Hearing God: Transcending Trauma with Liz Wright and Dr. Beth Argot

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GlMHFYqOhB4&t=144s

Trauma, Worship, and Whole-Brain Healing

Dr. Beth Argot describes **trauma as anything that overwhelms a person's ability to cope**, leaving individuals feeling powerless, unseen, unsafe, or unable to process experiences. Rather than viewing trauma only as catastrophic events, she argues that many of the deepest wounds come from **small, repeated experiences accumulated over time**, especially during childhood. These layered experiences, often called complex trauma, may include abuse, bullying, neglect, rejection, or chronic stress. According to Argot, people frequently recover more quickly from a single major event than from years of smaller, unresolved wounds.

Trauma affects the brain in ways that can interfere with a person's perceived ability to connect with God. Using a model developed by **Daniel Siegel**, she divides brain functioning into three basic systems: the cortex (thinking and reasoning), the limbic system (emotion, sensation, and threat detection), and the brain stem (automatic bodily functions such as breathing and heart rate). During threatening situations, the brain's survival mechanisms become activated. The limbic system detects danger, the cortex temporarily goes offline, and the body enters fight, flight, or freeze responses. Trauma memories become stored largely in emotional and sensory regions of the brain, which may explain why many trauma survivors struggle to tell their stories coherently or even remember certain events.

Argot proposes that many experiences of spiritual disconnection during trauma may be explained, at least in part, by neurobiology rather than spiritual deficiency. She notes that many believers feel as though God has become distant during seasons of suffering, grief, or trauma. However, she suggests that this experience is often **a protective response of the brain rather than evidence of weak faith**. The body, designed by God for survival, sometimes protects itself through emotional numbing, forgetting, or withdrawal. She observes that many people feel isolated because churches often do not openly discuss these experiences, leading individuals to believe something is wrong with them spiritually.

A central theme in the discussion is the idea of "whole-brain connection with God." Argot suggests that people who continue to experience God's presence during difficult seasons are often those who have learned to engage both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of their faith. Modern Christianity, she argues, has become highly intellectualized, emphasizing teaching, sermons, Bible study, and doctrinal understanding, while often neglecting movement, creativity, sensory engagement, and embodied worship. She describes contemporary Christianity as becoming "a very cognitive faith."

For healing, Argot advocates the use of expressive arts, emphasizing that artistic ability is unnecessary because the healing comes from the process itself rather than the finished product. Activities such as drawing, writing, movement, music, clay work, painting, or simple creative exercises engage the entire brain and provide access to areas where trauma is stored. She recounts experiences in Ukraine, where therapists, counselors, and chaplains working amid ongoing war-related trauma found traditional therapeutic approaches insufficient. Through simple creative

exercises, participants who had felt emotionally frozen began reconnecting with themselves, with others, and with God.

One practical exercise she recommends is the "Brain Book." On one page individuals write prayers, thoughts, or journal entries, while on the facing page they respond visually through colors, sketches, symbols, or creative expression. This combination allows both analytical and imaginative processes to work together. She describes numerous testimonies of people experiencing renewed spiritual vitality and emotional healing through these practices, including former pastors who had become disconnected from church life due to spiritual wounds.

Argot also argues that Christian worship historically involved much more than intellectual engagement. She suggests that throughout much of church history worship was deeply sensory and participatory, involving movement, visual symbolism, ritual, architecture, and bodily engagement. In her view, many of these elements diminished following the Protestant Reformation, leading churches toward more sedentary and cognitive expressions of worship. While she does not advocate returning to ancient forms unchanged, she proposes rediscovering practices that engage the whole person in contemporary settings.

Perhaps her most significant insight is the relationship between worship and healing. She concludes:

"In the act of worship, we can be healing."

"In the process of healing, we can be worshiping."

Healing, therefore, becomes more than emotional recovery; it becomes an act of spiritual formation and transformation. Likewise, worship becomes more than singing or attending services—it becomes participation in God's restorative design for human beings.

For individuals currently experiencing trauma or spiritual numbness, Argot recommends engaging practices that involve the entire person rather than relying solely on traditional prayer. Suggested practices include:

- Walking, movement, swaying, or dance
- Listening to music balanced with intentional silence
- Drawing, painting, doodling, or journaling
- Creating visual responses to Scripture
- Writing prayers alongside artistic expression
- Spending time listening expectantly rather than only speaking to God
- Participating in safe, supportive community

She emphasizes that trauma tends to isolate people, making healing difficult in solitude. Consequently, intentional spaces of safety, creativity, and relational connection can become important contexts for recovery. Her broader vision is to create environments where those wounded

by trauma, including those harmed by church experiences, can reconnect with God and others without pressure or shame.

Key Quotes

- "Anything that overwhelms our ability to cope."
- "The most challenging trauma to heal from are the multiple layers of little things in life."
- "The thinking part of our brain goes offline."
- "It's nothing to do with faith. It's just biological."
- "People who sense God's presence very closely are generally people who have already connected with God in a whole-brain way."
- "We've become a very cognitive faith."
- "The arts use the whole brain."
- "In the act of worship, we can be healing."
- "In the process of healing, we can be worshiping."

Scriptures Mentioned or Inferred

- 1 Kings 19:11–13 — God's "still small voice"
- Psalm 46:10 — "Be still and know that I am God"
- Romans 12:2 — Renewal of the mind
- Psalm 149:3 — Praise through dance
- Psalm 150 — Worship through music and instruments
- Genesis 1:27 — Humanity created in God's image
- Isaiah 61:1–3 — Restoration and healing
- Matthew 11:28–30 — Rest for the weary