

**SESSION 2a: What is a wound of the heart?**

**Objectives:**

- 1) Explain how trauma is a “heart wound” and identify how it make people behave
- 2) Show that God accepts our honest emotions
- 3) Learn to manage strong feelings through a breathing exercise
- 4) Care for heart wounds by talking and listening

Lesson usually begins with a STORY about a painful situation – asking the group what has been lost in the story? What are some things that people you know have lost?

Some experiences in life are very painful – causing deep suffering that lasts a long time. This is called “TRAUMA.” Deep wounds of the heart and mind take a long time to heal and affects every part of our lives – body, mind, relationships (with others, with God, and with self). The “wounds of the heart” can lead someone to feel and behave like a different person all together.

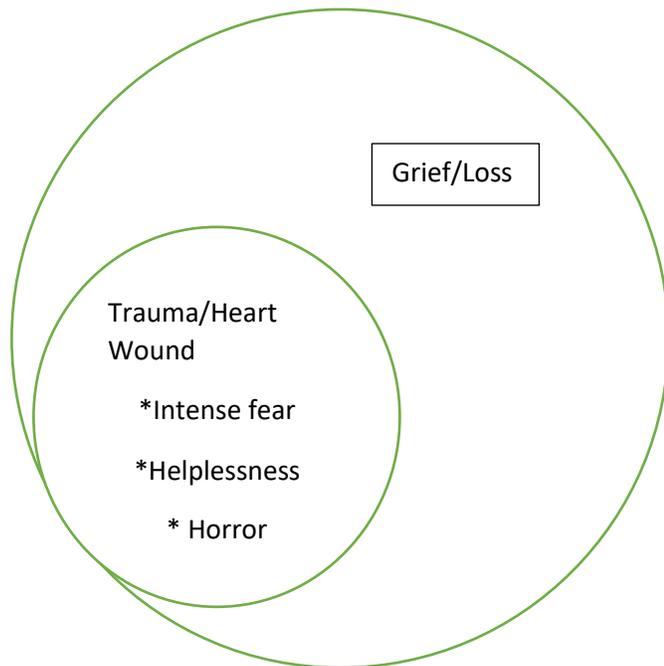
Trauma can be a single event, a prolonged event, or repeated events, overwhelming us – leading to fear, helplessness, or horror. We lose control and are unable to stop its effects. Trauma = Heart Wound is often visualized within the circle of Grief/Loss. Ask the group (or yourselves): What types of events can cause trauma?

Our hearts can be wounded, or traumatized, by hearing details of someone else’s experience – secondary trauma. Not all emotional pain is trauma, and not all problem behaviors are the result of trauma.

**A Heart Wound is like a Physical Wound: Think of a deep cut on your arm vs. a Heart Wound. How do they compare?**

**PHYSICAL WOUND      HEART WOUND**

Visible	Invisible but seen in behavior
Painful and needs care	Same
If ignored, often gets worse	Same
Must be cleaned to remove dirt or foreign bodies	Pain has to be expressed and any sin confessed
If wound heals on the surface with infection inside, can become sicker	If pretend healed, often causes great problems
Only God brings healing, but uses people & medicines	Same
If not treated, attracts flies	Same – attracts bad things
It takes time to heal	Same
Healed but leaves a scar	Same. Not the same after healed



## How do people with wounded hearts behave? (3 main categories common)

Do we know people who behave in these ways? Have we felt like this?

- Relive the traumatic experience (think about and retell repeatedly; flashbacks; nightmares)
- Avoid reminders of trauma (avoid people, places; going numb; not remembering; using drugs/alcohol, work, food, etc to avoid feelings)
- Being on the alert all the time (jumpy, anxious, overreacting with violence or anger; insomnia; panic attacks; headaches; stomachaches; dizziness/palpitations)

Some situations are more difficult than others – for example:

- Something that causes shame, a sense that we are deeply flawed
- Something that forces us to act in ways that go against our beliefs, especially if it harms someone else in the process (moral injury)
- Something very personal – family death or betrayal by close friend
- Something that goes on for a long time
- Something that happens repeatedly over a period of time
- Something that causes an unexpected death
- Something that someone has done intentionally to cause us pain (different from accidental)

PEOPLE REACT TO PAINFUL EVENTS DIFFERENTLY. Two people may go through the same event, but one may have a severe reaction while the other is not affected much at all. A person is likely to react more severely if he or she:

- Is usually a sad personality or highly sensitive
- Had many bad things happen in the past, especially as a child (abuse or parental death)
- Already had many problems before this happened
- Has a history of mental illness or emotional problems
- Did not have the support of family or friends during and after the event

## WHAT DOES YOUR CULTURE TEACH PEOPLE TO DO WITH THEIR EMOTIONS WHEN THEY ARE SUFFERING INSIDE?

Some Christians with troubles say that we should not think or talk about our feelings. They also say we should not go to others for help with our troubles – we should just forget the past and move on; or we should pray about it and read the Bible. They think that feeling pain in our hearts means we are doubting God's promises. THIS IS NOT TRUE!

**What does the Bible teach us about expressing our feelings?** (May break into small groups and read and discuss these verses – then come back together and highlight reactions.)

**Scripture:** Matthew 26:37-38 and 75; Psalm 55:4-6; 1 Samuel 1:10-16; John 11:33-35; Jonah 4:1-3

What is happening in these scriptures? How are people expressing their feelings?

Jesus had strong feelings and shared them with his disciples. Paul teaches us to share our problems with each other as a way of caring for each other (Gal. 6:2; Phil. 2:4) The OT is full of examples of people pouring out their hearts to God. God wants us to be honest and speak the truth from our hearts (Psalm 15:1-2).

**Optional exercises:** 1) Collect several containers of different sizes and shapes and connect an emotion or event to them. As one shares multiple stresses, wounds of the heart, he/she tries to hold more and more of the containers until there is "overload." What does this teach us about trying to carry all of our emotions without processing? 2) Bottles under water – hand over different empty water bottles as emotional burdens and try to hold them under water, until they pop up and can't hold them under any longer.

**How to handle strong emotions? Breathing exercise:** relaxing and slow breathes; thinking about being quiet in a special place; alone or with loved ones – even imagining Jesus telling you how much he loves you. Breathing in

and out slowly. When upset and stressed, deep breathings help to settle us when we experience strong emotions of any kind. Then think/tell one thing you want to remember from the lesson.

### **LESSON 2b: What can help our heart wounds heal?**

Tell another story of trauma – a School Bus Trip with loss within the family and a concerned church friend listening to someone carrying a heart wound.

What 3 questions asked? (What happened? How did you feel? What was the hardest part for you?) How did each of these questions help the friend?

One way we get pain out of our hearts is by talking about it. Telling another person about what happened is an important part of healing. As we share our pain with another person, little by little our reactions will become less and less intense. We may need to tell our story many times. But if we are not able to talk about our pain, and if there is no one to listen to us, these reactions may continue for months and years.

When we talk with someone who listens well, it can help us gain an honest understanding of what happened and how it has affected us; express our feelings about what happened; accept what happened; feel heard and know we are not alone; trust that God also wants to hear about our pain (Psalm 62:8).

**What is a good listener like?** (Often use skits to give examples of good and bad skills; can practice these skills in a training)

- Creates a safe space (share what are comfortable sharing without interruption; not judgmental or critical; patient; affirms feelings are normal and does not dismiss pain; confidential)
- Asks helpful questions (1. What happened?; 2. How did you feel?; 3. What was the hardest part for you?)
- Shows he/she is listening with appropriate body language, words of agreement, reflective listening; respects that it may take time and may need breaks (wounds and feelings are often expressed in layers, like an onion – need to peel them back slowly and carefully)

There are times when someone may need professional help beyond listening:

- If life or health at risk
- Unable to care for self or essential daily activities
- Losing touch with reality, hearing voices, etc

Another way we can express the pain in our hearts is by doing activities such as drawing, poetry, dance, and music. Each culture has different ways that people express themselves, leading to healing for our hearts. Art project – ask God to show you the pain in your heart; express creatively. What was the experience like? Did you realize anything new?

**Plan to share your creation with another person!**