TRUST IN THE VALLEY:
A Hermeneutic of Trust, Felt Safety, and Connection for Survivors of Trauma

by

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Ministry in the Department of Divinity in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Arms of Hope is a nonprofit organization in Texas that ministers to a population that has experienced various forms of betrayal of trust. This includes neglect, emotional abuse, as well as physical and sexual abuse. Arms of Hope – Boles Campus, where I live and work, is a residential campus that aims to serve this population through meeting basic needs, counseling, case management, life skills development, and spiritual care.

My role at Arms of Hope has taught me that Christians struggle with conversations surrounding trauma and trust. Many in our surrounding community have unfair theological stereotypes involving Arms of Hope's residents, and some have a genuine fear of getting too close to residents on campus. This critical issue prevents healing for the residents of Arms of Hope.

There is a need for Christians to provide support to those who have experienced betrayals of trust, beyond monetary support. It is through trust, felt safety, and connection that relationships develop, and this can only happen when an individual understands trust and consistently shows up in a healthy manner.

My thesis will attempt to bridge theological thinking and our biblical narrative on trust with what a trust-based relationship looks like and how a person achieves it when trying to love someone well. This thesis will move between the psychological damage that takes place when betrayal of trust occurs and how thinking theologically through trauma and trust can bring about a holistic view of the humanity of the person who has experienced the unfortunate trauma.

The methodology that will be explored will include:

- Literary Review of Trust
- Biblical Narrative and Trust
- Exploring Care Through Compassion and Friendship

The literary review aims to educate my readers on trust and explain why this particular work is necessary. I will build upon the work that has already been done to expand my argument for the importance of understanding trust in making a positive change in the lives of those who have experienced betrayal.

The pastoral care portion of this thesis will focus on the importance of Christians forming healthy relationships with individuals who have experienced betrayals of trust. Understanding trust leads to a deeper understanding of what connection and relationship look like.

Exploring the biblical narrative will help my readers understand that trauma and betrayal of trust are not new phenomena. The scripture I will spend time with will bring Christians back to biblical stories that teach first hand accounts of betrayal of trust and how to think about compassion and care from a Christian perspective.

The method of studying compassion and friendship will be essential to conclude on, as it will challenge my readers to recognize that they must commit to marginalized communities and that working with or ministering to trauma survivors will not be a “quick fix” but rather a lifetime of work.

Dedication

To my children, Casen and Kayleigh:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.
-Proverbs 3:5-6

And to my wife, Shana:

Thank you for trusting me. I love you.

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Introduction: Stories of Isolation

Trust does not come easily to Charlotte. She grew up in a family where her parents tried their best. Still, due to the alcohol and drug abuse of her caretakers, Charlotte spent most of her formative years caring for herself (most would just call it survival), receiving extraordinarily little nurture from those who should have provided the majority of it. Aren't the ones who struggle the most with love the ones who were not loved well by primary caretakers? She had little control over her choices, and even though she was primarily her own caretaker, she was often told what to do, how, and when to do it. It was rare that she ever got it "right" in her parents' eyes.

Knowing this part of her story puts into perspective why her relationships as a grown woman were marked by challenges. She never received a good example of what a healthy relationship should be. She had a child with a man she loved but with whom she did not always feel safe. The desire to survive outweighed her desire for genuine connection; she did not know what real connection was anyway. "That thought is for the privileged," she always said. She married him before the conception of the child, even though he would call her derogatory names almost as often as he would use her real name. All around her, people would encourage her to stay in the marriage and submit to the abuse. Even her faith, what little she had, would tell her the same thing. When a person grows numb to the world around them, doing the more difficult tasks becomes more manageable.

The gift of a child is beautiful, but when it also brings about fear for the future, the moment becomes tainted. Shortly after her baby boy was born, Charlotte's husband kicked her and the child out of his home due to a jealous new girlfriend who had been occupying his time as of late. This was not the first time he had had intimate relationships outside their marriage. Now

homeless, hungry, and alone, Charlotte worries about how in the world she and her child will make it. Houseless and hopeless, Charlotte and her child wonder and survive until the next best thing comes along.

Charlotte's story is familiar. Here, we read a modern-day story of a marginalized woman with echoes of Hagar in the book of Genesis (Genesis 16; 21). Very few people can hear a story like Charlotte's and question why she does not trust others easily. Her lack of trust makes sense, given her life. Charlotte's story is a story that is told by women.

Isolation and sin go hand in hand. "The one who lives alone is self-indulgent, showing contempt for all who have sound judgment. A fool takes no pleasure in understanding" (Proverbs 18:1-2, NRSV). When people are isolated, dreadful things happen. Lila understands isolation well. She had been in it for so long that she could hardly remember what a healthy community was or if she ever had really been part of it. It is almost as distant a thought as a fairy tale movie where the prince comes and rescues the damsel in distress. In the town that she called home, she quickly learned that some did not approve of her presence. Whether that was due to her appearance, her behavior, or the fact that she had become so desperate to survive that she turned to men to take care of her, she did not know. She would move on and find another man when one failed and fell short. They would always fall short in the end.

Lila would shop when others were at work rather than make things difficult for herself. She hated it when others cast judgmental looks at her, so she worked hard to pay attention when the town was busy and when most everyone was away from places like the grocery store. She had done this for so long that she genuinely believed that a healthy community was something that she did not need. She also felt that she did not deserve it. She had learned that trusting in herself was the safest thing she could do.

One day, she went to the local grocery store to grab a few things for dinner for her boyfriend and herself, but something strange happened. She noticed a strange man that she had never seen before. After all, it was a small town, and she had spent so much time avoiding people that she had a surprisingly good idea about who was local and who was not. Not only that, but there was something different about the man's accent. She had learned to get a fairly good read on people, and her gut told her he was from somewhere up north.

Walking down the same aisle as they got closer, the man spoke to her and asked her if she could spare a few dollars or possibly purchase him some water. Taken aback, she quickly told the man that he would not be interested in speaking to her if he knew who she was. The trauma of isolation had taught her that she was bad, and she felt that warning people to stay away was more of a kindness than actually engaging with them. The man, although asking something of her, had kindness in his voice. He smiled when he spoke to her and not with a smile that said he wanted "something else" from her. It was a genuine kindness she had not experienced for a long time. She gave him a couple of dollars, and he expressed his appreciation. They walked their separate ways down the aisle. A deep curiosity built up in Lila as she walked away. A curiosity with the potential to bloom into something beautiful if she would only let it.

We all know Lila's in this world. Whether we know them or know of them, we have seen what isolation and lack of trust can do to an individual. Lila's story is not particularly different from the story we read in John's gospel of a woman who goes to the well during the heat of the day because she knows that others typically avoid getting water at that time (John 4). While there, she meets Christ, who talks to her about much more than drinking water.

There are many stories like Charlotte's and Lila's. Arms of Hope is a nonprofit Christian organization in Texas with a program specifically for individuals like Charlotte and Lila. It is

called the Together Program, it and exists for single mothers and their children who are escaping situations of houselessness, domestic violence, and human trafficking. Many of these families enter Arms of Hope's campuses broken, desperate, and lacking in trust of just about everyone. When I was hired to be the pastor for the Arms of Hope – Boles Campus (Quinlan, TX) in 2018, I had not spent much time thinking through the concept of trust, especially trust in conjunction with trauma.

Part of my role at Arms of Hope is to tell the story of God. Specifically, I tell churches and organizations how God is at work within Arms of Hope and of the deep love God has for disadvantaged children and these single-mother families. In my years of telling their stories, I have encountered some of the most generous people on earth. I have seen individuals and families write checks, volunteer on campus, and fervently pray. These people are a gift, and Arms of Hope would not exist without their deep love and generosity.

On the other, unfortunate, side of that coin, I have experienced individuals who might be generous with their money but unwilling to partner with the ministry due to various obstacles. I define "partner" as physically coming alongside residents to walk with them and establish healthy relationships with them. "Partner," in my mind, means entering into a posture where faithful relational ministry takes place. Some of the barriers that get in the way include fear, unfair theological stereotypes, and frustration that trust is not happening at the speed they would like. The fear often comes from working with a vulnerable population. For some, these mothers and children can be "too rough around the edges," a view which can quickly damage a relationship when trying to connect. I have witnessed numerous times where an individual will say something along the lines of, "Well, if she would have just chosen a better man…" or, "If she would just quit using drugs and alcohol to cope, things would be better." The list goes on and on.

It can be disheartening to see how quickly a motivated individual can quit on one of our residents due to one of these barriers.

There is a dangerous disconnect between this marginalized group and the average churchgoer working through what it means to love God and neighbor as oneself (Matthew 22: 35-40; Mark 12: 28-31; Luke 10:25-28). Simply put, healthy Christians must learn to care about this vulnerable group of folks; we must care about reclaiming a proper understanding of trust because it is a matter of life and death. The continued presence of systemic trauma in this group of people exists not only because they are caught in a vicious family cycle that has often been around for generations but also because these children and families have lacked authentic and healthy friendships that are based on a foundation of trust. To put it simply, people need to care about this marginalized group of people because, like many other groups, their very lives are at stake. It is true that success is born out of arduous work. But success is also born out of the community that picks us up when we cannot pick ourselves up, and there is no true community without trust. Trust is the foundation on which relationship is built.

To understand this disconnect more deeply, it is essential to understand the importance of trust in the Christian life. Before we dive into what trust is, it is important to know what it is not. Trust is not a tool or a means to an end. It is much more than something used to gain favor from another, although individuals do gain relationships from trust. Much like love, trust has at times been used to scheme to get closer so that an individual might be preyed on.

"Faith" is a word often used in theological circles and different church settings. Individuals who have been churchgoers for a while know that faith is central to the Christian walk. This familiar language speaks of the importance of seeing with one's heart. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1, NRSV).

“Trust,” on the other hand, is a word that is often thought to be “understood” when, in all actuality, our understanding of what trust is has become fractured due to the ways that trust has been broken in our lives.

The Greek word *πίστις* (*pistis*) is most commonly translated by English words’ “faith,” “belief,” and “trust.” We use these words in a wide variety of ways in daily life, but when a person has faith in something in the strongest sense of the word, that faith is synonymous with trust. For example, if I put faith, in the strongest sense, in the fact that the Dallas Cowboys will win the Super Bowl this year, I trust that it will happen with my whole being. This would mean that my actions would follow my trust/faith, and I would purchase Super Bowl tickets early in the season. (It has been a while since I have had that level of faith in the Cowboys.) There is story after story in Scripture where faith and trust (πίστις) walk with one another because they are one another. So, what do we do when πίστις is fractured?

Trust, as a foundation, has the potential to provide a basis for individuals and communities to live life and enjoy life in several aspects. Those who have walked on this earth for a while know the fragility of trust how easily it can be broken, and how difficult it can be to repair trust once it has been broken. Looking at trust through a theological lens can help us understand why trust is important in our Christian lives and how we might live trustingly today in 2025.

In this thesis, I will approach the notion of trust from a few different avenues. In chapter one, I will dive into the reality of trauma and how trauma foundationally entails a betrayal of trust. With the betrayal of trust come unfortunate realities such as loneliness, isolation, marginalization, shame, and fear. I will unpack some of the consequences of broken trust. Within this chapter, I will also expand on the importance of trust for a healthy relationship.

In chapter two, I will explore biblical narrative and biblical scholarship regarding trust. In the stories of Hagar (Gen. 16; 21) and the woman at the well (John 4), we will encounter real stories of trust betrayed or regained and explore the reality of redemption amid trauma and broken trust. In this chapter, I will explore what it means to be a person who is redeemed.

In chapter three of this project, I will talk about the paths to healing after traumatic instances of broken trust. In this section, I will highlight the importance of understanding our own stories of trust and /or lack of trust. In particular, I will show the importance of making sense of our own worth from the viewpoint of our Creator. After exploring the foolishness of self-care. I will examine trust-based relationships and their components, such as felt safety, connection, community, and the importance of showing up and remembering, all the while, that patience and repetition are all part of the healing journey. I will end with the claim that holy friendship is essential to bringing an individual, or oneself, back to a place of health and out of isolation.

Chapter 1 – Trauma as Betrayal of Trust

Charlotte's and Lila's stories are painful stories because they experienced isolation, fear, loss of hope, and the list goes on and on. Without a support system (community is a good word for this), they have been navigating life alone and struggling to make ends meet. To write about trauma, we must first define trust and what trust is not. It is a beautiful sight to see a trusting relationship played out in front of us or within our own lives. The many ways a person is blessed due to the trusting, healthy relationships that she/he has can seem never-ending. On the other hand, many individuals and families do not know of trust or the healthy relationships stemming from trust. In trying to understand trauma and what an individual, group, family, or institution is going through, it is important to have a good definition of trust and how the fracture of trust results in trauma, which we will explore in this chapter. In this chapter, I will argue that at the root of trauma is betrayal of trust.

Trust Defined and the Human Life

First, let us define trust. In the introduction chapter, I spent some time in the previous chapter writing about πίστις (faith/trust). This word appears hundreds of times throughout Scripture and is a word that Christians use regularly. In his book on trust, Henry Cloud writes that trust is "the fuel for all of life."[1] According to Cloud, just like a vehicle needs gasoline or diesel fuel to move down the road, we, too, need things to fuel us to accomplish tasks and goals. Charles Kiser, in his coauthored book with Elaine Heath, *Trauma-Informed Evangelism,* writes, "Love and trust grow primarily from lived experience, not from intellectual assent to a set of

[1] Henry Cloud, *Trust: Knowing When To Give It, When to Withhold It, How to Earn It, and How to Fix It When It Gets Broken In Life and Business* (New York: Worthy Publishing, 2023), 5.

abstract principles."[2] Everyone is a product of the life they have lived and the relationships that have shaped them. Individuals choose whether to trust or not based on how past individuals have treated and cared for them. I would argue (and believe Kiser and Heath would agree) that the individual who struggles with love and trust has either not had a healthy connection before or has been betrayed to the point that it has fractured their understanding of trust and love. When we interact with people for the first time, we must begin to ask the question: What fuels this person, and who is helping them fill their tank?

There is a wealth of literature on brain development, particularly regarding how children form secure attachments early in life. Cloud continues to name the importance of trust when he writes, "Trust is the confidence that someone will guard what is important to you, what you need, possess, or desire. Whatever your interests are, someone you trust will safeguard the interests you entrusted to them."[3] To put it simply, trust is the belief that the person being trusted will not only be present when needed but also show up as a safe person who genuinely cares about one's wellbeing. An unfortunate reality exists where there are many unsafe people that have no problem showing up in the lives of vulnerable people. The gift of presence is not something only safe people give. Trusting people care about the hearts of others, however, as opposed to the untrustworthy person who cares only about receiving something and has very little concern about giving.

In order for a relationship to move beyond superficial trust, a posture of vulnerability must be present. This task can be challenging for many. We allow space for vulnerability to make

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[2] Charles Kiser and Elaine Heath, *Trauma-Informed Evangelism: Cultivating Communities of Wounded Healers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023), 165.

[3] Cloud, *Trust,* 30.

room for something good to happen to us (i.e., the trusting person shows up and assists with what we need).[4] One of the unfortunate realities that comes with distrust is the fear of vulnerability. When a person lacks trust, they struggle to take the risk required to build a trusting relationship.

The reality of the sinful world we live in makes vulnerability and dependency a difficult task for many. There are several people that have stories of being let down or hurt and are left thinking, "It would just be better if I did it on my own." In chapter 3, I will address the reality that everyone has experienced a betrayal of trust in some form. For those who have healthy relationships and are in relationship with people they can depend on and trust, it is essential to remember why that trust is in place. Likely, our current healthy relationships did not emerge instantly. Instead they were cultivated and tested over time, and now the trusting relationship exists authentically. They are relationships built on trust. Those with trusting relationships must remember how valuable they are and how many people in the world lack someone they can trust. It is essential for those interested in ministering to people, who have experienced deep betrayal of trust, to evaluate our own healthy relationships and recognize that what may come easy for some can be difficult for others.

There is a sense of mystery surrounding trust. Many of us have firm memories of moments when "something clicked" in our brain, and we decided that specific individuals were worthy of trust. We can define these moments and understand the evolution of trust, but there are also several ways in which a person benefits from having trusting relationships in their life. I describe "benefit" here as something that makes a person's life better or healthier. Trust gives a person a sense of security that will be further developed in later chapters. The language of our

[4] Cloud, *Trust,* 135.

heart understands what our mind cannot. Trust leads to a sense of felt safety, connection, love, secure attachment, healing, justice, hospitality, and a sense of community (belonging). Although this is not an exhaustive list, I will focus on these benefits at various points throughout this thesis.

Whereas much of this thesis addresses trust and the lack thereof between humans, trust in God carries a number of profound theological implications. Within the Christian life, there is a resounding call to have faith and trust that the Triune God— Father, Son, and Spirit —is at work in the individual lives of people and the world around them. As Christians, we have faith/trust that God is better at ministry than we are, and that God calls all people to God's self. In reflecting on faith/trust in God, author and psychiatrist Curt Thompson writes, "Before we can 'trust' or 'have faith in' God, we first must practice and strengthen our mind's capacity to trust at all. Again, 'trust' or 'faith' is a word that represents most primally and interpersonal, embodied interaction in which we are being ever more deeply known and thereby loved."[5] We practice this ability to trust by learning to trust those who have proven themselves trustworthy. As people who believe in the Gospel of Jesus, we must remember to have trust that God has already been at work to bring all to him. Christians receive the gift of working with God as we proclaim the good news of the cross and resurrection.

As we read earlier the stories of Charlotte and Lila, it would not be surprising if stories of other current or past individuals came to mind. You might have met individuals who, despite your best efforts to love and support them, continued to push you away and stay at arm's length (or further). It is no secret that we all know Charlottes and Lilas of the world. Some are people

[5] Curt Thompson, *The Deepest Place: Suffering and the Formation of Hope* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Books, 2023), 10.

we encounter daily on the street corners, in grocery stores, and occasionally in our churches. Some of them exist in our own families. It would not be surprising if some reading this now might have been in a similar situation in the past or even now. For many, understanding why some people have difficulty trusting others is not a complicated thing to grasp, because we can recognize that trust has been a challenging obstacle at times. Unfortunately, more often than not, our emotional and theological judgments come out when interacting with "these types" of people. Statements like, "Well, if she had just picked a better partner…" or "Well, if he would just quit drinking and doing drugs…." In many cases, compassion and empathy are often absent when ministering to those who have experienced a profound betrayal of trust.

Judith Herman writes, "To study psychological trauma is to come face-to-face both with human vulnerability in the natural world and with the capacity for evil in human nature. To study psychological trauma means bearing witness to horrible events."[6] To understand trauma as a betrayal of trust, Christians must be willing to witness the evil of the world in which we live. This is another task with which, in my experience, Christians often struggle. To embark on the journey of learning about betrayal of trust is a matter of life and death, and to look away threatens to make us complicit in the harms and hurts inflicted on marginalized communities daily. The first step in understanding where a person is requires those who wish to be the hands and feet of Jesus (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:27) to adopt a posture of discomfort (vulnerability) and a willingness to learn (loving curiosity). To help us understand how the powers and principalities of the world often exploit the vulnerable, Herman frames the rules of tyrannical people and systems in this way:

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[6] Judith L. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2022), 9.

> The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "tyranny" as "cruel and unfair treatment by people with power over others." Dictionary.com defines it as "arbitrary or unrestrained exercise of power; despotic abuse of authority." The Cambridge English Dictionary speaks of "government by a ruler or small group of people who have unlimited power over the people in their country or state and use it unfairly and cruelly." Common to all three definitions is the idea of power exercised without limits. Tyranny is the antithesis of the Enlightenment concepts of liberty, equality, human rights, and the rule of law.[7]

Tyranny as power, and specifically abuse of power, is what many who have been in traumatic situations have experienced at the hands of someone who should have cared for them. This is the foundational event in which trust is broken, and coping mechanisms are what remain. It is fundamental to understand why individuals lack trust when seeking to care for and help them. Christians cannot lead hurting people if they do not know the path to get to healing themselves. Herman continues, "Tyrannical societies are governed by the rules of dominance and subordination. These rules are quite simple: The strong do as they will because they can. The weak and vulnerable submit. Bystanders are fearfully silent, willfully blind, or willingly complicit with those in power."[8] Herman brings to light an essential element of trauma and trust by stating that the individual perpetrator(s) are not the only ones to blame. For Herman, and I would agree, those who choose to stand idly by knowing that abuse is taking place are also to blame. Silence is not an option for us when it comes to the hurting people in our communities who desperately need intervention.

Based on the conversations I have had with Arms of Hope supporters about trauma, the first thing that comes to mind when imagining, remembering, or speculating about abuse is, in most cases, physical violence. Although physical violence is one of the more atrocious forms

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[7] Judith L. Herman, *Truth and Repair: How Trauma Survivors Envision Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 2023), 25-26.

[8] Herman, *Truth and Repair,* 26.

trauma takes, it is not the only way that control is achieved. Emotional manipulation and neglect are two forms in which many people experience trauma, which leads to isolation and fear. I would argue that most forms of abuse have been inflicted on the wonderful residents that call Arms of Hope home, but emotional abuse and neglect are the most common forms. Herman reminds her readers, "Everyone has an equal right to life and liberty, but any one person's liberty ends where it infringes on the rights of others. No one has the right to coerce another person to submit to his will. For this reason, in a just society, the law forbids using the methods of coercive control against other people. Violence, threats, and harassment are crimes."[9] Despite the truth that everyone has equal rights, those with the least amount of power often suffer at the hands of tyrannical individuals who frequently take the form of spouses, caretakers, guardians, and leaders. Moving forward we must be people who refuse to accept this reality if we are to genuinely care for those who are suffering.

Often, an apology is a tactic used by the abuser to continue to gain compliance and obedience. Stephen Rubino, an attorney for survivors of childhood abuse by clergy, stated, "Apologies don't count from the pulpit. They don't count from a spokesperson. They don't count from a press release. They only count in person. I learned that in first grade from Mary Adele."[10] Rubino draws on first-hand experience from children who suffered at the hands of their abusers. Apologies are empty words unless they come from the abuser, and real change happens as the result of the abuser's desire to do better. Most people are aware that apologies often lack authenticity and serve to maintain control over victims. Frequently, individuals stay in abusive

[9] Herman, *Truth and Repair,* 42.

[10] J Curran, *Sex Scandal Big Business for Lawyer* (Associated Press, April 1, 2002).

situations either due to not having a choice (i.e., children living with abusive guardians) or due to the lie that things will be better and the untrustworthy, "I am sorry." Anyone who has been a victim of abusive relationships and trauma at the hands of another knows, in retrospect, the difference between an authentic apology and a continued push to control. Herman reminds her readers, "True apology also offers a promise, implicit or explicit, that the offender has undergone a moral awakening: that he is a changed man and will never repeat his crime."[11] In a perfect world, all apologies would mirror Herman's model, but anyone who has experienced a betrayal of trust in some way knows that actions speak louder than words.

The level of terror that exists for those in situations that have been previously named is something that can keep individuals in different forms of captivity for long periods. Where fear of physical harm and death is a motivator for many to remain compliant, emotional control is another way in which people are forced into submission. Herman writes,

> Psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless. At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force. When the force is that of nature, we speak of disasters. When the force is that of other human beings, we speak of atrocities. Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning.[12]

To have one's trust betrayed does not simply mean that the individual(s) will only have difficulty trusting others in the future. There is also a loss of autonomy. The person they were before the betrayal of trust is no longer at the forefront of their minds. Instead, they find themselves in a state of survival that forces them into a posture where situations that are normal for some people, such as decision-making, understanding who they are, and understanding what a healthy

[11] Herman, *Truth and Repair,* 93.

[12] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery,* 48.

relationship entails, tend to go by the wayside. No matter what "type" of trauma and betrayal of trust a person experiences, it has the capacity to render the individual(s) helpless and in a state of terror.

As mentioned earlier, several unfair judgments and theological stances are held by people who do not understand why a person is untrusting. In responding to a scribe who asked which commandment is the most important, Jesus answers, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31, NRSV). Christians whom Christ has charged with the greatest commandment must seek to understand the reasons for the behaviors of marginalized communities. Listening leads to knowledge, which in turn leads to understanding, which fosters empathy and, ultimately, a loving relationship.

Results of Trauma and Betrayal of Trust

Psychiatrist and trauma specialist Bessel van der Kolk orients his readers to how trauma impacts an individual, both body and mind. Van der Kolk administered the Rorschach test to Vietnam-era combat veterans, a psychological assessment in which veterans provide their interpretations of inkblots, which are then analyzed through psychological interpretation.[13] In these studies of combat veterans, he learned that "traumatized people have a tendency to superimpose their trauma on everything around them and have trouble deciphering whatever is

[13] Bessel van der Kolk and C. Ducey, "The Psychological Processing of Traumatic Experience: Rorschach Patterns in PTSD," *Journal of Traumatic Stress 2* (1989), 259-274.

going on around them."[14] One does not have to experience combat on the battlefield to fall into this survival mode. Those who have experienced trauma (betrayal of trust) of several kinds know that escaping the trauma is nearly impossible, and the fear of potential future abuse weighs heavy on them. It is in the moments of feeling threatened that specific coping mechanisms emerge, which will be addressed later. Van der Kolk elaborates, "After trauma the world becomes sharply divided between those who know and those who don't. People who have not shared the traumatic experience cannot be trusted, because they can't understand it. Sadly, this often includes spouses, children, and co-workers."[15] Oftentimes, trust is a thought that proves impossible for the individual who has experienced trauma. The phrase that runs through the individual's mind, "They couldn't possibly understand," is a common emotional response that prevents a person from taking a leap of faith and trusting what could be a loving and capable individual. Trauma is in the business of interfering with trust and love. Trauma impacts one's ability to think of anything else. Helping victims of trauma find the words to "describe what has happened to them is profoundly meaningful, but usually isn't enough."[16] Understanding the trauma that someone has been subjected to is one thing, but learning to journey alongside them is a task that requires more than understanding. Initial words and actions likely do not begin to scratch the surface for someone who is untrusting of just about everyone around them.

Van der Kolk reports that in a study on how trauma is remembered, participants told him "how upsetting it was to be suddenly hijacked by images, feelings, and sounds from the past.

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[14] Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 17.

[15] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score,* 18.

[16] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score,* 21.

Several said they wished they knew what trick their brains were playing on them during these flashbacks."[17] The question of "why" a person who has lived through traumatic experiences acts a certain way can be a mystery even to the person herself. This belief that a person should just get over it and "pull themselves up by their bootstraps" lacks compassion and understanding for how trauma impacts both mind and body. Most who have experienced trauma would do just about anything to be able to put it in the past and move on with life. Many of them choose the destructive cycle of substance abuse, alcohol abuse, and dismissiveness in attempt to cope with the trauma they have endured. As van der Kolk continues to remind his readers, people must remember that the body does not allow forgetting to happen. In doing brain scans on individuals who had lived through traumatic experiences, van der Kolk notes how the "scans revealed how their dread persisted and could be triggered by multiple aspects of daily experience. They had not integrated their experience into the ongoing stream of their life. They continued to be 'there' and did not know how to be 'here' – fully alive in the present."[18] This is a good reminder for those who seek to understand the effects of trauma on the body that time does, in fact, not heal all wounds. The result of trauma is the continued reality that continues to warp the mind and forces individuals who have seen the worst of people not to trust due to the fear of what might happen if they do. Being a prisoner of trauma is the continued response of those whose trust has been betrayed. The fear of the unknown can be paralyzing to someone whose trust has been deeply betrayed by an abuser.

[17] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score,* 40.

[18] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score,* 47.

Van der Kolk orients his readers to how the brain works in times of peril. Many have heard that our brains go into a "fight or flight" mode. For many, this saying resonates more with men and women serving overseas in different combat zones. However, a person who has suffered at the hands of an abuser knows that one does not need to serve in the Global War on Terror to experience their own combat zone.[19] Van der Kolk opens the door to understanding the brain:

> When the brain's alarm system is turned on, it automatically triggers preprogrammed physical escape plans in the oldest parts of the brain. As in other animals, the nerves and chemicals that make up our basic brain structure have a direct connection with our body. When the old brain takes over, it partially shuts down the higher brain, our conscious mind, and propels the body to run, hide, fight, or, on occasion, freeze. By the time we are fully aware of our situation, our body may already be on the move. If the fight/flight/freeze response is successful and we escape the danger, we recover our internal equilibrium and gradually "regain our senses."[20]

Here, the phrase "survival of the fittest" comes to mind. The desire to survive is loud and often overwhelming when a threat is detected. Even when there is no threat, an individual with experience in the fight, flight, or flee response can quickly revert to this posture due to a feeling that danger is imminent. Whether or not the threat is present matters nothing to a person's brain at that moment. Van der Kolk gives the example of when the human brain's standard response is blocked: "[W]hen people are held down, trapped, or otherwise prevented from taking effective action, be it in a war zone, a car accident, domestic violence, or a rape – the brain keeps secreting stress chemicals, and the brain's electrical circuits continue to fire in vain. Long after the actual event has passed, the brain may keep sending signals to the body to escape a threat that no longer

[19] The Global War on Terror was a global military campaign initiated by the United States following the September 11, 2001 attacks.

[20] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score,* 54.

exists."[21] This is a helpful reminder for the individuals, communities, and churches that do not understand why a person who has experienced trauma has moments when they enter into a state of hysteria and are ready to fight or run away to distance themselves from the danger that may or may not be present. Their brain and body will prevent them from avoiding such thoughts or reactions. The is the case for many residents that call Arms of Hope home.

Our brains do more than allow us to problem-solve and think. As previously mentioned, they also direct our responses to different situations. Van der Kolk states that when we do not know where to go (mentally or physically), when our internal signals do not work, when we are too scared to move, and when our actions are not in line with our needs, psychological problems arise; trauma gets in the way of all these different things.[22] In remembering that trauma is a betrayal of trust, it might make sense to those trying to empathize and help vulnerable people to remember that other responses to different situations should not be taken personally. Traumatized individuals that have bodily reactions often do not have the language to explain their reactions and are usually just as confused as those who witness the reaction. Self-awareness usually happens in retrospect and not in the moment of panic. In staying with the theme of how brains work, it is essential to remember that:

> Breathing, eating, sleeping, pooping, and peeing are so fundamental that their significance is easily neglected when we're considering the complexities of mind and behavior. However, if your sleep is disturbed or your bowels don't work, or if you always feel hungry, or if being touched makes you want to scream (as often the case with traumatized children and adults), the entire organism is thrown into disequilibrium. It is amazing how many psychological problems involve difficulties with sleep, appetite, touch, digestion, and arousal. Any effective

[21] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score,* 54.

[22] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score,* 55.

> treatment for trauma has to address these basic housekeeping functions of the body.[23]

The mind is responsible for many things concerning the body's daily routine. When trust is betrayed, we have learned that a range of reactions can occur, from simple bodily responses to intense moments of survival. This is a valuable lesson for individuals who wish to support people from marginalized communities. Reminding that touch, hygiene, and appetite are all affected by the betrayal of trust, and therefore, understanding these trauma-related results can help inform what care might look like. Ignoring any of these trauma responses can lead to further trauma. Van der Kolk reminds his readers that there is a price to pay for neglecting the body's messages. In doing so, a person is "unable to detect what is truly dangerous or harmful for you and, just as bad, what is safe or nourishing. Safe regulation means having a friendly relationship with your body."[24] When a friendly relationship does not exist, individuals often turn to other sources of regulation, which can involve substance abuse and compliance with untrustworthy individuals in positions of power. I will speak more about behaviors and coping mechanisms of trauma in the next section.

Understanding the Lasting Effects of Trust Betrayed and Trauma

Van der Kolk reminds his readers that "trauma robs you of the feeling that you are in charge of yourself. The challenge of recovery is to reestablish ownership of your body and your mind – of your self."[25] As we all know, there is no way to go back in time and stop what traumatized a person in the first place (what's done is done). According to psychiatrists and

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[23] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score,* 56.

[24] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score,* 99.

[25] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score,* 205.

psychologists like van der Kolk, there are ways to deal with the imprints of trauma on the body, mind, and soul. Before we engage with healing (chapter 4), we will begin to look at the lasting effects of trauma that speak to the experience and behaviors that are present in someone who has experienced a betrayal of trust. These experiences and behaviors include hyperarousal, intrusion, and avoidance.

Many people experience hyperarousal in one way or another whether it is jumping while watching a horror movie or when startled by a young child who thinks it is funny to jump out from behind a corner to scare you. Hyperarousal for an individual who has experienced traumatic events is of a different color. Herman mentions that after a person has a traumatic experience, the instinct for self-preservation seems to go into a permanent state of alert for fear that the danger could return at any moment. She states, "In this state of hyperarousal, which is the first cardinal symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the traumatized person startles easily, reacts irritably to small provocations, and sleeps poorly."[26] Understanding the reality of PTSD allows for a more compassionate understanding for those who constantly seem on edge. For the average traumatized person, it can become somewhat standard to switch back and forth between states of hyperarousal and calm, depending on the situation. Still, this task is much more difficult for the person who has experienced some of the world's worst betrayals.

Intrusion is another lingering result of traumatic experiences. Herman orients her readers to the place of intrusion within an individual's life when she writes, "Long after the danger is past, traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present. They cannot resume the normal course of their lives, for the trauma repeatedly interrupts. It is as

[26] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery,* 51-52.

if time stops at the moment of trauma."[27] This aligns with what we have learned from van der Kolk about how the body retains the trauma a person has experienced. Lenore Terr, psychiatrist and childhood trauma expert, describes the reality of intrusion on children:

> The everyday play of childhood…is free and easy. It is bubbly and light-spirited, whereas the play that follows from trauma is grim and monotonous…Play does not stop easily when it is traumatically inspired. And it may not change much over time. As opposed to ordinary child's play, post-traumatic play is obsessively repeated….Post-traumatic play is so literal that if you spot it, you may be able to guess the trauma with few other clues."[28]

The reality of intrusion on those whose trust has been betrayed catches hold of the most inward parts of who they are. Escaping the experiences that hold individuals captive in their minds and bodies goes far beyond only trying to stop remembering and thinking about what happened to them. Herman notes that while trauma offers opportunities for mastery, most dread and fear the experiences they encounter, whether it is intrusive memories, dreams, or actions, "the survivor is continually buffeted by terror and rage."[29] Due to the pain that comes from reliving trauma in physical and psychological ways, it makes sense why so many who have experienced betrayal of trust do everything they can to suppress and avoid the feelings and memories related to the traumatic event(s). We live in a world where, in most situations, there is an unspoken expectation to "behave" and to "not make any waves." It is easy to see why someone who has experienced a traumatizing betrayal of trust would struggle to fit into these unfair parameters.

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[27] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery,* 53.

[28] Lenore Terr, *Too Scared to Cry: How Trauma Affects Children…And Ultimately Us All* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 238-239, 247.

[29] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery,* 61.

For the person who struggles with intrusive thoughts due to betrayal of trust, avoidance is another tool used to protect the mind and body. In some cases, dissociation is a tactic that a person learns, consciously or unconsciously, for protection. It is important to note that avoidance may or may not be consciously willed, and that many forms of avoidance may be unconscious and deeply unwanted. In other cases, a traumatized person might move to alcohol or drug abuse. Avoidance is not always the case of choice and can, in fact, be out of the person's control. Herman notes that "traumatized people run a high risk of compounding their difficulties by developing dependence on alcohol or other drugs."[30] This is often a coping mechanism that most people, especially Christians, struggle to understand based on their understanding of Scripture. Frequently, I encounter individuals who struggle to empathize with why a person is struggling with substance abuse. There is often a lack of understanding regarding why a person might struggle with this type of dissociation, and instead, the focus is on the act itself. When individuals have had trust betrayed over and over again, it makes sense why they would prefer to seek relief from substances instead of once again trying to trust someone who, in their mind, will likely disappoint them anyway. People have proven to be untrustworthy, and drugs and alcohol have proven themselves to be tools that will not disappoint in the same way. Another way of framing would be that whereas individuals (spouses, guardians, etc.) have been absent and let them down in the past, at least the alcohol or narcotics are available and are present when needed to numb the pain. It is imperative to note that while substance abuse can make an individual feel "better" for a moment, there are several repercussions for such behavior. In a study on combat veterans, it was noted, "The men used alcohol and narcotics to try to control their hyperarousal and intrusive symptoms – insomnia, nightmares, irritability, and rage outbursts. Their drug abuse,

[30] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery,* 65.

however, ultimately compounded their difficulties and further alienated them from others."[31] Substance abuse is a road that allows traumatized individuals to numb themselves for a time. Still, studies of the brain and body have proven that abuse of substances ends up doing more harm, both physically and psychologically, in the end. Harm that includes everything from disease, stroke, high blood pressure, further alienation from support systems, and financial instability.

As has previously been stated, trauma is a betrayal of trust and is not isolated to a singular event(s) but affects the entirety of life moving forward. Herman states, "Traumatic events destroy the victim's fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, the positive value of the self, and the meaningful order of creation."[32] In addition to hyperarousal, avoidance, and intrusion, trauma has the ability to take control and moves the individual into a state of depression. Everything becomes distorted for the person who is afraid to trust others. People who experience trauma have compromised intimacy issues and feel humiliated, guilty, and helpless. Often, what remains is fear and contradictory feelings of need.[33] Abusers take away a person's sense of autonomy. Henry Cloud and John Townsend write,

> Humans are incredible optimists when it comes to destructive relationships. For some reason we think that a person who is hurtful, irresponsible, out of control, abusive, or dishonest is going to change if we just love them correctly or more or enough. We think that if we just let them know about their mistakes, or cry the blues, or get angry, that they will change.[34]

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[31] Herbert Hendin and Ann Pollinger Haas, *Wounds of War: The Psychological Aftermath of Combat in Vietnam* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

[32] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery,* 74.

[33] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery,* 82.

[34] Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Safe People: and avoid those who aren't* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Books, 1995), 97.

In some cases, the abused will rise to defend their abuser in times when the abuser is threatened by others or by courts of law. Herman writes about a young woman forced into a life of prostitution and pornography, and how even though this young woman was terrified of everything her perpetrator stood for, the thought of escaping her abuser was more terrifying.[35] Through this story, readers are able to see that due to a lack of trust, fear takes control, and defending her abuser out of fear superseded her fear of escape. There is story after story about those in captivity who are more fearful of escape and its repercussions than of what is being done to them at the hands of their abusers. Attempting to flee an abusive relationship carries for many the risk of escalating violence. For healthy and safe individuals, it is essential to remember that often, a traumatized person struggles with trust based on their past experiences and, perhaps, the current abuse that exists in their relationships. The road to a healthy and trusting relationship can be a long and winding road. It will require patience and time. For healthy and trusting individuals who sincerely desire to cultivate trust with someone in this situation, they must be willing to "buckle up" and be patient.

Isolation can be a deep frustration for people (Christians especially struggle with it). Isolation is a form of avoidance that traumatized people consciously or unconsciously apply to protect themselves from potential harm. We create various tools to fight it, including church events, bus routes to pick up individuals who can't commute on their own, and small group-style events for those who are considered more introverted. For those impacted by broken trust, isolation is essentially suffering in their own pain. It is a defense mechanism to promote individual or familial safety. It encompasses the whole idea of "if I am not around others, I am

[35] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery,* 123.

safe." Thompson discusses suffering in isolation in three distinct categories. First, in isolation, people suffer because of what someone has done to them. Second, in isolation, people suffer because of what they might have done to themselves. Third, people suffer in the process of growth or lack thereof.[36] This trifold approach to thinking about isolation helps individuals understand the complexities of isolation. Not only is isolation a response to fear of past and potential future abusers, but isolation also arises because of shame experienced by the person who was complicit or failed to act in a certain way when the abuse was happening to themselves or a loved one. Thompson elaborates more on this second point of isolation: "How often are we tempted to impatiently chide ourselves for not having made the personal changes we so desperately long to make?"[37] Many have heard some version of the saying, "I don't care what other people say, but I sure can be hard on myself." It is extremely easy to let feelings of guilt and shame move us into a position of isolation. We can indeed be our own worst abusers.

Cloud and Townsend offer helpful questions for those with a desire to help marginalized people, encouraging them to continually reflect on their relationships and the relationships they are attempting to form. Those in extreme isolation have found themselves in at least one relationship (whether they chose it or not) that brought about more isolation than togetherness. For some, the question of "Why won't she trust me?" is directly related to isolation. Preaching professor Sarah Travis writes, "Survivors often resist telling their stories because they fear they will not be believed or that their experiences will be questioned. Survivors of traumatic interpersonal violence are especially vulnerable to the secondary injury of having the narratives

[36] Thompson, *The Deepest Place,* 90.

[37] Thompson, *The Deepest Place,* 99.

discounted, overanalyzed, claimed as false, exaggerated or manipulated."[38] With this information from Travis, it makes sense why an individual would be wary of seeking help from others. Isolation is not put in place solely due to fear of physical or psychological harm, but fear of not being heard.

The author of Ecclesiastes notes there is a relative advantage in numbers:

> Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.[39]

Knowing that there is strength in numbers is one thing, but teaching/proving this to someone who has experienced deep pockets of betrayal is entirely different. Cloud and Townsend orient their readers to the belief that Satan delights in seeing individuals isolated from one another. Recognizing that the power of love lies in relationships, the adversary is dedicated to isolating individuals from God and from others.[40] To put it into perspective, years ago, I read the book *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer and watched the movie directed by Sean Penn. It is the true story of Christopher McCandless, who, inspired by authors such as Henry David Thoreau, sought to live in isolation away from civilization. Christopher made it to Alaska, where he survived in an abandoned bus for 113 days before his death. In his time of chosen isolation, one of McCandless's last thoughts, according to the movie, was a quote that read, "Happiness is only real when shared." Readers of Christian scripture recognize a deep call to community and

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[38] Sarah Travis, *Unspeakable: Preaching and Trauma – Informed Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021), 37.

[39] Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, NRSV.

[40] Cloud and Townsend, *Safe People,* 81.

relationship. For those in isolation due to personal choice or captivity by their abusers, there is a loud and vital call to lovingly connect them with others in healthy community. As we have learned, this is a task that must be attempted with careful thought, understanding, grace, and patience.

I would now like to shift our attention to what I believe is one of the most destructive results of trust that is betrayed—the destructive and isolating emotion of shame. Shame, and the story that shame tries to impose on people, is a formidable barrier that hinders healing for those who have experienced the betrayal of trust. Thompson rightly says shame "is the emotional weapon that evil uses to corrupt our relationships with God and each other, and disintegrate any and all gifts of vocational vision and creativity."[41] Shame is the bright red stop sign that tells people that they are not good and, therefore, not worthy of anything good. Shame is one reason why individuals continue to pursue toxic relationships where they are abused, isolated, and made to feel inferior. Shame also teaches us that we are not worthy of God's love. Thompson takes it a step further and reminds his readers, "Shame is a primary means to prevent us from using the gifts we have been given."[42] Shame tells individuals that they are bad. This is different from guilt. Guilt is an awareness of having done something wrong, based on one's actions.

Thompson notes that "[shame] is actively, intentionally, at work both within and between individuals. Its goal is to disintegrate any and every system it targets, be that one's personal story, a family, marriage, friendship, church, school, community, business, or political system. Its power lies in its subtlety and its silence, and it will not be satisfied until all hell breaks loose.

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[41] Curt Thompson, *The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories we Believe About Ourselves* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2015), 13.

[42] Thompson, *The Soul of Shame,* 13.

Literally."[43] More often than not, shame is the barrier that lies in the way for a trusting relationship to form and flourish. Shame not only tells an individual that they are bad, but it is also a constant reminder that they will never measure up or be enough for anyone. Isolation comes from shame telling a person that they are not worthy of love or a genuine trusting connection with good people.

It becomes easier to understand the behaviors of individuals who have had their trust betrayed when we recognize the role of shame in the equation. Thompson recalls telling his patients, "'Shamed people, shame people.' Long before we are criticizing others, the source of that criticism has been planted, fertilized and grown in our own lives, directed at ourselves, and often in ways we are mostly unaware of."[44] Often, I have encountered questions by parishioners demanding an explanation for "this" person or "that" person's behavior. It is easy to see people in their dysregulated state and wonder, "What is their deal?" When we view the situation through the lens of shame and its power over individuals, it becomes easier to understand and recognize that the person behaving in a way that is not ideal is often due to the shame inflicted upon them by others. There are children's homes, homeless shelters, and everything in between that are full of people who have been told that they are not good or that something is wrong with them. It is no wonder that their own hurts and pain push them to inflict pain on others. Thompson reminds his readers that "shame is committed to keeping us sick."[45]

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[43] Thompson, *The Soul of Shame,* 22.

[44] Thompson, *The Soul of Shame,* 29.

[45] Thompson, *The Soul of Shame,* 31.

Shame does not always show up in loud and booming ways. It can also be a sneaky enemy that waits for opportune moments.

> Shame does not limit itself to obvious parts of our story. It is not only the voice of our coach telling us we are the worst free-throw shooter she has ever seen. It is not restricted to the memory of the rape. No, it lives in our mind waiting for unexpected opportunities to color the feeling of a moment with its nondescript residue that we would barely identify as having anything to do with our subject.[46]

Shame is devious. It is easy to pinpoint why the person who murdered or abused someone experiences shame. It is more difficult to understand the presence of shame for the individual who has been victimized at the hands of an abuser. If we are honest with ourselves, everyone has likely felt shame at one point in his or her life. Whether as children or adults, humans tend to be overly critical of themselves.

Scripture is not silent on the topic of shame. We see the sneakiness of shame creep in not long after God had created the world and everything he called "very good" (Genesis 1:31a). Adam and Eve had everything they needed in the Garden of Eden. They had food, water, companionship, felt safety, and communion with God. Adam and Eve had trust with God and with creation. It does not appear to take long after creation before a serpent deceives Adam and Eve and then shame enters the picture. Thompson speculates "that before [Eve's] encounter with the serpent, the woman has lived in a world of anticipated joy. She assumed she was loved and did not need to wonder about it, in the same way she did not need to think about breathing. That is, unless or until something comes along to interrupt it, to shear it off."[47] Shame gets in the way of more than just human relationships. Shame takes focus away from the gift of joy and love

[46] Thompson, *The Soul of Shame,* 86.

[47] Thompson, *The Soul of Shame,* 105.

shared between God and creation. This love and joy never go away, but when shame creeps inside, a distorted view of truth and lies is in our sights.

The Apostle Paul reminds readers of the importance of community in his letter to the church in Corinth:

> Now there are a varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are a varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though man, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jew or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.[48]

Followers of Jesus believe that everyone brings a gift to the table. We call these gifts spiritual gifts. When shame is present, it steps in the way and stifles the gifts that God has given, so much so that it becomes easy to forget they existed in the first place. For individuals struggling with shame due to a betrayal of trust, it can be a long road to remember that they, too, have something worthy to contribute to a community of believers. Christian communities must learn that even the outsiders struggling with trust also have gifts that can benefit the group as it currently exists. To realize this truth extends the gift of hospitality to those seeking community.

As has been stated, trauma is the result of trust being betrayed. Many of us in healthy and trusting relationships do not realize the prevalence of marginalized folks who lack the vital

[48] 1 Corinthians 12:4-13, NRSV.

necessity of trust in their lives. As we witness individuals who are isolated, fearful, and hopeless, it is easy to imagine the untrustworthy people that harmed them. At Arms of Hope, we are in the business of caring for individuals who should have been loved well by people but, unfortunately, were not. This comes in the form of guardians, spouses, churches, and many other individuals. What should have been one of the most intimate relationships in their lives turned out to be lacking in a crucial trait: trust. As a minister, I have heard story after story of abuse at the hands of people who should have been trustworthy supporters. These stories are why I wanted to explore trust.

Trauma is not something that simply happens to someone in the past but rather a profound betrayal of trust that fractures more than what happens within the abuser's control. We have explored several different results of traumatic abuse, such as hyperarousal, intrusive thoughts, avoidance, inability to avoid toxic relationships, isolation, and shame. Defining trust and what trust is not is extremely important for Christian communities. Understanding the "whys" of a person's life choices and behaviors is necessary if one is to come to a place of understanding and compassion. In chapter 2, we will turn to Scripture, where we will explore stories of trust and what they meant in their individual contexts, and how God might be speaking to us today through these stories. Reading Scripture helps believers to understand God's character and the love that God has for creation. Yes, there are instructions for daily life and spiritual growth, but in order for Christians to gain the trust of those who have experienced a deep betrayal of trust, we must remember that God is continually at work in the world and always has been. Reading Scripture helps us to understand suffering and gives readers a moral and ethical framework on how to approach healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation. In looking at the stories of Hagar and the Woman at the Well, I will argue that even though these two women

suffered at the hands of abusers, God continued to be with them. Through these stories Christians are reminded to participate with God in the care of the marginalized.

Chapter 2 – The Biblical Narrative

In the introduction, I introduced two women. Charlotte and Lila, whose stories closely mirrored those of Hagar (Genesis 16 & 21) and the Samaritan Woman (John 4). Christian Scripture is not silent about those who suffer at the hands of an abuser. Both stories prompt the question of trust's existence: where do we see trust, and where do we see it lacking? For those who identify as Christ's followers, to know the Lilas and Charlottes in the world is one thing; but what does the Bible tell us about marginalized folks who suffer at the hands of untrustworthy people? In these stories, we will explore where trust exists and how an individual's lack of trust is due to a betrayal of trust of some kind.

The Hagar story matters to my argument based on the reality of her abuse and isolation. Many at Arms of Hope have suffered in similar ways as Hagar (specifically sexual dominance and expulsion). In this story we find an enslaved woman who appears to have no trusting or trustworthy human relationships in her life. Everyone is in the business of taking from her or telling her what to do. She has little or no autonomy. In reading her story, we read about the reality of trust destroyed. Yet, even when human relationships fail, we read about the Lord who sees those who suffer. Even when trust is betrayed by other people, God's faithfulness endures.

The Hagar Narrative – Redemptive Promises

> *He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. Then Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my slave-girl to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!" But Abram said to Sarai, "Your slave-girl is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she ran away from her.*
>
> *-Genesis 16:4-6, NRSV*

The story of Hagar in the Book of Genesis revolves around her role as an Egyptian slave to Abraham's wife Sarah (known at the beginning of the Hagar story, in Genesis 16, as Abram and Sarai). When Sarai was unable to have children she offered Hagar to her husband in order to have a child on her behalf. Hagar became pregnant, which leads to tension between her and Sarai. After a conversation between Abram and Sarai regarding Hagar's pregnancy, Sarai mistreats her which causes Hagar to flee into the wilderness. While in the desert, Hagar encounters an angel of the Lord, who tells Hagar to return to her mistress and submit to her. The angel promises her that Ishmael (Hagar's unborn son) will be a great nation. Hagar names God (*El-roi*), the God who sees.

Hagar returns, as the angel instructs, and gives birth to Ishmael. Sarah gives birth to a son named Isaac and insists that Abraham send Hagar and Ishmael away so that her son might inherit all Abraham possesses. Abraham complies and sends them away. While in the wilderness, they face dire circumstances, but God intervenes, providing them with water and ensuring Ishmael's survival. In the end, Hagar becomes the mother of a great nation through Ishmael, fulfilling God's promise to her. The Hagar story highlights themes of faith, struggle, and betrayal of trust.

The story of Hagar (and Ishmael) is one of those stories that has a history of giving people pause. All too often, Christians (especially pastors and teachers) ignore and skip over texts that make us uncomfortable. In doing so, we miss opportunities to minister to those who have experienced deep betrayal of trust. Our first act of loving others is to spend time with these uncomfortable texts so that we may create opportunities for conversation and learning about those who have suffered at the hands of an abuser(s).

Phyllis Trible notes in her book *Texts of Terror*, "In this book, my task is to tell sad stories as I hear them. Indeed they are tales of terror with women as victims."[49] Trible names the critical task of wrestling with these texts to understand those, especially women, who have experienced profound breaches of trust. To call them "texts of terror" is a gesture of hospitality and acknowledgment towards those whose trust has been betrayed. John Thompson writes, "[T]hese chapters also harbor a fair share of stumbling blocks. Sarah and Abraham take things into their own hands using the Egyptian slave girl Hagar as a surrogate for the supposedly barren Sarah. In other words, the 'first parents of faith' conspired to commit polygamy, and did so, it would seem as a colossal act of unfaith."[50] Again, here we see a scholar bringing a troublesome topic to the surface with the freedom to ask hard questions and listen to how the Holy Spirit works today in Scripture. Asking the difficult questions of the biblical narrative does not imply a lack of faith but rather a desire to understand in a way that allows Christians to enter the world of skeptical and trauma-worn individual(s). It is essential to name these stories as "difficult" and reflect on the importance of spending time with them in the same way that it is important to acknowledge the injustices that take place in our communities every day. For many, turning a blind eye to someone else's suffering has become a common practice and learning to see those who suffer is an important task in order to be an agent for positive change in the world.

The biblical texts of terror can easily lead to questions of theodicy, that is, of why God would allow evil in a created world. This is one of the questions that has pushed me to understand the stories of individuals that call Arms of Hope home and how God has been at work

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[49] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022), 1.

[50] Thompson, *Reading the Bible with the Dead*, 13.

in their lives despite their suffering. Addressing the topic of theodicy is a subject that countless theologians and Christians have debated throughout the years. Asking the question "why does God allow evil to fall upon people?" has pushed many folks (especially those who have experienced betrayal of trust) away from the Christian faith. Stories like Hagar have the power to address the difficulties that individuals and communities endure while also reminding readers that while God does not cause the pain, God is with people throughout their struggle.

Delores Williams does not directly address the topic of theodicy, she has a great deal to say about Hagar. In her book, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, she brings to light womanist biblical interpretation and how this tradition has emphasized female activity and de-emphasized male authority. Williams associates Hagars story with the African American slave:

> [A] story of a female slave of African descent who was forced to be a surrogate mother, reproducing a child by her slave master because the slave master's wife was barren. For more than a hundred years Hagar – the African slave of the Hebrew woman Sarah – has appeared in the deposits of African American culture. Sculptors, writers, poets, scholars, preachers, and just plain folks have passed along the biblical figure Hagar to generation after generation of black folks.[51]

Through the lens of slavery and oppression, Williams shows her readers the parallels between a traumatic event in Scripture and the traumatic reality of African Americans held in bondage. This lens has the power to display deep levels of injustices that have happened all throughout history and current injustices of marginalized people. To equip this lens can move hearers and readers towards a posture of compassion for those who have suffered and for those currently suffering at the hands of an abuser.

[51] Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 2.

My project of trust, and the ways that trust exists and is absent in the lives of the residents of Arms of Hope home, is similar to Williams' work within the African American community and the story of Hagar. Just as Williams uses the Hagar narrative to shed light on the challenges of the African American community, I use the Hagar narrative to shed the same light on the life-battered residents of Arms of Hope. The Arms of Hope residents that I reference throughout this project have struggled and suffered in similar ways to the marginalized community (African Americans) that Williams references throughout her work. Bringing these stories to light is important in order for those who desire to help to understand the places that Arms of Hope residents have been. Through the story of Hagar, the struggles of the African American community that Williams writes about, and the folks that call Arms of Hope home, we are able to uncover the injustices that have always been present and recognize that God does not abandon the suffering and trusting people are needed to help abused individuals heal.

Williams writes, "Hagar, like many women throughout African American women's history, was a single parent. But she had serious personal and salvific encounters with God – encounters which aided Hagar in the survival struggle of herself and her son."[52] For those who work and walk alongside marginalized groups of people who have experienced betrayals of trust, this perspective has the power to evoke empathy and understanding in struggling single mothers (like those at Arms of Hope) trying to make ends meet. Trible notes, "For Hagar, the plot of the first story is circular, moving from bondage to flight to bondage, while the action of the second is linear, proceeding from bondage to expulsion to homelessness."[53] Hagar's story, like that of

[52] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 3.

[53] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 10.

many single mothers at Arms of Hope, is a revolving door. Often, from the outside, individuals tend to think that a person's situation is based on a singular choice (i.e., choosing the wrong spouse, substance abuse, etc.). Still, for many individuals, it is more than an individual lapse of judgment. It often contains story after story of abuse and control at the hands of an abuser.

> The African American community has taken Hagar's story unto itself. Hagar has 'spoken' to generation after generation of black women because her story has been validated as true by suffering black people. She and Ishmael together, as family, model many black American families in which a lone woman/mother struggles to hold the family together in spite of the poverty to which ruling class economics consign it. Hagar, like many black women, goes into the wide world to make a living for herself and her child, with only God by her side.[54]

This is a perspective that resonates with many who are marginalized by injustice. In the previous chapter, I briefly addressed the topic of shame and isolation. Many who have suffered at the hands of an abuser have felt isolated to the point that the Lord was the only one they thought they could turn to in times of desperation and trouble. It would greatly benefit many marginalized communities for Christians to hear this perspective and strive to be a trustworthy person who utilizes the gifts of friendship and listening. To assist in combating the shame and isolation that many who have experienced a betrayal of trust is a gift to those who have been abused.

Several similarities emerge when considering Hagar and the African American woman; some have been mentioned but let us take it a step further. Williams writes,

> All forms of coerced surrogacy evidence the exploitation of the slave woman by the slavocracy. Like the slave system among the ancient Hebrews (Abraham and Sarah), slavery in the United States demanded that slave women surrender their bodies to their owners against their wills. Thus African American slave women (like the Egyptian Hagar) were bound to a system that had no respect for their

[54] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 31.

> bodies, their dignities, or their motherhood, except as it was put to the service of securing the well-being of ruling class families.[55]

To put what Williams states in simpler terms, slaves were viewed in the same way as a piece of farm equipment or a carpentry tool. They existed in the eyes of their owners to serve and work without being acknowledged for their humanity. To not be seen as someone created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) can not only marginalize but also strip individuals of their natural God-given identity in the eyes of the one who abuses. In turn, losing one's identity has the deadly potential to allow the suffering person to believe that they are not good (shame) and to believe that they are not worthy of anything but the current treatment at the hands of their abuser. This is a result that many residents at Arms of Hope have also experienced. They have more often than not been used instead of being loved and cared for.

Williams notes points of dissimilarity between the Hagar narrative and the narrative of the African American slave. She writes,

> The Bible does not tell how or why the Egyptian woman Hagar came to be the slave of a Hebrew woman – given Egypt's overwhelming power and leadership in antiquity and the Hebrew people's relative obscurity and powerlessness. Nor does the text indicate whether Hagar's skin color had anything to do with the nature of her bondage among the Hebrews and her miserable treatment by Sarah.[56]

We get a clue to the powerlessness of the Hebrew people and the overwhelming power of Egypt in Gen. 12:16 where because of Sarai's beauty, she was taken into Pharaoh's house. There is a level of uncertainty within this text regarding why Hagar was a slave in the first place, which remains unanswered. America, on the other hand, has a violent history of abusing those who physically, mentally, and spiritually act outside of what is deemed "normal" by the powers that

[55] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 63.

[56] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 75.

be. Residents of Arms of Hope are an example of the powerlessness that marginalized people experience on a daily basis. Trible points out, "[Sarai] wants returned the superior status that she unintentionally relinquished in using Hagar. Further, she demands that her husband rectify the wrong because he holds authority over Hagar, too. But Abram, speaking for the first time [16:6a] in this scene, chooses not to exercise power and thus remains passive."[57] It would not be appropriate to call this scene a "power struggle" because Hagar is given little to no power much like Arms of Hope residents have experienced. What unfolds instead is a mistress who continues to abuse based on her own decision while Abraham chooses not to support Hagar. The silence of the bystander is another significant betrayal of trust in the view of the abused as we see in Abraham. A valuable reminder is embedded here that, at times, what appears suitable for one person can mean suffering for another. Decisions that impact individual flourishing and well-being often occur without consideration of who the decision might harm. For the residents of Arms of Hope, I have heard several stories of family members not coming to help and instead stand idly by while the abuse takes place.

It is worth mentioning that Hagar's story differs from the Exodus narrative, where God intervenes on behalf of Israel's captivity; Hagar must take "command of her own life under the threat of Sarai."[58] God does indeed intercede on behalf of Hagar, but unlike the Exodus, the release from bondage is not the story's outcome. Once Hagar and Ishmael are sent away on the orders of Abraham, Williams reminds her readers, "Hagar and her child are alone without resources for survival. Hagar must try to make a living in the wide, wide world for herself and

[57] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 13.

[58] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 13.

her child. This was also the task of many African American women and the entire community of black freed people when emancipation came."[59] Similarly to the African American story, residents of Arms of Hope have stories of abandonment and expulsion with little to no resources for survival. It is due to these circumstances that Arms of Hope has become a place of refuge for these individuals and families.

In America, there are several ministries and ministry-type organizations to help individuals experiencing houseless situations similar to Hagar's. Arms of Hope is one of these organizations that exists in Texas. Before finding refuge in a location like Arms of Hope, the individuals who call Arms of Hope home have spent a fair share of time without a place to call home. In a sense, they, too, are wandering in the desert. There is no shortage of information about how emancipated African Americans did not have the luxury of looking for an organization like Arms of Hope.

In looking through the lens of American Christianity, Williams writes, "African American women's historic experience, as well as the community's appropriation of the Hagar-Sarah stories, make visible the conflict and brutal treatment women with upper-class privilege can inflict upon women of lower classes."[60] It goes without saying that it is usually those with power who exploit the poor and defenseless. Even today, many honestly feel that they do not contribute to the harm to the vulnerable population of those experiencing houselessness, domestic abuse, and human trafficking. Even though most Christians were not present at the time of a person's abuse, their practice of stereotyping marginalized communities continues to isolate these groups

[59] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 104.

[60] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 163.

of people that are in need of trusting people. Williams reminds her readers, "Today many black women like Hagar, raising families alone, demonstrate courage and personal ingenuity as they struggle to find resources for survival."[61] Some of the bravest and hardest working people I have met in the last several years are single-mother families working tirelessly to provide a future for themselves. Many of them did this single-handedly before calling Arms of Hope home to praise their grit and determination further.

Continuing to highlight oppression that marginalized communities have endured, Williams writes, "Through the lens of motherhood we see the struggle between power and powerlessness in human relationship disrupt peace in a family unit, breed enmity between women and send a poverty-stricken female slave (Hagar) scurrying into the wilderness."[62] Readers know nothing of Hagar's life before Genesis 16, but to pass over the powerlessness of this woman, as well as her lack of peace, would be a mistake for readers of this story. Only the person who has experienced this type of betrayal of trust can genuinely understand the anxiety that was present for Hagar and is present for individuals who still experience this type of trauma.

Williams recaps to her readers that when Sarai sent Hagar to lie with her husband, she was not sending someone with sexual experience. Williams writes,

> The word used in Genesis 16 to describe Hagar is šip̄·ḥāh, meaning 'a virgin, a dependent maid who serves the mistress of the house.' This means that Hagar was a virgin when she was made to lie down with Abram. Female slaves, especially those owned by slave masters, were often rented out as concubines by their masters. Obviously, Sarai had not allowed such a fate to befall Hagar.[63]

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[61] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 114.

[62] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 16.

[63] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 17.

Many who suffer at the hands of abusers recall how even their bodies were not in their control. There are stories that exist on the campuses of Arms of Hope that mention this very thing. The abuser took everything from them, including their bodies, for their own sexual satisfaction. This truth is telling about Sarai's own interest in self-preservation by allowing, for the first time, sexual dominance over her servant Hagar. Since she was unable to have her own children, Sarai chose to take matters of her family's legacy into her own hands.

Williams brings to light some interesting resemblances between Abraham and Hagar after Hagar flees Sarai. She writes, "Just as the welfare of Abram's family is insecure at this point, so is Hagar insecure. She has run off into the wilderness as a lone woman without family support or protection. Courageous though her action to secure liberation may be, Hagar is without the support and physical sustenance a pregnant woman needs."[64] There are thousands of women in America who flee abusive relationships. Where I have personally seen the Church fall short is that while Christians often applaud the individual fleeing, there is frequently little to no support offered to that individual, leaving her alone and vulnerable. Again, we see the mentality of "Just pull yourself up by your bootstraps" as an often-repeated response to those in need. These responses hinder the healing necessary for Arms of Hope residents and anyone who has endured abuse.

As Hagar and Ishmael make their living in exile, Williams notes, "The issue of homelessness is resolved in the statement, 'He grew up and made his home in the desert, and he became an archer. He made his home in the desert of Paran' (verses 20-21a)."[65] Here readers are

[64] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 19.

[65] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 30.

able to see God providing for Hagar and Ishmael. In the moment when Hagar believed that death would take them, God opened Hagar's eyes, provided a well, and was with Ishmael as he grew. This has been a revelation that many who call Arms of Hope home have come to realize. When these amazing residents have found themselves in a place without hope, God opened the door to Arms of Hope to serve them and help them rebuild. It would make sense to speculate that Hagar's trust in the Lord grew just as I have seen Arms of Hope residents' faith grow. Williams speaks of wilderness in the eyes of enslaved persons in the United States in the 19th century when she writes, "To the slave, the wilderness was a friend that often sheltered and fed the runaway slave. In the wilderness slaves often gathered the plants and herbs they used for healing. Sometimes when slaves were beaten by their masters, they ran off and hid several days in the wilderness. The vegetation and fruit in the wilderness sustained them."[66] The runaway slave and Hagar find solace and protection in the wilderness. The Christian faith teaches that God is with both Hagar and the one fleeing abuse and betrayal of trust. Although the presence of God is with those in traumatic situations, it is also the responsibility of the Church to meet the basic needs of those in situations that require community.

It is worth noting that "we do not know whether Sarah actually took Ishmael as her own as she stated in Genesis 16. The reference to 'this slave-girl's son' leads us to conclude that Sarah did not consider Ishmael her son. However, there is ambiguity here."[67] Again, words are easily broken and promises happen with "crossed fingers" behind our backs more often than we realize. Hagar was never given a choice in the matter, just like other marginalized groups do not get to

[66] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 103.

[67] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 25.

choose if they want to suffer at the hands of an abuser or not. The powerful make the decisions and get to decide if they are going to change their mind or not.

> As a symbol of the oppressed, Hagar becomes many things to many people. Most especially, all sorts of rejected women find their stories in her. She is the faithful maid exploited, the black woman used by the male and abused by the female of the ruling class, the surrogate mother, the resident alien without legal recourse, the other woman, the runaway youth, the religious fleeing from affliction, the pregnant young woman alone, the expelled wife, the divorced mother with a child, the shopping bag lady carrying bread and water, the homeless woman, the indigent relying upon handouts from the power structures, the welfare mother, and the self-effacing female whose own identity shrinks in service to others.[68]

The various types of individuals who resonate with the story of Hagar are mentioned in this section. Trible hits the nail on the head with the above paragraph. As Christians, we have the responsibility to lean into oppressive historical stories and current stories of abuse in order to learn who these people are and why they suffer the ways that they do. Sinful histories like slavery, when viewed through the lens of Genesis 16 and 21, give us the ability to step into the lives of those who have suffered in order to understand more deeply and then participate in the important task of change. Trible and Williams orient their readers to understand more deeply the need to care for marginalized communities like those that call Arms of Hope home.

Since there is, thankfully, no shortage of literature that speaks to the tyrannical control (by those in power) of African Americans, as well as many that occupy marginalized pockets of the world, we switch focus from the suffering and oppression of Hagar, as well as individuals and communities like Hagar, to the trust that manifests through Hagar's liberation and relationship with the Divine. Hagar shows readers what it means to live life under constant

[68] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 28.

oppression and betrayal, and Hagar shows us something about how God shows up even, and especially, in these circumstances leading to the possibility of trust in God.

> Hagar could not give birth in the wilderness. Perhaps neither she nor the child could survive such an ordeal. Perhaps the best resources for assuring the life of mother and child were in the home of Abraham and Sarah. Then, when Hagar and her child were finally cast out of the home of their oppressors and were not given proper resources for survival, God provided Hagar with a resource. God gave her new vision to see survival resources where she had seen none before. Liberation in the Hagar stories is not given by God; it finds its source in human initiative. Finally, in Hagar's story there is the suggestion that God will be instrumental in the development of Ishmael's and Hagar's quality of life, for "God was with the boy. He grew up and made his home in the desert [wilderness], and he became an archer" (Genesis 21:20).[69]

Despite what trust may have looked like in her life before captivity and despite the trauma that she had endured at the hands of Abram and Sarai, we get a glimpse of a woman who has the nerve to trust God in a moment of despair. It is important to note that this type of dire situation is why so many traumatized individuals choose to trust unsafe people. Where this is different than trusting God (who does not abuse or exploit), naming that many remain in abusive situations based on the fact that they have nowhere else to go is important for Christians to understand. Williams points out,

> Hagar becomes the first female in the Bible to liberate herself from oppressive power structures. Though the law prescribes harsh punishment for run-away slaves, she takes the risk rather than endure more brutal treatment by Sarai. The harshness of the force Sarai exerts upon Hagar is indicated in the passage by the verb (ʻnh), which is also used in Exodus to indicate the suffering experienced of all the Hebrews when they were slaves in Egypt.[70]

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[69] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 4-5.

[70] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 18-19.

Williams further orients her readers to understand more deeply the dire circumstances that Hagar was in. Most readers of Scripture would agree that Israel's predicament in Egypt was traumatic, and it is helpful, through the help of the original text, to see the equivalences between Hagar and Israel. It serves as a reminder that God meets people where they are and this includes residents of Arms of Hope.

As Hagar is pregnant and in complete isolation, an angel of the Lord appears to Hagar and calls her by name. By this action, according to Trible, "The deity [God] acknowledges what Sarai and Abram have not: the personhood of this woman."[71] Names have a way of doing more than just addressing a living, breathing person. Names have the power to echo through time the idea that "I see you." Attributing different details to a person (i.e., houseless person, slave, domestic abuse survivor, trafficked person, etc.) can be helpful by acknowledging the hardship a person is going through, but to use a person's name means acknowledging their personhood. This is one of the tasks of Arms of Hope. Arms of Hope is an organization that reminds its residents that they are seen and loved because of the conviction that God created them, loves them, and has called Christians to love in the same way. On the other side of the coin of naming, Trible notes that Hagar is the only person in the Bible to whom is attributed the power of naming God, who has revealed Godself to her:

> The expression is striking because it connotes naming rather than invocation. In other words, Hagar does not call upon the name of the deity. Instead, she calls the name, a power attributed to no one else in all the Bible. "You are a God of seeing" (16:13b). The maid who, after seeing her conception of a child, had a new vision of her mistress Sarai, now, after receiving a divine announcement of the forthcoming birth, sees God with new vision. Hagar is a theologian. Her naming

[71] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 105

> unites the divine and human encounter: the God who sees and the God who is seen.[72]

To see the uniqueness that Hagar is the only person in all of Scripture who names God has the gift and power to subvert any stereotypes that Christians may have about women's roles in this world. If a slave girl wandering the desert has permission to name YHWH, then perhaps the patriarchal society that we live in could learn something from the gifts of women. This includes learning about the importance of challenging social norms and advocating for equality. Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim, and Peterson observe that "such an ordering activity through naming is coordinate with God's naming and hence is an integral part of the creative task, involving human beings in an ongoing cocreative responsibility."[73] Christians and society have long been caught up in the powers and principalities of this world. I do not suggest that we ignore this essential task of naming harmful tyrannical entities, but it is worth noting that we are also in the business of cocreating with God. Each has been tasked with the gift of taking God's love and cocreating with God, trusting systems that care for the least of these within the world. This is the mission of Arms of Hope.

Williams notes that once Hagar gives birth to her son, her "power of naming has been surrendered to the patriarch Abram," but the fact that Hagar returned to the household of her slave-owner after her self-initiated liberation demonstrates her faith and her radical obedience to God."[74] It is worth pausing here to reiterate Hagar's trust in God. Putting her whole trust in God allowed her to return to an unsafe environment where potential consequences for running away

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[72] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 18.

[73] Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 49.

[74] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 25.

and her safety was unknown. This trust is a deep level of faith. Another striking parallel between the Hagar narrative and the African American slave mother is that "black women have been devout in their mothering and nurturing tasks. They believed God supported them in their struggle. In a recent lecture at Duke Divinity School, the biblical scholar Judy Fentress-Williams observed that God's command to Hagar to return to Sarai, together with the proclamation that Ishmael would be untameable ("a wild beast of a man"), may have signaled to readers of the text in exile that while they may not (yet) be free, they are called to look to the freedom of generations yet to come, to hold that freedom inside them.[75] Perhaps these writers would also agree that, more often than not, the Black woman believes "that as long as there is belief in God, there is never a moment when we are alone."[76] Williams perfectly articulates the trust that Hagar, as well as current individuals who are isolated and in danger, have in a deep level of faith that God will be with them and not abandon them in times of hardship. Through community and teaching, Arms of Hope is an organization that seeks to educate its residents on the deep love that God has for all of creation and that God does not abandon anyone no matter how difficult their situation is.

Williams makes an interesting and powerful claim about Hagar's faith when she writes,

> As the result of these hard-time experiences and the encounters with God, Hagar and many African American women manifested a risk-taking faith. Though she obeyed God's mandate for her life, Hagar dared to give a name to the God she met in the wilderness. In a sense, this God is her God, and possibly not the God of her slave holders Abram and Sarai. No other person in the Bible names God.[77]

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[75] Dr. Judy Fentress-Williams, Lecture at Duke Divinity School, March 19, 2025.

[76] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 51.

[77] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 97.

This is a trust that is bold and true, versus one that wavers and is insecure. Trusting God allows individuals like Hagar to "enter the belly of the beast" in order to do what is needed in that moment. This trust in God could be a trust that women in abusive relationships might feel in the presence of their abusers, or teenagers living with abusive guardians. Such trust does not erase the damage of the abuse or the urgency of stopping or escaping from it. Nor does it justify it in any way. But it is a way of surviving with one's soul intact. Deep trust is deep faith that God is with them in the valley of the shadow of death.

A profound level of trust in God takes hold of Hagar after a severe betrayal of trust by Abram and Sarai. In keeping with the theme of trauma survivors, "the Hagar stories are those which suggest that an ex-slave mother could, with only God's help, be in complete charge of furnishing her son with survival strategies. There are no other stories like this in the Bible."[78] While we may only have this singular story that speaks to stories like Hagar's, in the year 2025, we have story after story of how trust in God is what enables individuals to navigate times of trouble and hardship. At any given time, Arms of Hope has campuses filled with individuals who have a deep faith, or are leaning to be people of faith, and are doing everything they can to trust in God and work so that their lives may overflow with the goodness they have received from God.

> No other biblical image could have been more appropriate than Hagar in the wilderness for representing the African American past and present. In the two accounts of her story in Genesis, Hagar goes into the wilderness. In the first account (Genesis 16:1-9), Hagar is still a slave. In her pain and misery she meets her God for the first time. Her experience with this God could be regarded as positive by African Americans because God promises survival, freedom, and

[78] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 115.

> nationhood for Hagar's progeny. The African American community has, all of its life, struggled for survival, freedom and nationhood.[79]

Williams reminds her readers here that, although emancipation occurred for the African American community, there is still significant work to be done to ensure that all people have equal rights and status. The same is true with the residents of Arms of Hope. Drawing on theologian James Cone, Williams asserts that "the biblical witness…says…God is a God of liberation, who speaks to the oppressed and abused and assures them…divine righteousness will vindicate their suffering…[and that] it is the Bible that tells us that God became human in Jesus Christ so that the kingdom of God would make freedom a reality for all human beings."[80]

There is much to be learned about trust from the story of Hagar. One obvious lesson learned is the complexity of human relationships. There is no denying that individuals suffer at the hands of others in the 21st century. This story demonstrates that suffering has been an integral part of life's equation from the very beginning. There have always been, and always will be, on this side of heaven, those who suffer from individuals in power who only have their best interests in mind. The story of Hagar, I argue, should be a story that prompts Christians today to open our eyes to the atrocities that happen within our communities. It is a lesson for those who seek to love their vulnerable neighbors well, especially when they see and hear that someone in their community is being abused and left with a betrayal of trust.

Another important lesson about trust in this story is the ever-important trust that believers have in God. Through this story, readers begin to understand more deeply that God sees those who are oppressed. Trust in God is made easier when the abused individual recognizes that God

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[79] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 104.

[80] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 128.

is not some far-off deity that cannot be around those who suffer. Not only does God see those who are oppressed, but readers also learn that God often shows up in unexpected places. In Hagar's case, God shows up in the wilderness when she is vulnerable and fearful. In believing that God is always near the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18), it becomes easier to trust in God's timing over our own. Although Hagar did not get to choose the situation she found herself in, she was able to trust in the God who sees her. While this does not entirely alleviate the pain that a person receives at the hands of an abuser, recognizing God's presence can be a helpful truth that leads those who suffer to a deeper trust in the God who does not abandon in times of need. The faith that I have witnessed from Arms of Hope residents echoes this truth.

All of Scripture is liberating for those in captivity and bondage of all kinds. Where the story of Hagar echoes loudly in the lives of enslaved people and African American culture, I argue that Hagar's story resonates with all whose trust has been betrayed by someone who was supposed to love them well but did not, for whatever reason. Williams continues to draw on Cone's claim that God deeply cares about the oppressed by affirming Cone's belief that Christ had liberation on his mind when he read from the scroll of Isaiah in Luke 4.[81] Through the story of Hagar, readers learn the possibility of trust and redemption for those who have experienced betrayal of trust. As we look to the marginalized communities that are working tirelessly to survive, Christians must also ask the question: What does it mean for *these people* to be redeemed? The story of Hagar resonates with many who are hurting in the world today. Not being afraid of this biblical narrative and the stories of those who have experienced similar circumstances is the first step to understanding and redemption.

[81] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 130.

I chose the story of Hagar because I believe that we gain an understanding of trauma and trust that can be helpful when trying to minister to the marginalized of today. There are stories from the residents of Arms of Hope that mirror the story of Hagar. The story of Hagar opens our eyes to trauma and abuse that still exists in the world today. Readers also are able to see the desperation of abandonment and betrayal that many residents of Arms of Hope have experienced. Readers and listeners of these stories are also able to understand more deeply the different injustices that marginalized people experience ever day. Through all of the pain and chaos that those without trusting relationships endure, we lean through the story of Hagar that God shows up for those who are powerless and traumatized. It is through God calling Hagar by name after she fled her abuser that readers are reminded of the importance of remembering that those who have experienced a betrayal of trust are more than traumatized individuals. At Arms of Hope we seek to remind, as God did by calling Hagar by name, that although terrible things have happened to our residents, they are human beings created in the image of God and worthy of love and trust from others. Learning to recognize a person's worth is a way, as we see from the Hagar narrative, that we may generate trust from those who have been abused and abandoned.

The Woman at the Well – The Move from Isolation to Trust

> *A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you know the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."*
>
> *-John 4:7-10*

The story of the woman at the well in John 4 portrays a beautiful encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman. Jesus is traveling from Judea to Galilee and intentionally passes through Samaria and stops at Jacob's well in Sychar. It is at the well that Jesus meets a Samaritan

woman that has come to draw water at the heat of the day. Even though it was not customary for Jews to associate with Samaritans, Jesus asks the woman for a drink. The woman, surprised at this question, engages in a conversation about "physical water" and "living water" with Jesus. Jesus speaks of water that grants eternal life which prompts the woman to ask for this water in order that she no longer has to return to the well. Jesus, revealing his knowledge of the woman's personal life allows the woman to recognize Jesus as a prophet.

The Samaritan woman raises a theological question about the proper place to worship and Jesus responds by teaching her that true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. Jesus ultimately reveals himself to the woman as the Messiah. Inspired by her encounter with Jesus, the woman leaves her water jug in haste to tell others about Jesus and invites them to come see for themselves. Many Samaritans come to see Jesus and believe him to be the Savior of the world. It is through the story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman that readers learn about acceptance, breaking down societal barriers, and the transformative power of personal encounters with Jesus.

The Samaritan woman in the Gospel of John is in some ways similar to the story of Hagar. Both stories involve women who have endured abuse (certainly in the case of Hagar, plausibly in the case of the woman at the well) and both women encounter God in the context of isolation. Like many of the residents served at Arms of Hope, we find a woman who finds herself isolated, at least with regard to when she is visiting Jacob's well. Readers are left to imagine the different kinds of betrayal of trust she has suffered to put her in this situation. Jesus breaks through this isolation, however. Initially seen as a presumptively untrustworthy person, he successfully establishes trust with her. This story serves as a reminder that God is at work in the

world and we are called to be participants with God when seeking to love marginalized individuals and communities.

The story of Jesus and the Woman at the Well in John 4 is a story that allows one to speculate about the effects of trust's betrayal. In this story, we see an unlikely woman encounter Jesus, and her life changes in a way that one would not expect. Prior to this encounter with the Samaritan woman, Jesus had an interesting conversation with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and leader of the Jews (John 3:1). Nicodemus came to Jesus in the secrecy of night to ask Jesus questions that seemed like good questions. At the end of the story, we find that Nicodemus listens to what Jesus says but does not understand the meaning behind his words. D. Moody Smith notes that in comparison with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman

> makes a major breakthrough in understanding Jesus. Without full or proper perception, she nevertheless wants what Jesus can give her and asks him relevant questions. The irony of an outcast, a Samaritan woman, coming to some understanding while the learned teacher of Israel was clueless is not lost on the author of this Gospel, nor should it be on the reader.[82]

More often than not, Christians deem one group capable (whether that be a capability to understand or to accomplish some other task) while another is deemed incapable. The comparison of Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman is a prime example of these types of biases. On paper, Nicodemus would be the one who would win a battle of religious wits compared to an outcast woman with a laundry list of poor decisions. Often, the residents at Arms of Hope have told me stories about people's judgments of them. They have been in multiple situations where they were told they did not belong or could not understand and therefore chose to isolate

[82] D. Moody Smith, *John*, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 109.

themselves to protects them of other's judgements. John reminds his readers that when it comes to Jesus, what is usually expected is not always the result.

C.K. Barrett orients readers of John's gospel to the fact that while the dialogue between Jesus and the woman is the focus of this encounter, there are other aspects to observe.[83] There are good reminders in this truth that ought to force readers of Scripture to read Scripture slowly as well as thoughtfully. Here we see Jesus slowly begin to gain the trust of a person who likely does not trust many if any. He does this by doing what many have likely not done which is to give this woman some of his time. The gift of presence can be a powerful way to gain trust if done right. Raymond Brown notes that Jesus could have easily gone north through the Jordan valley and then up into Galilee through the Bethshan gap, avoiding Samaria altogether.[84] That Jesus did not do so suggests a commitment to the inclusion of people in the kingdom of God who are outside of usual religious and cultural boundaries. Jesus shows readers what it means to meet marginalized people where they are. This is an important component of the ministry at Arms of Hope. Although residents find themselves at home at Arms of Hope, we must be creative to meet them where they are. This could be something as simple as giving them an option to go on a walk while we talk verses the expectation of sitting in an office.

It was not just the woman in this story who lacked trust. Jesus lacked trust too—in the Pharisees. Smith points out that the Pharisees

> will prove to be Jesus' enemies soon enough (7:32). So far, they have appeared as authorities responsible for the rather hostile questioning of John (1:19), and one of them, Nicodemus, has shown himself unable to comprehend Jesus (3:1-21).

[83] C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 228.

[84] Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII, The Anchor Yale Bible* (New Haven: First Yale University Press, 2008), 169.

> Enough has been said about Pharisees that the careful reader will understand why Jesus leaves Judea for Galilee when he gets this word that Pharisees were troubled by the topic of Jesus baptizing others (4:1-3). The Pharisees are based in Jerusalem (1:19,24) and Jesus wants to avoid them.[85]

Jesus is no stranger to trust and knows in whom he can put trust and whom he should avoid for the time being and, therefore, steers clear of the Pharisees for the moment. John 2 notes that "when he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone" (John 2: 23-25, NRSV). Thompson points out in reference to the route taken that "Jesus is not on his way to Jerusalem; his route will provide the occasion to demonstrate that his mission will not be limited to the Jews but is intended for all the world."[86] One must not lose sight of the important reality that the good news of the Gospel is not good news for one group of people. The Gospel is good news for all, and Jesus' mission is to share the good news with the world for everyone to see.

Reflecting on John 4: 5-6, Smith observes that "the scene is set with Jesus at the well, tired from his journey, at midday. (The text actually says "the sixth hour," which by ancient Jewish reckoning would be noon.) Although John does not say it, the reader of Scripture would know that Jacob was named Israel by God (Gen 35:10), so Jacob's well is Israel's well, and 'Israel' is still a good name in John, even if 'Jew' is not."[87] The contrast between Jacob and Jesus is introduced early in the story to set the stage for the conversation that is soon to unfold. Brown

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[85] Smith, *John,* 110.

[86] Thompson, *John,* 98.

[87] Smith, *John,* 111.

notes, “The woman’s choice of time for coming to the well is unusual; such a chore was done in the morning and evening. There is little likelihood in the suggestion that the scene is deliberately being related to the crucifixion, where noon is also the hour, and Jesus is again driven to express his thirst.”[88] D.A. Carson notes, “Women were more likely to come in groups to fetch water, and either earlier or later in the day when the heat of the sun was not so fierce. Possibly the woman’s public shame (4:16ff.) contributed to her isolation.”[89] Carson and Brown speculate on the severity of the woman’s situation. Not only is it one of the hottest points of the day (who would want to draw water then?), but what is normally a community chore is an individual chore for this Samaritan woman. Not only does she feel safer getting water at the most heated moment of the day, but she also lacks support in getting the water. Support, one could speculate, could be the assistance of actually drawing water from the well or the support of friendly conversation while chores are being done. Here, Jesus provides another important example of “going the extra mile.” Even though Jesus is tired, and likely thirsty, he finds the energy to engage with this woman beyond his physical exhaustion. At Arms of Hope this example is important as ministry almost always requires extra effort. Many of the residents of Arms of Hope have experienced people quitting on them time after time, and when we prove that they are worth our effort even when the day is done it can be a wonderful way to gain trust.

While the text tells readers almost nothing about the woman, beyond her husbands and immediate reactions to Jesus, it is easy to imagine the betrayal of trust that this woman has

[88] Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII,* 169.

[89] D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 217.

endured throughout her life. Carson and Brown's speculation highlights the isolation in which this woman is currently living.

> As Jesus rests at the well, the Samaritan woman arrives and Jesus accosts her. The long conversation then begins. In a scene of which Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman is reminiscent, the servant of Abraham finds a wife for his son Isaac at a well (Gen 24). The servant opens the conversation with Rebekah by asking her for a drink. Likewise the prophet Elijah opens a conversation with the widow of Zarephath by asking for a drink (1 Kgs 17:10). The setting marks the encounter as biblical, and the theme of water, which symbolizes Jesus and the salvation he brings, already enters the picture.[90]

Here, Smith reminds readers of Scripture that this is not the first time a well has been introduced in Scripture. The symbolism of the well suggests to the reader that this is no ordinary meeting and that it would be wise for the reader to pay attention to what might happen next. Thompson frames this setting by mentioning the strained relationship between Jew and Samaritan, which is important to the conversation that is about to take place. She writes, "In her response to Jesus' request for a drink, the woman underscores the barrier between them: he is a Jewish male, she a Samaritan woman (cf.4:27). Jesus crosses this double barrier, risking reputation and honor and whatever disapproval his actions might occasion, in order to ask something of her."[91] Christians are no strangers to barriers that separate groups and individuals from one another. It is also relatable how uncomfortable it can be to cross over a barrier to interact with someone new (i.e., going to the "bad part" of town). Barriers today continue to limit relationship like they did in Jesus' day and many would agree that crossing barriers is no simple task. Most of the residents of Arms of Hope have found themselves houseless at some point. There are several unfair

[90] Smith, *John,* 111.

[91] Thompson, *John,* 98.

judgments that these residents have encountered at the hands of people who are financially better off. Teaching residents at Arms of Hope that we are all created equal in the eyes of God, despite status, is another way trust is built. Readers see Jesus crossing over a similar barrier with the woman at the well. Readers are reminded through this story that trust can emerge despite worldly barriers.

Smith informs his readers why the interaction between Jew and Samaritan would have been considered odd:

> A gulf separates Jews and Samaritans. The alienation has its roots in the fact that large numbers of the Samaritans (the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel) were deported after the Assyrian conquest of 721 BCE. Moreover, according to 2 Kgs 17:24-41, they were replaced by foreigners. Judeans were deported after the Babylonian conquest of 586. The Jews returned from exile in 537 BCE, although many remained in Babylonia. The returned Jews regarded the Samaritans, who had presumably intermingled with foreigners, as corrupt and apostate. Yet the Samaritans understood themselves to be worshipers of the same God, although they recognized only the Pentateuch as Scripture. After the return of the Jews from exile, the Samaritans attempted to assist them in the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple but were rebuffed, so they opposed and for a long time delayed the reconstruction of the temple (Ezra 4). Later the Samaritans built their own temple on Mount Gerizim, the site of which would have been clearly visible to Jesus and the woman as they conversed.[92]

Smith orients his readers to the troubled history that exists between the Judeans and the Samaritans. Make no mistake that this troubled history was not a simple misunderstanding, but rather years of disagreement that formed boundaries and shaped opposing thoughts and opinions. Distrust of one another would have been common among both the Judeans and the Samaritans. For those who read of this division in 2025, it is not significantly different from some of the divisions that exist within our own culture (i.e., Catholic and Protestant debates, poor versus rich, etc.). In addition to the geographic barriers that existed, the perceived barrier of ethnic purity also

[92] Smith, *John,* 112.

hindered the attempt to understand one another. Just as most people are taken aback by the presence of someone they do not know, the Samaritan woman would have likely been surprised to find someone else at the well, as she likely did not encounter anyone at that time of day. After some initial conversation, which included Jesus asking her for a drink and her questioning why a Judean would ask a Samaritan for a drink, Jesus begins to talk about a certain "gift from God." Meeting the need of others is one of the important missions of Arms of Hope. By Jesus extending this gift to the woman would have been an enormous thing to do based on the woman's isolation. Meeting different needs of marginalized people (food, shelter, clothing, and the Gospel) can be another way to gain trust.

> The woman does not know Jesus' meaning, but could scarcely be expected to. 'The gift of God' is an unusual expression in John. The woman will eventually come to some recognition, tentative though it may be, of who Jesus really is (4:19, 29). Jesus speaks of 'living water' with a phrase that could also mean 'running water,' in effect playing to her lack of understanding. Jesus means the water of life, not natural, running water, but the woman, in using the same phrase, does not yet know this.[93]

It would make sense to recognize the woman's skepticism and distrust of Jesus from the very beginning. Smith reminds his readers, "Water, particularly running or flowing water, symbolizes God's gift of salvation in Scripture (Jer 2:13; Ezek. 47:1-8; Zech 14:8; cf. Rev 22:1-2, as well as John 7:38-39), and this symbolism appears also in later Jewish writings."[94] This "living water" is unlike any water that this woman or any Samaritan person in the area has drawn before. Jesus is moving the conversation to something much more powerful and inclusive than this woman could imagine. Here we see Jesus demonstrate another way to gain trust by offering this spiritual gift. It

[93] Smith, *John,* 113.

[94] Smith, *John,* 113.

is easy for many to become offended when questioned by someone they have attempted to do a good deed for. Jesus, although questioned by the confused woman, does not get frustrated at her, but instead, continues to clarify what he is saying. This is good practice for those who are attempting to gain the trust of others. Patience is important in the road to a relationship build on trust.

Barrett writes, "Jesus' request for a drink serves to bring out a double contrast and parallelism, first between the 'living' (flowing) water of the spring and the living water which is given by Jesus and is so called because it confers eternal life, and second between Jesus and Jacob as givers of water. The woman does not know, as readers do, that Jesus is greater than Jacob because he gives water better by far."[95] There is much to unpack in the understanding of the "living water" that Jesus mentions here. The question of thirst is certainly in the equation, but Jesus is talking about something much more important than dehydration and far more important than what the patriarch Jacob offered; the woman will soon learn this truth. Carson points out that "the water provided by the venerated patriarch [Jacob], as valuable as it was, quenched thirst only for a short while; the 'living water' Jesus gives bans thirst forever in the one who drinks it."[96] Jesus would know that meeting the basic needs of people was important. Meeting the basic needs of food, drink, clothing, and shelter were things that were important to Jesus (Matt 25). It makes sense to assume this woman was thirsty or needed water for some other chore that required water. Jesus takes this need of everyday people and broadens the need for it. Thompson writes, "That is what Jesus offers her; neither her gender, her ethnicity, nor her religious

[95] Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John,* 228.

[96] Carson, *The Gospel According to John,* 220.

commitments or practices are a barrier to Jesus' gracious gift to her. Neither should they be a barrier to the mission of Jesus' disciples to her and her townspeople."[97] Nothing is a barrier to the love of God. Even though it was unlikely for a Jew and Samaritan to even have a pleasant conversation, the gift that comes from Christ is a gift that is not slowed by human-made boundaries.

Different than Nicodemus's questions, the woman's questions "advance the conversation. She asks about the source of the water, and she asks about Jesus and Jacob. Underlying her questions is a growing awareness that Jesus can supply her need."[98] For the first time in this narrative, readers begin to see glimmers of curiosity that could be viewed as trust forming. It is easy to speculate that this woman has been without trusting relationship due to the fact that she is getting water alone at this time of day. As mentioned earlier, gathering water was usually a community event and not done at the hottest time of day. Brown points out that the use of "sir" (*kyrie*) "means both 'sir' and 'Lord'; most likely there is a progression from one to the other meaning as the woman uses it with increasing respect."[99] There exists story after story of people using terms of respect for abusers due to the abuser demanding complete submission. What readers see unfolding here is something completely different. The respect that is forming is a reaction that comes from a need to trust and a desire to acquire a healthy relationship. The simple gesture of Jesus acknowledging the woman and asking her for a basic need is a disarming tactic that allows the woman to be curious about Jesus which allows the conversation to continue. While respect should not be required in the caring for marginalized people, Jesus teaches the

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[97] Thompson, *John,* 99.

[98] Smith, *John,* 114.

[99] Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII,* 170.

importance of acknowledging the personhood of the woman and in turn we read that respect is returned by the woman. This is an important piece of the mission of Arms of Hope. While respect and appreciation are not required of the residents that call Arms of Hope home, those of us who work at Arms of Hope are expected by the organization to see everyone through the lens of their personhood which is an act of love and respect.

The woman continues questioning Jesus, now bringing Jacob into the conversation. Smith writes, "The description of Jacob's giving the well and drinking from it with his sons and flocks affords a parallel to the work of Jesus, which has not yet been explained to the woman. Jacob is Israel (Gen 35:10), so this is the well from which the children of Israel drink. Although it is the well of Israel, it does not permanently relieve thirst."[100] Again, the story of Jacob and Israel is a story that was familiar in Sychar. The deep respect and reverence that came with Jacob would have been a story that the woman would undoubtedly have known well. Jesus continues the comparative conversation between Jacob's well and himself. "The former is still natural, everyday water; the latter is different. Jesus first states what is obvious about the water of Jacob's well or any water before going on to speak of 'the water that I will give,' which is internal and eternal. It 'gushes up,' which is surprising in a well."[101] Wells were, and are, deep pockets in the ground. It was rare that a well would gush up. The water that Jesus offers cannot be contained anywhere, which is the point Jesus is making. The Samaritan woman starts to understand what Jesus is saying in some regard. Social boundaries are not obstacles for God's love.

[100] Smith, *John,* 114.

[101] Smith, *John,* 114.

Smith writes, "How nice never to be thirsty or to have to draw water!"[102] Marginalized folks like the Samaritan woman know what it is like to not have their basic needs (such as thirst) met. The idea that it is possible to not be thirsty anymore would have been appealing to this woman. Brown notes that "the living water is not Jesus himself but something spiritual that he offers to the believer who can recognize God's gift. The living water is not eternal life but leads to it."[103] Jesus is teaching the woman that what he offers is far superior to the need to drink to satisfy a bodily need. Jesus offers something that perhaps only someone who has been thirsty can truly understand.

The dialogue about the woman's current and past relationship ensues, and "Jesus reveals that he knows her, and knows her past, quite fully. He expands upon the truth she has spoken. Although her past is apparently unsavory, nothing more is made of it explicitly. Yet to such people Jesus comes, a point made in other Gospels (cf. Mk 2:17)."[104] The dual natures of Christ are on display in this scene by noting that Jesus (as man), like the woman, is also in need of water, but (as God) also knows who the woman is, as well as her past. Despite knowing about her rather colorful relationship history, Jesus is exactly where he wants to be. Readers of the Bible know that Jesus is not deterred by unethical behavior and is often in the company of those who have been shunned because of their behavior. This is another good lesson that Christians could learn from Jesus. Brown reminds his readers, "Jews were allowed only three marriages; if the same standard was applicable among the Samaritans, then the woman's life had been

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[102] Smith, *John,* 114.

[103] Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII,* 178.

[104] Smith, *John,* 115.

markedly immoral."[105] Again, we find Jesus in a posture of relational ministry as he is not deterred by the woman's past relationships – even though it is likely that her multiple marriages were against Jewish law. Smith writes, "Jesus expands upon the nature of this coming true worship of God. The hour is, of course, the hour of Jesus' glorification and death. For Jesus to say that it is coming and now is (cf. 5:25) probably reflects both the eschatology and the perspective of this Gospel."[106] John may be telling his readers that what folks have been expecting (the coming of the Messiah) could very well be happening earlier than people thought. Although she has not recognized it yet, the Messiah was in front of the woman at the well. It is worth noting that Samaritans only accepted the Pentateuch as scripture; Brown thus suggests that in claiming Jesus as a prophet, she did so based on Deuteronomy 18:15-18 since Samaritans would have refused the prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible.[107] Moses was the key figure for the Samaritan people, and it was a Moses-type person that Samaritans would be looking for in the Messiah. Prophecy from the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 9; 42) that tells of the coming of a Davidic Messiah would have been foreign or even rejected by those from Samaria due to their rejection of Hebrew prophets as well as to the notion of rule by a king in Jerusalem.

Smith accurately says, "God seeks those who will worship him in spirit and truth is not out of keeping with the theology of this Gospel. God seeks true worshipers, but God's reality and revelation (spirit and truth) define the nature of that worship."[108] The reader of John 4 is witnessing the shift of belief and understanding of the theology possessed by the Samaritan

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[105] Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII,* 171.

[106] Smith, *John,* 116.

[107] Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII,* 171.

[108] Smith, *John,* 117.

woman (and soon other Samaritans). Brown notes that the phrase "Father in spirit and truth" is not necessarily an "essential definition of God, but a description of God's dealing with men; it means that God is Spirit toward men because He gives the Spirit which begets them anew."[109] This understanding of who God is moves readers and the Samaritan woman to a position that shows the very heart of God, which desires people to change and to realize the deep love that God has for all of creation. Thompson writes, "Once the Spirit that 'blows where it wants' has been given, then true worship will not be limited to the temple in Jerusalem, any more than the life-giving breath of God is confined to a single people."[110] Jesus here is pushing against understanding of what proper worship looks like and moves the barrier to include all people that exist in different locations. This is good news for the individual who is untrusting due to the many varieties of abusers in the world.

Jesus then reveals himself as the Messiah to the Samaritan woman. Again, this is a different Messiah than would be expected by Samaritans, but the word "messiah" would have been a word understood by this woman. Brown reminds his readers, "Samaritans did not expect a Messiah in the sense of an anointed king of the Davidic house. They expected a Taheb, seemingly the Prophet-like-Moses."[111] Carson believes that the Samaritan woman saw that "the one who sat by the well and asked her for a drink was none other than the promised Messiah, the expected Taheb, the one who could indeed provide her with 'living water.'"[112] For an individual like the Samaritan woman, who likely was responsible for meeting her own needs, this news of a

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[109] Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII,* 172.

[110] Thompson, *John,* 105.

[111] Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII,* 172.

[112] Carson, *The Gospel According to John,* 227.

gift without expectation would have been both powerful and emotional. Often, those who have experienced a betrayal of trust lack the trust needed to put themselves at risk to receive help. Jesus, however, is not an ordinary person, and the Samaritan woman recognizes that after the conversation that she has just had. Jesus here displays another important tactic in displaying trust. Jesus is vulnerable with the woman and allows her to fully know him. It is important to give the gift of vulnerability with the residents of Arms of Hope for the simple fact that they are deeply cautious around others based on the trauma they have endured. To give the gift of authentically knowing one another allows for barriers to be broken which in turn can give them the confidence to be vulnerable with us.

Smith notes that "she [leaves and] bears witness to her fellow Samaritans. That she leaves her water jar implies that she goes with a sense of urgency and purpose. Her word of witness appears quite uncertain, but indicates she has heard Jesus' claim."[113] The good news that Jesus has presented could not be contained. Even though there was no instruction from Jesus to go and share what she had just heard, she was unable to keep the news to herself and quickly left to tell others about what she had just heard. Jesus appears to be concerned with proper understanding and belief, which requires a level of vulnerability, trust, and change of heart. This is seen by the vulnerability of the woman in talking with Jesus (a stranger), her willingness to understand what he is saying, and her actions of taking the good news to her fellow Samaritans once she trusts what he says is true. It is worth mentioning that Jesus does not "give unqualified acceptance to the title of Messiah when it is offered to him by Jews, [but] he accepts it from a Samaritan."[114]

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[113] Smith, *John,* 119.

[114] Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII,* 172-173.

This truth reminds Christians that no one is beyond the love of Christ. Jesus has a deep desire to reach the least of these, as evident in the story of the Samaritan woman.

The woman leaves the scene as the disciples arrive at the well. Carson writes, "[The disciples'] unvoiced surprise that he was talking with a Samaritan woman reflects the prejudices of the day…Jesus was not hostage to the sexism of his day."[115] Unfortunately, the presence of barriers like sexism, racism, and other forms of stereotyping is not something unique to people in the 21st century. These stereotypes are among the reasons that trust is so often broken. Toxic judgments that harm marginalized folks have existed for millennia. Carson continues that Jesus' continued dialogue with the disciples shows Jesus' teaching that "the seed and the harvest is already taking place (referring either to the Samaritan woman or to the people of Sychar who are approaching)."[116] The disciples are unaware of what has just occurred at the well, and Jesus takes the time to paint for them a broader picture of what has happened and what will continue to happen. Smith reminds his readers that "an eschatological harvest is evidently in view. Jesus seems to have in mind specifically a harvest of followers, adherents, or believers, and that fits this scene exactly. Here, the harvest would seem to be the Samaritan believers."[117]

The disciples might very well have been confused by Jesus' words, but the Samaritan woman understood the importance of Jesus' message based on the haste with which she left. Although readers of this story are not privy to the woman's living situation, it can be inferred that she possessed very little, given her marginalization and status within the community. While well-

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[115] Carson, *The Gospel According to John,* 227.

[116] Carson, *The Gospel According to John,* 229.

[117] Smith, *John,* 120.

off people can also be victims of marginalization, the point here is that the poor are often the most ostracized within communities. Smith reminds his readers of the important work of the Samaritan woman. He writes, "The woman's testimony leads many Samaritans to faith. Because of its basis, this seems to be sign faith, indeed, sign faith[118] at second hand; they have believed the woman's testimony. Yet this is just the beginning."[119] It is essential to recognize that Jesus ministers to this marginalized and isolated woman to accomplish the work of the Gospel. While it is true that Jesus could have encountered anyone in the area, his divine mission led him to a woman whose trust had been betrayed.

Thompson focuses on the reception of Jesus' ministry and states, "The Samaritan woman's responsiveness, however tentative, foreshadows the responsiveness of those outside of Judea to Jesus."[120] Based on what the Samaritan woman told the others, their curiosity, and their trust in the woman, led them to go see for themselves. Carson reminds the readers of this story that the "witness of ordinary human beings is never despised (df. 1:7; 15:27; 17:20), even though v. 42 underscores the fact that the peculiar witness of Jesus himself is more powerful and wonderful yet."[121] The Samaritan woman is evangelizing in her telling of the things that Jesus told her. There is a powerful reminder that what Jesus offers all people is a gift that is more wonderful than can be comprehended. Thompson concludes that the "Samaritans' welcome shows that the salvation coming 'from the Jews' is intended for all the world. The designation of Jesus as 'Savior of the world' expresses the Johannine conviction that Jesus delivers 'all people'

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[118] Sign faith illustrates a particular type of belief that is prompted by signs or miraculous events.

[119] Smith, *John,* 121.

[120] Thompson, *John,* 98.

[121] Carson, *The Gospel According to John,* 231.

from the peril of death."[122] Many fear what seems to be the finality of death. In the message of the Samaritan woman, her fellow Samaritans are told, perhaps for the first time, that death does not have the final say (Rom 8:37-39). In building trust with the Samaritan woman, she feels courageous enough to witness to those who could have very easily been the ones to exclude, and abuse, her in the first place.

Gerard Sloyan notes that "despite this complete knowledge of Jesus about them, the Samaritans are portrayed as a people accepted. Nothing is forgotten but all is forgiven."[123] In the eyes of Christ, no one is outside the scope of his love and forgiveness. This is a truth that echoes loudly to those who have experienced a betrayal of trust in various forms. The differences between Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman have been noted, but it is worth mentioning that the Samaritan woman was able to progress beyond what the religious expert Nicodemus could. Nicodemus, a Jewish leader, was likely more focused on tradition and Jewish expectation while the woman at the well, outside of religious norms, was more receptive to the mystery of God. Carson rightfully notes, "[Nicodemus] was learned, powerful, respected, orthodox, theologically trained; she was unschooled, without influence, despised, capable only of folk religion. He was a man, a Jew, a ruler; she was a woman, a Samaritan, a moral outcast. And both needed Jesus."[124] Her progress gives her the platform to witness to fellow Samaritans. Smith agrees that the Samaritans going to Jesus after the woman testified does not have the intention of devaluing her witness; it is intended "rather to underscore the importance of firsthand communication and

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[122] Thompson, *John,* 110.

[123] Gerard Sloyan, *John, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1988), 56.

[124] Carson, *The Gospel According to John,* 216.

communion with Jesus himself."[125] These individuals heard the good news of Jesus and could do nothing but accept what they had heard. This is trust/belief/faith (*pistis*) in its finest form. Sloyan points out to his readers that this text "gives guidance about how to deal with wounds and divisions, especially those of long standing. [Jesus] is presented as a reconciler of ancient enemies."[126] It is through the belief of the Samaritan woman that echoes into the lives of her fellow Samaritans that redemption is not beyond their grasp. Even though isolation had taken hold of this unnamed woman, she learns that she is worthy of the good news as well. She trusts Jesus. Contemporary readers of this story are likewise reminded that redemption is never beyond our grasp. Even though the valley of the shadow of death (Ps. 23) may take hold of marginalized folks at any given time, there exists a "living water" that calls and is worthy of trust. I have seen similar things happen through the actions of residents at Arms of Hope. I have seen some of these amazing people accept Jesus while being here and in turn minister to their families and friends. Some of their encounters have led to family members and friends being baptized on Arms of Hope campuses. Building trust (*pistis*) with Jesus has the power to change lives far beyond our comprehension.

Like the story of Hagar, there is much to learn about trust from Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman. One of the best lessons readers learn is recognizing the actions of Jesus in this story. Just as we are called to love all neighbors well, we read about Jesus moving beyond social and cultural barriers to minister to this woman. If Jesus is unafraid to meet people where they are to build their trust, perhaps we should not be either. Jesus' understanding of the woman's

[125] Smith, *John,* 123.

[126] Sloyan, *John,* 58.

situation also led this unnamed woman to trust him. Christians do not possess the ability to know a person's past as fully as Christ does, but there are lessons to be learned about being willing to be attentive to others. Through Jesus' actions with the woman, Christians are taught that trust is possible when there is a willingness to learn and listen to those who have had their trust betrayed. Another level of this is noting that Christ does not judge the woman for past behaviors. Instead, Jesus gives her the gift of knowing him. It is vital for those who seek to help marginalized individuals to be wary of developing a "Messiah complex" while also acknowledging that the gift of friendship entails allowing others to get to know you. There is a good reminder in this story about the importance of presence and kindness.

Chapter 3 – The Way of Healing

The Necessity of Trust

In this thesis, I have described the importance for trust in human life, the relationship between trauma and trust, and common experiences and behaviors associated with trauma. Then I engaged two scriptural narratives, Hagar (Genesis 16, 21) and the Samaritan woman (John 4), and argued that these two stories have much to teach about trust and trust's betrayal. In this final chapter, I analyze and argue different biblical, theological, and psychological principles for the establishment of trust when trust has been lost. Trusting relationships provide a path to healing for those who have suffered at the hands of an abuser.

There has been an effort to describe the reality of trust for those, both in Scripture and today, who have experienced abuse at the hands of power. Chapter 1 aims to define what trust is and what trust is not. To establish a proper theological hermeneutic of trust, one must learn the grammar of trust and understand its implications. Within this task of definition, I argue that trauma, at its core, is a betrayal of trust at the hands of an individual, group, or institution. Defining trauma as a betrayal of trust opens the door to understanding what the foundation of genuine trust is. Within this foundation, I argue that trust is closely tied to the following: felt safety, connection, love, secure attachment, healing, justice, hospitality, and community that leads to holy friendship. The fallout of trust betrayed results in what would be considered "obscure behaviors," which include isolation, fear, loss of hope, substance abuse, cycles of unhealthy relationships, and disassociation from what could be healthy and good connections (i.e., church and faith communities). Moving into the biblical narrative and exploring two key stories, Hagar (Gen 16; 21) and the Samaritan woman (John 4), readers can get a biblical account of the betrayal of trust, whether direct or speculative. It is through these stories that readers see

the presence of healing through trust (i.e., the Samaritan woman eventually trusts Jesus) as well as pockets of felt safety (i.e., Hagar's felt safety with the God who sees her). Through Hagar's felt safety with God, she returns to Abraham and Sarah not knowing what life, or consequences, might look like. There is also much lacking within these narratives about the lack of trust within these two women's relationships with other people. For example, Hagar receives no hospitality from Abraham and Sarah and one can speculate that the Samaritan woman lacks community. Secure attachment is absent in Hagar's relationship with Abraham and Sarah just as hospitality is absent for the Samaritan woman. There is much to learn from these two narratives about establishing trust while there are also examples of what not to do when trying to establish trust with an abused person or community. As I have argued, marginalized individuals frequently experience isolation and fear due to broken trust.

In this chapter, I turn from focusing on what trauma (betrayal of trust) is and how it has historically been recorded to guiding readers down a path to understanding the way to healing for individuals who have had their trust betrayed. I will argue in this chapter that trust is necessary for traumatized people to heal. Individual grit and resilience can only take a person so far. Rather, it takes a community and authentic relationships for a person to truly heal from the pain that exists from others betraying their trust. People need community because it provides a sense of belonging, support, and shared experiences, which are crucial for mental and physical well-being. Community not only helps individuals feel less alone but can also reduce stress and isolation and enhance a person's personal growth. Furthermore, beyond human community is the call to trust in Christ and allow one's life in Christ to be the foundation for gaining trust with others. This foundation leads to a personal and communal transformation that pushes against one's false self, as described below.

To display these principles, I will elaborate on Arms of Hope's therapeutic model, Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI), that provides tools to those who are attempting to gain the trust of someone who has experienced trauma. These tools include using authoritative voice, healthy touch, playful engagement, mindful awareness, and repair. It is through these tools that compassion and friendship can be achieved when working with someone who struggles with trust.

The Theological Meaning of Community

Dietrich Bonhoeffer had much to say on the importance of community. In his work *Life Together,* he orients his readers to see the beauty of living life within a Christian community. Bonhoeffer writes, "Into the community you were called, the call was not meant for you alone; in the community of the called you bear your cross, you struggle, you pray. You are not alone, even in death, and on the Last Day you will be only one member of the great congregation of Jesus Christ."[127] For Bonhoeffer, community is essential in the Christian life. We also see the gift of community as something that is important in Jesus' life with this disciples that journey with him throughout his ministry. For Christians who desire to gain the trust of marginalized people, having a foundational understanding of who Jesus is, in order to follow him, is essential. Often, residents of Arms of Hope have commented on the healthy community that exists on campus as one of the reasons they choose to stay.

Extending Bonhoeffer's insights, Stanley Hauerwas and Jean Vanier write in *Living Gently in a Violent World* that "to become a friend of Jesus is to become a friend of the excluded.

[127] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (New York: HarperOne, 1954), 77.

As we learn to be a friend of the excluded, we enter into this amazing relationship that is friendship with God."[128] In reflecting on the mission of the L'Arche community, where those with and without disabilities live together, readers are reminded of a beautiful posture that can be taken for another. The posture says to another, "I will not leave you. You can count on me to be here day in and day out in this place."[129] Hauerwas and Vanier have simplified the gift of community for all who call this planet home. This is the posture that Arms of Hope takes for the individuals and families that are served. True community and care is built on trust, where members of the community can see that trust exists because God's creation is visible in them. A proper way to heal for those who have experienced betrayal of trust is to repeatedly show them that you will not abandon them (whether physically or emotionally). Actions must mirror these words when walking with someone who has had their trust betrayed. Jesus displays this in his interaction with the Samaritan woman. Jesus, through his story of living water, invites the woman into a community that includes himself, a community that has the mission of nonjudgmental love and the promise of eternal life. Readers see through the story of Hagar how difficult life can be without trusting community.

Trusting God, Trusting Others

M. Robert Mulholland Jr. writes, "If the purpose of the Christian life is to be like Jesus, it might be a good idea to first get some idea of who Jesus is."[130] For most who believe in Jesus,

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[128] Stanley Hauerwas and Jean Vanier, *Living Gently in a Violent World: The Prophetic Witness of Weakness* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 41.

[129] Hauerwas and Vanier, *Living Gently in a Violent World,* 47.

[130] M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering Your True* Self (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 12.

the desire to walk with marginalized and hurting individuals comes from the call that Christians receive in Scripture (i.e., John 13:34-35). While there are good people who are not believers who take up the call to do the same, Christians do so in order to follow in Jesus' footsteps and because they, too, have seen the benefit of community and friendship. In Jesus' prayer from John 17:20-23, Mulholland believes that "Jesus is praying that you and I would live in a similar kind of relationship with God that he has as the revelation of true humanness in the image of God. Jesus is indicating that the purpose of the Christian life is life of loving union with God at the depths of our being."[131] To know God is to know the love that God possesses for each person who has ever walked the earth and for those still to come. Furthermore, to truly know God is to trust in the love that God has for creation. In offering the Samaritan woman to know him (Jesus), he invites her into the love that God has for his creation. In summary, ministering to marginalized people is a choice that everyone will make or not, but Mulholland also reminds his readers that we are a people who are called to love God's creation. Just as Jesus connects with the Samaritan woman at the well, we are also called to do the same with other marginalized individuals and communities, building solidarity and communal ties with them.

David Benner writes in his book *Sacred Companions,*

> The essence of Christian spirituality is following Christ on a journey of personal transformation. The distant land to which we are called is not heaven. Nor is it some external, physical place. The distant land is the new creature into which Christ wishes to fashion us – the whole and holy person that finds his or her uniqueness, identity, and calling in Christ.[132]

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[131] Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey,* 14.

[132] David Benner, *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 26.

Here, Benner reminds his readers of the important task of transformation. It is not a transformation that can be obtained by individual effort, but rather a transformation that can only come from the Divine. This requires a posture of submission to God's will and the good that only God can do. To warn individuals that this is a "God and I" type relationship, Mulholland writes, "[W]e might be tempted to think that this union with God is a private 'possession' for our individual benefit. Jesus disabuses us of this temptation. He indicates there is yet a larger purpose for our union with God."[133] This "larger purpose" that Mulholland orients his readers toward is a purpose of sharing the benefits that come from a relationship with God. It is through a trusting relationship with God that individuals build trust and care for those whose trust has been broken in violating ways. A union with God is contagious and invites curiosity for those who are searching for someone to put their trust in, whether they know they are searching for it or not. We see this played out in Hagar's encounter with God in the wilderness. Hagar's trust in God allows her to return, in confidence, to an abusive home life and the Samaritan woman's trust in Jesus gives her the courage to go witness to fellow Samaritans. Trusting in God requires a level of vulnerability just like it did for Hagar and the Samaritan woman. God does not promise that hardship will not befall us but does promise to remain with us in times of trouble (Psalm 23:4). Readers see this contagious curiosity take place in the Samaritan woman's understanding of who Jesus is. She is unable to selfishly hold onto this truth but felt compelled to go and tell those who will listen to her the good news she has just learned. It is easy to speculate, given her status in the community, that this was a risk, but her own transformation pushed her to a place of witnessing to others about the good news she had just heard.

[133] Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey,* 15-16.

In continuing with the theme of trusting God, Mulholland draws on Athanasius of Alexandria, and his readers that "Jesus became man that we might be made god. Now, you might think this is a rather bold and extreme affirmation, and it certainly is. But isn't this simply another way to express Peter's contention that we are to become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4)?"[134] Here, Mulholland orients his readers to the beauty of the incarnation and the cross and the importance of trusting the message of the cross. Scripture teaches that there is reward for those who choose to embrace the love that God has for creation. Where Jesus was the only human who shared Divinity with God the Father and God the Spirit, Athanasius challenges Scripture readers to be prepared for the divine reality of a life that is to come. Mulholland continues, "I hope you are beginning to see that the Christian life in its fullness is far more than being active in a Christian community, affirming a certain set of beliefs or adopting a particular behavior pattern. These are a secondary result of the primary reality of a life engaged in an ever-deepening union with God in love."[135] This is important to remember when attempting to gain the trust of someone. We love (and build trusting relationships) because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). It is the union with the Divine from which goodness flows from one person to another. It is because of this union and the love that God has that allows people the beautiful task of authentically gaining trust from those who do not possess it.

For Christians attempting to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13-16), Mulholland reflects on Jesus' words about taking up their cross and following him; "Once again, this doesn't mean giving up candy for Lent." It means the abandonment of our false self,

[134] Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey,* 17.

[135] Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey,* 19.

the relinquishment of our whole, pervasive, self-referenced structure of being. Our cross and Jesus' cross are united. His cross is the presence of his love at the core of our false self."[136] If we are to believe that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), then Christians must remember that the Triune God is at work through us when we love people who come from difficult places. The gift of the cross is the gift that we bring to people who are hurting and living in difficult situations. Benner reminds his readers, "Mystery will always be enigmatic. But it need not be feared. A spiritual journey that seeks to eliminate all that is mysterious will never take us far enough from our comfort zone for genuine transformation."[137] This is a beautiful way of speaking of the love of God and how it will never be fully understood on this side of heaven. Individuals and communities can still take what they can understand and allow that to transform them now so that they may live as transformed people among the broken that make up our local communities. Readers see the false self of the Samaritan woman get overpowered by her new belief that Jesus is who he says he is and offers to this woman her true self which is a person who is capable of relationship with Jesus. Abandoning her false self was crucial for her own personal growth and emotional well-being. Readers see Hagar arguably going through an analogous transformation after her encounter with the God who sees her and later promises her that Ishmael will be a great nation. She is no longer just a slave, but one that has seen God, has been seen by God, and can claim the promises of God.

According to Benner, the topic of love cannot be separated from caring for those who are in front of us. He writes, "No account of Christian spirituality is complete if it fails to give a

[136] Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey,* 79.

[137] Benner, *Sacred Companions,* 31.

central place to love. God is love. And how did Christ love? He loved God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength, and his neighbor as himself. Christ's love [becomes] our love."[138] Benner articulately points out to his readers that we often get love backward. He writes, "God doesn't want me to try to become more loving. He wants me to absorb his love so that it flows out from me. Only love is capable of genuine transformation. Willpower is inadequate."[139] There is a good reminder here that attempting to "muscle" our way into the lives of others will never be fully effective. Readers see Jesus earning the trust of the Samaritan woman rather than demanding it. Genuine trust is built on love and presence. There is no substitute for this. For Christians, building trust starts with an appreciation of and rest in God's love for us, that makes it possible to trust God. Out of that, we can model love that makes trustworthiness possible. Benner also issues a worthy warning to his readers, which is worth bringing to the conversation: "How tragic it is when a person invests all his or her energy in knowing God and none in genuinely knowing him or herself. And how terrifying when such a person is in a position of leadership or influence."[140]

During my Master of Divinity study at Duke Divinity School, I was privileged to take a class with Luke Powery on the theologian and minister Howard Thurman. In the first class of the semester, Dr. Powery told the class that if we were not careful, our knowledge of God would outgrow our relationship with God.[141] Knowing what Scripture says is essential. However, knowing, as the saying goes, is only half the battle. If we only attempt to lecture and teach that

[138] Benner, *Sacred Companions,* 32.

[139] Benner, *Sacred Companions,* 34.

[140] Benner, *Sacred Companions,* 36.

[141] I took this class with Luke Powery in the Spring semester of 2018 at Duke Divinity School.

trust is necessary without going through the journey and process of lovingly earning trust, our mission will be incomplete, and we risk further harm to others. Personally, I have seen this harm move individuals to continued or further isolation. It is good to remember that trust is not just about knowledge about the other, but knowledge of (knowing in relationship). Jesus does not simply lecture the woman, but chooses to be present with her and to have a conversation with her. In allowing the woman to know him is an act of vulnerability that Christians should model when attempting to gain another's trust.

Curt Thompson reflects on a past client named Jeremy, who had grown accustomed to isolation and had begun to believe the lies he told himself.

> Jeremy knew things. But he hadn't been known by anyone in such a way that he felt understood, forgiven, or encouraged. Not by people nor by God. And to the degree that he was not known, the one thing he could know was his own heart. This, in turn, limited the development of the characteristics of God's Kingdom in his life.[142]

Jeremy's story is a story that is all too common today. When trust is lost or continually betrayed, it is easy to understand why a person would choose to isolate to feel safe. However, doing so further keeps people like Jeremy from the gift of being known by safe and trusting people. Thompson elaborates on this point from the point of the untrusting person,

> I am not saying that research or knowing empirical truth is unimportant, but I am emphasizing how much our lives revolve around knowing in a manner that assures us we are 'right.' We have failed to see that this need to be right, to be rationally orderly and correct, subtly but effectively prevents us from the experience of being known, of loving and being loved, which is the highest call of humanity.[143]

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[142] Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising connections between neuroscience and spiritual practices that can transform your life and relationship* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2010), 14.

[143] Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul,* 17.

For many individuals that choose isolation due to betrayal of trust, Thompson brings to light the belief that what they are doing in isolating is what they feel is the "right" thing to do. Helping hurt people understand that trust is possible and that their isolation is only further harming them can be difficult, depending on the individual. Through Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman, she learns, at least in that moment, that isolation will not allow her to tell of the good news she has just learned about. She exits her isolated state to go interact with fellow Samaritans. Thompson continues,

> If you allow yourself to be known by God, you invite a different and frankly more terrifying experience. You are now in a position of vulnerability. If you permit others to know you, they can make their own assessment of your worth. They can react to you. You give them power to be affected by you and in so doing to affect you. You grant them the option to love you or to reject you. In essence, you – must -trust another with yourself.[144]

Vulnerability will almost always be challenging for someone whose trust has been betrayed. Thompson helps his readers understand more deeply why vulnerability can be difficult for people. Most people struggle with vulnerability on a regular basis, regardless of whether they have trusting relationships or not. Vulnerability within a trusting relationship can become easier over time, but it is usually challenging to master.

Readers can only imagine the desire that Hagar and the Samaritan woman felt in their isolation for someone to understand them and validate them in their moments of distress. In moments of peril and anxiety, individuals often yearn to be understood by others. To be understood gives a sense of calm in trying situations and seasons. Thompson enables his readers to grasp the concept of self-regulation. When an individual can show up in a safe and comfortable capacity, providing a sense of security, which can lead to emotional regulation, this

[144] Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul,* 23.

is another result of trust. Trust can show what communal regulation looks like, which in turn helps individuals learn to self-regulate.

> A three-year-old who brings you one of her creations or invites you to participate in her play is demonstrating that the two of you already share some sense of being comfortably known. She trusts you. You matter to her, and she believes she matters to you. In this way, you are known to each other at some dimension of significance. It is this very reality of being known that provides the grounding for her to bring you her artifact in the first place – and then witness how that act of creativity engenders greater connection between the two of you, deepening your co-created sense of being known.[145]

The childlike examples we receive of the benefits of trust are something to be expanded with those who are not children. It cannot be overstated that to "know" someone intimately is one of the greatest gifts that can be given to another. Thompson states, "We are people of desire. We want things. We long for things. It is primal to our nature to yearn. As Saint Augustine reflected, 'The whole life of the good Christian is holy longing…That is our life, to be trained by longing. We have been at it as a race for as long as we have been on the planet."[146] Thompson and Augustine mention a deep desire for trust-based relationships. This longing desires communion with the Divine and communion with trusting people.

Felt safety and secure attachment are two results of trust that most people desire, whether they know how to put these desires into words or not. Oftentimes, actual felt safety and attachment are the result of understanding others and meeting them where they are. Perfection is impossible in any respect and it is worth noting that there will be times when people fall short of

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[145] Curt Thompson, *The Soul of Desire: Discovering the Neuroscience of Longing, Beauty, and Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 48-49.

[146] Thompson, *The Soul of Desire,* 10.

gaining the trust of someone else. On this point, C.S. Lewis reminds his readers, "[A] Christian isn't a man who never goes wrong, but a man who is enabled to repent and pick himself up and begin over again after each stumble – because the Christ-life is inside him, repairing him all the time, enabling him to repeat (in some degree) the kind of voluntary death which Christ Himself carried out."[147] Lewis understood life's roller coaster and recognized the importance of second chances when we fall short. Even though many people have a deep desire to be a person who offers felt safety through a trusting relationship, there will be times when we fall short of our goal. Failure only occurs when individuals stop trying to improve for others and themselves. Gaining the trust of people who have had their trust betrayed is a difficult process so in those moments when we do accidentally miss the mark, we have a wonderful opportunity to show what repair looks like.

Thompson writes about three needs that everyone has that will eventually lead to a fourth need. He writes, "These three needs – to be seen, soothed, and safe – make way for the fourth: to be secure (collectively referred to here as the four s's). Security is about being able, in the face of feeling seen, soothed, and safe, to move away from our relational base and step out to take the risk of new adventure, whether that's across the crib, across the room, or across the country."[148] Thompson understands that there is risk involved in seeking the four s's. This ties back to the earlier conversation about vulnerability and the challenges of being vulnerable at different stages of life.

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[147] C.S. Lewis, *The Case for Christianity* (New York: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 54.

[148] Thompson, *The Soul of Desire,* 32.

John Swinton writes, "We come to know the world as we allow our horizon of understanding – the boundaries and parameters of our current knowledge, experience, and understanding – to enter into dialogue with another horizons of understanding. This process of dialogue forms the epicenter of how we come to know all things."[149] Simple conversation has the potential to be a gift for those in isolated and untrustworthy states. Individuals who desire to help marginalized individuals reach a place of healing must learn to embrace the challenge and discomfort of situations that may be new. This might come in the form of meeting a marginalized individual where they are, rather than insisting that they always come to you. Jesus can be seen putting himself in a position of discomfort by engaging with a woman that most had deemed an outcast. It would have been easy for him to leave once the woman arrived but chose the more difficult path of conversation that allowed the woman to feel seen, soothed, and secure. Cloud simply puts it when he writes, "Safety breeds safety. And safe people make us better people for being around them."[150] This is a beautiful explanation and definition of safety, a component of trust. It is beneficial for those in a trusting relationship to continue to evaluate why their relationship(s) make them better. In what ways do they feel safe because of their trusting relationships? Just as God made Hagar feel seen and safe in his interaction with her, Christians are called to help traumatized individuals feel the same.

Cloud explains how people employ the coping mechanism of devaluation to protect themselves. Devaluation keeps people low and prevents them from special things, like love, which has the power to save. Cloud writes, "Devaluation is a coping device which we use when

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[149] John Swinton, *Finding Jesus in the Storm: The Spiritual Lives of Christians with Mental Health Challenges* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020), 44.

[150] Cloud, *Safe People,* 57.

love has not worked for us. Reaching out for connection is work. It's risky and humbling enough, even with safe people. But if you've been around unresponsive people for a while, it's more than work. It can be torture."[151] The way to healing requires trusting people to remind those who have had their trust betrayed that they are valued and bring good things to the table. We see this, for example, when Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that she is capable of witnessing to others about what she has learned. The task of teaching someone who suffers from shame that they are, in fact, wonderfully made in God's image and that the world is better with them in it (Psalm 139:14) is an extremely important task when trying to gain trust.

Swinton recounts a time when he was providing care to an individual who was lonely and afraid. He told Swinton of the ways in which people had abandoned him and left him in isolation when they found out that he had a schizophrenia diagnosis. In conversing with Swinton, he says, "That's why I tend not to tell people unless I know they're going to be OK, like I can tell you [John Swinton] because you won't turn against me for it, I know that."[152] Swinton had given this individual the gift of acceptance and non-judgment which allowed the individual to trust him. Although we do not know what all went into Swinton earning this person's trust, it is evident that this felt safety bred trust. This is the beautiful gift of trust and presence that we see with Jesus' nonjudgmental encounter with the woman at the well. Swinton reminds his readers, "Healing comes to us from God, but it also comes to us from other human beings."[153] Like Jesus, Christians are called to help those who have experienced betrayal of trust to heal.

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[151] Cloud, *Safe People,* 131.

[152] Townsend, *Finding Jesus in the Storm,* 59.

[153] Townsend, *Finding Jesus in the Storm,* 214.

Thompson orients his readers to the importance of secure attachment from an early age. He writes, "Much more than a toy or blanket, a parent's facial expression, tone of voice, or scolding glance will actively impact the way the mind of the child–in this case, the brain/body portion of it–will function. From the beginning of life, no one's mind functions completely independently from the minds of others."[154] Thompson uses this example of toys, facial expressions, and tone of voice as the platform to show that secure attachment forms (or not) from a very early age. This truth further highlights the importance of trust when considering the potential harm that can and does occur to young children who lack trust. People must be mindful of their words, yes, but they also must be mindful of what else might be communicated through tone, body language, and other nonverbal cues. Our brains were designed to attach and connect to one another. This brings a deeper understanding of the Psalmist, who writes that God "formed my inward parts" (Psalm 139:13, NRSV).

Thompson continues to emphasize the importance of secure attachment from an early age, stating, "From the moment of birth, the infant brain seeks connection. It is like a miniature radar system, scanning the surrounding environment, searching for something – someone – to help bring coherence to its emerging sense of life."[155] The natural movement of our bodies and brains is to seek secure attachment. To understand the need for secure attachment is to recognize the importance of trusting people in the lives of those who have not experienced trust for a long time.

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[154] Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul,* 30.

[155] Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul,* 112.

We have spent time exploring why individuals get caught up in a cycle of unhealthy relationships, and Thompson helps us understand the underlying reasons. Thompson beautifully names the elephant in the room, namely that people are often solely focused on "fixing" issues. People are not problems to be solved; treating them as such can hinder their healing. People with a desire to build trust and secure attachment must learn to see the beauty in the individuals they are walking with. This ability to see the beauty in others can foster respect for them, which in turn can contribute to secure attachment. Thompson gives his readers hope when he writes, "Over time, the process of developing secure attachment and deepening integration leads to a widening of the window of tolerance and an expanded capacity to tolerate and regulate stress."[156] Thompson tells his readers about the "good days ahead." Through patience and presence, trust emerges, and good things follow, enabling a healthier relationship and a healthier person. Christians would do well to remember the presence of God to Hagar and Jesus to the Samaritan woman as a good example of the power of presence and one's time.

Trust-Based Relational Intervention

Having been trained in theology and ministry, I quickly learned after starting at Arms of Hope that I lacked the grammar to understand the trauma of neglect and emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. One of the therapeutic practices adopted at Arms of Hope is the Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) approach developed by the Karen Purvis Institute of Child Development at Texas Christian University. In summer 2023, I was fortunate to attend a week-long training that enabled me to claim the title of TBRI Practitioner. In this section, I will discuss TBRI and the positive effects that the model of trust-based relationships can have on those who

[156] Thompson, *The Soul of Desire,* 37.

have experienced deep levels of betrayed trust. While TBRI is a psychological intervention that does not have explicitly biblical or theological roots, I will then return to the story of Jesus and the woman at the well and show how Jesus was modeling particular TBRI principles.

One of the most popular statements that comes out of TBRI is a statement from the late Karen Purvis[157] herself: "You cannot lead a child to a pace of healing if you do not know the way yourself."[158] Purvis recognized the importance of self-awareness before undertaking the critical task of caring for marginalized individuals, in her case, children. For individuals who desire to build trust and walk alongside those who have experienced trauma, Purvis reminds them that they must have already done the work to know the steps to get to a place of healing. We cannot treat a child in a way that we have not experienced.[159] Similarly, a person cannot fix a small engine in need of repair unless they have received training or experience. So, can a person lead a trust-weary individual to healing if they have not journeyed through their own healing? Jesus was no stranger to untrustworthy individuals and readers find Jesus avoiding those who seek to do him harm (i.e., Matt 12: 14-15).

When we are secure, we can talk about the good and bad things.[160] More often than not, individuals who do not trust will be reluctant to share the innermost workings of their hearts. The

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[157] The Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development was created as an outgrowth of the Hope Connection®, a research and intervention project developed in 1999 by Dr. Karyn Purvis and Dr. David Cross. The Hope Connection® began as a summer camp for adopted children who experienced early orphanage care. The results proved so remarkable, they sparked a compelling scientific and personal journey for Drs. Purvis and Cross. In 2016, the Institute began a new chapter of its history by changing its name from TCU Institute of Child Development to Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development, in honor of the late Dr. Purvis.

[158] This quote was sprinkled all throughout the training and within much literature focused on TBRI. More information about TBRI can be found here: Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development

[159] Dr. Danica Knight, TBRI Practitioners Training - Dallas/Fort Worth, June 2023.

[160] Knight, TBRI Training, June 2023.

ability to partner and journey with others increases when secure attachment takes hold. TBRI defines what healthy attachment is and the four skills that are necessary for healthy attachment. The four skills are the ability to give care, the ability to receive care, the ability to negotiate needs, and the ability to be autonomous ("I'm ok with 'me' or 'we.'").[161] Readers see Jesus modeling the ability to give care in his works of healing, the ability to receive care from others in his acceptance of others' hospitality and companionship. Furthermore, readers see Jesus comfortable in the company of others or by himself. For secure attachment and trust to exist in a relationship, these four skills serve as a test that can indicate whether trust is present in relationships. When considering the path to healing, reevaluating whether these skills exist is a good test. Following up by questioning why these skills do or do not exist in a relationship is a good follow-up question for individuals attempting to build trust.

Commenting on how relational trauma has the capacity to disorganize and to disrupt, TBRI practitioner Daren Jones affirms that "Babies [all people] should not bleed when they are on our watch."[162] This statement is one that I would argue needs to be adopted by every Christian who seeks to build trust with marginalized individuals. Taking this phrase literally is essential, but I would also argue analogously that no one should *emotionally* bleed in our care either. What I mean by this is that by not checking improper theological judgments, inflicting shame, or "you fill in the blank," we run the risk of inflicting emotional bleeding on those we seek to care for. God did not allow Hagar or Ishmael to die in the desert just as Jesus did not allow the woman to remain isolated during the heat of the day.

[161] Knight, TBRI Training, June 2023.

[162] Daren Jones, TBRI Practitioner Training, June 2023.

When children experience the toxic stress associated with relational trauma, their development is organized around survival strategies, which are adaptive to toxic caregiving environments, but that puts the developing child at risk in normal environments.[163] Here we see a reminder from chapter 1 of some of the unfortunate behaviors that result from a betrayal of trust. Jones demonstrated to his listeners the importance of secure attachment and connection, which fosters trust and enables children and adults to react appropriately in "normal" situations. Everything happens in the context of relationship. Healing has to happen in relationships, and we need to get rid of tricks and shortcuts.[164] Gaining the trust of those who have had it betrayed is a long and arduous process that requires patience and resilience. When those who seek to help others who have had their trust betrayed try to expedite the process to benefit themselves, rather than those who have been hurt, it is sloppy work and has the potential to harm people.

Christians must stop acting surprised when chaos happens and remember that our job is to teach the way to healing.[165] Christians especially have what I would consider poor "poker faces" when it comes to the dysregulated actions of those who have had their trust betrayed. When chaos ensues, compassion is rarely the first reaction. Jones challenged his listeners that one of the first gifts of hospitality that can be given is the gift of understanding. When individuals who do not trust easily act like those who do not trust easily, stop being surprised and meet them where they are with love and compassion. Humans are designed to respond to threats, but we are not designed to stay in a state of stress.[166] Whether an individual is mentally wounded

[163] Jones, TBRI Training, June 2023.

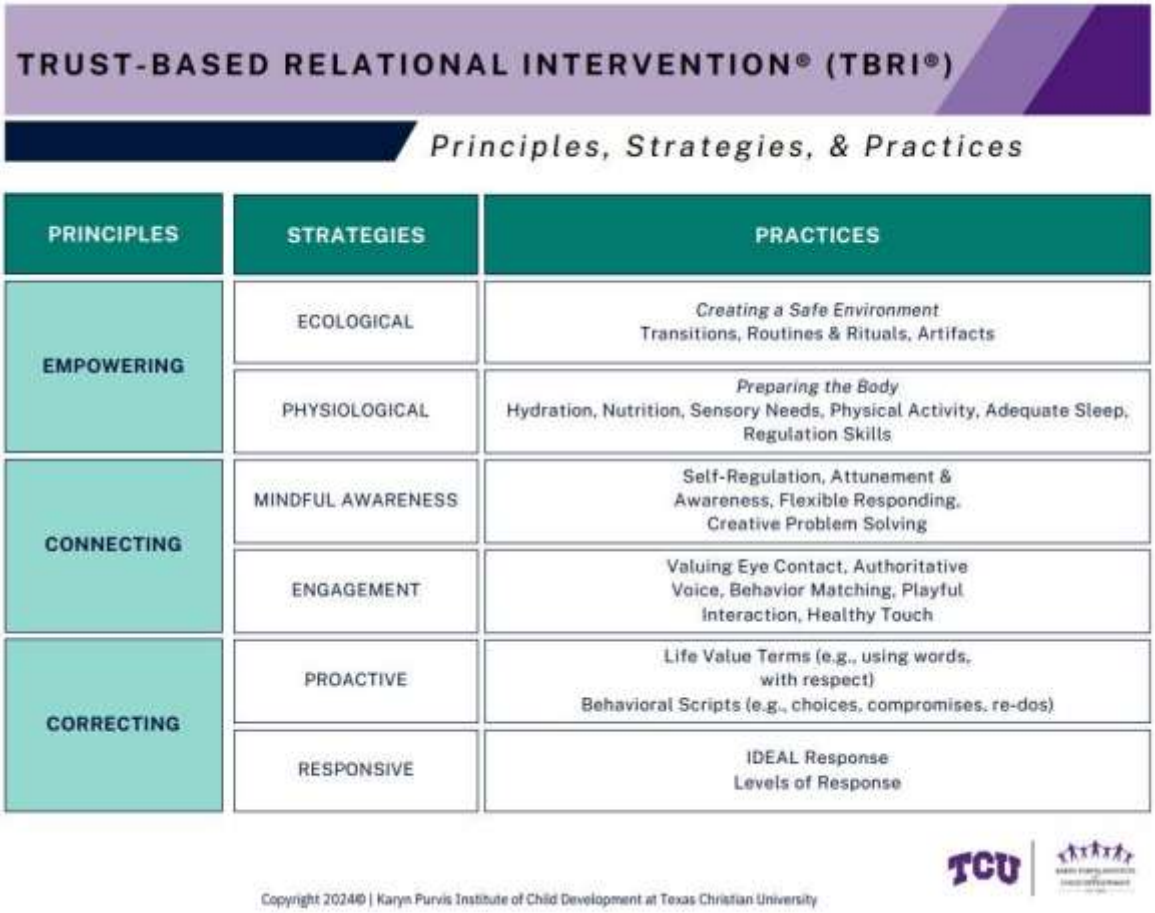
[164] Jones, TBRI Training, June 2023.

[165] Jones, TBRI Training, June 2023.

[166] Jones, TBRI Training, June 2023.

from a time at war or a single mother who has suffered at the hands of an abusive spouse, many understand what it means to respond to threats, whether they are real or perceived. The first task for the person seeking to gain trust is to remain calm at a dysregulated person's different reactions. The second task is to teach that the need to stay in a defensive posture is not necessary. Instead of Jesus chastising in surprise at the Samaritan woman's relationship history (which he already knew), he chooses to converse with her in playful engagement and give her good news of the deep love of God.

Within the TBRI model, practitioners learn about practices and strategies that lead to three key principles: empowering, connecting, and correcting.



**TBRI Principles*

When needs are unmet, individuals learn that they do not have a voice and that behaviors are needed to get their needs met.[167] When trust is not obtainable and needs are not met, the individual will then shift to different "survival strategies" that move them to obtain control of a situation, manipulate to achieve it, triangulate, and, at times, engage in violence.[168] Readers do not see Hagar act manipulatively or violently, but due to the abuse she endured at the hands of Sarai, she quickly shifted to the survival strategy of running away into the wilderness.

It is worth noting that self-regulation cannot occur until a child is three years old, and that brains are not fully developed in females until age 25-26 years old, or in males until age 30 years.[169] This matters for building trust in adolescents and younger adults. Humans are called to regulate one another.[170] A healthy relationship is built on the foundation of trust, which is reciprocal regarding regulation. Healthy relationships help people "cool off" when their emotions get the best of them. Healthy, trusting relationships also enable the growth of laughter, joy, and fun in an individual.[171] In Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman readers get a glimpse of joy as she leaves to witness to her fellow Samaritans. Individuals seeking to help those who have lost their joy and happiness would do well to remember that laughter, joy, and fun are good things for this person to regain (or, perhaps, to gain for the first time).

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[167] Jones, TBRI Training, June 2023.

[168] Jones, TBRI Training, June 2023.

[169] Jones, TBRI Training, June 2023.

[170] Jones, TBRI Training, June 2023.

[171] Jones, TBRI Training, June 2023.

Human connection within the TBRI model is crucial and is the heartbeat of TBRI. The more connected we are, the easier it is to correct.[172] One of the biggest concerns of those wanting to help marginalized communities is addressing behaviors that arise from stressful situations. More often than not, a person's behavior is the primary concern of others, and TBRI teaches that connection must be present before correction can happen. TBRI teaches that we find the need and meet it even amid different behaviors. Reading Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, readers do not see Jesus immediately correcting the woman's lifestyle choices. Instead, we see Jesus connecting with her through the topic of water. Similarly, Christians must find a way to connect with others. One of the greatest gifts we can give kids is the ability to self-regulate.[173] Through the heartbeat of connection that is TBRI, trust eventually takes hold. Within this trusting relationship, we have the opportunity to teach self-regulation, including techniques such as breathing exercises, meditation, and physical exercise.

Important to the TBRI model are six specific engagement strategies. When people have difficulty trusting, it is not enough to simply tell them what is true As the TBRI handbook states, "… nonverbal channels of communication are critical when interacting with these vulnerable youth, since the nonverbal channels are processed directly by the primitive 'downstairs brain.' It is our nonverbal behavior that engages the amygdala: A child's brain needs a functioning cortex – the 'upstairs brain' – in order to process words and language."[174] Employing tools that TBRI provides can enable those who are trying to build trust with vulnerable individuals to convey that they are safe, healthy, and worthy of trust. These engagement strategies include authoritative

[172] Troy McPeak, TBRI Practitioner Training, June 2023.

[173] McPeak, TBRI Training, June 2023.

[174] TBRI Staff. *Trust-Based Relational Intervention Handbook* (Texas Christian University, 2021), 90.

voice, healthy touch, behavioral matching, mindful awareness, repair, and playful interaction.[175] We encounter some of these different modes of communication in Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman.

First, Jesus uses the disarming technique of *playful engagement* to help him begin to build the woman's trust. Indeed, playful engagement and laughter can be one of the most effective tools for healing, whether it is healing from a dysregulated state in the moment, or healing from a lifelong betrayal of trust.

Second, Christ uses an *authoritative voice* while also adopting a posture that could be seen as one of playful engagement, knowing he did not have a bucket to draw water he asks her for a drink. An authoritative voice does not denote power and control, but rather the tone, volume, and cadence that the person attempting to gain trust and connection uses. An example of this would be when an individual who has experienced trauma begins to lash out violently at those around her. It would then be appropriate to use an authoritative voice to gain the attention of the person who could potentially be a threat to those around her. It is a blend of structure and nurture, neither weak nor harsh.[176] Remaining calm is a key principle of TBRI, so an authoritative voice should not result in a person's dysregulation. Just as Jesus is not seen getting frustrated at the Samaritan woman when she does not understand his words, Christians would also do well to keep their calm when attempting to build trust with marginalized individuals.

Third, *healthy touch* is another engagement strategy that can be deployed while firmly recognizing the importance of appropriate boundaries. TBRI research reminds readers that

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[175] *TBRI Handbook,* 90-91.

[176] *TBRI Handbook,* 90.

"adolescents in the USA are generally touch-deprived, and the lack of healthy touch in their lives is associated with aggression and depression. Touch can be tricky with children and youth who have experienced relational trauma, but they need it."[177] This does not mean that every person who has experienced a betrayal of trust needs a hug. It could, however, mean that a gentle touch on the shoulder could be perceived as a healthy one. Individuals must discern if healthy touch would be beneficial or harmful in each situation, erring on the side of safety.

Fourth, *behavioral matching* (simple matching practices), such as getting down to eye level with a child, interacting face-to-face, or reflecting a child's action or emotional states, can be powerful mechanisms for mindful engagement.[178] Jesus could be viewed as modeling this as he was sitting by the well when the Samaritan woman showed up. Drawing water from a well entailed a downward movement of the body and bucket to obtain the water. The fact that Jesus is sitting would similarly match the woman's position as she drew the water. It would have been acceptable for Jesus to stand up or even stand over the woman while he spoke, but he chose a similar posture to one drawing water.

Fifth, entering a posture of *mindful awareness* when attempting to gain the trust of someone who is untrusting is crucial for those trying to love well and establish trust. "Mindful awareness is a particular state of mind that reflects a certain openness to experience in general and the current situation in particular."[179] Readers of John 4 can see Jesus assume this posture as he interacts with a woman who would have, no doubt, been weary of people. Jesus, presumably

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[177] *TBRI Handbook,* 91.

[178] *TBRI Handbook,* 91.

[179] *TBRI Handbook,* 99.

on account of his divine nature, knew the woman and her past and therefore knew how best to interact with her. Although Jesus does not condemn the woman with his knowledge of her past, he opens the door to trust and connection by allowing the woman to know that her secrets are not a deterrent for him in wanting to continue the conversation with her. The way to healing for each individual depends on the person and what he/she has encountered that resulted in their betrayal of trust. Being mindful and aware allows for a moment of discernment that can provide the correct answers for the person in need. In drawing on the work of Daniel Siegel, TBRI defines awareness as how individuals react to others, being nonjudgmental and observant when interacting with someone with relational trauma.[180] Each person is unique, and their reaction to eye contact, healthy touch, and playful engagement will be different. It is essential to recognize that what works for one relationship may not work for the next. Moving forward with compassion is one of the greatest gifts we can give someone who has experienced relational trauma. If a person is not connected and empowered, they will not be able to be corrected.[181] Mindfulness leads to compassion for the individual situation. The more mindful those seeking to gain trust and establish a relationship are, the easier it will be to identify what works and what does not. Jesus is mindful of the Samaritan woman's situation when offers her the gift of living water.

Sixth, *repair* is a crucial component of the TBRI model. There is no perfect person, and everyone falls short, even when our intentions are in our best interest. It is essential to remember that sometimes you get it wrong and fall short. That does not mean failure, but rather an

[180] *TBRI Handbook,* 99.

[181] McPeak, TBRI Training, 107.

opportunity to adjust and find what works to build trust. When trust is unintentionally betrayed, the work of repairing the harm that has been done is critical. Judith Herman also notes the importance of repair: "When the community rallies to the victim's support, vengeful feelings are transformed into shared righteous indignation, which can be a powerful source of energy for repair."[182] Where Herman is specifically speaking to repair a betrayal of trust, her words resonate with those who may have deployed a tactic of TBRI that fell short of connecting with someone. Jones said, "The greatest gift you can give your people is a voice."[183] This takes us back to the four skills of healthy attachment, specifically negotiating needs. Those seeking a relationship with the broken must remember that the individual voices of the trauma survivors are tremendously important. If no one soothes or comforts, people will learn how to do it themselves. We cannot ask people to stop using the survival tools they have if we do not give them anything else. It is on us to find a way to meet the need. It is on us to figure out the dance.[184] The example of dance is a helpful tool for individuals to find their way to healing. Those who are attempting to gain the trust of another must learn to listen to the music and learn the required dance. Just as different types of music require different dances, so too is the dance of gaining trust. God, however, does not get this equation wrong. Jesus knew the required "dance" for the woman at the well because he knew her. In learning about those we are seeking to help, we learn what tactics to deploy to develop their trust.

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[182] Herman, *Truth and Repair,* 47.

[183] Jones, TBRI Training, June 2023.

[184] Jones, TBRI Training, June 2023.

Organizing cultural resilience is important within the TBRI model. People cannot regulate if they themselves are not regulated.[185] This is a nod to the call mentioned earlier to remain calm in all situations. Why do people build walls? People build walls so other people will climb over them."[186] Within this question and answer, we uncover a path to a person's heart. For the individual who isolates due to fear, they build a "wall" around their heart to prevent them from being hurt again. To scale this wall is not a matter of hostility or to be equated with military action, but rather an act of love that leads from a place of isolation to a place of trust. Whether individuals feel that they want connection or not, many would give anything for someone to seek them out where they are in order to walk with them through their difficult season. The TBRI training that I attended was geared towards children in juvenile facilities. Although the training itself was geared towards gaining the trust of adolescents, TBRI is not a model for children alone. When working with a family, it is just as crucial to "TBRI" the parents as the children; when working in an organization, it is just as important to "TBRI" the staff as it is the children or youth whom the organization serves."[187] The model of TBRI provides additional tools to the toolbelt of those who wish to serve the least of these. The tool of obtaining trust is the desired result of a beautiful connection with someone whose trust has been betrayed.

Other people do not get to decide for others. Individuals decide if they feel safe or not.[188] Connection begs the question: Do you have a real relationship with the people that you serve? If the answer is "no," then reevaluation of the tools that have previously been implemented will be

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[185] Amanda Purvis, TBRI Practitioners Training, June 2023.

[186] Purvis, TBRI Training, June 2023.

[187] *TBRI Handbook,* 148.

[188] Purvis, TBRI Training, June 2023.

required. To put it simply, if the dance moves that were employed were incorrect, a new dance must be learned. We need to pass self-regulation on in order to say we are trauma informed.[189] TBRI is a model that emphasizes the importance of trust in establishing a healthy relationship. It is through the components mentioned in this section that orient those who have a desire to help others can make a difference in the lives of those whose trust is broken. The remarkable result is that both parties benefit and are blessed by the hard work of earning trust. It is a task that makes a tangible difference in the world, not just for those who are wounded.

Understanding and Compassion

One of the most significant barriers to gaining someone's trust is often a disconnect between the person who has experienced a betrayal of trust and the one who is deemed "normal" by society's standards. I have personally seen this get in the way of many individuals who do not understand why they continue to be met with resistance by trauma-weary individuals. Thompson, in reflecting on this topic, writes, "Do you ever feel as if it's too late for change? God is always at work. If you worry that you messed up your children years ago and now all you can do is pray for them, I want to assure you there is hope. But his hope comes from you making sense of *your* story first, not your child's."[190] Readers of Scripture see this truth that God continues to be at work in the world that God created, and it is God who is at work within each person to work for the goodness God desires for creation (Phil 2:13). Readers see God at work in the desert with Hagar in the same way readers see Jesus at work with the Samaritan Woman. In the year 2025, Christians would do well to remember that God is still at work in the world.

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[189] Purvis, TBRI Training, June 2023.

[190] Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul,* 156.

> [A]nything we move with intention to do is freighted with the potential to create even as God has intended for us to do as a direct function of being made in his image. And all of it is done to some degree by bringing order out of chaos. The work before us is to strengthen our awareness of the reality that this is what we are at all times on the precipice of doing. We are called to be like our trinitarian God and create beauty as he has and so become more fully formed into the image of Jesus.[191]

God is the one who calls creation "very good." Yet, we are also called to be the hands and feet of Christ, to be people who, too, bring order out of chaos (John 13:34). It is an important task to ask where the Spirit is leading us in care for others. It is an essential reminder that the greatest commandments of Christ also include loving ourselves as we do God and our neighbors (Matt 22:36-40). In reflecting on the ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:1-11), theologian Rowan Williams writes, "It is, first of all, good news about humanity itself – the humanity that we all know to be stained, wounded, imprisoned in various ways. This humanity – yours and mine – is still capable of being embraced by God, shot through with God's glory, received and welcomed in the burning heart of reality itself."[192] God is in the business of moving all people back to the full embrace of God. This is good news not only for the marginalized but also for all of creation. It is crucial to remember this when building trust with others. It counters the notion that trust and love are only things for the hurting to attain. Everyone is continually called back to the love of God. We get the gift of doing it together rather than individually.

One of the first steps in being a compassionate and trusting person is to listen attentively to others. We see Jesus doing this when the woman at the well speaks. Jesus' responses to her are proof that Jesus heard what the woman had to say. Herman writes, "The first step is simply to ask

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[191] Thompson, *The Soul of Desire,* 62.

[192] Rowan Williams, *Being Human: Bodies, Minds, Persons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 106.

survivors what would make things right–or as right as possible–for them. This sounds like such a reasonable thing to do, but in practice, it is hardly ever done. Listening, therefore, turns out to be a radical act."[193] This is both the individual's task and the community's task. Herman writes, "People cannot feel safe alone, and they cannot mourn and make meaning alone. If trauma is truly a social problem, and indeed it is, then recovery cannot be simply a private, individual matter."[194] It is not only laughter and joy that result from community, but also recovery and trust. TBRI is in the business of recovery and one way to meet the need of an abused person is to match, when appropriate, their behavior which would mean the topics they are passionate about.

> [Survivors] want their communities to recognize and respect their suffering and to acknowledge the seriousness of the harm they have endured. As individuals they want the people who form their moral communities to hear them, to believe them, to recognize that they have been hurt, and to offer help and support. As a group, they want the larger public to recognize that survivors are everywhere and that sexual violence is a major public health problem. Not simply a private misfortune.[195]

Understanding what a person feels (as much as we can without directly experiencing it) and meeting that with compassion is a crucial step in building trust. It is a way to counter the unfortunate reality of isolation that many people face.

In reflecting on those that make up a jury in a court of law, Herman writes, "Trust is rebuilt only when victims see that those in a position of authority have listened to them and share in their righteous indignation. So often, that is the main thing they seek."[196] In this example,

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[193] Herman, *Truth and Repair,* 4.

[194] Herman, *Truth and Repair,* 2-3.

[195] Herman, *Truth and Repair,* 81-82.

[196] Herman, *Truth and Repair,* 52-52.

Herman orients her readers to the vital task of listening and empathizing. This does not mean that one must accept everything that a person states to be true, but being empathetic to one's feelings has the power to build trust and understanding. In the healing journey, Herman points out a fruitful conversation she had with a survivor where the survivor admitted, "I would want them [abusers] to hear my words: 'I am a living, breathing human being. I'm not just a body.'"[197] So often do people land in a posture of untrust because they have been made to believe that their personhood has been stripped from them at the hands of an abuser. Trust begins to reform when victims feel they have been heard well.

Similarly, Henry Cloud writes, "For you to trust that someone will do what you need in a relationship, you have to feel they really make an effort to listen and understand your needs. You need to feel that they know what it feels like to be you in whatever you are doing."[198] Cloud defines connection and trust as when a person can trust someone when they feel their needs are cared about, when their motive is for another and not just themselves, when they guard what others have entrusted to them, and when their track record matches the promises they make to others.[199] Although it can be harmful to project oneself into the lives of the person whose trust we are trying to gain, empathizing and seeking to understand what it might feel like to be in their position can be a gift that leads to empathy and trust. Cloud writes, "The process of trust begins by listening and by understanding other people – what they want and what they're feeling – in short, knowing what matters to them."[200] We cannot know what a person feels they need if we do

[197] Herman, *Truth and Repair,* 79.

[198] Cloud, *Trust,* 31.

[199] Cloud, *Trust,* 36-38.

[200] Cloud, *Trust,* 42.

not allow them space to voice their needs. Silence, again, is one of the best gifts people can give, as it creates space for understanding and trust. "When the motive is to benefit others and not just ourselves," Cloud writes, "everyone profits."[201] It is important to remember that everyone benefits when reciprocal trust is present. Reciprocal trust is when it extends beyond "us" to "them" as well.

It should go without saying, but kindness is a crucial pillar in building trust. In the story of Christ and the Samaritan woman, just as Christ was kind in interacting with a woman whom many deemed unworthy of friendship, we too are called to be people of kindness. Many people attempt to do good, but a lack of kindness and empathy can be significant barriers to building relationships with those who have had their trust betrayed. Cloud says, "[S]ome of the least kind individuals are people of rigid rules and moralistic, judgmental 'integrity.' But without the demonstration of kindness, trust does not ensue."[202] More often than not, individuals who struggle the most with a population like the one that Arms of Hope serves are those who are held to rigid rules that are believed should be universally followed. These rules include everything from abstaining from drugs and alcohol to sexual intimacy outside of marriage. It has been my experience that those with firm convictions in these matters typically lack kindness when ministering to those currently engaged in such behaviors. When correction and ministry do not include kindness and love, trust will not likely be a part of the end result. Jesus embodies kindness and love in his interaction with the Samaritan woman.

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[201] Cloud, *Trust,* 68.

[202] Cloud, *Trust,* 89.

In cadence with the other authors reflected in this chapter, Herman writes, "No one can face trauma alone."[203] When people are in their own valley of the shadow of death, they are usually in need of others who will help them climb up the steep sides. In the cases of Hagar and the Samaritan woman, God does not allow them to suffer along indefinitely. Christians too are called to walk alongside those who have had their trust abused and are living in isolation.

In writing about Christian friendship, Sarah Travis reminds her readers that "the body of Christ is invited to bear one another's burdens, and becoming a body that witnesses to trauma is an important aspect of this burden-bearing. Compassionate witnessing involves human connection and an awareness on the part of the witness about how they themselves are reacting and responding to the event."[204] Travis resonates with the words of so many who tell us of the importance of journeying together as the body of Christ. Benner writes, "Presence to another person is sharing this gift of my true self-in-Christ. It is not playing a 'spiritual friend' role. It is simply being fully my authentic self and then setting this self aside as I seek to create a place within myself where I can receive another person."[205] For Benner, being a person who recognizes that it is through Christ that healing comes can be the truest form of friendship, one that involves receiving someone in trust and love. Swinton beautifully ends his book on the mental health challenges of today and the church by writing, "There is a tremendous power and

[203] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery,* 153.

[204] Travis, *Unspeakable,* 75.

[205] Benner, *Sacred Companions,* 51.

beauty in the suggestion that the church is called to be a specialist in human kindness. Small acts of kindness, tenderness, and thoughtfulness bring healing. It's really not that complicated!"[206]

Many authors have taken up the call to write, preach, and teach about the importance of trust in each person's life. Specifically, they all write to the call that the Christian community receives to be a light in the world (Matt 5:14). Christian psychologists, psychiatrists, theologians, counselors, and many others have seen the need that is evident within folks who do not trust based on the trauma they have experienced. The way of healing highlighted in this chapter is merely a small part of the journey to achieve community and trust. Trust is necessary for traumatized people to heal. Through empathy, compassion, patience, understanding, and love, people can begin to make a difference in the lives of those whose trust is nonexistent. It is important work that everyone who calls on the name of Jesus is called to do.

[206] Swinton, *Finding Jesus in the Storm,* 215.

Conclusion – A Call to Holy Friendship

In 2015, my family and I moved to Durham, NC, so that I could begin my journey at Duke Divinity School. I had been accepted to pursue a Master of Divinity and was excited about my studies and the first-hand ministry experience I would receive throughout my time there. When I filled out my application for my first field education experience for the summer of 2016, I had hopes of working with the veteran community in some capacity, as I was a combat veteran myself. As luck would have it, I would not be working with the veteran community but with another marginalized population in Durham. I was selected to be a ministry intern at Reality Ministries, a nonprofit organization in Durham. Reality Ministries is an organization that fosters friendships amongst people of all abilities, which are marked by mutuality, authenticity, and the reality of Christ's love for all.[207]

My time at Reality Ministries taught me the importance of authentic love and trust, which have the power to reach the margins of our world. Much of Reality Ministries' population had been marginalized due to the mental and physical health challenges that they possessed. Reality Ministries is a place where individuals can gather and be reminded of their value in the world, understanding that each person is created in God's image and has something positive to contribute to the world. My summer experience at Reality Ministries was that of joy and community. I was accepted immediately and received the same beautiful message that each participant received. It was a wonderful summer that changed my perception of many stereotypes I thought I knew and taught me that there is trust in the community that welcomes the outsider. Reality Ministries holds within its mission a wonderful example that the Church and Christian

[207] Reality Ministries, Inc., available at: https://realityministriesinc.org

community would do well to model. Although Reality Ministries is not immune from difficult days, the way community and trust are embedded in its identity is worth noting.

I recall this story as a prime example of why Christian individuals and communities should care about the importance of trust within marginalized communities. Before my time at Reality Ministries, I had many trusting relationships. These included my wife, Shana; my parents; a brother; friends; my platoon during my military service; and various Christian communities formed through different churches. Even when I thought I knew all there was to know about trust, I learned something new through the gift of a field education placement. For me, it was a good reminder of the beauty that can come from being stretched and challenged. It is a good reminder that there are isolated individuals throughout our communities who lack the support of a place like Reality Ministries and yearn for trust and communities that will journey with them in their time of need. We must be a people who understand the importance of cultivating trust, and ultimately to cultivate holy friendships.

In my first semester in Duke's Doctor of Ministry program, I was required to read an article titled "On Holy Friendships" by L. Gregory Jones, former dean of Duke Divinity School. This article led me to find Victoria White's book, *Holy Friendships.* White states that "Holy friendships are mutual and sacred relationships deeply formed in God's love. Mutuality comes from acknowledging the feeling of belonging that bonds holy friends together."[208] Holy friends go beyond what a normal friendship or acquaintance provides. Within holy friendship, one finds accountability, sustainment, and encouragement. It is a mutual relationship that benefits both parties. White elaborates on the differences between regular friendships and holy friendships, "A

[208] Victoria Atkinson White, *Holy Friendships: Nurturing Relationships that Sustain Pastors and Leaders* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2023), xvi.

holy friendship is different from an ordinary friendship because it is held in God's love and part of God's bigger, ongoing story in the world."[209] I would argue that while most people have friendships of some sort, there is a deep need within the Christian community for holy friendships. Those who have had their trust betrayed require holy friendships. "Holy friends mutually affirm, challenge, and encourage each other because they know their friendship is not just about them; it is about how God is working through them and loving God's creation."[210] This is not to be confused with a friendship that is too afraid to step on toes and only agrees with everything. Holy friendship is rooted in affirmation and encouragement, but also challenges when we miss the mark. White beautifully writes, "Holy friends see us in our pain, stick beside us, and guide us into a new life where we record new mantras, reframe old memories, and tell stories of resilience and hope. Ultimately, holy friends are our story editors."[211]

In the stories of Hagar and the Samaritan woman at the well, readers do not have the luxury of knowing what their future relationships looked like or if holy friendship was ever achieved. I find White and Jones' words on holy friendship to be extremely important, however, when attempting to gain the trust of marginalized people. Having the goal of holy friendship in mind creates a potential model that allows everyone involved to be blessed by the gift of trusting relationships. Holy friendship is a gift that requires a lot of time and effort that can move those in relationships into a position where isolation has a difficult time infiltrating.

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[209] White, *Holy Friendships,* 17.

[210] White, *Holy Friendships,* 23.

[211] White, *Holy Friendships,* 45.

I am who I am because of the holy friendships I have had throughout my life, as well as the ones I currently have. As we have seen, there is a gift in walking beside the broken people within our various communities. These are gifts that benefit both parties of the relationship. Holy friendship is the ultimate goal of trust. Through the journey of building trust, which takes as much time as required, we begin to see glimpses of joy, peace, and happiness. This is the way of Arms of Hope and the wonderful people that we serve. Our campuses are made up of individuals who have been abused, neglected, and forgotten, and yet they continue to search for the gift of trust. At Arms of Hope, we have the privilege of walking alongside amazing people to show them a better way than they have experienced up to that point. This is not an opportunity to claim that we always get it right (we do not), but we are in a position to answer the deep call within Scripture to care for those who have very little, including trust.

It is imperative for those who desire to build trust to understand the grammar of trauma and understand that trauma, at its core, is a betrayal of trust. To understand what betrayal of trust entails, one can begin to comprehend what remains after a person's trust is betrayed by someone who should have loved them well. Understanding the sequelae of trauma means understanding why individuals who have had their trust betrayed flee to substance/alcohol abuse, shame, disassociation, hyperarousal, and the vicious cycle of toxic relationships.

Scripture is not silent on the topic of trust. As we have seen, Hagar and the Samaritan woman have something to teach readers of Scripture. Through the window of Hagar’s story, readers can see neglect and abuse of power that are all to common even today. It is through Hagar’s story that one can see the devastating effects of trust betrayed, as well as the hope and trust that those who suffer can have in the God who sees them. The Samaritan woman in John’s Gospel offers readers a glimpse of what life without trust might have looked like in the first

century. Several similarities were noted between the woman at the well and marginalized single mothers of today. Where the story of the Samaritan woman can evoke emotional responses of sadness and pity, the point is that this marginalized woman trusted Christ at the well. Through her testimony, others also came to believe the good news. This is a powerful reminder that God works through many and that even though a person may be untrusting, they can do amazing things in the name of Jesus.

The way of healing is as simple or complex as people would like to make it. Trust is not only important in an individual's life; it is necessary for flourishing. There is a requirement for all those who seek to develop authentic trust with marginalized individuals to spend time reflecting on their understanding of trust and the ways it has been broken and sustained throughout their lives. This leads to the path of empathy, which is imperative when working with people who have had their trust betrayed. Through the patient and repetitive process of building trust, connection, felt safety, community, and (eventually) holy friendship emerges. Using tools like Trust-Based Relational Intervention can assist individuals in not only understanding why trust is broken but also provide them with tangible tools to help rebuild trust with those who have been hurt. The healing process can be a long road, but it is essential if we hope to make a difference in the life of someone living in isolation and shame.

I am reminded of a colleague from my Doctor of Ministry cohort. I look up to him due to his attentiveness to his spouse, children, and community. One day before class, I asked him for advice on what he would recommend for me (a father of two young children) going forward. He told me that he always asked his children two questions from an early age. The first is: What can make me love you more? The second is: What can make me love you less? The answer to these two questions is simple: nothing. This is the gift of holy friendship. This is the gift of trust. A

bond that is created where each person recognizes the belovedness of the other and does not fluctuate in the love that is present. What a beautiful gift to give one another! What a beautiful gift to give those who have experienced betrayal of trust! May we all continue to follow the wonderful path of love, for it is the path of love that leads to trusting relationships.

May God bless you with discomfort
At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships
So that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger
At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,
So that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with tears
To shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger and war,
So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and
To turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness
To believe that you can make a difference in the world,
So that you can do what others claim cannot be done
To bring justice, and kindness to all our children and the poor.[212]

[212] A Franciscan Benediction.

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