

AACC **Grief, Crisis & Trauma Counseling Preconference**



Theological Foundations for Ministering to Survivors in Crisis, Trauma and Loss

Presenters:
 Kevin Ellers
 Jennifer Cisney Ellers
 H. Norman Wright

AACC **Preconference Schedule**

- **9:00-11:00 a.m. Kevin Ellers**
 Theological tenants for helping people through grief and trauma
- **11:15-1:15 p.m. Jennifer Cisney Ellers**
 Cutting-edge research and techniques for trauma and PTSD
- **2:45 - 4:45 p.m. H. Norman Wright**
 Ministry to Families during Grief, Loss and Crisis: Practical Approaches to Helping

AACC **What We Want In Life**

- Homeostasis vs imbalance
- Consonance vs dissonance
- Harmony vs sour notes
- Answers vs questions

AACC **The Psalms & Crisis**

Psalms of orientation:
coherence, stability & reliability

Psalms of disorientation:
disequilibrium, incoherence, chaos & pain

Psalms of new orientation:
movement from disorientation to orientation into transformation

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I walked a mile with Pleasure,
 She chattered all the way;
 But left me none the wiser,
 For all she had to say.
 I walked a mile with Sorrow
 And ne'er a word said she;
 But, oh, the things I learned from her
 When Sorrow walked with me!

Along the Road
 ROBERT BROWNING HAMILTON

AACC **Two Grieving Families**

- Tonya – death of special needs son natural causes
- Linda – death of son in a farming accident

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Tenant One

Adversity and loss are universal experiences



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- Death, trauma and adversity happens to Christians and non-Christians
- Failure to understand this can interfere with helping survivors grieve their losses
- Full acknowledgement of the loss takes time

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Key Scripture

Isaiah 53:3-4 (NIV)

“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.”

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Key Scripture

Ecclesiastes 1:18 (NIV)

“For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.”

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Key Scripture

Ecclesiastes 11:8 (NIV)

“However many years a man may live, let him enjoy them all. But let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many.”

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Key Scripture

Hebrews 4:14-16 (NIV)

- “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

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Key Scripture

1 Peter 4:12-19 (NIV)

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, “if it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.”

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How Christ’s Disciples and Apostles Died

- **Andrew**, brother of Peter, was crucified in Edessa.
- **Bartholomew** was beaten and then crucified in India.
- **James the Great**, older brother of John, was beheaded in 44 A.D. in Judea.
- **James the Less** was beaten, stoned, and then clubbed to death at age 94 in Jerusalem.
- **Jude**, brother of James, was crucified in 72 A.D. in Edessa.
- **Luke** was hanged on an olive tree in Greece.
- **Mark** was dragged to death in Alexandria.

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How Christ’s Disciples and Apostles Died

- **Matthew** - killed with a weapon that had a blade and spike in 60 A.D. in Nadabah.
- **Matthias** stoned and then beheaded in Jerusalem.
- **Paul** was beheaded with a sword in Rome.
- **Peter** was crucified head down by request as unworthy to die the same as Christ, in Rome.
- **Philip** was scourged, imprisoned, and then crucified in 54 A.D. in Heliopolis, Phrygia.
- **Simon** was crucified in 74 A.D. in Britain.
- **Stephen** stoned to death in 34 A.D. in Jerusalem.
- **Thomas** was thrust through with a spear in India.

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Luke 13:1-5

1 Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ² Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. ⁴ Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”

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Tenant Two

Human beings experience emotions and have reactions to loss and trauma



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- Scripture is full of stories of human reaction
- Sleeplessness
- Appetite loss
- Confusion
- Longing to die
- Deep sorrow
- Doubt
- Isolation
- Psalms of lament

Tenant Three

It is normal for believers to experience spiritual struggles and doubt



- In our pain we sometimes feel abandoned
- Jesus on the cross “My God why hast thou abandoned me?”
- You will often hear a lot of bad theology from grievors – this is from the heart not the head
- Supportive environment significantly impacts homeostasis
- C.S Lewis - Shadowlands

C.S. Lewis: Shadowlands

- “I don’t want to be anywhere else anymore, here now”
- “It doesn’t spoil it makes it real”
- “The pain then is part of the happiness now”
- “What is happening to me?”
- “I’m afraid that suffering is just suffering after all... no cause, no purpose, no pattern”

C.S. Lewis: Shadowlands

- “There is nothing to say. I know that now. I’ve just come up against a bit of experience.
- Experience is a brutal teacher...you learn, my God you learn”
- “It is a bloody awful mess and that is all there is to it”
- “I don’t know what to say to him”
- “It doesn’t make sense”

C.S. Lewis: Shadowlands

- “You can’t hold on to things, you have to let them go”
- “We read to know we are not alone”
- “Some people would say we love to know we are not alone”
- “I know more about love from books rather than from personal experience”
- “I don’t think any of us want to be alone”
- “I have no answers any more, only the life I’ve lived.

C.S. Lewis: Shadowlands

“Why love if losing hurts so much? Twice in my life I’ve been given a choice....as a boy and as a man. The boy chose safety, the man chooses suffering. The pain now is part of the happiness then. That’s the deal”

Tenant Four

The church should be a sanctuary for the wounded



The church should be a

- Place of refuge
- Place for questioning
- Place for unhurried reflection
- Place for study
- Place for comfort
- Place for fellowship
- Place for sharing
- Place for companionship

Tenant Five

We can grow through adversity and loss

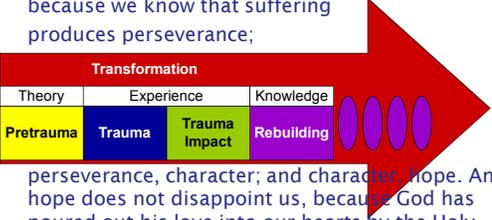


Our Perception of Adversity

“... And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;

Transformation			
Theory	Experience	Knowledge	
Pretrauma	Trauma	Trauma Impact	Rebuilding

perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Romans 5:1-5).



Tenant Six

Faith perspectives may change through trauma and loss



Tenant Seven

Faith community must be an ongoing, non-intrusive presence



Tenant Eight

Experiential rather than intellectual reasoning is critical



Transformation

Relationship

Tenant Nine

Faith can bring hope and a future



Jeremiah 29:8-14

- 8 Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. 9 They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," declares the Lord. 10 This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place."

Jeremiah 29:8-14

- 11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

Hope in Crisis

- What unique perspectives does Christianity bring to times of crisis and loss for survivors?
- From your experience what are some things people do that can actually serve as barriers in building hope?
- What has been the most helpful thing caregivers have done to bring hope in your times of crisis?
- Who around you can you think of at this time who may be struggling with hope?

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Hope in Crisis

- Remember that hope in the early aftermath needs to focus on something simple and concrete
- The church may have to stand as a beacon of hope for survivors when they are unable to find hope in their darkest hours
- It is better to help survivors discover hope than try to lecture them in what they should hope in

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Hope in Crisis

- Understand that it is natural for people to lose hope when life gets overwhelming
- Help survivors look at the psalms of lament to see that it is okay to struggle with hope and yet the psalms point to where we should choose to place our trust
- Connecting survivors with other survivors who are emotionally healthy and have experienced similar can be very helpful

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Tenant Ten

Stories can promote healing



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Story can promote healing

- We all have a story
- The bible is story
- Other people's stories when **appropriately shared** can help us heal
- A survivor's story will evolve over time
- A survivor's story can help heal others while healing their own wounds

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Telling the Story

- Balance caregiver voyeurism in assessment
- Its for them not for you
- Different people have different needs
- Introverts vs extroverts
- Survivors want to talk about it when **they** are ready
- They aren't going to talk until they feel safe with you

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Telling the Story

- You must be tuned into them
- Give few answers but learn to ask great questions
- Be aware of what is going on inside you
- Let it all come out without judgment
- What they say may not really be what they believe
- Remember their story will evolve

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Spiritual Assessment

A photograph showing a group of people standing outdoors. In the foreground, a man wearing a black turban and a light-colored checkered shirt is looking towards the right. Next to him is a woman in a white short-sleeved shirt and dark pants. To her right, a woman in a colorful sari is being embraced by another woman. In the background, there are other people and a building. A portion of a blue car is visible on the right side of the image.

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The beautiful people are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These people have appreciation, and sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep, loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

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Closing Scripture

- Jesus said in Matthew 5:4

“Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted”