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Lament and the Voice of the Veteran
Theological Hope in the Aftermath of War

By
Seth H. George

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry.

Saint Louis, Missouri

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore how Lamentations 3 provides a connection between the ministry of the Word and pastoral care for veterans who have experienced various forms of spiritual distress during and after warfare. This research addresses a gap between the care clinicians and ministers offer to veterans and the religious need that some combat veterans have. Given the presence of combat veterans within the church, how do ministers of the Word fill this gap with biblically-based pastoral care?

Addressing this question utilized a qualitative design with semi-structured interviews and seven Christian veterans from the Vietnam War, the Gulf War and the War on Terrorism. Research questions guiding the interviews were (1) How did Christian veterans experience God during combat? (2) How did combat shape the faith of Christian veterans upon their return home? (3) How have pastors helped Christian veterans engage God?

Three areas of literature were explored: spiritual and moral injury, the challenges of providing pastoral care within this context and a survey of Lamentations 3. Findings revealed that the care which ministers of the Word provided to Christian combat veterans was individualized and well received. However, the religious care specific to the effects of combat was primarily provided by combat veterans to one another resulting in three primary findings. First, the binary gap between the church and the clinic was expanded to include veteran organizations creating a triangular network of care. Second, feelings of spiritual distress were surpassed by the presence and protection of God during and after combat. Third, the ministry of these combat veterans to other veterans resembled the spiritual progression of the speaker in Lamentations 3 and the willingness

to explore the need for confession and forgiveness with other combat veterans in ways that therapists or ministers typically cannot.

The significance of these findings reveals a connection between the role of the speaker in Lamentations 3 and combat veterans who have suffered spiritual distress and yet experienced God's hope. These veterans are the ones who engage their community of veterans as shepherds and invite them to engage God through confession. The task for the minister of the Word is to recognize the uniqueness of this ministry and equip its churches and veterans with scriptural encouragement and tangible support to these shepherds.

To my wife, Sarah George, who has offered such enthusiastic support to this project. To Katherine, Timothy and Anne who have patiently worked around me, my computer and piles of books at the dinner table. To my parents, Wyatt and Betsy George, who have encouraged me in the Lord for a lifetime.

What is Jesus doing at the moment when he is most being used by God?
He is lamenting on the cross, “Why have you forsaken me?!”

— Michael Card

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Acknowledgements

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Those deserving special thanks for inspiring the need for this research are Walt Ehlers, Bob Bidwell, Dave Peterson, George Gentry, Sam Sanford and Gary Beikirch who have gone to be with the Lord. I also wish to extend special thanks to Dwight Zeller, and Andrew Zeller who have encouraged me by their faithful service and to serve faithfully as an Army Chaplain.

Abbreviations

AWOL	Absent Without Leave
CIB	Combat Infantryman Badge
ESV	English Standard Version
GWOT	Global War on Terror
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
PCA	Presbyterian Church in America
PCS	Permanent Change of Station
POW	Prisoner of War
PTG	Post Traumatic Growth
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
ROE	Rules of Engagement
RTD	Return to Duty
VA	Veterans Administration
VC	Viet-Cong
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
WWII	World War Two

Chapter 1

Coming Home from Combat as a Spiritual Stranger

What is the nature of spiritual alienation after war for veterans? How can pastors enhance their ministry of the Word to those who appear to have lost hope in God as a result of their experiences in combat?

On 29 March 1973, the United States military pulled the last ground combat military unit from Vietnam. On 25 June 1973, *Home from the War* was published by Robert Jay Lifton, a psychiatrist from the University of New York who captured the testimony of Vietnam Veterans plagued by the killing that took place in Vietnam.[1] By 1974 University of Chicago theologian and counselor Dr. Don Browning noted two items of interest in Lifton's book. First, was the moral conflict characterizing the testimonies. Secondly, Lifton was particularly interested in the veterans' quest for spiritual and moral rebirth of these individuals. Browning cautioned other pastor-counselors that they should not fail to consider that, "health becomes a footnote to the struggle to know and do the good."[2] Five years later, William P. Mahedy, who had been an Army chaplain in Vietnam, also referenced Lifton's book and added his concerns. Among his fellow

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[1] Robert J. Lifton, *Home From the War: Vietnam Veterans, Neither Victim nor Executioner*, 1st ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 44–49, 312. These pages are one example that describe the desensitization to violence that led to the My Lai Massacre and the uselessness of killing more broadly in Vietnam.

[2] Don Browning, "Psychiatry and Pastoral Counseling: Moral Context or Moral Vacuum," *Christian Century* issue 90, January through June (February 6, 1974): 158-161. Confirmation of this assessment can be found in Lifton's chapter The Warrior and the Prophet which describe the VVAW as "a spiritual home for a lot of lost souls" and who were on a mission to find the truth of the war but ended up filling a prophetic role to society extends its religion and morality that isn't divinely inspired but inspired from their experience with death. This understanding of prophecy is about insight which can lead to spiritual regeneration (312 & 318).

Vietnam Veterans. He observed a deep-rooted moral and spiritual malaise that had settled on them, stating in the subtitle of his article that "The religious community alone is equipped to bring the Vietnam Veterans home."[3] He later published a book titled *Out of the Night,* which further described the spiritual malaise of veterans. These combat veterans had concluded that God had betrayed them and was essentially "absent without leave" (AWOL) during the war.[4] Conversely, Mahedy also noted that the faith of some veterans had deepened as a result of the war. They felt a "period of estrangement from religion and after a period of searching, finally, returned to a worship of God, if not to a church."[5]

In the decades since Lifton, Browning, and Mahedy first published, two trends have developed. Suicide has plagued Vietnam Veterans at twice the rate of their peers.[6] Tom Berger, the executive director of the Vietnam Veterans of America National Health Council in 2014 lamented, "You, know, we're just old guys, and we're going to die, so why pay much attention to them?' . . . That's kind of the feeling that some of our members have."[7] The spiritual malaise persists. A lesser-known trend is that veterans are

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[3] William P Mahedy, "We've Got to Get out of This Place: The Religious Community Alone Is Equipped to Bring the Vietnam Veterans 'Home,'" *The Christian Century* 96, no. 30 (September 26, 1979): 922–23.

[4] William P. Mahedy, *Out of the Night: The Spiritual Journey of Vietnam Vets* (New York : Ballantine Books, 1986), http://archive.org/details/outofnightsp00mahe, 125.

[5] Mahedy, 23, 31, 129.

[6] Maria Olenick, Monica Flowers, and Valerie J Diaz, "US Veterans and Their Unique Issues: Enhancing Health Care Professional Awareness," *Advances in Medical Education and Practice* 6 (December 31, 2015): 635–39, https://doi.org/10.2147/AMEP.S89479. Travis Roach and Saheli Nath, "Counties with More Vietnam Veterans Have a Higher Suicide Rates," *Journal of Regional Analysis and Policy* 53, no. 1 (April 10, 2023): 105–15.

[7] Jordain Carney, "Why Are So Many Older Veterans Committing Suicide?," North Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, April 13, 2014, https://www.veterans.nd.gov/news/why-are-so-many-older-veterans-committing-suicide.

more likely to attend evangelical and historically black churches reflecting studies that show religious people are twice as likely to serve in the military than those who are non-religious.[8] Considering the connections that Vietnam Veterans and the veterans of other wars have with churches, pastors must understand the spiritual issues with which many combat veterans wrestle in the aftermath of war. However, in the years since Vietnam, it has been the community of research psychologists and psychiatrists who have sought to research and understand the persistent moral and spiritual challenges of veterans. This wasn't for a lack of concern among pastors but because researchers and practitioners within the Veterans Administration (VA) dedicated to the clinical care and veterans themselves organized political pressure demanding help.[9] It was against this backdrop that the moral and spiritual issues facing veterans gained attention and developed into the field of research known as moral injury.[10]

Having introduced the initial observations of Lifton, Browning and Mahedy, which identified the spiritual malaise and estrangement among Vietnam Veterans, attention must be given to how psychologists and psychiatrists described these same spiritual issues. Initially, treatment was given for what is called Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD), but now assessments described a phenomenon called moral injury, which revolves around questions of morality related to, but distinct from, PTSD.

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[8] Tobin Grant, "Religious People Are More Likely to Be Veterans: Two Graphs on Veterans in American Religion," Religion News Service, November 11, 2015, https://religionnews.com/2015/11/11/religious-people-are-more-likely-to-be-veterans-two-graphs-on-veterans-in-american-religion/.

[9] Timothy S. Mallard and Nathan H. White, *A Persistent Fire: The Strategic Ethical Impact World War 1 on the Global Profession of Arms* (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2020), 249.

[10] For the sake of simplicity and consistency given the theological orientation of this research, I have chosen to spell moral injury with lower case letters even though there are times it could arguable be written as Moral Injury or MI just as PTSD uses capital letters.

Moral and Spiritual Injury as a Clinical Challenge

In 1980, the term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was formally recognized as a diagnosis by the American Psychiatric Association to describe the effects of combat upon Vietnam Veterans.[11] PTSD is a descriptor of the physiological reactions commonly found as a result of combat trauma such as intrusive flashbacks, and dreams, arousal, hypervigilance, and various avoidant behaviors, all of which can be acute or chronic in nature.[12] Retired Navy Chaplain Dwight Horn gives a vivid description in the opening statement of his article "PTSD and War," writing:

> When the enemy tries to kill you, the memory of that moment does not go away. The bullet as it zips past, the deafening explosion of an IED or mortar round, the guttural screams of a combatant who charges at you with lethality will forever become a part of you. When these experiences lead to injury or result in the death of those by your side, the trauma can be relentless and haunting.[13]

Combat-associated trauma is not unlike other forms of trauma from an event which may only last a short period of time, yet it is a wounding that can "function as a present, progressive, and continuing experience."[14] Consequently, even though the pursuit of suitable treatments initially identified the symptoms as they related to the original experience, researchers have come to recognize that issues such as shame and guilt are also associated with the initial circumstances are are resistant to traditional

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[11] Miriam Reisman, "PTSD Treatment for Veterans: What's Working, What's New, and What's Next," *Pharmacy and Therapeutics* 41, no. 10 (October 2016): 623–34.

[12] Reisman.

[13] Dwight Horn, "PTSD and War: The Ever Real, Ever Present, and Ever Controlling Impact of Combat," *PRCC Chaplain Ministries*, n.d., 1, www.prcc.com.

[14] David E Lounsbury, Ronald F Bellamy, and David C Thomasma, *Military Medical Ethics*, vol. 1 (Borden Institute, Walter Reed Army Medical Center: Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Army, United States of America, 2003), 138.

clinical treatments because of the varying moral codes of each person.[15] Additionally, the veterans seemed to require a more informal approach from their doctors than traditional clinical treatments and doctor-patient relationships. They preferred formats were semi-spontaneous rap groups which began to form around the country that utilized a form of group therapy.[16] By 1994 a research psychologist named Jonathan Shay, who was serving the VA in Southern California, published a book titled *Achilles in Vietnam*. Shay had spent years listening to veterans individually and in groups and landed on the term "moral injury" as a concept to describe the phenomenon of guilt and shame that persisted among Vietnam Veterans. Shay defined moral injury as characterizing a combatant who has experienced "a betrayal of what is right by a legitimate authority in high stakes situations."[17] Moral injury includes the actions of legitimate authority because of the nature of combat and leadership within war, which creates these high stakes situations and has a lasting impact upon those who experience them to such an extent that their character deteriorates.[18] The events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent

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[15] Edgar Jones, "Moral Injury in a Context of Trauma," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 216, no. 3 (March 2020): 127–28, https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.2020.46. Alanna Coady et al., "Trauma, Spirituality, and Moral Injury: Assessing and Addressing Moral Injury in the Context of PTSD Treatment," *Current Treatment Options in Psychiatry* 8, no. 4 (December 2021): 186–95, https://doi.org/10.1007/s40501-021-00252-0.

[16] Lifton, *Home From the War: Vietnam Veterans, Neither Victim nor Executioner*. 76-79. These groups grew out of informal Vietnam Veteran groups who ultimately wanted professionals to help them sort through their thoughts. Their intent was to be less formal than group therapy and were marked by affinity, presence and self-generation of all participants.

[17] Jonathan Shay, "Moral Injury," *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 31, no. 2 (2014): 182–91, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036090. Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat and the Undoing of Character*, 4, 5, 37.

[18] Jonathan Shay, "Moral Injury." Oral History Review, Spring 2012Intertexts, Vol. 16, No. 1 © Texas Tech University Press," *Texas Tech University Press*, Oral History Review, 16, no. 1 (Spring 2012), 60. https://oralhistoryreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Shay-Jonathan-Moral-Injury-Intertexts-Lubbock-16-1-Spring-2012-57-6685-86-2012-.pdf.

Afghanistan and Iraq wars broadened interest among active-duty military members and other research psychologists about moral injury, and before long, the term was permanently fixed into the lexicon of veteran care.

The legitimacy of a PTSD diagnosis rests on an impartial clinical assessment based on physiological factors (syndromes and disorders) related to combat. The diagnosis carries no moral connotations since a veteran's issues can be traced to the explosion of a grenade (for example) that causes symptoms such as hyperarousal.[19] In the same way the term moral injury carries a similar expectation by offering a diagnosis from medical professionals free of moral judgement even though the concept of a *moral* injury requires a different calculus. The calculus in this case is that the moral judgement was a subjective experience which mattered deeply to the veteran. Yet, classifying the experience as an *injury* sustained during combat, gives it a medical connotation. In spite of similarities, the differentiation between PTSD and moral injury presents a problem for the clinical paradigm of the VA which evaluates the injuries of veterans in order to determine the appropriate level of disability benefits. In this case, how does one assess if the shame associated with moral injury has a debilitating effect upon a veteran, and what specifically are the origins of that shame? Why does the same type of event impact one person and not another? The subjective nature of these questions makes it hard for the

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[19] Sonya Norman and Shira Maguen, "PTSD: National Center for PTSD," *U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs*, n.d., https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/cooccurring/moral_injury.asp#:~:text=A%20moral%20injury%20can%20occur%20in%20response%20to,a%20line%20with%20respect%20to%20their%20moral%20beliefs. Disability for compensation related to a traumatic event (the "stressor") or an experience with the stressor is related to PTSD symptoms if the stressor happened during service and a doctor has diagnosed the servicemember with PTSD . . . Although the core features of moral injury overlap with symptoms and common features of PTSD, it is possible to have moral injury and not meet criteria for PTSD.

VA to quantify and therefore it does not give a disability rating for moral injury as it does for PTSD.

The issues of shame and guilt mean understanding moral injury along behavioral lines limits possibilities for treatment. Current explanations of moral injury reflect an acknowledgement that guilt and shame are connected to the spiritual domain as a way to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the morality behind decisions made in combat. For example, "The key precondition for moral injury is an act of transgression, which shatters moral and ethical expectations that are rooted in religious or spiritual beliefs, or culture-based, organizational, and group-based rules about fairness, [and] the value of life."[20] Additionally, the "act of transgression" is of significance because Shay's approach to moral injury was the violation of one's morality which could be compounded by the decision or action of a leader that transgresses these same moral codes. Timothy Mallard, an Army Chaplain and professor of ethics at the Army War College also argues that guilt and shame can result by actively transgressing one's own moral code which also ruptures foundational religious beliefs leading to a temporary or permanent loss of that transcendent relationship to God. He refers to this condition as spiritual injury.[21] Additionally, qualitative researchers at the Shay Center within the Volunteer's of America (VOA) organization have developed Resilience Strength Training which

[20] Shira Maguen and Brett Litz, "Moral Injury in the Context of War," Mindfulness Peace Project, June 26, 2015, https://mindfulnesspeaceproject.org/moral-injury-in-the-context-of-war/.

[21] Mallard and White, *A Persistent Fire: The Strategic Ethical Impact World War 1 on the Global Profession of Arms*, 275.

explores the value of religious rituals and participation in their pursuit of providing care that accounts for the spiritual practices of life.[22]

Although the research into spirituality and moral injury has developed a better sense of causes, the issues of how to provide care, especially in terms of the ever-present goal of "healing" have proven to be elusive, prompting Dr. Warren Kinghorn of Duke University to write that there is a theological gap in the field that should be addressed by Christians. He argues that clinical models, though useful "cannot treat moral injury as anything other than an imminent, psychological phenomenon" and even if a religious community could be involved in healing, the nature of the clinical model "cannot pass judgement on the validity of moral rules and assumptions that individual soldiers carry."[23] Therefore, Kinghorn turns to Christian moral theology and practice noting there is a fragmentary Christian tradition which provided formal liturgies of lament after warfare. Kinghorn is not alone in his supposition that lament plays a constructive role within the life of the one struggling with moral injury. The late Larry Graham, Professor of Pastoral Theology and Care at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado, believed that the process of lamentation in connection with religious symbols and

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[22] Timothy M. Barth et al., "Effects of Resilience Strength Training on Constructs Associated with Moral Injury among Veterans," *Journal of Veteran Studies* 6, no. 2 (December 14, 2020): 101–13, https://doi.org/10.21061/jvs.v6i2.199.

[23] Warren Kinghorn, "Combat Trauma and Moral Fragmentation: A Theological Account of Moral Injury," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 32, no. 2 (2012): 68, https://doi.org/10.1353/sce.2012.0041. "Wars are things to lament, not to celebrate, as even acts justified under particular descriptions such as "shooting in self-defense" can be deeply complex and troubling in the details."

communities is a strength-producing part of rebuilding and meaning-making that results in the veteran's ability to cope and heal after traumatic events.[24]

Although the scope of Kinghorn's paper is beyond the boundaries of this research as it pertains to the field of moral injury his comments point to the value of a Biblical Theology that explores the connection between spiritual alienation and estrangement in the aftermath of war and other forms of conflict as a need to lament. While veterans report appreciation for psychological or physiological approaches to care,[25] it is not unusual for combatants to suspect that one's personal issues are not limited to the psychological domains but involve some level of connection or reconciliation with God.[26] This possibility is of fundamental importance since warfare can expose combatants to troubling questions regarding the nature of good and evil, the person of God, His responsibility for them and others and their accountability to Him based on broken moral codes. Therefore, the theological questions raised by Vietnam Veterans during, and often times after their war experience, is of great importance, in part because their questions related to spiritual and moral injury provide a window into the nature of their theological needs not just because of particular experience as the cause of a moral injury, but because

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[24] Larry Graham, "Moral Injury, Lamentation, and Memorializing Rituals as Pastoral Care," Ministry Matters, June 28, 2018, http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/8960/moral-injury-lamentation-and-memorializing-rituals-as-pastoral-care.

[25] Shay, "Moral Injury."

[26] Donna Carla Bailey, "Religious Coping, Trait Forgiveness, and Meaning as Protective Barriers for Soldiers" (Phd. Diss., Iowa State University, 2009), 35–53. https://dr.lib.iastate.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/1b15afe7-8265-4614-bed2-5eff6ea70478/content Although this study is mainly concerned with religion and forgiveness after a traumatic event, it made a research distinction between those who had "a positive religious coping" which included a forgiveness trait and those who had "a negative religious coping." Those who had a positive religious coping were marked by turning to God, helping others, and religious forgiveness were less likely to suffer from psychological stress than those with negative coping who felt alienated from God and viewed God as punishing and uncaring and therefore had difficulty reconciling faith with their Vietnam experiences.

of the lifelong and existential questions of faith, of which one's spirituality is concerned.[27]

This section has briefly introduced the origination of moral injury as a phenomenon related to PTSD, but distinct with respect to issues of shame and guilt which are tied to one's sense of morality. The limitations of clinical methods to address the spiritual and theological considerations in the field of moral injury have been raised by various researchers who have also suggested the connection between a combatant's experience after combat and the need for lament. Attention will now be given to scriptural laments as a practice that is oriented towards God (reengagement with God).

Lament as Theological Engagement

Kinghorn has noted there is a theological gap within the field of moral injury that has not fully considered utilizing the liturgies of lament. Graham has noted lament as a religious practice that helps memorialize and make meaning. The basis of laments within the historical Christian Community are anchored within the Old Testament scriptures and recognized (among other things) as expressions of complaint and need, directed towards God in forms of liturgical worship.[28] Importantly, these various expressions are formed on the basis of their participation within God's covenant community.

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[27] Mallard and White, *A Persistent Fire: The Strategic Ethical Impact World War 1 on the Global Profession of Arms*, 281. The context of this comment is Mallard's interest in distinguishing a difference between moral injury as an event, and spiritual injury which has life long implications with respect to one's faith.

[28] Claus Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*, 1st ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 94, 95.

The Psalms contain laments that were written during periods of conflict and war such as Psalms 13, 23, 54, and 83 perhaps also Psalm 55 which deals with betrayal in the midst of conflict. These laments, both individual and communal in nature, are witnesses to a living God who is to be personally engaged with in the midst of conflict, in order to provide justice and deliverance on the basis of His character and covenant. Notably, God's vindication and covenant love are sometimes featured as concluding words of praise for how God has intervened and provided deliverance in the Psalms.[29] There are also laments that were written post-conflict, such as those recorded in Psalms 79 and 137 which speak to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the book of Lamentations, which are set within the context of Jerusalem's fall and destruction by the Babylonian empire.[30] The nature of siege warfare is evident within Lamentations through the appalling conditions Jerusalem was subjected too such as rape, humiliation, and the testimony of a starving woman eating her child, a horror mentioned twice.[31] Yet the main voices speak to the shame, guilt and the anxiety of being separated from God.[32] Neither the author, nor the community at large, was immune to the effects of the conflict. Spiritual confusion and turmoil seemed to be an unavoidable state, given the nature of the situation.[33] Lamentations 3:1-18, 28-30, 46-66 captures a range of scenarios which suggest all

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[29] Psalm 55 is an example.

[30] Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*, 54.

[31] Lamentations 2:20 and 4:10 describe starving mothers eating their children.

[32] Robin Parry, *Lamentations*, 1st ed., The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 12. "In chs.1 and 2 there are just two voices – those of Lady Zion and the Narrator. There is disagreement about whether the man in ch.3 is the same Narrator or a new character." The same discussion is continued for the voices in chs 4 and 5.

[33] Johan Renkema, *Lamentations*, Historial Commentary on the Old Testament (Belgium: Peeters Leuven, 1998), 45, 46.

manner of spiritual turmoil; be it alienation from God, abandonment, and various forms of injustice suffered from fellow countrymen and enemies. As a result of what could be viewed as a broken moral framework, a renewed engagement with God becomes the primary concern as the author's memory reflects upon the mercies of God in Lamentations 3:19-24. Here, the nature of the lament transitions from a spiritual state of being that has a theological cause and introduces the possibility of theological hope based on the faithful and loving character of God.[34]

Kinghorn's argument that the theological relationship to moral injury is important in that it is based upon a supposition that liturgies of lament could be part of the healing solution for warriors. Graham states this explicitly. However, their comments do not extend to the book of Lamentations itself. In fact, very few authors connect the context of modern warfare and issues such as spiritual distress,[35] PTSD or moral injury with the book of Lamentations. Lanahan, who wrote in 1974, and later Middlemas, are exceptions and acknowledge a military connection by refering to the speaker in Lamentations 3 as 'the Solider.'[36] Furthermore, of all the veteran testimonies I have read and heard, only one has referred to the Book of Lamentations.[37] Generally, Lamentations is understood

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[34] Parry, *Lamentations*, 101.

[35] Spiritual Distress defined for the purposes of this research is a broad term which could span everything from God's affliction described theologically in Lamentations 3 in which his absence, silence, alienation and punishment to anthropologically centered descriptions of uncertainties associated with moral injuries.

[36] William F Lanahan, "Speaking Voice in the Book of Lamentations," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93, no. 1 (March 1974): 45, 46. Jill Middlemas, "War, Comfort, and Compassion in Lamentations," *The Expository Times* 130, no. 8 (May 1, 2019): 346, https://doi.org/10.1177/0014524619831576.

[37] Jimmie Dean Coy, *Priosoners of Hope: A Gathering of Eagles*, (Mobile, AL: Evergreen Press, 2005), 113. Colonel Sam Johnson spent nearly seven years as a POW in Vietnam referenced Lamentations 3:22, 23.

through the lens of loss and grief[38] and has been adopted by some pastors and scholars to use the laments as a guide in counseling church members who face various types of suffering.[39] Lamentations is also described as survival literature in which life is portrayed in the midst of a world characterized by death.[40] Finally, there are a growing number of scholars who view the literature through the lens of trauma[41] and how trauma shaped the poetic language and structure of Lamentations to include the plurality of speakers sharing their laments musically with one another as a form of temple worship or even a dirge.[42]

These sources tend to view the impact of trauma as an injury received or a violation of one's agency as a primary feature of suffering. While covenantal disobedience is acknowledged as a point of personal or communal responsibility, the focus upon trauma within Lamentations studies is similar to the violation of one's personal agency within the fields of PTSD and moral injury.[43] The restoration of this

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[38] David J. Reimer, "Good Grief? A Psychological Reading of Lamentations," *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 114, no. 4 (January 11, 2002): 545, https://doi.org/10.1515/zatw.2002.030.

[39] Eric Kress and Paul Tautges, *God's Mercy in Our Suffering: Lamentations for Pastors and Counselors*, 2nd ed. (Woodlands, TX: Kress Biblical, 2019), 38, 43. The acknowledgment of the source of suffering is emphasized as a key method for the counselor to impress upon the counselee as a way to acknowledge God's disciple and sovereignty in order to mitigate the carelessness by which some seek to "move on" in life as a way to avoid responsibility.

[40] Tod Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book* (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 43.

[41] Jeremiah W. Cataldo, "Lamenting Loss: A New Understanding of Trauma in Lam 1," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*, August 24, 2020, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09018328.2020.1801927.

[42] Jill Middlemas, "War, Comfort, and Compassion in Lamentations," 351. Middlemas argues part of the insight of the book's post-conflict nature its deliberate poetic structure and linguistic choice and usage. She says, "There appears to be a deliberate sense of order to the poems. The elements of a funeral song are most prevalent in the first and second poems, but they recede and the collection ends with one of the purist examples of a communal lament in the Old Testament in the fifth chapter."

[43] Joseph M. Currier, Kent D. Drescher, and Jason Nieuwsma, "Introduction to Moral Injury," in *Addressing Moral Injury in Clinical Practice.*, ed. Joseph M. Currier, Kent D. Drescher, and Jason

agency is precisely what clinical models struggle to reestablish, given their natural role to relieve suffering and pursue healing. Kinghorn mentions that churches may be thankful for the relief that clinical methods offer to relieve suffering, but they should not be satisfied. He essentially argues that the reclamation of agency is the telos Christian theology offers in this context as a desire to reconcile with God and to fully participate within the Christian community. An application of this is allowing one time to lament.[44]

Psalms of lament, in their own way, acknowledge the violation of one's agency but focus on the longing of one's heart and the need for personal deliverance in various ways. For example, Psalms 51 and 85 reflect upon individual and corporate repentance. Psalm 38 is an active prayer and lament of personal confession which shares an intensity that is very similar to Lamentations 3:1-30. Likewise, the nature of lament described in the Book of Lamentations is not limited to the violation of one's moral agency, but a recognition that active sin against God is the cause for a lamentable spiritual condition and therefore resulting in separation from God. It is in light of this that the faithfulness of God's character and lovingkindness (His heart and covenantal love) is desired and confession of sin by the individual and community is considered essential to the hope that a real restored engagement with God is possible as stated in Lamentations 3:25ff, "The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him."[45]

Robin Parry, a research scholar, and editor with the publisher Wipf and Stock points out just how fragile is this aspect of Lamentations. He describes it as striking a

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Nieuwsma (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2021), 9, 13. https://doi.org/10.1037/0000204-001.

[44] Kinghorn, "Combat Trauma and Moral Fragmentation," 66, 68.

[45] Lamentations 3:25-30.

"balance between emphasizing her transgressions and repentance (which would undermine the audience's sympathy for her) and ignoring it (which would falsify her plight)."[46] The importance of this statement is not about the opinions of the readers or hearers, but about how the experience of Jerusalem's fall impacted the prophet and the people. Essentially, Parry is describing the nature of spiritual agency via lament as a series of prayers offered as a means to engage God. An important step in embracing this agency is the honesty of confession in Lamentations 3:1ff, "I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of the LORD's wrath . . ." And telling the truth about one's sin exemplified in Lamentations 3:42, "We have transgressed and rebelled."[47] The man also testifies in Lamentation 3:32, "Though He brings grief, He will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love." Parry observes these prayers for mercy on the basis of God's heart are challenged with the difficulty of engaging a silent God through prayer. Some commentators argue the engagement was still a future hope yet to be fulfilled, meaning agency was maintained through the lament itself,[48] but others point to verse 57 - "You came near when I called You, and You said, "Do not fear." as evidence that God indeed revealed Himself to be present.[49] By this interpretation, the telos of the lament was an engagement with God that brought peace and fulfilled the longing of the author's heart.

In summary, laments within the Old Testament reflect a desire for God's presence during times of conflict and after conflict. With respect to the book of Lamentations, and

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[46] Parry, *Lamentations*, 30, 31.

[47] Kress and Tautges, *God's Mercy in Our Suffering: Lamentations for Pastors and Counselors*, 121.

[48] Parry, *Lamentations*, 122. Renkema, *Lamentations*, 449, 450.

[49] Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*, 186, 187.

especially chapter 3, the nature of the lament not only expresses a desire to move from spiritual estrangement to renewed engagement with God, but does so by fulfilling the desire of one's heart by reentering the covenantal framework that the author and the people had violated. Parry notes the delicate balance this requires for the author of Lamentations 3 in order to achieve spiritual legitimacy with his audience. This balance is a challenge that pastors, as ministers of the Word, must recognize when offering pastoral care to veterans. Veterans may understand the nature of moral injury and hope for God's presence but may fail to understand the nature or value of theological lamentation upon their return home from war as a means to engage God, let alone the form and flow of laments as a practical form of worship.

Pastoral Challenges to Veteran Care

The theological nature of Lamentations 3 and its shift to the first-person voice testifies to the personal desire to move from spiritual estrangement to renewed engagement with God. This testimony is a significant resource for pastors, when offering pastoral care to veterans, especially if they tend to favor pastoral care that leans toward Psalms of innocence such as Psalms 17 and 27 and do not understand the nature or value of theological lamentations which include confession.

Pastors who desire to incorporate scriptures such as Lamentations 3 as part of their pastoral care to veterans will face the complication of a culture that is unfamiliar with, and resists, the process of lament. Kelly Kapic, a theology professor of Biblical Studies at Covenant College, writes that "any who have truly lived and loved must come to believe that lament is at least part of our existence . . . only the idealistic and unloving

belittle tears and sadness."[50] Claus Westermann extends this point saying, "just as pain and suffering are characteristic of human existence, so also the expressing of pain is intrinsic to life as we know it."[51] Mahedy noted the cultural models for masculinity and spiritual strength during the formative years of the Vietnam Veterans tend to depict Jesus as a type of John Wayne and not "the man of Sorrows" to which Kapic refers. These veterans had no language for lament.[52] In many cases, this is not because Christian veterans do not recognize the value of biblical lament. Rather, it is due to a persistent culture and military sub-culture that strengthens resistance to forms of spirituality that require spiritual vulnerability. The military community typically resists seeking any form of help, spiritual or otherwise, that might look like an emotional weakness for fear of being stigmatized,[53] or because of confronting one's fear that faith in God has been lost.[54]

Against these cultural perceptions stands the lament of "the mighty man" or "the valiant one" in Lamentations 3:1 who is both a believer in God and one who experienced warfare. Furthermore, the usage of his lament testifies to an engagement with God.[55] The

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[50] Kelly Kapic, *Embodied Hope: A Theological Meditation on Pain and Suffering*, 1st ed. (Downers Grove, Il: IVP Academic, 2017), 29.

[51] Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*, 89.

[52] Mahedy, *Out of the Night*. 138. This is in reference to the blending of John Wayne stereotypes and Jesus Christ.

[53] Chad Lewis, "An Exploratory Analysis of the Association between Moral Injury and Mental Healthcare-Seeking Attitudes and Behaviors in Returning Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars," *MedRxiv*, August 31, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.08.25.20182147.

[54] Harold G. Koenig and Faten Al Zaben, "Moral Injury: An Increasingly Recognized and Widespread Syndrome," *Journal of Religion and Health* 60, no. 5 (October 1, 2021): 2989–3011, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-021-01328-0. 2991-2993. The Moral Injury Symptom Scale-Military Version-Long Form (MISS-M-LF) study is unique in that it specifically queried participates about their loss of faith and feelings of punishment by God.

[55] Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*. 186. In his discussion on Lamentations 3:57 Westermann states that "God is no longer silent and begins to ameliorate the situation."

point of the lament is not to evaluate the spiritual strength of the man or present a formula that guarantees God's response, but to encourage the veteran that a theologically oriented lament is a substantial act of faith that hopes in the truth of God's steadfast and merciful love. "For though He causes grief, He will yet show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies."[56] The challenge pastors face is that warriors who believe in God, can slip into a spiritual alienation and distress which appears to be a rejection of God as described in Lamentations 3:18, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the LORD." These warriors may believe God has rejected them: "He has mangled me and left me numb." None of this is necessarily an end of faith.

In conclusion, those providing pastoral care to Vietnam Veterans during the early years of their return observed veterans who appeared to be estranged from God. This estrangement was characterized by the impact of their guilt, shame and anger at God. Psychiatrists, psychologists and practical theologians eventually described these and similar disorienting traits as spiritual and moral injury. Of note among these providing care is William Mahedy, a Vietnam Veteran himself who served as a chaplain. In this sense, Lamentations 3 may be describing a type of spirituality after the destruction of Jerusalem in combination with ministry that utilizes lament as a practical form of faith that engages God and discusses this hope with his community.

The challenge of offering pastoral care in the contemporary context may be a cultural unfamiliarity with the military experience and related experiences such as PTSD and moral injury. There may also be a cultural unfamiliarity with lament and perhaps a personal resistance to it. However, the book of Lamentations offers hope to both the

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[56] Lamentations 3:32.

pastor and to the veteran that God's covenant love is immanent throughout the process of lament.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore how Lamentations 3 provides a connection between the ministry of the Word and pastoral care for veterans who have experienced various forms of spiritual distress during and after combat. The background for this research introduces the phenomenon of moral injury as a contemporary field of research which developed from PTSD and trauma studies. The reason for including this topic as a backdrop to the primary purpose of this qualitative research is because the terms and concepts of PTSD and Moral Injury have become fixed within the vocabulary of combatants. Pastors may find the presence of moral injury and PTSD as contributors to the challenges of providing pastoral care to veterans who struggle with what it means to seek and engage God in worship.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the qualitative research:

1. How did Christian veterans experience God during combat?
    a. How was God's faithfulness experienced?
    b. How were feelings of God's presence or rescue experienced?
    c. Did you ever feel alienated from God?
2. How did combat shape the faith of Christian veterans upon their return home?
    a. How has worship, prayer, confession and the scriptures been a part of their life?

b. In what ways do reflections upon combat have bearing on their understanding of God?

c. How have they been cared for as veterans?

3. How have pastors helped Christian veterans engage God?

    a. How have veterans helped other veterans engage God?

    b. How was the ministry of scripture shared?

    c. How has the ministry of prayer and confession of sin been a part of worship?

Significance of the Study

This study has significance for clergy and all those who provide pastoral care to Vietnam Veterans or the veterans of any conflict. Pastors may struggle to understand how to offer pastoral care due to unfamiliarity with PTSD, Moral Injury or the military culture. Likewise, they may find that veterans are unfamiliar with scriptural lamentation. The findings from the literature and qualitative research of this study provide significant theological and practical help. This research will explore how the lament found in Lamentations 3 testifies to the faithfulness of God and the community of believers to veterans who have experienced spiritual distress as a result of their combat.

Pastors can benefit from this research because the book of Lamentations supports the ministry of the Word by providing a theological and contextual[57] understanding for the spiritual complexities suffered by veterans during and after the experience of war. The focus on Lamentations 3 contributes to an understanding of the various issues

[57] Graham, "Moral Injury, Lamentation, and Memorializing Rituals as Pastoral Care."

associated with these complexities as a first-person testimony that may encourage pastors in their role as ministers of the Word and the pastoral care they provide as part of the covenant community.

The collecting and analysis of combatant veteran testimonies will provide pastors and spiritual leaders with the lived experiences and best practices of veterans who have sought and recovered hope in God and shared this hope with other veterans. Finally, the value of this research may also extend to other veterans who find themselves trapped or struggling with various forms of spiritual distress such as feeling afflicted, alienated or abandoned by God and therefore struggle to believe the testimony of the scriptures.

Definition of Terms

In this study, key terms are defined as follows:

Combat Arms – Commonly referred to as units that participate in direct tactical ground combat such as the Infantry, Armor, Cavalry, Special Forces and Artillery.

Combat Support – Commonly referred to as units that provide fire support and operational assistance to combat elements such as Engineers, Military Police, Intelligence, Aviation Military and the Signal Corps.

Combat Service Support – Commonly referred to as Logistics that includes a wide range of military occupational specialties (MOSs) such as the Finance Corps, Transportation Corps, Medical Corps, Judge Advocate General (JAG) and Chaplain Corps as examples.

Hesed - God's covenant relationship with His people results in His loyal love and faithfulness, even when His people are unfaithful to Him. Always at the heart

of *hesed* lies God's gracious and generous sense of compassion; his steadfast love and mercy.

Lament - An act or prayer that expresses personal or corporate grief that often have five components: Address to God; complaint; confession of faith; petition for relief; and vow of praise.

Military Occupational Specialty – An MOS is the role or job someone had while in the military.

Moral Injury – A betrayal of what is right by a legitimate authority in high stake situations.[58]

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder – The physiological reactions to traumatic events commonly found as a result of combat such as intrusive flashbacks and dreams, arousal and hypervigilance and various avoidant behaviors, all of which can be acute or chronic in nature.[59]

Post Traumatic Growth - The possibility of growing through one's traumatic experience.

Spiritual Distress - A broad term used for this research which could span anything from God's affliction described poetically in Lamentations 3 such as His absence, silence, alienation and punishment to anthropologically centered descriptions of uncertainties associated with moral injuries.

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[58] There are a number of very good definitions. Jonathan Shay's definition is represented here because he coined the term and his material is a primary source for this research.

[59] Reisman, "PTSD Treatment for Veterans."

Spiritual Injury - An enduring spiritual distress, such as disappointment with God, that began with a specific event

Veterans Administration – The Veterans Health Administration is America's largest integrated health care system, providing care at 1,321 health care facilities, including 172 medical centers and 1,138 outpatient sites of care of varying complexity, serving 9 million enrolled Veterans each year.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Spiritual and Moral Injury Concerns

The purpose of this study is to explore how Lamentations 3 provides a connection between the ministry of the Word and pastoral care for veterans who have experienced various forms of spiritual distress during and after combat. The background for this qualitative research recognizes the phenomenon of spiritual and moral injury, as well as PTSD, as contributing factors that are known to hinder the ability of some veterans' to transition back into civilian life. Particular emphasis will be given to moral injury as a current conversation within the broader field of PTSD and trauma studies as it relates to the challenges of engaging God in a meaningful way through worship.

The spiritual questions raised after spiritual and moral injuries range from broadly spiritual to theologically specific questions depending upon the religious orientation of those conducting research, christological questions are also entertained by researchers who are practicing Christians. Although Lamentations 3 is not overtly Christological, themes of personal redemption are present especially as veterans speak of their experiences in combat in light of their faith in Christ or in relationship to other passages of lament within the scriptures. Therefore, attention will be given to expressions of lament as a form of theological engagement and worship throughout the scope of war and the pastoral challenges inherent in recognizing lament as worship. Towards this end, the literature review will include three relevant areas of research to provide a foundation for this qualitative research. These areas include spiritual and moral injury as an indicator of

spiritual distress and a need for connection; a conceptual approach to pastoral care that encourages connection and reconciliation with God and His people; and considerations from the third chapter of Lamentations that exemplify elements of lament as a means of engaging God in the aftermath of Jerusalem's destruction.

Social and Spiritual Factors Behind Moral Injury

The early literature investigating spiritual distress experienced by Vietnam Veterans was limited in scope because the research efforts surrounding trauma and PTSD that provided a morally neutral relationship between doctor and patient focused upon the treatment of symptoms. Once it became evident that questions of shame and guilt persisted, clinicians continued to consider these issues through a psychological lens resulting in the field of research called moral injury. The observations made were similar to those made by pastors who used a theological lens to understand the sources of suffering in veterans. Although the intent of clinicians and pastors has been to find a means of healing, this goal has proven elusive to both, though for different reasons: for clinicians the nature of guilt and shame is tied to spiritual matters and for pastors spiritual matters are tied to trauma. The survey in this literature review seeks to illustrate how the perspectives of both the clinician and the pastor have developed through their understanding of personal agency (responsibility) within war and through visualizing pathways of spiritual growth after the veterans return home.

Soldiers returning from the later years of the Vietnam War found themselves in socially precarious positions given the mood of the country about the war, especially after the revelations of the My Lai massacre in 1968 and the shooting at Kent State in 1970.

The poor treatment of veterans by certain sectors of society was a stamp of social disapproval at the end of a difficult tour of duty. This, combined with their inability to connect with the previous generation of WWII veterans who had fought a "good war" for a "just cause"[60] created a backdrop in which many Vietnam Veterans felt socially alienated and were unaware of America's commitment as defined in the 1954 Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). But even as the political and social mood changed by the late seventies and early eighties, a moral malaise persisted among these veterans prompting care givers to ask, "Why?"

The starting point for understanding the causes of veteran suffering is typically the act of killing because it is the signature tragedy and trauma that reverberates throughout warfare. That killing, or seeing others killed, may be traumatic is not widely disputed given our cultural context.[61] However, a common assumption is that killing within the rules of war, and especially in self-defense, is a natural guard against suffering from the ill-effects of combat such as guilt or shame. On the other hand, the participation in atrocities outside the rules of war, such as the My Lai massacre, have been thought to be the primary causes for guilt and shame.[62] While it is true that combatants often acknowledge killing another human begins a process of reconciling their actions with personal convictions, the trigger for guilt is not always the knowledge of killing, but

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[60] Mahedy, *Out of the Night*, 115.

[61] Mallard and White, *A Persistent Fire: The Strategic Ethical Impact World War 1 on the Global Profession of Arms*, 35–42. Marc Livecche makes a strong argument for the connection between moral injury and our cultural context, especially when the biblical concept of love is misconstrued as kindness and the violation of kindness.

[62] *Remember My Lai Participants*, vol. Part 1, Frontline (Yorkshire Television, England: Maryland Public Television, 1989).

killing someone in particular. David Grossman, a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel who was also trained as a psychologist, points out this particularity has much to do with psychological trauma, especially if the face of enemy is seen.[63] What becomes evident in Grossman's research is that despite efforts to abide by the rules of armed conflict, a sense of moral failure can develop. The same issues have been documented in the more recent wars fought in Iraq and Afghanistan. For some soldiers killing within the Rules of Engagement (ROE) is small comfort compared to the violated sense of responsibility and accountability for another person[64] which cannot be dismissed due to an honest mistake or reduced to a legal matter.[65]

Clinical Observations

Jonathan Shay works extensively with veterans using a clinical lens to explain how certain events in combat, such as killing, become injurious to the combatant. The crux of his theory for veteran suffering revolves around events in which there is a "betrayal of what is right, by a legitimate authority in a high stakes situation."[66] This

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[63] David Grossman. *On Killing* (New York: Little, Brown & Co. 1995.) 119. "As men draw near it becomes extremely difficult to deny their humanity. Looking in a man's face, seeing his eyes and his fear, eliminate denial. Instead of shooting at uniform and killing a generalized enemy, now the killer must shoot at a person and kill a specific individual."

Grossman. *On Killing*. 28, 29. "This (refusal to fire) indicates a previously undiscovered psychological force. A force stronger than drill, stronger than peer pressure, even stronger than the self-preservation instinct . . . If a soldier goes up and look sat his kill – a common occurrence when the tactical situation permits – the trauma grows even worse, since some of the psychological buffer created by a midrange kill disappears upon seeing the victim at close range. Also see page: 78.

[64] Timothy Kudo, "How We Learned to Kill," *The New York Times*, Sunday Review, February 27, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/01/opinion/sunday/how-we-learned-to-kill.html.

[65] Robert Meagher. *Killing from the Inside Out: Moral Injury and Just War*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books. 2014. 106, 107ff.

[66] Shay, "Moral Injury." 182-191.

definition developed over a period of time to explain how the violation of one's responsibility is not simply limited to a decision to kill or not to kill, but to a larger range of actions or decisions. A common example is that of survivor's guilt and any sort of situation in which a veteran ultimately feels guilty and convinced, "It should have been me." Circumstances such as these seem beyond one's control to the individual who has never experienced combat, but from the soldier's perspective it can be viewed as a personal failure and a betrayal of what is right for which there are long-term consequences. One of Shay's key findings discussed in his book *Odysseus in America* is the depth of these injuries. With a view towards physically traumatic events causing PTSD, he shows how these injuries invade one's character. One of the long-term consequences is the loss of social trust, meaning that normal acts of friendliness and cooperation are viewed as acts to manipulate the innocent. This may even lead to paranoia.[67] The complexity of this injury to character is what Shay describes as the Greek word for *themis*, a broad betrayal of what is right, with an impact that isn't merely personal and private anguish but also behaviors that cause mistrust among others toward the veteran, or between veterans, as seen in the troubled character of Odysseus.[68] Shay observes that these characteristics manifest themselves in loose patterns among veterans beginning with demoralization, self-loathing, a loss of self-respect and initiative, a feeling

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Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat and the Undoing of Character*. 4, 5, 37.

[67] Jonathan Shay, *Odysseus In America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming* (New York, NY: Schribner, 2002), 150–152.

[68] Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat and the Undoing of Character*, 5, 193. Themis – Shay uses this term to describe the social conception of morality, of "what's right." Homer used the term themis to refer to the normal adult's cloak of safety. Shay argues that Moral Injury and PTSD are challenges to a soldier's sense of what is normally right.

of pervasive vulnerability and social withdrawal, etc.[69] Shay emphasizes it is important to understand that a necessary step towards recovery is to bring isolated and alienated veterans back into groups in which social trust can be reestablished through tangible and trusting relationships.[70]

Nancy Sherman also focuses on how the impact of traumatic events during combat develops after soldiers come home and extends to the issues of both trust and responsibility. With respect to trust she describes the reciprocal relationship between warriors itself can be fraught creating emotional isolation (Sherman also interacts with the story of Odysseus). When trust has been broken and because of the difficultly to rebuild trust apart from empathy, veterans tend to retreat into their own social circles. Compounding this retreat is the permission that civilians may inadvertatnly give to the veteran who withdraws. The resulting distance between soldier and civilian then perpetuates the myth they (civilians) have nothing to offer in terms of helping veterans heal.[71] With respect to responsibility, Sherman argues for a "progressor's stance" rather than a "perfectionist stance." The progressor's stance recognizes the limits of one's agency and seeks to realize ways to understand personal responsibilities that aren't as rigid as conflating it with holding one personally accountable. She makes this distinction because of the tendency some veterans have to trap themselves with the belief that others hold them responsible.[72] The progressor's stance revolves around the idea of regaining

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[69] Shay, *Odysseus in America.* 160.

[70] Shay, *Odysseus in America.* 175.

[71] Sherman, *After War: Healing the Moral Wounds of Our Soldiers*, 112-120.

[72] Sherman, 149.

self-hope and moving beyond feelings of entrapment, not just from the memory of the events, but from the condemning gaze of others, even those who a soldier may have killed or the gaze of the those who died on "the Marine's watch."[73] This does not mean a memory is forgotten or feelings are erased. The feelings can remain and be touched, but with empathy there, the feelings no longer need to be a source of paralysis.[74]

Edward Tick, a clinical psychotherapist and co-founder of the non-profit Soldier's Heart, reasons that the soul is at the center of human consciousness and experience, covering a range of aspects from our desire to create and preserve life to the aspects of what is sometimes called the shadow, i.e., that which is judged by society, religion or ourselves to be unacceptable life.[75] Therefore, moral injury is really a wounding of the soul and not merely a psychological disorder but a soul disorder which is why it cannot be treated by therapeutic models and why it responds to morality, spirituality, aesthetics and intimacy. The loss of intimacy is significant and his reading of King David's life through his Psalms of lament "reveal a man, warrior, and king in confusion, despair, loneliness, and spiritual collapse." Interestingly, Tick notes that he was also a man who sometimes "felt Divine presence and favor, in distress sought its renewal, and though life gave it praise."[76] As Tick investigates more contemporary testimonies of veterans, he argues that a proper social contract between warrior and civilian are "interchangeable

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[73] Sherman, 149.

[74] Sherman, 161.

[75] Edward Tick, *War and the Soul* (Wheaton, Il: Quest Books, 2005), 16-22.

[76] Edward Tick, *Warrior's Return: Restoring the Soul After War* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2014), 115.

concentric circles of protection and caring."[77] When society neglects its role, the cost of breaking the contract is the collapse of the warrior which is evidenced by the veteran carrying the collective wound and responsibility of the war alone leaving him isolated upon his return rather than coming home to a society serving as a refuge.[78] As a result, "war horror becomes imprisoned in participants' psyches" and the effects of alienation and betrayal expand and essentially begin to originate from outside of the warrior to include loved ones, the community, societal leadership and the judgement of the public opinion or any combination of these."[79] All of this can lead to substantial wounding, neglect and abandonment. Tick quotes one Vietnam Veteran who said, "At eighteen I left the country to fight for it overseas. At nineteen, when I returned, America left me."[80]

Pastoral Observations

William Mahedy writes with a pastoral lens as an active minister of the Word and Sacrament describing the veteran's experience as a journey into the night, a result of going to war and killing. He argues these soldiers went to war culturally inculcated with assumptions that killing for the sake of the state would be painless in the same way that the killing of Remus by Romulus for the sake of ancient Rome was painless and guiltless. However, through the course of combat these soldiers experienced guilt and shame

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[77] Tick, *Warriors Return,* 120.

[78] Tick, *Warriors Return,* 157-158.

[79] Tick, *Warriors Return,* 121.

[80] Tick, *Warriors Return,* 120-122.

similar to what Cain felt after killing Abel.[81] Responsibility and guilt lingered as the John Wayne version of Jesus faltered and then went AWOL.

Mahedy also believes the church is necessary to help its warriors (and a warring people) interpret their spiritual journey out of the night, but to do so "The church must claim its hold on scripture according to the revelation which has been entrusted to it."[82] However, Mahedy's assessment is that the church itself is under the influence of the same sort of mythology as its soldiers, a conclusion reached after ministering to veterans who actively tried to rid themselves of God (the god of their childhood), but in the end recognized that their experience of estrangement actually turned into what is described as "me and God" experiences. The veterans viewed these experiences as analogous to Jesus being in the desert and, interestingly, led some back to the church.[83] Mahedy believed that if churches, especially conservative, did not hold fast to the scriptures for these veterans, they would merely offer them the same old idols as substitutes for spiritual substance rather than fulfilling its mission to reconcile people to Christ.[84]

Siemon-Netto also considers the impact of a God gone AWOL and reflects upon the words of Mahedy and Paul Tillich concluding that sin, in the form of unbelief or "un-faith" is prior to the state of estrangement. He notes that most psychologists and clergymen recognize the Vietnam Veterans' belief in God, but no longer have faith or

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[81] Mahedy, *Out of the Night*, 175.

[82] Mahedy, *Out of the Night,* 167. His fear was that the nation would lay claim to the scriptures.

[83] Mahedy, *Out of the Night,* 176–82.

[84] Mahedy, *Out of the Night*. 179.

trust because they felt God let them down when He was most needed.[85] Siemon-Netto charges that the culture of the church not only didn't prepare the young people of the sixties and seventies for the reality of sin, but did little to help returning veterans because its leaders, especially those in progressive denominations, failed to separate the "War from the Warrior." As a result, many returning to the church for forgiveness found judgment.[86] In some cases civilian pastors reminded them of some of the military chaplains they served with who had "sported their rank," living like "lifers" and "desktop warriors." These realities made the process of faith difficult, adding another layer of spiritual damage especially as they became aware that something was also wrong with the "God of their childhood."[87] Still, many veterans express desire to leave their lives of isolation and want to be invited back into the community of the church. Like Mahedy, Siemon-Netto found through his rap group sessions that many veterans recognize their assumptions about an AWOL God were untrue. The opposite was true and they were the ones attempting to walk away from God (usually with much cursing) when in fact God was still there and wouldn't "let them off the hook." Instead of an absent God who deserved to be cursed, veterans who were discipled found solidarity with the Christ who had also suffered and been rejected, whose "priestly act was to put an end to man's estrangement caused by sin."[88] This, was the "acquittal" of God that Siemon-Netto wrote about.

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[85] Uwe Siemon-Netto, *The Acquittal of God: A Theology for Vietnam Veterans* (New York, NY: Pilgrim Press, 1990), 39, 40.

[86] Siemon-Netto, 54, 55.

[87] Siemon-Netto, 40, 41.

[88] Siemon-Netto, 41.

To summarize the observations of the clinicians, the causes of moral injury that stem from killing another person has the potential to create lasting psychological guilt due to the violation of one's responsibility for another. The fixation of guilt in the minds of these veterans resulted in what they perceived to be a personal failure, a betrayal of what is right, that was compounded by societal judgements, even the imagined? judgements of those who had not survived the war. Their findings showed that guilt and shame result in fractured responsibility, damaged character, wounded souls and contributed to their withdrawal from various aspects of society and feelings of neglect and alienation.

The pastors also recognized killing to be a major contributor to moral injury and spiritual injury. They also identified that presumptions of the veteran's childhood god, sometimes shaped by church leadership, created the conditions for the spiritual disillusionment with a god who went AWOL, contributing to the moral malaise and spiritual estrangement suffered by returning soldiers. Thus, Mahedy clarifies that scriptures must be held firmly by the church because of its ministry of reconciliation to Christ. Siemon-Netto notes that veterans often find solidarity with the Christ who was also rejected and suffered. Both men observed that veterans were not content to remain separated from either God or the church but desired to return.

As important as understanding the causes for spiritual and moral injury, the research community is interested in how healing might take place. Interestingly, both secular and religious scholars agree that moral issues need spiritual care and that the healing of an injury is not the same as restoring one's soul. As a result, the conversation

surrounding one's soul involves community participation that is inclusive of religious practice.

Spiritual Connection and Recovery

Mahedy recognized that healing was the first order of business for the veterans. Their insistence led to rap groups and political organization to ensure help would be available through the VA even though, as Lifton noted, they did not consider themselves to be patients in the traditional sense.[89] This dichotomy vexed professional clinicians whose training had inclined them to reduce the veteran's symptoms down to various descriptions of psychiatric stress and possibly, as Mahedy speculated, to "de-politicize the issue."[90] Thus clinicians such as Jonathan Shay were not only fully aware of the limitations PTSD treatments could offer, but with respect to guilt and shame, but they were aware of the limitations of themselves as clinicians. Nevertheless, Shay and others such as Edward Tick and Bret Litz responded with curiosity and compassion for suffering veterans. As a result, they pondered long term care in relationship to spirituality.

Clinical Observations

After identifying causes of moral injury in his book *Achilles in Vietnam,* Shay's focus turned to long term care and the difficult journey to return home and readjust to civilian life is found in his book *Odysseus in America*. Part One is titled "Unhealed Wounds" and Part Two is "Restoration" which deals with a three-stage recovery process

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[89] Mahedy, *Out of the Night*, 62–63.

[90] Mahedy, *Out of the Night,* 92.

of safety, sobriety and self-care; trauma-centered work of constructing a personal narrative and of grieving; and reconnecting with people, communities and ambitions.[91] Shay repeatedly emphasizes community as the means to recovery, be it one's character in relationship to social trust, the ability to move from isolation to accountability through support groups or becoming involved in community service which could also serve as a means of penance.[92] Of particular importance is Shay's realization that many health providers view the veteran's interest in community service as a hobby and distinct from what they offer as health providers. His realization that veterans need to be communally involved is part and parcel to the healing and recovery process of moral injury. This includes going to sacred places such as the Vietnam War Memorial with his VIP Groups.

Shay is also aware of the problems veterans had with certain clergy members upon their return home. As a result, he holds civilian religious leaders and military chaplains accountable for some of the moral injury veterans suffer because of their role in representing God. But he also acknowledges that the care of some religious (leaders) and cultural therapies are superior to anything clinics could offer in terms of healing.[93] Therefore, he makes it a habit to refer veterans struggling with spiritual issues to visit clergy and join their communities in order to participate in religious rituals of penance such as confession and the Eucharist.[94] Furthermore, as the founder of the Shay Center (within the Volunteer's of America [VOA] organization) and in partnership with moral

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[91] Shay, *Odysseus In America*, 168–78.

[92] Sherman, *After War: Healing the Moral Wounds of Our Soldiers*, 33, 153, 162 & 168.

[93] Shay, *Odysseus In America,* 152.

[94] Sherman, *After War: Healing the Moral Wounds of Our Soldiers*, 168.

injury researcher Rita Brock, research efforts are being devoted to develop Resilience Strength Training which explores the value of religious rituals and participation in their pursuit of providing care that accounts for the spiritual practices of life.[95]

Edward maintains that the wounded souls of veterans can be healed only by strategies that recognize that PTSD is fundamentally a soul disorder because PTSD is primarily a moral, spiritual and aesthetic disorder.[96] He believes that practicing aspects of faith through restoring relationships with enemies, services of atonement for past actions, ceremonies and the truth about war can help grow one's soul to become wise and strong and ultimately, to surround the disordering of trauma with a network of relationships and activities.[97] This idea finds additional and more detailed support in his book "Warrior's Return" in his chapter on transformation. Two of the supporting points read: "You can follow the path of a spiritual warrior. You can grow an identity big enough (Post-traumatic Growth, Post-traumatic Spiritual Development) to carry this wound, discover its blessings, and give it meaning." And secondly, "Your wound will never go away, and you will be different forever, but you can transform so that the wound is integrated into your whole self. It becomes your honorable story. Its disturbing symptoms fade and are replaced by wisdom, compassion, and lifelong service."[98] From his perspective transformation in healing is different than a clinical and therapeutic model. He views the nature of transformation as wisdom gained, such as traditional societies and communities

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[95] Barth et al., "Effects of Resilience Strength Training on Constructs Associated with Moral Injury among Veterans."

[96] Tick, *War and the Soul*, 108.

[97] Tick, *War and the Soul,* 286.

[98] Tick, *Warrior's Return*, 166–67.

who give "warrior medicine" through a "medicine man" who are skilled in applying the medicine of wisdom after trauma. Another example is the Biblical Job, who also saw a new "vision." Job's experience of looking into the whirlwind only came after his relentless demands (laments) for God to respond, and only then was he able to "experience the healing wisdom of humility in the face of cosmic complexity." Key to Tick's image of traditional societies is the critical importance of a supportive community and the citizenry upon which warriors depend upon their return from war. Again, the idea for a social contract in which support is provided to the warriors by the community is central because citizenry also bears the cost and responsibility for the war its warriors fight as well as sharing its wounds.[99]

If Shay and Tick have provided relational approaches to professional veteran care, Brett Litz and a cohort of researchers collaborated and applied their research skills to better understand how the efforts of care givers are to be focused. Their 2014 study on recovery recommends a clinical care process that includes the following; connection, preparation and education, modified exposure component, examination and integration, dialogue with benevolent moral authority, reparation and forgiveness, fostering reconnection, and planning for the long haul. The issue of forgiveness, practically speaking, leads to "making amends" and exploring spirituality in order to construct connections that transcend the self by joining activities and church groups because, "forgiveness within religious and spiritual frameworks is potentially instrumental in

[99] Tick, 157-158. It is worth noting that Job's "community of friends" failed to absorb his pain and grief with him.

alleviating guilt, shame, and demoralization."[100] In other words, his evidence-based methodology recognizes that religious communities have unique offerings for those suffering from guilt and shame which supports the more relational methods and conclusions that Shay and Tick have found to be helpful for veterans.

Pastoral Observations

Warren Kinghorn has entered into this research of spirituality and veteran care and expressed the need for Christian theologians to speak to these issues and explore how care might be understood and delivered through the religious community and practice.[101] Responses are coming, especially from military chaplains because of their proximity and interest in veteran care.

Adam Tietje, an Army Chaplain, and doctoral candidate at Duke University, has entered the conversation by addressing what is perceived to be the silence and absence of God. He writes:

> The experience of combat trauma and the attending overwhelming evil are often followed by the experience of the profound silence of God. The fundamental question "why?" echoes back seemingly unanswered. God's absence or malignancy is often presumed. For combat trauma survivors, this encounter with the hiddenness of God often leads to a loss of faith.[102]

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[100] Brett T. Litz et al., "Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans: A Preliminary Model and Intervention Strategy," *Clinical Psychology Review*, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, 29, no. 8 (December 1, 2009): 704, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2009.07.003.

[101] Asa Keimig, "Combat Trauma and Moral Injury: A Christian Psychiatrist's Perspective," Liberty University College of Osteopathic Medicine, February 23, 2023, https://www.liberty.edu/lucom/news/combat-trauma-and-moral-injury-a-christian-psychiatrists-perspective/.

[102] Adam Tietje, "Contra Rambo's 'Theology of Remaining': A Chalcedonian and Pastoral Conception of Trauma," *Pro Ecclesia* 28, no. 1 (February 1, 2019): 22–38, https://doi.org/10.1177/1063851219829936.

The core problem in this case is a soul wound in which the whole person is wounded in relationship to God. Moving forward necessitates theological language and the world of sin and salvation. Like Timothy Mallard, Tietje suggests that a distinction should be made between moral injury and spiritual injury as the difference between an episodic event and an enduring spiritual distress. This also includes the difference between psychological language and theological language, for the purpose of developing a theology of veteran care that is useful for pastors. The distinction is important when caring for the soul because, "soul wounds are theologically the object of salvation, while psychological wounds are the object of psychotherapeutic healing."[103] In his book "Toward a Pastoral Theology of Holy Saturday," he explores three areas of theological import: the place of sanctuary, lament and confession, forgiveness and reconciliation. All of these are captured in the liturgy of Holy Saturday in which the silence and absence of God is punctuated by the darkness of Christ in the grave during Holy Saturday before the Gospel of Christ's resurrection can be announced in the midst of hell. Tietje describes the condition of spiritual injury as a descent into the abyss which is accompanied by an assumption of God's malignancy as well as by the sins perpetrated against the veteran and/or sins committed by the veteran. The abyss characterized by Holy Saturday is a place of sanctuary with Christ and a place for the wounded soul cry in lament due to the evil experienced. It is also a place in which confession can be offered. In many cases both may be required of the veteran.[104] The abyss is also a place of healing, i.e., salvation. This

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[103] Tietje.

[104] Adam Tietje, *Toward a Pastoral Theology of Holy Saturday: Providing Spiritual Care for War Wounded Souls* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018), 87.

he argues is the very core of spiritual care and why words of lament and confession are so important. Apart from sanctuary with the suffering Christ, Tietje believes moral injury becomes an impediment to the Gospel and hearing the words of God's grace, "a concrete word for concrete sins," he writes quoting Dietrich Bonhoffer.[105] To emphasize the importance of fellowship with Christ he offers a word of caution about unrealistic expectations about belonging, stating that no community, commune, or collective, or person will every satisfy our loneliness completely.[106]

Mark Lee, an Army Chaplain and practical theologian who has specialized in pastoral care within Army hospitals, has written on the importance of post-traumatic growth (PTG). Lee argues the conceptual value of PTG is helpful for recovery because it provides the "possibility of growing through one's traumatic experience," rather than focusing on the *disorder* of PTSD which implies permanence and moral injury, and thus a symptom to be treated.[107] Lee concurs with Tick that where trauma has necessitated PTSD treatment and caused a spiritual injury, a parallel line of effort that pursues PTG is important to restore proper relationships between veterans and their communities.[108] This growth is a struggle in which previously held assumptions and views of the world are reinterpreted in helpful ways. Growth is indicated by a greater appreciation of life, and a changed sense of priorities, more intimate relationships with others, a greater sense of

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[105] Tietje, 89.

[106] Tietje, 103.

[107] Mallard and White, *A Persistent Fire: The Strategic Ethical Impact World War 1 on the Global Profession of Arms*, 249, 252.

[108] Mallard and White, 250.

personal strength, recognition of new possibilities; and, spiritual development.[109] Lee's comments are supported by a compilation of qualitative PTS(D) and PTG studies by Dr. Koenig, Dr. Blaze and Dr. Schaefer of the Duke University Medical Center, which proposed a model of interrelationships among those suffering post-traumatic stress. They suggest that "intrinsic religiosity possibly represents" that those with inherent religious beliefs i.e., those who pursue God for the sake of God or religion rather than for personal gain are more likely to experience PTG rather than those characterized by "extrinsic religiosity" whose religion is externally motivated.[110] Those with inherent religiosity may feel the initial effect of trauma(s) more deeply but have the ability to make meaning and experience greater levels of coping consistent with PTG, such as the ability to forgive, reframe one's faith and benefit from the social connections of religious practice. Notably, the conclusion of this work proposes that those who are intrinsically religious are able to "attend religious meetings and adhere to religious practices despite shortcomings of the faith community or immediate benefit from practices, may have higher inclinations to forgive, and more likely perceive trauma as loss rather than violation of entitlements toward others or God."[111]

Lee describes value of creating new and "common narrative" as a community of soldiers with common experiences in combat. The collective will of this community is

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[109] Mallard and White, 252.

[110] Frauke C. Schaefer, Dan G. Blazer, and Harold G. Koenig, "Religious and Spiritual Factors and the Consequences of Trauma: A Review and Model of the Interrelationship," *International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine* Vol. 38(4) (2008): 519.

[111] Schaefer, Blazer, and Koenig, 519,520.

important because it essentially declares, "I can survive because they have survived."[112] He then frames the process and struggle of PTG within the Christian community in particular even as they struggle with spiritual injuries. Nevertheless, the church community remains centered upon God's love in Jesus Christ and is empowered for service by the Holy Spirit. At the core of this is a belonging to Christ and the community of believers. Importantly, Lee clarifies that the church isn't merely a place to understand the suffering of the past but to receive spiritual care in the present, whether by eating at a common table, through prayer together or by celebrating life together.[113]

Summary of Spiritual and Moral Injury Concerns

What becomes evident in the literature provided by both groups is that healing must be contextualized within one's sense of self and community which inherently involves spiritual aspects. As clinicians approach this topic, their professional neutrality regarding spirituality remains, while Christian pastors provide more detailed descriptions of spiritual life and practice. In order to arrive at these conclusions, a number of key observations became evident. Jonathan Shay's formation of community groups was a pioneering effort that revealed community service to be viewed as acts of penance for veterans and a step in forming new life narratives. Edward also recognizes the value of these activities to include meeting with former enemies. He expands the view of healing

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[112] Mallard and White, 253-255.

[113] Mallard and White, 257-261. In this last comment Lee gives credit to the Stanely Hauerwas and Jean Vanier article *Living Gently in a Violent World*.

to be wisdom gained, another form of growth that envelops trauma, and similar to Shay, creates an honorable story. Both men view the formation of a new identity as significant towards recovery. The research of Bret Litz is more formulaic but captures the felt need of veterans to make amends and participate in religious and veteran communities just as Shay and Tick observed, because of the need for atonement and penance among veterans.

These research efforts overlap with the research of the chaplains who describe what participation in a religious community is and means, especially in light of the spiritual damage experienced within combat and its associated killing and trauma. Tietje views healing as salvation and ties salvation to the resurrection of Christ, but not before the abyss has been experienced and sins lamented and confessed. This experience explains, or rather redeems, the perceived absence of God. His description of the sanctuary as a place of darkness in the abyss illustrating the veteran's experience in the aftermath of the Afghanistan war is similar to the descriptions of Mahedy and Siemon-Netto who described how Vietnam Veterans experienced the absence of God, until they realized that God had always been present.

Lee centers Christ and the church in the isolated veteran's experience. As the veteran participates in the body of Christ, healing fades as a priority as spiritual growth in Christ becomes preeminent and fellow members of this community share in both life struggles and celebrations. The suggestions of Tietje and Lee are consistent with Mahedy and Siemon-Netto who, as active ministers, recognize the role of the Word and Sacrament, not merely as symbolic but as participatory within the Body of Christ and the restoration of fellowship with God. Again, the priority of healing fades as the isolation of

spiritual and moral injury is replaced with hope in fellowship with God and with his people.

Pastoral Challenges in Veteran Care

The literature review in the first section of this chapter introduces the research surrounding spiritual and moral injury by clinicians and military chaplains, observing that healing and spiritual growth may develop through community relationships. This section will examine literature which points to the role of lament for veterans. This topic is challenging due to the tendency of pastors to rely upon medical assessments related to spiritual and moral injury and to minimize the value of biblical lament for spiritual growth. The focus will depart from the causes of spiritual distress and focus on a practical approach detailing why lament is important and how it can be incorporated into pastoral care for veterans.

Medical and Pastoral Ethos in Partnership

Pastors seeking to offer veterans care are increasingly unfamiliar with the military,[114] making it easier to assume that the combat-related issues of veterans are better left to the VA or other medical experts. Portrayals of veterans as either hard and

[114] Katherine Schaeffer, "The Changing Face of America's Veteran Population," *Pew Research Center* (blog), November 8, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/11/08/the-changing-face-of-americas-veteran-population/. The percentage of veterans across the United States has decreased from 18% in 1980 to 7% in 2018.

self-sufficient or homeless and prone to self-destructive behaviors have fostered a cautious stance, when in fact many are well adjusted.[115] Extensive research and advanced technologies within the medical field also obscure the role of pastoral care in patient well being. Additionally, some in the medical community want no specific religious commitments, given the preferred simplicity of today's pluralistic and international society.[116]

However, the absence of religion from medicine has not simplified the ethics of medical care. Dr. David C. Thomasa agrees with the observation that the traditional Hippocratic synthesis of the physician-patient relationship has been complicated by the presence of others, which some view as "strangers at the patient's bedside."[117]Although the inclusion of chaplains or pastors is not a part of Thomasa's argument, he acknowledges the presence of moral theology as a part of its past and that moral analysis and judgments are made on behalf of the individual and families based on social policies and concerns.[118]

On the other hand, medical practitioners at Duke University Medical Center have discussed the value of the Golden Rule within the clinical setting and recognize it as a fundamental tool for making sound and ethical judgments for patient care. Used properly,

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[115] Casey Sumner, "The Concept of Thriving Among Vietnam Veterans: A Qualitative Study," (PhD Diss., Capella University 2021). https://www.proquest.com/openview/65526a36da582c760d5c951b66a9f33e/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y. This is especially true among veterans with marriage and children relationships.

[116] Lounsbury, Bellamy, and Thomasma, *Theories of Medical Ethics: The Philosophical Structure*, 1:27.

[117] Lounsbury, Bellamy, and Thomasma, 1:25,41.

[118] Lounsbury, Bellamy, and Thomasma, 1:27.

they say, the Golden Rule can protect patient preferences and autonomy from the health provider's bias in decision-making. Interestingly, it also has value in that its ethos transcends religious or denominational affiliations.[119] Without stating it outright, the authors of this article use the Golden Rule to protect the "do no harm" ethos.

Sarah Gibson, an Anglican minister who has served as chaplain in hospitals and the Australian Defense Force, argues ministers are not strangers, but beneficial additions, to the bedside. Because of the complex moral and ethical judgments that challenge doctors and their patients who suffer with PTSD and moral injury, Gibson recommends a partnership between those trained in clinical care and pastoral care. She bases this assessment on the Hippocratic Oath and its ethic of "do no harm" in relationship with the Golden Rule, "Do unto others." While there is no dispute that evidence-based protocols of the Hippocratic Oath greatly benefit patients, she points to studies that demonstrate even simple visits from chaplains can improve the wellbeing of patients. This type of pastoral presence extends to veterans who have struggled with post-traumatic and resiliency issues, even when it is difficult for them to understand how the spiritual care of pastors complements the medical care of doctors and nurses.[120]

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[119] Kirsten N. Corazzini et al., "'The Golden Rule': Only a Starting Point for Quality Care," *Director* 14, no. 1 (2005): 5.

[120] Thomas Frame, *Moral Injury: Unseen Wounds in an Age of Barbarism* (Australia: NewSouth, 2016), 224,225.

Distinguishing Religious Judgement from Theological Assessment

Kinghorn recognizes at least two contributions from Christian ethics within the ethics of healthcare as it relates to moral injury. First of all, the Protestant neighbor-love that seeks to relieve human misery. Nevertheless, this zeal for relieving suffering struggles[121] because it is here that medical professionals bump up against the limits of the Hippocratic Oath and find that complex moral judgments are unavoidable. Secondly, Kinghorn argues that Christian contributions are necessary because a purely clinical environment tends to rely fully on medical technologies and techniques for healing,[122] and this tendency has proven inadequate, given the reality that "soldiers who kill in ambiguous circumstances are often to themselves neither guilty nor innocent, neither victims nor perpetrators, neither heroes nor villains, but some complex amalgam of them all."[123] This situation transcends technique and, as a result, clinicians (in their professional context) have no capability to assess the moral judgement of veterans in particular or, to bring in Thomasa's concerns, those of society either. Therefore, Kinghorn argues that chaplains and pastors must acknowledge the limitations of clinical care with respect to moral injury and be neither intimidated nor satisfied with all that the medical field offers for veterans.[124]

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[121] Kinghorn, "Combat Trauma and Moral Fragmentation," 66. He employs the observations of Gerald McKenny who views the combination of moral zeal and teleological silence within modern medicine and bioethics as an inheritance from Francis Bacon's construction of nature as "manipulable for human ends together with a protestant commitment to neighbor-love that focuses on the relief of human suffering."

[122] Kinghorn, "Combat Trauma and Moral Fragmentation." 67

[123] Kinghorn, 63.

[124] Kinghorn, 68. "Wars are things to lament, not to celebrate, as even acts justified under particular descriptions such as "shooting in self-defense" can be deeply complex and troubling in the details."

Larry Graham, a former professor of Pastoral Theology and Care at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado, strives to establish a model that accounts for moral and religious judgements. He writes:

> pastoral theology is a theological discipline linked to the practices of healing, sustaining, and guiding. Making a judgement about what is better or worse, suitable or not, healing or wounding, in the practice of pastoral and spiritual care involves coming to theological conclusions.[125]

Graham frames pastoral care in the unity of body and soul, in accord with the way humans are created in the image of God. Separating the body from the soul tends to marginalizes the body and obscures the love, righteousness, and self-giving nature of God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Instead, Graham calls for "minding the gap." In the same way that every train traveler knows to "mind the gap" between the train car and the platform to avoid disaster, chaplains and pastors must mediate the much greater gap between the righteousness of God and the sinfulness of the humankind.[126] This mediation does not fall solely on the individual caregiver but involves a community of care.[127] Nevertheless, for Graham, minding the righteousness gap is the work of a guide, or a shepherd, who walks with and navigates the gaps with those who suffer. Theological judgments in this respect are not declarative conclusions from the care giver to the counselee, which can easily be complicated by perspectives on theodicy, but moral discernment requiring theological assessments, fostering a collaborative approach that

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[125] Graham, "Moral Injury, Lamentation, and Memorializing Rituals as Pastoral Care," 12.

[126] Graham, 45.

[127] Graham, 44–47.

looks less like clerical authority and more like mutual discovery.[128] Taking all these factors into consideration positions the pastor to provide care to those who expect judgment yet fail also to appreciate the moral depths of their own interpersonal relationships. The move forward is educational and spiritually therapeutic, particularly through the practice of lament as a means of strengthening the spiritual relationships that can reveal meaning, even in suffering.

Kinghorn's suggestion is less of a judgment and more of an interest in religious practice. He turns to liturgies of lament as a practice that can play a constructive role within the life of one struggling with spiritual and moral injury, because such practices nurture a spiritual wellbeing that specific psychotherapeutic traditions cannot. He points out that clinical counselors can speak of moral injury on the basis of

> moral assumptions that would allow for judgments between redemptive and nonredemptive post-combat suffering or they can aspire to value-neutrality in an effort to maximize social and scientific acceptability, but they cannot do both.[129]

Kinghorn proposes that the Christian traditions that impose penance on soldiers returning from war[130] and the Augustinian caution about the moral danger of war[131] should prompt a meaningful inquiry into the role of lament. According to Kinghorn, laments guard against the modern tendency to provide judgements, providing "a blanket

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[128] Graham, 48–52.

[129] Kinghorn, "Combat Trauma and Moral Fragmentation," 66.

[130] Kinghorn, 68.

[131] Kinghorn summarizes Augustine's argument that even in just circumstances, war can provide the opportunity for the display of sinful concupiscence. 68.

of absolution for all acts occurring in a campaign."[132] Ultimately, Kinghorn emphasizes that wars are something to lament and that churches should incorporate a practice of lament for its warriors to name the moral trauma of war as a reminder that the peace of God is not fully present and to work towards the healing of shame so that the combat veteran can be reconciled to God and the Christian community.[133]

Summary of practitioner ethos and religious judgements

Two important points emerge through this discussion. First, even though it has been hoped that the pluralization of moral and religious commitments would lessen the moral complexities of medical ethics and "do *less* harm," research reveals that complexities remain, and that medical professionals struggle to attach meaning to suffering and so rely upon the "Do unto others" ethos. Gibson's appeal to the medical and pastoral professional ethos to meet within the Christian ethic, "Love your neighbor as yourself," articulates the Hippocratic Oath via a careful application of the Golden Rule.[134] Therefore, pastors are not "strangers at the patient's bedside" but necessary participants in the moral assessments pertaining to patient care. This ethos does not imply pastors are to march into hospitals and make theological judgments, but it does imply, as Kinghorn and Graham point out, that clergy have a responsibility to assess what makes suffering meaningful during pastoral care. Pastors cannot naively refer veterans, who suffer the effects of guilt and shame, back to the medical professionals for treatment, because they

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[132] Kinghorn, "Combat Trauma and Moral Fragmentation," 68.

[133] Kinghorn, 70.

[134] Chaplain Bang notes this in his dissertation 2012 "A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON PAIN AND SUFFERING AND PRACTICAL PASTORAL CARE FOR THE SUFFERING" in which he quotes a 1986 article *Caring and Curing: Health and Medicine in the Western Religious Traditions* which incorporates the call for Christians to bear one another's pain and hardships as stated in Galatians 6:2 by Ronald L. Numbers and Darrel W. Amundsen (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986). 233.

are called to guide and assist veterans in making moral assessments. Here the second point of this discussion takes center stage. Both men suggest a means for moral and theological assessment can be found in the Christian tradition and practice of lament. By introducing the role of clergy to guide lament, Kinghorn and Graham position pastors as caregivers and fellow-worshippers of God, removing them from the role of judge, which is often the expected of them by both medical professionals and veterans.

Pastoral Applications of Lament

The primary interest of veterans suffering from PTSD and moral injury is healing. Where healing proves elusive, it is often a result of the complexities of guilt and shame creating a sense of living under judgment, which drives some to reject God and his judgments, including the church, resulting in spiritual alienation, as discussed by Mahedy and Simeon-Netto. Others seek religious penance, absolution, or atonement from clergy, prompting Jonathan Shay and other clinicians to refer Christian veterans to clergy, and others, like Edward Tick, to lead veterans on missions of spiritual reconciliation. Graham and Kinghorn recognize these issues and suggest the role of lament meets the religious and theological needs of veterans suffering from combat trauma because lament leads to a form of pastoral care and hope in a way that religious judgment does not.

Recovering Lament as Pastoral Care for the Traumatized

A significant challenge to pastoral care among veterans is the infrequent practice of

biblical lament within the modern American church.[135] Kelly Kapic argues the failure to encourage those who suffer from addressing God directly could have harmful long-term consequences saying, "If we do not restore space for lament in the individual and corporate church life, our suffering will not only drive us away from others but from God himself."[136] Yet, the Bible teaches another possibility:

> God in his sovereignty, has recruited us to fight in his war against darkness and death, and lament bring us back to our dependence on him in that fight. Lament does not undercut his divine authority and care but rather beseeches the presence and comfort of God into the most wounded parts of our soul.[137]

Although laments are a natural part of the Christian experience across time and culture,[138] one area of contemporary interest has emerged in the broader field of trauma care. Anglican theologian Susan Shooter has published qualitative research in sexual

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[135] Christopher J. H. Wright, The Message of Lamentations: Honest to God. The Bible Speaks Today Series. Downers Grove, Illinois. IVP Academic. 2015. Pg. 21 Brian L.Webster and David R. Beach, "The Place of Lament in the Christian Life." Bibliotheca Sacra 164, (2007), 387_402. Jacinta Marie Neilly, "Reclaiming the Practice of Lament: Lament as a Modern Pastoral Care Practice in the Face of Grief and Loss in the Bahamas." (DMin Diss., Candler School of Theology, 2021), https://etd.library.emory.edu/concern/etds/k3569569n?locale=pt-BR. The research revealed congregants do not believe lament is important to church life and that they would stay away from church if it was practiced too much. Pg. 12. Christopher J. H. Wright, "Lamentations: A Bottle for the Tears of the World," ChristianityToday.com, August 14, 2015, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/july-august/lamentations-bottle-for-tears-of-world.html.Christopher J. H. Wright. This is an interview with Rob Moll. Erik Raymond, "Can Your Theology Handle the Book of Lamentations?," The Gospel Coalition Blogs, 2016, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/erik-raymond/can-your-theology-handle-the-book-of-lamentations/. Raymond states that Lamentations has been a blind sport for him and that many believers who believe the Bible is authoritative in practice functionally redact themes such as God's judgement. This article is indicative of a variety of similar articles and podcasts such as this Colin Smith on Teaching Lamentations to Grieving People (thegospelcoalition.org) and blogs What Are the Most Neglected Books in the Bible? – The Pietist Schoolman. Aaron Armstrong, "What Do We Do with Psalm 137?," Aaron Armstrong, June 26, 2017, https://aaronarmstrong.co/what-do-we-do-with-psalm-137/.

[136] Kapic, *Embodied Hope: A Theological Meditation on Pain and Suffering*, 31.

[137] Kapic, 33.

[138] June F. Dickie, "The Importance of Lament in Pastoral Ministry: Biblical Basis and Some Applications," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 40, no. 1 (2019): 1–11, https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v40i1.2002. Neilly, "Reclaiming the Practice of Lament." Federico Villanueva. Lamentations. Asia Bible Commentary.

trauma that not only supports Langberg's statement revealing the importance of holding up the incomprehensible to God but also oulines how it can transform one into a minister who provides pastoral care. Shooter's findings reveal the importance of "God's timeless presence," "transformation," and "knowing ministry," in terms of understanding God as permanently present and loving and therefore a resource for spiritual endurance that "inspires godly practice in the survivor's own ministry, this is to say, the survivor's pastoral relationship with others reflects God's healing relationship with her."[139]

Nathaniel A. Carlson continues, describing how trauma tears spirit and flesh and can only be mended and redeemed by the resurrected Christ, pointing to the cross as the fulfillment of lament. He argues the mystery of lament cannot be reduced to mere psychological complaint. Such an assessment would depreciate the mystery. Nor can divinely inspired laments be cheaply divorced from the human psychological realities in the text. He describes the therapy of the gospel as a biblical lament that ministers Jesus Christ to trauma victims as one who shares our sufferings personally. Indeed, the gospel accounts describe Jesus drawing on the Psalms of lament, even on the cross. The Psalter and other wisdom literature in Scripture offer trauma survivors healing with a "library of lament" such as corporate readings, prayers, and songs that give victims opportunities to express their pain, anger, isolation, and sense of divine abandonment within "the safety of validation, and the hope of the gospel."[140]

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[139] John N. Sheveland, "Redeeming Trauma: An Agenda for Theology Fifteen Years On," in *American Catholicism in the 21st Century: Crossroads, Crisis, or Renewal?*, vol. 63, College Theology Society (Ossining, NY: Maryknoll; Orbis Books, 2018), 143-145.

[140] Nathaniel A. Carlson, "Lament: The Biblical Language of Trauma," *A Journal for the Theology of Culture,* vol. 11, no.1, (2015), https://www.academia.edu/25374709/LAMENT_THE_BIBLICAL_LANGUAGE_OF_TRAUMA., 68.

Reintroducing Lament for Spiritual Healing

Such lament must take a variety of forms, especially if it is to be accessible and beneficial for a congregation and members who are combat veterans. For example, laments can be read from the psalter, sung, and prayed in corporate worship. June F. Dickie has investigated the practice of lament among Christian women in South Africa. She connects the practice of lament to the teachings of John Calvin, who recognized the healing value of lament, "performing" psalms in which he discussed the psalms as the anatomy of the soul. He believed those who suffer could recognize the presence of God as they meditated upon the Psalms and by doing so would receive physical and emotional emotional benefit.[141] With this in mind, Dickie guides groups of women through Psalms and says that three elements of the practice of lament make this process successful: agency, justice, and realignment. Psalm 3 shows agency in bringing one's complaint before God. Complaining to God is not passivity in the face of suffering but an assessment of an unacceptable situation. The restoration of justice condemns the mouth speaking evil and promises it would be dealt a heavy blow, and realignment leaves panic behind and cultivates an attitude of trust in God.[142] Dickie's interest is healing, and she demonstrates the physiological benefits of an individual deliberating as he or she works through a Psalm visually, verbally, and creatively by using them as guides to compose personal prayers of lament to God. This process induces a healthy amount of physical and

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[141] Dickie, Lament as a contributor to the healing of trauma: an application of the form of biblical poetry. 5-8

[142] Dickie, Lament as a contributor to the healing of trauma: an application of the form of biblical poetry. 9

emotional stress but not merely to voice inner complaints for inner healing, but to take real pain to God, making the context ripe for God's response.[143] Done corporately, Dickie concludes there is substantial value to Christian congregations if laments are incorporated with praise, confession, and intercession. The lack of communal lament not only deprives individuals of a place to lay down their sorrows, but it also deprives those within churches who feel "balanced" in their lives with the understanding and need for ministry alongside those who feel "unbalanced." The absence of lament deprives congregations of opportunities to come to God honestly and in the security of God's covenant promises.[144]

The experiences of John Enders, a professor emeritus of Sacred Scripture at the Jesuit School of Theology at Santa Clara University, mirror those of Dickie. Enders has also guided students through Psalms at a deliberate pace to demonstrate the value of bringing a complaint to God in an age in which doing so creates great discomfort, even tempting some to derail lament with humor rather than address their hurt and anger with lament.[145] While Enders does not assume trauma as a Bible study lens, he does seek to reveal timeless features of the text. Using Psalm 13 as an example, Enders asks students to follow a simple process: describe who is speaking, the audience, their mood, their goals and desires, as well as their setting.[146] He underscores the blunt language of laments, such as, "How long?" "Stop rebuking me!" "Do the dead in Sheol praise You?"

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[143] Dickie, Lament as a contributor to the healing of trauma: an application of the form of biblical poetry. 9, 13.

[144] Dickie, The Importance of Biblical Lament in Pastoral Ministry. 8.

[145] John Endres and Liebert, Elizabeth, *A Retreat with the Psalms: Resources for Personal and Communal Prayer* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001), 50.

[146] Endres and Liebert, Elizabeth, 54.

According to Enders, the frankness of the language reveals the bond of covenantal love in the Psalms and in other laments such as Hannah's in I Samuel 1-2.[147]

Eric Kress and Paul Tautges use Lamentations as a model for counselors to provide pastoral counseling with material that could also be used for small group or individual studies. They do not assume a particular kind of suffering such as trauma. Rather, they acknowledge that affliction from God is real and that people feel God's silence when God is silent. The Book of Lamentations guides the reader to understand that this silence is a result of sin and that God's silence will persist apart from confession and repentance. Using the words of Lamentations itself, Kress and Tautges demonstrate the necessity of confession and repentance for reengaging God. Their approach is thoroughly theological, and anthropological considerations are grounded in the gravity of sin and being a sinner. While the consequences of sin and the problem of theodicy cannot be avoided, these things may not be resolved fully until God is met face-to-face.[148] According to Lamentations 3:32, however, chastisement is meant to draw the repentant sinner close according into the lovingkindness of God, as revealed in Lamentations 3:32.[149] Although they do not develop it, Kress and Tautges contrast those who refuse to confess, as David did prior to the arrival of Nathan the prophet, and a willing confession before God.[150] With this approach, they reinforce the agency of the individual who suffers and counsel them through approaches for confession on God's terms. They also

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[147] Endres and Liebert, Elizabeth, 56-58.

[148] Kress and Tautges, *God's Mercy in Our Suffering: Lamentations for Pastors and Counselors*, 24, 70, 73, 173.

[149] Kress and Tautges, 105.

[150] Kress and Tautges, 72.

encourage participants to reflect on those who have called them back from sin and the benefit of that ministry, as the prophet Nathan did for David. The possibility of such reconciliation and peace expressed in Psalm 51 and relief from spiritual affliction described in Lamentation 3 constitute vital steps in the healing and recovery of souls.

Making Public and Civil Laments Accessible to Pastors

Larry Graham comments on the value of ceremonial forms of lament for spiritual recovery. He specifically views lament though the lens of moral injury and believes the process of lamentation, in connection with religious symbols and communities, forms a vital part of the veteran's ability to cope and heal after traumatic events.[151] Graham has observed, "Many veterans who are struggling with questions about killing . . . find that the 'interrogating causes' dimensions of lamentation and memorialization will help them come to terms with what is and is not theirs to bear."[152] The Vietnam War Memorial, often referred to as "The Wall" has become a site for active engagement in memorializing lamentation and recovering from war.[153] This place of public grief for the veterans and their families may appear to be a civil memorial absent of formal religion, but it has merged the civil and sacred, with all manner of memorabilia left at the wall to enshrine loved ones.[154]

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[151] Graham, "Moral Injury, Lamentation, and Memorializing Rituals as Pastoral Care."

[152] Graham, 144.

[153] Graham, 145.

[154] Rebekah Hobbs, "A Place to Mourn: Why the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Is Crucial to American Healing," *Digital Literature Review* 1 (January 6, 2014): 60–67, https://doi.org/10.33043/DLR.1.0.60-67.

Graham argues theologically that these laments interrogate human agencies rather than divine agency and "allow us to protest, complain, contend, and wrest power from those forces that damage us and diminish the world." The emphasis on "us" is important. Laments are not merely for veterans but for the community at large, including those offering pastoral care. Ceremonies at memorial locations that commemorate individuals through public ritual help move those who suffer beyond personal demise to embrace and be embraced by the "vital community energies which may sustain, guide, and heal one another and our broken world," thus setting the stage for long term recovery.[155] Stephen Williams, a Christian Vietnam Veteran, recalls attending his first public parade that captures these vital community energies in *Nine Pairs of Boots in Vietnam.*

> In 1991, I was asked to walk in a parade with other Vietnam vets. We were included in our community parade for the victory in Desert Storm . . . It was the first time I had publicly identified with other veterans, and it was actually the first time I felt honored for my service. While driving toward the parade, I almost turned around and went home. I expected boos and harassment if I participated. I decided to go anyway. When I got there, I found some Vietnam Vets . . . We were all nervous but got organized and began to march. It was awkward at first. The guys in the front of us carried a banner that said, "Vietnam Veterans." When we got to the first intersection and turned onto the main street, the crowd began to stand, clap and cheer for us. I began to feel myself stand taller, and with pride for my service. I was finally participating in a parade I had only ever dreamed about.[156]

William's account relates how his fear of public identification and ridicule from his prior experiences contributed to personal uncertainty, an experience not uncommon

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[155] Graham, "Moral Injury, Lamentation, and Memorializing Rituals as Pastoral Care," 138, 139.

[156] Stephen R. Williams and Williams, Rosie J., *Nine Pairs of Boots in Vietnam: Steps to Healing Every Veteran Needs to Know* (Powell, Ohio: Auther Academy Elite, 2020), 84.

among Vietnam Veterans. The change in public attitude, making participation in a local parade commemorating Vietnam Veterans possible, was no small matter in Williams' recovery and healing process.

Graham emphasizes that public memorial ceremonies support the agency of the veteran and can connect to his or her moral depth. Ceremonies reframe the ways a veteran responded to violence and reconnect him or her to deeply held desires for compassion that may be underlying a moral injury or to a new path toward forgiveness, rather than being fixated upon loss and pain.[157] Williams told of other personal reframing interactions, especially in relationship to medics who had tried their best to treat their fellow soldiers and yet believed they had done damage, violating their ethos of "do no harm" and thus suffering spiritual and moral injury as a result.[158]

Summary of pastoral applications of lament

Two broad themes relating to the use of lament with combat veterans have developed. First, the pastoral caregiver adopts a role of shepherd rather than theological judge and provides veterans with practical exercises to engage suffering from either trauma and/or alienation from God. Second, Carlson recommends building a "library of lament," then modeled by Dickie, Enders, Kress, and Tautges, to walk participants through Psalms of lament or Lamentations. A verse-by-verse, section-by-section approach allows each participant to wrestle with the themes and gives them the space to

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[157] Graham, "Moral Injury, Lamentation, and Memorializing Rituals as Pastoral Care," 104-108.

[158] Williams and Williams, Rosie J., *Nine Pairs of Boots in Vietnam: Steps to Healing Every Veteran Needs to Know*, 85, 90-97.

describe current applications. They are introduced to the scriptures by their shepherd, but they offer their own laments to God, wrestling personally with questions of moral responsibility, confession of sin, and God's presence or absence, without experiencing the judgments of religious leaders. Graham also explains a conceptual basis for the value of public memorials to introduce lament to veterans. These events provide practical and pastoral touch points that are neither within the walls of the hospital nor the church but still have spiritual value for the veteran and facilitate relationships consistent with the "do unto others" ethos.

Summary of Pastoral Challenges in Veteran Care

This section seeks to establish a rationale for practical ministry to combat veterans who suffer from spiritual and moral injury. The importance of pastoral care alongside medical care cannot be overstated because attentive, well-informed pastors can not only love their neighbors in the medical community but also answer spiritual and moral needs or questions that secular medical professionals are less able to address. Kinghorn and Graham suggest that the practice of lament provides a way religious leaders can assess the theological and spiritual needs of a veteran as a shepherd, rather than as a judge. Shepherding occurs through the ministry of the Word, whether through small group of discussions of biblical laments or through participation of public memorial events. Both means are accessible to pastor and veteran and serve as ways to position those who suffer within a community to engage God honestly and participate in a Christian community which seeks the healing through God's mercy and lovingkindness.

Lamentations 3: A Witness for Theological Engagement

Introductory Comments on Lament and the Book of Lamentations

This section will focus on Lamentations Chapter 3 as a resource for combat veterans to engage the God of the Bible despite their traumatic experiences, including PTSD, moral injury, and spiritual alienation. It will begin with some general comments on the nature of lament within the Bible.

What is a lament, and what does the Bible say about the circumstances that produce and surround laments? Claus Westermann observes that the heartfelt cry is the pre-verbal expression of pain. When pain is verbalized in God's presence, the cry becomes a lament. As such, it can initially appear as a single word or expanded to a phrase.[159] Laments in the Old Testament canon directly address God by asking painful questions arising from deep suffering and the resulting trauma. One could argue that the first recorded laments appear in the account of Abel's murder. God declares that Abel's blood cries out to him from the ground! Interestingly, God's exiling curse upon Cain elicits a complaint directed back to God due to his loss of freedom.[160] Laments can be basic in terms of what is expressed, as with Cain and Abel, but they can also be vividly descriptive as recorded in Psalm 88:9-16:

> My eye wastes away because of affliction. Lord, I have called daily upon You; I have stretched out my hands to You. Do You show Your wonders to the dead? Do their spirits rise and praise You? Is Your love declared in the grave, Your faithfulness in destruction? Are Your wonders known in the place of darkness, or Your righteous deeds in the land of forgetfulness? But I cry to You for help, LORD; in the morning my prayer comes before You. Why, LORD, do you reject

[159] Westermann, *Lamentation,* 89.
[160] Westermann, *Lamentation,* 96.

me and hide Your face from me? I have been afflicted and ready to die from my youth; I suffer Your terrors; I am distraught. Your fierce wrath has gone over me; Your terrors have cut me off.

This Psalm also reveals reasoning which are common to laments. There are complaints related to God's silence or perceived absence, descriptions of injustices or threats,[161] and, cries for deliverance either from God's wrath or from the worshipper's enemies. Laments also contain confessions of confidence or faith in God, often on the basis of God's past actions. Psalm 13 combines David's cry for deliverance with trust in God despite abuse at the hands of his enemy and the threat of death. Like most laments, it concludes with praise or a vow of praise when the day of deliverance arrives.[162] Laments sometimes include the language of repentance and confession. The scriptures command the people to lament for their sin, as in Jeremiah 4:8 and Joel 1:8-13. And for similar reasons Jeremiah instructed the people to teach their daughters to lament in Jeremiah 9:20.[163] Finally, laments often arise out of contexts of spiritual isolation and despondency, as seen in Psalm 88 and Job, or of conflict, as we saw in Psalm 13. Taken as a whole, laments are theologically complex with overlapping themes to describe a range of spiritual experiences from the point of distress to deliverance.[164] The complexity of laments is also featured in Lamentations, a book which includes five laments

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[161] Job 10:2 is an example, "I will say to God, 'Do not condemn me; Show me why you contend with me. Does it seem good to you that you should oppress, that you should despise the work of your hands, and smile on the counsel of the wicked?"

[162] Psalm 13:5-6, "I have trusted in your mercy; My heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me."

[163] Jeremiah 9:20, "Hear, O women, the word of the Lord, and let your ear receive the word of his mouth; teach to your daughters a lament, and each to her neighbor a dirge."

[164] Westerman describes the connection between the dirge and lament on page 61.

describing the suffering and spiritual dynamics during the siege and destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians. In part, because they arise from a context of warfare, these laments are well-suited as a source of encouragement and wisdom for those who have been traumatized by war, including their own violent actions, and who struggle with PTSD, moral injury, and an ongoing sense of spiritual alienation from God.

The prophet Jeremiah is traditionally understood to be the author of Lamentations. It is a tradition that has existed since the translation of the Septuagint and is supported in part by the book's composition after the fall of Jerusalem, which Jeremiah witnessed. Furthermore, Jeremiah wrote laments after King Josiah's death as stated in 2 Chronicles 35:25.[165] The Protestant reformer John Calvin echoes this tradition even as he recognizes multiple voices within the book, based on its linguistic and theological characteristics. With respect to Lamentations 3, Calvin notes that Jeremiah spoke in the previous chapter about the people in the voice of a woman, "as it is often done; but now the Prophet himself comes before us" to exhort others to lament by personal example for the purpose of true repentance.[166] However, because no author is specifically identified within Lamentations, commentators in recent decades have proposed a variety of single or multiple authorship possibilities based on linguistic and theological observations of their own. This development has expanded perspectives on how lament reflects the nature and purpose of suffering in relation to divine punishment and to the restoration of relationship with God.

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[165] Duane Garrett and Paul R. House, *Song of Songs / Lamentations*, 2nd ed., vol. 23b, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 284,285.

[166] John Calvin, "Commentary on Jeremiah and Lamentations - Volume 5," *Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library* 5 (November 24, 1999): 262.

The occasion for the book of Lamentations is the aftermath of Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC and the subsequent suffering.[167] The cause of destruction is attributed to the people's rebellion and sin against God according to Lamentations 2:17.[168] Paul R. House, a professor of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School, writes that the poems of Lamentations offer a "sustained, detailed, and realistic sense of the terror of individual and corporate punishment for sin."[169] House continues by stating that Lamentations can help the student consider the enormity of themes in the Old Testament such as God's wrath, which came upon Jerusalem after many divine warnings and calls to repentance in the Law and the Prophets.[170] Irrespective of its cause, however, the suffering that Jeremiah describes is severe, raising profound questions about the future of God's people and of God's promises to them. Contemporary studies within Lamentations extend beyond a basic acceptance or rejection of a Deuteronomic theology to the contributions each poem makes to understanding of the role of lament in relation to a wide range of theological, sociological and literary perspectives on human suffering.[171]

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[167] Lamentations 4:12

[168] Lamentation 2:17, "The Lord has done what he purposed; he has carried out his work, which he commanded long ago; he has thrown down without pity; he has made the enemy rejoice over you and exalted the might of your foes."

[169] Garrett and House, *Song of Songs / Lamentations*, 23b:279.

[170] Garrett and House, 23b:280.319. The Temple sermons of Jeremiah 2 and 26 are examples.

[171] Williams, *The Shadow of Christ in the Book of Lamentations: A Guide to Grieving with Faith*, For example, Williams, a professor of Old Testament at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, views these complexities in theological terms due to the loss of fellowship with God and His people.

Garrett and House, *Song of Songs / Lamentations*. 280. House argues Lamentations confronts a society that "avoids confessing sin since to do so would be to admit that they do not deserve to be happy and satisfied."

Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002). O'Conner places emphasis on the cultural complexities of a shame-honor culture that created an image of

What follows will focus upon the third poem (Chapter 3) because of the speaker's documented transition from spiritual alienation to corporate worship and the speaker's own testimony that God has heard his cry. Towards this end, the identity and authorship of the speaker will be addressed because of its bearing on how commentators describe the nature and purpose of suffering in Chapter 3. An analysis of three representative pericopes will follow, in which the speaker's transition from one audience to another reveals how the speaker chooses to engage God.

The Speaker in Lamentations 3

The question of single or multiple authorship of Lamentations influences discussions about the identity of "the man" presenting himself in Lamentations 3:1, transliterated here as the "*geber.*" The the term *geber* is used across the Old Testament dozens of times as some variation of a "mighty or capable man."[172] For example, Genesis 10:9 refers to the *geber* as a mighty hunter, Judges 6:12 describes a man of valor, God calls Job to gird up his loins like "a man" in Job 38:3 and 40:7 and in Job 16:21 the term

God as punishing and violent which is further complicated by the immorality of trying to justify God's violence.

Garrett and House, *Song of Songs / Lamentations*. 306-310. House's treatment of the acrostic literary features in Lamentations is similar to most commentators in that efforts are made to reconcile the message of lamentations with the acrostic structure of the book. Whereas chapters 1, 2 and 4 begin each verse with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet (Chapter 5 does not follow this same structure), the third chapter triples this format so that each stanza is made of three lines each of which begins with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet forming a series of well-developed literary stanzas starting with Aleph and concluding with Tav that expand the description of suffering introduced in the other chapters.

[172] "H1397 - Geḇer - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (Kjv)," Blue Letter Bible, accessed March 31, 2024, https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/gen/1/1/s_1001. Man, Strong Man, Warrior (indicating the strength or ability to fight.)

refers to his role as an intercessor. Psalm 18:26 points to the aspect of purity, and Jeremiah 41:16 to mighty man of war. In the Lamentations, the arrival of this anonymous but notable figure introduces the reader to the speaker's spiritual suffering instead of the catastrophe that befell Jerusalem, described in the first and second poems. The personal characteristics of the third poem also point to community lament characteristics that continue in the fourth and fifth poems. As commentators have tried to determine who the *geber* is, his identity becomes shaped in light of how the entire poem is interpreted. This interpretation includes whether he is one individual or multiple parties, how the nature and purpose of the *geber's* suffering is understood, and if God is truly engaged.

Williams follows Calvin's tradition and does not challenge the idea of Jeremiah's authorship or a single authorship. With respect to the multiple voices within Lamentations, Williams notes the Old Testament feature called a "corporate personality"[173] and that the identity of the *geber* has the meaning of one with "great strength and faithfulness, if not a royal connotation."[174] From this perspective, the question of authorship is superceded by the author's intent to minister to the people of God as a mediator of God's promises. House also attributes a single speaker, probably the same as the narrator, or first-person speaker, in Lamentations 2:11-19. He believes this position reflects the theological progress within the book beyond a "sin-punishment scheme to other factors, including God's character; the fate of Zion's opponents;" and the speaker's counsel on how the people may "come into a better relationship with their

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[173] C. J. Williams, *The Shadow of Christ in the Book of Lamentations: A Guide to Grieving with Faith*, 1st ed. (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown and Covenant, 2022), 10. William argues this phenomenon is part of semitic thought in which there is a back-and-forth movement in which a singular author can use singular and plural voices of the family or nation.

[174] Williams, 90,91.

covenant God."[175] House's view of Chapter 3 mirrors Lamentations as a book with a single author using multiple voices, who loved the people, shared in their sorrows and ministered to them through the poems. The identity of the *geber* and the author of Lamentations remains debatable. House argues that Lamentations reflects Jeremiah's theology and could have been Jeremiah but offers that authorship could also be connected to Baruch, Ebed-melech, or others such as a temple singer, a prophetically oriented priest, or another faithful member of the community.[176] Whoever the author, the choice to remain anonymous was intentional and forces the reader to focus upon the message and theology of Lamentations as well as its ministerial purpose.

Renkema represents a break from the traditional views of authorship. He presents Lamentations as a collective effort of a temple singers guild, [177] based on the author's familiarity and expertise in the language of Psalms, such as Psalm 88, and the Zion theology found throughout the book, such as Lamentations 5:18.[178] Westermann follows suit and believes the poems of Lamentations grew out of the experience of the survivors of the catastrophe, to include temple singers. He speculates the laments themselves were written down by a scribe who may have been a fellow survivor but was not the creator of the songs and that the acrostic form of the book is not an original feature but a secondary development.[179] With respect to the identity of the *geber*, Renkema describes him as the

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[175] Garrett and House, 23b: 408 & 301.

[176] Garrett and House, 23b:303.

[177] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 53.

[178] "But you oh Lord are enthroned forever, your throne endures through the ages." Lamentations 5:18

[179] Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*, 102-104.

"devout one" but also one who identifies with Israel as a poetic "everyman."[180] Westermann simply translates *geber* as "I am the man and one who laments as an individual."[181] Both identify him as a representative figure who articulates a crisis of faith. However, according to Renkema the identity of the *geber* belongs to the community of temple singers which locates the significance of the lament as a form of community worship in which faith is restored and God is directly addressed.[182] Westermann believes the *geber* is joined by the temple singers and the community of fellow suffers thereby totaling three separate sources of authorship. He delineates these speakers by observing linguistic differences in verses 1-25, verses 26-41 and verses 42-51,[183] which he maintains offer evidence against Jeremiah's authorship[184] and imply a later date for the middle portion of the poem. Westermann's rationale is that commentators often assume Chapter 3 is a unified poem spoken by a single voice, be it an individual or the community, when in fact, the linguistic features of verses 26-41 indicate the presence of different speakers and a different time.[185] This becomes practically important, because the central portion of chapter 3 cannot function, then, as a theological prism through which to understand the suffering represented in the book or as the theological development of a single speaker, as House argues. The reason for House's

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[180] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 63,64, 348-352.

[181] Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*, 69.

[182] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 52, 169.

[183] Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*, 170, 175.

[184] Westermann, 69.

[185] Westermann, 70.

counterpoint is because the *geber* counsels his countrymen as a "fellow sufferer and sinner," who moves from being an observer in Chapters 1 and 2, to one who ultimately leads in prayer and praise; this progression that House believes characterizes the Book of Lamentations.[186]

Nancy C. Lee, a Biblical Studies professor at Elmhurst College, uses an oral poetic approach which speculates that Jeremiah is one of the poets in conversation with other poets. She makes her case on the basis of phrases found in the book of Jeremiah.[187] Lee considers the *geber* opening the poem to be a new poet and the first of four who appear in the chapter. For example, the first poet's lament is interrupted by the admonishment of the second singer.[188] As a result Chapter 3 includes four separate themes and four perspectives on suffering.

Kathleen O'Conner acknowledges the authority that Lamentations would carry if Jeremiah is the author and motifs such as the flowing of his tears and his experience in a pit are personal testimonies. However, like Westermann and Lee, she maintains the authors are unknown survivors and that the voice of each poem stands on its own, expressing perspectives of their ordeal so that no single voice dominates the others, be it the voice of resistance spoken by the Daughter of Zion or the voice of trauma spoken in Chapter 3, in fact the main characteristic of the voice is that it is "fragile."[189] O'Connor

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[186] Garrett and House, 407,408.

[187] Lee, *The Singers of Lamentations: Cities under Siege, from Ur to Jerusalem to Sarajevo*, 60:8,82, 90. One example of this is the phrase "her gates" which is seen in Lamentations 1:4 and 2:9 and three times in Jeremiah 14:2; 17:27 and 51:58.

[188] Lee, 60:174.

[189] O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, 45.

identifies the *geber* as a "strongman." His presence is important in terms of his presence throughout the poem, but for reasons much different than the theological progression described by House and Williams. O'Connor views the theology professed by "the strongman" as a fragile hope because he is frustrated by his powerlessness through the course of his affliction and by the silence of God and therefore "the book honors the voices of pain."[190] She finds similarity with Williams, seeing the *geber* as a distinct voice from that of the narrator and the daughter of Zion in Chapters 1 and 2. The strongman is an altogether different speaker who is joined by the voice of the community later in Chapter 3. [191] From O'Connor's perspective, the key feature of chapter 3 is not theological engagement with God, but the absence of God's voice.

Parry bridges the differing views about authorship by proposing Lamentations is a collection of poems written in Judah after the destruction of Jerusalem by many who were left behind after the exile. He agrees with House and Williams and acknowledges the voices speaking within the book were created by a single editor who crafted the book into its final form.[192] Parry describes the *geber* as the "valiant man" who demonstrates, in combination with the acrostic structure and the intertextual links with other chapters, the *plausibility* of multiple authors. Parry is not as concerned with linguistic tensions as Westermann and O'Connor. Rather, he is more focused on the message's legitimacy in the midst of a suffering community well acquainted with the issues of sin and its

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[190] O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, 14.

[191] O'Connor, 44.

[192] Parry, *Lamentations*, 4,5. Garrett and House, 301. Williams, 9-11.

confession.[193] The speaker must consider the delicate balance of addressing sin in relation to suffering, while also addressing God's righteousness in relation to suffering.[194]

In summary, the question of authorship in relation to the identity of the *geber* reveals different understandings of how suffering is interpreted in the third poem. For those who hear a single voice, Chapter 3 represents the theological and spiritual progress of the speaker, because the *geber* also takes on the role of a minister speaking to his community and leading them to repent before God. For those whom the *geber* represents one of many voices behind the text, the lament of Chapter 3 functions as a liturgical tool for the community to express its crisis of faith in worship. In this case, the voice of the *geber* is more representative than ministerial, and the silence of God is more profound than engagement with God. For example, O'Connor views the lament as a reconstruction of faith during the absence of God. Parry even raises the question of the lament's legitimacy within the community. Westermann's delineation into three separate voices, along with Parry's interest in the legitimacy of the lament in the eyes of the community, provides a basis for turning attention to the *geber's* audience. They must wrestle with this message, how it may interpret the theological significance of their suffering, and how they might respond.

Audience in Lamentations 3

Parry's question about spiritual legitimacy makes it necessary for readers to

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[193] Parry, 4,5.

[194] Parry, 31.

analyze the *geber's* audience for a discernable purpose or resolution to his suffering and that of his community. Three transitions in the text of Chapter 3 from one audience to another will be reviewed, the stanzas of verses 17-24; 40-42; and 55-57.

Audience Transition in Lamentations 3:16-24 (Vaw, Zayin & Het stanzas)

Just as the identity of the *geber* is unspecified, so is his human audience through Lamentations 3:1-16. While it can safely be assumed his immediate audience is those to whom he is describing his suffering in verses 1-13,15-17, the presence of verse 14 and "mocking" from the people raises questions about the *geber's* relationship to his audience. Are they his ultimate, intended audience? It certainly does not seem that they are the ones from whom he expects relief. Throughout this lament, the *geber* addresses his complaint indirectly to a remote, third-person singular "he," a person who isn't named until verses 16-18, the Vaw stanza.[195] Furthermore, the lament shows the *geber* is nearly consumed by despair, but his turn in spirit is not because of his immediate audience. Rather, a new audience is implied in verse 19 of the Zayin stanza. Here the word "remember," uses the imperative mood, implying that God will once again be his audience. A similar means of addressing God with the imperative is found in Lamentations 1:9,11 and 20, and in 2:20. Because of this, commentators such as Parry, House, and Westermann view the Zayin stanza as the start of a petition and prayer

[195] Renkema, 370. Renkema discusses the reasons why some commentators prefer to translate verse 14 as "I was a laughingstock to all my people" or "all the peoples." Either way, the effect for the *geber* is that his suffering was compounded by individuals. Renkema's translation of the *geber* as the "*devoted one*" takes on additional significance given the ridicule he faced for remaining faithful to a God who had punished them all.

addressed to God.[196] This is confirmed by the emphasis added in verses 20 and 21, indicating the practice of prayer is not abandoned even though he believed God had refused his prayers earlier.[197]

Renkema argues any other interpretation of the imperative besides God as the audience would be illogical,[198] especially in light of verse 23 in which the second-person singular is again used as a direct word of praise to God, "Great is Your faithfulness!"[199] Westermann takes a slightly different approach here noting the petition has transformed into devotional language [200] which, combined with the recollections of verses 20 and 21, can be interpreted as expressions of praise *about* God. Although God is not discounted as part of the audience, Westermann emphasizes a change in the speaker's identity rather than that of the audience. He supports his view by observing verses 2-17 are a simple collection of accusations arranged alphabetically, distinct in style from another who wrote the avowal of trust in verses 17b – 25 and representing a higher level of artistry.[201] O'Connor makes a similar observation noting that in verse 17 the *geber* suddenly "becomes the acting subject," "My soul is rejected from peace; I have forgotten goodness." However, the source of strength is found in his inability to forget his trauma necessitating that he tell, and retell, what happened to prevent further dehumanization,

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[196] House, 413. Westermann, 173, 174.

[197] Parry, *Lamentations*, 100.

Renkema, 378.

[198] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 378.

[199] Renkema, 389.

[200] Westermann, 173. This is similar to the devotional language found in Psalms 8 and 139.

[201] Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*, 174.

prompting him to exclaim, "remember!"[202] This leads him to make contact with the divine "Eavesdropper" in verse 23 whose faithful character is the "taproot of his hope" and source of his confidence.[203] Williams and Lee also emphasize the strength of the *geber,* but rather than emphasize his trauma, they emphasize his continual prayer as a display of strength[204] and God as the cause for his hope.[205]

Parry appreciates the fact that God is being addressed, but instead of emphasizing grammatical notes, he locates the *geber's* hope in the character of God, specifically his memory of God's *hesed* and covenant promises as the spark resulting in his confession of praise.[206] House believes this section is a reminder of God's faithfulness to renew the people (promised in Deuteronomy 30), which "lasts as long as God lasts since it is grounded in his personal character."[207]

The Het stanza includes one additional statement related to the *geber's* audience and to God's character in verse 22a. If commentators follow the MT, translations include the first person plural of *tammu* (to perish/cease/end), and follow close to Renkema's translation "that we do not perish."[208] If commentators follow the BHS edition such as Parry and House, translations use a third person plural, "The loving kindnesses of

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[202] O'Connor, 48.

[203] O'Connor, 50.

[204] Williams, 97,98.

[205] Lee, *The Singers of Lamentations: Cities under Siege, from Ur to Jerusalem to Sarajevo*, 60:173.

[206] Parry, *Lamentations*, 101, 102. Geber's turn of hope is not based on evidence of survival "we have not perished" as the MT implies but on hope from the confession (102).

[207] Garrett and House, *Song of Songs / Lamentations*, 23b:415. This is contrasted with the faithfulness of God to punish (Deut 30:1-10).

[208] Renkema, 385.

YHWH are surely not ended."[209] Either translation is, as Westermann describes, an "avowal of confidence" in the faithfulness of God.[210] Nevertheless, the difference in translation raises the question of how the audience is to receive what is being said. On the one hand, the third-person singular (BHS) continues the expression of praise and maintains focus on God's character and his *hesed*. On the other hand, the first-person plural (MT) invites the original audience to recognize their survival as evidence of God's *hesed*.[211] Renkema believes the MT is consistent with the lament as a corporate expression of worship, and Williams follows suit because this is the first verse in the poem which positions the reader to see the *geber's* suffering as representative of the community. He notes this statement may also provide a basis for a corporate hope that is expressed by the community saying, "We are not consumed," a hope that will be elaborated further when their redemption is proclaimed in verse 58.[212]

Summary Audience Transition in Lamentations 3:16-24

Verses 16-24 reveal the *geber* is sharing his lament, a complaint about God, with his immediate audience even though his words of prayer and praise are reserved for God because of his hope in the unfailing character and *hesed* of God. All the commentators recognize the desire of the *geber* to interact with God, and all note the transition in speech at verse 19 as a petition. But, where most commentators see a transition in audience, Westermann interprets a transition in speaker who voices words of praise about

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[209] Parry, 87.

[210] Westermann, 173.

[211] Parry, *Lamentations*, 101.

[212] Williams, 100, 118.

God. O'Connor marks the transition to God as the inability to forget trauma motivating a desire to make contact with God. Of particular note, the grammatical possibility of the MT in verse 22a indicates that the *geber* is inviting his community to join him in the word of praise, because of God's lovingkindness in preserving them. His declaration that God is his portion demonstrates personal trust as well as implying where he may find relief from his spiritual alienation from God.

Audience Transition in Lamentations 3:40-42 (Nun stanza)

What follows from verse 25 to verses 40-42, the Nun stanza, is a series of exhortations to persevere and recognize the character and nature of God. As the *geber* asks, "Why should a living man complain when he is punished for his sins?" in verse 39, he transitions to the Nun stanza and back to the wider audience with the cohortative mood to emphasize the community's need for self-examination.[213] This transition in mood, combined with his new stance toward his audience, has been noted by commentators. Lee describes this move as a transition between the second and third singers. She argues the second singer was defending God by suggesting that the people remain quiet in verses 25-30 by using the softer cohortatives of verses 28-30 to persuade them. Yet, the third singer responds by rejecting this advice and forming an accusation against God initiated by the second-person singular in verse 42, "and You have not pardoned."[214] Interestingly, Lee believes the response to the third singer in verses 46-51

[213] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 421. Renkema says the Qal Imperfect, even without the final Hay ought to be understood as a cohortative.

[214] Lee, *The Singers of Lamentations: Cities under Siege, from Ur to Jerusalem to Sarajevo*, 60:176.

is the prophet Jeremiah, due to the word usage of "our enemies" and the characteristic weeping of the prophet's eyes.[215]

Westermann believes this stanza marks the boundary between an individual disavowal of lament in verses 26-41 (in contrast to the avowal of confidence in verses 17-15) and the fragment of a community lament captured in verses 42-51.[216] He argues that verses 26-41 are distinct from other portions of Lamentations and do not represent the kernel of the whole composition. This is a striking difference in interpretation from commentators such as Parry and House, who view verses 31-33,[217] the Kaph stanza, as the most profound theological insight of the book, the highwater mark of Lamentations.[218] Renkema also sees this stanza as the center of the entire book because, finally, the cause of the lament appears. What they have been forced to endure is something contrary to God's nature, "He does not afflict from the heart."[219] Instead, Westermann argues these verses are a post-exilic expansion characterized by self-examination and silence. It represents a return to God rather than the need to be rescued from God and is an entirely different situation, "far removed from the horror of Jerusalem's destruction," even suggesting it was incorporated during the time of Ezra.[220] Additionally, the Nun stanza sets up the next transition of God as audience, making the

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[215] Lee, 60:177.

[216] Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*, 180.

[217] Lamentations 3:31-33 "For no one is cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone."

[218] Parry, *Lamentations*, 105.

[219] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 408.

[220] Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*, 180.

case that verses 42-50 comprise another speaker with another accusation against God. "You have not forgiven" indicates that God remains Israel's foe.[221]

O'Connor emphasizes God's silence and inaction up to through verse 30. The transition marked by corporate confession and worship in verses 40 and 41 reengages the community as the audience. However, because of God's continued silence, the strongman speaks on their behalf to God in verse 42, "We have transgressed and rebelled; You have not forgiven." O'Connor interprets this complaint to mean the speaker felt God had let them down,[222] and, in combination with the silence of God, accounts for the strongman's back and forth movement through the previous stanzas of the poem, which causes him to "wobble in uncertainty" and never able to fully yield to the praise that was offered earlier in the poem.[223]

House considers the significance of this stanza differently from O'Connor, pointing to a theological development as God is addressed once again. Addressing God, despite silence, heightens anticipation for deliverance, especially as the *geber* considers his own actions in relation to God's goodness. House says this contrast is accomplished with the transition from the cohortative mood of verse 41 in which he exhorts his audience, "Let us lift our hearts and our hands," to the first-person plural of verse 42, "We have indeed transgressed, and You have not forgiven." House describes this confession as a reference back to Jerusalem's confession in Lamentation 1:20, "for I have

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[221] Westermann, 183. Westermann also notes that this direct address is unlike the third person accusation in vv 2-16. He believes the form of direct address parallels the communal laments as found in the Psalter and Lam 5.

[222] O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, 53.

[223] O'Connor, 49.

been very rebellious."[224] He maintains this underscores their realization that punishment did not come from God's heart (verse 33) but from their actions. Therefore, the goodness of God isn't called into question, but rather, their own. The worship leader calls the community to take responsibility, confessing their sins, as an avenue for restoring their relationship with God in order to make the experiences perhaps even redemptive.[225]

Williams also points to theological development by the *geber,* which progresses forward from the cohortatives of verses 40 and 41 and indicates a turn to the Lord by the community in which they voice true repentance. Williams suggests the last part of verse 42, "You have not forgiven" may indicate that God is not obligated to forgive, or that another basis for forgiveness is necessary, "one that enables grace to meet repentance and result in forgiveness."[226]

Summary Audience Transition in Lamentations 3:40-42

This section reveals key points which advance interpretations of the nature and purpose of suffering in Lamentations 3. Primarily, the transition to the cohortatives indicate the *geber's* identification with his audience and their corporate need to return to the Lord and lift up their hearts and hands to God in worship. Verse 42 of this stanza states that sins have been confessed, which includes the transition to God as his audience by saying, "You have not forgiven." The interpretation of this statement has implications

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[224] Garrett and House, *Song of Songs / Lamentations*, 421.

[225] Garrett and House, 23b:417, 420, 421.

[226] Williams, *The Shadow of Christ in the Book of Lamentations: A Guide to Grieving with Faith*, 119. He suggests this tension is resolved in verse 52, "My enemies without cause hunted me down like a bird." This verse is the highpoint of the chapter for Williams because of the transition from a plural guilt to a singular innocence providing the contrast between Jerusalem's punishment for her sins and the confession of the people's sins. This also becomes the basis for the geber's substitutionary role in the place of many which is vindicated in verses 58 and 59. See page 123.

in whether the commentators believe this stanza represents theological progress or uncertainty. Progress is championed by House, Williams, and Parry who see this statement as an elevation of the *geber's* ministerial and mediatorial role to the community, as he urges them to consider the gravity of their sin in relation to the righteousness and goodness of God. This view of theological development is supported by the assumption that *geber's* voice is the same voice heard at the beginning of the poem.

Those who view this poem as theological uncertainty view this stanza as a punctuation mark of God's inaction and silence. Confession has been made, but forgiveness is withheld, and effort to make contact with the divine eavesdropper remains frustrated. The lament itself is an expression of a heart that remains wounded and reflects a community disappointed in God. As a result, the statement in 42b initiates a prayer of accusation against God in the verses that follow.

Westermann's assessment that verse 41 is the conclusion of a section of the poem, possibly written during the time of Ezra, deserves attention. Westermann not only detects different speakers and audiences, but he also sees in verses 26-41 a different sort of suffering and worship setting in which the speaker and his community have been separated from God for a long time and now need to return. Westermann argues that those who view verses 31-33 as a theological highpoint and acrostic center of the poem, miss this vital aspect of lament. This point will be addressed further below.

Audience Transition in Lamentations 3:55-57 (Koff stanza)

The call for deliverance in the Koff stanza beginning in verse 55 also contains an important question in terms of its audience. Verse 57 says, "You drew near on the day I called on You, and said, Do not fear!" Has the *geber* become the audience? Westermann considers the direct address of verses 55-58 to be a psalm of praise for God's deliverance. Verse 57 captures the state of the worshipper's extreme distress and, as he cried out to God, that he was "admonished not to fear." Because God was no longer silent, his voice began to "ameliorate their situation."[227]

Renkema considers the stanza to be a prayer for intervention and the fourth and fifth poems to be evidence that God had not yet granted actual restoration to his people. Instead of direct speech from God, survival in the midst of judgment is considered a favor from God.[228] These verses are express trust, the basis for the help he expects, a promise to which God obliged himself. Therefore, Renkema does not see a change in audience and judges the phrase "Fear not!" to be an interior voice similar to what he would have "heard in the temple liturgy when God's salvation and liberation were promised to the petitioner."[229]

O'Connor sees tensions and contradictions in the hopes of the *geber* and agrees with Renkema that this word of assurance is not direct speech. She views the series of verbs in the perfect tense as completed actions, memories from previous conversations or

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[227] Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*, 186.

[228] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 450.

[229] Renkema, 452, 453, 455.

traditional words of affirmation. Furthermore, O'Connor surmises that the *geber* forgets his calls for repentance and moves on to pleas for judgments against his enemies with the hope that, if God would attend his pleas, a better future might be possible.[230] In House's translation of verse 57b, the verb "fear not" is governed by the prior verb in the perfect tense, "he said." While he also reads these verbs as completed past actions, House argues that God genuinely heard the *geber's* cry and gave real comfort to the *geber* during the fall of Jerusalem, just as God did for Jeremiah, Jonah, and many psalmists during their time of need. The effect of this, as verse 58 implies, was that God took up his cause against his enemies.[231] Parry's emphasis is on the point of deliverance. He speculates the words could be the memory of priestly words from the past. However he says, the fact remains that verse 57 contains the only direct speech of God in the book of Lamentations, and the greater emphasis is on the physical deliverance he experienced from the pit (verse 55).[232]

Summary Audience Transition in Lamentations 3:55-57

This stanza refocuses the audience on the action of God, especially verse 57, which is typically translated with the perfect tense verbs governing the imperfect verbs. Given the perfect tense with past or completed action, the *geber's* testimony is historical and can be understood in two ways. Either God has fulfilled promises to his people in the past, and this word gives the *geber* confidence that deliverance will come from God in the future, or hope in God is based on his character, but his continued silence is making

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[230] O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, 56.

[231] Garrett and House, *Song of Songs / Lamentations*, 23b:426, 427.

[232] Parry, *Lamentations*, 122, 123 and 124

future deliverance uncertain. An alternative interpretation of the perfect tense, however, understands that the *geber* is testifying that the voice of God has just been heard as a recent and personal deliverance. This interpretation would make the *geber* the audience of God's speech and signal that his alienation with God had ended.

If the imperfect tense of the verb "do not fear" is allowed to influence the understanding of the passage, the voice of God is a present help, as Westermann says for the relief of suffering and, as Williams implies, for the moment of rescue.[233] This reading receives support from a similar construction of the perfect with an imperfect in verse 7. However this stanza is interpreted, the testimony of the *geber* points to an immanent God who is to be engaged and petitioned from the pit, a place of isolation and persecution.

Summary of the geber's Identity and His Audience in Lamentations

The *geber's* introduction as the man of affliction sets a tone uniquely personal within the collection of poems. His afflictions, described in detail, leave no doubt that God is the source of his affliction, which was not lessened by his community. In fact, the community exasperated his affliction. The first sixteen verses in Chapter 3 detail these conditions. Although there is a tendency to read the third poem chronologically, especially by commentators who accept a single author's voice, the *geber's* description of the pit in verse 55 may arise from the same period of time, especially when commentators give consideration to the poem's acrostic structure. Nevertheless, physical isolation compounds the experience of spiritual isolation in verse 7. In the aftermath of

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[233] Williams, *The Shadow of Christ in the Book of Lamentations: A Guide to Grieving with Faith*, 126. This is an inference drawn from his interpretation of verses 56, 57a and 58. Oddly, he does not mention 57b.

Jersualem's destruction, the *geber's* severe isolation forms the context of the complaint he delivers to his countrymen. Despite the intensity and duration of his suffering, the *geber's* determination to address God remains clear in verse 19. As verses 22-24 describe, his desire to reengage and offer praise to God is rooted in the Lord's *hesed* or covenant faithfulness. This stanza also positions the *geber* as a spiritual leader before his community, who invites others to consider the character of God's *hesed* in verses 31-33. His leadership reaches its most persuasive point in verses 40-44 as he identifies with the sins of the people against God and encourages corporate confession, as yet another invitation to worship.

Commentators who employ a form critical approach, such as Westermann and O'Connor, are careful to note that the literary movement of Chapter 3 is not necessarily a theological progression but the juxtaposition of multiple speakers who view the voice of the *geber* as representative of the community's suffering. The variety of voices highlights the corporate role of the lament as a form of worship theologically oriented but also religiously cathartic as the lament develops a theological language rising out of their crisis of faith. Here, the role of a minister is less important than the religious function of the lament itself, which is representative of the community. In this respect the remainder of the poem, beginning with the address to God in verse 42, can be interpreted as either a movement of the community to its historic understanding that it must wait patiently for the forgiveness and redemption of God, an act of hope that rests upon the character of God, or an accusation against God that must be renewed due to his absence. If the ministerial role of the *geber* is developed in verse 42 and beyond, the immanence of God is revealed, and the speech becomes a common lament of deliverance, with respect to

verses 55-57, which includes public testimony that God has taken up the *geber's* case for justice against his enemies. Here, the voice of God addresses the repentant *geber* and people, indicating their alienation from God comes to an end.

Summary of Literature Review

Browning and Mahedy initially revealed that Vietnam Veterans felt alienated from God as a result of their experiences in combat. Clinicians have also observed the need for atonement and penance among combat veterans who suffered effects that transcended PTSD, resulting in the study of moral injury and most recently spiritual injuries. This research prompted others to consider the ties between moral injury and spirituality as a means for healing. Researchers now suggest the practice of lament for combatants to renegotiate their spiritual difficulties towards healing or post traumatic growth. Some suggest that the lamentation and confession of sin is necessary for healing. The difficulty facing clinical professionals is the inability to lead veterans through this type of care, and the difficulty of Christian pastors is the perception of standing before the veterans as a religious judge. Therefore, pastors can best guide veterans through psalms of lament as a shepherd who exposes veterans to a library of lament that enables them to enter into the Christian community and engage God personally and seek healing through his love and mercy.

The *geber* in Lamentations 3 is a man who has experienced the fall and destruction of Jerusalem, which has been followed by God's affliction, defeat by the enemy, and the scorn of his people. Some scholars view him as a single speaker who speaks to his community about his distress but remembers the *hesed* of God and then

addresses God. The *geber* also testifies about the heart of God to the people and calls them confess their sins. The speaker testifies that he himself was nearly lost to the pit but cried out to God and was heard and redeemed. He therefore stands as a spiritual leader before his community as one who identifies with their sin and calls them to hope in God.

An alternate perspective views the *geber* of Lamentations 3 as a collection of speakers. As such, the role of a minister is less important than the religious function of the lament itself, which is representative of the community. In this respect the poem can either be interpreted as an encouragement for the community to wait patiently for the forgiveness and redemption of God; an act of hope that rests upon the character of God; or, as an accusation against God in which faith must arise due to his absence.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to gain a rich description of how veterans experienced God during and after combat and how their faith was shaped by those experiences and by the ministry of their pastors and churches. These experiences were then analyzed in light of Lamentations 3 as a passage of scripture that may be able to inform pastors how to provide pastoral care to those returning home from combat. The background for this research assumed the phenomenon of moral injury and PTSD as indicators of spiritual distress and therefore an obstacle to engaging and worshipping God. This study also assumed that Christian veterans have learned important principles about the lovingkindness of God as a result of their experiences in combat and that pastors made contributions which helped veterans engage God in worship.

This research will explore three main areas in the literature review covering spiritual and moral injury, the challenges of providing pastoral care within this context and a survey of Lamentations 3. Therefore, a qualitative study was proposed to comprehend the views and experiences of selected veterans. After completing the literature review, the researcher pursued the qualitative study. To examine Christian veterans' experiences more closely, the following research questions guided the qualitative research:

1. How did Christian veterans experience God during combat?
    a. How was God's faithfulness experienced?
    b. How were feelings of God's presence or rescue experienced?
    c. Did you ever feel alienated from God?

2. How did combat shape the faith of Christian veterans upon their return home?
    a. How has worship, prayer, confession and the scriptures been a part of their life?
    b. In what ways do reflections upon combat have bearing on their understanding of God?
    c. How have they been cared for as veterans?
3. How have pastors helped Christian veterans engage God?
    a. How have veterans helped other veterans engage God?
    b. How was the ministry of scripture shared?
    c. How has the ministry of prayer and confession of sin been a part of worship?

Design of the Study

This study explored the relationship between the veteran's experience of God during and after combat, in relationship to themes present within Lamentations 3. This researcher employed a basic qualitative research design. Sharan B. Merriam, in her book *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, explains there are four aspects to qualitative research. First, the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning. Second, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. Third, the process is inductive. Fourth, the product is richly descriptive.[234] To further explicate the nature of a basic qualitative research, Merriam summarizes such research as an

[234] Sharan B. Merriam and Ezilabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 4th ed. (San Franciso: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 15–17.

interest in uncovering how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their world, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences."[235]

This study employed a basic qualitative research design and conducted semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data gathering. This qualitative method provided for the discovery of more comprehensive and descriptive data from participants by allowing their world view to emerge and engage the ideas relevant to the topic of theological lament as engagement with God.[236]

Participant Sample Selection

This research required participants who are able to communicate their spiritual journey during and after their experiences of warfare. To gain data towards best practices, the participants self-reported to the researcher that they had experienced some form of spiritual distress (the absence, alienation or affliction of God) as well as a sense of the lovingkindness of God as a result of their experiences of war that ultimately led them to worship God. Therefore, the purposeful study sample consisted of a selection of seven Christian veterans who fought in Vietnam War, The Gulf War and the Global War on Terrorism who were currently worshipping in a local church, thus meeting a criterion-based selection of attributes crucial to this research.[237]

Seven participants were chosen from purposeful sampling of sixteen veterans whose service spanned World War II through the Global War on Terrorism, in order to

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[235] Merriam and Tisdell, 24,25.

[236] Merriam and Tisdell, 111. (Semi structured interviews).

[237] Merriam, 97.

provide an understanding about what is common or average among Christian veterans who have experienced spiritual hardships of warfare.[238] This larger group of participants represented combatants from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines. They represented a cross section of enlisted, a non-commissioned officer, a warrant officer, and commissioned officers. Both draftees and volunteers were included. Participants represented a variety of military occupational specialties (MOS) in order to gain a maximum variation of military service experiences. This included service members who served in combat arms, combat support and combat service support. They also varied in age and number of tours, which provided a broad spectrum of war time experiences for the study. This study only included males but that was not by design, nor relevant to selection criteria. Of more importance was a basic Christian belief in God that was challenged or interrupted due to spiritual distress during or after Vietnam that ultimately resulted in a desire to engage God and assist other veterans in their ability to engage God. Seven veterans from the larger group of sixteen met these criteria and represented a cross section of the variables mentioned above with one notable exception. Six of the seven veterans represented combat arms (infantry and aviation) and one represented combat support (engineer). Unfortunately, the researcher was not able to interview any who were serving within the medical military occupational specialties (MOS). Nor were any interviews conducted with those who were seriously wounded during combat. This left a gap in the diversity of experience among Christian veterans interviewed that must be weighed and considered with care.

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[238] Merriam, 97.

Participants were invited to join the study via an introductory letter, followed by a personal phone call. Some veterans heard of the research and asked to participate. All seven of the participants from the larger sample size expressed interest and gave written informed consent to participate. In addition, each participant signed a "Research Participant Consent Form" to respect and to protect the human rights of the participants. The Human Rights Risk Level Assessment is "minimal" to "no risk" according to the Seminary IRB Guidelines. The following is a sample of this consent form.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

I agree to participate in the research which is being conducted by Seth George to investigate spiritual engagement after warfare for the Doctor of Ministry degree program at Covenant Theological Seminary. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary. I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of the participation, to the extent that they can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, and/or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:

1) The purpose of the research is to investigate Christian Veterans of war who experienced various forms of spiritual disorientation and discouragement consistent with aspects of Biblical lament, such as feeling alienated from God or fellow Christians upon their return home but ultimately reengaging God through worship.
2) Potential benefits of the research may include a better understanding of how and why the need to engage God shapes the post war experience, how pastors might better understand aspects of this particular spiritual journey, and finally how Lamentations 3 addresses the nature of this journey through lament that is oriented towards the lovingkindness of God. There are no direct benefits for the participant apart from the possible encouragement to be gained by sharing these experiences with those who read this work.
3) The research process will include interviews with seven veterans who have "minimal variation" of experiences. Priority of interest is for those who served in the Vietnam War, but not to the exclusion of veterans from other wars who have similar experiences. Every effort will be made to conduct interviews face-to-face. If this is not possible Zoom, or a similar communication platform will be utilized. The interviews will be recorded. As a participant, I am a volunteer and introduced to the safeguards per the protecting human research participate training. I have the option to withdraw from the process at any time. The purpose of the interview is not to discuss wartime experiences, or pry into the personal diagnosis of PTSD, Moral Injury or any other form of trauma. At the conclusion of the interview, I have the chance to revisit

or amend statements on an agreed upon timeline. As a participant, I have the opportunity to review statements or themes recorded in chapter 4 and am given an opportunity to ensure comments are representative of my words and experiences. I will be briefed on the steps taken to ensure how my anonymity and the interview material is protected and stored for the following three years. Finally, I will be invited to review chapter five findings and the entirety of the dissertation if I have any interest.

4) As a participant I will receive a list of sample questions prior to the interview if I wish to prepare for the conversation. I have been invited to review Lamentations 3 in order to gain an understanding of the Biblical context for this research. Interviews will be approximately 60 to 90 minutes in length.
5) Potential discomforts or stresses: The nature of the conversation will acknowledge the periods of spiritual difficulties faced throughout the course of their lives post-conflict, but the goal of the questions will be to understand how they found hope and / or satisfaction with God. Again, there is no interest in hearing participants discuss war time experiences or the specifics of difficult memories or trauma.
6) Potential risks: Risks are determined to be "Minimal." Participants are asked to reveal personal information regarding individual viewpoints, background, experiences, behaviors, attitudes or beliefs. Additionally, participants are selected based on characteristics of spiritual experiences that are unique to veterans to include aspects of Biblical lament. Participants are asked to reflect upon their own behaviors, values, relationships, or person in such a way as to be sensitive to any personal concerns that might be raised regarding the subject matter of this inquiry.
7) Any information that I provide will be held in strict confidence. At no time will my name be reported along with my responses. The data gathered for this research is confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent, unless otherwise required by law. Audiotapes or videotapes of interviews will be erased following the completion of the dissertation. By my signature, I am giving informed consent for the use of my responses in this research project.
8) Limits of Privacy: I understand that, by law, the researcher cannot keep information confidential if it involves abuse of a child or vulnerable adult or plans for a person to harm themselves or to hurt someone else.
9) The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the study.

_____

Printed Name and Signature of Researcher Date

_____

Printed Name and Signature of Participant Date

Please sign both copies. Keep one. Return the other to the researcher. Thank you.

Research at Covenant Theological Seminary which involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to: Director, Doctor of Ministry; Covenant Theological Seminary; 12330 Conway Road; St. Louis, MO 63141; Phone (314) 434-4044.

Each participant completed a one-page demographic questionnaire for the interview. The questionnaire asked for information concerning the selection criteria above. It also requested information of particular interest in this study. Possible participant variables of interest included (1) the conflict, (2) age during service, (3) number of tours served, (4) and military branch and (5) military occupational specialty (MOS). The analysis in chapter four described the relevance of the demographic data.

Data Collection

This study utilized semi-structured interviews for primary data gathering. The open-ended nature of the interview questions facilitates the ability to build upon participant responses to complex spiritual issues in order to explore them more thoroughly. As Merriam states, "This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic."[239] Ultimately, these methods enabled this study to look for common themes, patterns, concerns, and contrasting views across the variation of participants allowing the researcher to make sense out of data that involves "consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read."[240]

The researcher performed pilot tests of the interview protocol to evaluate the questions for clarity and usefulness in eliciting relevant data. Initial interview protocol categories were derived from the literature review but evolved around the explanations and descriptions that emerged from doing constant comparison and iterative work during

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[239] Merriam, 110, 111.

[240] Merriam, 202.

the interviewing process. A recalibration of the interview questions was approved by the research advisors to reflect the realities of the field-tested interviews. This allowed for greater flexibility in the timeline of how veterans experienced God during combat as well as after combat. This was important given the significance of those experiences despite the decades of time that have passed with most interviewees. Categorizing the data while continuing the process of interviewing also allowed for the emergence of new sources of data.[241]

The researcher interviewed seven Christian veterans for 60 to 90 minutes each. Prior to the interview the participants agreed to the format which included a recognition that the IRB consent form given them granted me permission to use the interview material and represented my commitment to protect the information and their identity. The IRB forms were signed once each participant was satisfied with the interview and final representation of comments included in chapter 4. In order to accommodate participant schedules, the researcher scheduled the interviews in a time and place of the participant's choosing. In person, telephonic and video teleconferencing platforms were used. The researcher audiotaped the interviews with a digital recorder. By conducting two interviews in a week, the researcher completed the data gathering in the course of five weeks. After each interview, the researcher wrote field notes with descriptive and reflective observations on the interview time.

The interview protocol contained the following questions which were designed to support the themes of the Research Questions.

1. How did you experience God during combat?

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[241] Merriam, 197.

a. Was there ever a sense of God's absence?
b. Where there times in which you felt God's presence?
c. Was there a time(s) you felt God rescued or protected you?

2. Have you ever thought about how your experiences in combat may have shaped your faith through the course of your life and if so, how?
    a. Have any Bible passages ministered to you in light of your experiences?
    b. Have churches or other Christians ministered to you as a veteran?
    c. Did you ever feel alienated from God after combat?
    d. **Did PTSD, Spiritual or Moral Injury have any bearing on your faith?
    e. Have you experienced God's peace or loving kindness in a particular way as a result of your experiences during or after combat?

3. In what ways and to what extent have you received help to engage God from pastors or the church?
    a. How was the ministry of scripture and prayer shared with you?
    b. How has the confession of sin been a part of this process for you?

4. ****How have your experiences as a veteran equipped you to help or minister to other veterans?
    a. Have you been a part of any veteran organizations?

b. Have public memorials or ceremonies for veterans been helpful and if so, in what way?

c. Have you invited or led other veterans in prayer or other forms of worship through the course of their hardships?

5. What advice would you give to young Christians coming home from war? What advice would you give to pastors who have combat veterans in their congregations?

** This question was only asked if the participant voluntarily described their own PTSD multiple times.

**** This question was included after the initial field tests which was asked as a way to better understand research question number three.

Data Analysis

Within one week of each meeting, the researcher personally transcribed each interview by using computer software to play back the digital recording on a computer and typed out each transcript. Analysis of the data followed the method of constant comparison which inductively analyzed the data gained from the interview process and helped determine similarities and differences.[242] This method provided for an ongoing coding and arrangement of data in order to establish patterns that would build or reveal if

[242] Merriam. 32,

there were grounds for a theory to be built[243] relating spiritual patterns of practice among Christian veterans comparable to what is described in the third chapter of Lamentations.

The analysis focused on discovering and identifying (1) common themes, patterns, and emotions across the variation of participants; and (2) congruence or discrepancy between the different groups of participants that would contribute to a grounded theory of spirituality after warfare. The basic difference between the seven participants selected and the larger group of sixteen was a distinct experience or observation of spiritual distress. Coding for further analysis then included, but was not limited to, short phrases and longer accounts related to the silence of God, a misunderstanding of God, the love of God and God's protection, the meaning of God's plans and purposes, the role of ministers and churches as well as the body language and enthusiasm for aspects of God's work in the lives of others or experiences with things such as PTSD and moral injury were also noted and coded.[244] All of these formed axial questions that were selectively organized into three categories that were aligned with the Research Questions.

Researcher Position

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary data collection and analysis instrument, per the grounded theory of data collection. Researcher bias based upon beliefs, values, personal preferences, and experiences are unavoidable. For this reason, Merriam urges researchers to "identify them and monitor them in relation to the

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[243] Merriam. 32.

[244] Merriam. 199.

theoretical framework and in light of the researcher's own interests."[245] In light of this, it is helpful to understand that this researcher is a Christian minister ordained in an evangelical and reformed denomination. Specific personal religious convictions that may have bearing on how this research is framed, is a belief that the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are inspired by God and are infallible, as described in the Westminster Confession of Faith. Likewise, this researcher believes in the transformative work of God in the lives of repentant individuals through the work of Jesus Christ, applied by the Holy Spirit, leading to the worship of God. Additionally, this researcher has served as an endorsed chaplain in the United States Army for 20 years and participated in multiple deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. The intent of the research to investigate the spiritual journeys of Vietnam Veterans primarily, is not due to a lack of interest in the veterans of other conflicts but because Vietnam Veterans have demonstrated an interest in sharing their experiences for the purpose helping others other veterans. Additionally, they have had more opportunities than veterans of later conflicts to provide care to others over the course of their lives.

As a minister of the Word, the researcher strives to understand how the Christian scriptures are appreciated by veterans. Likewise, the researcher has met other ministers who have questions about how to provide ministry to veterans who demonstrate aspects spiritual distress and, in some cases, social distance from others. The assumption is that spiritual issues raised in Lamentations 3 might serve as a guide and encouragement to other ministers of the Word regarding the centrality of God's *hesed* in the aftermath of warfare, even through the midst of a lament. There is no assumption that the practice of

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[245] Merriam, 16.

lament replaces the care provided by health care professionals who are oriented towards healing, but it is made with an understanding that lament after warfare is a fundamental human experience that is oriented towards theological peace.

Study Limitations

As stated in the previous section, participants interviewed for this study were men within the Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines. Women were not drafted during the post World War II era, nor officially admitted into combat arms roles until 2017. Some of the study's findings may be generalized to other occupations such as first responders, in terms of how they may share similar spiritual responses in the context of trauma, high stress and uncertain environments and how those experiences have bearing on one's understanding of God's love and the role of pastoral care to men and women of these vocations. Readers who desire to generalize some of the particular aspects of these conclusions from these combat veterans should test those aspects in their particular context. As with all qualitative studies, readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately applied to their context. The results of this study may also have implications for survivors in other forms of conflict.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore if Lamentations 3 provides a connection between the ministry of the Word and the pastoral care for veterans who have experienced various forms of spiritual distress during and after combat. The intended audience is church ministers and chaplains in hospitals or military units, first responders, and veteran organizations.

Participant criteria involved four areas of interest. First, participants were to be Christians, which did not mean each veteran had an active faith during combat. Of more importance were their reflections on how their faith was shaped by combat and how ministers cared for them. Second, they were to be active participants in a church or Christian fellowship. Third, these veterans were to be experienced in combat. Fourth, they were to have an ability to describe their experiences with God during or after combat, which ideally included experience or observations of spiritual distress followed by a renewed engagement with God. Preference was given to retired veterans because of the time they had to reflect upon God's work in their lives. Seven participants met the criteria: five Vietnam veterans, one Gulf War veteran, and one War on Terrorism veteran.

This research avoided discussing combat experiences as much as possible in favor of focusing on spiritual experiences upon returning home. However, it was nearly impossible for most to separate their experiences with God from the context of combat. Hence, after the first iteration of research, Research Question # 1 was adjusted to include experiences with God during combat to gain a greater understanding of their faith over

the course of their lives. Only one participant spoke of faith outside of combat, yet his testimony was firmly anchored in his combat experiences and critical to understanding God's faithfulness.

In accordance with a basic qualitative research method, the interview questions were semi-structured by design. Care was taken to ask the questions in general terms in keeping with the minimal risk parameters of this study for the protection of the participants. The researcher did not ask for "war stories" or dig for details of these stories beyond clarifying questions, and then, only if the story was part of a larger point. Questions revolved around the nature and practice of their faith. In this respect, the research was designed to pursue theological accounts.

Three research questions guided the interviews:

1. How did Christian veterans experience God during combat?
2. How did combat shape the faith of Christian veterans upon their return home?
3. How have pastors helped Christian veterans engage God?

Introductions to Participants and Context

The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and selectively coded for the data to construct a grounded theory for the consideration of ministers who provide pastoral care to veterans. To accomplish this, the interview material was organized by its relationship to each research question to determine if a practical theology of pastoral care to veterans by ministers could be better understood. The interview process was iterative. After every two or three interviews, an analysis reassessed the effectiveness of questions, the relevance of the research questions, and the criteria of the participants. Care has been

taken to represent the overall context and intent of each participant. Thus, the data includes several lengthy quotations. Each interview lasted about ninety minutes, and participants were given the opportunity to review and provide feedback on how they were represented. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identities of the participants.

Bobby is from Kansas. In 1969 he was drafted into the Army after his senior year in high school and served as an infantryman assigned to the 101st Airborne Division. He served in Vietnam for one year. He has been married for fifty-four years and has two children. At the time of his interview, he attended the same Baptist church he grew up in, has served as one of its missionaries, and led a Christian Veterans Ministry.

Brandon is from Virginia. He enlisted in the Navy in 1960 and served as a Seabee. He served two years in Vietnam during 1968-1969 and twenty total years in the Navy. He worked as a behavioral therapist for twenty-five years in the civilian community and with the VA. He has been married for fifty years and attends a Methodist church.

Michael is from Kansas. In 1968 he was drafted into the Army after his senior year in high school and served as an infantryman assigned to the 173rd Airborne Division. He served in Vietnam for one year. He has been married for fifty-three years and has three children. At the time of his interview, he attended a Baptist Church and has served as deacon.

Jackson is from Illinois. He was commissioned into the Marines Corps in 1963 and served in the First Marine Reconnaissance as a Platoon Commander in the 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion. He served in Vietnam for six months in 1965 and returned as a missionary in 1972. He has been married sixty-three years and has four children. He

served in the Navigators, Christian Military Fellowship, and Cadence International and at the time of his interview, he was ministering to Marines in Virginia.

Scott is from Virginia. He enlisted in the Army and served as a warrant officer flying helicopters. He spent nearly two years in Vietnam from during from 1967 to 1969. He was married forty years and has one child. Upon retirement he participated in a church plant and served as an administrative pastor. At the time of his interview, he attended a Bible Fellowship Church and participated in two different veteran organizations.

Danny is from Colorado. He enlisted in 1983 as an infantryman and was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division. He served in the Gulf War as part of tactical reconnaissance unit as a pathfinder unit. He has been married twenty-seven years and has two children. At the time of his interview, he attended a Protestant church, has served as a chaplain to veteran organizations, and served a counselor for addiction ministries and services.

David is from Wisconsin. He enlisted in the Marines in 1989 and was later commissioned by the Army as an infantry officer. He served in Iraq in 2003 and later returned as an Army chaplain in 2007. He has been married twenty-six years and has four children. At the time of his interview, he attended a Baptist church and co-led a Christian Veterans Ministry.

RQ # 1 How did Christian veterans experience God during Combat?

a. How was God's faithfulness experienced?

b. How were feelings of God's presence or rescue experienced?

c. Did you ever feel alienated from God?

In fear, but in the hands of God

These initial accounts provided context to understand who these veterans are and how their faith was shaped by the experience of war. This first question allowed each participant to comment on experiencing God in general terms. Most participants responded by describing what was most memorable in terms of feeling God's protection, typically against a backdrop of the physical fears inherent in combat. David said:

> How did I experience God? Man, his hand of protection. I didn't have anybody get hurt on my team. I didn't have anybody get killed. But we got engaged all the time, and we were by ourselves with no supporting elements to call, out in Western Iraq . . . It was really scary. My heart was up in my throat most of the time as I was responsible for these guys and felt super vulnerable.

David also described a snapshot of life inside his Humvee. He had rigged up a rudimentary sound system to play music from time to time and frequently played a CD that he came to appreciate and spoke of as if it were a part of his worship to God while he was in Iraq. "We played a CD that characterized that whole tour for me. It was a Third Day CD that just played constantly. The Mountain of God. That song just characterizes that whole tour for me. "I thought that I was all alone, broken, and afraid. But you were there for me."

Jackson described a mission in which his Marine walking point detected the enemy and spoiled their ambush. The resulting burst of enemy AK47 gunfire wounded five men in his platoon before they gained the initiative and seized their objective but not before Jackson was hit multiple times in the second burst of enemy gunfire.

> We threw hand grenades, and I was hit and went down. I thought I was going to die and was grief-struck when I thought of the impact my death

> would have on my wife and daughter. Yet, I had received Christ's forgiveness of my sins and received his gift of salvation. I knew I would pass from death into eternal life. This blessed assurance gave me a peace to die by. I was at peace even if I were to die. Then, in the next moment I felt God's strength returning to my body, and I grabbed my corporal's rifle who was also hit . . .

For Jackson, the crucible of combat was also a confirming moment of faith. Michael, on the other hand, saw substantial combat and never thought about God but was aware of his growing sense of fear, saying,

> "As time went on and, you know, I started really being fearful. It was getting to where every time you go out at night, on an ambush or whatever, it was always bad, but it was getting worse. I thought, I can't deal with this. So, I literally remember saying to myself, 'Well, if it happens, it happens. There's nothing I can do about it.' I became a fatalist, and it kind took the edge off of some of the fear."

Danny was part of a small tactical reconnaissance team during the lead up to the Gulf war and through its duration. He held on to Psalm 23 daily and survived hard helicopter landings, explosions of scud missiles, missions behind enemy lines, the loss of friends, and survivor's guilt. His team saw "disasters ricochet" off his body, including stepping on a five-inch scorpion in his bare feet. They thought he was charmed, but Danny kept his thoughts to himself and quietly believed that God was protecting him so that "neither should I fear the arrow that flies by day."

Bobby was drafted, trained, and deployed to Vietnam in 1968. At the beginning, it seemed his prayers were going unanswered, and he concluded that God was either "absent or too big" to be concerned about him. While he was in basic training, he expressed interest in becoming a chaplain's assistant, but when his drill sergeant found out, Bobby was prevented from ever seeing a chaplain and was assigned to the 101st Airborne as an infantryman. God's silence continued while he was in Vietnam. After

returning from patrols in the jungle to a larger base of operations, he went out to a pile of dirt called “the mountain” and offered a final prayer to God saying, “I don’t understand. I feel like you’re silent. I still believe in you, but I just feel like I’m out here, and so this is it.” He said this mutual silence continued for another month until their machine gunner had problems with his arm, which meant they needed a volunteer to carry the “60,” and he stated, “That’s when the whole sniper thing happened . . . and the dust settles, and everyone’s just sitting there, mostly to my rear saying, ‘How do you miss the target?’ The target was Bobby, probably because he had been carrying the M60, something he had promised his dad he would never do, which added gravity to the event. He continued, saying:

> The sniper had fired three aimed shots at me at close range (and missed), and one of the guys fired a grenade that hit a tree and fell back toward me putting me in the kill radius, but it didn’t explode! It was like -- I've never heard God's voice, but I had the clearest sense of -- I don't know how to describe it, but I had the clear sense that God was there and knew what was going on. I had this sense that God had a plan . . . and at that point I began to pray again and prayed throughout Vietnam.

Although Bobby did lose his fear of dying, he was still fearful of being hurt and losing his legs, especially since he was subject to mortar and artillery fire. He credited God’s hand of providence for surviving with both his legs intact.

Brandon’s story began by being blown over a Jeep by an artillery shell that killed four of his friends. This event resulted in his conversion experience.

> When the first triage team came through, all they saw was blood flowing around my chest. I was face down and they saw blood, so they assumed I was dead and tagged me. In fact, I still have the tag . . . so they ship me back to Okinawa, Japan. I was in the hospital for about thirty days because the shrapnel hit close to my spine, and I was paralyzed from my neck down. They got all the shrapnel out, most of it out, and all nerve

> sensations came back, all over my body . . . I woke up after surgery, and there sat a chaplain next to me. He was a non-denominational chaplain who could not have been more valuable to me than my medication was. The first question he asked me was, "Why do you think God spared your life? I don't want you to answer this today. I'll be back tomorrow." And I thought about it all night long, and I was really confused because I called myself a Christian only because I did believe in God, right?

Brandon went on to describe his upbringing, growing up Jewish, learning about the Old Testament, and going through bar mitzvah when he was 12 years old. However, none of this mattered to him, and he didn't think about matters of faith until the chaplain asked that question. It sparked thought and confusion but also a renewed interest into what his chaplain would read during morning prayers in Vietnam. Amazingly, after being paralyzed, he was sent back to his unit in Vietnam to complete his tour of duty. Nevertheless, Brandon continued:

> And so, I sat there trying to think, "Why did he spare me? Why me and not any of my friends?" When he got back the next day, he said, "Have you got an answer?" I said, "No, I don't." He said, "OK, I'll help you." And he explained, "God's got a purpose for you." I didn't even think of it that way at all. And he said, "He wants you to spread his word by acts, not by words but by acts."

This last account described the lingering effects of combat in which expectations of God's protection fell short**.** Scott had been providing support to a group of missionaries who were ministering to a leper colony for twenty-five years and training locals to be pastors. Just prior to the first skirmishes of the Tet Offensive, Scott had petitioned his commander to evacuate the missionaries, but his request was denied. As the NVA swept through the area, the missionaries hid themselves in the trash dumps until they thought the fighting was over and then reemerged. However, as the NVA started

regressing back through that same area, they saw the missionaries. Apparently, the missionaries tried to communicate they were civilians and not connected to the war but were gunned down. There was only one adult survivor, the wife of the senior missionary, and a few of the children.

Scott said, “I was really upset, and it set off a series of deep questions in which I wondered about God and how he could let something like that happen. These were good people. This lasted for a long time until I met my wife in Germany, and she helped me work through it.” Scott’s comments were notable because he hesitated to say too much about his service, even though he served for over eighteen months as a young pilot during an active period of the war. Despite all the experiences he had, fear was not verbalized as a significant theme, and this one event cast a cloud on Scott’s theological thinking that would take years to resolve.

Summary of How God Was Experienced in Combat

The first research question sought to determine how Christian veterans experienced God in combat. These responses included themes of fear, God’s silence, and God’s protection. In all cases, participants displayed passion in describing how God intervened or showed himself to be faithful regardless of whether it was in an instant or over a longer period of time. Accounts were frequently punctuated with exclamatory statements such as, “How else do you explain this!” “Oh, my goodness!!!” “Praise God!!!” “Absolutely Remarkable!!!” They showed no hesitation in expressing their thankfulness whether the event happened fifty-five years ago or twenty years ago.

A notable feature of the participants' stories was that they were not discouraged by those who attributed various events to luck. Each participant spoke with conviction regarding the moment he experienced God or saw his plan come to fruition. Descriptions of God's silence and absence were closely tied to stories of God's protection, but there was little interest in elaborating on the difficulties of God's silence or absence. For example, Jackson stated that while he was anxious in various situations, he had been consoled by "following his directive" and mentioned Philippians 4:6-7, the command not to be "anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

David approached his deployment as one already interested in pursuing some form of ministry and was the most comfortable discussing the various contours of faith. He referred to the absence of God three times and was the only person to refer to music, unprompted, as a way of meaning-making and worship. The lyrics that he quoted during the interview, interestingly, described the absence of God. There was, however, a remarkable similarity between Jackson and David in their ability to assess the hand of God quickly in biblical and theological terms. Both were older and already involved in Christian discipleship groups prior to their deployments, and both were ready to pursue formal ministry upon their return.

What remained constant was the sense of mortal fear and a greater trust in God's hand of protection and presence. Also, each participant demonstrated an interest in tying his testimony to God's plan for his life.

RQ # 2 How did combat shape the faith of Christian veterans upon their return home?

a. How has worship, prayer, confession and the scriptures been a part of their life?

b. In what ways do reflections upon combat have bearing on their understanding of God?

c. How have they been cared for as veterans? (by pastors and churches).

This research question sought to determine how combat shaped the faith of the veterans upon their return home and elicited two primary responses. The first was how the scriptures helped them draw meaning from their experiences, and the second involved PTSD. The topic of PTSD was deliberately left out of the research and interview questions to maintain a low risk environment, given the medical complexities of PTSD and because the research addressed how veterans resolved matters of spiritual struggle rather than physiological stress. Still, PTSD was described by the participants without prompting and is included because of its influence on the interviews.

Coming Home and Searching for Healing

The older and younger veterans, despite their age differences, faced the same pressures common to the young people of their day. Once they returned home, they were immediately involved with questions of marriage and divorce, work and school,

friendships and church families. However, the unique desire of the veterans was for personal healing from the effects of combat.

In some cases, the conditions for healing were established prior to the end of their tours of duty. Jackson's experience is unique among the particiapants in part because he was already married and a father, a mature Christian surrounded by other believers, a careful observer of Vietnam War and its larger implications, and his tour of duty was earlier in the war. He was the one participant who did not suffer from PTSD or moral injury. He attributes this to his understanding of the sovereignty of God and why he was in Vietnam. As a result it was his physical healing that required immediate attention. Jackson was airlifted out of Vietnam with his corporal and point man to a USAF hospital in the Philippines where he awaited the amputation of his arm. The day before the surgery, a friend working at the Overseas Christian Servicemen's Center came with some others and prayed for healing, read scripture, and sung a hymn. Then he was flown back to Hawaii where the amputation was averted, and he recovered from his injuries. Jackson was reunited with his wife and daughter, and then had time to plan his vision for ministry. Providentially, the ministry calling he would answer years later would look remarkably similar to the ministry he had recieved. In terms of his combat experience shaping his future ministry, he was not an exception to the rule.

Scott's return home was much different. He landed at Fort Lewis, Washington, and was told to hide his uniform and "make sure they don't see the brown envelope with your orders." He then transferred to Germany, which "protected him from the anger in the United States." Once there, he met his wife who was instrumental in helping him sort out what he experienced in Vietnam. He said the process took six to eight years before he

would talk about it with others or attend church. Michael married his girlfriend but not before putting a tremendous amount of stress upon her, even after he became a Christian. Once Bobby returned to Kansas, he made plans to marry his high school sweetheart, started attending college, and returned to his home church. He avoided the protests on campus and was well received at church, but there were difficulties. He wanted to describe how his experiences in combat had been shaped by God but realized people weren't ready to receive it.

> So, in church things must be proper; they must be righteous. In church you're supposed to let your mind think on these things. There was a period of time when I would tell people this or that, you know, and they would just kind of look in your face. I finally got to the point of realizing it doesn't matter what I say they won't really understand anyway. So, here's the thing, I wanted to honor the Lord. I wanted to speak of the glory of the Lord . . . but it's kind of awkward (to talk about) the Lord's glory even in war, and yet there are ugly parts.

What he did have was a father who wanted to speak with him, who also happened to be a medic during WWII. As they talked about Vietnam, Bobby said, "It was amazing, I think he had memorized every letter I wrote, and sometimes he repeated the same questions . . . I didn't understand it until years later, but I'm convinced that my dad needed to talk too because he had sons (in Vietnam) and especially me (being in the infantry) and him being a medic and all the amputations (he performed), he worried about his boys coming home in pieces."

It is notable that Bobby was in the practice of talking about events as they happened and in talking to God through prayer. During his second interview, he described the relationship between trauma and adrenaline and described the first time he had to shoot an enemy soldier tracking his patrol.

> I was hidden off to the side of the trail while our patrol was resting, and then I saw an enemy soldier who was tracking us coming down the trail slowly. He kept coming closer and closer. I was hoping he would turn around and go away, but he kept coming. Then he stopped. He knew we were close and started looking carefully around until his eyes met mine. It seemed like an eternity, but it only could have been seconds. And then, it was over. All the guys jumped up and were high-five'n me, slapping me on the back, telling me I was the man. But I'll tell you, I cried.

Neither today, nor at that time, does he remember picking up his weapon and firing. The unit chaplain was on that patrol and spent some time talking to him, mainly about his emotional response, which the chaplain thought was normal, and, in true infantry fashion, with all the other guys listening with curiosity. He also related that his unit was tactically disciplined, which meant calling for the enemy to surrender. He remembered, "Most of the time they gave up and so that was nice. I feel like that has a lot to do with your conscience too because it's hard to shoot a man. Because how do you know? What does God think of me?" Bobby said that throughout the course of that year he "never shot anyone in anger." Furthermore, his conduct affected his peers who sometimes had questions about their own conduct and decisions, and he was often the one they would ask, to include questions on morality in the rear. On one occasion he confronted the moral decisions of a fellow soldier who was concerned about God in the field, but not in the safety of base camps in the rear.

Once he returned to Kansas, the nature of the questions changed. "And then, when I came home, having people talk about 'Thou shall not kill.' OK, Well I did. I really searched the scriptures, and I wanted to figure out if I was wrong." And he noted, "I prayed, I prayed that God wouldn't put me in the infantry . . . I prayed because I didn't want any of this." Importantly, Bobby said he had formed conclusions about the role of

God's sovereignty for long enough that by the time he encountered a preacher from another church who confronted him about going to Vietnam, Bobby had his thoughts together and was determined to be heard. "He literally shook his finger in my face and shamed me for going to Vietnam for over an hour. He interrupted me every time I tried to talk." Bobby finally forced the preacher to listen to his story and ultimately extracted an admission that it was the Lord who had him go to Vietnam. Interestingly, the details of this story were given with as much energy as any of his combat stories.

Once Brandon returned, his marriage quickly began to suffer because of his PTSD and her lack of concern about his emotional condition. They divorced in 1971. He remarried in 1974. In the meantime, he was searching for a church and introduced himself to a minister saying he had returned from Vietnam but was told, "Please don't talk about Vietnam in the church." I said, "Wow, I don't need to hear any more." He found a kind minister who listened to him well, but the incident prompted Brandon, who ended up working as a therapist counseling many veterans over the years, to conclude that the poor reception some Vietnam Veterans experienced in the airport, college campuses, or even in churches contributed to PTSD and to his own.

> It wasn't just Vietnam; it was coming back to the country we loved. They dropped us off in a hanger so we could change out of our uniforms, and then we walked through the airport with our heads down and shaking . . . . every one of the Vietnam Veterans in my group (a VA group he leads) suffered from coming back to this country, and when you love your country, it is heart breaking. . . I didn't have a strong faith when I came back, I was a newbie. I had a lot of stress. I don't know if I could have made it. I got no support from anybody; except I found a minister in a little town that I came back to. He was extremely nice. No combat experience, but he understood how to listen to people.

The difficulties in being able to speak freely to someone by the Vietnam Veterans flowed quickly into discussions of PTSD. Nearly all the participants had well-formed opinions about PTSD in general or at least in terms of their own experience with it.

Although Danny became a believer at the age of 12 while navigating the foster care system, by the time he joined the Army and was preparing for the Gulf War, he was operating out of what he described as a "woundedness" which had spilled over into various parts of his life, to include his family. He returned home from the war to a failed marriage. His wife had essentially left and took their children. Alcohol was a part of his life, and once he realized his interest in the Army was declining, he decided to get out of the Army and slipped into a dark place spiritually and physically.

Danny used his skills and resourcefulness as a member of a small special operations team to ensure he obscured himself rather than seek the healing resources he needed. He worked in coal mines (which he believed would be his death) and other jobs that afforded nighttime shift work and minimal interaction with other people. He did talk to his grandfather who had been a tail-gunner in World War II who encouraged him, but during that time he said, "If I had to be around more than three or four people, I'd get the shakes . . . I just didn't want to be around anyone and have my life be revealed." By the time he sought help at a VA in Kansas, he was told that his PTSD was off the charts and the doctor tried to commit him. Instead, he climbed on his motorcycle and rode away. Danny was in darkness and knew it, but even his efforts of reconnecting with God were complicated by his prayer life which he described as a form of begging and only worsened his condition stating, "The more you beg, the more it brings fear." As he reflected on these times, he mentioned the "art of healing" in various forms of ministry

that facilitated key aspects to healing. He relayed, “I just had to learn to talk to God . . . we don’t have to beg our Father for things.” He also mentioned the critical importance of “going before God with your trauma and your confession.”

David spoke at length on the topic and related how a particular experience was addressed during his training for ministry within the VA.

> The hard part is when you talk about the trauma of that experience. There was one particular time in which we got ambushed down in El Tash. There were huge crowds with kids trying to stop us from going through. They put us in a kill-box and you know, so they're shooting us and they're shooting these kids . . . It was horrible. And trying to make meaning of that. We had to make hard decisions to live. And I don't understand why He would have allowed that to happen? I took a class specifically on evil and suffering in the world, trying to reconcile how it is through evil, good can come? How did any good come out of all those kids that died or got hurt? And I recognized there are theologically ways that you can reconcile things. But there's some realities in our humanness and in our brokenness, we just need to do some things for healing. So, I went and saw a counselor while I was in seminary. Trying to make meaning of that instance in particular, others happened in that tour, and I was diagnosed with PTSD. So, I've got PTSD after my first tour and I'm thinking I'm broken.

David’s training in seminary also gave him an opportunity to do Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) at the VA, which quickly put him into a position in which he was ministering to others.

> What I discovered was personal healing in and through meaning making as I came alongside others to make meaning of their own pain and suffering. I think that's true in the Christian journey. Coming into an understanding that I am also broken, I am also a sinner. And I was beginning to do that corporately as part of my theology. It's part of God's way.

Michael’s situation required attention for two reasons. He hadn’t yet become a Christian and didn’t appear to care what society thought of him upon his return. However, his pre-conversion story bore tell-tale signs of PTSD and moral injury, and the futility of partying with friends who had also been in Vietnam as a coping mechanism.

> I didn't view myself as a good kid anymore, and I saw depravity everywhere. At the time I didn't know what the word even meant, but I saw, I mean, I did things that, you know, I did things that I'm not proud of and did things I'm ashamed of. But I didn't relate my struggles after going home to Vietnam. But after a few weeks, I wanted to go back to Vietnam because everything at home was going too fast. I mean life was pretty simple in Vietnam. Every twelve days that chopper would come in (hopefully) and give you some new uniforms and ammo and food. But (at home) I was just, I was so dissatisfied. You probably wouldn't have known it because I was right in the middle of all the partying. It's supposed to, you know, bring you happiness. But it sure didn't. I was so, so lost.

Michael said his lifestyle was a symptom of wanting to be alone because he was beginning to hate crowds of people. Then one evening in 1971 he, his girlfriend, and another friend picked up two hitchhikers. The question was asked, "What do you want to do tonight?" The hope was they would share some drugs. The hitch hikers said, "Do you want to get saved?" Michael was curious and ended up in what he described as a "Jesus Revolution Church" where all the "hippies and straights seemed to get along well." It seemed appealing, but there was still "Vietnam and all my other friends," even though they left him empty. Soon after he received a Bible from a non-believer and read the Sermon on the Mount, he concluded that the hippies had ripped off Jesus' ideas. Then his girlfriend accepted the Lord at the church. Michael related the following:

> After going to that church, I went up to our apartment, and finally I just said, "Well, you know, if Jesus is real – supernatural - I suppose you can talk. Jesus, if you're real, I want to know." And you know, I felt the presence of God! I'm slow to accept things like that. It was a real experience, and what got me, as I look back on it, I'd never thought about God loving me. That was nothing. But I sensed that Christ loved me. I think it was a legitimate experience because of my ignorance. I don't know if it was conversion or one of the things that was leading to that. But I really had a physical experience of God's love. And I wept and I laughed. The next Sunday comes along, and they were having the baptismal service, and I got up and received Christ and got baptized the same night with my girlfriend. And then we got married.

After that, Michael said he devoured scripture and was excited to know that Jesus was real but said that repentance for things in Vietnam came slowly. He recalled that it was years and years before he came to the point of recognizing and confessing some of the things to God and others for what he had done. He recalled a young boy in Vietnam who was crying, trying to get his attention for help.

> You know, I just pushed him away . . . when I speak about Vietnam, I tell groups some of the stuff. Things that used to make me snicker when I was there, now, they make me cry. You know, it's like, "Wow, what war does to you!" It's just horrible. You know, the depravity of this in us. And boy, that's one thing I had down. People are evil. But even my repentance came slowly . . . but after my conversion, I was so positive! Like, Jesus is real!

However, healing and a greater sense of peace with God was also the result of confessing sin. In his second interview, which discussed the contents of this chapter, he relayed the significance of confession with more detail, stating, "I had this recurring nightmare that had nothing to do with Vietnam. But one evening while I was talking with our group (Christian Vietnam Veterans), I said, 'Listen guys, I need to confess to you my heart over the way I killed a VC . . .' It wasn't long, but I realized that dream never came back. It was gone. I was healed."

Summary of Coming Home and Searching for Healing

The transition home for all seven participants was a combination of managing civilian responsibilities, a need to discuss what they had experienced, newfound spiritual realities, and the presence of PTSD. Jackson's experience was unique because he did not navigate PTSD. However, he did take on remarkable challenges such as learning Vietnamese and returning to Vietnam in 1972, during which he was once again exposed to the anxiety of indirect fire, but this time as a minister of the gospel. The other six

participants recognized the presence of traumatic and moral questions that lingered and addressed them at various stages of their lives. All recognized that these issues had to be resolved over time, and none viewed them as spiritual distress per se, weaknesses, or any sort of badge of courage. Nevertheless, it was clear there was a need to frame the topic through the lens of scripture and faithful practice because PTSD represented another aspect of being human and either directly or indirectly related to sin. Moral questions were separated from PTSD. Together, they were recognized as an indication that fellowship with God and others was needed given the propensity to drugs, alcohol, isolation, distance from the church or the frustrating inability to be understood by others.

The Role of Scripture

One event that prompted Bobby and Michael to think through their combat experiences was the movie *Platoon*. Bobby described what almost sounded like an out-of-body experience saying the experience was "fascinating" as he recalled watching some of the scenes, remembering his own terrifying experiences in Vietnam and having to tell himself, "It's ok now." He added extra emphasis on the word "now" and also added with some humor, that the only reason they were there in the first place was because their wives wanted to see the movie. For Michael, whose wife also initiated interest in the movie, seeing scenes he'd lived unfold on the screen unleashed powerful emotions. These were stories both men had tried to tell, but nobody could understand or wanted to hear. For both, the movie coincided with their need to talk about Vietnam as part of their return home decades on. In truth, this process had already been started by meeting with other Vietnam Veterans by the late 1980s and early 1990s, but the movie put the images and experiences before the public and thus changed the opportunities for conversation.

Importantly, Bobby's desire to tell stories of the Lord's glory had not diminished, but in the time since Vietnam, the scriptures, which had been a source of understanding and healing, were now a means of communication and ministry. The role of scripture was mentioned by all the participants.

The ease with which the veterans were able to incorporate scripture and scriptural concepts continued the conversation of PTSD and healing. David provided the most extensive discussion about the nature of PTSD in relationship to the warrior's identity and King David.

> I believe David was someone who navigated the challenges of PTSD. I think he starts hurting the moment that he cut Goliath's head off. I think that when he flung the stone and it sunk into Goliath's head, that was just part of what he did, like when he faced lions and other predators. This (Goliath) was a predator. But in making meaning, I think the moment that he potentially experienced moral injury was when he grabbed the sword, cut off his head and held it up. He started to compromise. He was developing a warrior identity according to what the society and what the culture wanted him to be. That was different than who he understood himself to be. And that is true of the war. The way of fear is, you're constantly being pushed, prodded, and pulled to become self-active as a warrior.

Like Danny and David, Bobby took a similar direction after referring to the "ugly parts" of scripture. He also discussed King David and framed the issue theologically in a way that highlighted God's sovereignty in his life that helped him place value on his experience of PTSD.

> I mean you think about David, King David. Saul killed his thousands, and David killed his ten-thousands. All of that was hand-to-hand (combat) you know, so it had to be a mess. Some of it, I believe that it's almost like a part of my backpack. There's some of the stuff that I will always carry, and I will never set it down. But it's also like, 'You (God) brought the PTSD.' There are things about PTSD, if you look at it like a graph, there's severe and there's lesser forms. You can see this stuff in the news about PTSD on one hand. But on the other hand, I don't see PTSD as all bad. Hyper-

> vigilance is one of the symptoms, and I am not scared of being hyper-vigilant. I'm very aware of my surroundings (in ways) most people aren't.

He continued, saying that even today he continues to run across scriptural passages that describe his experiences and conclusions about the nature of God's care for him while he was in Vietnam, encouraging him to this day, be it Isaiah 58:8 which describes God as "The glory of Lord is my rear guard," or statements such as The Lord of Hosts. He said, "You find this everywhere in the Bible *The Lord of Hosts* or *Lord of Armies*. Did you know it could be translated *Lord of Warriors* – That's MY God! . . . I wished I'd known that in Vietnam!"

Summary of the Role of Scripture

The immediate experiences with God during or after Vietnam were supported by various passages of scripture and scriptural themes that helped the participants make meaning of their past and their new lives. Bobby represented the enthusiasm with which this group of veterans reflected upon the Bible, "I have so many favorite verses, I just feed on them. Yeah, I've lived that! Psalm 22. Psalm 22! He (King David) talks about, saying, 'Be close, be not far from me for trouble is near.' When I read that I said, 'Man, I have been there!'" Even Michael who was not a believer clearly connected scriptures in the way he "devoured" passages and in the ways he connected them to God's care over his life, such as he recitation of Psalm 130:5,6 as a an example of his time in Vietnam, during which his soul was learning to wait for the Lord, more than the watchmen of the morning. These connections also provided substantial meaning to the participants' ability to handle and make sense of hardships such as trauma and PTSD.

God Plan and Purposes

The combination of PTSD with the participants' relationship to scripture also had bearing on how they understood God's plans for their lives. Of the participants interviewed, all had PTSD except Jackson, but none spoke of it in ways that indicated it dominated their lives. Instead, it was contextualized within the sovereignty of God's plan and purposes, to include the work of personal transformation. Michael reflected on this saying, "You always think, 'Ohh, that would be terrible thing to go through,' and then you go through it. But I realize, 'I didn't think about that part of it.' It's like that about a lot of things. I take it as providence. It's there for a purpose, you know, and I think everything that we go through has purpose and it's for God's good." Danny emphasized that "trauma will always be a part of you; it becomes your wound, and it becomes your gift to others to help them along the way when they think there is no hope." Bobby was able to share time with his son on a campout and hike and teach him to truly be silent and therefore aware of the diversity and beauty of their surroundings. David, the youngest of this cohort of veterans, said the presence of PTSD can make a person feel broken, but argued it can also be understood in light of "God's provisions" and "the reality of divine intervention."

> I'm navigating my own challenges of PTSD, OK? I recognize that God was walking me through this, and as I'm trying to make meaning of it, and He's also bringing me counselors and resources. His Word and his servants were critical for me personally and helped me navigate the challenges corporately.

Brandon echoed these thoughts, saying he was more focused on how he walked with others facing similar situations. After he retired from the Army, he got a degree in

psychology and practiced as a therapist for twenty-five years. When he retired a second time, he transitioned into veteran care for those with PTSD as a volunteer. This work has afforded him the opportunity to minister freely, and he adds, with tremendous support from the clinicians, “I've been doing this for about three years now, and the head of the VA who set all this up, he said, ‘I don't know what you're doing, but everybody wants to be in your group.’” He added, “I don’t want you to think that I didn't have to have a lot of therapy. I did. I still deal with constant stress. I can't watch any movies about the Vietnam War. And I don't sit around and tell horror stories about Vietnam. I have worked my way through the depression.”

One final observation in relationship to the participants’ recognition of God’s plan and purpose was the additional perspective achieved after participating in veteran reunions, enabling participants to see what they had known and suspected all along about God’s purposes and his glory. Scott’s story was powerful. After struggling with the distress of the missionaries who had been gunned down as the NVA had regressed, he reconnected with the surviving children of the families and reunited with his former commander, saying:

> I can't really question God in that sense. God had his plan I saw a lot afterwards of what God's plan was and has been. One, was that the wife and a couple of those children, the daughter and son-in-law of the missionaries killed, became Evangelical Free missionaries, became missionaries to the Vietnamese in Cambodia, in a school in Kuala Lumpur, and other places. So, I saw what God can do. I saw God convert the colonel, who wouldn't let us go and try to bring them to safety, he became a Christian.

It was an example of seeing God’s plan and purposes come together in a remarkable way after that tragedy. Jackson expressed how he marveled over God’s providence by giving the “rest of the story” of the events surrounding his ambush. In the

days prior to the ambush, he had shared his hope in the Lord with one of his corporals. That same corporal was one of the five who was wounded. After he was shot, he cried out that he wasn't ready to die and asked Jackson to pray for him. Jackson said, "I prayed out loud, 'God help him!' and then called for the medi-evac to carry him, our point man, and myself out of there before they bled out." Twenty years later, he was reunited with the corporal and found out that he had asked Christ to forgive his sins while he remained in the hospital in the Philippines. He told Jackson, "While I was in the hospital, a guy finished what up what you were trying to tell me, and I got born again!" Bobby and his wife went to a reunion and took one look at everyone and drove home because he didn't see anyone. The next year he went with a friend who had become a Christian. It was there he ran into the D Company guys who his platoon had been sent to rescue almost thirty years prior. It was a mission that involved infiltrating a loose VC perimeter and then fighting their way out, an account in which Bobby said he was praying almost non-stop. One of the men there was showing an old photograph that included an unidentified soldier. Bobby looked at it and said, "That's me!" to the delight of the other veterans.

Summary of How Combat Shaped Faith Once Back Home

A notable feature that shaped the responses of this research question was that participants felt that inquiries about practices such as prayer, confession, worship and scripture had been covered through their descriptions of experiencing God in combat. Therefore, the connection between a formal worship service inside a church sanctuary in "1978," as the question was interpreted, had little resemblance to their faith in "1968." As a result, general observations of churches and the roles of ministers were mentioned but

better suited for Research Question 3. However, over successive interview iterations, the personal accounts of transitioning home and coming to terms with their new life and PTSD provided the structure for their stories of how their faith was shaped by combat and their return home and became another means to frame how they understand God's faithfulness and purpose for their lives.

What also became evident through the "shaping" of their stories was the opportunity to have someone listen to what they had been through. For the Vietnam veterans, opportunities for conversations about their time in combat was limited. But this was true also for Danny, whose mentor (a Vietnam veteran) reminded him to be careful since most people preferred to read about warriors in a book or see them in a movie. Over time, a number of the participants used the scriptures to frame or explain their stories, but this took years. As a result, the responses were not linear or categorically clean, as in "This scripture helped me when I felt alone or when I didn't have anyone to talk to." Instead, their responses were set against the background of returning home and *being* home, a process which took years, even decades. Nevertheless, the transition home from combat set the tone for the next phases of their life. Interestingly, the Gulf War and War on Terror representatives shared similar vocabulary and concepts of woundedness and healing, albeit without the complication of the societal issues the Vietnam veterans faced.

Finally, from participant to participant, there was substantial variety in life stories, but over the course of time their similarities became evident. A key similarity was the need to speak about their experiences and the struggle to find those who could listen. Also, healing was an active pursuit, but not merely for the sake of healing since most still have symptoms, but as part of their testimony to share God's faithfulness. In this way

PTSD became part of their story and a way to frame how God's plan was meaningful and also gave practical purpose to how they communicate and share their lives with others. From this vantage point, none of participants considered PTSD a spiritual detriment. Brandon was direct, as were the others, when asked if PTSD had bearing on his faith, saying,, "Not at all."

RQ 3 How have pastors helped Christian veterans engage God?

a. How was the ministry of scripture shared?

b. How has the ministry of prayer and confession of sin been a part of worship?

c. How have veterans helped other veterans engage God?

The emergence of veterans leading veterans to God

The third research question addressed the challenges of engaging God following combat and the difficulties of returning home. The transition from the battlefield to home was not defined by a particular issue but instead was marked by starting families, establishing work, and pursuing education where possible. Integrating back into churches or finding new churches formed key memories indicative of "defining and refining their identities," to use David's term. In most cases they immediately pursued relationships with pastors and churches because they were already engaged with God. Disparaging remarks or attitudes were rare and did not dissuade them from searching for another church or continuing to seek out Christian fellowship among the broader community. Nor

were they deterred in finding a church that was pastoral and biblically centered. Towards this end, the role of pastors and the church to minister to these veterans was significant.

As noted in chapter 3 in the discussion on methodology, the initial questions elicited answers that were much more descriptive concerning care for other veterans and other various ministries. Thus, Question 3.c was added, and in subsequent interviews, it became the central part of the conversations. Nevertheless, references to pastors, churches, and the pastoral care they received was sprinkled throughout the interviews and is still relevant to Research Question 3, as it provided insight into the problem identified with this research as a whole i.e., how ministers of the Word might offer pastoral care to veterans caught in the gap between the care clinicians offer and the care ministers traditionally offer. Thus, this section will summarize and recap what the participants said about pastors and churches before moving into main areas of discussion.

Ministry Received

Brandon was encouraged to engage God by a hospital chaplain. He emphasized, "It was a non-denominational chaplain who could not have been more valuable to me than the medication." He was told by this chaplain that, "Every morning when you wake up, you need to realize you're on borrowed time. You should have been gone and you aren't. Be of good service, thankful, be joyful." Brandon testified that once he had recovered at the hospital in Okinawa and returned to duty in Vietnam, the first thing he does in the morning is to thank God and help people. He recalled listening to the unit chaplain's morning prayers and scripture readings of Psalm 23, "When I got back from the hospital, I'd listen more intently to it. And I realized, what truth that is! I mean, 'I

feared no evil?' Yeah! Because God was with me!" Upon his return home, a civilian pastor with no connection to the military ministered to him as a good listener. After Brandon was remarried, they transferred to another post and met a helpful unit chaplain. "We got transferred to Guam. And the chaplain there happened to be a family therapist, and he was wonderful with us because my wife and I were brand new newlyweds. We had four kids between us, and it was stressful. And he just grabbed us by the hand and led us through the front door . . ." Brandon said he also has a good relationship with his current pastor and the veterans in his church always get together and talk after church, noting, "It's not coincidental, but there is a deeper level of fellowship going on. We all know they've all served in combat. Army, Air Force, Navy. And so, we have that brotherhood." Interestingly, and relayed with some humor, his pastor knows his story and on Easter sometimes talks about the resurrection and has had Brandon stand up in church as someone who has "come back from the dead! And I always get a kick out of that because he enjoys it too."

Bobby's father spoke with him about his experiences in Vietnam on a regular basis in ways that no one else could or would. He was puzzled by some of the comments prior to his departure to Vietnam such as, "if God's called you to be a killer, be the best you can be." Equally puzzling was the silence from the older generation of veterans upon his return. The rebuke of a local minister detailed in the previous section stands in contrast to the stability of his home church. He expressed substantial thankfulness for the efforts the church had taken to bring various speakers and expose him to Christian thinkers such as Haddon Robinson. He has remained married to his wife, who is also a believer, and she was significantly invested in his care upon his return, and to help him

provide tangible and spiritual support to veterans as well. They are a complete team. He has remained in his home church for his entire life, serving on their mission board. He also noted that his congregation has been welcoming to veterans even though church leadership had no idea how many veterans were in the church and that a veteran ministry was warranted. In his second interview, his wife said, "At one point as the church was setting up tables for all the ministries, we asked if we could set one up for veteran ministry, and they just gave us this blank look, like, 'What are you talking about?'" Bobby and his wife are now considered missionaries of the church.

Michael was evangelized by two hitch hikers and a church congregation that was a part of the Jesus Revolution. He was given a Bible, which he did not read, and then given a Bible by a non-believing friend, which he did read. Recently he has benefited greatly from biblically sound, Reformed pastors, whom he mentions by name. "I think of the input I've gotten from good people, like my former pastor, great (teachings on forgiveness)."

Scott did not talk about attending chapels or churches in Vietnam or Germany. Once he was stationed stateside in California, he began attending a small group with his wife and began to see things "according to God's timing and plans and not mine." This realization led to regular church attendance and ultimately a relationship with a pastor who asked him to serve on their missions committee, which led to a church planting ministry as he transitioned from retirement.

Jackson was discipled prior to going into Vietnam and was visited in the hospital by a group from Overseas Christian Servicemen's Center, all of which encouraged him to pursue ministry. Once he was out of the Marines, he entered seminary and began to serve

a church. After his training was complete, he returned to Vietnam for a short trip in 1972 as a missionary. By 1975 he was in the Philippines as the director of a Christian Serviceman's Center and spent the rest of his career in this type of ministry, as well are continuing in the Marines as a reservist. He stated that he has thoroughly enjoyed military chapels and the ministry provided there.

After David returned from Iraq, he was encouraged to pursue the ministry from small groups comprised of Army chapel and civilian church members. They provided substantial financial and prayer support, which enabled him to transition to seminary almost as soon as he returned from Iraq in 2003. He also received care from a therapist. David expressed disappointment in the church(es) for being timid and hesitant to step into areas of ministry marked with uncertainty, such as veteran care, a disappointment that was not limited to veteran care, but to other areas of the church.

Danny's situation was different. His difficulties prior to the Gulf War remained upon his return. However, he also began to spend tremendous amounts of time reading the Bible and engaged in search for a church that would preach and teach the Bible. He visited over a dozen before finding a little church that had a lot of quiet and studious families. He benefited greatly from their patience for him. He also met his wife who he has been married to for twenty-seven years. Although the pastor admitted he didn't know what to make of him and couldn't "hear a thing he was saying," because he was convinced Danny was wild, Danny said it was "a healing church." He also had the benefit of a mentor, a Vietnam veteran who cautioned him to be careful how he spoke of his experiences in combat, reminding him, "Who you are in Christ is who you actually are."

Summary of Ministry received

These observations taken as a whole reflect the variety of ways in which veterans received the care they needed. Firstly, only Danny actively sought isolation. Michael was headed in that direction until the Lord changed him. The rest of the participants were connected to the larger church body through the outreach of church members who were family, friends, or ministers. They all have remained involved in local churches. In every case, a personal touchpoint was important. If it was a pastor or chaplain serving within their vocational calling, it came through a personal act of ministry rather than a corporate worship service. Neither sermons, Sunday School classes, nor church programs were mentioned in detail. None of them implied that corporate worship was not valued. The participants emphasized that pastors and churches had tremendous value, but the face-to-face relationships provided the most benefit. Thus, discipleship rather than corporate worship made the most difference, they revealed. Furthermore, the capacity to connect spiritually was more important than a prior relationship.

The formation of testimony and witness

Reintegration took place rapidly, with little ceremony and a lot of pressure to get on with life. Ultimately, there was a natural interest in reconnecting with veterans and all participants in this research have participated in various ministries that support Christian veterans which have also provided opportunities for them to share their testimonies.

Michael began to connect with Christian veteran ministries during the early 1990s and invited other veterans who were not Christians to join in their fellowship. He began to speak about his experiences in Vietnam first in his church and then was invited to speak in classrooms by teachers who worked with him. He said those invitations were opportunities God had given him to share his testimony and the gospel. An early example was Memorial Day 2001. He felt compelled to offer a testimony to his church about a veteran who had been killed in 1970.

> I was surprised to find out that Gary was Canadian. He was a very pleasant and likable person and didn't get hardened even when his best friend was killed. Gary was killed while he was carrying a wounded GI to safety, just days before he would have turned twenty years old. Jesus said, "If you want to be great in God's kingdom, learn to be the servant of all." I believe this is how we should judge our real heroes in life . . . No doubt, the Lord Jesus is our ultimate hero, although he existed in the form of God, took the form of a bond servant, and humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a cross. As Christians we are dedicated to memorializing Christ's death every day. I believe it's good and right as a nation to set aside one day to remember and honor those true heroes who have sacrificed their lives for the principles and freedoms which have made America the best place to live, possibly in all of history.

Brandon related that when he conducted group PTSD sessions, he began by holding the Bible. This was an intentional "statement" to introduce himself as warm and inviting and to draw members into the group's purpose.

> I never tried to beat anybody over the head with it . . . I tell them my story, and I'm holding the Bible. I think they see how important that is to me. OK, and I stress that point too. That I wouldn't be here with them today if God hadn't entered my life. That's exactly what I do. I tell them my experience and how God led me through it.

Jackson's transitioned into civilian life with an immediate entry into ministry training that was a result of his Vietnam experience in Vietnam. After a friend of his was killed he said:

> I regretted that I had never inquired of his faith. This caused me to realize that if I were killed, none of my fellow Marines would know of my faith in Christ. Hence, I asked the Lord to grant me opportunities to testify of my faith in Christ and share the gospel with other Marines when the doors of opportunity presented themselves. It was shortly after that I had the opportunity to share the Word of God with my corporal.

Both Jackson and Bobby saw the need to be witnesses almost as soon as they saw and experienced God's hand in the events around them. Bobby stated that when he was in Vietnam, it was almost like a mission field.

> I had guys coming to me, 'What do you think about when this happened' or "I did this, what do think God thinks of me"' It's like my only witness is, "Here's what I know about what the Bible stays ... " These events, from Vietnam to veteran ministry, have led him to Psalm 118: 17. "I shall not die. but I shall live, and I will tell of the works of the Lord." Bobby said, "That's my verse ... I'm no war hero, but I am a witness because I saw things that I can't explain. A mighty soldier? No, there were times when I knew I should have died, and God said, "Not today." I'm a witness. In 1969 when I got sent, there were words like God is dead or God went AWOL in Vietnam. You know what? I'm a witness. He didn't, and I know he's not dead. I know he's there.

By the 1990s, Bobby was connecting with a Christian veteran ministry. He was persuaded that he should take the lead in one of these chapters even though he had reservations. He said, "On the one hand, I wanted to run, but on the other hand, something about this really grabbed my heart." Nevertheless, he and his wife committed to six months and no more, only to end up serving for twenty years.

The experiences of the Gulf War and War on Terror veterans upon their return home created a remarkably different reception in terms of the initial experience, but the

spiritual issues the two participants described were similar in terms of their need to pursue Christian pastors and churches. These needs included working through their difficulties with PTSD and also building on their interest and ability to share their testimony to veterans as veterans.

Danny refused to allow himself to be committed to the VA to begin a regime of medications, but he did become established in the church he found. Despite personal ups and downs, he was ultimately encouraged by his church to attend Bible college and seminary classes. Although he didn't pursue ordained ministry, he did pursue serving as a chaplain for combat veteran motorcycle clubs and other discipleship-based ministries. He said he enjoyed connecting with Christian veteran groups at a personal level, but he also believed that scripturally based veteran organizations, instead of task-oriented, were critical for healing. One beneficial program was the Mighty Oaks ministry, which encouraged him and served as a model for ministering to others. Danny has turned his experiences -- combat, PTSD, personal ups and downs and his relationship with God -- into a means of evangelism that frequently uses II Timothy 2:13, which he uses to ask other veterans fundamental questions about faithfulness.

David immediately benefited from VA services while pursuing seminary and training through a Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program that enabled him to minister to other veterans. Confirmation for this ministry despite his PTSD developed out of a remarkable series of events that David confesses was "God's provision," which was "absolutely remarkable." One of the first steps in that journey was an opportunity to transition into the Army reserves almost as soon as he left active-duty status. He arrived at Ft. Campbell and was sent straight down to a battalion to serve as a chaplain. David

protested saying he hadn't been to seminary and wasn't qualified and was privately concerned about managing his own issues of PTSD. Nevertheless, he went and on the first day in the unit the commander had a battalion formation and called David up to the platform and said:

> Guys, this is our new chaplain. Look at his chest. He's got a CIB. He just came back too. He understands you. He understands me. And if you don't go and talk to him you are an idiot.

David continued:

> So, without theological training, I'm coming alongside them as a fellow warrior and listening and God is prompting . . . I saw God's hand in every step of my preparation for ministry. It was beyond my capacity, and I began to recognize that but for the calming presence of the Holy Spirit, I would be completely overwhelmed.

He emphasized God's work wasn't only about provision during combat but also provision for the needs of sinful people serving by faith.

> Our humanness as a warrior includes implicit woundedness. This was absolutely a part of my growing understanding . . . of what credentials are, and that there are certain credentials that you have (in the Army) that don't define you, but refine you, and give you access in ways that you wouldn't otherwise have.

David added that the ministry placed before him was a ministry in which he was technically unqualified in terms of professional credentials, yet the reality he was struggling with qualified him. With that realization, David pursued Army chaplaincy. Upon his retirement, he deliberately chose to align with Christian ministries that disciple veterans one-on-one while supporting his family through a management job.

Serving as a Shepherd

Like Bobby, Scott was "called" to develop his church's mission program and then plant a church. "I would say that event changed my whole thinking, and what I thought I

was getting into, and what God got me into was totally different . . . I got into setting up and helping with a new church plant. I got fully engaged in the church and everything that God wanted me to get engaged in." During those years, he experienced the loss of his wife to ALS, which caused him to question God's goodness as he had after Vietnam. However, he was given care and a book to read by a fellow church member, which eventually led him to recognize and come alongside others experiencing loss also. In this way he has lived what David described as a "qualification" to offer care amid grief and brokenness, with a willingness to step into uncertain ministry situations.

Brandon didn't speak of healing per se, even though the purpose of the group is for recovery and healing. He said he shared his testimony in these groups, but his focus was on sharing joy and peace, almost a form of group discipleship. His sessions opened and closed with prayer, he explained, and participants knew that remaining in his group means they will have a chance to pray, and that prayer was ultimately a shared responsibility. The prayers were simple, "God, please look out for all of us and guide us in your direction." Moreover, he added, he tried to move participants to take simple steps and ask, "Look out for me God. Take care of me. Thank you, God, for everything you do for us." He also helps them to see that they can thank God for unanswered prayers.

> . . . they get healthier and there is more joy in their prayer . . . and quite a few of them have joined churches. Yeah, they can see what church can do for them. You know, they don't see what they can do for the church at this point. But sure, if nothing else, there's nothing like that feeling of peace in your heart . . . (and I encourage them) if you don't find peace in one church, keep looking, you'll find peace, you'll find faith. Don't give up.

Scott's role at his church also positioned him to provide spiritual leadership through professional advice, which has enabled him to share scriptures such as Colossians 3:23 and 1Peter 5:7. These scriptures can fundamentally reorientate those

struggling with a variety of life issues, he explained. He also participated in, and provided leadership, to a large veteran's group that offers fellowship, and he said he enjoyed helping other veterans navigate the VA system. His experience and spiritual progression reflected how the other participants also positioned themselves within their respective communities. Each has been involved in their churches, the VA, and separate veteran groups, and from those vantage points, they have learned to see those who are struggling and to provide care just outside the reach of the institutional aspects of their medical and religious communities.

David discussed the need veterans have for ministry, much of which deals with loneliness once they are removed from their companions. He framed his role of entering the gap using Isaiah, saying, "Send me!" "I'm here with you!" He noted that warriors can do better connecting with each other and that the wider "Christian community does a bad job of being judgey," but as unique society, David says, veterans groups can help with "meaning making, getting others back to Christ, and a general sense of beauty and knowing we aren't alone." He continued:

> Ironically, right now, I'm having a walk through the valley. It's profound, so I think of Psalm 121, "I lift by eyes up to the mountains, where does my help come from? My help comes from you! Maker of heaven and earth." And so, the fact that we as warriors we've experienced aloneness, to know that if in the darkest night of the soul when someone feels like they are self-destructive or hopeless and they no longer want to be on this earth, he can pick up the phone and call me. They can be reminded that they aren't alone. So that's one thing, this community, sense of responsibility to one another. Yes, I will show up. I am here, going back to Isaiah. I will get on a plane; I will send money. So, its not only words but deeds that matter. When good things happen, I will celebrate . . . My experience and therefore my testimony, is I see that you're hurting. I'm reminding you that God is with you. So as a brother in Christ, when you forget you soul, you forget that song in your heart, I am someone that sees it as my responsibility to sing it or read it back to you and remind you of God's

> faithfulness. Part of my responsibility is to continue to show up in that way and to remind people of that. And then there are people who do that for me too.

Bobby ended up leading Christian recovery groups at the VA, as well as starting another ministry within his church in addition to maintaining an active status with the original veteran ministry. The essence of the ministry, he said, interestingly, was the first story in the first interview before the recording device was turned on. He said he was being confronted by a veteran who insisted upon needing help but refusing to believe anyone could understand. Bobby's patience and willingness to answer questions about his "credentials" changed this man's demeanor and opened the door for ministry.

Part of his ability to minister was unique to his combat experiences. Simply being able to say, "I understand," was a genuine expression in depth matters of life, death, trauma, fear and the silence of God. This has opened the conversational door to difficult topics and practical steps forward. For example, he didn't shy away from the nature of God's silence. "You know sometimes God seems silent. Have you ever noticed when you were in grade school, the teacher is up there talking and talking. You're learning all this stuff, and then, there's a certain time when the teacher goes silent. When is that? It's when you're taking a test, dealing with it (the test). I think it's like that with God." He also spoke of ministering to a veteran who had been trapped by feelings of survivor's guilt for years because he had switched duties with a friend who was then killed on Christmas day in Vietnam. The guilt of having personal freedom so he could enjoy Christmas had convinced him he was unforgiveable. Bobby talked and walked with him step by step, emotion by emotion, to share God's forgiveness with this veteran who had felt isolated from God for decades. In some cases, Bobby walked with individuals through a week-by-

week program which concluded with a message of Christ's forgiveness and the presentation of a new set of dog tags with the word "Forgiven" attached. He loves to present the tags with a hug to those willing to receive it.

Danny commented on the importance of forgiveness and how his ability to share the Lord's forgiveness instead of self-forgiveness began to connect with other guys much better. He started by paraphrasing Philippines 1:6, "God will complete what he began in you." He noted this concept is hard for veterans who have felt like

> "They weren't faithful to God and experienced loss. To come back (from war) with guilt that you live with, and not only what you did, but also the confusion of wanting to spend time with the guys you deployed with, who are like a second family. So, when I talk to veterans about these things, I say, "Well, do you think God understands? . . . Do you think He's faithful to us? Do you think he loves us and understands?"

Danny said that for him "to understand these things was not so much about forgiving myself. I'm not big on self-forgiveness. I always found it was God's forgiveness that automatically made me able to forgive myself."

After asking him if he ever shared that insight with anyone else, he thought for a moment and said:

> The sad thing is that the ministry I've been involved in, I bring it up from time to time, whether the guy was a veteran or not a veteran. Some of them just fall apart. Burst into tears because they had never thought of it that way. I used to think I had to forgive myself because people would tell me that. But I can never forgive myself enough. That was the problem. I never felt good enough to forgive myself for my poor behavior. But I found out that if I received God's forgiveness and really believed he gave it to me, the whole ego thing just went right out the window.

Danny went on to describe how rare it is for men to be involved in doing spiritually significant and symbolic things. He talked about taking guys recovering from

addiction up into the mountains to teach them land navigation after they had gone through the Way of the Wild Heart program. Once there he walked them through various stages of life, with each stage going higher up the mountain.

> We give them an opportunity to discuss what they would have wanted to talk to God about at that stage of life, and then imagining what they as a father would tell their son going through that trauma. Each time something is said they lay down a rock until a cross is formed. Not everyone makes it to the top, but for those that do confess everything to God, and every trauma, when it's over its like their first encounter with God. They have this elation. Because the idea of going to God with your trauma and with your confession and laying a rock down, it's just symbolic. People don't forget stuff like that.

This aspect of Danny's story is even more remarkable because he had battled alcoholism, which God used without him knowing it. During a low point in his life when he was wondering if his ministry efforts were of any value Danny received a Facetime call from five of his teammates during and after the Gulf War. They told him, "You may not know this but when you drank, you shared so much scripture, so much about God, it got stuck in our heads . . . we are all Christians now." Danny didn't remember any of these conversations, but he realized that God could use him even through failures.

Jackson drove to the heart of seeing others struggling with spiritual distress and described Psalm 51 as central, saying:

> Like King David, many veterans struggle with the guilt of their sins that is ever before them, and unless they ask the Lord's forgiveness as did David, they will never find the rest for their soul. I have on numerous occasions found Psalm 51:1-17 to be used mightily of the Lord to bring solace to veterans who struggle with unrepentant sin. I have had the opportunity to counsel combat veterans who struggle with the memory of their war experience. While the trauma of combat has a stressful impact on one's life for years to come, I have found that moral failure and sin is often a major factor in their lament.

He described speaking to an older veteran from a previous conflict who was given an order to carry an enemy soldier, but he physically could not do it, and even at the point of exhaustion, was given no help. He relayed with tears in his eyes that he violated his own conscience telling him not to shoot but did so anyway. Given the larger circumstances, no one blamed him or questioned him. The man broke down in front of Jackson and asked if it was murder. Jackson responded with tears of his own and asked:

> Is the Lord telling you that? He nodded to the affirmative. I then said, "The Lord will forgive you if you will ask him too." He bowed his head, and after a period of a couple minutes followed, he looked up at me. I could see the look of relief and peace that filled his eyes. I shared the gospel with him and explained how Jesus bore the burden and consequences of our sins on the cross. He nodded again in agreement. This man, like others, crossed a moral line and suffered the guilt throughout their lives until they became reconciled to God through receiving Jesus Christ as their sin bearer and Savior.

Michael's spoke freely of how and why he confessed sin and experienced the power of God's forgiveness. As a fatalist, Michael experienced the full range of passions during combat after losing his friends to enemy fire and in engaging the enemy. He was profoundly grateful for the gospel, for the hope of forgiveness and healing, and for being able to confess to fellow Christian veterans. Michael said he is slow to judge or jump to assumptions about the difficulties other veterans have faced. Instead, he described how he uses the scripture to call others to confession before God saying:

> I tell them about the hatred I had over the years. I always mention to them that I thank God he has forgiven me, but I'm still ashamed. You know, Paul mentioned this a lot, "I persecuted the church, that person, that church." I was this close to an enemy and watched him die. Eyeball to eyeball with no remorse, I practically enjoyed it. . . I explain to them and want them to know I hate war. It's, it's horrible. It's the most horrible thing known to man. It's worse than natural disasters. I hate it, what it does to people's minds . . . So, I'm kind of protective of people who went through that even though they may have done wrong things. You know, we're all accountable. If I heard something that like, when they were in

> Iraq, and I think they were into some, you know, stuff. Not real gross stuff, I would never defend that or anything, but I'm slow to judge. So, I say, “For God so loved *Michael* that he sent his only begotten son.” And passages about our sinfulness: “*Michael* was dead in his trespasses and sin.” And then I share my testimony. I say, "Do you find yourself in the Bible? I do. Here I am." There are a whole lot of scriptures about us being sinners, and I just put my name in there. It fits perfectly because it is true. And then what Christ does. (Even) Christians don't understand our redemption! That's what I love about Reformed theology because some people, because of the things they did, have a hard time with forgiveness . . . But I love the Bible and the gospel! Our God is a God of salvation!

As David mentioned, no one implied that such ministry efforts came naturally or were easy. There were no tangible awards or rewards. There was no applause lines as they enter into the gap. Bobby mentioned with a smile, “I suppose, with my awards and five bucks, I might get a cup of coffee!” Danny looked forward saying:

> I do know that the best part of my life will be when Christ returns and so I don't worry about accolades or great achievements in my life today . . . I’ll tell you right now. For myself, I’ve served as a chaplain to organizations that I've never, I've never felt worthy of God calling me to. I just, I think it's because I know what's in my heart when I'm not in fellowship with God. I know I'm capable of the worst times without fellowship and connection with the Holy Spirit. But if the Lord's got any more use for me, and if I don't have another heart attack, I'll be grateful.

Summary of The emergence of veterans leading veterans to God

The material gleaned from this research question revealed that pastors do in fact minister to veterans but that the participants themselves stepped into ministry to help servicemembers in spiritual distress who feel distant from God. They entered these situations equipped with their testimonies of God’s transforming work, God’s Word as described in the previous two research questions, and also with a sense of God’s calling to provide care as others cared for them. For example, Scott as one who has experienced

grief on the battlefield and grief through the loss of his first wife to ALS, saw and experienced the providence of God firsthand. As a result, when he saw others experiencing similar things he stepped into that space with compassionate and practical understanding.

The issues addressed by the veterans were daunting for most ministers and ran the spectrum of grief, survivor's guilt, self-destruction (suicide), hatred for the enemy, and even murder. In each case, the ability to see individuals struggle with these issues was met with willingness to engage them personally and to seek God. Such confidence was less a result of combat experience and more a recognition that God's love and forgiveness were greater than battlefield experiences, something each understood with conviction and was therefore interested in sharing with other veterans.

Additionally, these ministries took place apart from the formal places of worship. In David's experience, veterans didn't have the same hesitations entering difficult areas of ministry that civilian pastors did. David attributed that courage partly to being familiar with uncertainty. Danny stated that part of their training is to suffer, and yet, "soldiers" don't like to see others suffer unnecessarily and therefore provide help. Brandon and Bobby have both led PTSD recovery groups within the VA, but neither look at these groups as the pinnacle of healing. Both look to such ministry opportunities as avenues to connect them with God.

Finally, Brandon's assessment of the effectiveness of lay ministry from his vantage point as a group therapist was notable. He observed that those entering his group had a fear that he would judge them, saying, "The biggest fear I've heard of voiced, especially the new people, is you're just going work with the Bible. You're not going to

work with us. You're just going preach at us instead of helping us! And you know, I laugh. And they know I'm laughing with them, not at them. (I tell them), you're looking at a guy that came from zero to 10. So, I don't expect you to be like me. That's impossible. But you can have a lot of the qualities I have simply by opening your heart and opening up your minds." Brandon's statement provided an adequate conclusion, given that each of the participants experienced a spiritual journey and process in which God ministered through extremely difficult and unusual circumstances, and yet they grew spiritually, became witnesses to God's care, and have in turn ministered to others.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore if Lamentations 3 provides a connection between the ministry of the Word and pastoral care for combatants who have experienced or observed various forms of spiritual distress during and after combat.

Chapter 1 introduced the problems some Vietnam veterans struggled with after their combat experiences. Don Browning predicted such experiences would make "health a footnote to the struggle to know and do the good."[246] William Mahedy described a spiritual malaise among veterans to whom he ministered.[247] By 1980 PTSD was an official diagnosis, after which substantial research was invested into understanding and treating the condition.[248] By the early 1990s, psychologists and psychiatrists noticed that some of the veterans diagnosed with PTSD also suffered from lingering guilt and shame connected to their combat experiences, rooted in the sense that their morality had been violated or betrayed. This phenomenon was described as moral injury. The persistent effects of moral injury have defied healing, which has led researchers to explore various aspects of spirituality as a possibility. It has been suggested that resources within Christian liturgies, such as the practice of lament, may be one such resource.[249] However,

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[246] Browning, "Psychiatry and Pastoral Counseling: Moral Context or Moral Vacuum." 158-161.

[247] Mahedy, *Out of the Night*, 125.

[248] Reisman, "PTSD Treatment for Veterans."

[249] Kinghorn, "Combat Trauma and Moral Fragmentation," 69,70.

a complicating issue within contemporary culture, including typical churches, is a preference to address emotional and psychological problems clinically while neglecting practices such as biblical lament.

In chapter 2, the first section of the literature review described recent efforts to connect moral injury to lament as a theological category and as a solution for healing. The second section of the literature review surveyed the challenges of providing care to veterans with spiritual and moral injury by the medical community and pastors. Research supports the need for religious ministry among those who suffer from moral injury, especially regarding forgiveness. However, the fear of religious judgment has kept some veterans from seeking pastoral care. This fear may be resolved by religious leaders serving as shepherds rather than judges, and thus as shepherds, sharing in lament may provide a balm for moral injury and/or spiritual distress. The third section of the literature review explored the spiritual themes of lament within Lamentations 3, which was written after the fall of Jerusalem. Particular attention was given to the identity of the *geber* and the significance of the transitions between his audiences.

This research proposes that the third poem of Lamentations may assist ministers of the Word in providing care to combat veterans. Lamentation 3 was chosen because the chapter addresses spiritual distress and spiritual renewal in the aftermath of conflict. It is a first-person witness by the *geber* (a mighty man) and describes the difficulty of engaging God after the fall of Jerusalem and includes the need to confess sin as a part of that process. It also captures his testimony of the *hesed* of God and his redemption. Although it is not known if the *geber* was a warrior or not, military combat veterans were

interviewed to better understand the relevance of Lamentations 3 to those who have experienced the severity of conflict and spiritual distress.

Three research questions guided the interviews and the findings listed below:

1. How did Christian veterans experience God during and after combat?
2. How did combat shape the faith of Christian veterans upon their return home?
3. How have pastors helped Christian veterans engage God?

The interview criteria for participation stipulated that each veteran be a Christian, which did not necessarily mean each veteran had an active faith during combat. As noted in chapter 4, one participant carried a Bible in his rucksack for an entire year in Vietnam and never thought to open it. Of greater importance was the ability to reflect upon how their experiences in combat shaped their faith and spiritual growth. In addition to being a Christian veteran, the relationship between their spiritual distress and engaging God was significant. This aspect included an interest in how they received spiritual care from ministers. Of the sixteen veterans who expressed interest in the research, seven met the criteria. The information given by the seven participants in chapter 4 was processed using a basic qualitative method to discover descriptive data from participants by allowing their worldview to emerge and engage the ideas relevant to the topic of theological lament as engagement with God. The details were discussed in chapter 3 covering methodology.[250]

[250] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 111. (Semi structured interviews).

I am an Army Chaplain with over twenty years of service.[251] Periodically, church pastors asked me how they might care for veterans who have returned from combat and settled in their churches. I found my answers to be overly detailed and generally unhelpful. I have also provided ministry to veterans from World War II to the Global War on Terrorism who were experiencing some form of spiritual distress. In some cases, specifically related to post-combat pastoral care, I could have been more effective as a shepherd. As a result, I became interested in how other pastors have ministered to Christian combat veterans from the perspective of veterans themselves, especially in terms of grief or the scriptural aspects of lament. Although I did not expect to hear the language of biblical lament,[252] I did expect to hear how pastors guided them through periods of grief after they returned home. This expectation turned out to be only partially true.

What I discovered was that spiritual experiences during combat were as significant, if not more significant, than post-combat experiences. For example, it was nearly impossible for the Vietnam veteran participants to speak of "1978," given the significance of their experiences in "1968." Therefore, after the first iteration of interviews, I asked participants to describe their spiritual experiences with God during

[251] The term, "minister of the Word" is used in this research. However, the terms "minister," "minister of the Word," and "pastor" are inter-changeable even if there is a preference for the term "pastor" given the topic of pastoral care. As an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in America, The Book of Church Order, Presbyterian Church in America. Chapter 8, The Elder. 8-5 clarifies this role. I am designated as a teaching elder and with ruling elders share in the function of "expounding and preaching the Word of God and to administer the Sacraments." With respect to the proclamation of the gospel, I am a preacher. With respect to the ordinances instituted by Christ, a steward. With respect to my position before the people, an evangelist.

[252] The classic formulations of Biblical lament such as address, complaint (typically against God but it could be against the enemy or self for sin), confession of trust, vow to praise, deliverance or the variety of spiritual experiences of the *geber*,

and after combat. I also asked if they had ever observed other veterans in spiritual distress and if they had been able to help. The revision aligned with the semi-structured and open-ended nature of the conversations. This adjustment also enabled the research to evaluate participant responses in relationship to the complexity of spiritual issues without directly focusing on the pastors of these veterans. As the Merriam quote in chapter 3 states, "This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic."[253] The data from the conversations produced a significant amount of detail as seen in chapter 4.

Research Findings

The analysis of the findings focused on discovering and identifying (1) common themes, patterns, and emotions across the variation of participants; and (2) congruence or discrepancy between the different groups of participants that would contribute to a grounded theory of spirituality after warfare. Initially, the language of lament was almost completely absent, let alone any mention of feeling afflicted by God. This absence was expected and one reason for the research in the first place. What was surprising was how little the word "grief" was used. Understandably, it is not a comfortable topic, but initially I thought that either the selection criteria for participants was flawed or that the relationship to Lamentations 3 was tenuous. However, as the data was organized by the

[253] Merriam, 110, 111.

research questions, four relevant findings emerged that brought the Research Questions into conversation with the literature review.[254]

1. The "pastoral gap" between pastors and clinical providers discussed in the literature review was expanded to include veteran organizations, which created a triangular network of organizations.
2. Most of the veterans discussed PTSD in relationship to Research Questions # 2.
3. Feelings of spiritual distress were surpassed by testimonies of God's presence or protection during or after combat.
4. The participants shared in the ministry of the *geber* and in this capacity performed one or both of the following roles . . .
    a. an ability to see and connect with peers who are spiritually distressed.
    b. an ability to understand and call others to confession without being judgmental.

Each finding will be discussed below, followed by a summary of recommendations for ministers and suggestions for future research.

Discussion of Findings

1. **The "pastoral gap" between pastors and clinical providers discussed in the literature review was expanded to include veteran organizations, which created a triangular network of organizations.**

[254] Merriam, 197.

The first finding clarified the pastoral problem. By listening to the veterans describe their experiences in combat, their diagnoses of PTSD, and experiences with ministers, I learned that they were not moving solely between the clinic and the church for care, but rather, they were closely tied into veteran organizations, primarily Christian veteran organizations. This triangular formation of organizations created a safe network for spiritual growth and connection. In fact, two of the participants (Brandon and Bobby) also led groups within the VA itself, and Scott was an active participant of a veteran organization and helped others navigate the VA. During Danny's difficult days after the Army, he bounced between churches and the VA and ultimately found a church and then camaraderie and ministry through Christian veteran groups, even serving as their chaplain.

This triangular observation could be further developed by adding the workplace and family as two other significant systems that formed the participants' stories, turning the triangular formation into a more three-dimensional pentagon. However, given the institutional nature of churches, clinics, and veterans groups as places that offer a network of resources and care, it is sufficient to say that veterans who bounce from one organization to another without being able to settle may interact with fellow veterans more frequently than either a doctor or a pastor. The participants all intuitively understood the reasons for bouncing between these organizations in ways that local pastors may not.

2. **Most veterans felt compelled to discuss PTSD in relationship to Research Questions # 2.**

Lamentations does not use medical terms, yet our culture's scientific approach assumes a clear separation between the medical and the spiritual. Those interviewed reflected this distinction. Most participants had been diagnosed with PTSD and volunteered this information freely. Even though it was not part of the Research Questions, the topic was present in their stories. It was clear that PTSD had found a home in the common vernacular of these veterans. Interestingly, the percentage of PTSD among these participants was far higher than in a larger sample group. Additionally, given the way David spoke of trauma and sin, and how Danny stated, "We need to bring our trauma and our confession before God," I wondered if I had found a modern-day equivalent of the *geber* who stated, "I am the man who has seen affliction." Tempting as it was, I suspected a red herring. Not a single participant blamed or accused God. Not a single participant described PTSD as an affliction. Although Bobby had concluded that God had some responsibility in his PTSD, it was placed within the greater context of God's sovereign plan for his life, a life that he considered a blessing. For the six participants with PTSD, the condition motivated them to care for other veterans and provide leadership within veteran groups. Their personal suffering had given them skilled compassion to engage the suffering of others.

A growing body of literature describes Lamentations as trauma literature. Indeed, Lamentations 2:20 and 4:10 bear witness to the horrors of siege warfare, exceeding any of the grit described in chapter 4. However, the *geber's* purpose for speaking in Lamentations 3 is not to retell the horrors of war but to capture his experience with God.

His spiritual leadership modeled public lament for his community who were still separated from God by their covenant unfaithfulness.[255]

During the interviews, references to morality were far less frequent than instances of trauma. Moral injury was referenced only once by David, who was the youngest of the group and familiar with the term. However, the concept occupied critical points in their personal reflections in ways that carried more weight than PTSD. Bobby spoke of morality in relationship to one's conscience, specifically his, as one who frequently engaged in firefights and was always relieved to capture instead of kill, because, "Killing another man is a hard thing to do." Michael tried not to think about moral issues while in combat, but after he became a Christian, they impacted him head on. Jackson spoke of issues of morality in relationship to forgiveness.

Several participants mentioned the need to seek forgiveness from God as relief for suffering and because of sin. Brandon noted that a fear of judgment by those in his group had to be overcome before he was able to care for them and address the possibility of peace with God. Scott's experience with grief was directly related to combat, which helped him understand and minister to the grief of other Christians, especially as he has seen the faithfulness of God through that experience and the loss of his wife to ALS. It is notable that in each case, questions of morality were linked to what was lamentable about their experiences during and after combat in ways that PTSD was not.

Reflecting on the interviews as a whole, I realized that a number of the participants began their interviews with signature experiences that were resolved by God.

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[255] Lamentations 1:8,14,18

This was true of Scott, Bobby, Brandon, Danny, and to some extent, Jackson.[256] The nature of my inital question had little bearing on the content. In fact, Brandon, Scott, and Bobby were into their stories before I had a chance to press "play" and record. Scott's account of the missionaries being killed was the clearest example of a tragedy compounded by his commander's decision. The moral issue was ultimately resolved through his own relationship with God and hearing the "rest of the story" from the surviving missionary's wife, and the conversion of his commander, but not before he wrestled with years of spiritual difficulty and alienation from the church. Being a witness of God's redemption didn't erase the difficulty of the memories, but it contributed to his growing peace with God.

To summarize, the veterans' combat experiences contained trauma and issues of morality that created lamentable situations. Yet, questions of morality rather than trauma itself pointed more directly to the need for resolution by God and in some cases the need to receive or share forgiveness by God to others. These results align closely with the discussions in the literature review.

3. **Feelings of spiritual distress were surpassed by testimonies of God's presence or protection during and after combat.**

A Matter of Application

As mentioned above, I was surprised at how little the participants spoke of grief or any form of spiritual distress. I expected to hear descriptions of the spiritual malaise used

[256] With respect to Jackson, it was an unrecorded conversation by phone after which he sent the details through the mail.

by Mahedy[257] or, to use Johan Renkema's stronger term, "disillusionment," which he believes describes Lamentations 3 more accurately than more general terms such as "distress."[258] However, considering the distinctive nature of accounts, along with the research criteria for Christian veterans, I concluded that the term "spiritual distress" was appropriate, especially since I do not believe the purpose of Lamentations is to position the *geber* as an "ideal type" for evaluating conflict experiences, be they combatant veterans or not.

The participants' signature stories set the thematic parameters for how they felt God's presence or protection, how they understood God's plans and purposes, and how certain scriptures became meaningful to them, even years later. These elements obscured or supplanted periods of grief and resulted in testimonies of spiritual progression and growth rather than malaise, disillusionment, or distress. Mark Lee describes these elements as post traumatic growth.[259]

Although the details were different for each participant, spiritual growth was evident in Scott's life even though his distance from God lasted more than six years and in Bobby's as well, whose distance from God (God's silence to be more precise) lasted less than six months. The same could be said for Brandon, who become a Christian in Vietnam, and Michael, who became a Christian after Vietnam. It was no different for Jackson, who was active in Christian small group ministries prior to his tour of duty in 1965 or for David in 2003, who was also active in Christian small groups prior to his

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[257] Mahedy, "We've Got to Get out of This Place," 922,923.

[258] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 62.

[259] Mallard and White, *A Persistent Fire: The Strategic Ethical Impact World War 1 on the Global Profession of Arms*, 249, 252.

deployment. Both immediately pursued ministry to military personnel upon their return home. Regardless of whether they were fifty or twenty years removed from combat, discussing God's presence and faithfulness reflected spiritual and theological growth. Their experience and memory of God's protection during combat was vivid almost to the point of replacing lament altogether.

Their spiritual progress warrants emphasis because it was cast against the background of combat and how they made meaning of those experiences. They were familiar with mortal fear and their own mortality. Within the context of God's providence, they were sensitive to the death of teammates and their own survival, even minimal injuries. Although I didn't ask, I believe Jackson, Bobby, Brandon, and David received purple hearts but were all able bodied. The participants understood they had much to be thankful for and that God had called them out of a particular experience and preserved them to be men of service, pastors, chaplains, and counselors. They all considered themselves blessed and witnesses of God's kindness and redemption.

Connecting to Lamentations 3

Lamentations captures an experience that God's people probably preferred to forget or could not forget, as O'Connor noted.[260] Thus, a poetic and acrostic structure was useful for communicating and memorializing what was so tragic, and in some respects, unspeakable.

For those who experienced the tragedy, the transition from the laments of the narrator and the daughter of Zion to the *geber's* singular voice as a witness to God's

[260] O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, 48.

hesed assures readers that in spite of the Jerusalem's total destruction and in spite of their past sinfulness, God's *hesed* remains. House establishes the progression from a sin-punishment spirituality into a better understanding of how the people come into a better relationship with their covenant God. Therefore, the lament unfolds not because of God's silence or frustrated hope, as O'Connor argues,[261] but because the people have not yet reengaged their covenant-keeping God. Moreover, as a witness, the *geber* is also a minister of God's *hesed* described in verses 22-24 and 31-33 and God's redemption in verses 55-58. Interestingly, Westermann resists this conclusion and even insists there cannot be a pattern of theological progress since the various authors offer different perspectives of lament. He argues that viewing the poem and Lamentations through God's *hesed* will prevent the church from recognizing the value of lament. His commitment to this position is supported by a form critical method that notes multiple voices rather than a singular voice who rejoices in God's hope and redemption.[262]

The observations of William Mahedy, Don Browning, and Uwe Siemon-Netto in the early years after Vietnam agree with Westermann and O'Connor that veterans suffered because the church was unable to recognize their need to lament, let alone participate in any form of public lament with them. Furthermore, those who have explored issues related to moral injury and lament such as Kinghorn, Dickie, Graham, and Carlson also point to the absence of lament in the contemporary church as the source of spiritual atrophy and therefore a liability for veterans caught in spiritual distress. These failures

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[261] O'Connor, 14, 49.

[262] Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*, 86–91, 92,92. These pages are one example where he discusses the form critical method which provides the foundation for his concern that the church will fail to lament and then fail to engage God.

should not be dismissed. A case could made that the state has filled in this gap with the Vietnam Memorial Wall and a place for public and personal lamentation.

However, it was difficult to find Christian veterans willing or able to express frustration with God. Likewise, the idea of discussing the value of lament alongside God's *hesed* and redemption, as Westermann suggests, was foreign to the Vietnam veterans, given their five decades of life experience. Although the Gulf War veterans and Global War on Terrorism veterans were more adept at describing spiritual distress, they were clearly looking forward to Christ. If the *geber* is identified as a believing man of valor or even a warrior, accepting the theological progression from spiritual distress to godly joy would be a natural result of faith, just as it was for the seven participants and the larger group of sixteen. Their experiences do not validate the scriptures but illustrate the validity of a natural reading of Lamentations 3, in which the *geber* navigates the complexities of faith and ends with real hope in God. Likewise, the form critical reading of Lamentations 3 as a collection of redacted poems with potentially conflicting theological perspectives stumbles upon the lived experiences of these combat veterans.

Another factor supporting this conclusion is the use of scripture. The commentators examining Lamentations 3 point to a variety of scriptural words, phrases, and images common to the Old Testament.[263] Whoever wrote the third poem was familiar with scripture and wove the words of scripture into this lament.

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[263] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 349, 357, 409, 456. Renkema is just one example of a scholar who offers a detailed and superb contribution to the inclusion of Biblical language from the description of the word geber in verse 1, the imagery of siege walls in verse 4 from II Kings 6 & 7, the phrasing of verse 33 from Job 7:17, Jeremiah 44:21 to Hosea 11:8 and to concepts such as redemption in relationship to God's representative on earth in verse 58.

Most of the participants referred to the scriptures with ease and particularly the Psalms: Psalm 2, Psalm 130, Psalm 23, Psalm 51, Psalm 121. The example of King David was powerfully healing. Danny referred to his "Job experience" of losing everything. Philippians, Colossians, and I Peter were also discussed. Their working knowledge of the scriptures and how God uses various means and circumstances to sustain his people guided them regularly. In fact, Bobby continued to run across passages that remind him of God's character more than fifty years after his combat experience.

Here, Westermann's attention to detail is helpful. In his opinion, Lamentations 3:26-41 contains subject matter distinct from the rest of the poem. He speculates this content is probably from the time of Ezra and therefore written by a different author.[264] There is certainly a different sort of experience, in terms wisdom gained through hardship and suffering, but to assume a different author is unnecessary. Bobby and David's interviews demonstrated that it was natural for the same person to reflect on events twenty or even forty years later with more diverse experiences and mature views of God's character and purpose. Furthermore, the lament of the *geber* is not simply a story of survival; it is a testimony to the character of God. This same element was true with the seven participants who animated their stories with the scriptures and with points of exclamation about God's character, such as, "I'm just so thankful for his forgiveness," "You can't tell me that isn't God!" and "I love the Bible and the gospel!" [265]

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[264] Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*, 180.

[265] Michael and Bobby's interview tone of David and Brandon's interviews.

Summary of Lamentations 3 connections

I believe that House is correct to argue that an important feature of Lamentations 3 is the theological progression of the *geber* and that the third poem serves as the pinnacle of the book. Westermann and O'Connor believe such views fail to give due justice to the larger issue of the *geber* leading the community in a lament and therefore fail to give enough value to the practice of corporate lamentation. Their concerns revolve around the need for the contemporary church to engage in lament and come to terms with the reality of God's silence and spiritual distress. O'Connor also believes the strength of these situations is that faith is allowed to develop from the community. These are important observations that each pastor needs to weigh with respect to the spiritual health of the local church. The observations from Browning, Mahedy, and Siemon-Netto are cautionary tales for the church to consider. However, this interpretation fails to account for the repetition of God's *hesed* as foundational to hope and the voice of God saying to the *geber* in Lamentations 3:57 "Do not fear" followed by the declaration of redemption. Even Westermann recognizes this is the only place in Lamentations in which God speaks. I maintain these factors, taken together, argue for a single voice who testifies to the *hesed* of God as worthy of praise, given his deliverance from the pit and his state of spiritual affliction. As a result of this progression, the *geber* stands as a witness of God's *hesed* as real hope and therefore speaks to God and to his community on this basis.

While the participants' accounts did not validate the scriptures, they testified to the spiritual and theological progression after combat and warfare. These accounts may also help ministers of the Word understand that even if spiritual distress or lament lasts for years, God's hope may yet carry them through and past their period of lament.

The participants shared in the ministry of the *geber* and in this capacity performed one or both of the following roles . . .

a. **an ability to see and connect with peers who are spiritually distressed.**
b. **an ability to understand and call others to confession without being judgmental.**

Biblical laments within the context of conflict, such as Psalm 79, and post-conflict, such as Psalm 88, are laments in which grief and distress dominate from start to finish. The progression of Lamentations 3, however, in which the *geber* moves from spiritual distress to standing as a witness of theological hope and deliverance to his community, parallels Psalms 13 or 54. Might the content of the interviews be just as easily applied to these Psalms as to Lamentations 3? One might be tempted to say "Yes."

However, if a signature feature of Lamentations 3 is the act of the *geber* calling his community to confess their sin after the collapse of Jerusalem, the *geber's* voice has a different relevance and heightened sensitivity. A call to confession after conflict runs the risk of being ill-timed, if not ill-conceived, considering the trauma experienced and the level of spiritual distress. Given the level of Babylon's brutality, Psalms of innocence such as Psalms 17 and 27 might seem more appropriate.

However, Lamentations does not position the people as innocent victims.[266] They are guilty, even if the punishment is severe.[267] The sensitivity of their situation is one reason for debate over the role of the Deuteronomic theology and divine punishment, single or multiple authors, the silence of God, and whether or not hope in Lamentations is ever answered at all. Indeed, some commentators imply that the role of the lament is spiritual therapy[268] or protest[269] rather than divine deliverance. But if lament is reduced to spiritual therapy, what are readers to make of the cohortatives in Lamentations 3:39-42? Is this simply a literary feature of the poetry, or is it reasonable to assume there was an actual *geber* who called his people to confession, even sparking repentance? If so, who is he?

The arrival of the *geber,* a "mighty man,"[270] in Lamentations 3 has sparked a range of interpretations about his identity, summarized in chapter 1 and the literature review. The word's usage across English translations of the Old Testament requires interpretation of the context, and the same applies for the third poem.[271] Given the anonymous nature of the *geber,* in combination with the traditional view of Jeremiah as the author, English Bible translators have settled on the more ambiguous and general title, "the man," which House argues is the strength of allowing his arrival and his lament

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[266] Parry, *Lamentations*, 116.

[267] Middlemas, "War, Comfort, and Compassion in Lamentations." 355.

[268] O'Connor, 14. Middlemas, 355.

[269] Reimer, "Good Grief?," 558,559.

[270] "H1397 - Geḇer - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (KJV)." Man, Strong Man, Warrior (indicating the strength or ability to fight.)

[271] God calls Job to gird up his loins like "a man" in Job 38:3 and 40:7. Job 16:21 as an intercessor. Genesis 10:9 refers to a mighty hunter. Psalm 18:26 points to the aspect of purity, Judges 6:12 describes a man of valor and Jeremiah 41:16 as a mighty man of war. The Old Testament writers were able to use the term to fit any number of descriptions that pointed to some aspect of strength.

to speak more loudly than his identity.[272] Renkema's interest in its "everyman" aspect offers similar wisdom. Still, commentators cannot resist some interpretive interest in the *geber* given the centrality of the third poem in the book and its acrostic features. Renkema's interpretive lens considers the *geber* "the devout man" due to the nature of the lament and his assumption that temple singers are behind the authorship of the poem. O'Connor believes the term *geber* contrasts the characteristics of his former strength against the spiritual weakness expressed in the poem. Of particular interest to this research are the interpretations of Lanahan and Middlemas, who consider the *geber* as "the soldier."[273] It is worth noting that we all assume many 'roles' or various aspects of our identity. The geber of Lamentations may well have been a combatant during the siege of Jerusalem but also a priest or prophet just as the prophet Samuel who picked up the sword against the Amalekite king Hgag.[274]

Each interpretation ultimately hinges on one's perspective on authorship and the purpose of the lament. The argument for understanding the lament as a witness of theological progression from affliction to hope based on God's *hesed* has been made above. However, if the purpose of the *geber* is simply to provide a personal testimony for the sake of a testimony, a key feature of the text is overlooked. The speaker's audience, and how each audience is addressed, is significant. Imperatives are used to address God in verses 20-22, and cohortatives are used in verses 40-42 to address the community. The

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[272] Garrett and House, *Song of Songs / Lamentations*, 23b:303.

[273] Lanahan, "Speaking Voice in the Book of Lamentations." 45,46.

Middlemas, "War, Comfort, and Compassion in Lamentations," 355.

[274] I Samuel 15:32,33.

cohortative feature of Lamentations 3:40-42 emphasizes an invitation to engage God through confession and worship and is a distinctive feature of how the poem is ultimately interpreted.

Again, Westermann and O'Connor argue against viewing the third poem as a theological progression for fear that the community's need for shared lament would be obscured. I can imagine that, given what we know of human nature, the temptation to avoid lament is constant, even when the poem was written. However, O'Connor is so committed to this position that she believes verses 40-42 lament God's inaction. Forgiveness is absent because God is silent.[275] Nancy C. Lee's position is worth revisiting as well. She believes verses 25-41 reveal a second group of singers defending God through the course of this post-conflict experience. This portion begins with, "The Lord is good to those who wait for him . . ." She describes verses 28-30 as soft cohortatives and says that this second group of singers concludes their song with verses 40 and 41: "Let us test and examine our ways . . ." Verse 42 is the entrance of the third singer who disagrees with the second singers and initiates an accusation against God, "We have transgressed and rebelled and you have not forgiven . . ." However, the problem is that in God's pursuit to punish, he "wrapped himself in a cloud so that no prayer can get through."[276]

Two objections may be raised to these interpretations. First, the *geber* is not looking to the community for hope, he is looking to God for hope, and in the process, he experienced redemption according to verse 58. If the transition between audiences shows

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[275] O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, 14.

[276] Lee, *The Singers of Lamentations: Cities under Siege, from Ur to Jerusalem to Sarajevo*, 60:176.

anything, it shows the *geber's* concern for his community is grounded in his hope for them to know God's *hesed* as he has. One might even say that an interesting feature of this "lament," as distinct from the Psalms of lament, is that the community occupies a central part of the conversation. However, the central concern of the *geber* is that they join with him in reengaging God in confession because they have not examined their ways and because God has not forgiven them yet. Lee argues their prayers have been blocked, so how could they know forgiveness? House disagrees with these interpretations and notes that first person plural, "We have trespassed," is a confession of sin that reaches back to the first poem, verse 20, and that their punishment wasn't arbitrarily decided by God but arose from their own actions. Therefore, recognizing a singular voice supports the theological progression of the *geber* and his witness that God's heart is not one of condemnation as seen in verse 33.[277] The transition to the cohortatives in verse 40 is the *geber's* ministerial invitation to the people to confess their sins.

C. J. Williams proposes that repentance is in view with verse 42. His approach to the text provides an interesting contrast to Lee's conclusions. Lee argues that verse 42 begins a lament of accusation against God specifically, which agrees with those who argue for multiple voices within the text. Williams posits that forgiveness was not experienced by the community, which prompts its lament, as Lee would also argue. However, Williams asks, "Is God obligated to forgive if the basis for forgiveness is absent?"[278] The grounds for his question lies in verse 39, which uses the general term for

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[277] Garrett and House, *Song of Songs / Lamentations*, 23b:420.

[278] Williams, *The Shadow of Christ in the Book of Lamentations: A Guide to Grieving with Faith*, 119.

man, *adam,* prior to the *geber*, which is its third and final use in the poem.[279] He also translates מה with "what" rather than "why," which renders verse 39 as, "(About) what should a living *adam* complain? *Geber* for sins."[280] With this statement, the community responds to the *geber* in the same way, according to Williams, that they responded to the *geber* in verse 22, "because of the Lord's great mercies *we* are not consumed." Their response of self-examination and worship, pious as it is, does not provide the basis for forgiveness. Therefore, the plural voice of lament continues through verse 47: "Fear and a snare have come upon us, desolation and destruction." Verse 48 switches back to the singular voice of the *geber*, "My eyes overflow with rivers of water . . . ." [281] The *geber's* witness continues with his deliverance from death, redemption, and vindication, which Williams argues is the pinnacle of the poem.[282]

Williams' approach recognizes the theological progression of the *geber* and positions the community as his central concern while still allowing the community to raise its lament. He allows an emphasis on the community through the voice of their lament but not at the expense of the theological progress and hope of the *geber*. Williams is also comfortable with forgiveness hanging in the balance, but only to a certain point. He argues forgiveness is possible given the role and identity of the *geber* as a substitute. As such, the *geber* is not simply a representative voice of the community, or a minister to the community, but ushers in a ministry of substitution for their sins based on his

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[279] Lamentations 3:27 is the second use of the *geber*, "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth."

[280] Williams, *The Shadow of Christ in the Book of Lamentations: A Guide to Grieving with Faith*, 117.

[281] Williams translation p.121

[282] Williams, *The Shadow of Christ in the Book of Lamentations: A Guide to Grieving with Faith*, 127.

translation of verse 39, ". . . *geber* for sins." He argues the return to the singular voice in verse 48 lends conceptual support to this perspective, which I will address briefly.[283]

Answering Agency

This analysis has been an apology for understanding the third poem as the *geber's* theological journey from affliction to hope, based on God's abiding *hesed* even among the ruins of his home and deep pain of his people. Therapy, or "catharsis" as Renkema calls it, is not the intention here.[284] Mere spiritual catharsis does not motivate others to share in a lament the same way renewed hope in God does. Nor does it adequetly explain the voice of the Lord saying, "Do not fear!" and the *geber*'s reply, "You have redeemed my life!" So, the question must be raised again. Who, after the chaos and suffering experienced during the siege of Jerusalem, has the right to call the community to examine themselves and confess their sins?

Parry identifies this call to confession as the central sensitivity of the poem. Within Lamentations, sin is admitted, but the suffering has been tremendous, and so he reads the lament as an effort to make God feel uncomfortable and respond according to his covenant faithfulness.[285] Therefore, Lamentations must strike a "balance between emphasizing her transgressions and repentance (which would undermine the audience's sympathy for her) and ignoring it (which would falsify her plight)."[286] Truly, the

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[283] Williams, 125.

[284] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 410.

[285] Parry, *Lamentations*, 29,30.

[286] Parry, *Lamentations*, 30,31.

cessation of hostilities and the aftermath of war are sensitive times. Sensitivity does not vanish after a day or two, or even a couple decades. Yet, this is the challenge the *geber* takes on in earnest as one who has also seen this affliction.

During the conversations with the participants, I proffered that Lamentations 3:1 could be translated, "I am the warrior who has seen affliction . . ." This translation immediately connected dots in my mind to past ministries and conversations with other combat veterans. Without question, I was making an interpretive decision about the background of the *geber*.

One initial assumption I held was that ministers walked combat veterans through their grief and spiritual distress, guiding them back into a worshipping relationship before God. This assumption proved only partially true. Ministers did play a role as hospital chaplains, military chaplains, and listening pastors. But, over the course of the interviews, it became clear that the veteran participants themselves kept watch over their peers who suffered and provided them with care. They did this as those who had suffered physically and spiritually themselves but also as those who had received God's hope with a deep understanding of the moral issues inherent in combat. They could do this because they had already interrogated their experiences in Vietnam, the Gulf War, and the War on Terror in terms of moral legitimacy but moreso in light of God's *hesed* or loyal love. This difficult spiritual process made them credible witnesses.

In light of this discovery, the participants shared in the ministry of the *geber* as witnesses and as ones who could see the suffering of others and come to their aid. This was powerfully illustrated by Brandon's triage tag declaring his death. Credibility was formed in the life of Danny, who started as an infantryman and ended up serving on a

Special Operations team. By military standards Danny had achieved much, but he found himself metaphorically buried in the Kentucky coal mines before his later "redemption" in Kansas. This spiritual process became the real source of his credentialing. He described the change in his view towards others in this way: "If you see enough suffering, it will change you. You want to speak out, to behave a particular way, to go after somebody who needs (to be) rescued because we have suffered so much; sometimes we can't stand to see others suffer." David's witness was public. He wore his credentials on his chest as a combat infantry badge (CIB), as one infantryman standing before a formation of infantrymen who also had their CIBs. While, from his perspective, the badge was superficial compared to what had happened in his heart and soul, nevertheless it legitimized him to serve other combat veterans. Bobby's case, however, involved literal interrogations by other combat veterans who wondered if such an approachable man could really understand them.

All the participants had experienced various levels of suffering and witnessed God's deliverance. From these experiences, a genuine concern grew for members of their own community to engage and experience God. Again, the aftermath of conflict is always a sensitive time, and the interviews reflected these sensitivities, both personally and politically. Warren Kinghorn and other researchers, including secular clinicians, have noted these sensitivities and speculated that the practice of lament may be a valuable part of care for veterans who suffer.[287] Caregivers who are attentive to combat veterans

[287] Tick, *Warrior's Return*, 157.

wrestling with spiritual and moral injury have also concluded there needs to be a place for confession.[288] Even secular clinicians have recognized this.[289]

Because of this, a key question emerged for Christian leaders. How do ministers of the Word provide a place for combat veterans to confess? The interviews did not uncover any occurrences in which a pastor led them to confession or repentance. However, several participants called and led other veterans to confession. In this sense, they gave voice to the cohortatives of Lamentations 3:40-42 and actively sought to relieve the sensitivities of those suffering spiritual distress as a result of unconfessed sin.

On the surface, this conclusion seems obvious. For example, recovered addicts care for the addicted who still suffer. Also, Susan Shooter's research points to Christian women who have been sexually abused ministering to other victims of sexual abuse by overcoming their own suffering and fear.[290] In these studies, the relationship between perpetrator and victim, guilty and innocent, is important. However, the issues surrounding veteran care involve the nature of war itself and the combination of suffering, fear, guilt, and innocence. When the moral use of force in combat is confused, sometimes being replaced with the legal use of force, the categories of guilt and innocence can be confused. Additionally, when one's decisions have direct bearing on the wellbeing of another, confusion increases. Thus, some warriors struggle deeply and for years with survivor's guilt to the point of feeling condemned.

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[288] Tietje, *Toward a Pastoral Theology of Holy Saturday: Providing Spiritual Care for War Wounded Souls*, 87.

[289] Shay, *Odysseus In America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming*, 153.

[290] Susan Shooter, *How Survivors of Abuse Relate to God: The Authentic Spirituality of the Annaliated Soul* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2012). 247,248. "Their attitude reflects an open, silent, listening, non-judging, non-evangelizing and giving love that eases the anxiety, fear and suffering of others."

Lamentations 3 includes guilt and innocence in the same lament: "Let us examine ourselves . . . I am being hunted without cause."[291] This is not to say that Lamentations 3 offers an exact equivalent to the moral use of force[292] or even to moral injury. Rather, it reminds readers that any individual can wrestle with issues of guilt and innocence before the Lord, especially in matters of killing or death, even years after the conclusion of war. Such circumstances indicate spiritual distress or, as Timothy Mallard described, "spiritual injury," long after the event that caused a moral injury.[293]

If these complexities are difficult for those who have some experience and understanding of warfare, how much more difficult are they for those who have never experienced combat or the decision-making process in combat? Where or to whom can those who have persistent struggles arising from these experiences go? The literature review revealed the important role that clinicians have had in helping combat veterans and also that questions of guilt and shame persist, requiring spiritual or religious care. Spiritual healing does not result merely from an education or further explanation. Moreover, the veteran's conscience must be addressed. Forgiveness and redemption are needed.

The interviews produced plenty of data about moral guilt and described a variety of difficult situations, but the real question the data raised was how does the one who is struggling with guilt engage God and experience redemption? The advice of professional clinicians and the pastoral care of ministers are helpful, but after succumbing to battle

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[291] Lam. 3: 40, 52

[292] Such as the Rules of Engagement (ROE) at the tactical level of combat.

[293] Mallard and White, *A Persistent Fire: The Strategic Ethical Impact World War 1 on the Global Profession of Arms*, 275.

fatigue or following an ill-conceived order and killing to prevent being left behind or failing their mission, where can combat veterans find forgiveness and redemption? Because of the terrible choices the conditions of war presents, I framed these situations and individuals in a sympathetic light. Yet, because of these morally complex situations, redemption is needed. But, who can offer it? Whose invitation to confession is legitimate? Whose witness to God's redemption and *hesed* is credible? And, of great importance to this research, who is even able to see the guilty trapped in his or her guilt?

I propose it is the *geber*. Because he is a *devout veteran of war*, his voice is credible. Because he bears the marks of pain and suffering in ways that most "temple singers" or "clinicians" do not, his invitation to confession is more readily accepted. Whether the *geber* was a prophet, a warrior, or blacksmith, his specific identity was not as critical as the strength of his faith in combination with his presence during Jerusalem's demise. This combination shapes the *mighty man* into a *devout veteran of war*. I offer this conclusion for two reasons. First, it preserves the importance of the *geber's* mission over his identity. Secondly, it maintains the identity of the *geber* is a specific person of the community, perhaps Jeremiah or Baruch, who is able to see those trapped in guilt and to invite them into confession, to include those who succumbed to the pain of starvation and killed their neighbors for food or water during the siege of Jerusalem. In short, he had shared in the sufferings of their experiences.

The *geber* sees and goes to the guilty because he has experienced God's forgiveness and *hesed*. Though formed as a lament, the third poem also includes the *geber's* witness and invitation as an expression of hope. Williams illuminates this aspect

of the poem by describing it as a literary lentograph.[294] From one perspective, the *geber* in verse 39 prompts the repentance of the community, which is followed by the description of the *geber's* deliverance from "death" in the pit, covered by a "stone," redeemed and vindicated. By tilting the angle of the lentograph again, the substitutionary role of the *geber* is displayed with messianic hues as the source of hope. Williams defends this description by citing similar language in Psalms 22, 40, 69, Isaiah 53, and a hermeneutical reference to Hebrews 10:8,9: "He takes away the first, that he may establish the second." While his position shares a kindred spirit with Martin Luther's famous assertion,"I see nothing in Scripture except Christ crucified,"[295] the significance of the covenant community joining together in corporate confession as an act of worship is primarily in view. Furthermore, the *geber's* role of modeling this act of worship as a legitimate expression of hope in God's *hesed* cannot be understated, especially in light of the temple's destruction. So, even though Williams rightly acknowledges the contrast between the *geber* and the *adam,* and makes a plausible case for the voice of the community as participarty in confession, it is the spiritual leadership modeled by the *geber* as one who not only shares in suffering, but in the sins of the community as well, which lends strong support for the *geber's* legitimacy to stand before the community and seek after God. I believe the translations of verse 39 support this given the מה is an interrogative regardless of whether it is translated as "what" or "why." Furthermore, the use of the preposition עַל extends the contrast as rendering the sentence, "How should a man complain, a *geber* for /in view of his sins." From this perspective of spiritual

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[294] Williams, *The Shadow of Christ in the Book of Lamentations: A Guide to Grieving with Faith*, 123-129.

[295] Dr Raymond F Surburg, "Luther and the Christology of the Old Testament," n.d., 6.

leadership, the *geber* is truly a minister leading from the front as a confessor who invites his community to join with him. His eyes are fixed on God's *hesed* not in judgment on the sins of the community or with diminished hopes of forgiveness due to the loss of the temple and the more visible means of substitutionary atonement.

The selection of Christian participants was deliberate. I was unsure how the role of Christ would factor into the discussions about God and the topic of warfare. References to Jesus, Christ, God as Father, and being a Christian peppered the interviews. However, the participants' devotion to God saturated the interviews, and this theological, rather than Christological, emphasis was, I suspect, in large part due to the first research question, which framed the interview as an inquiry into the how God was experienced. The fundamental idea remained; that by seeking the Lord, forgiveness could be found as confession was brought to him. This truth was stated one way or another by most of the participants and was a distinct aspect of ministry to which they were sensitive, especially as they assessed the suffering of other veterans. In this regard, they offered their own forms of "soft cohortatives" to those in spiritual need but with confidence in the atonement and love of Christ.

This observation is not to say that pastors of churches are not able to do this, or that their legitimacy cannot be established with combat veterans. It is only to say that the research indicates that Christian combat veterans see other veterans who are suffering, intuit the gravity of their suffering, and engage in this ministry of confession as ones who have experienced an abundance of God's *hesed* and forgiveness through Christ. Because of this, they are slow to judge their peers. The research also suggests that Christian

combat veterans engage their peers with more frequency than pastors due to their own participation in the triangular network of care for veterans.

The limitations of this research are also worth noting with respect to repentance. As referenced in an earlier section, Parry sees repentance as part of the *geber's* efforts to balance issues with his audience which could affect his legitimacy. O'Connor believes repentance was an issue, but because the *geber* had forgotten about it, he had moved on to justice by verse 59.[296] Williams sees repentance present within the community based on his interpretation of the cohortatives in verses 40 and 41 of the third poem. As discussed in the literature review, Eric Kress and Paul Tautges state that God's silence will persist apart from confession *and* repentance and that Jeremiah called the people to repentance and he confessed their sin.[297]

Kress and Tautges bring the verbal aspect of confession into the larger theological and pastoral context with what the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) calls "repentance unto life." Ministers of the Word are thankful for confession but also keenly aware of the importance of a life of repentance due to the nature of being a minister of both Word and Sacrament. Of the six paragraphs in chapter 15, only the sixth paragraph refers to confession which describes its importance for public and private confession of sins committed against another or the church.[298] The WCF provides a

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[296] O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, 56.

[297] Kress and Tautges, *God's Mercy in Our Suffering: Lamentations for Pastors and Counselors*, 122.

[298] "The Westminster Confession of Faith," Ligonier Ministries, accessed April 14, 2024, https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/westminster-confession-faith. Chapter 15.6 "As every man is bound to make private confession of his sins to God, praying for the pardon thereof, upon which, and the forsaking of them, he shall find mercy: so he that scandalizeth his brother, or the church of Christ, ought to

practical model for face-to-face confession among the people of God. While it also exhorts Christians to confess privately to God, many combat veterans desire to confess face-to-face but cannot because they have no way to face their former opponents, perhaps, because that opponent was killed.

The work of Edward Tick, referred to in the literature review, describes veterans who engage in all manner of service work, counseling, religious and cultural rites. They visit monuments, memorials, and former battlefields. They converse with former enemies and, of course, fellow combat veterans. They do all this in good faith, and often with tears, as the weight of past actions and terrible secrets or memories are released. Tick reports good results and healing.[299] On the other hand, some veterans pursue isolation which can result in personally destructive behaviors as another means of atonement.

It should not surprise any pastor that a veteran, Christian or not, would desire the opportunity for a face-to-face confession and these same individuals sometimes seek to confess to a *devout veteran of war* to sooth the soul and maybe attain forgiveness. This act may be cathartic and may bring healing if the matter is handled honestly between two veterans. But if the act is turned towards God himself by the *devout veteran of war*, it begins to resemble the ministry the *geber* sought for the people by turning them to God in Lamentations 3:40-42. Healing may result, as Michael testified, but the purpose of this engagement is greater than healing; it is to worship God, which Michael expressed

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be willing, by a private or public confession and sorrow for his sin, to declare his repentance to those that are offended; who are thereupon to be reconciled to him, and in love to receive him."

[299] Tick, *Warrior's Return*, 98, 158.

Tick, *War and the Soul.* 98.

beautifully with statements of love for the Lord. “Jesus is real! . . . I love the gospel . . . our God is a God of aalvation!”

Therefore, even though the worship and confession of the research participants manifested repentant lives in a broader sense, the ministry of confession shared with others was limited in scope much like the *geber’s* cohortatives of confession in Lamentations 3:40-42, regardless of whether they are interpreted as an invitation or as a corporate confession.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore whether Lamentations 3 provides a connection between the ministry of the Word and pastoral care for combatants who have experienced or observed various forms of spiritual distress during and after combat. The purpose of this study was not to discuss how pastors can minister to veterans who struggle with moral injury or PTSD per se, but only to bring awareness that these topics create practical challenges to pastoral care. This and other research in the field of trauma care suggests that the practice of lament may be beneficial to combat veterans. Towards that end, this study focused on Lamentations 3 as an example of biblical lament, arising from the context of warfare, that pastors may employ in ministry with combat veterans.

The discussions above argued that Lamentations 3 is a lament that describes the *geber’s* theological progression from spiritual distress to hope because of God’s *hesed,* and on this basis, the *geber* invites his community to confess. Although this research focused mainly on this progression, and the lamentable topics of war and death that occasion lament, the declaration of redemption in verse 58 is a profoundly encouraging

statement of faith. Williams rightly recognizes this section of the poem as the highwater mark of the *geber's* message. Whether Williams' application of the cohortatives to the community's voice is accepted or not, he agrees with House that the community's relationship with God is the mission and concern of the *geber*, and does so in a way that acknowledges the possibility of multiple voices within the poem. Furthermore, if the poem was meant to be sung by temple singers or used in worship, and whether it was sung in major or minor keys, the poetry shines a light on the character of God and his *hesed*. Therefore, the *geber's* presence during Jerusalem's destruction, which would eventually result in his own renewed relationship with God, and his invitation to others who experienced similar traumas, remains a provision for God's covenant people.

Today's minister of the Word should recognize the unique position this poem occupies in scripture as a post-conflict lament that reflects aspects of spiritual distress that continue to affect the people of God. But, this lament also reminds those who suffer that God redeems and enables many who suffer to bear witness to his love in the midst of tragic circumstances.

One benefit of conducting this research was the check it provided against some of my unconscious comparisons between the experiences of the *geber* and veterans I have known. As a note of caution, Lamentations 3 isn't a checklist of essential post-conflict experiences, nor is the *geber* an "ideal type" of Christian veteran. Such an interpretation is doomed to be irrelevant, for lack of enough comparable experiences, or spiritually damaging, if forced upon a specific veteran's experience. Instead, this passage orients combat veterans towards what the *geber* believes about the character of God, despite personal suffering, and fosters a desire to orient others with similar experiences toward

God in ways that are similar to what is found in 2 Corinthians 1:4, ". . . so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God." Another encouragement of this research was the similar testimonies of the participants. The common thread of their guidance could be summarized with the Apostle Paul's statement in Philippians 3:13,14: "Forgetting what is behind and straining on toward what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Their growth in the Lord and determination to invite others to find freedom through the forgiveness of Christ instead of remaining trapped by past experiences is remarkable.

Recommendations for Practice

There are a number of recommendations for pastors to consider from these findings. However, I must remind readers again of the limits of this study. As mentioned earlier, I spoke with sixteen veterans and a few beyond that number declined to participate for a variety of reasons. I approached nineteen in total, all of whom were Christians and attended churches, and so the conclusions recorded here are specific to a sub-set. It would be unfair for pastors to assume these particulars apply to all Christian veterans. I focused on older veterans, not current servicemembers, to discover what enduring principles or truths stood the test of time and would be beneficial to pastors and other veterans. Practical and fundamental aspects of pastoral care emerged and revolve around the following four issues:

(1) Pastors are part of the veteran's network of care.

(2) Christian veterans desire to connect their experiences with the scriptures.

(3) Some veterans will be remarkably sensitive to discipling other veterans with respect to the forgiveness of specific sins.

(4) Veterans need faithful shepherds who will lead them to the Lord.

(1) Pastors are one part of a veteran's network of care.

What should a pastor consider? The interview data revealed that Christian veterans were active participants in their church and veteran organizations and were familiar with the VA. These veterans received care from all three entities and often contributed to their effectiveness. Often, they approximated the triangular model mentioned in the first finding. Scott, Bobby, Danny, and Brandon were exemplars. Scott enjoyed helping others navigate the VA system, served as a church planter and administrator, and provided leadership at a veteran organization. Brandon and Bobby led veterans support groups in the VA, were active with their churches, and periodically gathered with other veterans at church or at reunions. Danny found these organizations helpful in establishing healthy fellowship and was interested in their scriptural footing. It is important for pastors to understand that veterans with this level of maturity and interest for ministry are present within this network of care and may be a tremendous resource for ministry to other combat veterans in their church who feel alone.

How might a pastor offer care? A pastor should not avoid engaging veterans and providing counsel to the veteran in spiritual distress as asked or needed. But, the pastor should also ask about the veteran's wider network of care. Pastors will then be in a better position to connect veterans with other helping agencies or with another Christian veteran who already has established contacts. If families are involved, a pastor can

recommend resources and confirm their need for an established network of care. Most importantly, just as the *geber* was present during the fall of Jerusalem, a pastor must continue to be present through discipleship, in the hospital room, teaching and hospitality ministries, or even attending Memorial Day events.

(2) Christian veterans desire to connect their experiences with the scriptures.

What should a pastor consider? Christian veterans, just like other Christians, have a desire to know how the scriptures can encourage and make meaning of their experiences. It was difficult to capture the love the participants had for the scriptures. Just as the *geber's* words in Lamentations 3 reflect themes present in Psalm 69 and other laments, the words of combat veterans may reflect many passages of scripture. The scriptures were one way the love of God and his purpose for their experiences was confirmed. Those interviewed referred to Psalms 22, 23, 51, 121, and 130, in addition to many New Testament passages. There was a strong connection to the Psalms, perhaps because the psalmist spoke of his own conflicts, which resonates with combat veterans. Bobby was representative of other participants in this study. He did not say much about his time in Vietnam but spoke mainly about his subjective experience with God and from his knowledge of the scriptures too. The importance of this experience was evident in the fact that he did not describe his relationship with God and the scriptures in the past tense but in the present.

How might a pastor offer care? Pastors can hear how the scriptures have shaped and guided veterans' lives as a result of their experiences. Ministers of the Word also have an open door to share passages with veterans. Offering passages such as

Lamentations 3 (with a simple introduction) and allowing the scriptures to speak for themselves can be quite effective. Moreover, developing a ministry of presence is important. For example, pastors can attend veterans' gatherings and share appropriate scriptures on Veterans Day, Memorial Day, or other significant days. They can also volunteer to give brief devotionals or to pray. Veterans know the importance of recognizing the sacrifices others have made and typically have a deep sense of gratitude that will connect with the Word of God.

Additionally, leading congregations through various Psalms of deliverance such as Psalm 69, Psalms of innocence such as 17 or 27, and laments such as those found in Job, the Psalms and the Book of Lamentations, will build the "library of lament" that Nathan Carlson described. These passages will help members, whether combat veterans or not, make meaning of past traumas and prepare for future experiences that are personally and spiritually difficult. Pastors may also help create other, more intimate ministry contexts that foster conversation and shared ideas between congregational members. For example, some churches have Sunday Schools, grief ministries, prayer ministries, or small groups in which Psalms of lament might be considered in detail. These groups of church members, which hopefully will include veterans, might write out their own prayers of lament, as suggested by June Dickie and John Endres. Likewise, the Lord may use these kinds of gatherings to build connections with veterans.

(3) Some veterans will be remarkably sensitive to discipling other veterans with respect to forgiveness of specific sins.

What should Pastors consider? Generally speaking, pastors will not be in the position of the prophet Nathan saying, "You are the man!" but those in spiritual distress may need the devout veteran of warfare who can say, "I am the man!" They are the ones who have experienced the silence of God through the course of conflict, seen traumatic things, and been rescued from the pit. They speak as those who have been redeemed from their own guilt. The combat veteran's experience is not one with which most pastors can "empathize," as the word is commonly used today. However, other combat veterans, like the *geber*, are able to identify with their experience and even invite them into confession through the use of "soft cohortatives." God has shaped many Christian veterans to be mission minded. The devout veterans of war aren't the only ones who can extend this invitation, but they may do so with more nuance because of their presence in similar events and their godly reflection upon those events.

How might pastors offer care? All the participants in this study had a desire to serve God. Encouraging such individuals to be involved and to lead others in the church and in the community will be a blessing. Current and former service members are often team oriented, and their ability to organize or lend expertise to ministry activities may be appreciated, regardless of age. Pastors can orovide them with opportunities to lead spiritually and place them in contact with veteran organizations such as the Mighty Oaks Foundation and The Warrior's Journey. These are vital ways a church can get behind a veteran. Providing financial support to attend these events may be a tangible way to offer care, just as some churches conduct family retreats and sponsor counseling ministries. Realistically, the likelihood of a *devout veteran of war* being a member of your church is

low, but creating connections with local veteran groups is a great way for your veterans to meet those God has raised up and to develop godly fellowship.

(4) Veterans need faithful shepherds who will lead them to the Lord.

What should pastors understand? Veterans who have been involved in combat have already formed distinct opinions about God. There might be deep respect, or there might be deep-seated anger. Typically, combatants are young people who haven't reflected on theological or eternal matters any more than their families or schools required. Nevertheless, combat is a profound experience that often challenges a person's assumptions on the nature or role of God as either a protector or not, as just or absent.

Pastors who consider how biblical laments apply to those who have survived conflict and how they reveal the speech of those who understand and trust the character of God have something to share that secular counselors do not. Veterans do not need pastors who opine about PTSD or speculate on the sources of moral injury. Such conversations can lead inadvertently to moral judgments and overlook the wounds of the person sitting in front of the pastor and the healing that Jesus offers. Scott and Danny may not have looked like typical church-goers after combat, while they were experiencing spiritual distress, but neither had rejected God. On the contrary, they felt as if God had rejected them. Danny struggled to believe God might ever have any use for him again. Scott was no longer attending church. Michael no longer considered himself to be a good person and was on a downward spiral. Yet, in God's providence and time,

civilian ministries and pastors were instrumental in shepherding them after combat and in contributing to their development as *devout veterans of war*.

How might a pastor offer care? As a pastoral relationship develops, questions can be asked about the nature of their service. Specifically, who were they with and what kind of unit were they in? What was their commander or command sergeant major like? Question of this nature demonstrate an interest in what life was like in terms of who they were with rather than quickly drilling down to, "Okay, what did you do?" If a veteran knows he or she can approach the pastor on the basis of the Gospel the possibility for ministry needed is greater.

I remember an occasion in which I dismissed the need for a soldier to confess something he had done because I did not judge it to be a sin. This was not my judgment to make despite my good intention. As discussed in the literature review, veterans need a shepherd not a judge. This point cannot be overstated. Pastors are shepherds. As a young shepherd my eyes were fixed on the green pastures and I did not always discern when someone needed me to walk and talk with them through the valley of the shadow of death, or, in terms of this research, a need to lament. In this case, the need to lament may have included confession of sin, or perhaps a conversation with his chaplain about the lamentable things happen during the course of war and where God might be in the midst of it.

The temptation to avoid lament may come in other forms as well such as wanting to bring psychological relief or discuss an interest in politics and Just War Theory rather than unpacking personal difficulties. There may be a natural discomfort on the pastors part with the practice of Biblical lament and any number of issues which prevent a

combat veteran and a pastor from an honest discussion about confession. Yet, Michael found relief and healing simply by confessing to Christian brothers and discovered the healing described in James 5:16, which says, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” Confession and repentance unto life in Christ is a marvelous gift that ministers of the Word and Sacrament steward. These elements are part of worship. When combat veterans find these practices in churches or within faithful veteran organizations, God be praised!

The final aspect of care that pastors can offer to veterans arose from David’s story. His philosophy of ministry towards veterans was based on Isaiah, “Here I am, send me!” He rightly concluded that his call not only included facing “sin and brokenness” but also embracing times of celebration. Warriors are notorious storytellers, but their stories often come from a heart that loves to celebrate what is admirable about another. If a pastor can face sin and brokenness *and* also celebrate forgiveness and the new life offered in the gospel, a pastor can touch a veteran’s heart.

Summary of Recommendations

I will conclude this section with a comment about today’s veterans and their future contributions to the church. A friend of mine rightly commented that the praise heaped upon servicemembers during the Global War on Terrorism was an embarrassment of riches compared to what those from previous conflicts recieved. Awards, combat balls, banners and public applause in airports and other public places were offered as collective expressions of thanks. However, expressions of thanks are not the totality of what

veterans need nor will this define the limits of what they have to offer to the next generation of veterans and the church in the future.

The most recent generation of combat veterans who have experiences of spiritual distress call it moral injury. It is entirely possible that moral injury is also an indicator of one's need to lament. Part of moral injury is a difficult process of engaging God which aligns with aspects of lament whether the word is used or not. I suspect that many of these veterans sitting in our congregations have not contemplated that a lament is anything more than private grief or a condition to be treated should it persist. In fact, a God-centered spirituality during and after combat is a gritty affair. Prayers are prayed that question God's absence. There are deep feelings of disappointment and expressions of complaint against God. There are times of hardship during and after combat that prompt prayers for relief and deliverance. And, as seen in this research, confessions of sin and expressions of praise ultimately become an inherent part of a biblical lament. This process may last a year or two, it may linger for thirty, but either way it is a spiritually formative experience that reveals the goodness of God.

Today, we have veterans sitting in our churches and communities who lament. This is not said to arouse pity but the opposite; to encourage, with an emphasis on courage, to engage lament, because tomorrow many of them will stand and carry a new mantle of spiritual leadership. They will step into the role of the *devout veteran of war* and lead others to the cross and the living Christ. In the meantime, the shepherds of the church have an opportunity to offer pastoral care that includes the practice of lamentation within disciple making as one way to prepare these individuals for the mission to which God will call them.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused on the experience of combat veterans in light of Lamentations 3 to better understand points of connection between the ministry of the Word and pastoral care for combatants who have experienced various forms of spiritual distress during and after combat.

As with any study, there are limitations as to how extensive the research can be. Therefore, the following areas of study could be valuable for those who are veterans of various kinds of conflict. First, a similar study could focus on veterans's families of the Global War on Terrorism. Given the advances in understanding moral injury and trauma in general, a study of the impact combat upon spouses and children in relationship to Lamentations may provide insights for churches and how they encourage veteran familes. Secondly, qualitative research of similar proportions could include first responders who have lived through and intervened in volatile environments. Finally, civilians who have experienced sustained forms of community conflict and how their experiences may be addressed and encouraged through biblical lament would be profitable. Each demographic would provide perspectives from other "Devout Veterans of War/Conflict."

Appendix

א *Aleph*
1 I am the man who has seen affliction
Because of the rod of His wrath.
2 He has driven me and made me walk
In darkness and not in light.
3 Surely against me He has turned His hand
Repeatedly all the day.

ב *Beth*
4 He has caused my flesh and my skin to waste away;
He has broken my bones.
5 He has besieged and encompassed me with gall and hardship.
6 Dark places He has made me inhabit,
Like those who have long been dead.

ג *Gimel*
7 He has walled me in so that I cannot go out;
He has made my chain heavy.
8 Even when I cry out and call for help,
He shuts out my prayer.
9 He has blocked my ways with cut stone;
He has made my paths crooked.

ד *Daleth*
10 He is to me like a bear lying in wait,
Like a lion in secret places.
11 He has turned aside my ways and torn me to pieces;
He has made me desolate.
12 He bent His bow
And set me as a target for the arrow.

ה *He*
13 He made the arrows of His quiver
To enter into my inward parts.
14 I have become a laughingstock to all my people,
Their music of *mockery* all the day.
15 He has saturated me with bitterness;
He has sated me with wormwood.

ו *Vav*
16 He has broken my teeth with gravel;
He has made me cower in the dust.

17 My soul has been rejected from peace;
I have forgotten goodness.
18 So I say, "My strength has perished,
As well as my hopeful waiting *which comes* from Yahweh."

ז *Zayin*
19 Remember my affliction and my homelessness,
the wormwood and gall.
20 Surely my soul remembers
And is bowed down within me.
21 This I will return to my heart;
Therefore I will wait in hope.

ח *Heth*
22 The lovingkindnesses of Yahweh indeed never cease,
For His compassions never fail.
23 *They* are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.
24 "Yahweh is my portion," says my soul,
"Therefore I wait for Him."

ט *Teth*
25 Yahweh is good to those who hope in Him,
To the soul who seeks Him.
26 *It is* good that he waits silently
For the salvation of Yahweh.
27 *It is* good for a man that he should bear
The yoke in his youth.

י *Yodh*
28 Let him sit alone and be silent
Since He has laid it on him.
29 Let him put his mouth in the dust;
Perhaps there is hope.
30 Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him;
Let him be saturated with reproach.

כ *Kaph*
31 For the Lord will not reject forever,
32 For if He causes grief,
Then He will have compassion
According to His abundant lovingkindness.
33 For He does not afflict from His heart
Or grieve the sons of men.

ל *Lamedh*

34 To crush under His feet
All the prisoners of the land,
35 To deprive a man of justice
In the presence of the Most High,
36 To defraud a man in his *legal* case—These
things the Lord does not see *with approval*.

מ *Mem*
37 Who is there who speaks and it happens,
Unless the Lord has commanded *it*?
38 *Is it* not from the mouth of the Most High
That both calamities and good go forth?
39 Why should *any* living person or *any* man
Complain because of his sins?

נ *Nun*
40 Let us search out and examine our ways,
And let us return to Yahweh.
41 We lift up our heart to *our* hands
Toward God in heaven;
42 We have transgressed and rebelled;
You have not pardoned.

ס *Samekh*
43 You have covered *Yourself* with anger
And pursued us;
You have killed *and* have not spared.
44 You have covered Yourself with a cloud
So that no prayer can pass through.
45 *You have made us mere* scum and refuse
In the midst of the peoples.

פ *Pe*
46 All our enemies have opened their mouths against us.
47 Panic and pitfall have befallen us,
Devastation and destruction;
48 My eyes run down with streams of water
Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.

ע *Ayin*
49 My eyes pour down unceasingly,
Without stopping,
50 Until Yahweh looks down
And sees from heaven.
51 My eyes deal severely with my soul
Because of all the daughters of my city.

צ *Tsadhe*
52 My enemies without cause
Hunted me down like a bird;
53 They have silenced my life in the pit
And have placed a stone on me.
54 Waters flowed over my head;
I said, "I am cut off!"

ק *Qoph*
55 I called on Your name, O Yahweh,
Out of the lowest pit.
56 You have heard my voice,
"Do not hide Your ear from my *prayer for* relief,
From my cry for help."
57 You drew near when I called on You;
You said, "Do not fear!"

ר *Resh*
58 O Lord, You have pleaded my soul's cause;
You have redeemed my life.
59 O Yahweh, You have seen my oppression;
Judge my case.
60 You have seen all their vengeance,
All their purposes against me.

שׂ *Sin* / שׁ *Shin*
61 You have heard their reproach, O Yahweh,
All their purposes against me.
62 The lips of those who rise against me
and their whispering
Are against me all day long.
63 Look on their sitting and their rising;
I am their mocking song.

ת *Tav*
64 You will recompense them, O Yahweh,
According to the work of their hands.
65 You will give them dullness of heart;
Your curse will be on them.
66 You will pursue them in anger and destroy them
From under the heavens of Yahweh![300]

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