland. It was harvest period, and the entire family went to their farm in the outskirts of their village to harvest grain. Young men from Romchi village attacked and killed the entire family except for the wife and mother, Abigail. She got back to the village, bleeding profusely and grieving the loss of her family. She was received by Zumgu's community head, Chief Bulus, a cabinet member, Mr Zaka, and Madam Helen. The Zumgu community went into deep mourning and anger against Romchi village, and began planning a reprisal attack. These circumstances created an urgent need for trauma transformation and healing.

Cast: Abigail, Chief Bulus, Mr Zaka, and Madam Helen

➡ The journey

1. Invite the group that prepared the roleplay to enact the story. Invite the rest of the participants to listen and observe because the group discussions will build on the role play. **Maximum 15 minutes**
2. In the large group, identify unhealthy ways to deal with fear and anger illustrated by the role play.
3. Then create a list of the healthy ways in which the characters could have responded to the grief, fear, and anger. **Maximum 20 minutes**

4. Divide participants into family groups so that each person has a chance to contribute to the discussion. Consider the following questions:
 - What did the role play remind them of in their own experiences?
 - What could have been done better in both the role play and the experiences they know about?

Some responses might be either unhealthy or healthy, depending on the situation. Invite participants to articulate why a certain reaction can be either healthy or unhealthy. **Maximum 15 minutes**

5. Invite participants back into the circle and ask them the following questions:
 - How are these three emotions (grief from the last activity, fear and anger) related to each other? (Where necessary, bring them back to the role play as a case study.)
 - Do you have questions that you wish to ask? **Maximum 9 minutes**
6. Close with a short prayer. **Maximum 1 minute**

Note: The facilitator can further explain these emotions by differentiating fear from faith. Many Christians believe that there are 365 “fear nots” in the Bible – one for each day of the year. There are actually only 108 direct phrases that can be counted as “fear not”/“do not be afraid.”

Whatever the real number, it is important to acknowledge that sad events happen to all. But we can receive these events in faith, knowing that, as Romans 8:28 reminds us: “...all things work together for good to them that love God and they who are called according to God’s purpose.” So, in faith we believe this promise. While fate is fatalistic in outlook, faith has an outlook of hope based on the knowledge that God understands our pain and is there to journey with us into victory. God in God’s sovereignty is still in charge of events of our world. We must accept them in faith and not surrender to fate. You might talk about the righteous anger of God and human anger. Also talk about grief as a natural emotion in the face of loss. Relate these three emotions in the context of trauma.

Activity 2D – Relaxation exercise and closing ritual

 **Time needed:** 30 minutes

Objectives: By the end of this activity, the participants should be able to:

- Move from the intense place of grieving to feeling calm and peaceful
- Learn the relaxation techniques to use to help others who have had an intense emotional experience

Instructions: Use simple deep breathing to relieve the body, mind, and soul. Do not use complicated breathing exercises that have transcendental spiritual

connotations. Simply ask participants to breathe in slowly, count to three, and then breathe out slowly to count to five. Repeat this at least ten times.

Be cautious that with nothing to focus on other than the breathing, adolescents who have had a very difficult time with the previous activity may be easily distracted. They may allow their minds to go back to the painful memories. Help them to be conscious of the movement of their muscles as they breathe in and out. Tell them that it is okay if some distracting thoughts come and go.

Benefits: This is a simple activity that only focuses on breath and so is less likely to trigger other memories. It is also very simple to remember and for individuals to repeat in future

➔ The journey

1. Invite participants to sit up tall in their chairs with both feet on the ground. Suggest that they might close their eyes. Say (slowly and calmly):

Now breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out. Focus on your breath as it fills your lungs deeply. Observe your breath as it passes out through your nose. Breathe in, breathe out. In, out. If you feel your mind wander, just gently bring yourself back to your breath. In and out, you are alive, you are here. As you breathe in, breathe in life energy, breathe in good, and breathe in peace. As you breathe out, breathe out your pain, your longing, your tiredness. As you breathe in, let God's clean air soothe and calm you. In and out.

Pause for a while, letting participants relax into their breath. Then resume:

Now that you are relaxed and breathing deeply, if you'd like, let your mind drift to a special place where you feel safe, peaceful, calm, and happy. It can be a real place or an imagined place, but the important thing is that you feel completely safe. Now imagine going to that place. How do you get there – see yourself entering that place. Now that you are in that place, look around. Take in all the details about the place. What does it smell like? Are you outside or inside? What sounds do you hear? Are you standing or sitting or lying down? Just take some quiet time to be fully and completely in this safe place.

Pause for a while and then gently say,

Now, feeling refreshed and calm, slowly prepare yourself to come back and get ready to open your eyes. When you are ready, open your eyes and look around.

2. Give participants a little time to be in the present, and then end in the usual way. **Maximum 10 minutes**

SESSION 3


Forgiveness, Restorative Justice, and Trauma Transformation and Healing

 **Time needed:** 2 hours, 30 minutes

Objectives:

- To explore forgiveness and restorative justice as part of the trauma transformation and healing process
- To give the participants a chance to reflect on their own experiences of forgiveness and practices of restorative justice
- To analyze the healing (and not manipulative and silencing) role of forgiveness in the context of injustice and trauma

Methodologies: Role playing (drama), using a fish-bowl plenary session format, family group discussions, and individual work. Three volunteers will need to prepare for the restorative justice ritual before the session.

 **Materials:** 2 flip charts, marker pens, kola nut/edible bitter/tree bark/white clay, a bowl of water/traditional wine, and a mat or some traditional stools (chairs can work as well)

Activity 3A – Restorative justice using traditional ritual

 **Time needed:** 50 minutes

Activity objectives: By the end of this activity, the participants should have:

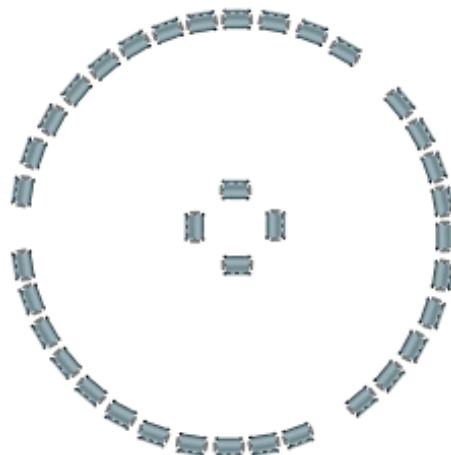
- Explored some of the rich traditional rituals/exercises/processes of forgiveness and reconciliation using the restorative justice communitarian model
- Analyzed how restorative justice contributes to the process of trauma transformation and healing

Methodology: Role play for the three volunteers, fish-bowl community format in two semi-circles for the rest of the audience.

 **Materials:** kola nut/edible bitter/tree bark/white clay, a bowl of water/traditional wine and a mat or some traditional stools (chairs can work as well).

➔ The journey

1. Invite participants to sit in a semi-circle as part of a community to which the two parties in the role-play belong.
2. Within the semi-circle, create an open circle of four chairs.



An example of a fishbowl. Remember that for a maximum of 30 people, the outer circle will have 26 chairs (not the 36 shown in the image above).

3. Ask three volunteers to sit on the chairs in the inner open circle. One of the three volunteers will be the mediator and narrator of the whole process. The mediator's role can be carried out by the workshop facilitator if necessary.
4. Invite the rest of the participants to sit in the bigger semi-circle.
5. Explain to them that this is an example of a restorative justice ritual traditional in most African countries. As the actors prepare and take their seats, ask the participants in the outer circle to be very attentive to what will be said and done. **Maximum 5 minutes**
6. The mediator then takes over and introduces the issue that has caused the two parties to have a conflict or hurt. The mediator lays the ground rules that ensure each of the parties has a chance to share their side of the story without any interruptions. **Maximum 5 minutes**
7. The mediator then asks the two to give each their side of the story. The mediator makes sure the ground rules are observed. If any of the two or the outer circle disrupts the process, the mediator calls them to order until both parties have shared their story. **Each 5 minutes: maximum 10 minutes**
8. The mediator then asks each of the two if what they have shared really reflects what transpired, especially if the two perspectives of the story do not agree. The mediator also makes sure that the offending party is repentant and able to apologize. **Maximum 5 minutes**
9. The mediator asks the offended party whether they accept the apology or if there is something else that they want the offending party to do as

a symbol of reparation. When this is settled, the mediator asks whether both parties are ready to share from the same bowl in reconciliation.

Maximum 5 minutes

10. If the answer is affirmative, then the mediator takes the tree bark and gives a piece to each party to chew while the offending party expresses their regret for the offence and the offended party affirms forgiveness. The mediator hands the bowl of water to them to take a sip and spit to the ground while the rest of the community shouts, “Let it go, let it go.” The mediator then gives another piece of the bark to both of them and invites them to chew. The mediator allows each to drink from the same bowl of water and to swallow the bark. **Maximum 5 minutes**
11. The mediator commends the two for taking such steps. The mediator invites the community into discussion by inviting them one by one to come and take the empty chair and share their responses to the following questions:
 - Do you know similar rituals in your community? If yes, what are they called?
 - How does restorative justice contribute positively or negatively to the process of trauma transformation and healing?
 - Would you recommend this as an effective way of dealing with questions of justice in the process of trauma transformation and healing?**Maximum 15 minutes**
12. The facilitator can close the activity with a traditional or Christian song about forgiveness.

Restorative Justice as a communitarian conflict resolution approach can be summarized by four key values:

- **Encounter:** creating opportunities for victims, offenders, their families, and community members to meet through the mediation of a third party to discuss the conflict and its impact on them
- **Inclusion/Participation:** providing opportunities for parties in conflict and their communities to fully participate in its resolution
- **Amend:** allowing the offender, through dialogue and mediation, to take steps to repair the harm caused by acknowledging it publicly
- **Reintegration:** seeking to restore both victims and offenders to wholeness, so they can continue to or become contributing members of their community²²

22. Adapted from “What Is Restorative Justice,” *Restorative Practices International*, <https://rpiassn.org/resources/what-is-restorative-justice/>.

Activity 3B – When, how and why do we forgive in the context of trauma?

 **Time needed:** 30 minutes

Activity Objectives: By the end of this activity, the participants should be able to:

- Unpack the when, how, and why of forgiveness
- Appropriately situate forgiveness as part of the process of trauma transformation and healing
- Identify some of the common scripture verses that capture the when, how, and why of forgiveness

Methodologies: Family group work and plenary sharing

 **Materials:** flip chart pages and marker pens, Holy Bible.

The journey

1. Ask the participants to get into their family groups.
2. Give them two flip charts.
3. Ask them to divide the flip chart into three columns: when, how, and why.
4. Explain that they will be thinking about forgiveness. Ask them to discuss and write down into each of the section what their answers are. Encourage them to include relevant biblical verses. **Maximum 15 minutes**
5. Ask them to come back to the circle and share their findings. **Maximum 14 minutes**
6. Close with a short prayer. **1 minute**

Forgiveness in trauma healing is part of self-love and care. Lack of forgiveness hurts the person bearing it rather than the offender, for it causes bitterness and continued hurt. Forgiveness keeps us from passing our hatred on to others.

“Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and through it many become defiled” (Heb. 12:14-15).

Forgiveness opens us to receive God’s forgiveness:

“If you forgive others the wrongs they have done to you, your Father in heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive the wrongs you have done.” (Matt. 6:14-15; Mark 11:25).

Forgiveness frees us of the burden of holding grudges against others. It has potential to change the person who offended us. The Book of Acts tells us that Paul observed the stoning of Stephen and listened to him praying for God's forgiveness for those who stoned him. Paul's conversion and his stopping his persecution of Jesus' followers are connected to witnessing Stephen's behaviour.

Forgiveness has other effects: Forgiveness is associated with mental health. It has the great potential to heal relationships. It releases the need and desire for revenge and allows for renewed hope. It opens the heart to receive healing love and renews the ability to trust. It can heal the wounds of war and bring release and relief. It can boost our interconnectedness as it breaks the cycle of violence in societies and brings sustainable peace. It liberates the spirit, mind, and body that are imprisoned in the bitterness of the past. It could even serve as protection (or immunity) for the spirit, mind, body against many diseases and pathologies.

Activity 3C – Transforming trauma and building resilience toward healing

 **Time needed:** 1 hour

Activity objectives: By the end of this activity, the participants should:

- Have explored the causes of their hurt and be motivated to build resilience toward healing
- Continue to build lasting bonds of the interconnected and interdependent, where mutual vulnerability through storytelling becomes a relational resource for accompaniment toward transformation and healing

 **Materials:** Holy Bible, flip charts, and marker pens

The journey

1. In the plenary circle, ask the following questions:
 - What have you done to address the hurt caused by something that you or someone else did to you?
 - How do you deal with the trauma that such hurt causes at the personal, group, and community levels?
 - What role does faith play in dealing with such hurt and the trauma it causes?
2. Invite participants to respond to these questions as they are able to. **Maximum 15 minutes**

3. Invite the participants to think about, identify, or express in drawing:
 - What makes them happy.
 - What gives them peace of mind.
 - What they want their life to be. **Maximum 15 minutes**

N.B. The facilitator can provide images that symbolize what makes people happy. For example, the shining sun, flowers, a beautiful beach, a beautiful high waterfall.
4. Invite them to share what they are expressing in their drawing. **Maximum 15 minutes**
5. Invite participants to talk about what makes them feel better. Examples of response can include talking with others, building a sense of hope from previous experiences that we overcame, taking a walk, or praying. **Maximum 10 minutes**
6. Read Psalm 23 aloud and invite the participants to use it as a prayer. Or after reading the psalm, close the activity with a short prayer that acknowledges pain and expresses hope of transformation. **Maximum 5 minutes**

Positive change: according to Professor Stephen Joseph, positive change is about “accepting the traumatic experience as a part of who you are. It’s about accepting that it can change and evolve who you are, which is why you shouldn’t fixate on putting back those vase pieces back together exactly as they used to be. It’s also about realizing that how you view the world can change, as can your experience of some of your relationships. All in all, it’s about acknowledging that personal growth can be found from the suffering that comes from trauma.”²³

Activity 3D – Review of the section and closing ritual

 **Time needed:** 10 minutes

Activity objectives: By the end of this activity, the participants should have:

- Explored how love can be an instrument of positive thinking and can help heal fear and anger
- Created a spirituality, sacramental life, liturgy, and ritual that help integrate the body, soul, and spirit in the mystery of wholeness

 **Materials:** Holy Bible

23. Susanna Newsonen, “How Trauma Can Lead to Positive Change,” *Psychology Today*, June 13, 2016, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/the-path-passionate-happiness/201606/how-trauma-can-lead-positive-change>

➡ The journey

1. Ask one of the participants to read 1 Corinthians 13.
2. Ask the participants what love is and what love is not, according to the passage.
3. Ask them to think of some actions of love they can be proactive with in response to those who hurt them.

Caution: Emphasise that in cases of abuse (including sexual abuse), sometimes the most loving response to the abuser is to disconnect from them.

4. Close with a song and prayer.

“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

SESSION 4


Christian Spirituality and Healing: Ensuring Freedom of Will, Will to Find Meaning, and Meaning of Life in Jesus Christ

 **Time needed:** 2 hours, 30 minutes

Objectives:

- To explore how participants' spirituality can lead to healing by ensuring that their freedom of will, will to find meaning in whatever situation, and meaning of life is affirmed through their faith in Jesus Christ
- To discover participants' freedom of will, will to find meaning, and meaning of life using a contextual Bible study methodology
- To show participants how to surrender their pain at the cross of Jesus through a ritual of writing and burning

Methodologies: Plenary sessions, small group discussions and individual work

 **Material:** Sheets of paper (one for each participant), pens/pencils (enough for each person), Holy Bible, flip chart, and marker pens

Activity 4A – Opening prayer and reflection

 **Time needed:** 10 minutes

Activity objectives: By the end of this activity, the participants should be able to:

- Recap the intersecting roles of forgiveness (mercy) and justice in the journey of trauma transformation and healing
- Continue to anchor the journey into their spirituality

 **Materials:** Holy Bible

The journey

1. Read from Psalm 23 in any appropriate languages of the participants.
2. Ask one participant to pray, or the facilitator can offer a short prayer.


3. Start the song “Yesterday I Learnt Something, Yesterday I Learnt Something!” or any relevant contextual song that motivates participants to share. Allow as many participants as possible to say one word or phrase reviewing the previous session. **Maximum 5 minutes**
4. Ask if anyone has any questions about the previous session that need to be answered? **1 minute**
5. Introduce the whole session. **4 minutes**

Activity 4B – Freedom of will (respect of individuality)

 **Time needed:** 30 minutes

Activity Objective: By the end of this activity, the participants should be able to:

- Develop a visual reminder of actions one can take to build up self-esteem
- Share reminders with each other for accompaniment purposes

 **Materials needed:** a sheet of paper, a pen or pencil, and crayons of different colours for each participant (Alternatively, provide a sketch of a tree [one for each participant]), something to stick the pictures to the wall (Prestik or similar)

The journey

1. Explain that in this exercise we are going to draw a tree that represents the things that help to build up and support our own self-esteem and affirm our freedom of will as needed for trauma transformation and healing. The facilitator can share sketched tree images with those who feel they cannot draw a tree.
2. Explain the following:
 - Roots:** Represent our family roots, especially our parents or guardians who took care of us as we grew up. Like roots, these are people who nourish and care for us. What kind of food does the tree take in to grow?
 - Trunk/Stem:** Represents three main things: good times; difficult times; and things that have hindered our hopes (like destructive pests on a tree).
 - Branches:** Each represents a family member that is close to us, including friends, as well as our hopes and wishes.
 - Leaves:** Each leaf represents our talents and skills. Leaves can also represent a life-changing significant event.
 - Flowers:** Represent each thing and experience in our life that makes us feel good about ourselves.
 - Fruit:** Each fruit represents our achievements, however small or big. In some cases, these achievements (fruits) can be the same as the things that make us feel good about ourselves (flowers).

3. Distribute the papers and pens, pencils and crayons to each participant.
Maximum 20 minutes
4. Ask those willing to share about their tree. Ask them to stick their tree on the wall. Invite them to take time during break intervals to take a walk around the room to learn from each other. **Maximum 10 minutes**
Invite someone to start a song.

According to Viktor Frankl: The will to find meaning in whatever the experience is distinct from the concepts of the will to power and the will to pleasure. And as far as meaning of life is concerned, life never ceases to have a meaning until the last breath is taken.²⁴

Activity 4C – Will to meaning and meaning of life: a contextual Bible study of 2 Kings 7:3-20



Time needed: 1 hour

Activity Objectives: By the end of this activity, the participants should be able to:

- Read scriptures through the lens of their contextual realities and revive their freedom of will
- Start building their own theologies of hope and healing by exploring the meaning of their life



Materials needed: Holy Bible, flip chart, and marker pens

➡ The journey

1. Invite participants to divide into their family groups. Ask each group to identify two people to read the text. The rest listen attentively as the biblical text is being read in the following way: The first person reads verses 3-12 and the second person reads verses 13-20. **Maximum 10 minutes**
2. Ask them to discuss the following questions:
 - What do they know about leprosy?
 - How do communities respond when someone has an infectious disease that they know about?

24. Viktor Frankl, *The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy* (New York: Meridian/Penguin Group, 1969), vii, ix.

- If you had such an infectious disease and your community responded negatively to you, what would your natural attitude be to them and to yourself?
- What lessons can we learn from the attitude of the four lepers in the story? How did this act help them to find meaning in their life?
- What lessons can we draw from these lepers' generosity?
- What gives us meaning of life, especially when we are in pain?
- How can our faith in God become the source for the meaning of our life?

Each question should take a **maximum of 5 minutes (total 35 minutes)**


3. Invite them back to the plenary circle. Ask each group to share some of the responses that bring out the will to meaning and meaning of life – to affirm one's self-worth. **Maximum 12 minutes**
4. Ask them to pair up with someone they know. Ask each one to bless the other by identifying their partner's strengths as a way of thanksgiving to God. **Maximum 3 minutes**

According to Professor Sarojini Nadar, *Contextual Bible Study (CBS)* is an interactive study of particular texts in the Bible. It brings the perspectives of both the context of the reader and the context of the Bible into critical dialogue to raise awareness and promote transformation. Five key C's to consider in CBS is that it should be interactive (*community*), acknowledge the context of the reader (*context*), and the context of the Bible (*critical-ity*), invite critical dialogue and raising awareness (*conscientization*) and bring transformation (change).²⁵

Activity 4D – Closing celebration

 **Time needed:** 50 minutes

Activity Objective: By the end of this activity, the participants should be able to seal this part of their journey of transformation and healing with a closing exercise and celebration.

 **Materials needed:** a piece of paper and a pen or pencil for each participant, a lighter, a metal bucket

This activity needs to be performed outdoors. Take measures as to ensure the safety of the participants and the facilities.

25. Sarojin Nadar, "Beyond the 'Ordinary Reader' and 'The Invisible Intellectual': Shifting Contextual Bible Study From Liberation Discourse to Liberation Pedagogy," *Old Testament Essays* 22:2 (2009), 384-403, at 391.

➡ The journey

1. Invite the participants to take a piece of paper and write down some of the painful memories that they still carry. **Maximum 5 minutes**
2. Invite them to carry their piece of paper to an open space. **Maximum 1 minute**
3. Read Isaiah 43:1-3 as you invite them to throw their paper in the pail where a fire has been previously lit. **Maximum 5 minutes**
4. Give a short reflection about God's protection. **Maximum 10 minutes**
5. Ask volunteers to offer thanksgiving prayers. **Maximum 10 minutes**
6. Invite the participants who want to share about their experience. **Maximum 10 minutes**
7. Invite singing and dancing (to end on a joyful note). **Maximum 7 minutes**
8. Share about the follow-up process. **Maximum 2 minutes**
9. Share refreshments with song and dance.

Note: Brief the participants about the follow-up processes including twinning them as healing companions.

SESSION 5

Post-Workshop Follow-Up: Empowerment and Healing Companions



Time needed: Dependent on context and methodology

Objective: By the end of this session, participants will be able to embrace the importance of having healing companions and belonging to a support group in continuing trauma transformation and healing in their lives. If the process continues for a time, issues of livelihoods and entrepreneurship can be included. This is however beyond the scope of this document.



Materials: a copy of the notes on empowerment and healing companions.

For this follow-up on healing companions, the twelve steps from Alcoholics Anonymous can be adopted and contextualized for trauma transformation and healing.

Process: The post-workshop follow-up is not shaped into activities but on shared information and notes. It can include presentations and lectures by professionals on livelihood; human rights; capacity building; self-care; and other related issues.

N.B.: We repeatedly referred to this trauma healing process as a journey. The journey does not stop after these few sessions. It can last many months or years. We do not have to walk the rest of the journey alone – in fact we should not.

Support groups (healing companions): In trauma transformation and healing, longer-lasting results can be achieved by reaching out to each other and accompanying each other than by journeying alone. Healing can be strengthened when one offers to share their journey and struggles with others. Support groups and healing companions help to remind people that they are not alone on this life-long journey of transformation and healing. They also help people to hold each other accountable to the gains and responsibilities this journey entails. A number of tools can be used in this continued journey. Two of these are attached in Appendix 2

Appendices

1 – Local vernacular terminologies

African communitarian well-being – *I am because we are* – in some of the languages in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and South Sudan are as follows:

Ana tare (in Hausa, Nigeria): Means “we are together.” It can signify the interconnectedness and interdependence of people and creation together.

Amaudo (in Igbo): Means community of peace.

Wanfumbul (in Krio, Sierra Leone): Means we belong together as community.

Karo (in Bari and Karo, South Sudan): Means “relative.” It appeals to the relatedness of the Karo people.

God

SS Arabic: *rabuna, Allah*

Igbo: *Chukwu Okike*

Hausa: *Allah*

Mende: *Ngewo*

Peace

SS Arabic: *salam*

Igbo: *Udo*

Hausa: *Salama*

Mende: *Dileh*

Healing

SS Arabic: *elag*

Igbo: *ogwugwo*

Hausa: *Warkarwa*

Reconciliation

SS Arabic: *musalaha*

Hausa: *Sulhu*

Mende: *Imeudo*

Journey

Igbo: *Njem*

Hausa: *Tafiya*

Krio: *fashaikun*

Transformation

SS Arabic: *ta-gere*

Igbo: *Mgbanwe*

Justice

SS Arabic: *adalah*

Igbo: *Ikpeziriezi*

Hausa: *Adalci*

Mende: *Tonya*

Trauma

SS Arabic: *halat, nefsi*

Igbo: *Obi nriwa*

Hausa: *Rauni*

Mende: *Gbamee*

2 – Tools to continue the healing process

How To Forgive Someone Who Has Hurt You: In 15 Steps

This is one example of a forgiveness process that can be followed.²⁶ It is important to remember that forgiveness is a process, and that this process can look different in different situations and contexts.

Step 1: Move on to the Next Act

Your past history and all of your hurts are no longer here in your physical reality. Don't allow them to be here in your mind, muddying your present moments. Your life is like a play with several acts. Some of the characters who enter have short roles to play, others, much larger. Some are villains and others are good guys. But all of them are necessary; otherwise they wouldn't be in the play. Embrace them all, and move on to the next act (Christian Council of Nigeria Final presentation pp112-116).

Step 2: Reconnect to Spirit

Make a new agreement with yourself to always stay connected to Spirit even when it seems to be the most difficult thing to do. If you do this, you will allow whatever degree of perfect harmony that your body was designed for to proliferate. Turn your hurts over to God, and allow Spirit to flow through you.

Your new agreement with reality in which you've blended your physical self and your personality with your spiritual God-connected self will begin to radiate a higher energy of love and light. Wherever you go, others will experience the glow of your God consciousness, and disharmony and disorder and all manner of problems simply will not flourish in your presence. Become "an instrument of thy peace," as St. Francis desires in the first line of his famous prayer.

Step 3: Don't Go to Sleep Angry

Each night as I drift off to sleep, I adamantly refuse to use this precious time to review anything that I do not want to be reinforced in the hours of being immersed in my subconscious mind. I choose to impress upon my subconscious mind my conception of myself as a Divine creator in alignment with the one mind. I reiterate my *I am*, which I have placed in my imagination, and I remember that my slumber will be dominated by my last waking

26. Wayne W. Dyer, "How To Forgive Someone Who Has Hurt You: In 15 Steps," Blog, <https://www.drwaynedyer.com/blog/how-to-forgive-someone-in-15-steps/>. These steps have been used in most of the Christian initiated trauma transformation and healing responses used in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and South Sudan. The tricky question has been mainly to do with the timing. When is the appropriate time to introduce forgiveness in the process of trauma response so that it becomes an important piece of the healing process? Otherwise, if wrongly timed, it can precipitate adverse responses. In this resource, forgiveness intentionally comes after dealing with grief, anger and fear.

concept of myself. I am peaceful, I am content, I am love, and I attract only to myself those who are in alignment with my highest ideals of myself.

This is my nightly ritual, always eschewing any temptation to go over any fear of unpleasantness that my ego might be asking me to review. I assume the feeling in my body of those *I am* statements already fulfilled, and I know that I'm allowing myself to be programmed while asleep, for the next day I rise knowing that I am a free agent.

Step 4: Switch the Focus from Blaming Others to Understanding Yourself

Whenever you're upset over the conduct of others, take the focus off those you're holding responsible for your inner distress. Shift your mental energy to allowing yourself to be with whatever you're feeling let the experience be as it may, without blaming others for your feelings. Don't blame yourself either! Just allow the experience to unfold and tell yourself that no one has the power to make you uneasy without your consent, and that you're unwilling to grant that authority to this person right now.

Tell yourself that you are willing to freely experience your emotions without calling them "wrong" or needing to chase them away. In this way, you've made a shift to self-mastery. It's important to bypass blame, and even to bypass your desire to understand the other person; instead, focus on understanding yourself.

By taking responsibility for how you choose to respond to anything or anyone, you're aligning yourself with the beautiful dance of life. By changing the way, you choose to perceive the power that others have over you and you will see a bright new world of unlimited potential for yourself and you will know instantly how to forgive and let go of anything.

Step 5: Avoid Telling People What to Do

Avoid thoughts and activities that involve telling people who are perfectly capable of making their own choices what to do. In your family, remember that you do not own anyone. The poet Kahlil Gibran reminds you:

Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself. They come through you but not from you . . .

This is always true. In fact, disregard any inclination to dominate in all of your relationships. Listen rather than expound. Pay attention to yourself when you're having judgmental opinions and see where self-attention takes you. When you replace an ownership mentality with one of allowing, you'll begin to see the true unfolding of the Tao in yourself and other people. From that moment on, you'll be free of frustration with those who don't behave according to your ego-dominated expectations.

Step 6: Learn to Let Go and Be Like Water

Rather than attempting to dominate with your forcefulness, be like water: flow everywhere there's an opening. Soften your hard edges by being more tolerant of contrary opinions. Interfere less, and *substitute listening for directing and telling*. When someone offers you their viewpoint, try responding with: "I've never considered that before—thank you. I'll give it some thought."

When you give up interfering, and opt instead to stream like water—gently, softly, and unobtrusively— you become forgiveness itself.

Picture yourself as having the same qualities as water. Allow your soft, weak, yielding, fluid self to enter places where you previously were excluded because of your inclination to be solid and hard. Flow softly into the lives of those with whom you feel conflicted: Picture yourself entering their private inner selves, seeing perhaps for the first time what they're experiencing. Keep this image of yourself as gently coursing water, and watch how your relationships change.

Step 7: Take Responsibility for Your Past

Removing blame means never assigning responsibility to anyone else for what you're experiencing. It means that you're willing to say, "I may not understand why I feel this way, why I have this illness, why I've been victimized, or why I had this accident, but I'm willing to say without any guilt or resentment that I own it. I live with, and I am responsible for having it in my life."

If you take responsibility for having the experience, then at least you have a chance to also take responsibility for removing it or learning from it. If you're in some small (perhaps unknown) way responsible for that migraine headache or that depressed feeling, then you can go to work to remove it or discover what its message is for you. If, on the other hand, someone or something else is responsible in your mind, then of course you'll have to wait until they change for you to get better. And that is unlikely to occur. So, you go home with nothing and are left with nothing when peace is really on the other side of the coin.

Step 8: Let Go of Resentments

What causes annoyance and anger after a dispute? The generic response would be a laundry list detailing why the other person was wrong and how illogically and unreasonably they behaved, concluding with something like, "I have a right to be upset when my [daughter, mother-in-law, ex-husband, boss, or whomever you're thinking of] speaks to me that way!"

But if you're interested in living a Tao-filled life, it's imperative that you reverse this kind of thinking. Resentments don't come from the conduct of the other party in an altercation; no, they survive and thrive because you're unwilling to end that altercation with an offering of kindness, love, and authentic forgiveness. As Lao-Tzu says, someone must risk returning injury with kindness, or hostility will never turn to goodwill.

So, when all of the yelling, screaming, and threatening words have been expressed, the time for calm has arrived. Remember that no storm lasts forever, and that hidden within are always seeds of tranquility. There is a time for hostility and a time for peace.

Step 9: Be Kind Instead of Right

There is a Chinese proverb, if you're going to pursue revenge; you'd better dig two graves, which is saying to me: your resentments will destroy you.

The world is just the way it is. The people who are behaving "badly" in the world are doing what they're supposed to be doing. You can process it in any way that you choose. If you're filled with anger about all of those "problems," you are one more person who contributes to the pollution of anger. Instead, remember that you have no need to make others wrong or to retaliate when you've been wronged.

Imagine if someone says something to you that you find offensive, and rather than opting for resentment, you learn to depersonalize what you've just heard and respond with kindness. You are willing to freely send the higher, faster energies of love, peace, joy, forgiveness, and kindness as your response to whatever comes your way. You do this for yourself. You would rather be kind than right.

Step 10: Practice Giving

In the midst of arguments or disagreements, practice giving rather than taking before you exit. Giving involves leaving the ego behind. While it wants to win and show its superiority by being contrary and disrespectful, your Tao nature wants to be at peace and live in harmony. You can reduce your quarreling time to almost zero if you practice this procedure:

Wherever you are, whenever you feel strong emotions stirring in you and you notice yourself feeling the need to "be right," silently recite the following words from the *Prayer of Saint Francis*:

Where there is injury, [let me bring] pardon.

Be a giver of forgiveness as he teaches: Bring love to hate, light to darkness, and pardon to injury. Read these words daily, for they'll help you overcome your ego's demands and know the fullness of life.

Step 11: Stop Looking for Occasions to Be Offended

When you live at or below ordinary levels of awareness, you spend a great deal of time and energy finding opportunities to be offended. A news report, a rude stranger, someone cursing, a sneeze, a black cloud just about anything will do if you're looking for an occasion to be offended. Become a person who refuses to be offended by any one, anything, or any set of circumstances.

If you have enough faith in your own beliefs, you'll find that it's impossible to be offended by the beliefs and conduct of others.

Not being offended is a way of saying, "I have control over how I'm going to feel, and I choose to feel peaceful regardless of what I observe going on. When you feel offended, you're practicing judgment. You judge someone else to be stupid, insensitive, rude, arrogant, inconsiderate, or foolish, and then you find yourself upset and offended by their conduct. What you may not realize is that when you judge another person, you do not define them. You define yourself as someone who needs to judge others.

Step 12: Don't Live In the Past – Be Present

When we find it difficult to forgive, often it is because we are not living in the present, and instead, we assign more importance to the past. We assign a good portion of our energy and attention lamenting the good old days that are gone forever as the reason why we can't be happy and fulfilled today. *"Everything has changed," "No one respects anyone else like they used to..."* This is assigning responsibility to the past for why you can't be happy today.

It's doubtful that other creatures waste the present moment in thoughts of past and future. A beaver only does beaver, and he does it right in the moment. He doesn't spend his days ruminating over the fact that his beaver siblings received more attention, or his father beaver ran off with a younger beaver when he was growing up. He's always in the now. We can learn much from God's creatures about enjoying the present moment rather than using it up consumed with anger over the past or worry about the future. Practice living in the moment by appreciating the beauty around you now.

Step 13: Embrace Your Dark Times (embracing your shadows – Carl Jung)

In a universe that's an intelligent system with a divine creative force supporting it, there simply can be no accidents. As tough as it is to acknowledge, you had to go through what you went through in order to get to where you are today, and the evidence is that you did. Every spiritual advance that you will make in your life will very likely be preceded by some kind of fall or seeming disaster. Those dark times, accidents, tough episodes, break ups,

periods of impoverishment, illnesses, abuses, and broken dreams were all in order. They happened, so you can assume they had to and you cannot un-happen them.

Embrace them from that perspective, and then understand them, accept them, honor them, and finally transform them.

Step 14: Refrain from Judgment

When you stop judging and simply become an observer, you will know inner peace. With that sense of inner peace, you 'will find yourself happier and free of the negative energy of resentment. A bonus is that you'll find that others are much more attracted to you. A peaceful person attracts peaceful energy.

If I'm to be a being of love living from my highest self that means that love is all I have inside of me and all that I have to give away. If someone I love chooses to be something other than what my ego would prefer, I must send them the ingredients of my highest self, which is God, and God is love.

Criticism and condemnation of the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of others regardless of how right and moral my human self-convinces me it is a step away from God-realization. And it is God-consciousness that allows for my wishes to be fulfilled, as long as they are aligned with my Source of being. I can come up with a long list of reasons why I should be judgmental and condemnatory toward another of God's children and why, damn it, I am right. Yet if I want to perfect my own world and I so want to do so then I must substitute love for these judgments.

Step 15: Send Love

I spent years studying the teachings of Patanjali, and he reminded us several thousand years ago that when we are steadfast—which means that we never slip in our abstention of thoughts of harm directed toward others—then all living creatures cease to feel enmity in our presence.

Now I know that we are all human: you, me, all of us. We do occasionally slip and retreat from our highest self into judgment, criticism, and condemnation, but this is not a rationale for choosing to practice that kind of interaction. I can only tell you that when I finally got it, and I sent only love to another of God's children whom I had been judging and criticizing, I got the immediate result of inner contentment.

I urge you to send love in place of those judgments and criticisms to others when you feel they impede your joy and happiness, and hold them in that place of love. Notice that if you stay steadfast, when you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.

A Meditation to End on Love

Picture yourself at the termination of a quarrel or major dispute. Rather than reacting with old patterns of residual anger, revenge, and hurt, visualize offering kindness, love, and forgiveness.

Do this right now by sending out these “true virtue” thoughts to any resentments you’re currently carrying. Make this your standard response to any future altercations: I end on love, no matter what!

The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs. https://www.aa.org/pages/en_US/members-of-the-clergy-ask-about-alcoholics-anonymous

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This ecumenical resource is developed from a context where the causes of trauma include conflict, poverty, sexual and gender-based violence, and disease.

It highlights God's loving gift of reconciliation, gives us hope, and forms the basis for our Christian ministry of accompaniment, transformation and healing. The process of walking, praying, and working together for trauma transformation and healing is framed within the WCC's Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

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