

Leading A Combat Trauma Care Group

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1. Why we decided to write the Combat Trauma Healing Manual.

- Plenty of books that try to deal with CTHM – but God not in the mix.
- A few books approaching it from a Christian perspective – but not interactive.
 - It's relatively simple for a PTSD sufferer to read, but that won't make a lot of difference. Need to WORK.
 - Which, frankly, is one reason why it's difficult solo, and better in group.

2. Main philosophy of the Bridges to Healing approach:

- God is the Healer and you are NOT.
- But God wants to partner with you to construct an environment that will accommodate God having optimal access to the CT sufferer's body, soul and spirit for healing.

3. A quick walk-through of the CTHM – Objectives Step-by-Step

Before You Begin

- **Objective: to let them know that God will be in the mix.**
- Going to be from a Christian perspective
- If you're not a Christian . . . appendix A.

Introduction – MG Bob Dees

Objective: to let them know we appreciate them, want to help them.

- Thanking – honoring
- What you'll encounter in the Manual
- Encouragement to dive in and DO IT.

Prologue – Nate Self, former Captain in the Rangers – Silver Star Recipient

Objective: To present someone they can identify with.

We've been where you are.

- Testimony of his struggle with PTSD
- Battle of Takur Ghar

Step 1 – Where Was God?

Objective: To help them look upon God as an ally, not as an enemy, unconcerned, distant or distracted.

- Going to war with Sunday School Theology
- Your condition: a result of free will, the fall, and man's inhumanity to man
- Where WAS God – and where IS God?
- God is the only God who suffered – has the right to say, "I know EXACTLY what you are going through.

Step 2 – What Happened To Me?

Objective: To help them understand the physical and psychological context of their Trauma.

- Understand CT/PTSD/Secondary Trauma from physiological, psychological and spiritual standpoints.
- Exercise to identify their symptoms
- TBI

Step 3a & 3b – Where’s the Hospital

Objective: To give them practical input on how to construct a healing environment.

Five Elements:

- Ministry of the Holy Spirit
- The Word of God
- Prayer
- The Christian Community – Fellowship
- Mindset
 - **Courage** – truly is a matter of the will – Scott Peck: “Not the absence of fear, but acting in spite of the fear.”
 - **Intentionality**
 - **Optimism**

Step 4 – How Did I Change?

Objective: To help them remember, journal and process their trauma.

- Writing exercise:
 - Life before combat
 - What happened while in the theater of war that traumatized them
 - My life since combat.
- A foundational element of healing from PTSD

Step 5: How Can I Stand It?

Objective: To help them acknowledge and process their grief and loss in a constructive manner.

- Grieving is not only OK, it’s IMPORTANT!
- What normal grief looks like
- How to grieve
- How NOT to grieve
- The process of grief
- How to mourn.

Step 6a & 6b – How Do I Move On? Giving and receiving Forgiveness

Objective: To help them understand the vital role of forgiveness in their lives.

- Receiving God’s forgiveness
 - True guilt vs. False guilt
- Forgiving themselves
- Seeking forgiveness from others
- Forgiving those who have wounded them

Step 7 – Who Am I Now?

Objective: To help them rebuild their shattered identity based on what God says about them, not based on what the world or the devil says.

- Went over 10 feet tall and bulletproof
- An 8 step exercise designed to help them counter the negative self-perceptions they may have built up.

Step 8 – How Do I Fight?

Objective: To help them understand who their TRUE enemy is, and how to fight him in the spiritual realm.

- Teaching about Satan and spiritual warfare
- Doorways and Footholds – an exercise to help them recognize areas of vulnerability that Satan will exploit
- Spiritual armor

Step 9: How Do I Get Across?

Objective: To help them find “Bridge People” – those who will help him/her construct a healing environment.

- The necessity of good Christian fellowship
- The necessity of finding a “Battle Buddy” – and even some ways of coaching that Battle Buddy about how to be a good one.
- The benefits of getting involved in a small support group.
- When and how to find a counselor

Step 10: How Do I Get Back To “Normal?”

Objective: To help them understand that there is no going back to “Normal”, but they can go forward to a “New Normal”.

- Takes them through some exercises that will help them think through things in their lives that might need to change:
 - Vocation
 - Location
 - Companions
- Dealing with triggers
- Setting personal goals
- Serving others

4. What are the main needs of CT sufferers who attend?

- Forgiveness
- Help them to understand what happened to them
- A place and a way to process their grief and loss
- Filling of the Spirit
- Control of their symptoms
- Hope for the future
- Friends who understand
- Respect
- Honor
- Can you think of any others?

5. What should your main objectives be?

- Deliver some helpful content
- Provide an environment where the Spirit can work on them directly.
- Get them into service of some sort.
 - God created us in His image;
 - God is a giver;
 - So He wants us to be givers too.

- Sooner rather than later
- Take them with you. Not “Go do that.” s/b “Let’s go do this together.”

6. Who are you? What’s your role?

- You are not the leader – you are the facilitator; God is the leader.
- Requirements of a Facilitator:
 - A heart to love and care and listen
 - Willingness to look to God and flex in response to His direction
 - Humility

7. How to get a group together.

- Pick a starting date and then publicize it in the normal ways:
 - Church bulletin
 - Announcements from the podium
 - Posters
 - Personal invitations
 - Outside the church
 - VA
 - VFW, PVA, other veterans groups
 - Local veteran publications or events
- Don’t have a “sign up sheet” – instead, post an email address that people can write to inquire about the group.
 - Easier to write a stranger anonymously

8. What to name the group?

- Suggestions:
 - CT Care Group
 - CT Study Group
 - CT Bible Study
 - CT Support Group – Gary Sanders: these two groups, same content.

9. How many weeks should we meet?

- How long do you think it’s going to take for them to experience healing?
- How long do most people want to commit to a weekly obligation?
- Dilemma!
- Commit to a finite period (8 to 12 weeks), then re-evaluate and re-up if you want.
- Realistically, it will take you half a year to get through the manual.
- Military jargon: “To standard, not to time.”

10. How long should each class be?

- An hour really isn’t enough time – but if you have no other options, go for it.
- Best if you had 1.5 hours.
- Two hours great – if they can handle it (not every one can)
- Whatever you decide, start and end ON TIME!

11. Group Dynamics

- Three basic configurations:
 - Solo -good
 - One-to-one -better
 - Small group -best
- Size of group
 - Big enough for good interaction
 - Small enough to keep someone from being intimidated or lost in the group
 - Minimum: 3 + you.
 - Maximum: 10 to 12 + you and an assistant.
- Makeup of group
 - Gender
 - Couples/singles
 - Combat/non-combat
 - Military CT/non-military CT
 - Christians/non-Christians
 - CT sufferers/care givers/friends/family
 - Different wars
 - Different branches of the service
 - Basic principle: Try anything; trust God
 - A homogenous group may generate more relaxed sharing, but a diverse group may accomplish more deep healing.
 - If wives are involved, give them WWCH and have them work off parallel chapters.
 - If mixed genders or couples, consider having a few sessions where they are separated for part of the study, and then come back together later.
 - If you're a man leading a group that has some women in it, get your wife involved . . .
 - She can key in on the needs and responses of the women better,
 - She can add the necessary feminine touches
 - She can defend you from any women who may try to make advances on you.
 - No one-to-one time with a member of the opposite sex.

12. First Session – things to get across . . . and reiterate frequently.

- Emphasize Jesus as the Healer (Exodus 15:26).
- Make it clear that this group will be approaching PTSD and Combat Trauma from a Biblical perspective.
 - If you haven't made that decision to connect with God, be sure to read the "Before You Begin" page (page 3) and Appendix A.
 - If you'd like to talk with me more in depth about this, let me know.
- The purpose of this group is to try to provide a context in your life where God has optimal access to your body, mind and spirit for the purpose of healing.
- I'm not going to be able to fix you; no one here will fix you; this book won't fix you – God is the only entity capable of helping you at all.
- **Expectations.** What do you hope to get out of these meetings? What are your expectations for me? For yourself? For that person sitting next to you?

- Help them understand the concept of “New Normal,” and that positive growth can be the result of traumatic times.
- Help them understand that progress may be slow, but persistence and consistency will carry them along.
- Nothing happens by accident for the Christian – God has brought you here for a reason.

13. Session Format

- Homework vs. No-homework
 - You be the judge
 - “You’ll get out of it what you put into it.”
 - Have a plan, but be willing to depart from it
 - Let the Spirit lead
 - Suggested format:
 1. Welcome any newcomers
 2. Prayer (one person – special needs that are already known)
 3. Late-breaking news, articles, other tools, testimonies, special speaker, events, video clip, insights from your QT.
 4. Reiterate the rules (especially “This is confidential.”)
 5. Disclaimer: “I’m not a professional, not a veteran, but God’s put a love in my heart for you, and I care about you – that’s why I’m doing this.”
 6. *Quick* review of last week’s study (5 minute max.)
 7. Start into this week’s content
 8. If rough time, stop and pray
 9. Share your objectives for next session (pages to read ahead on)
 10. Close in prayer (prayer requests?)

14. How to cover the content.

- Unless you’ve already agreed otherwise, assume they’ve all at least read ahead.
- But feel free to read (or have someone read) a section before you start to discuss it.
- Come up with an “Opening Question” designed to get them into the topic at hand.
 - For instance, starting on Step 5 – Grief. = page 65.
 - “Outside of your combat experiences, what is something that you have grieved about in the past?”
- Ask a question that can be answered by the content they read
 - For instance: “What triggers grief?” What you’re looking for is what Chaplain Giunta wrote about LOSS triggers grief.
 - But don’t ask, “What did Chaplain Giunta say triggers loss?”
- Then build on that answer with a follow-up question:
 - “As a result of your combat experiences, what are some of the things that you have lost?”
 - The second question spring-boards off the content of the study, and helps the members start looking inward – moving from the theoretical to the personal.
- Try to compose two or three “Application” questions during the session. Examples:
 - “Does this suggest any course of action that you ought to take?”
 - “What could you do about this? When?”
 - “Can any of you think of a practical way to respond to this issue within the next 48 hours?”

- “Is this something we just need to think about and be aware of, or do you think we’re actually supposed to DO something about it?”
- “When you’ve encountered this issue in the past, how have you dealt with it? Did that work for you?”
- “What do you think it would take to integrate this concept into your life?”
- Other ways to generate discussion:
 - “What thoughts came to your mind as you read this section?”
 - “Did this raise some questions?”
 - “Could you identify with this quote (verse, paragraph)? How?”
 - “Here’s what I thought – what did you think?”
 - “How does this part affect you personally?”
 - “How did this section (quote, verse, paragraph) make you feel? Why do you think it made you feel that way?”
 - (Regarding a point made in a section) “Has anybody here ever experienced this?”
 - “How has this issue changed you? Changed your opinion about God? The Church? The Military? Yourself?”
 - “What bothers you about this?”
 - “How do you deal with this?”
- Exercises or Fill in the blank parts
 - First ask if anybody did them, and would they like to share.
 - If not, give them time right then to work through them, and share afterwards.
 - Step 4 – writing their story – best if they can do that at home by themselves, if possible.

15. The Rules:

1. Respect members’ privacy. Keep everything that is shared here strictly confidential. Don’t pass on what is shared with anybody – even to your spouses.
2. Don’t talk with non-group members about who else is in the group.
3. Make an effort not to dominate the discussion; let others in; “share the air.” Avoid long, detailed descriptions of your experiences. Make your point!
4. Have the courage to share what’s on your mind or what you’re feeling: it’s part of your healing process. The more you share, the safer you’ll feel here, and quicker you’ll progress toward “New Normal.”
5. But realize that you have the “right of reticence.” No one will be forced to share if they don’t feel like it. It’s OK to “pass” in a discussion or during prayer times.
6. Be prepared and willing to hear some difficult and distressing comments and stories. Try your best to extend grace, and not react negatively.
7. Listen actively, deeply, honoring all contributions.
8. Don’t criticize or make judgments about other group members: show grace and mercy – just as God has shown to you.
9. Don’t interrupt.
10. Try not to compare yourself with others in the group. Each person is unique, and at a different place in their healing journey. Focus on how God’s working in *your* life.
11. Look for opportunities to affirm and honor each other during the meeting.
12. Be consistent in your attendance.

13. Share ownership of the group. We're not here to entertain you – all must be willing and hold themselves responsible to contribute to the good success of the group and its mission.

16. Do's and Don't's

- Get there early, prepare the room, set out refreshments, perhaps put on some worship music, pray, be ready to welcome them as they come. Set the pace on punctuality!
- Encourage *discussion*. Don't be a lecturer.
- Get them sharing with each other; interacting. Remember that the manual supplies a format and some useful content, but the real healing will come through the sharing, the interaction, and the application as God works on them directly.
- Be sure you are praying for your group and every individual in it – daily!
- Get other people praying for your group too.
- Always serve refreshments!
- Pay attention to the environment of the study.
 - Someone's home is a very relaxing, comforting, non-threatening setting.
 - Chairs in a loose circle
 - Temperature; lighting; chairs; ventilation
- Be patient: with group members, with the process, with participation, with church administration.
- If someone is dominating discussions, talk with him afterwards: "You find it so easy to share – but I think some of the others are intimidated (or lack your confidence). What can we do to try to draw them out more, and give them the opportunity to share?"
- Don't publicize names and email address lists without permission.
- If possible, recruit an assistant: can act as a substitute, help with logistics, and can be trained to lead their own group.
- Most of the sessions are pretty intense. So try to interject some *positive* things whenever possible.
- Give the manuals to the group members for free if possible. "You've done your service. We want to honor you for that. This is a response for your taking the first step to come here."
 - If they insist on paying, say "OK. But I'll use that money to buy a manual for someone else.
 - In your publicizing, note that the materials will be free – "Our gift to you."
 - Consider it a gift of healing; an investment in their healing.
- Have Kleenex available.

17. Things to do between meetings

- Call to chat, find out about a prayer request they shared, see if they need a ride next week, etc.
- Email, Facebook or Twitter them.
- Get some one-to-one time with individuals.
- Plan a group outing – either a fun event or a service project.
- Plan a pot luck dinner and invite spouses.
- Plan a weekend retreat.