

Soul Repair: Recovery from Moral Injury After War

(Boston: Beacon Press, 2012)

By Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini, with Camillo “Mac” Bica,
Herman Keizer, Jr., Pamela Lightsey, and Camilo Mejia

A Study Guide for Congregations



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Few major social institutions teach the moral integrity, courage, personal discipline, humility, sense of purpose and responsibility, and commitment to the lives of others better than the Armed Services. And none works so thoroughly to compromise, deny, dismantle, and destroy the very values it teaches. This is the paradox of war. *Soul Repair*, p. 128

Overview

War in any form can overwhelm moral conscience. To grasp the meaning of moral injury after war, listen to the stories in this book deeply, with your heart. Moral injury can afflict anyone faced with morally ambiguous choices under extreme life or death conditions, so, as you read and discuss it, avoid debates about the justness of a particular war.

As the first book written specifically on moral injury, *Soul Repair* embeds stories of people and strategies that helped veterans on their journey to recovery, but it is not a how-to guide. More ways to help can be found at www.brite.edu/soulrepair and in forthcoming work from the team that prepared this guide.

Goals of this guide are to help you:

1. Understand the differences between moral injury and PTSD, which can be concurrent, but are not the same.
2. Understand *deep listening* – i.e. how we can be effective “listeners” without biased comment or judgment.
3. Recognize or identify veterans who might suffer from moral injury and how we might respond with openness and empathy.
4. Recognize that every one of us has a debt to those we send to war and that it is imperative we do all we can to help them find their way back home to us.
5. Understand and engage the entire society – especially its congregations, community organizations, colleges, and workplaces – in healing for those with moral injury so they

may integrate traumatic memories as part of their lives, rebuild their moral identity and sense of meaning, and recover capacities for intimacy, empathy, play, curiosity, and equilibrium.

6. Participate in community conversations of mutual responsibility and vulnerability about our own relationships to war and its aftermath.

Chapter-by-Chapter Guide

(This guide can be used to read the book alone or in a book study group. As you work your way through the questions, we suggest you write out your answers as you go.)

Lesson One

Introduction: Review our Understanding of Moral Injury

1. Define moral injury and discuss your understandings
2. How does moral injury differ from PTSD and what are some implications for how to address moral injury?
3. How might moral injury play a role in veteran or active duty military suicide? Ex. Clay Hunt.
4. Discuss the implications of moral injury on understandings of God, the ability to trust authority, traditional church, and religious affiliations.
5. Read Psalm 51 aloud, feeling your way into the mood of the poet; 2 Samuel 12: 1-13; and Hebrews 4:16. How do these scriptures relate to Moral Injury? Can you think of others?

Lesson Two

Chapter 1: Getting into the Personal Stories

Watch the Tyler Boudreau video, (10 minutes) and discuss your responses.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5uaMwZVhwQ>

1. What does it mean to swear an oath that requires putting oneself in harm's way? Is this something you would be prepared to do? Everyone who joins the military has one thing in common; they must swear to the enlisted or officer Oath. The Oath of Enlistment is something that every service member must promise and adhere to for

his/her entire military career. They also swear to discipline and accepting orders. Finally, they vow to face the UCMJ (Uniform Code of Military Justice) should any violation of discipline arise.

Discuss the Oath of Enlistment (for enlisted) and Oath of Office (for officers) and their implications for moral discernment in service members on active duty.

The Oath of Enlistment:

“I, _____, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign or domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God.”

The Oath of Office:

I, _____(SSAN), having been appointed an officer in the _____ (Military Branch) of the United States, as indicated above in the grade of _____ do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign or domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservations or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office upon which I am about to enter. So help me God.”

2. How might a combatant who serves willingly, even with great enthusiasm, suffer from Moral Injury?
3. Why would a combatant fight and kill when strongly opposed to a particular war?
4. If a large number of civilians object to a war as immoral or unjust, how might this affect our reaction to and regard for the combatants returning from such a war?
5. Read again Psalm 51, 2 Samuel 12: 1-13 and Hebrews 4:16. Discuss how your understanding might have changed.
6. Read, Romans 8:6, 2 Thessalonians 3:16 and Ephesians 4:26. Discuss how they relate to moral injury.

Lesson Three

Chapter 2: How does Moral Injury happen?

Watch the Camilo Mejia video, (5 minutes) and discuss your response.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZL9gUoHf58c>

1. What important decisions would you be forced to make if you were drafted, trained, and sent to war? What are the “hands -on the trigger” decisions that would change your life no matter your choice? What might be the impact of the hands-on and hands-off decisions?
2. Read Psalm 103: 8-12 and discuss its relevance to moral injury.
3. Name some differences in combat training and the actual combat environment from WWI and WWII through Korea, Vietnam to present. Why might this information be significant regarding moral injury?
4. Note the effect of liturgy and sacraments on the soldiers as described on pages 24-27- reread again as a group. What might be concluded from this?
5. Read Psalm 18:3-5 and Deuteronomy 31:8.

Lesson Four

Chapter 3: In the aftermath

Watch the Joshua Casteel video, (9:34 minutes) and discuss your response.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fM8jjqxtSpY>

1. How can you imagine wrestling through the inner conflicts between religious faith and combat service in relation to one’s enemies?
2. Check online for veteran suicide statistics from reliable sources. Note that most suicides are still Vietnam vets. These are veterans more than 40 years removed from combat. Why are their rates so high?
3. Re-read, as a group, pages 48-49. If you were a veteran arriving home from combat having recently witnessed the killing or maiming of a comrade or witnessed or been a party to the killing of children of the “enemy,” how might you react when someone passes you in an airport and says, “Thank you for your service” or “God bless you for your service” and goes on their way? What does it mean to “honor” someone’s military service or to call them “heroes.” Let the experience of war settle into your heart before you answer. What might you want to hear or experience coming home?

4. Re-read the last paragraph in chapter 3 on pages 66-67. How might you or your community support veterans in looking forward and rebuilding a new life after war?

Read carefully 1 Corinthians 13:13. Note how healing starts with Love – by and from the entire church community for the veteran, the veteran’s family and friends. How can your congregation be transformed by the presence of veterans and become a trustworthy partner in a lifelong journey together that will restore trust and offer spiritual grounding?

Read Romans 12:12, Isaiah 41:13 and Psalm 130 .

Lesson Five

Chapter 4: I will live with Moral Injury

1. Discuss the transition that combat veterans make from war to civilian life or a peacetime environment if they remain on active duty. What role might congregations take in this transition?
2. How might a “Christian soldier “justify his/her actions and behavior in a combat environment?
3. Some veterans return from war with a feeling that their country has betrayed them. What are some of these betrayals and how might these affect a veteran’s willingness to trust institutions or authorities?
4. Many veterans spend years dominated by anger for complex reasons. What are reasons a combat veteran might be easy to anger and who or what might they feel anger toward? How might your congregation handle anger without shaming or being afraid of veterans who might be struggling with anger?
5. Identify problems that a soldier might experience in leaving the military and transitioning into civilian life. Discuss and suggest a support system that would address these.
6. War changes people forever. What a service member considered “normal “ before serving in combat will not be something they can return to unchanged. List some types of assistance that would be helpful for a veteran in coping with these changes.
7. Read John 16:22, 2 Corinthians 5:7 and Psalm 37: 23-24.

Lesson Six

Chapter 5: Soul Repair and Conclusion

A veteran may return home to a loving family, a good job, friends and an accepting church. Yet, these groups may never be aware of the internal struggles that the veteran faces on a daily basis. When these groups notice changes it is often assumed or hoped that time will heal these conditions. When time doesn't and the conditions worsen, the veteran often withdraws and may even become separated from their family or community.

1. The Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF) program introduced in 2009 established five categories: (1) physical (2) emotional (3) social (4) familial and (5) spiritual. Describe spiritual fitness according to CSF and discuss its limitations in determining a service member's fitness for combat.
2. What, if any, responsibility do the church and community have in preparing service members for war and then assisting them in recovering from moral injury when they return?
3. Collective false forgiveness is what anthropologist Renato Rosaldo calls "imperialistic nostalgia." Explain this concept and describe its fallacies. What are the limits to forgiveness? What is possible for recovery from moral injury when forgiveness may not be possible or welcomed?
4. What does it mean when religious communities create a "place for grace" - a place for veterans to recover from moral injury?
5. Whatever war trauma a veteran is experiencing, the most successful step in the healing process is for veterans to tell their story to someone who is genuinely willing to listen. Describe the parameters and criteria of a good listener. Why is listening such a proven dynamic in the healing process?
6. What could a small group or an individual do to assist veterans in recovering from moral injury?
7. Read John 29:11, Psalm 23:4 Jeremiah 29:11, Ephesians 3:16, Matthew 11: 28-30, and Psalm 51:10

This study guide was prepared by Mike Hess and HC Palmer, Vietnam veterans and members of the RezVets Ministry Team at Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas, in consultation with Rita Nakashima Brock and students in the Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Moral Injury Course at Brite Divinity School, January 2014.