

WHEN YOUR CONCILIATION CLIENT IS A TRAUMA SURVIVOR¹

by Tara Barthel

In this workshop, we will discuss five important things every Christian conciliator should know before they take on a client who is a trauma survivor. We will look at trauma in both of the contexts of individual mediations and organizational interventions (such as church conflict interventions).

1. HAVE AT LEAST A RUDIMENTARY UNDERSTANDING OF AND FAMILIARITY WITH TRAUMA

Trauma is an experience or life event that disturbs a person such that he or she experiences extreme emotional and physical reactions.

“Psychiatric problems are always spiritual problems and sometimes physical problems.” Ed Welch, *Blame it on the Brain*

- God created us as two substances: spiritual (inner man) and physical (outer man). We are not disembodied spirits. We are not the sum of our physical (chemical, hormonal, electrical) impulses.
- “ACES” (Adverse Childhood Experiences Study) – longitudinal data in a statistically significant data set

*“How deep is the mud? It depends on who you ask.
We all go through the same stuff differently.”*

“Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” 2 Corinthians 12:8-9

¹ This workshop and accompanying handouts are designed to provide a general introduction to Christian conciliation and various aspects of trauma with which Tara Barthel is familiar. They are not intended to provide pastoral, legal, or other professional advice. Tara Barthel is neither an expert on trauma nor a medical doctor. Attendees and readers are encouraged to seek the counsel and oversight of their local church leaders as well as any competent professionals (lawyers, counselors, medical professionals) relevant to their life situations.

2. LEARN TO RECOGNIZE TRAUMA REACTIONS

Most trauma survivors do not understand how deeply trauma has affected them.

- Fight. Flight. Freeze. Sometimes, traumatic memories are stored by our limbic systems in ways that “trigger” (“flood”) our bodies with cascading, overwhelming hormonal/physiological responses that "hijack" the trauma survivor's ability to react in that moment.

- Without a rudimentary ability to recognize a trauma reaction, and without prayerful preparation as to what a wise and loving response will look like when someone is having a trauma reaction, most Christians (and most people in general) inadvertently cause significant harm.

3. BE PREPARED TO RESPOND WISELY

What is the most loving and wise thing you should do to bring the greatest safety to your client in that (often extreme) crisis of a trauma reaction?

“We are surrounded by people who are not like us at all; their lives are nothing like ours. Their difficulties are things we have never encountered.”

“How do we provide a refuge for those who suffer?”

Tim Keller, Gospel in Life

- Safety. Life-threatening? Call 9-1-1. Go to the closest emergency room. GET. HELP. NOW.

- Hope. Listen carefully. Observe diligently. Use an economy of words—often something like: “You’re not crazy. This is real. You are not alone. There is help and hope.”

“Trauma compromises our ability to engage with others by replacing patterns of connection with patterns of protection.” Stephen Porges

“Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Galatians 6:2

4. LOVE WELL. BE CLEAR ABOUT YOUR ROLE

Trauma survival and growth in grace is a long, complex process. Do not overpromise what your role is going to be.

“Loving people well is the most inefficient thing you could ever do, but according to Jesus, it is the godliest thing you can ever do.” Tim Lane, CCEF

- Recovery from this trauma is a multi-layered, complex process. Christian conciliation is merely one aspect of a trauma survivor’s journey. Other helpers (church leaders, counselors, medical doctors, friends, family members) play different roles.

- Be realistic and concrete. Know your limits and communicate your limits. Don’t overpromise, but don’t be too quick to walk away from what might be for you an important, and extremely satisfying, ministry opportunity.

“I pray you heal from the things no one ever apologizes for.”

“Love one another deeply, constantly.” 1 Peter 4:8

5. GIVE HOPE - THIS SUFFERING IS TEMPORARY

“In prayer together, we love one another.”

Megan Hill, The Priority and Privilege of Prayer

- Pray. Pray. And then pray some more. And remember that the Christian never prays alone! (“Jesus, the guarantor of a better covenant ... is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make continual intercession for them.” Hebrews 7:22 & 25)

- Keep an eternal perspective.

*“You will feel better than this. Maybe not yet, but soon.
Just keep living until you are alive again.” T. Rubin*

“We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” Romans 5:1

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

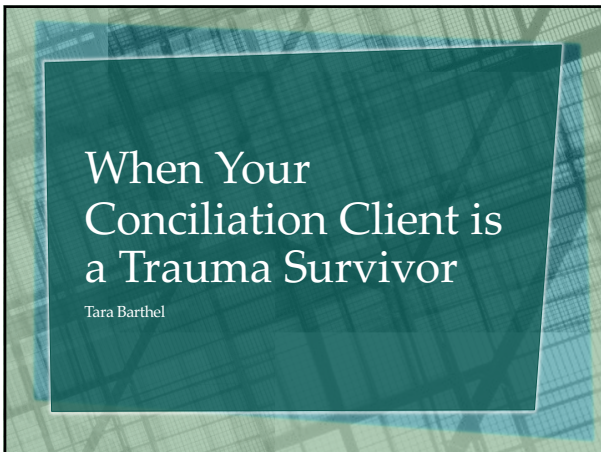
**** PLEASE NOTE:** I do not agree with all of content of all of these resources (especially because many of them are not from a Christian worldview, but also because even the resources by Christians sometimes disagree with each other), but I believe sincerely that they are worth your time and consideration.

- The ACES Study: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/>
- Tara Barthel, *Video Series “Living the Gospel in Relationships”* & Barthel and Edling, *Redeeming Church Conflicts* & Barthel and Dabler, *Peacemaking Women*
- CCEF Article: Helping Difficult People in Your Church: <https://www.ccef.org/resources/blog/helping-difficult-people-your-church>
- Don Carson, *Love in Hard Places*
- Heather Davediuk Gingrich, *Restoring the Shattered Self – A Guide to Complex Trauma*
- Gaius Davies, *Genius, Grief & Grace: A Doctor Looks at Suffering and Success – Case Studies on Martin Luther, John Bunyan, Amy Carmichael, CS Lewis, D. Martyn-Lloyd Jones*
- Rachael Denhollander, *What is a Girl Worth? My Story of Breaking the Silence ...*
- Ajith Fernando, *Reclaiming Love – Radical Relationships in a Complex World*
- Dave Furman, *Being There: How to Love Those Who Are Hurting*
- G.R.A.C.E.– Godly Response to Abuse in a Christian Environment: <http://www.netgrace.org/>
- Brad Hambrick, *Becoming a Church That Cares Well for the Abused*
- Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery – The Aftermath of Violence*
- Johnson & Fitzpatrick, *Counsel from the Cross*
- Robert Kellemen, *Sexual Abuse – Beauty for Ashes*
- Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores*
- Jeremy Lelek, *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder – Recovering Hope*
- Arielle Schwartz, *The Complex PTSD Workbook – a Mind-Body Approach to Regaining Emotional Control and Becoming Whole*
- Darby Strickland, *Is it Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims* (to be released by P&R in 2021)
- Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, & Body in the Healing of Trauma*
- Pete Walker, *Complex PTSD – From Surviving to Thriving*
- Ed Welch, *Blame it on the Brain and Shame Interrupted*

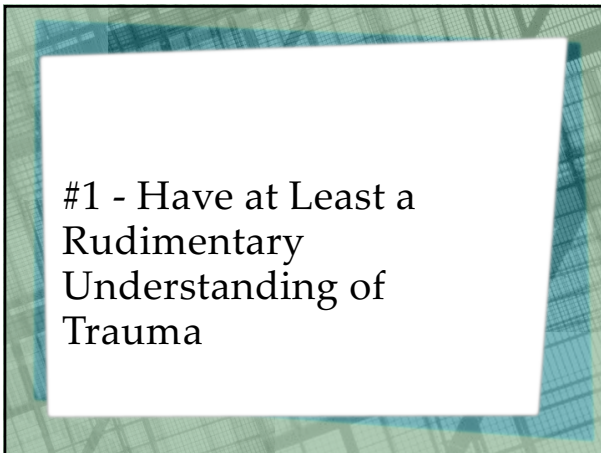
Thank you so very much for the privilege of serving you at this event!

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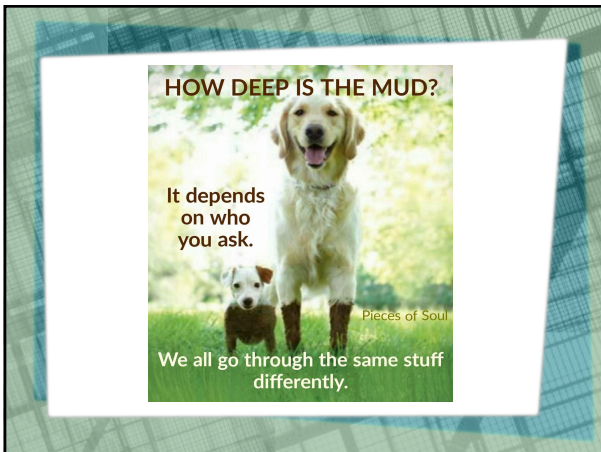
Tara Klana Barthel (www.tarabarthe.com) has served as a professional Christian mediator for over twenty years. She also maintains her license to practice law, teaches Rhetoric, and occasionally accepts speaking / writing invitations. Currently enrolled in Reformed Theological Seminary, Tara is the coauthor of the books *Peacemaking Women* and *Redeeming Church Conflicts*, and the creator of two video series: *Living the Gospel in Relationships* and the ASL-translated women’s video series, *Becoming Who You Already Are*. Tara also delights in serving her family as a homemaker, but even after 25+ years of marriage, she still can’t cook.



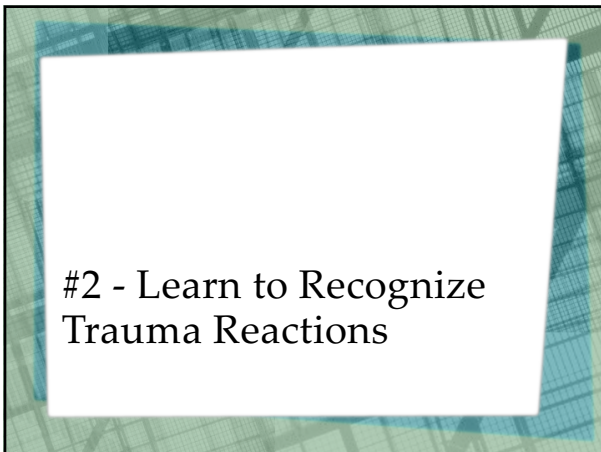
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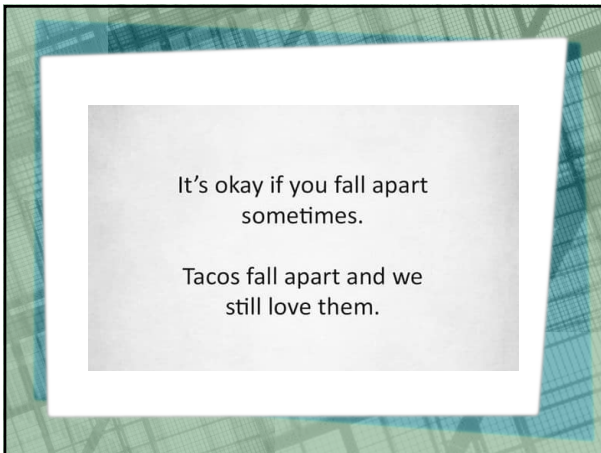
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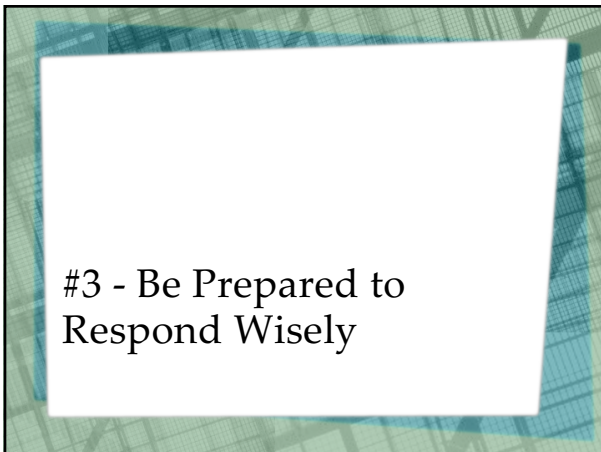
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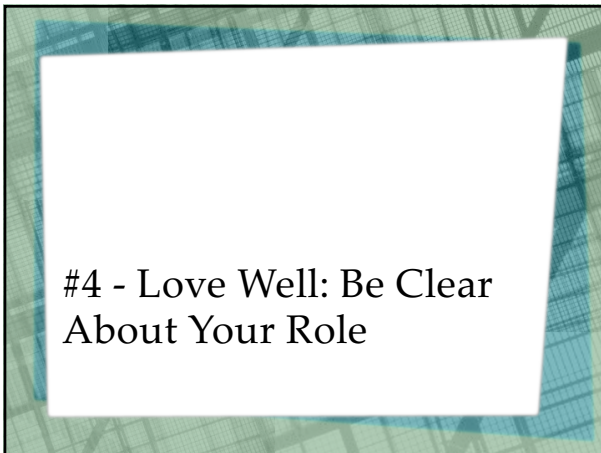
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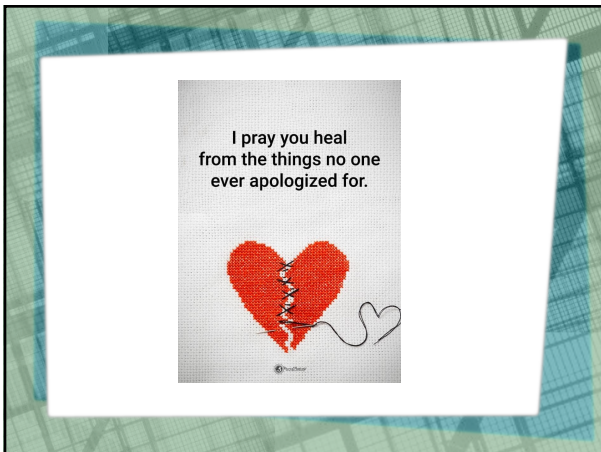
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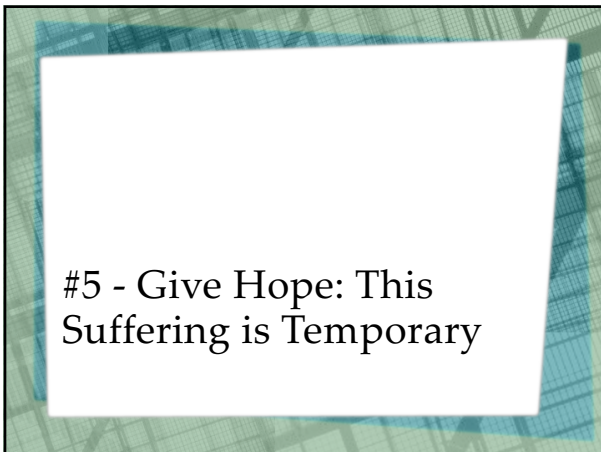
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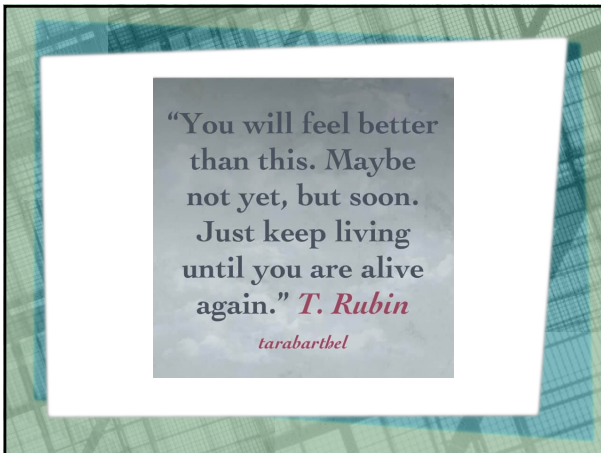
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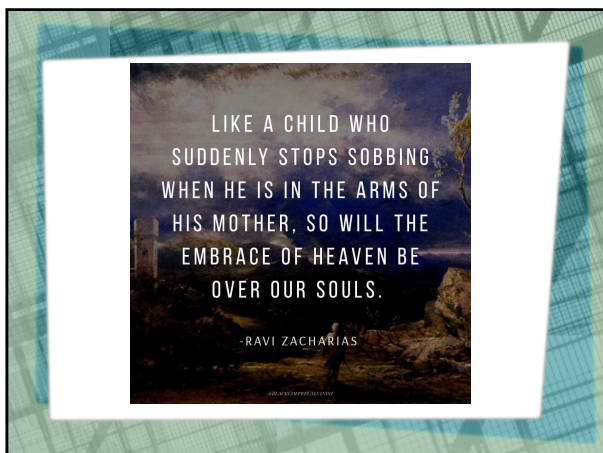
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