



## Training Disaster Responders in Spiritual First Aid

This is the facilitator guide for a half-day training session to prepare disaster responders prior to a disaster or to provide basic training after a disaster has occurred. It is designed to align with and support the use of the booklet for disaster survivors, *Beyond Disaster: A Survivor's Guide for Spiritual First Aid*, using the participatory learning model.

**Facilitators leading this training should be certified in the *Healing the Wounds of Trauma* program at the Training Facilitator level or higher.**

### Background

These materials are based on the program, *Healing the Wounds of Trauma: How the Church Can Help*. When preparing responders in advance to respond to disasters, recommend that they attend a Healing Group or Initial Equipping of the trauma healing program, to understand the program better and to experience the healing process for themselves. If the training is being held to train responders following a disaster, recommend to the participants that they attend an Initial Equipping of the *Healing the Wounds of Trauma* program once the situation has calmed. Following that training, people certified as Apprentice Facilitators can begin holding healing groups for survivors, to help them process their experience and heal more fully. Disaster survivors are typically not ready to process their experience until 3-6 months after the disaster occurred.

Before the training session, ask the meeting hosts about the context the disaster responders are preparing for. Are they responding to a disaster that has already occurred or preparing to respond to various types of disasters? If they are responding to a particular situation, learn about the context and the needs of those whom they will be trying to help. If they are preparing for future disasters of various types, include some discussion of how the needs may vary depending on the type of disaster. Also, discuss with those hosting the training whether they plan to host Equipping Sessions later, and how they will inform people of the training.

When facilitating this training after a disaster, keep in mind that local disaster responders probably have also experienced some trauma from the disaster. Use the activities to help them debrief and begin to process their experience.

## Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

- understand some of the effects of traumatic experiences
- provide information to disaster survivors about what helps or hinders recovery
- give survivors tools to help them heal emotionally
- attend to their own needs while helping others

## Who should attend this training?

This training can be helpful for anyone interested in helping those affected by disasters. It can help people prepare to respond after a disaster has occurred or for future disasters. Responders who focus on meeting physical needs—like handing out provisions, searching for survivors, providing transportation, clearing storm debris or helping with reconstruction—can be more effective if they understand survivors’ spiritual and emotional needs. They can also learn to identify signs of secondary trauma they may experience as they help, and know how to help themselves recover.

People who are struggling to manage their own lives may not have the time or energy to help others. Those who have been greatly affected by a disaster should carefully consider whether they have the emotional resilience to help others at this time without becoming overwhelmed. They should focus on their own recovery first. Once they feel stronger, they can reach out to help others.

## Timing Estimate

Introduction & Bible story about disaster	30 minutes
What do survivors need?	20 minutes
Why am I feeling this way?	20 minutes
Why do I feel so sad?	30 minutes
How can a wounded heart heal?	45 minutes
How can I relate to God in this situation?	40 minutes
Looking to the future	5 minutes
How to use what you have learned	15 minutes
Caring for disaster responders	20 minutes
Closing	15 minutes
Total (not including breaks)	4 hours

## Preparation

- Arrange the meeting space to accommodate small group discussion, either around tables or seated in circles of 4 to 6 people
- Prepare copies of the materials for each participant:
  - **Postcard** to distribute to survivors immediately following a disaster, when they are overwhelmed and not likely to read even a booklet
  - **Booklet**, *Beyond Disaster: A Survivor’s Guide for Spiritual First Aid*, for them to talk through with individuals or groups of disaster survivors, and then leave with them

- Gather supplies: flipchart and/or whiteboard with markers; paper for participants to take notes, write laments and do the art exercise; markers or crayons
- Ask two participants to prepare the Listening Skit (give them copies of the script)
- As people arrive, ask them to sign in with their name, organization, and contact information

## **Introduction (15 minutes)**

[Host: Introduce facilitators and open the session with prayer.]

**Say:** This training is based on the program, *Healing the Wounds of Trauma: How the Church Can Help*, which was originally developed to help people in Africa who were living in the midst of war, the HIV epidemic and other traumatic experiences. The program is designed to equip pastors and other Christians help others without requiring a high level of education or lengthy training. It brings together biblical and mental health principles to help people recover from any type of traumatic experience. This makes it a useful resource for those affected by disasters.

The theme verse of the program is Psalm 34:18: *The Lord is near to those who are discouraged; he saves those who have lost all hope.* Often people don't feel that God is near and they feel hopeless. We want to come alongside those who have been overwhelmed by their experiences—to help them understand what has happened to them and give them hope that they can recover.

Today, we will begin by talking generally about how disaster situations affect people and our goals as we seek to support them. We will look at a Bible story about a disaster to see what we can learn from that example. Then, we will talk about the effects of disaster on people, the process of recovering emotionally and spiritually, and what helps or hinders recovery. We will look at some materials developed for disaster survivors that you can use in talking with people, and that they can continue to use to help themselves recover. We will also teach some skills and methods you can use to help people. Finally, we will consider how you can keep yourself healthy as you help others.

Besides teaching the material, we will be asking you to participate often. We know that the more people engage with what they want to learn, the more they understand and remember.

Now, let's start by getting to know each other. [Have participants each say their name, what organization they work with (if applicable) and their current role in disaster response.]

[If they are responding to a specific disaster that has occurred, ask several to share the current situation in the area they will be working. What are the biggest needs they are seeing now?]

**Say:** Now let's talk more generally about the effects disasters have on people.

**Ask:** How do disasters differ from other types of trauma that people may experience?

**Add** from these points:

- Disasters can affect people's whole lives, while many other types of trauma have narrower impact
- Disasters force drastic changes on people

**Ask:** How do people generally respond when change is forced on them?

(resistance, resentment, feeling stressed)

- Disasters affect entire communities. Survivors' normal support systems may be destroyed. Resources they usually rely on are reduced or completely unavailable.
- Disaster response tends to focus on physical needs; emotional needs are often overlooked

**Say:** When a disaster occurs, people and organizations focus on meeting physical needs. Often, spiritual and emotional needs are overlooked or set aside. This training is about helping people spiritually and emotionally.

The program model of *Healing the Wounds of Trauma* begins each lesson with a story, to help people start to think about the theme of the lesson. Let's look at a story in the Bible about a disaster and how people's needs were met.

### **Bible story about a disaster (15 minutes)**

**Read** (or ask a participant to read) 1 Kings 17:7-16, Elijah and the Widow at Zarephath

#### ☛ SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What was the disaster? What was the widow's situation? What was Elijah's situation? What did God provide through Elijah? What did the widow do?
2. How might this story affect your view of disaster response?

#### ☛ LARGE GROUP DEBRIEF: **Add** any points that were not mentioned

- God through Elijah did not provide a supply of prepared food. He asked the widow to trust God, and provided resources that she could use with her own capabilities.
- This suggests that responders should not feel responsible to do everything for those affected.
- They should work to provide for immediate needs and think about how to help survivors care for themselves.

### **What will your role be?**

**Say:** It is important to define your role in responding to a disaster, clearly and specifically. Then, remember your role and limit your involvement so that you can be effective. You cannot do everything. If you try to do too much, you may not fulfill your responsibilities well, and you may interfere with others in their roles. If your role is not defined yet, make a point of doing that after this training session. Review the expectations with your response team before taking action.

If you are to focus on spiritual and emotional needs, you will offer **comfort, encouragement, and hope**. Learn about other resources so that you can refer people to those and stay focused on your role.

## What do survivors need? (20 minutes)

**Say:** Let's think about how people feel and what they believe when things are going well for them, and how we might help them start to feel good about their lives again.

**Ask:** What are the things that give people a sense of wellbeing in their lives?

(A good job, health, good relationships, etc.)

**Say:** These things that give people a sense of wellbeing could be summarized into 3 core beliefs:

- There is order in the world
- There is justice, or a sense of right and wrong
- I am valuable to God and others

**Write** the above on the flipchart or whiteboard, then explain:

“There is order in the world” means that a person can explain the events taking place around them (in their family, community, or country). They can predict how things will probably go in the future. The person can make choices about their life.

“There is justice, or a sense of right and wrong” means that a person feels that wrongs will be made right—either by a person, a government, or God.

“I am valuable to God and others” means that a person feels he or she is important and deserves respect.

When someone's life is shattered by a disaster, their trust in these beliefs can be destroyed:

- The patterns in my life are destroyed ... only chaos remains
- Wrong wins over right ... what happened is unfair
- I am not important ... I have no value to God or others

By helping to restore, even a little, some of these core beliefs, we can help them to stabilize and **give them hope**. Even though their lives may never return to how they were before, they will recover to a point where life is manageable again.

To know how you can help, you need to understand how the person is affected. This may be compared to medical “triage” in which doctors or nurses evaluate how critical each patient's needs are before deciding what to do.

☉ **SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION:** (some can focus on immediate needs and others on longer-term)

How can disaster responders help stabilize survivors and begin to restore their sense of wellbeing?

How might immediate needs be different from what they need later?

☉ **LARGE GROUP DEBRIEF:**

**List** responses on the flipchart or whiteboard using only highlighted words, and say the rest of the thought.

**Add** points not mentioned.

### **Immediate needs— the first two or three days:**

People who are overwhelmed by a disaster cannot think clearly. They need more help. Asking them to think through things can be confusing and stressful.

- **Listen to them** talk about their experience and what is difficult about it
- **Accompany them** as they begin to stabilize their lives.
- **Affirm their value** by giving personal attention and support. Find ways to help people feel safe and secure.
- **Suggest action in small steps** that feel manageable—this helps restore their dignity and sense of personal power. Gradually, survivors can regain their ability to function.

**After the first shock**, encourage survivors to:

- **Take care of their bodies** by eating well, sleeping enough, and working or exercising. Physical activity reduces stress and helps people sleep better.
- **Connect with people** even if they feel like being alone. Isolation slows recovery.
- **Ask for help** when they need it, and **accept help** that is offered.
- **Re-establish routines**, especially with children. This reduces the feelings of chaos the disaster created and brings back some sense of order.
- **Make some decisions for themselves. Set goals** (even small ones) **and complete them.** This helps restore some sense of control and choice.
- **Postpone major decisions**, as much as possible.
- **Not worry if their spiritual life is disrupted.** Let them know this is a normal reaction and, in time, they can recover and even grow spiritually through the difficulty they are experiencing.

☉ **LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION:** Disasters will affect people differently. Some may be upset while others are traumatized. What might make people more likely to be overwhelmed by their experience of the disaster?

**Add** anything from the list not mentioned.

- if they already had many problems before the event
- if they did not have the support of family or friends during and after the event
- if they have mental illness or emotional problems
- if they are usually sad or very sensitive
- if they had many bad things happen to them in the past, especially when they were children
- if they are the type of person who generally wants someone else to tell them what to do

If reactions continue for several months and keep the person from carrying out their responsibilities, they may need more specialized help, from a pastor, a counselor, or a doctor.

**Say:** When people are overwhelmed, they may look to others to tell them what to do, or they may be able to choose between a few specific options. Once people are not overwhelmed, these questions may help people find practical solutions:

1. What resources do you have? People usually have resources or support systems that are not immediately apparent. Consider the impact of any actions or solutions on systems they have in place.
2. What have you tried? What was helpful or not helpful?
3. What are some other things you could try?

4. Who might be able to help you, even a little bit?
5. What seems like the most helpful next step?

As we said, our goal is not to solve everything for survivors of a disaster. We want to begin to restore their dignity and help them get their lives in order. We can do this by guiding them to find solutions for themselves.

Consider your specific role in responding to the disaster. If you are to focus only on spiritual and emotional support, then refer survivors to others for help in solving practical problems.

### **[Hand out postcards & *Beyond Disaster* booklets]**

**Say:** Let's take a few minutes to look at these materials that have been developed for helping disaster survivors. You can see that they present some of the material we just discussed.

The postcards are ideal to give people immediately after a disaster when they are overwhelmed and are not likely to read much. The booklets are designed to use when talking to people. You may also leave these with them so they can continue to work through the information later. The booklet also includes many Bible verses. We will not take time to cover those during this training session.

We want you to understand these materials well so you can help others understand it. These are good resources to guide your actions and conversations as you help others. Engaging with the material during the training will help you learn it, so sometimes we will be asking you to notice where information is in the booklet, and other times to put it down so you can participate in the conversation.

Notice that some of the information we just finished talking about is in the first section of the *Beyond Disaster* booklet titled "Start Here." Now, let's get back to talking about how disasters can affect people.

## **Why am I feeling this way? (20 minutes)**

**Say:** Often, people's emotional reactions to a disaster are confusing and overwhelming to them. We want to spend some time thinking and talking about these reactions. Then, we will discuss how we might help people when they are feeling confused or overwhelmed.

Strong feelings are a natural part of living through a disaster, but not everyone reacts the same. Some people are ashamed of their reactions. We can help them understand and accept that these reactions are **normal**. People who have lost less than others have often feel they should not grieve. We need to affirm that their pain and loss matters too.

Experiencing a disaster can have strong effects on people's minds and bodies. After disasters, people are often more emotional than usual or act in ways that are unusual for them. They may feel confused and overwhelmed. They may feel exhausted or achy and become ill. These are all normal reactions.

Often after a traumatic experience, people look for someone to blame—either themselves or someone else. Part of people's sense of wellbeing is based on seeing order and justice in the world,

so it is natural to try to make sense of what has happened. Accepting what has happened can help people begin to heal.

There may also be positive effects: for example, reexamining priorities, focusing on what is important, and connecting with others.

Some people experience trauma when a disaster happens. Trauma is what we call the effect of an experience when people feel intense fear, horror or helplessness. When people are traumatized, they typically react in 3 main ways.

**List** these on the flipchart or whiteboard.

- Reliving
- Avoiding
- Being on alert all the time

☉ **SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION (5 minutes):** Assign each group to list examples of one type of reaction

☉ **LARGE GROUP DEBRIEF (5 minutes):** **Add** as needed

- **Reliving:** thinking about the event all the time, nightmares, flashbacks, retelling their story many times
- **Avoiding:** avoiding places, people, sights, or smells that remind them of the event; may not be able to remember much about the event; refusing to talk about the event; feeling numb; trying to avoid strong feelings by using alcohol or drugs, working too much, eating too much or not enough, sleeping too much
- **Being on alert** all the time: always feel tense or anxious, easily startled, overreact with anger or violence, have trouble sleeping or wake up too early, have trouble breathing or feel dizzy, shake or have irregular heartbeat, have headaches or stomachaches

**Say:** Look at Section 1 in your *Beyond Disaster* booklet to see how the information we just covered is presented. Now, let's look together at "What helps children".

### **How children are affected (5 minutes)**

Read pp. 20-21 together and ask for comments.

**Say:** After a traumatic experience, many people feel very anxious, angry, or afraid. They may never have had such strong feelings before. Let's look together at the suggestions described in the booklet for how people can begin to manage strong feelings. These are things you can help others do, and you can do for yourself whenever you feel it would be helpful.

### **How to calm strong emotions (5 minutes)**

☉ **LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION:** What can people do when their feelings are overwhelming?

1. Do something enjoyable, even small things.
2. Imagine a calm scene to mentally escape for a while.



3. Practice a Breathing Exercise.
4. Use the Container Exercise to delay feelings for a while and then process them a little at a time, as they feel ready.

**Say:** Now, let's put our booklets aside and talk about how people often feel after a disaster, and how to help them through that time.

## **Why do I feel so sad? (30 minutes)**

**Say:** Most people feel deep sadness at some time after a disaster. They may have experienced many losses. To recover from losses, people need to grieve well. There are various ways of describing the grieving process, but most of them include similar aspects. The model we use is easy for people to understand and remember.

**Draw the Grief Journey** on the whiteboard or flipchart (p. 35 in the *Beyond Disaster* booklet). Your drawing does not need to be as detailed as the drawing in the booklet.

**Describe** the journey and ask how people might feel in each Neighborhood. Or, have each small group discuss one Neighborhood and then describe it for the large group. Or, the facilitator can lead the group in acting out the journey as a skit, in a way that works for the size of the group, then debrief.

**Say:** People may go back and forth between these Neighborhoods as they grieve and may go at a different pace than others. This is normal. But if they are stuck for a very long time along the way, they may need help from a pastor, counselor or doctor.

People who have lived through a disaster may experience many different types of losses. When people lose things, they feel sad, and that sadness may last for a long time. It can be helpful to understand that this is part of the normal grieving process.

If people do not understand why they continue to feel so sad, it can be helpful for them to think specifically about what they have lost. Making a list of what they have lost in the disaster they experienced can help them understand their need to grieve. They should include people and things that are gone or have changed. They should also include intangible things that were a part of what made life seem good; for example, hope and security.

Grieving takes a lot of courage and energy. Knowing they are on a journey can help people accept the journey and can help others be patient with them, but it won't take the pain away.

Let's talk about what helps people as they grieve.

### **What helps recovery?**

☀ **SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION:** When you have been mourning the loss of someone or something important, what helpful things have people done or said? What have others said or done that was not helpful?

☀ **LARGE GROUP DEBRIEF:** What helps people during the grieving process?

**List** participants' responses on a flipchart or whiteboard using a few words. **Add** from the list:

- **Encourage them to talk about how they feel** when they are ready. Allow them to express their anger and sadness.
- **Help them understand that it is normal to grieve**, and that the process takes time. They will not always feel like they do today, and feelings often vary day-to-day.
- **Visit them and spend time with them.**
- **Help with practical things.** Don't wait for them to think of what others might do to help. Think of what might help and take action.
- If the body of a loved one cannot be recovered, **arrange a memorial service** to remember the person's life and publicly acknowledge their death.
- Often, people have difficulty sleeping in the early weeks and months after a loss. **Encourage them to get physical exercise**, since that reduces stress and can help people sleep better at night.
- People often do not feel comfortable relating to God after a disaster. **Encourage them to practice aspects of their faith that feel helpful to them.**
- **Pray for them** (Ephesians 6:18), or with them when they are ready—do not assume that people want you to pray with them; avoid pressuring them.
- **When the person is ready, share promises from God's Word to encourage them.** For example, "The Lord is near to those who are discouraged; he saves those who have lost all hope." (Psalm 34:18) Be sensitive to how this may affect people!
- Eventually, they need to bring their pain to God. The more specific they can be about their loss, the better. For example, they may have lost a loved one, but also an income, companionship, respect, or security. They should bring these losses to the Lord one by one.

### **What hinders recovery?**

- Not being allowed to grieve or express their true feelings
- Not having support and understanding during the process

**Say:** A few of the things we have listed are included on p. 40 of your booklet. The other points are things that may be helpful for you to remember. You can also find the picture and description of the **Grief Journey** in that section.

Now let's look together at p. 42 & 43 and talk about how we can help children.

**What helps children?** (5 minutes). Review this section with the group and invite a few comments.

### **How can a wounded heart heal? (45 minutes)**

**Say:** The experience of a disaster causes a great deal of grief and pain. We might think of the pain in our hearts as a heart wound. Let's compare pain in our hearts with a physical wound, for example, a deep gash.

☉ **LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION:** How is a heart wound similar to a physical wound? (5 minutes)

**List** on flipchart or whiteboard:

**Physical wounds**

- visible
- painful, and sensitive
- need to be treated
- need to be cleaned of any dirt or bacteria
- if ignored, may get infected
- God heals but he uses people like parents, nurses, doctors
- take time to heal
- may leave a scar

**Ask** whether a heart wound is similar to each of the characteristics listed.

**Say:** We have mentioned several times the importance of listening as a key to healing the wounds in people's hearts. Let's talk about how we can do that effectively, starting with observing an example of listening to a person who has just been through a traumatic experience. Then, we will talk about what you noticed. [NOTE: Adjust the scenario and dialogue as needed, to avoid having it be so similar to the current situation that it triggers strong emotional reactions.]

**LISTENING SKIT: Poor listening (5 minutes)**

Narrator: There was a strong earthquake in Michael's (or Martha's) area and part of their home collapsed while they were inside. This left him (her) with a broken arm and minor concussion, and nearly killed his (her) spouse and child. He (She) has been able to go home from the hospital and is staying with relatives but is worried about his (her) family. Even though they have food and a place to stay while their home is repaired, Michael (Martha) is feeling worse and worse. Their pastor has just stopped at the hospital to visit the family. He (She) finds Michael (Martha) in the waiting area, pacing back and forth. (P = Pastor, M = Michael or Martha)

P: (Rushed greeting) I came to see your family.

M: They're sleeping just now, but I'm not doing so well.

P: (rushed) Look at the positive: you survived! Thank God!

M: But I'm feeling confused. Could we talk?

P: (distracted) I need to get to a meeting about how to get repairs done on the church. Let's talk as we walk to my car.

M: Okay (reluctantly). Now that my wife (husband) and daughter are getting better, I'm feeling worse. I'm not sleeping and I feel very anxious whenever I am indoors.

P: There's no reason to be afraid. Forget it. Take control. God hasn't given us a "spirit of fear."

M: Oh no! Now I feel guilty about feeling afraid. And I feel angry. I know I should feel thankful, but...

P: Yes! You should be thankful. Being thankful will wipe away the negative feelings. This reminds me of when our church burned down a few years ago. I decided to rejoice, and everything was fine.

M: I tried to but I can't control the fear. (P's phone rings)

P: (answers his phone and says) I'm talking with Michael (Martha). He's (She's) having a really hard time, but I'll be there as soon as I can get away.

M: I can see you're busy, but what can I do about this fear?

P: Remember Romans 8:28—all things work together for good. Be thankful. I'll ask the church to pray for you.

M: Oh please no, don't tell everyone how I'm feeling!

P: Don't worry—we're a family. It's all in the family. There's no reason to be embarrassed. I've gotta run.

M: (looks dejected)

☛ **LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION (2 minutes):** What advice would you give the pastor to be a better listener?

**Say:** Let's give the pastor another chance to be a good listener:

### **LISTENING SKIT: Good listening (5 minutes)**

P: Good morning! I came to see you.

M: Thanks. I'm not doing so well.

P: Do you want to talk? Let's go somewhere private.

M: Okay.

P: Tell me what happened.

M: It's a horrible scene in my head. We were all in bed sleeping when the house started to shake. Some things fell off a shelf with a loud bang and woke the family up. I quickly got out of bed and called for everyone to get outside. As we were trying to get out, part of the roof fell in and landed on us. My wife (husband) and daughter were unconscious and bleeding. I got out and was screaming for help to get my family out. A neighbor came running and helped me pull away enough of the debris to get them out.

P: It's amazing you could think clearly. Were you in pain?

M: I don't know. It was a blurry nightmare. I think I was in shock.

P: How did you feel?

M: I was worried about the new dishes we had gotten recently, and whether they would get broken. I know that sounds crazy.

P: That's not crazy. Maybe it kept you from being overwhelmed.

M: I hadn't thought about it like that.

P: Tell me more.

M: Well, first I was glad to have survived, but now I have bad thoughts and feelings. I'm confused. I felt so helpless and now I'm angry. Why would our house fall in when so many others didn't? I guess I'm glad other people aren't having to suffer like we are, but it feels unfair that we have to go through all this pain and trouble.

P: I'd probably feel that way, too.

M: Really? That's helpful to hear. I just don't feel thankful, even though my family survived. I'm not sleeping well. I know that now the aftershocks have stopped and most buildings are safe, but I'm afraid to be indoors anyway.

P: Well, it's normal to have all these feelings after what you've been through. What was the hardest thing for you?

M: The worst was seeing my daughter and wife (husband) injured.

P: Yeah. You said you felt helpless?

M: Totally. I always try to take care of my family, you know, and I couldn't do anything.

P: What helped you begin to feel safe?

M: Once we got to the hospital and the medical team told me we were all going to be ok.

P: I can understand that. I know you love your family and they love you. I'm glad you can be here for them. We love you too. Let's talk again next week, okay?

M: Thanks. It really helps to talk about it. Do you want to see my family? They're awake now.

P: Yes, let's.

🌀 **LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION (5 minutes):** What did the pastor do this time that showed good listening skills?

Ideas might include: Show you are listening by responding in encouraging ways. This may be by looking at them, or by making affirming sounds like "Mm-hmm." Don't look out the window or at your watch. Don't seem impatient for them to finish. It is important to be sensitive to their culture as you listen. For example, eye contact when listening or speaking may or may not be appropriate. From time to time, repeat what you think the person has said. This will give the person a chance to correct, restate, or affirm your understanding.

**Say:** Do you remember what questions the pastor asked?

**List** on the flipchart or whiteboard:

1. What happened?
2. How did you feel?
3. What was the hardest part for you?
4. What helped you begin to feel safe?

**Say:** These questions can help guide the person in telling their story, and the fourth one may help reassure them that they are no longer at that crisis point. If the response to this question is that they still do not feel safe, ask what small thing they might do to help them begin to feel safe.

What is important is helping the person feel understood and cared for. We do not need to know all the details of what happened in order to do this. Focusing on talking about what happened may use so much time that you don't get to the more important questions.

If people become very distressed talking about their experience, it is not helpful to continue. Let them take a break, think about other things, and get calm inside. They can resume telling their story when they feel ready.

☀ **DISCUSSION IN PAIRS:** (7 min each) Practice listening using participants' own experience of the disaster (primary or secondary trauma). If they were not personally affected by the disaster, ask them to talk about another frightening or difficult experience.

[After 6 and a half minutes, announce that the first person will have 30 seconds to finish what they are saying. After 30 seconds, announce that pairs should switch speaking and listening roles.]

☀ **LARGE GROUP DEBRIEF:** How was the listening experience for you? Did you feel heard and understood?

**Say:** People can also express their pain without using words by drawing or modeling with clay. They don't need to be artists! Encourage them to get quiet inside, ask God to show them the pain in their hearts, and begin drawing. They can let the pain flow out of their fingers without thinking about it too much. Artwork may be symbolic rather than realistic. For example, a ball may represent a brother who was an athlete. Once they finish drawing, it is helpful to reflect on what they have drawn. This is very helpful for children, but it can help adults a lot too. Traumatic experiences affect our brains in ways that can't always be expressed in words. By drawing, we can often learn more about how something affected us, and process some of the pain that we can't put into words.

## **How can I relate to God in this situation? (40 minutes)**

**Say:** Besides talking and doing artwork, another good way to express our feelings is through writing a lament. A lament can be composed by an individual or a community. The Bible has many examples of laments in the Psalms. In a lament, people pour out their complaints to God and beg him to help them, all the while stating their trust in him. In Psalm 62:8 we read: *Trust God, my friends, and always tell him each one of your concerns. God is our place of safety.* Let's read a lament together as an example.

**Ask** someone to read Psalm 13 (p. 56 in the booklet)

**Say:** In Psalm 13:1 David asks, “How much longer will you forget me, Lord? Forever?” In verses 5 and 6 he says, “I rely on your constant love; I will be glad, because you will rescue me. I will sing to you, O Lord, because you have been good to me.” How can he say both these things at the same time? They seem contradictory. But that can be how we feel sometimes.

Laments have three basic parts. **List** on the whiteboard:

- Address to God (“Oh God”)
- A complaint or expression of your feelings
- A request for help

☀ **INDIVIDUAL WORK:** (20 minutes) Give participants the option of doing either art or lament.

☀ **DISCUSSION IN PAIRS:** (5 minutes) Encourage people to share their lament or artwork, if they are comfortable doing so. Otherwise, they can share how the experience felt for them and what they learned from it.

☀ **LARGE GROUP DEBRIEF:** How was the experience for you?

Encourage them to try later whichever exercise they did not do today.

## Looking to the future (5 minutes)

**Say:** Healing can take a long time and recovery typically happens in stages. The last section of the *Beyond Disaster* booklet gives encouragement for continued recovery using suggestions and tools that we talked about earlier. You can review that later.

When people have started to recover and are ready to process their pain at a deeper level (generally 3 to 6 months after the disaster), it would be helpful for them to participate in a Healing Group. To lead Healing Groups well, facilitators need training. This begins with attending an Initial Equipping Session of *Healing the Wounds of Trauma*. [Share any decisions made with training hosts about when Equipping Sessions will be offered and how participants will be informed.]

## Using what you have learned to help disaster survivors (15 minutes)

**Say:** You can use the information you have learned and practiced today, and the materials we have given you, in many situations. As you seek to help those affected by disasters, keep in mind the importance of understanding what others are doing in the area. **Coordination** is the key to avoid interfering with the good others are doing and to avoid overlapping efforts in which some people receive attention from multiple sources while others receive no help.

Make sure to adjust what you share with people according to where they are in their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual processes. **To do this, you must first listen.** Once you understand what happened to them and what they are experiencing, you will be better able to decide what will help them. And once they feel understood, they will be better able to listen and receive what you have to share with them.

## Helping people individually

**Say:** The survivors' booklet *Beyond Disaster* can be a good conversation guide. Show them the table of contents or mention the topics and see what interests them. Start there. It is not necessary to review all the information in the booklet with them. Be familiar with it and then use what is appropriate to the person and the situation. If some time has passed since the disaster and people's lives have stabilized, it might be good to start with the Grief Journey.

If possible, give them a copy of the booklet to keep. It will help to remind them of your conversation and give them information about things you may not have talked about. They can read the Bible verses to give them comfort and hope. They may also want to share the information with others.

As you talk with people, collect contact information that you can give to those who can follow up with them. **Do not promise to follow up with people yourself unless you can and will do so!** The disappointment will only add to their pain. Others in the area can use the contact information to invite people to Healing Groups.

## Helping disaster survivors in a group

**Say:** Bringing survivors together as a group can allow disaster responders to help more people efficiently. You can provide them with helpful information as a group and then meet with people individually to listen to their stories and reassure them. If possible, have several disaster responders available to talk with the survivors individually.

Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Soon after a disaster, people are often overwhelmed and cannot think clearly. Do not give them more information than they can take in. Remember to speak a little slower than you usually do, and pause often to give them time to understand what you are saying.
- Helping them understand that their reactions to the traumatic experience are normal can reassure them. And you can give them ideas about what will help or hinder their recovery.
- Give people the opportunity to tell their stories to someone who knows how to listen well. It is best not to invite disaster survivors to share their stories in a group, since that can upset others who experienced the disaster. Let them know that this is a time to talk about what happened and how they are feeling, not a time to discuss practical needs.
- If possible, give people copies of the postcard and/or booklet to take with them.
- After a disaster, people are often vulnerable. It is important that helpers not abuse this vulnerability by preaching at them, trying to evangelize them, or giving them religious literature they did not request.

Once you have gathered a group of people who experienced the disaster, seat them in a large circle if possible. You might begin your meeting by saying something like this:

*Thank you for coming to participate in this meeting. We would like to share some things that may be helpful for you as you recover from this crisis. The emotional needs of people who have lived through a disaster are as important as physical needs in order for them to recover fully.*



*However, people often overlook emotional and spiritual needs after a disaster, or set them aside while they focus on the need for food, shelter, and clothing. But the emotional effects of experiencing a disaster do not go away when we ignore them. Understanding what has happened to you and how it has affected you and the people around you is very important.*

Then, present the information from pages 12-20 of the booklet *Beyond Disaster*. Summarize the main points. You do not need to read the Bible verses at this time.

Next, using the information on pages 6-7, talk about what helps people recover more quickly, and what may slow their recovery.

Mention that managing strong feelings can be difficult during this time, and suggest ideas from pages 24-27 of the booklet. Then, lead the group through the Breathing Exercise on pages 26-27. Afterwards, suggest that they practice this for five minutes, three or four times per day. Tell them that they can also do this exercise with children to help calm strong feelings.

If you have copies of the postcard or survivor booklet available, hand them out. Tell them that the information you have given them is in the booklet, along with other information that may help them later, and Scriptures that may be comforting for them to read.

Finally, transition to listening time. Tell them that each of them has a story of what they have experienced and you would like to hear it. Give them instructions about how listening times will be organized, and what is available to them as they wait their turns. This may include food, drinks, art supplies or instructions and materials to write a lament, and activities for children. Also, give instructions about collecting contact information for follow-up.

Close with a simple prayer or blessing. For example, *May the LORD bless you and take care of you; May the LORD be kind and gracious to you; May the LORD look on you with favor and give you peace.* (Numbers 6:24-26)

After sharing the above content with the large group, give survivors the opportunity to meet individually with a facilitator in a private place. The facilitators who are listening to individuals privately should model the “good listener” we talked about—helping the person feel at ease, assuring confidentiality, and respecting the healing process.

As you listen to people, use the listening questions learned earlier. If you are listening to two people together (for example, a husband and wife), encourage them to share their story but not to talk in too much detail about the most difficult parts, as that may traumatize the other.

Try to adjust the time you spend with each person to meet the schedule the group has been given.

## **Caring for disaster responders (20 minutes)**

**Say:** Now, let’s talk about *you* for a few minutes.

People want to help after a disaster because they see the need and because they care about others. Compassionate people are likely to try to do too much and not take care of themselves. Taking care of other people can wear us out. Besides getting tired, when we listen to people’s stories of trauma and grief, we may absorb some of their pain, and experience some of the same symptoms they are

experiencing. We call this “secondary trauma.” We might also get so busy caring for others that we do not take time to care for ourselves.

☉ **LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION:** What might be signs that a caregiver is overloaded?

**List** symptoms participants suggest on the flipchart or whiteboard and **add** as needed:

- Feeling angry or sad all the time
- Feeling tired and irritable
- Not sleeping well
- Having problems with relationships
- Questioning the truth of our faith
- Questioning God’s goodness and power
- Doubting our own capabilities or God’s calling
- Beginning to distrust others’ intentions
- Focusing on the negatives and losing hope
- Becoming ill or having many accidents
- Resenting those who need our help

**Say:** If we have some of these symptoms for a while, we need to change something in our situation.

**Ask:** What should we do when we are overloaded?

**List** answers on the flipchart or whiteboard and **add** any points from the list that were not mentioned. [Write key points and say what follows.]

- Apply to ourselves what we know to do for others. [Think about your situation as if it were someone else’s. What would you advise them to do?]
- Pay attention to our own need for healing, so we can better help others. [If we have our own heart wounds that have not healed, they will add to our load.]
- Use wisdom in deciding how much to be involved in helping others. [Set a reasonable schedule. Take breaks to assess how the work is affecting you. What do you need so that you can continue to be helpful to others? Use the example of a pencil and sharpener or a cell phone and charger to make the point that self-care is critical for continued effectiveness]
- Practice the healing tools we have learned: talking about our feelings, lament, artistic expression, breathing exercise

[Mention the Container Exercise in the booklet. Say that often when we are responding to a difficult situation, we tend to set aside our feelings, sometimes without even noticing, but then we neglect to focus on them later and process them. We need to be sure to do that.]

- Follow Jesus’s example. [**Ask** someone to read Mark 6:30-32. What example did Jesus give us of self-care?]
  - time away
  - prayer
  - supportive relationships
  - reasonable expectations [even Jesus did not heal or attend to everyone. We need to recognize and accept human limitations and set boundaries. If we let ourselves become exhausted, we will not be able to carry on with the work God has given us.]

- Remember that you are not responsible to fix everything that others need. [The most important things that we can give them is to help them feel “seen”—to know that their experiences matter—and to feel some hope for the future.]

**Say:** Let’s take a minute to reflect individually. Think about how you respond to demanding situations, your current workload or life demands, and what you need to watch out for to avoid becoming overloaded.

☛ SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION or in pairs: Briefly share one or two things you will commit to do, to take care of yourself as you help others.

What challenges would you expect? How you can manage or overcome the challenges?

## **Closing (15 minutes)**

☛ LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION: What do you as a group want to do next in response to the current disaster (or future disasters, if this is pre-disaster training)? List responses and invite them to take a few minutes to plan how they will follow through on those items—what to do and who will take responsibility.

Explain where to get the materials to distribute when they need them.

Recommend that participants attend a Trauma Healing Initial Equipping Session within three to six months to become more skilled in helping people recover from trauma. Tell them how to get information about training events.

Ask someone to read Romans 8:38-39.

Close with prayer, asking for wisdom, strength, protection, and healing for each participant as they seek to help others in times of crisis.