

Stephen Reid: Slow down and let Scripture aid in healing

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Scripture can help trauma survivors experience healing, but readers must slow down and give the Holy Spirit space to work, a professor at Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary told a webinar audience.

"God has given us a self-revelation that helps us read our life not only in its celebratory times, but even in its traumatic events," said Stephen Reid, professor of Christian Scriptures at Truett Seminary.

Reid spoke on "The Role of Scripture in Healing Trauma" during a webinar sponsored by the Truett Church Network in partnership with Faith Fosters Texas.

Empathy, apathy and triggers

Reid honestly acknowledged the presence of "troublesome" passages in Scripture that have the potential to trigger painful memories for people who have experienced trauma.



Stephen Reid, professor of Christian Scriptures at Truett Theological Seminary, spoke on "The Role of Scripture in Healing Trauma" during a webinar sponsored by the Truett Church Network in partnership with Faith Fosters Texas. (Screen Capture

Image)

When faced with biblical passages that deal with violence and abuse, pastors and teachers should help Christians “navigate between three things—apathy, empathy and triggering,” he said.

Some Christians have read difficult passages of Scripture about warfare and abuse so many times—or seen so much violence in popular media—they become “inoculated” to the horror and slip into apathy, he said.

Others who may be less familiar with the Scriptures may be horrified by some details of stories that seasoned Christians tend to gloss over, he said. For example, he pointed to the Old Testament book of Judges, which he said is “just full of violence.”

“If Judges were a movie, it would be a Quentin Tarantino rated-R movie,” he said, noting it invites readers to react with some revulsion. “If you don’t get a sense of abhorrence in reading Judges, you’ve been watching too many bad movies.”

Individuals who have experienced trauma may be triggered by the same stories that have little impact on others, he noted.

Ministers and teachers can serve Christians well by helping them find the healthy middle ground of empathy—relating to suffering in Scripture at a human level without reliving personal trauma, he said.

Develop strategies for troublesome passages

When pastors and teachers recognize potential trauma triggers in Scripture, they can develop strategies for how to deal with troublesome passages in redemptive ways, Reid emphasized.

Begin with prayer, he suggested. Honestly acknowledge the potential for pain in the Scripture passage, and express openness for the Holy Spirit to perform a healing work.

“Slow down,” he said.

In a passage such as Psalm 13, which raises difficult questions that people who have been hurt may relate to, don’t rush through the disturbing questions in an anxious hurry to get to a rapid resolution, he urged.

Instead, he suggested, let the poetry of the psalm provide the rhythm that allows readers time to process the questions the psalmist asks.

“Let the poetry of the psalm really give space for the community to say, ‘Oh yeah, we’ve been there,’” Reid said.

Provide opportunity for readers of Scripture to be transformed—not just informed—by it, he urged.

“At the end of the day, it’s what God does in the human heart,” Reid said.

Be patient with individuals who have experienced abuse or other trauma, recognizing it often takes times for transformation and healing to occur, he emphasized.

“We need to give each other the grace of time as God has given us the grace of time,” he said.