Despite the fact that the soldier who has “come home” is no longer in “harm’s way” on the battlefield, for many soldiers home is where the real battle begins. Soldiers who return home from war face a multitude of complex issues which they must learn to deal with in order to be reintegrated back into their families and into society. Due to the nature of the work required at war, waging combat, handling dead bodies, dealing with devastated communities, and more, in the aftermath of a deployment, many soldiers suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, an illness which “occurs when a person has experienced, witnessed, or has been confronted with a traumatic event, which involved actual or threatened death or serious injury to themselves or others.”¹ Soldiers with PTSD have a long road of healing ahead, particularly in the realms of forgiveness of self and one’s wartime actions and reconciliation with community at home and abroad. Research shows that “unexpressed sorrow and incomplete grief can lead to the development or exacerbation of medical problems such as hypertension, heart disease, asthma, diabetes, fibromyalgia, arthritis, and irritable bowel syndrome. To avoid grief is to risk repressing anger and sorrow and remaining stuck with the behavioral patterns of unresolved grief.”² Therefore it is important for physical as well as mental health that these veterans be given the opportunity and resources to begin the process of healing. Pastors, within a team of

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other support personnel, help soldiers to process grief and loss through listening to stories of war which ultimately leads to forgiveness and healing.

The church, individual pastors, VA medical centers, and others dedicated to healing for veterans facilitate this journey of reconnection through listening, teaching and offering spaces of lament for those whose wounds extend far beyond their physical bodies. These efforts begin the process of re-establishing community for veterans whose deep brokenness often isolates them from relationships altogether and create the needed space that veterans require for authentic confession, lament, and true healing.

In this paper, I will first establish the deep need for lament within the journey of healing which takes place for the soldier having returned home from war. In this section, I will recognize the gravity of the soldier’s actions in war as well as the patience that is required in the healing process. Next, I will use verses of Nahum 3 to explain details pertaining to PTSD, paying close attention to physical and emotional symptoms which interrupt or undermine relationships with God and others. Finally, I will show the role lament plays within the journey of the soldier suffering from PTSD and other war related challenges, in order to articulate the need for a theological approach to a soldier’s reconciliation with self and others.

A Need for Lament

In a book written to help soldiers reintegrate after war, psychologist and traumatic stress specialist Bridget Cantrell explains some of the thoughts and images soldiers experience during and in the aftermath of battle. She writes, “Wracking explosions; flowing blood; a burning town; cries for help; and the full impact of what one has done comes flooding back. Now comes the full realization that you willingly participated in
something so unnatural to the mind and spirit.”³ The weight of these images and experiences often overextends a person’s ability to cope and continue on with every day life. When a soldier has been pushed beyond his human capacity to deal with the reality of his memory and past actions in war, PTSD becomes a real and potentially lifelong struggle. Cantrell writes, “At the end of each battle, and when the war is over, the images and the sounds of combat are still present in the minds and hearts of those who engaged in it—and these will never go away.”⁴

The painful emotional scars of combat leave many soldiers ashamed and fearful of what they accomplished while at war, even though they were merely “doing their job” or “following orders.” The reality for all soldiers who serve in the military and who are deployed to a warzone is that individuals die, and with their deaths other individuals, therefore, become killers. A U.S. pilot during the Kuwait liberation in 1991 wrote, “I’ve personally blown up five Iraqi tanks in the air sorties. I’ve flown over here. I know there were people inside those tanks, but I can’t afford to think about that right now and still do my job. I know when I get home I’ll have to face what was inside those tanks. I’m not looking forward to that.”⁵ No amount of training can prepare a human being for that moment, and this fact becomes the springboard on which forgiveness can begin.

Engaging with one’s horrific and life-crippling memories requires more than individual effort. Truly dealing with situations of lament takes a communal effort which stems, in part, from examples found in scripture. These examples provide a space for lament as a model for engaging both God and self in the process of healing. Nancy Duff, in Recovering Lamentation as a Practice in the Church, says, “Biblical literary forms of

³ Cantrell, 25
⁴ Cantrell, 24
⁵ Cantrell, 59
lament move well beyond regret to provide an avenue for expressing intense feelings of 
grief, such as sorrow and anger.”6 Through identification and honest acknowledgement 
of the depth of one’s wounds, the process of healing begins.

For the typical soldier, there are few spaces for this kind of work to take place. Too often families and society expect a speedy recovery of its soldiers and do not 
embrace the long-term process which is necessary. Yet pushing those exposed to war, 
and all it encompasses, into quick and shallow recuperation only results in more damage. 
Duff argues, “Proclaiming hope and praising God when one knows full well the reality of 
the darkness can be an eschatological challenge to the status quo, but if one is not careful, 
it can become confused with a self-deceptive refusal to acknowledge things for how they 
really are.”7 Faithfully navigating the tension between these two notions is the only way 
to do justice to the gravity of one’s wounds while also recognizing the ultimate power of 
God. The journey of lament enables the soldier to challenge his inability to acknowledge 
the intense emotions that grief entails, to free himself to make bold expression of grief 
before God and in the presence of others, and to allow himself to rely on God and the 
community to carry forth hope on his behalf when he has no hope in him.8

**Nahum 3: Signs and Symptoms of Brokenness**

In order to move forward in forgiveness, soldiers, veterans, and all they are 
connected to must understand the complex nature of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. 
Preliminary findings suggest that rates of PTSD will be at least 18% for Iraqi veterans 
and 11% for Afghanistan veterans, and it is likely that most pastors will encounter these

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6 Brown & Miller, 3
(Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press: 2005), 4
8 Brown & Miller, 4
individuals and/or their families in the church and wider community. Too often soldiers suffering from PTSD are damaged further by societal and even biblical expectations of gender appropriate behavior. Conceptions and depictions of gender within structures of war often associate strength and victory with masculinity and weakness and loss with femininity. Typically, notions of masculinity found in scripture and perpetuated by society do not give any account for the cycle of emotions or the traumatic response of the male soldier. Like the exiled subject of Nahum 3, a soldier with PTSD feels great disgrace, being emasculated and ultimately ridiculed by the public. Through a close reading of particular verses in Nahum 3, one is able to better understand the tragedy and experience of a soldier who has been in a combat situation, and possibly then be equipped to offer appropriate pastoral care.

The first half of the Nahum 3:2 names both the “voice of a whip” and the “voice of a quaking wheel.” Both of these sounds are formed by the tools and instruments used to wage war, similar today to the rumble of a tank or the ricocheting of an automatic weapon sounding in the distance. These sounds ring in the soldier’s ears and contribute to both physical and psychological reactions once a soldier has returned home. Soldiers with PTSD often suffer from hyper-vigilance which causes them to be jumpy, overreacting,

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9 Before I go any further I want to make a note about why I have primarily focused on male soldiers in my project. More women than ever before are filling the ranks of the military and they, too, suffer from PTSD stemming from trauma in combat and also military sexual violence. While I do not focus on the female experience, I think one is able to see how creating polarity between male and female, strong and weak, has a detrimental impact on the work and fruitfulness of both categories. In light of this, I believe it is imperative to no longer associate behaviors with gender, but instead to understand behavior as a human attribute, in this case a human response to trauma.
and violently angry without provocation. One primary trigger for re-experiencing war is sound, and too often this form of re-exposure also causes retraumatization.

The second part of v2 bridges sound and sight by describing the movement of the horse and chariot which are “rushing” (דהר) and “leaping” (מרקדה). The use of the participle contributes to the verse’s sense of continuous movement. By using the double participle the speaker powerfully captures the way in which those who witness the sounds and sights re-experience these events of the war machine. The horse and chariot seem not merely to “rush” and “leap” in the past, but they continue to do so in the present and into the future, their movement never completed in the mind of the soldier. The continuous movement of sounds and images impact the soldier in both waking hours and also in sleep. Recurring dreams are also a typical symptom of PTSD. Psychologists attribute nightmares to intrusion, one of the two predominant reactions to PTSD. Nightmares and flashbacks “often seem so real that persons experiencing flashbacks actually believe they are back in the psychological trauma for a moment or two.” Many persons with nightmares will actually avoid sleep altogether because of the intense fear of reliving the traumatic experience while sleeping. Sleep deprivation ultimately exacerbates loss of emotional control. Nightmares and flashbacks, along with other internal and external manifestations of trauma, cause a constant state of intense psychological distress. The structure of the verse with no defined subject or verb but instead being comprised of a series of quick, dramatic phrases models the disjointed and disruptive effect that sound and image have on the soldier in the aftermath of combat.

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10 John Oliver, *Coming Home: Developing a Theological Response for Returning Combat Veterans*, PowerPoint Presentation (Mid-Atlantic MIRECC), 21
11 Andrew Weaver, *Counseling Survivors of Traumatic Events* (Nashville: Abington, 2003), 35
12 Weaver, 35
13 Weaver, 35
Verse 3 intensifies the chapter’s depiction of the sights and images of war. The verse begins with the subject פיה, meaning “horseman.” This is the one who participates in battle, a direct parallel to the modern soldier. This participant of war is both the subject of the first half of the verse, wheeling the tools and weapons of war, and also is the silent observer in the second half, the one who reflectively surveys the aftermath of battle. His tools, sword and spear, are the means by which he completes necessary action for victory. Using these two objects he creates פגרוכבדחללרב “a multitude of pierced and a mass of corpses.” It is because of the actions of the soldier that there is a multitude of dead.

The second half of the verse intensifies the scene which the horseman witnesses after his work is finished. After the atnah, the verse says, “There is no end to the bodies. They will stumble in bodies.” The NRSV translation renders this verse, “piles of dead, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end.” Both translations indicate that there is no ending to the images of the dead. Literally there is no ending to the dead because there are too many bodies for the mind to take in, and figuratively there is no ending to the images because they have been seared into the heart of the one who has encountered them. The varied repetition of “the dead” is significant to any kind of combat situation and in particular parallels, through intense imagery, the traumatic experience of the soldier. A recent study completed by The National Center for PTSD indicates that 95% of soldiers in Iraq report to have encountered a dead body or some form of human remains while deployed.¹⁴ The literature and research pertaining to PTSD stresses the long-term effects of encountering the dead. There seems to be a connection between seeing or handling dead bodies and developing symptoms of PTSD.

The weight of these images and experiences of human lifelessness often push the limits of a person’s ability to cope and continue on with every day life. One story that illustrates encountering dead bodies came from a Vietnam vet who’s PTSD flared up in the recent years, in part, because of the coverage of the Iraq war. He said that in combat one learns very quickly how to increase your chances of survival and you use any means available. He was in firefights multiple times and often there was no traditional cover, meaning there was nothing, no sand bags, concrete blocks, or trees, to protect the him from the onslaught of bullets flying in his direction. Therefore, he would pile up the bodies of the dead soldiers and hide behind them. The parallels between his words and the words of the text were shockingly similar.

These images of the wounded and dead plague the soldier long after the actual battle is over. Cognitively, these images contribute to memory lapses, difficulty making decisions, a decreased ability to concentrate, and extreme distraction. In some cases a soldier’s tendency to isolate and distance himself from other people because of the difficulty of terrifying memories and extreme distraction will cause further damage to his brain. In the realm of the mind physical and emotional wounds merge to perpetuate cycles of damage and destruction. These wounds do more than damage the individual soldier’s mind, but also destroy the soldier’s ability to foster healthy relationships, one of the key components of reconnection and healing. Psychologists working with soldiers suffering from Traumatic Brain Injury also argue that psychosocial deprivation causes additional physical damage to the brain leading to reductions in “activity in the brain’s

15 Oliver, 26
higher level functions (prefrontal cortex) and parts of the brain linked to speech, emotion and memory (temporal lobe).”\textsuperscript{16}

The central theme of v.5, which is discernable throughout the entire chapter as well, is shame. While once the horseman reigned on the battlefield, in this verse the reversal of man into woman, powerful into weak, begins. The one defeated is feminized through an action which produces shame. The speaker says \textit{שלום ו novità} meaning “I will uncover your skirt.” This point is given emphasis in that feminine pronouns and suffixes are used throughout the verse. Not only is the one being shamed wearing a skirt, but she is also in the compromised position where it could be removed, therefore revealing vulnerability. In light of this conversation, the piel verb “to uncover” could also point to a very literal rendering of the text. Suffering from PTSD could be construed as a male soldier having his “skirt,” or his \textit{weaker}, feminine side, revealed. This is a disease that takes away an individual’s ability to maintain control of many aspects of his life, but in particular his emotions; in this state he is powerless.

One emotional response associated with shame that soldiers with PTSD experience involves feelings of guilt, spanning from guilt over loss of faith to guilt over the death of a fellow soldier. The process of making sense of who lives and who dies in war is not easy, nor is it quick. Often soldiers will ask say, “Why did I live when the other people died? I should have died, and they should have lived. It should have been me instead.”\textsuperscript{17} Survivor guilt is common expression of feelings which attempts to make sense of the deaths of fellow comrades. As a form of self-punishment, soldiers who survive war paint themselves as \textit{less} worthy because they did not die on the battlefield. Survivor guilt

\textsuperscript{16} Oliver, 57
\textsuperscript{17} Cantrell, 93
also spills into the realm of spirituality. Research conducted by the Veterans Affairs Administration shows that guilt associated with a loss of faith is the main reason that soldiers utilize VA mental services. Some estimate that around sixty percent of soldiers claim to abandon faith during war and over eighty percent have difficulty reconciling previous beliefs with wartime events.¹⁸

In addition to shame over loss of faith, many soldiers feel shame because of their behavioral reactions to trauma. Studies show that “uncontrolled displays of emotion evoke feelings of shame and vulnerability for many who suffer from PTSD.”¹⁹ Such displays of emotion transgress behavioral norms stemming from masculine and feminine gender constructions.²⁰ For example, loosing control of one’s emotions is associated with attributes of the feminine. Carol Cohn argues that certain characteristics like being impulsive, emotional, uncontrolled, and attentive to human bodies mark a person as female. Demonstrating these attributes in public is “a threat to his own sense of self as masculine, his gender identity, and it also identifies him with a devalued status—of a woman—or puts him in the devalued or subordinate position in the discourse.”²¹

Because many male soldiers feminize the enemy and use gender constructions as a means of domination, any association with the dominated gender (female) instead of the dominating gender (male) can contribute to the feelings of shame and guilt that veterans experience. Goldstein argues that “connected with this gender coding, but more elusive

¹⁸ Fontana, A., & Rosenheck, R., *Trauma, change in strength of religious faith, and mental health service use among veterans treated for PTSD*. (J Nerv Ment Dis), 579-584.
¹⁹ Weaver, 39
²⁰ In this paper, I am focusing on male soldiers because they are most likely to see combat and therefore most likely to suffer from PTSD. This does not mean that women do not suffer from PTSD; their symptoms and struggles have a slightly different nuance.
empirically, are the possible heightened (or just shaken up) sexuality of male soldiers.”\textsuperscript{22}

One extremely prevalent cause of male shame and guilt stemming from PTSD is sexual dysfunction. Research shows that “psychological problems after the war often include sexual dysfunction, such as an inability to maintain an erection, well after returning to civilian life.”\textsuperscript{23} The physiological issues surrounding sexual dysfunction not only damage the soldier’s sense of self, but the shame that arises from this dysfunction also threatens the family structure as well.

VV. 8-9 are taunts which attempt to plant seeds of doubt within the mind of the subject. What makes the subject, the one who is temporarily victorious and strong, any more powerful than the others who have come before but have fallen from power? In short, nothing. He is not immune to defeat. Even the strongest one cannot remain powerful forever. The question brings to light the harsh reality that war often leaves the invincible defenseless. Soldiers are trained to believe that they are more powerful, more prepared, and more capable than any other known force. Part of their strength lies in the fact that most of them accept this idea, reinforced by both the military and society. They believe that their value is wedded closely with their masculinity and physicality. Consequently, when this identity crumbles as it inevitably does, the soldier’s façade is undone. Goldstein argues that “many cultures link bravery and discipline in war to manhood—with shame as reinforcement—and use gender to motivate participation in combat.”\textsuperscript{24} If bravery falters or the desire to participate in combat diminishes, what does this mean for the soldier and his understanding of his masculinity? Where there is uncertainty and weakness on the part of the soldier, shame and guilt prevail.

\textsuperscript{22} Joshua Goldstein, \textit{War and Gender} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 406
\textsuperscript{23} Goldstein, 336
\textsuperscript{24} Goldstein, 406
Verse 10 builds upon and intensifies the theme of the enemy and defeated as feminine. The formerly masculine subject was at one time as powerful and strong as one could imagine. Yet, now he has become a she, and she has been conquered. The verse develops the idea that through feminization the soldier chooses the side of the enemy. The verse first uses לַלְֹוֶלֶל, meaning “for the exiles,” and then it repeats this suggestion by saying בֶּשֶׂבֶי הַלְֹוֶלֶל, “she walks with the captives.” Both of these iterations claim that the feminized subject is no longer on the right side. As if the plight of the subject was not devastating enough, now عدد, “her children,” another feminine suffix, will have their heads dashed along the streets. This is public disgrace because it is takes place חוץ, “outside,” where the entire world can see; the subject cannot protect her own offspring.

Part b of v10 intensifies the total passivity of the feminized subject using a niphal participle נָכְבָּרָה, meaning “her noble ones.” These are the formerly powerful and wealthy individuals related to the subject, the ones who typically controlled the leadership of the government structure. Once feminized, they are dealt with as passive agents. The now powerful יָדו, “cast lots” and bind גֶּדֶלי, “her great ones.” The use of נָרִיקו, “they were bound,” creates the image of a prisoner of war. In many ways 3:10 articulates the reversal which takes place for the soldier with PTSD. While at war, he is the one casting lots and binding the enemy, and then, upon returning home, the tables have been turned. He is now bound, with shame and guilt as his בְּזֵקִים (fetters).

Part a of v11 introduces one of the behavioral reactions to trauma, various forms of substance abuse. It is not unusual for a survivor of a traumatic event to turn to drugs and alcohol in order to self-medicate in order “to numb the pain, forget the memories,
relieve the guilt, or just get away from it all.” However, this means of escape actually intensifies the problem because the soldier further isolates himself from other people through developing an unhealthy relationship with addictive substances. The verse gestures to this notion, that those who have been conquered will now turn to drunkenness as these persons have no other viable option for escape or relief. On the one hand, this can lead to financial problems both from use and abuse as well as potential loss of job. On the other hand, isolation of the soldier leads to further dysfunction in the family. Cantrell says, “I believe that the soul gets wounded in every warrior. And, souls are connected first through family, each wounded soul affects the rest of the system… families are systems, communities are systems, countries are systems, the world is a system. When one part of us is out of balance our entire system is affected.” For these reasons, interventions that create space for lament are imperative for the not only the soldier but for the entire family.

In v.12, part b completes the transition from heroic soldier to reviled enemy. Now, this one who was once all powerful has “sought protection from the enemy,” . This is the ultimate transgression, to align oneself with those who are called the enemy, the very people who have been one’s adversaries during wartime. In many ways, admitting to illness and seeking help for PTSD are similar to siding with the enemy. If both weakness and the opposition are feminized then it becomes impossible to separate the two. The one who becomes weak therefore also becomes the enemy.

V.13 encapsulates the movement of the entire chapter. The subject has been feminized up to this point by the use of feminine pronouns, suffixes, verb forms, and

25 Cantrell, 43
26 Cantrell, 107
The final verse, v19, gestures toward a future of suffering with no end in sight. Many soldiers and veterans alike struggle because they, too, do not see an end in sight, to the conflicts abroad or the war at home. Jacob says, “A sense of futility came from the

27 Oliver, 31
Dr. Steve Rathbun, the acting head of the Epidemiology and Biostatistics Department at the University of Georgia, did an analysis of the suicide statistics of forty-five states in 2004-2005 and found that on average, 120 veterans committed suicide a week. The study showed that veterans were more than twice as likely to commit suicide in 2005 as non-vets. The study specifically stated, “Veterans committed suicide at the rate of between 18.7 to 20.8 per 100,000, compared to other Americans, who did so at the rate of 8.9 per 100,000.”

Furthermore, veterans aged 20-24, many of whom were deployed to Iraq for the war on terror, had the highest suicide rate among all veterans, estimated between two and four times higher than non-military personnel the same age.

Suicide and its complexities cause grief and pain for the families that are affected and require intervention. Stories told by veterans at PTSD clinics depict the void which often cripples the veteran upon reintegration into family and civilian life. Illness perpetuates isolation, and isolation perpetuates illness, creating an unrelenting cycle of violence. And, as Cantrell demonstrates, there are different kinds of suicide beyond a traditional understanding of actively taking one’s life. For example, “relational suicide (intentionally blowing apart relationships with those you love or are committed to) is a

29 Jacobs 294
30 This study was reported on a special aired on CBS Evening News and later reported in print on the CBS website. 13 Nov 2007
very common form of self-destruction with those who have experienced war-time trauma.”31

The kind of grief that many soldiers suffer from “can last as long as life itself,” and evokes the words of the Psalmist, “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?” (Ps. 13:1). Recently, there has been an effort to understand the long-term psychological effects of military combat which continue to affect the soldier later in life. The National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study found that “over 30 percent of the 2.8 million who served in Southwest Asia suffered a lifetime history with PTSD.”33 One of the more troubling realities of these findings has to do with the particularities of the population who typically serve in combat situations. The Vietnam War primarily deployed young men who were hovering around the age of twenty, a developmental age that is critical in terms of the establishment of a sense of self and lasting personality structure.34 Because of the interruption of combat, many young soldiers are unable to undergo that emotional development. This reality coupled with the experience of war inevitably creates persons with deep, lasting damage that is not ameliorated easily.

The first verb of 3:19 follows the pattern recognized earlier in the chapter. The utilization of a niphal verb causes the feminized subject to take a passive role in the action of the verse. The verb נחלת means “she was made sick,” and the feminine subject is מכתך, “your wounded/slaughtered.” Deviating from the utilization of the feminine suffix in previous verses, this word has a 2ms suffix attached to it. It is curious as to why the feminized subject of the chapter would be given masculine status at this juncture, yet v19

31 Cantrell, 44
32 Brown & Miller, 4
33 Weaver, 149
34 Weaver, 149
Because intense emotional intrusion can last for weeks and months at a time, many soldiers believe that there is no hope for an end to the pain. One unique aspect of PTSD is that facing memories often retraumatizes the victim, creating a cycle of intensification. As Weaver articulates, “The adage that ‘time heals all wounds’ simply does not apply to this condition.” In order for memory to be a means of freedom instead of a means of further damage, the soldier requires the guidance of professionals and the involvement of the larger community.

Finally, part b of v19 describes the humiliation that one experiences upon “coming home” with PTSD. One veteran spoke of his experience coming home after Vietnam. His bus was met by hundreds of protesters who threw rotten fruit at him and the others who had also just returned. He spoke of his confusion, saying, “I thought that I was doing my duty every day that I was in Vietnam. Every day was a fight for survival, and yet we found strength in the feeling that our participation was for the good of the world. That’s what we were told again and again. Coming home, after the hell of war,

35 Weaver, 35
was a worse nightmare.”

The public reaction to the veteran of the Vietnam War era exacerbated reintegration challenges.

*Part b* of the verse uses a two part structure to intensify the public reaction of the wounded subject. The verse makes the claim that קָרָאתָם , "all (people) are hearing," the disgrace of the one who has been shamed by his wounds. This use of hyperbole begins the intensification process. The soldier’s vulnerability cannot be protected because it is widely known by all. But, the real intensification takes place with the second claim in this clause. The verse says כּוּפְי־כּוּפְי , “they clap (their) hands,” which creates an utterly deafening noise. Not only is the public aware of the shame and humiliation of this situation, but they actually applaud out of happiness for the misfortune of the wounded. There is no denying or misinterpreting the public opinion in light of this image. The wounded who “come home” do not find refuge from the horror of war, but instead they are further traumatized by the public response. There is no assuaging their wound; no place is a safe respite.

A look at recent history reveals that many of the wars fought post-WWII have not been received enthusiastically by the public. Stories of soldiers shamed and humiliated upon “coming home” after Vietnam are frequently retold among the veteran population. Cantrell explains, “One of the most upsetting events that can take place is for someone to openly and unjustly accuse a veteran of doing something wrong. This has devastating effects on someone who feels they deserve more from a society, or a people, they were willing to endure hardships for.”

This societal shaming of soldiers upon returning home results in further damage and hinders the soldier’s healing process.

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36 Comment made by a veteran at a PTSD support group on April 8, 2008
37 Cantrell, 95
Acknowledgement of intense emotion and brokenness is the first step the soldier must take to address his PTSD and move toward forgiveness of himself. While some conversations pertaining to forgiveness may focus on interpersonal forgiveness, the particulars of the veteran population require more focus on intrapersonal forgiveness. A recent study on correlations between PTSD and forgiveness report, “Veterans often express guilt over past behaviors that can be intimately linked to their PTSD and associated mental health problems.”38 Moving away from guilt and toward forgiveness means coming to terms with the haunting realities of war and one’s involvement in these memories. This process is extremely slow and inevitably “requires facing a truth that is always accompanied by tremendous suffering.”39 In order to fully engage in reexposure without causing further damage, the soldier requires the help and support of pastors and mental health professionals as well as other communities who assist in dealing with loss and grief.

In her book, Pastoral Care for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Rev. Dalene Rodgers reports, “Trauma survivors may lose faith in God and lack a sense of awe and wonder about creation. They may disavow the goodness of humanity and integrity of the agencies or people connected to the traumatic event.”40 During the process of dealing with the multiple losses the soldier faces-- loss of faith in God/religion, government/military, loss of relationships, loss of ability to express certain emotions, loss

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38 Witvliet, C.V.O. “Posttraumatic Mental and Physical Health Correlates of Forgiveness and Religious Coping in Military Veterans.” *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 17 (2004), 269
39 Weaver, 40
40 Rogers 19
of job, home, or family and friends, loss of hope in the future, loss of joy and even self-worth--grieving is an important component for spiritual healing.

Loss of faith in the institution is particularly important in this conversation as the military community is a double edge sword for many who return from war and are suffering from PTSD. On one hand individuals in the military community are the people with whom a veteran has risked his or her life. These individuals understand what it really means to go to war either because they, themselves, have been to war or because a loved one has been deployed. The sense of community in this space of hardship and difficulty is great.

When the soldier returns home, he is no longer connected with these people in the intense and intimate ways he was connected with them during wartime. In addition to the immense transitioning which soldiers undergo upon returning home from war, oftentimes the soldier has also become disenchanted with the military. He may want to have nothing to do with the military community because it is a reminder of his experiences at war which have been so painful. Yet, breaking ties with the military in order to move on or remove oneself from what seems ugly or wrong equals great loss of community.

In light of this potential loss of community, pastoral care is imperative for those soldiers who are returning from war as well as for their families. It is important to note that pastors often have fewer stigmas than other mental health professionals. Therefore, those who are suffering from PTSD (and other mental health issues) may be more likely to approach a pastor than another kind of therapist. John Oliver, Chief Chaplain at the Durham VA Medical Center, emphasizes that treatment must be viewed as a team effort,
with patient, pastor, and mental health professionals all equally important and integral to healing.

Trauma victims are more likely to risk the pain and challenge that accompanies therapy if they feel like they have a companion to walk the difficult road with them. This kind of pastoral care happens when the pastor is able to give acceptance, support, and affirmation to a person in all the stages and complications of grief. Nonjudgmental listening shows patience and compassion and as a result, creates trust. It is critical that a pastor learn to “simply be present and avoid the desire to fix someone’s situation or make them feel better.” 41 Often a pastor is most effective when he or she says very little, but instead creates a safe space for one who is suffering to be open and honest.

Some of the greatest loss a soldier faces upon returning home from war takes place within the spiritual realm. Rodgers says, “Spiritual losses also may be reflected in a lack of hope in the future, loss of trust, a sense of no longer being a whole person, the inability to respond spontaneously and optimistically, and the loss of childlike innocence.” 42 Often God takes the brunt of the anger, disappointment, and sadness which is experienced. People blame God no matter if they were grounded in a faith tradition or if they didn’t have previous religious identity.

Despite the urge a pastor may have to deflect blame away from God, it is important that individuals suffering with PTSD be given the opportunity to experience the various stages of anger which exist in the aftermath of trauma. Soldiers are sometimes very angry, and it is important that this anger isn’t suppressed or deflected. God doesn’t need to be defended. God can handle anger. Advising someone to “not” be angry with

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41 Rogers 23
42 Rogers 19
God can make one feel misunderstood and alienated from God. Therefore, pastors should be prepared to listen and respond appropriately. When a soldier thinks that God punishes people and this is why he is suffering from PTSD, the question, “Why Me?” often arises. Rodgers warns, “If the pastor also believes that God is trying to discipline or punish someone’s behavior through the use of traumatic events, it becomes difficult to avoid taking the position of blaming the victim for what happened instead of holding the perpetrator accountable.”

Upon coming home, many soldiers expect to find their lives just as they were on the day that they deployed. Chuck Dean, National Chaplain for the Society of 173d Airborne Brigade and veteran of the Vietnam War, described of coming home, “We expected to start all over again at square one, but that’s no longer an option. The first thing returning warriors must realize is that our reintegration home will never begin at square one again.” Babies are now toddlers, children are now teenagers, and spouses are now sole parent in-charge after fifteen months of single parenthood. These are all new factors in family life that must be addressed on multiple levels in order for the reconnection process to begin. Without voicing the pain and anger over the loss of fifteen months of life with their families, in lament, many soldiers end up destroying more relationships than reestablishing them. Soldiers often have a difficult time discussing their experiences with family members, especially male soldiers who typically choose isolation over even informal conversation. Soldiers are sometimes aggressive which scares both spouses and children and causes further damage and isolation. Soldiers returning from combat situations are more likely to be violent with partners and children,

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43 Rogers 32
44 Cantrell, 30
63% engaging in physical violence in 2005. Despite the challenges to expressing grief or even finding the resources to speak truthfully about experiences of war, finding someone to talk with who is able to create a safe space for the trauma to be discussed is imperative. Cantrell points out the importance of acknowledging reintegration conflict with family members and friends, saying, “Either we can ignore our worsening situation with the people around us, or we can forge new paths to middle ground. As we do we will go far in developing and sustaining good healthy relationships to pave the way for a precious peace in the communities in which we now live.”

Finally, lament enables the soldier to rely on God and the community to bring hope when he has no hope in him. Hopeless situations ranging from the harsh, never-ending days of training to dealing with the loss of friends from wartime events are prevalent in military life. Therefore, during these moments of great doubt and hopelessness communities of support play an integral role in helping the soldier heal and maintain his coping mechanisms. Those who work with veterans with PTSD recognize the power of the community in their reconnection process. Cantrell depicts the roll of comrades, saying:

“No matter how bad the conditions were, or how often you dreamed of coming home to a normal life, leaving our close knit, powerful, and intimate community was very difficulty. What you had just seen and done with your comrades for those many long months could never be replaced in one’s heart. When you leave it, it is like a tearing in your soul. This “community” is what veterans long for when they get home and sadly, many never find it again. I believe if community can be re-established problems would dissipate. Relationships are at the heartbeat of community, and vice verse.”

45 A Guide for Military Families p9
46 Cantrell, 136
47 Cantrell, 135
Some memories seem too violent and terrifying to share with those who have not witnessed the realities of war despite the fact that sharing and human connectedness are imperative to moving beyond these memories. Even VA clinics struggle at times with convincing their patients of the value and need for authentic story telling. Karen Steinhauser, a research professor at the Durham VA, helps veterans develop a coherent personal narrative which further explores meaning and significance of loss, grief, and regret within the context of one’s life. Her studies attempt to evaluate the specific relationships between life review, forgiveness, and improved health outcomes for veterans in order to help the veteran focus on the critical issues needing to be both acknowledged and addressed. Steinhauser argues that giving audience to a veteran so that he can share his life narrative improves both health conditions and quality of life due to the “physiological changes occur during and following disclosure.”48 This research confirms the notion that practices, such as lament, can play a significant role in the eventual reconciliation of a veteran both with his own person as well as his family and community.

Individuals working with veterans should be trained to listen, uphold, and value the memories that veterans share, even when these memories are horrific and even morally questionable. The idea of forgiveness is integral to their healing, but forgiveness in this space does not wash over the human transgressions they committed while waging war. Many veterans warn pastors not to assure them that what they did in war was ok because it was duty or patriotic. One veteran said, “It doesn’t matter why I did it. It was wrong. Killing is wrong.”49 Sometimes the veteran goes into detail of what he did. Often

48 Steinhauser, 7
49 Jacobs 295
times this includes killing women and children, purposefully or accidentally, and torture of the enemy. Being able to voice these truths is part of confessing which may help to release repressed emotions and feelings. Continuing to harbor these things further produces feelings of isolation and loneliness. Judith Sigmund, professor of Clinical Psychiatry and staff at the VA Medical Center in Dayton, Ohio, says, “Trauma disrupts bonds and contributes to the isolation, shame, and social dysfunction seen in patients with PTSD.” Instead, “forgiveness allows for holding the person who has caused offense responsible, and does not involve denying, ignoring, minimizing, tolerating, condoning, excusing, forgetting, and (prematurely) reconciling.” A kind of forgiveness that accounts for both the horror of wartime actions as well as the human need for closure and restoration is the first step on a journey toward healing. It is only within a community committed to honest healing and transparent living, that brokenness is truly addressed.

Because these issues are highly complex and often volatile, pastors need specific education on this subject. For instance, a pastor should never tell a war veteran that he or she “knows” what the veteran has been through. If a veteran chooses not to talk about the war, this decision needs to be respected. Providing space for the soldier to enter into the conversation when he is actually ready lays a foundation for a potential relationship and deeper connection which might help the soldier take the step toward getting help. It is also imperative that a pastor never tell a veteran that it is time to put the war behind him so he can get on with his life. Forgetting about the war is not possible for a veteran, especially one struggling with PTSD, therefore, this kind of comment is likely to be resented and can cause further damage. In addition to this, bringing in political views into

51 Witvliet, 269
conversation is always risky, unless answering a direct question. Even when a veteran is angry with the government, he may be proud of his service or even proud of the military. When a pastor is properly educated, then these potential distractions or intersections of harm may be better avoided.

Lament reminds the community that brokenness is a reality not only for those who have undergone great trauma or hardship, but also that it is necessary for all persons in the community to take part in it. Patrick Miller, an Old Testament and Theology professor, speaks of lament in terms of the human voice. Lament found in scripture is not specific to one race, class, or gender. Instead, Miller says it is, “The voice of the suffering one, the brother, who cries out for help, is what brings God on the scene, what initiates a divine response.” He builds his case around one particular aspect of the first lament found in scripture, the story of Cain and Abel. In this narrative, lament arises from one who is no longer living. Even still, God responds to lament that comes from the dead. For many veterans who view their wounds as permanent and terminal, in other words as a death sentence, this illustration of God hearing the cries of the oppressed from death brings great comfort. As Miller argues further, “The human cry to God for help is not one element in the biblical story; it is one of its foundation stones, foundational for both our anthropology and our theology.” It is when the human cry falls upon the heart of God, and the love of God infuses back into the broken soul that reconciliation is possible for veterans of war.

Soldiers and veterans who suffer from PTSD will never be the same as they were before they went to war. The scars of combat, the images of the dead and mortally

52 Brown & Miller, 16
53 Brown & Miller, 16
wounded, sear into a soldier’s mind, never to be erased. In a similar fashion, Christ’s scars are visible. Christians can “…marvel that God did not wipe away his (Christ’s) lacerations… by raising Jesus from the dead, God did not eradicate the scars of his death but, instead, vindicated this Crucified One, and no other, as the Messiah.”54 The power of the resurrection is not that Jesus returns to physical perfection but that he overcomes brokenness, the visible scars a sign and reminder what the world inflicted upon him. Lament offers a language which can articulate the pain and the brokenness of the world which are a present reality, while still holding in tension the knowledge that God also has the power to overcome these things.

The wounds do not completely fade. In fact, in many cases of soldiers with PTSD, their wounds persist in visible and humiliating ways throughout their lifetime. Yet, the incarnation and crucifixion offer the ultimate example of human life, God-with-us, which undergoes the greatest possible suffering. Through the resurrecting power of God, He is raised to a new life. He is not free from the scars of the world. His wounds still persist, but in His new life these marks of brokenness do not have the last word. The example of Christ is an eschatological promise of transformation for the brokenness of humanity, not a promise of an easy solution. The soldier and his family do not have a quick “fix it” to the problem of brokenness from PTSD. Instead, they have a community which serves as a reminder of God’s promise of healing and restoration. This community supports soldiers whose hopelessness prevents them from envisioning a future of fulfilled promises. As Stanley Hauerwas offers in his book on suffering and evil, they have “a community of care that has made it possible for them to absorb the destructive terror of evil that

54 Brow & Miller, 56
constantly threatens to destroy all human relations.” The soldier with PTSD can not change the past despite his ability to remember it, and he cannot guarantee a future free from the horror of his illness even though he can imagine what he would want it to look like. He, therefore, exists in a tension that is both painful from his history and also frighteningly hopeful because of the gospel’s promises.

Resurrection from the depths of hell that many veterans experience cannot take place without remembering horror of the past or having faith in the future. Without these conflicting notions, true restoration is a distant possibility and cheap hope inevitably replaces these visions. For the soldier who has undergone horror and trauma, risking further damage by releasing ones protective guard and replacing it with hope is not an easy process, yet it is necessary. Lament provides a model for confession and ultimately for a hope fulfilled by God’s promise of restoration. As Black articulates, “The spine of lament is hope: not the vacuous optimism that ‘things will get better,’ which in the short run is usually a lie, but the deep and irrepressible conviction that God has not severed the umbilical cord that has always bound us to the Lord.” In the foxholes where soldiers await their next prey and in the desert sandstorms where soldiers stumble across explosive devices that sever life and limb, God is never blind or deaf to the human cry. God is with-us, offering a people in pain an eschatological promise that one day all that is broken will be renewed, all that is severed will be reconnected, and all that is wounded will be reconciled.

55 Brown & Miller, 12
56 Brown & Miller, 54
Nahum 3

1 Ah, city of blood, wholly lying, full of plunder. Prey will not depart.
2 Voice of a whip and voice of a quaking wheel and a rushing horse and leaping chariot.
3 A horseman offering the blade of the sword and the lightning of the spear.
A multitude of pierced, and a mass of corpses. And there is no end to the bodies.
They will stumble in bodies.
4 From a multitude of fornications of a prostitute, good grace, mistress of sorcery,
   Selling a nation to fornication and a family to sorcery.
5 See, to her an utterance of the Lord of Hosts.
   I will uncover her skirt upon her face.
   I will show a nation her nakedness and a kingdom her dishonor.
6 I will throw down to her a detested thing and I will lightly esteem her.
   I will make her a sore sight.
7 Then all of her sight will flee from her and he will say,
   “Nineveh is devastated. Who will lament her nothingness? I will seek her, comfort her.
8 Are you better than Thebes, an architect sitting by the Nile,
   Water surrounding her as a rampart, a wall from sea to sea.
9 Cush, her strength, and Egypt—there is no end.
   Libya and Libyans were among her helpers.
10 Also, she was for the exiles. She went with the captives.
   Her children will be dashed by the head at every street,
And upon her honor, they cast a lot and all of her greatness was bound in fetters.
11 Even you will be drunk.
   She will become concealed, and you will seek protection from enemies.
12 All her fornications are fig trees with first fruits, and
   They will be tossed about upon the mouths of those who eat.
13 See, her troops are women in her midst, enemies to her.
   They open her gate and devour her with fire.
14 Draw the water of siege to her. Make strong her fortifications.
   Come in the mud and trample in the clay, seize a clay floor.
15 There the fire will devour you and the sword will cut you off.
She will devour you as the locusts. Make yourself heavy. As a locust, multiply yourself.
16 You increased her gossiping from the stars of heaven. The locust stripped off and flew.
17 Her princes are as locust and her scribes are as locusts—
   Locusts declining in the wall in the day of cold.
   The sun rose and was chased away; its place was not known.
18 Those who shepherd you are drowsy. O King of Assyria, your majestic ones settle.
   Your people are scattered upon the mountain, and they are not gathered together.
19 There is no alleviation for your crushed ones, those who are made sick, the wounded.
   All hear your rumor and clap their hands against you.
   For who has not witnessed your evil doings.