

# El Paso pastor urges honesty to heal after trauma

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WACO—Pastor Ariel Martinez encouraged Texas Baptists to remain unwavering through “the trauma and drama” of a society still recovering from a pandemic by trusting God to help rebuild what was destroyed.

“God’s people are not called to live in defeat or survival mode,” Martinez, lead pastor of Del Sol Church in El Paso, told messengers and guests during Texas Baptists’ 2022 annual meeting in Waco.

He pointed to the example of Nehemiah, who mourned for what God’s people witnessed when they returned to their homeland after exile in Babylon.

“Nehemiah teaches us that it’s valuable to honor our grief as he mourned. I’ve had people say they feel bad for wrestling with doubt or having fear and anxiety, but those are real human emotions that God gave us,” Martinez said.

“God is not disappointed with you or mad at you. God understands the difficulties of life and is not ashamed to associate with those who are experiencing the traumas of life.”

Martinez recalled the trauma suffered in 2019 when a terrorist opened fire inside an El Paso Walmart, killing 23 and wounding another 23.

Then, when COVID-19 hit, the city experienced a high death count, with Martinez himself noting he “lost count of how many funerals I preached during that time.”

Martinez implored fellow Texas Baptists to turn to God for healing and

rebuilding in the wake of the traumatic past few years. He asked hypothetically how many were enduring life instead of enjoying life with God.

Quoting Psalm 137:1-4, Martinez said it would be understandable for God's people to want to hang up their harps and not have a reason to smile.

## **'You can't heal what you hide'**

But to be an unwavering people, rebuilding is necessary. To do that well involves handing those burdens to the Lord, who alone can handle them.

"Jesus looks at the struggles in our lives and says, 'Why don't you just bring it to me?' You can't heal what you hide. When we're honest about our emotions, we are respecting the image of God within us, respecting how God has formed us," Martinez said.

"We're being honest about what we feel inside, and that's worship. Worship is when we expose our hearts to God and are honest about how we feel."

Leaning into Jesus and allowing him to heal those wounds is essential to overcoming trauma.

"Trauma lies and says: 'It's always going to be like this. Everyone is going to hurt you.' But God tells the truth. The key to freedom and healing is honesty," Martinez said. "God is calling you to rebuild biblical faithfulness one brick at a time. It's worth the work."

## **Panel discusses revitalization**

The Nov. 14 afternoon worship time also featured a panel of pastors describing how they have benefited from [Pave](#), a new revitalization program through Texas Baptists' Center for Church Health.

Tim Williams, lead pastor at Gladewater Church in Mount Pleasant, said growth came to his church through celebrating every win. For example, he began making simple video recordings with his cell phone of new believers' testimonies the congregation could see when a person was baptized. The congregation has grown from nine members to 34 in a year.

For Canyon Creek Baptist Church in Temple, it was a new method of assimilating visitors into new members that has helped with community and growth.

"We had a lot of people visiting, and we felt we were doing everything to communicate but getting no response," said Pastor Josh Murray.

However, when the church began texting guests and inviting them to an assimilation event, "we got almost a 100 percent response," he said. "We had 36 go through our first [event] and join the church."

The panel also featured J. Carlos Garduño, associate pastor at First Baptist Church in Devine; Robert White, pastor of Freedom Church in Bedford; and Dustin Slaton of First Baptist Church in Round Rock.