

# *Living Hope*

living resilient and renewed



# Living Hope

Living Hope is a 16-week curriculum to use personally, one-on-one, or in a small group experience to guide you through simple biblical and neuroscience insights and tools to reduce the symptoms and challenges with trauma and/or PTSD.

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**GRACE ALLIANCE**  
HEALTHY SOLUTIONS FOR YOUR MIND

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# Vision

Trauma encompasses a wide range of possible experiences and events including childhood physical/sexual abuse, neglect, domestic violence, criminal victimization (e.g., rape), sudden death of a loved one, natural disaster (e.g., hurricanes, tornados, floods, earthquakes) and war. Research conducted by the National Institutes of Health finds that approximately 51% of women and 61% of men in the United States will experience at least one traumatic event in their lifetime.

After exposure to a traumatic event a large percentage of individuals show the mental and physical symptoms of post-traumatic stress. With time the symptoms for most will diminish and eventually end. However, a small percentage of individuals (~ 20%) do not show this type of resilience and develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Early intervention and treatment are important to minimize the prevalence and severity of the disorder.

## **support |sə'pɔrt|**

**1 to bear all or part of the weight of; hold up:**

**2 give assistance to; enable to function or act.**

One simple way you can help the survivors of trauma is by starting and facilitating a Living Hope Group in your area. Hope Groups were developed by the Grace Alliance, whose heart and vision is to relieve suffering, reveal Christ, and restore lives (John 9:1-3) to those struggling with mental health difficulties and disorders. Living Hope Groups are designed to provide an ongoing support structure to help trauma survivors hold one another up and give each person practical skills and tools in order to regain their lives and rebuild their families. All of this is done in a Christ-centered environment with a clear focus on the necessity of God's grace for life transformation.

Living Hope Groups focus on the positive, where the goal of each meeting is to end with a greater understanding and vision concerning their traumatic experience and related symptoms. While the Living Hope Group does allow some time to share pressing difficulties, the emphasis is on learning how to filter difficulties through God's grace and implementing the many practical skills and tools presented during the meetings.

# Group Structure and Flow

**COMMUNITY AND DISCOVERY:** Each Grace Group session allows for personal sharing and relationship building. Then, the group works together through each topic and allows for personal discovery through discussion and practicing the tools. Group members will want to have their own workbook copy to make notes and as a personal resource to review the various topics and tools.

**FOR ANYONE AT ANY TIME:** While the Grace Group follows a weekly curriculum each group topic stands alone allowing visitors to come at any point. If the group continues a second time, these new members can cover the other topics with the new group (or can review on their own).

**WEEKLY MEETINGS:** The group is designed to meet weekly for 16 weeks OR can be divided up into two separate 8 week sessions with a break in the middle (e.g., fall, break for holidays, continue in spring).

**PERSONAL WORKBOOK:** Use your own journal or notebook to answer the questions and work on each topic and the related tools. Take your time and work through the workbook at your leisure. Try to apply your new tools / skills for yourself and to improve your relationship with your loved ones.

## HOW THE GROUP WORKS

1

### FAITH

A scripture that looks at a Biblical story related to the topic. A general overview of the scripture is given.

Read the scripture together, the short commentary, and then have discovery discussion.

2

### FACTS

Specific facts related to the topic to be used for discussion.

Read the fact and then use the question for group discussion.

### ACTIVITY

Many of the topics come with additional information and practical tools.

Follow the instructions listed in each Activity section.

3

### FUTURE

Practical suggestions and tips individuals can immediately apply in their daily lives.

Read the points for overall encouragement to incorporate the topic and tools discussed.

## Grace Group Guidelines

1. **TO GIVE** understanding, respect, encouragement, and compassionate support.
2. **TO DISCOVER** hope, tools, and to learn from one another's journey.
3. **TO NOT FIX** anyone's challenges with immediate advice and solutions.
4. **TO NOT DEBATE** the right or wrong doctrine or theology.
5. **TO RESPECT** and maintain one another's confidentiality.

## Hope Group Prayer

Father, thank you for being with us  
and understanding our mental health journey.

Give us wisdom to discover helpful  
insight and tools for each of our paths.

Thank you for giving us hope, grace, and  
Your steadfast love for better days to come.

In Jesus name, Amen.

Use these guidelines and / or sample prayer at the beginning of each group.

# Stress and Trauma

## THE HEART OF GOD

Traumatic experiences are sudden and unexpected events outside the range of normal human experiences, that threaten life, health and/or personal integrity, and to which a person responds with intense fear, horror or helplessness. Normal stress-related reactions to trauma, many of which normalize with time, are fear and anxiety, the avoidance of reminders, fantasies and dreams, recollections of the event, sadness and anger, guilt and self-blame and concentration and sleep problems.

### KEY POINT

Stress is a shared human experience that results from the biologically determined “fight-or-flight” response.

# Faith

## Guidelines and Sharing

To begin, review the group guidelines. Then, take time to share your encouraging stories and/or any challenges. Then, pray before starting the group topic (see sample prayer).

### FAITH (Psalm 107:1, 20)

Is God good and does He really care for us? We have all heard this question: "How could a loving God allow \_\_\_\_\_?" Fill in the blank with any horribly traumatic event that occurs here on planet Earth (e.g., natural disaster, war, victimized by others). People often use this dilemma to argue against not only the love of God but also the very existence of God. But God does love us and is good despite the tragedies. He is full of mercy, love, and compassion to see His grace in us work, to not only endure through trials, but to restore our minds and bodies from the effects of them. He is patient and gracious in the restoring process and will help us discover that He is indeed good, and He longs to be in an ever-deepening relationship with us ... restoring and delivering us from despair to the living hope we have in Him (1 Peter 1:3).

**What do you find interesting about this?**

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# Facts

1

The human response to trauma occurs simultaneously on three different but related levels: biological, psychological and social. It is not a personal or faith weakness, but a normal reaction.

**Did you realize that part of your difficulties were reactive symptoms?**

2

**Biological** – During times of stress the brain and adrenal glands release chemicals that at first might be helpful in getting people to protect themselves, but over time can cause negative reactions in the body (e.g., insomnia, agitation and impulsive anger, suppressed immune system becoming susceptible to health issues).

3

**Psychological** – After a traumatic experience people often find it hard to concentrate and make thoughtful decisions. People may not think they are safe (even if they are) and feel afraid. They may feel guilty or blame themselves for some part of the traumatic event. Survivors may think they have no control over anything and therefore feel helpless.

**Have you noticed these biological and mental difficulties and what do you do to help manage them?**

4

**Social** – Individuals who have been exposed to trauma may have a tendency to withdraw and isolate themselves. Having understanding friends and family can help create safe community.

**Why is this difficult ... what helps you not be isolated or find life-giving support?**

## ACTIVITY: COMMON SYMPTOMS RELATED TRAUMA

Review and read through the descriptions on the next page.

**Discuss which symptoms, if any, you have had or are currently struggling with.  
Write down others not listed and share how (or discuss ideas) you have handled them.**

# Common Trauma Related Symptoms

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## Biological

Jumpy and easily startled  
Feeling tense or "on edge"  
Difficulty sleeping  
Irritability or outbursts of anger  
Sensitive to loud or specific noises  
Seem to have more sickness than usual

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## Psychological

Flashbacks (reliving the trauma over and over)  
Bad dreams and visions  
Frightening and intrusive thoughts  
Feeling strong guilt, depression, or worry  
Negative thoughts of God's disapproval  
Trouble remembering the traumatic event

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## Social

Avoiding places, people, situations, (and objects) that are reminders of the experience  
Tend to isolate and avoid going out  
Feeling emotionally numb and unable to engage emotionally with others  
Losing interest in enjoyable activities  
Relationship conflicts with spouse, family, children, friends  
Restless in crowds, church, or events (high alertness and not feeling safe)

# Future

1

Physical activity and exercise can help minimize the physical symptoms of stress by causing a reduction in stress hormones and an increase in the release of positive biochemicals such as endorphins in the body.

2

Survivors of trauma tend to heal and recover much faster when they are around other, supportive people. Social connection and engagement help survivors to feel and know that they are not alone. Being in this Living Hope Group is a good start towards developing a supportive caring community around you.

3

Remind yourself that healing is a process that you have begun, but it will take time.

4

We do not worship a distant, unapproachable God. Jesus knows what it is to suffer (Hebrews 2:17-18). We can take comfort in the fact that God can relate to us on our level.

## CLOSING PRAYER TIME

To end the group, take time to pray together as a group.  
Pray for anything related to the topic or any other needs.

1. **No pressure** for each person to pray.
2. **No pressure** to have eloquent or long prayers. Praying, "Thank you," is enough.
3. **Always try to end** with prayer that reaffirms comfort and hope.