

Children’s Moment “Little and Big” - Healthy Living

Good morning, girls and boys. We’re starting a new topic today. We’re going to talk about how we can be healthy. In honor of Mr. Rogers, I’m calling these lessons “Little and Big.”¹

Do you know who Mr. Rogers was? When I was younger, Fred Rogers had a great TV program. It was all about his neighborhood. Mr. Rogers introduced us to a lot of people. He shared stories about good times in his life as well as bad times.

What starts out little can sometimes become big. We built a planter box with herbs, peppers and tomato plants [*backyard video*]. They started out small and got big. They all bear fruit, the small ones and the big ones. For example, the cherry tomatoes will be the smallest but the sweetest tomatoes.

“It’s okay to be little without feeling bad about it. And it’s okay to have little dreams without feeling bad about them.”²

Let’s pray ... God, give us the strength and the grace to make choices which will allow me and my neighbor to become the best we can be.

¹ <https://www.fredrogerscenter.org/2016/01/a-little-and-big-start-to-the-new-year/>

² *Ibid*

Message: "Physical Health: A Message of Hope"

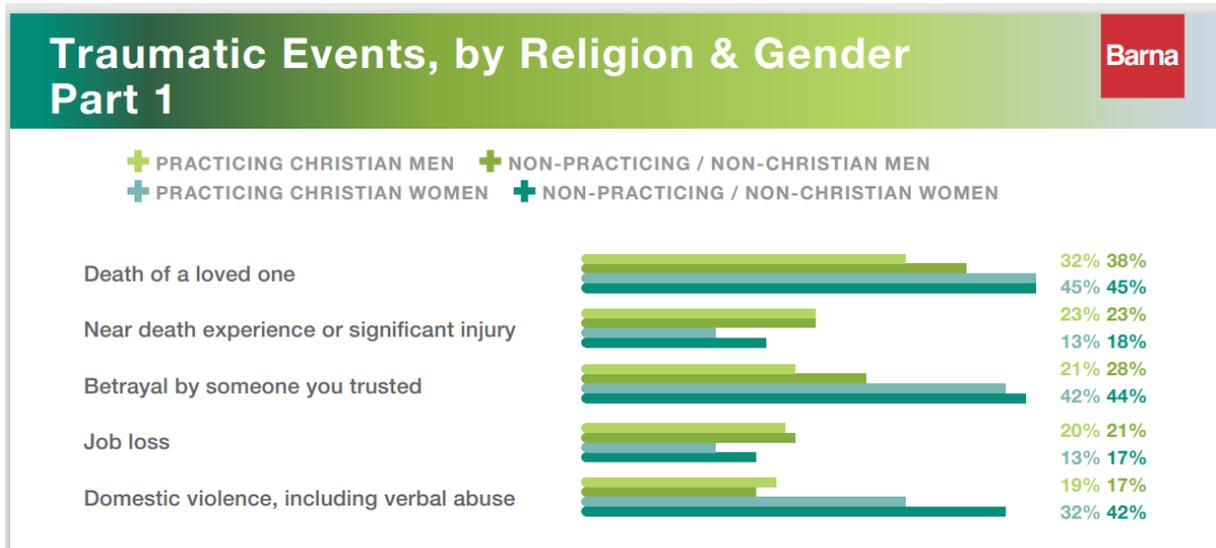
Good morning. Today, we're beginning a new, 4-part sermon series I'm calling "Health in a Crisis." In the online spaces we're creating together, I believe it's important for us to understand that our faith applies to our lives. One of the ways we do so is by examining ourselves and our needs in the light of scripture, tradition, our shared experiences and reason.

We're all feeling the stress and strain of the times we're living in. Everyone is impacted by COVID-19, racism, exclusion, oppression, uncertainty and the threats posed by hate and fear. Our question is, "What can we do?"

During this 4-week period, we're going to reflect on some of the ways the challenges we're going through affect us. To start, let me say what I believe to be true, after reflection and study. The spiritual, emotional, mental and physical aspects of our being, our whole self, are affected by trauma. God hears our cry and offers help and hope.

To set the stage, I'm sharing information from a recent study by the Barna Group, titled "Trauma in America." This material is available. I have a copy and would be happy to provide if a group of you would like to review it and discuss the findings.

First, let me share with you two slides about trauma.





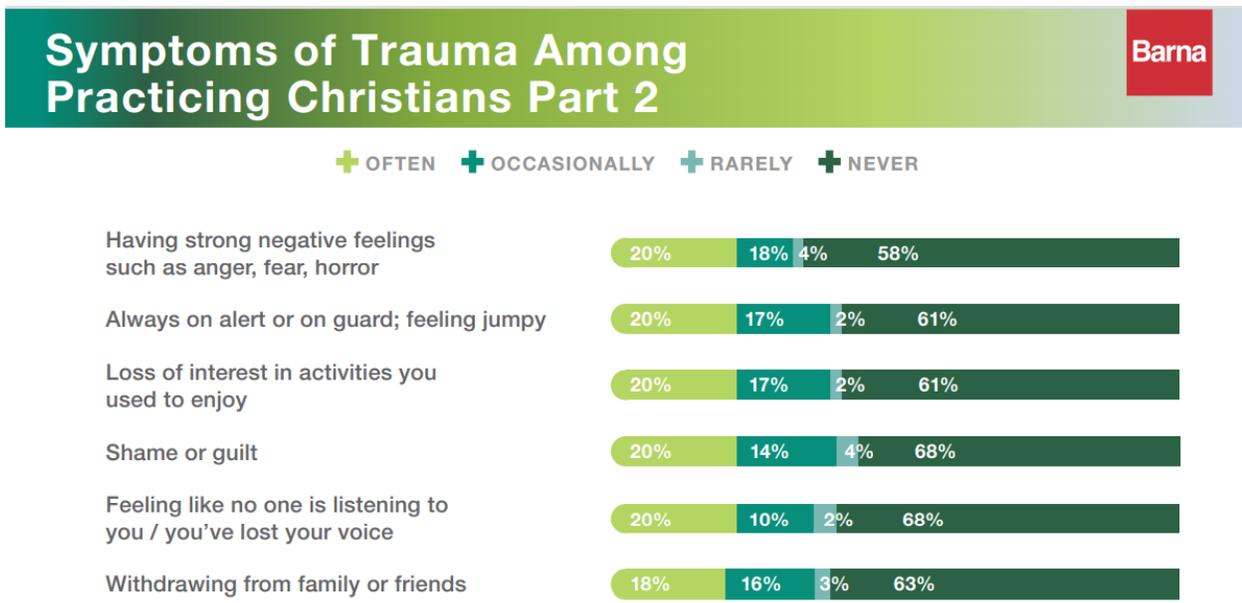
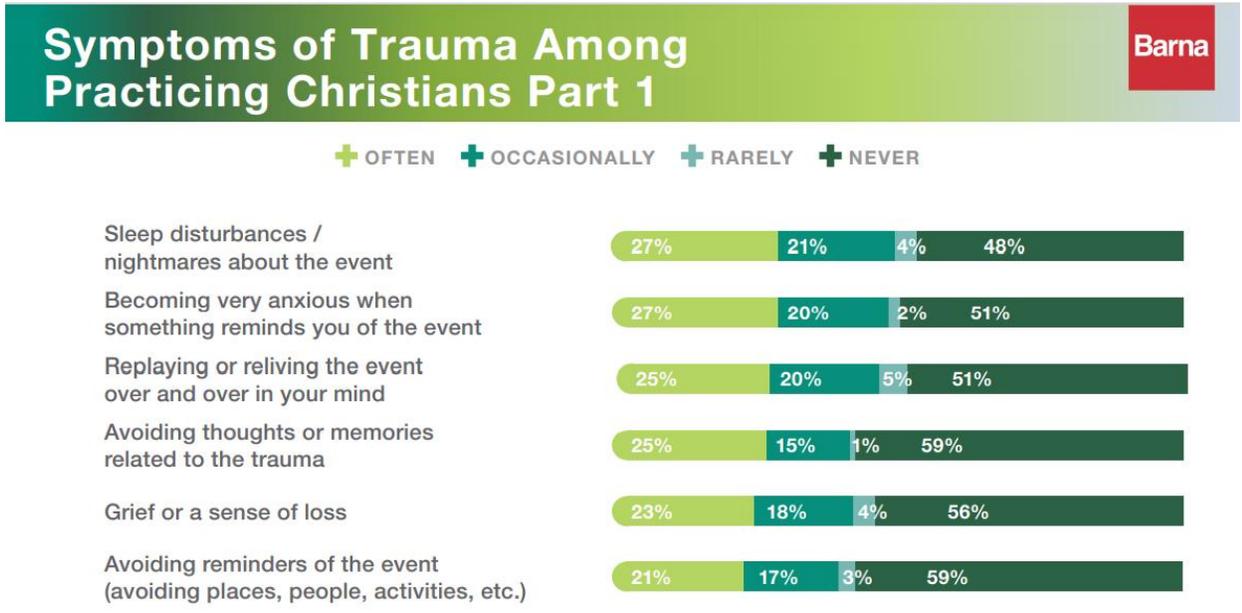
This information is available in my sermon manuscript, which you can find on our church web site, www.coronaumc.com.

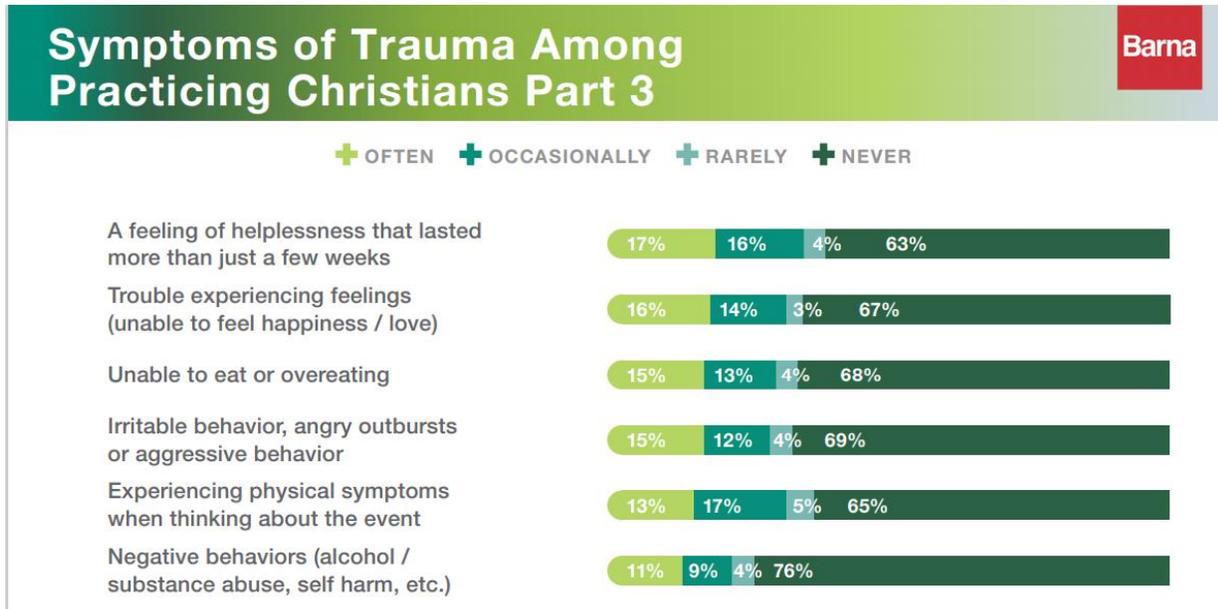
A brief summary shows we’re all dealing with events or living in environments with the capacity to traumatize us.³ Death, betrayal, violence and abuse are often the source of our trauma. Practicing Christians are not free from these events. We’re as likely to have a loved one die, suffer an injury or lose our job as the next person.

One, key finding to notice is when we regularly practice our faith at home, it seems to create an environment that lowers some risks. For example, Christian households have less food insecurity and lower reported rates of betrayal, abuse and domestic violence. Sadly, these still occur, but when we really live our faith, life is better.

³ Trauma in America, American Bible Society, 2020 – a graphics and material from this source.

Next, let’s look at how trauma affects us.





These are very normal and natural responses to the events that happen in our lives. There is no shame admitting we’re struggling with our feelings or we don’t like what’s happening with our body or we feel lost and out of control. It’s healthy to share with others. Yes, oversharing does occasionally happen, but most of you would be surprised at how little we share about what’s affecting us with others, even our loved ones.

For example, my father collapsed and was in the hospital two years ago. Everyone in our family heard about that. We were amazed at pictures we saw of him walking a day later. What we didn’t hear about was the fact that he nearly bled to death a month later when he removed a catheter by himself. One is just important as the other to us. After all, we love him. But the later problem was seen as more shameful. He felt more vulnerable and so we didn’t hear about it until months later.

Being part of a community of faith, hope and love means not being chained by guilt and shame. Sadly, that’s not always the case. Rather than a culture of openness and freedom, we can create an environment where honor and shame dominate. I know what you prefer. It’s the same for me. We can do better about accepting and affirming our own human weaknesses, flaws and needs. Once we admit to our own reality, then we’re better able to cope, teach our children and help others.

Now, I'd like to shift direction a little bit. The focus for today is on our bodies, our physical health. We're physically impacted by trauma.

Your body is an important part of your being. Your body important to you. It's also important to God because you are important to God. Your body isn't just a shell for your spirit. It a vital part of who you are as a person, part of a household and as part of the community of faith.

Paul reminds us humans aren't like animals. The nature of our being is different. There's a term you may know: anthropomorphize. It means giving human characteristics to something that isn't human. For example, Esperanza and I named our betta fish Mr. Fish. We talk about him as though he can think and understand the way we do. He can't.

I'm not telling you this to belittle other creatures or to falsely build us up. I'm saying the opposite. There's a beauty, dignity and respect due to all creatures. We read what Paul wrote earlier. Here's how Eugene Petersen translated it, "*You will notice that the variety of bodies is stunning. Just as there are different kinds of seeds, there are different kinds of bodies - humans, animals, birds, fish - each unprecedented in its form. You get a hint at the diversity of resurrection glory by looking at the diversity of bodies not only on earth but in the skies - sun, moon, stars - all these varieties of beauty and brightness. And we're only looking at pre-resurrection 'seeds' - who can imagine what the resurrection 'plants' will be like!*" (1 Corinthians 15:39-40, MSG). That gives us hope. We are beautiful in God's eyes.

Learning about our physical selves is important. Sadly, there are many aspects of our physical nature we can't easily talk about. For example, few of us talk about sex. And most of us find it difficult to talk to children about sex in appropriate ways. Another aspect of our physical nature we don't easily talk about is illness or disease.

A big area we don't like to talk about is our dependencies. There are a lot of ways to try to cope with trauma and stress. Alcohol, smoking and drugs, including opioids, are commonly used and misused. Pornography is another example. It has always been popular with men, but use by women has been rising over the past decade or two.

Learning how to have safe, open and age-appropriate conversations about our bodies is a healthy practice. After all, God made us to be the way we are. I heard a great analogy this week: not teaching our children about their bodies is like handing a teenager who's never driven the car keys. You're probably going to be attending traffic school and dealing with ramifications after an accident. You can do that or learn how to drive first. We can leave our children to learn from the internet and others, or we can create a safe place for them to ask questions.

The apostle Paul offers a helpful lesson about unhealthy practices. He wrote, *"No temptation has seized you that isn't common for people. But God is faithful. He won't allow you to be tempted beyond your abilities. Instead, with the temptation, God will also supply a way out so that you will be able to endure it"* (1 Corinthians 10:13, CEB).

This is a message of hope. No matter what your body may be enduring or the challenge you're facing, God won't leave you. God gives you the abilities and the will power to find a way out. One thing I will tell you from personal experience: the way out is through God.

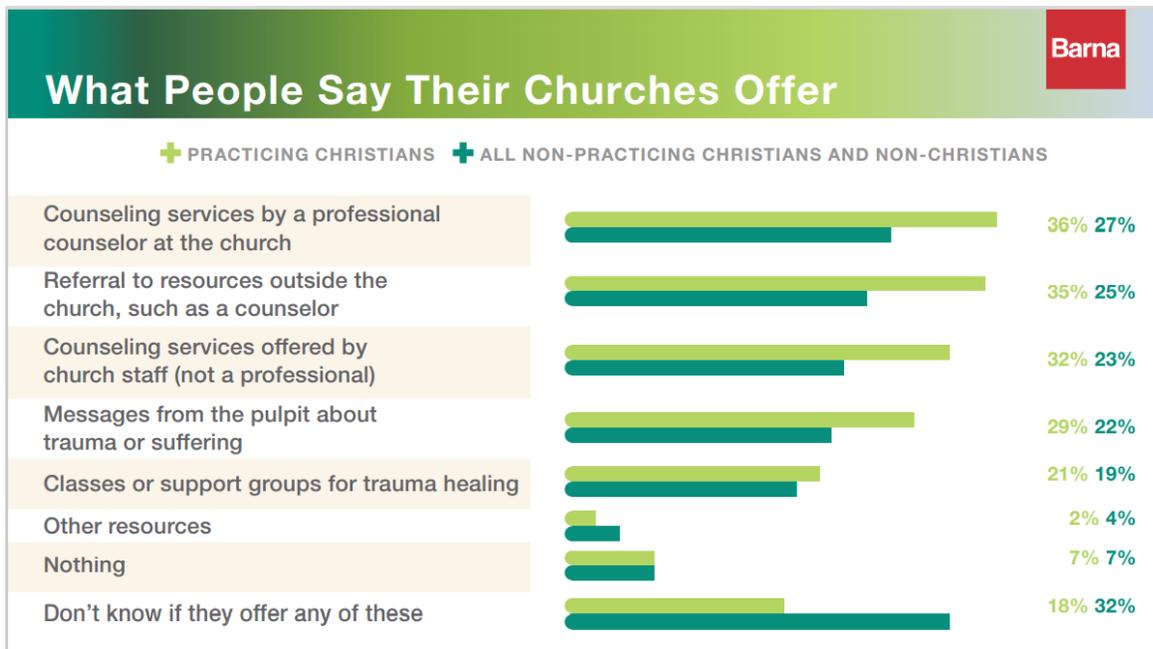
Where do we go for help?



This finding is expected. Most people who practice their faith are going to turn to scripture first for help. Then they'll look at other faith-based resources. Everyone reads medical information, regardless of your belief or unbelief.

The surprising result is the high number of people who don't seek help from any resources. There are many reasons. I would point to this as an area where our life, the way we live through trauma and the ways we cope, offers a message of hope to people who don't know where to turn.

What does the church offer to those who are experiencing trauma and other debilitating challenges?



You have a role to play. When you invite people to your house or to a watch party to be part of a service, you're offering hope. When you connect to a small group and invite friends, you're connecting people to God and to people who rely on God. That's sending a message of hope. When you host a group or ask how you can be part of our work, you're rolling your sleeves up and being God's ambassador of hope. And when give, you receive hope in return.

Let me offer one, final thought as we close. Paul understood physical struggles. There are several indications he had problems with his eyesight and health. He also suffered a lot at the hands of the authorities and so he had health problems later in life. He spent three years under house arrest, unable to leave the premises and chained to a guard. One of his most powerful lessons is about grace.

Paul wrote, *"so I wouldn't get a big head, I was given the gift of a handicap to keep me in constant touch with my limitations. Satan's angel did his best to get me down; what he in fact did was push me to my knees. No danger then of walking around high and mighty! At first I didn't think of it as a gift, and begged God to remove it. Three times I did that, and then he told me,*

My grace is enough; it's all you need.

My strength comes into its own in your weakness.

Once I heard that, I was glad to let it happen. I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ's strength moving in on my weakness. Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size - abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become." (2 Corinthians 12:7-10, MSG).

Another translation offers this summary, "God's grace is sufficient" (NIV). Even when we physically don't feel up to the task, God meets us where we are and does good work through our weakness. We don't have to be afraid. We can admit our fears and not be ashamed of our circumstances. God doesn't care about our stature or looks or whether we have hair or not. God doesn't care about skin tone. God doesn't care about gender or orientation. God cares about you and wants you to be part of a community of faith, a community of hope. That's how we care for others and are cared for in return. That's how our lives are made better.

God cares about you. Hold on to Jesus with faith, love and hope.
You'll be glad when you do.

Let us pray silently together ...

Reflection & Prayer

“Almighty God,
we pray that our brothers and sisters
may be comforted in their suffering and made whole.
When they are afraid, give them courage;
when they feel weak, grant them your strength;
when they are afflicted, afford them patience;
when they are lost, offer them hope;
when they are alone, move us to their side;
when death comes, open your arms to receive them,
knowing they will rise again to join you
free from all sorrow, pain and loss.
In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.”⁴

40-Day Kindness Invitation

- Do an act of kindness every day.
- Share your story on August 30th – send Pastor your stories or send them to the office.

⁴ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/a-service-of-healing-i>

1 Corinthians 15:39-40 (CEB)

All flesh isn't alike. Humans have one kind of flesh, animals have another kind of flesh, birds have another kind of flesh, and fish have another kind. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. The heavenly bodies have one kind of glory, and the earthly bodies have another kind of glory.

2 Corinthians 5:1-10 (CEB)

We know that if the tent that we live in on earth is torn down, we have a building from God. It's a house that isn't handmade, which is eternal and located in heaven. We groan while we live in this residence. We really want to dress ourselves with our building from heaven - since we assume that when we take off this tent, we won't find out that we are naked. Yes, while we are in this tent we groan, because we are weighed down. We want to be dressed not undressed, so that what is dying can be swallowed up by life. Now the one who prepared us for this very thing is God, and God gave us the Spirit as a down payment for our home.

So we are always confident, because we know that while we are living in the body, we are away from our home with the Lord. We live by faith and not by sight. We are confident, and we would prefer to leave the body and to be at home with the Lord. So our goal is to be acceptable to him, whether we are at home or away from home. We all must appear before Christ in court so that each person can be paid back for the things that were done while in the body, whether they were good or bad.