

Laying Hold of Healing After Extreme Trauma

Every military veteran knows the pride and satisfaction of serving their country. But they also realize that their duty time changed their lives forever. When they walked off the fighting grounds for the last time, unfortunately for most the war did not end. Mental and physical battles would rage for years, maybe even their entire lifetimes.

At the core of their military training was one undeniable truth—they may need to kill another human being. Since most people are raised believing that taking a life is beyond consideration, they now had to struggle with the difficult question: Is there a time to kill?

You may have been taught that the Ten Commandments say, “Thou shalt not kill,” but a more accurate translation would be “Thou shalt not commit murder.” There were times when God (as revealed in the Bible) actually required killing— not the taking of an innocent life, but the taking of the lives of incurable evil perpetrators.

One such time is when a “just war” must be fought. This includes a war waged for good and just purposes and not for self-gain, punishment for an evil deed perpetrated by a government, army, or civilian populace, and the restoration of peace.

But today it seems that there are no rules and anything goes: the killing of innocents; the sexual assault of captives; the kidnapping of children; the targeting of certain religious groups to behead, burn, or emaciate them, simply because of their chosen form of worship—or for no reason at all except the perpetuation of terror. These incurable perpetrators of evil must themselves be killed, according to the Bible!

Regardless of the justifications for killing cited here, those who must do the actual killing (in this case, our brave soldiers) are damaged in the process... psychologically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. Many of our soldiers return home already maimed and dismembered, without arms or legs; some without their hearing; some without their eyesight; and some even without properly functioning internal organs. Then there are those with traumatic brain injury (TBI). Some never return home because they gave the ultimate sacrifice: their lives. Of those who do return home, most are mentally and emotionally tortured and marred, broken and blemished, traumatized, stressed, and confused.

But after a soldier has laid down his weapons and the killing has stopped, he enters the next vital phase in his life—healing. The Bible states it simply: To every thing there is a season.... A time to kill and a time to heal. (Ecclesiastes 3:1–3).

A veteran is not simply a person who has served in the Armed Forces, or an older soldier who has seen long years of service. A veteran is a person who has been to hell and back. The horrific scenes, the spine-chilling sounds, the rancid smells, the devastating explosions, and the countless sights of maimed or lifeless bodies are seared into their minds. The physical and mental trauma they absorbed is unimaginable to anyone who has not engaged in combat.

The Department of Veteran Affairs reports that an average of twenty-two veterans commit suicide each day. Every veteran deals with PostTraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to some extent because of the brutality of witnessing or participating in killing.

Veterans also deal with two types of guilt: real or imagined (pseudo-guilt). Even if a soldier has engaged in justified killing, processing those actions creates feelings of violating the very principles and beliefs they have strongly

held since childhood, a feeling of personal disapproval. Even though the veteran did not commit any moral, theological, ethical, or legal acts, the internalized belief that they did something 'bad' or 'wrong' persists.

The elimination of those guilt feelings is the major foundation of a soldier's healing. Medical and mental health professionals can try to treat the veteran with therapies, drugs, or other methods, but ultimately these only mask the real issues.

However, there is one source of healing from all of the guilt, self-shame, and trauma you keep deep inside yourself. God specializes in healing minds, bodies, and guilt. He can relate to what you are going through. He watched as His only Son was viciously victimized by an unjust killing.

How did He respond? He offered forgiveness, compassion, and healing to those who mutilated Jesus without cause, and they are still offered to everyone. If God could do that for men who unjustly murdered His Son, He can comfort and heal veterans who took a life for a just and godly cause.

God is also the only one who can forgive you of the real guilt you experience because your conscience is making you aware of all the times you have sinned against Him. If you ask Him to forgive you, He will, and then the total healing process will begin. And once He has forgiven you, please forgive yourself. Don't continue to be your own enemy. Go forward confidently knowing that you are starting a new life and your past can no longer control you.

Understand that there are going to be times when memories, flashbacks, doubts, and old feelings of guilt will try to fight back against you since you have gone from a literal battlefield to a spiritual battlefield. Stand your ground! Don't give up! God's Army is never defeated, and He is on your side and fighting for you.

Keep moving forward. Recognize the reality of the past and don't live in denial. Bad stuff did happen, and yes, you may have been in on it. But now replace those old thoughts with renewed thoughts, the memory of your forgiveness and cleansing, and the reestablishment of your life. Soldier, what you did in the past is only part of the story. The rest of the story is that you have now been forgiven, cleansed, and restored to a right mind, a new and right way of thinking.

However, there are more mighty men who have fallen. They are the living, not the dead. They are not just the wounded in the body, the dismembered, and the physically brain-damaged by concussion. They are the veterans who had to kill, but who haven't healed. They are the men and women you know who have returned from the battlefields and suffer just as you have suffered, but they don't know what you have learned.

They are still lost, empty, disillusioned, frightened, lonely, disenfranchised, misunderstood, and without relief from the pains of war. Alcohol and drugs can only mask some of the symptoms. There is no chemical solution for moral and spiritual damage. They need you, soldier. You must become a warrior to the rescue. Leading others down the path you have discovered is now your mission.

Be proud of your service to our country. You made an enormous sacrifice to preserve freedom for all Americans and you stood strong against an enemy that wanted to destroy everything we hold dear. Every 'Thank you' and 'God bless you' that people speak to you are not simply empty platitudes, but heartfelt expressions of appreciation. Most people will never understand the physical and mental hell you had to endure, but they know that every action you took on the battlefield helped preserve our cherished homeland. {eoa}

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