

Organizing my thoughts around Foster's framework enabled me to utilize a common language to describe how so many struggle with implementing traditional spiritual practices—both because the impact of trauma decreases our ability to access these practices, but also because it has been incorrectly assumed that these practices are sufficient to bring about a full healing from trauma. The positive impact that Richard Foster's work has had on faith practices cannot be over-stated. But many individuals were negatively impacted by how some misapplied these spiritual practices as rules to live by and then over-promised the possible benefits.



Wonder if she has seen James KA Smith's work or Lauren Winner's work in regard to spiritual discipline

How Does Trauma Affect Spirituality? Eventually, we will explore how trauma is caused, but for now it is reasonable to ask if all inner turmoil is caused by trauma. No, but my study of trauma and its effects helps me understand that it is the root cause of most mental health problems. I will make the case for it also being the cause for most of the spiritual struggles that result in many Christians feeling like spiritual failures as they confuse the inner dysregulation created by trauma with what the church calls "conviction."

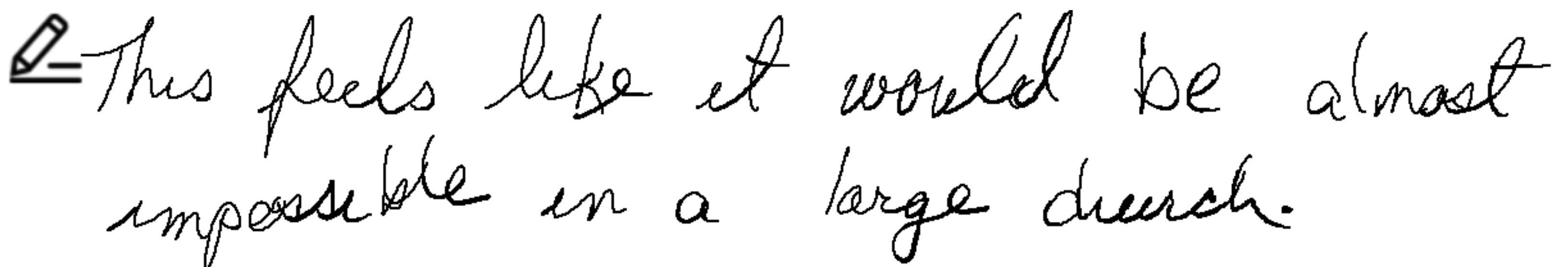
When we minister to people who feel physically or emotionally unsafe, it can be detrimental to pressure them to participate, especially if it involves being vulnerable. What may appear on the surface as shyness or reluctance may have a much deeper significance to those dealing with past tragedies or relational trauma. Unwittingly, we can try to include someone in an effort to be friendly, when in fact, the per

son is in a fragile or overwhelmed state.

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The only path to fully healing trauma, especially relational trauma, is through relationships that provide unconditional love or regard. Peter Levine states, "Trauma is not what happens to us, but what we hold inside in the absence of an empathetic witness." Healing comes not because we offer answers, but because we listen and compassionately believe the stories traumatized people tell us. Current neuroscience findings and my own personal experience supports this. Why was therapy so healing in my life? There are many reasons, but the primary one was the nonjudgmental and empathetic listening of my therapist. Felt safety is a cornerstone of healing. It must also become the central theme in our churches if we are to compassionately minister to those who suffer

 This feels like it would be almost impossible in a large church.

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Unresolved trauma lives on in the shadow of our unconscious minds and guides our behaviors and actions. Often incorrectly called "inner demons" or "original sin," the unconscious mind lives out unresolved trauma in ways people do not understand without deep healing. When their actions do not match who they believe themselves to be (or who they want to be), they say, either as a joke or with conviction, "The devil made me do it." It is impossible to understand adult behaviors without understanding the past. Repeated trips to the altar never solve the problem because it is not a spiritual problem. Ministry leaders and laypeople misidentified the effects of various types of trauma—combat related, physical or sexual abuse, or neglect—as sin and told people that accepting Jesus would heal the turmoil. By following the admonition to leave the past behind, these traumatized individuals tried to distance themselves from the pain but could not achieve this goal. Still in pain and confused by their lack of success, this generation unknowingly passed the effects of trauma

on to the next generation.

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What the traumatized world needs is the message that healing trauma can enable them to access the abundant life that Jesus promised.

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It has been prevalent for church teaching to pit emotions against mind, solid doctrine, and/or faith itself. Most sermons I heard said to ignore feelings, and "Stand alone on the word of God." Ministry leaders have often vilified the very emotions God created, even though the Bible is passionate and filled with raw emotion from cover to cover. Many who have experienced trauma have a distorted or damaged relationship with their emotions, with physical sensations, or with making sense of their pain. Many times, all of the above.

 I still think this aspect of the church's relationship with emotions, especially the white Evangelical church, could really be helped with Ignatius' rules of discernment or equivalent modernized version.

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2022-08-12 12:27

It is crucial to remember that the purpose of Christian meditation is to commune with God and find direction through listening. The challenge for those impacted by 6

4 trauma is to hear God's loving voice and not mistake the shame-based messaging in their heads as that voice. God's voice is loving and nonjudgmental. Shame tells them there is something horribly wrong with them; that they are unworthy of God's love.

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2022-08-12 12:28

Probably one of the most defining characteristics of shame is our very denial of it in our lives. I remember the day I told my therapist that I didn't believe I was suffering from very much shame. What I should have said is, "I don't allow myself to feel the shame that is coursing through my body all day long at the slightest provocation."

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2022-08-12 12:32

Shame in its most basic form—embarrassment—does help us recognize appropriate or inappropriate behaviors. In a healthy form, normal feelings of embarrassment help young children understand how to live in the world. Shame usually becomes unhealthy because our mistakes or childlike behaviors are punished either physically or through isolation. We believe we are bad instead of understanding our behavior was incorrect. The emphasis is the punishment of our "sinful behavior" instead of receiving relational instruction. In the biblical story, Eve's realization that she was tricked (not smart enough) was the beginning of shame. Both she and Adam hid from God, the very one who could relationally help them. This is still the narrative lived out by many.

 We believe we are bad instead of understanding our behavior was incorrect.

this does not remove the concept of sin but helps point out that shame and conviction of sin are not the same thing.

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Childhood trauma is more than a bad thing that happened; it is what individuals come to believe about themselves.

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Sadly, in this scenario, meditation can become a time for the those impacted by trauma to reflect on their feelings of worthlessness. They can either avoid it or wallow in it. In both cases it blocks the purpose of meditation which involves hearing the voice and words of a loving God. If those impacted by trauma are to ever believe themselves as worthy of God's love, it is essential that our messages move away from the view of a God who is punitive.

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Many adults were shamed as children for emotional outbursts—or worse, physically punished or abused. They project that fear of being shamed or hurt onto God and stop themselves from experiencing the openness and honesty that would be a pat

h to healing. While healing, their prayers need to be raw outpourings of their pain. If this does not feel acceptable, many who have suffered trauma as children will believe they must leave God behind in order to express their very legitimate pain. There are healing communities where expressions of pain are accepted and even encouraged.

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How Does Trauma Make Asking Difficult? What happens when a child who cannot trust adults reaches out to an invisible God? Many tell me stories of how they begged God to help them as children, to no avail. Without an understanding of free will and evil, children's views of God can be deeply warped by abuse. They will need many safe relationships (attachments) to repair this damage.

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There is nothing that Christians impacted by trauma desire any more than change, but their intense desire to change what they cannot understand about themselves often drives them to pray without ceasing in a manner that lacks attachment to God. Believing that God wants to answer their prayers would be transforming, but instead they doubt themselves and fear asking for what they need. For many, the Christian phrase, "If it is God's will..." feels comfortable, since they believe it probably is not God's will—for them, anyway. Many who suffered trauma or neglect as children find it almost impossible to ask for anything. Their needs were ignored, and now asking and not receiving feels like rejection.

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The North American Committee on Religious Trauma Research (NACRTR) states that, "Religious trauma results from an event, series of events, relationships, or circumstances within or connected to religious beliefs, practices, or structures that is experienced by an individual as overwhelming or disruptive and has lasting adverse effects on a person's physical, mental, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being."⁸

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When the hurting are fully heard, it is then possible to begin sitting in silence and solitude. While healing, I came across this quote by Peter A. Levine: "Trauma is not what happens to us, but what we hold inside in the absence of an empathetic witness."4

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Anytime a decision is forced—often by the threat of loss of respect, love, or support—the agreement is not freely given submission. Capitulation (forced choice) is not the same as submission (free choice). The first is power based, the second is relation based.

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For a powerless child, many situations involving unmet needs, lack of protection, or abuse can feel life-threatening. Often trauma survivors will react to a situation in a manner that seems unreasonable, as if it were a life and death situation. For an adult, whose childhood needs were not met, or if they experienced abuse or neglect when asking, the determination to have things go the way they want, at an unconscious level, can truly feel like a matter of life or death.

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many children impacted by trauma are submissive (coercively controlled). What looks like submission for the traumatized is most likely the autonomic freeze response. It is the safest choice, but forced silence is never healthy.

✍ Submission seems particularly problematic for childhood trauma survivors because of the role of forced submission.

But submission is also part of what I think is important discipleship work in a individualistic world.

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2022-08-17 14:06

Feelings of powerlessness, combined with a desire to belong, can make attending a church with an authoritarian leadership style feel like finding a home. The rules are clear and the community structure is less chaotic than the oftentimes tumultuous former lives of survivors. Attempting to live differently outwardly without the inner transformation of healing defines the lives of many traumatized Christians who have not accessed healing. They are searching for something or someone to help them live less chaotic and more peaceful lives and are perfect targets for legalistic views of submission and obedience.

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2022-08-17 14:13

Submission becomes healing when the basis is a relationship of equals. This results in freedom—something that is counterintuitive to most who have experienced relational trauma. Sometimes during therapy, I became frustrated because my therapist would not tell me what to do. In my mind she was the authority. I was still living within the powerlessness of my childhood and looking for someone to tell me who I was and what to do. In a paradoxical twist, those impacted by relational trauma must learn what it means not to submit. Only then can submission be a choice.

 Part of this is developmental. Sarah had a hard time making adult decisions because she did not have experience making the interim decisions that should be part of healthy growing up

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Relational submission is another expression for the word “vulnerability.” Shame, our sense of not being enough, is the enemy of vulnerability as it destroys the ability to submit to one another. Curt Thompson wrote, “Healing shame requires our being vulnerable with other people in embodied actions. There is no other way, but shame will . . . attempt to convince us otherwise.”⁷ When healing occurs and these individuals impacted by trauma no longer need to live defensively, protecting their inner self that has been wounded by shame, they can then experience mutually submissive relationships. Understanding submission as a relationship between equals is essential for those who have been abused by the powerful. Submission does not require open access by any who would cause harm, either physically or emotionally. This is not submission; it is abuse. Being secure in who they are will allow the traumatized to recognize healthy relationships, set boundaries, and gladly serve one another.

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I slowly realized my unhealthy need to serve was embedded in my childhood trauma. Without this learning experience, I would be writing books to make myself valuable to God and others. And desperate for recognition.

 Wonder if this is discussed in
Celebrities for Jesus by Kathryn
Beatty.

Also how many of the Christian celebrity
culture cases of abuse, actually cases
of abuse victims becoming abusers b/c
they did not or would not seek healing
in order to not perpetuate abuse.

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2022-08-17 14:27

Ministry leaders need to recognize how easy it is to gravitate toward those who cannot say no. When staff members are overworked, it is easy to unintentionally fall into the trap of preying upon the vulnerability of those who so desperately need to belong. While sitting in a staff meeting, someone mentioned a need and another staff member said, "Oh, Ruth will be glad to do that." There was an awkward silence because Ruth was not on staff and was already doing everything no one else wanted to do. Value the Ruths with restraint!

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2022-08-17 14:39

Survivors generally stay to be hurt another day. They only leave when the damage is so devastating that it is impossible to stay. Or they are dismissed. The emotional turmoil during these challenging experiences often gives others more fodder for judgment. This is when those impacted by trauma most need the unconditional love of the corporate body of Christ.

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Then I came across a series of bar graphs showing the increased chance of risky health behaviors that rose in lockstep with the number of ACEs an individual experienced. These behaviors included smoking, alcohol and drug addiction, promiscuity, and suicide. As I stared at the graphs, it began to sink in—the church traditionally called all these behaviors “sin.” In truth, they are all survival-based forms of self-regulation, as discussed earlier—suicide is the result of finding no other option to calm the inner storm.

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2022-08-17 14:42

In his book *In the Realm of Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction*, Gabor Maté stated, “It is impossible to understand addiction without asking what relief the addict finds, or hopes to find, in the drug or the addictive behaviour.”³

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What they said to me made it feel like I was the one who did something wrong. After that night, I was afraid that everyone in the church thought I’d committed some horrible sin. I never felt guilty about it until that happened, and then after that, I never felt forgiven. From then on, I was always on guard.”

 There are ways that being to something is a sin and feeling shame may be appropriate. But so much of our understanding of sin is cultural and people becoming Christians are attempting cross cultural translation.

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For every believer, it is essential to find a path to worship. For the traumatized, this is particularly important, especially if the trauma was in the context of the church. I end this section with possibly my favorite of Foster's words: "We are free in Christ to use whatever forms will enhance our worship, and if any form hinders us from experiencing the living Christ—too bad for the form."⁶ It is not about form; it is about a relationship.

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It is nearly impossible to be hypervigilant and experience joy at the same time.

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2022-08-22 10:33

The time when intervention could have prevented tragedy would have been during his ministry training. There is often a misconception that a call to ministry comes with the necessary spirituality to grow sufficiently during the preparation process. One

e again, the problem is not spiritual.

● <Trauma in the Pews> Page: 226

2022-08-22 12:17

Leaders who do not take time and effort to heal will end up in situations where they are helping others while still in the desert. Without enough water, they both become too dehydrated to survive. Nouwen addressed this by saying, “Who can listen to a story of loneliness and despair without taking the risk of experiencing similar pains in his own heart and even losing his precious peace of mind? In short: ‘Who can take away suffering without entering it?’”³ Professional counselors and therapists know this danger and are taught to set boundaries and remain accountable to mentors or colleagues.

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Faith communities sometimes provide too much grace to leaders without requiring accountability. In other situations, no grace is given to leaders who struggle. There seems to be no way to predict this. Grave sins can be swept under the carpet while minor misjudgments, real or perceived, result in modern-day tar and feathering. These reactions are true from both leadership and laypeople. It is much like the lives of children who live with unpredictable parents. It is the perfect storm for chronic stress. The situation for those who serve in supporting roles as assistant pastors is even more complicated. A young man who had survived several difficult ministry situations said, “The church needs a human resources department. There is no place for young staff members to voice concerns.”

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2022-08-22 12:23

Many unhealed leaders are hiding the inner turmoil of childhood trauma. I know this is true; I was one of them. If healing had been encouraged, it would have helped me walk into therapy much sooner in my life, even though the help might not have been trauma based. Our current and future leaders need permission to say when they are not okay and seek professional trauma-based help. Every church member and leader would benefit from sitting on a therapist’s couch and taking an honest look at their childhood. It does not have to be horrific abuse to unconsciously affect us.

Not having childhood needs met is enough. Incorrectly interpreting a childhood event and internalizing the wrong message is enough. Being bullied as a child is enough. Healing is the path to spiritual growth, and there is much at stake when those who have not healed harm those who desperately need someone to care about them. How much better to receive this help as part of their preparation.

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2022-08-22 12:45

Principle #1: Trauma-Responsive Ministry Places Relationships First Jesus always put relationship before repentance when interacting with the wounded and suffering. We should follow this example.

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The litmus test for trauma-responsive faith communities is how leaders and laypeople respond to the vulnerable sharing of trauma.

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When I first shared my story with others, I sometimes felt affirmed by their responses, but when alone, the old messages of shame would surface, telling me it was a mistake to share and that the person was just being nice, and so on. The greatest gift was when I was contacted the next day and thanked again for trusting them with my story. Stories are sacred sharings, and the sharing requires many affirmations.

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2022-08-22 12:47

A trauma-responsive church works together to help the traumatized to heal the pain at its source. They also support families and communities in ways that can greatly reduce the traumatic experiences of children.

Jesus did not have to suffer the pain of the violence inflicted on him. Just as many suffered as innocent children, so did Jesus, without sin, enter into suffering and humiliation. This is the story those who have experienced trauma need to hear. The sin was not their own but instead perpetrated against them. Jesus understands relational betrayal.
