Equipping for Frontiers in Missions:
Trauma and the Resurrection

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Though death and suffering are universal, some vocations increase the likelihood of repeatedly encountering such events; missions is one such vocation (Bagley 2003, 105). These circumstances violate God's design for his image bearers and often severely impact a person's perceptions of self and the world he inhabits. Therefore, these experiences can lead to a variety of disruptions designated as trauma. In spite of risk factors common to many fields, formal missions training in the church and academic institutions sometimes overlooks preparation for suffering or awareness of trauma (Rance 2021, 142–44). Sending and supporting workers, especially in unreached contexts, should include preparation for heightened risk (Irvine, Armentrout, and Miner 2006, 332–34), and theology is essential as part of this process. In particular, the twenty-first century church should consider a key theological emphasis of the first-century church: throughout the book of Acts, Jesus's resurrection is the most frequently cited event, motivating believers to follow Jesus and embrace risk on his mission.[1] Furthermore, both the narratives of Paul's ministry in Acts and his epistles highlight the centrality of resurrection theology in Christian response to suffering.

My thesis is that preparation for missional service should include a robust understanding of the doctrine of bodily resurrection with application to suffering and trauma. I will develop this argument in two movements. First, I will describe trauma's prevalence in missions and the role of plausibility structures in trauma. Second, I will examine the apostle Paul's plausibility structure for bodily suffering and resurrection in the context of missional endeavors. I will conclude with several suggestions for application in pre-field training.

[1] Jesus's resurrection is explicitly cited on thirteen different occasions (Acts 1:3; 22 2:24–32; 3:15, 26; 4:10; 4:33; 5:30; 11:40–41; 13:30–37; 17:3; 17:31–32; 23:6; 26:23; cf. 24:15, 21 and 25:19). Jesus's death is cited nine times, all concurrent with the resurrection (Acts 1:3; 2:23; 3:13–15, 18; 4:10; 5:30; 11:39; 13:28–29; 17:3; 26:23).

Missions and Trauma

To begin, I will describe what I mean by the term *trauma*, discuss its prevalence in missions, and summarize the idea of plausibility structures relevant to trauma. Based on the doctrine of man's creation in God's image as a dualistic whole[2] and considerations from trauma literature (Strickland 2022, 26; Van der Kolk 2015, 21; Langberg 2015, 78–79, 118; Walsh 1996, 245–47; Figley 1985, xviii), I understand trauma to entail (1) an overwhelming event that violates aspects of a person's image-bearing identity; (2) harm to body and soul as interdependent dimensions of an embodied person; and (3) ongoing, disruptive responses in a person's perception of self, other image bearers, God, and circumstances.[3]

Since trauma occurs everywhere that image bearers face the fall's effects, why consider missions contexts in particular? Many reasons could be discussed. I will suggest three: cross-cultural vulnerability, hazardous locations, and spiritual warfare. First, broadly speaking, missionaries live with significant stress factors. For instance, cross-cultural adaptation significantly raises demands on a person's capacities for basic life functions. The multi-layered dimensions of living life while learning language and culture place missionaries in a vulnerable position, which can be strange and disorienting for otherwise competent adults. Consequently, encountering suffering in these contexts can readily multiply stress to a level that overwhelms.

Second, and more specific to many unreached fields, vulnerable missionaries often live in vulnerable contexts. Unreached people often live in unsafe places. Developing nations generally suffer from a lack of infrastructure, medical resources, and educational opportunities; all these factors increase the prevalence of crime and intensify the effects of natural disasters. Also, many missionaries live under the pressure of hostile civil authorities and the associated concern for local friends' safety.

Third, spiritual warfare is intense where demonic religious systems have been unchallenged, sometimes for centuries. Satan seeks to destroy and devour through

[2] This view rests on the *imago Dei* as the center of biblical anthropology, defining the whole person's identity (humans are God's image) and function (humans image God): body and soul, capacities and function, reason and relationships (Hoekema 1986, 66–78; Bavinck 2003, 555–60).

[3] These perceptions manifest in diverse ways. By specifying perception, I do not preclude embodied dimensions of trauma; rather, I see perception as foundational to all trauma responses. The perception of ongoing danger drives many manifestations of trauma, including various health issues, hypervigilance, anxiety, depression, and more. The perception that a past event is still impending can lead to flashbacks, nightmares, and dissociation. The perception that people cannot be trusted manifests in disorganized attachment, withdrawal, grief, anger, and more. We cannot discern perception apart from its manifestation in our thoughts, words, actions, emotions, and physical states. We also cannot understand the reasons for a person's responses apart from their perception of themselves, other people, God, and their circumstances. The complexity of our constitution as embodied souls demands patient, careful consideration of the whole person.

deception and murder (John 8:44; 1 Pet 5:8); he unleashes hatred for God upon God's image bearers (Rev 12:10; Mark 1:13; 1 Cor 7:5). In the darkness of cultures untouched by the gospel, abuse and violence abound, often without the intervention or resources of a civil justice system to combat them (Ps 74:20).

Because the prevalence of significant stress, suffering, and spiritual warfare increases the potential for missionaries to experience trauma on their fields (Irvine, Armentrout, and Miner 2006, 329), training and sending entities should urgently consider these factors. No amount or kind of training can guarantee the avoidance of trauma. However, by evaluating their own plausibility structures (their view of what is plausible in life), missionaries can prepare for unexpected troubles.[4]

Past experiences form our plausibility structures: our perception of present reality and expectations for future reality—in other words, our understanding of the world as it is and our anticipation of the world as it will be. Generally, our experiences and beliefs shape our perception, which in turn generates our assumptions of normalcy and expectations for continuity, resulting in actions and responses. For example, Russell Moore recounts the eerie silence of the orphanage nursery in Russia where he and his wife met their sons during the long process of adoption. The babies had learned that crying was pointless since no one came to meet their needs if they wept. The first time he heard his son cry, Moore knew that the little boy was convinced he had a father who would hear him. The experience of receiving parental care had changed the child's plausibility structure: he perceived that he was loved, assumed that receiving care was the new normal, and expected his father to respond if he cried (2015, 46–47).

In his discussion of stress and trauma, Mardi Horowitz employs the term "inner schemata" to represent this concept. The human mind functions from "relatively enduring structures of meaning" that form assumptions, explain the world, and guide a person's actions in it (1997, 12, 93).[5] These structures and assumptions are not static: we continually revise them in light of new events, experiences we interpret by and integrate with our schemata (92–93). Horowitz defines "a stressful life event" as an event that is dissonant with our plausibility structures; because of its dissonance, it "threatens equilibrium." Faced with such a dilemma, people do one of three things: (1) reinterpret the event to match the schemata, (2) reinterpret the event as insignificant, or (3) revise the schemata to accord with the new reality. Events of death, injury, and violence preclude the first two options (93–94). In other words, traumatic events exert

[4] I draw the term *plausibility structure* from Peter Berger, who employs it to mean a credible view of reality that determines and explains behavior, formed in the context of social interactions (Berger 1969, 42–47).

[5] Ronnie Janoff-Bulman similarly observes that people generally function from their "conceptual system without awareness of its central postulates"; their "basic assumptions are implicit, rather than explicit" (1985, 18).

strong influence because they defy integration into our existing expectations: we do not know how to interpret and respond to them. They possess the potential to overwhelm because they are antithetical to God's design for his image bearers, and they usually break the boundaries of existing plausibility structures.

Multiple sources in trauma literature connect this concept of plausibility structures with the nature of trauma itself. Encountering death and suffering can "force us to recognize, objectify, and challenge our basic assumptions" that previously went unnoticed[6] (such as, "My world is relatively safe, and I can take care of myself," or "The world is evil, but God will protect me"). Judith Herman similarly categorizes trauma's impact on a victim's "fundamental assumptions" of "the safety of the world, the positive value of the self, and the meaningful order of creation (2015, 51). Most symptoms of post-traumatic stress are "largely attributable to the shattering of victims' basic assumptions about themselves and their world" (Janoff Bulman 1985, 18). These assumptions can include their "sense of invulnerability to harm": their basic confidence that they can live ordered lives in an ordered world (Figley 1985, xviii). Valerie Rance expresses the concept this way: "Traumatic events can destroy a person's trust in the world, other people, and even his or her self-identity" (2021, 14). Essentially, the potential for stressful events to overwhelm a person and lead to PTSD is related to his or her plausibility structures.

Given that connection, and given that missions increases the likelihood of encountering potentially traumatic events, preparation for missions should include (1) raising self-awareness particularly in perception of self, the world, and God related to suffering and weakness and (2) as needed, reforming plausibility structures to accord with a biblical perspective. A distinctly Christian aim in counseling after traumatic events includes helping people understand and trust what God says about himself, his purposes, his relationship with his children, his work for and in his people now and into eternity, our response to him, and the place of death and suffering in the whole story of all that he is doing. Before sending a person into a context where he or she will almost certainly face death and suffering, we should pursue the same aim.

Expanding plausibility structures with relevant theological themes can provide interpretive categories for a range of experiences. This preparation may not remove the impact of those events (death and suffering do not properly belong in human experience, and intense effects and responses are natural in a dis-ordered world), but it

[6] Janoff-Bulman identifies three kinds of assumptions impacted in trauma: "(1) the belief in personal invulnerability, (2) the perception of the world as meaningful and comprehensible, and (3) the view of ourselves in a positive light" (1985, 18).

charts a direction forward because missionaries will be better equipped to interpret those events: to some degree, they can fit into their plausibility structure. Many theological themes could be explored and applied in this process: God's providence, human dependence, God's glory, human telos, Christ's sympathy as high priest, God's presence, and more.[7] Particularly, theology of the saints' bodily resurrection is a primary support beam in a plausibility structure that can bear up beneath the weight of death and suffering. This doctrine affirms the expectation of death and personal weakness in the present world under the curse, though reframing every experience of death and its effects in light of God's power and promises.

Suffering and Resurrection

The early church exemplifies this resurrection focus. Risk in missions is no novelty; the church was born and its mission begun in a context of severe suffering: violence, imprisonment, abuse, natural calamity, and martyrdom. How did Jesus's first followers face these afflictions with unflinching hope? The bodily resurrection of Jesus radically transformed their assumptions about their own life and death, the world and their purpose in it, and the suffering they endured. In Gethsemane, the threat of club and sword had scattered the disciples to hide in panic (Matt 26:47, 56). Post-resurrection, on Pentecost, the Spirit's indwelling sent them out on mission with boldness (Acts 2:1–11). Facing severe suffering for the sake of Jesus, the believers yet persisted in gospel ministry (Acts 4:2–3; 5:29–42; 7:55–60; 8:1–4). The early church celebrated Jesus's resurrection in every gospel proclamation, and the danger of persecution was overshadowed by the Spirit-empowered courage of resurrection hope.

Within this historical context, the Apostle Paul's ministry was no anomaly.[8] Throughout his epistles, the apostle honestly describes his suffering on mission yet centers his perspective on the hope of bodily resurrection, which controlled his present perceptions and future expectations. Though the resurrection is a significant theme in many texts, I will consider application from three passages illustrating how the

[7] Rance observes seven coping skills employed by biblical personalities who faced severe stress, all deriving from trust in God and corresponding to significant theological themes. Rance measured the use of these skills among missionaries who experienced trauma, concluding that such skills positively impact the missionaries' well-being post-trauma (2021, 222–36, 241).

[8] Paul experienced multiple aspects of suffering and violence. Before his conversion, he himself had perpetrated violence against the saints (Acts 8:1–3), whom he later came to fiercely love (Gal 4:19; Phil 1:7–8; 4:1; 1 Thess 2:1–11). Paul humbly received divine grace to the glory of God, though he did not forget his past actions (1 Tim 1:12–17). During his ministry, Paul experienced profound weakness, shame, and affliction in his body. Jews and Gentiles alike responded to his preaching with violence: lashings, beatings, attempted murder, and imprisonment. Paul also suffered the threats intrinsic to first-century travel: shipwrecks, river crossings, wild animals, exposure, and thieves (2 Cor 11:23–33).

resurrection contributed to Paul's plausibility structure. In these texts, the resurrection assures *meaning* for suffering, provides *comfort* in suffering, and promises *glory* through and after suffering.

Meaning: 1 Corinthians 15

In his first canonical letter to the saints at Corinth, Paul addresses their questions about the resurrection with his longest discourse on the topic: four movements of thought and a concluding application. First, Jesus's resurrection is essential to the gospel message and supported by eyewitness testimony (vv. 1–11). Second, the meaning of Christian faith and ministry rests on the doctrine of bodily resurrection (vv. 12–34; see Lockwood 2000, 563). Third, the resurrected body will feature both continuity and discontinuity with the temporal body (vv. 35–49). Fourth, resurrection hope includes bodily transformation and ultimate, eternal victory (vv. 50–57). In conclusion, the certainty of the resurrection guarantees ultimate meaning for faith and suffering, motivating steadfast labor in Christ (v. 58). Overall, this chapter reframes perspective on (1) death in this world and (2) weakness in the self, based on the certainty of God's work to raise the saints in Christ.

First, resurrection assumes death: in this world, experiencing suffering and death remains plausible, even certain. However, Jesus's own death and resurrection dealt a death blow to sin and all its effects, changing the meaning of death from tragedy to comedy: all will end well (vv. 3–4). Because the dead in Christ will rise, the gospel message bursts with meaning (vv. 13–16). Faith brings ultimate value and eternal forgiveness; therefore, even literal, physical death does not destroy the believer (vv. 17–18). The saints in Christ have a sure hope of life after death, and are therefore of all people most to be envied, even in the face of death (v. 19).

In this world, saints expect safety through dying and rising like Christ because of his promise to fully vanquish death in the world to come (vv. 20–28). Jesus's resurrection is "the firstfruits" of more to follow, promising a full harvest of resurrected saints when he returns to destroy every evil power and "deliver up the kingdom to the Father," putting every enemy "under his feet" (vv. 20, 23–25; Lockwood 2000, 569). Paul's plausibility structure includes the presence and the power of death as an enemy not yet destroyed: when he faces death and suffering, he is not bewildered (v. 26).[9] However, because of Jesus's victory through resurrection, the wounds that death presently inflicts are the flailing jabs of a dying foe, already condemned and awaiting destruction. The

[9] The pangs of death still pierce the hearts of the saints, and such "grief can be an entirely appropriate manifestation of the biblical understanding that death is the enemy that has not yet been fully overcome" (Lockwood 2000, 571).

saints expect to suffer the sting of death but face this enemy with settled confidence that Jesus triumphs. The resurrection provides an interpretive category where we can place death and suffering to make sense of it in the whole picture of God's redemptive story.

Second, bodily resurrection also reshapes our view of personal weakness. Acutely aware of his physical weakness, Paul faced danger every hour and death every day, and the resurrection infused those afflictions with eternal meaning (vv. 29–32; cf. 2 Cor 11:16–12:10). If the resurrection were not part of his plausibility structure, hedonism would be the only sensible lifestyle. However, faith in the resurrection affected his behavior and emotions: for the sake of the gospel, Paul faced death with the expectation that danger multiplies gain for the saint. His vulnerability did not immobilize him, but rather, his hope of bodily resurrection inspired his acceptance of bodily weakness and suffering on mission.

The promise of power in the resurrection body can bear the present weight of weakness in the mortal body. Though a different kind of substance, the resurrected body will rise from the temporal body and eclipse its dishonor and weakness with glory and power (1 Cor 15:39–44).[10] Frail bodies vulnerable to death in this world are unsuited for eternal life in the world to come. Therefore, resurrection necessarily guarantees bodily transformation to inherit God's kingdom (vv. 50–51). This truth can radically transform the perspective of a saint experiencing trauma related to bodily suffering: trauma does not get the last word. God will have the last word about the bodies of his people: glorious and powerful, bearing "the image of the man of heaven" (vv. 43, 49).[11]

Paul concludes the discourse with pointed application. Resurrection hope establishes the saints "steadfast" and "immovable," fueling abundant effort "in the work of the Lord."[12] In this light, we perceive that our labors in a dangerous world and accompanying suffering in weak bodies are "not in vain," but endowed with ultimate meaning through the grace of our risen, victorious Lord (v. 58). The plausibility of death and resurrection with Jesus bolstered Paul with steadfast faith as he faced suffering and

[10] As Mitchell Chase observes, "the death of the body is a sowing, and the resurrection of the body is a reaping or harvesting of what was sown"; "the body that dies is the body that rises" (Chase 2022, 126–27)

[11] In the resurrection, God will renew the saints in embodied glory, "when death and all that inevitably trails in his wake shall be swallowed up in Victory, and the body of sin delivered from all that causes its bearer, or erstwhile bearer, to groan" (Vos 1952, 309).

[12] Paul follows a similar line of reasoning to the same application in Philippians 3:7–4:1. Christ's return will fulfill the transformation of redemption, making "our lowly body to be like his glorious body" (3:21). The saints will indeed attain "the resurrection from the dead" for which they strain (3:11, 13). When Jesus returns, he will "subject all things to himself," including death and its ensuing corruption (3:21; cf. 1 Cor 15:20–28). The application of this hope is steadfast life in Christ, as beloved brothers in the family of faith (4:1). All who share in Christ's suffering will share in his resurrection. Because Jesus will return and transform our bodies to glory and immortality, we can "stand firm thus in the Lord" (4:1).

death in his labors on mission. For modern sufferers, trauma tells a story of meaning lost, but death cannot render the saint's experiences meaningless: the meaning of our lives and suffering is determined by Jesus's resurrection and promised restoration.

Comfort: 2 Corinthians 1:3–11

Suffering and comfort are interrelated themes in Paul's second canonical letter to the saints at Corinth. The apostle receives and extends comfort in his suffering, beginning in his opening remarks.[13] In the face of seemingly certain death, God comforted Paul with the sure hope of bodily resurrection. From this passage, I will draw three observations based on union with Christ and its guarantee of resurrection that can reshape the saints' perspective of suffering and self, resulting in hope and comfort.

First, Paul perceives himself in union with Christ and his body, the church, not as an autonomous entity. His own suffering was therefore just one facet of participation in union with Christ and his people; Paul did not face death alone. Further, the communal sharing of suffering with Christ ensures the sharing of comfort in Christ as well, leading to full participation in Christ's resurrection (vv. 5, 9–10).

Second, Paul and his team viewed their present encounters with death as designed to remove self-reliance and teach dependence on God "who raises the dead" (v. 9b). Confronting their own mortality removed their ability to trust their own strength. Facing death forced their focus to the God who brings life out of death. Since God would raise the dead in Christ on the last day, Paul could calmly perceive himself as dead at present and trust God's deliverance from all distresses, rather than persisting in a delusion of personal invincibility (Gill [1809] 2005, 758).

Third, Paul was comforted and confident about present and future deliverance (vv. 9–10). The apostle's expectation may seem misplaced, given the prior martyrdom of other saints and Paul's own eventual beheading (Acts 6:54–60; 12:1–2; Eusebius, 2.25). However, their present deliverance from distress foreshadowed the future resurrection (Keener 2005, 158). Whether they would be delivered *from* death as in their most recent "deadly peril" or *through* death as in the redemptive work of Jesus, God always delivers his children. God comforted Paul and his team with the certainty of resurrection, enabling them to "set [their] hope" on his promised deliverance and draw

[13] His introduction describes intense external and internal troubles (1:8–10). He appeals to the Corinthians from the affliction of a heart in anguish that they would know his love (2:4). Further explanation of physical suffering provides context for his perspective on the resurrection body (4:8–10, 16). The apostle commends his ministry by cataloging diverse afflictions (6:4–10). The comfort of Titus's arrival interrupts physical and emotional distress (7:4–6). The word παρακλήσις or its cognate παρακαλέω occurs ten times in 1:3–7, always translated as a form of the word *comfort*. The Greek words occur fifteen times throughout the remainder of the letter, translated as *comfort, urge, appeal, beg, entreat*.

others into prayer and praise (2 Cor 1:10–11). Whether God provides or withholds immediate deliverance from suffering and death, the resurrection guarantees ultimate deliverance and safety for saints united with Christ. Vulnerable saints facing danger need the comfort of this hope to strengthen their plausibility structures for life on mission.

Glory: 2 Corinthians 4:7–5:10

Later in the same letter, Paul discusses the method and message of new covenant ministry: with hopeful sincerity, ministers unveil the glory of Jesus in the gospel (3:19–4:6). Paul then locates his physical and spiritual suffering within that context of gospel ministry, returning to the subject of his letter's introduction: God's work in the apostle's affliction on mission. Paradoxically, the glorious gospel light resides in "jars of clay," an image of an "unexceptional" and "fragile" "throwaway container" (4:7; Guthrie 2015, 253). In verse 10, Paul elucidates this metaphor: he carries "the death of Jesus" and manifests "the life of Jesus" in his body, a fragile vessel for eternal glory. Paul's perception of suffering and self rests on the assumptions of (1) God's purposes and (2) God's promises, revealed in the glory of life through death.

First, God's purpose in human weakness is the revelation of his power through the life of Jesus in the saints (4:7–12). Through the juxtaposition of extraordinary treasure with ordinary humanity, God reveals that "the surpassing power belongs" to him and not the ministers (4:7). God intentionally entrusts the glory of the gospel to ministers with fragile bodies, subject to death. To illustrate the revelation of God's power, Paul employs four pairs of seemingly contradictory realities.[14] In each pair, he first names affliction, perplexing trouble, persecution, and physical assault as the experience of death in union with Christ (4:8–12). Simultaneously, Paul's paradoxical perspective counters his experience of suffering: he is "not crushed," "not driven to despair," "not forsaken," and "not destroyed" (4:8–9). His confidence rests in God's shocking purpose to reveal the glorious life of Jesus in mortal bodies subject to pain and death, extending that life to other saints through the suffering (4:10–12; Gill [1809] 2005, 781). Paul submits in faith to God's purposes, perceiving the "death" of his physical weakness and affliction as a means of revealing God's power through Jesus's life in him, resulting in glory to God alone.

Second, God's purpose culminates in his promise of bodily resurrection. The weight of death could not ultimately overwhelm Paul, because resurrection power was

[14] Murray J. Harris asserts that Paul "summarizes the four preceding contrasts" in verse 10. "The death of Jesus" expresses the first element of each pair, and the second elements illustrate the reality of "the life of Jesus" at work (2008, 469).

concurrently working in him (4:10; Keener 2005, 175). Paul's faith in God's promise to raise the saints bodily "with Jesus" motivated persistent gospel proclamation, in spite of the accompanying danger and death (4:13–15; Harris 2008, 470). Paul could rejoice in the face of death, peering past its grim shadow into the light of life promised beyond: a resurrected body and God's eternal presence (4:16–5:8). He perceived the present "wasting away" of his "outer self" to be "light, momentary affliction" preparing "an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (4:16–17). The saint's "inner self" enjoys invincibility, "being renewed day by day"—focusing on the unseen, eternal reality including the "heavenly dwelling" of the resurrected body (4:16, 18–5:2; see Chase 2022, 124). Through the saints' temporal experience of suffering and death, God purposes to reveal his power in the life of Jesus and promises to draw the saints into his own eternal glory. Therefore, Paul views his physical frailty and ongoing encounters with death as conduits of incomparable glory he will experience in the life to come.

In each of these three passages, Paul interprets his experiences by the plausibility structure of God's actions and promises in Jesus. God raised Jesus from the dead. Through the Spirit, the saints are united with Jesus. Therefore, God is always present with his people, and the saints enjoy resurrection life in their spirits and anticipate its revelation in their bodies, though they expect suffering and death in the present cursed creation (Rom 8:18–23; Col 3:1–4). God's promise of bodily resurrection gives eternal meaning to temporal suffering and death, comforts saints presently feeling death's sting, and assures hope for eternal glory through and after death. Paul's durable joy and faithfulness rested on this hope. At present, given the similar prevalence of severe struggles and suffering on the field, this doctrine of bodily resurrection must significantly support the plausibility structures of saints preparing for service in missions.

Application

The following suggestions for application focus on my particular context, though principles could be related to a variety of missions-sending contexts. In the USA, three entities usually share the burden of preparing missionaries: the local church, the academy, and sending agencies. In spite of their specialized focus and often thorough sending processes, sending agencies cannot be expected to facilitate optimal evaluation and calibration of a missionary's fundamental assumptions about life and suffering before reaching the field. These things are often revealed and processed through experiences: plausibility structures form and re-form over time. Churches and academic institutions possess greater potential for discerning and shaping perceptions and expectations pre-field.

As the only biblically prescribed entity among the three, the church has ultimate responsibility for shepherding and discipling its members, including potential missionaries. The church holds the advantage of long-term personal relationship and investment, as well as spiritual authority. Therefore, when a church considers sending a member out on mission, especially to unreached fields, elders and other members should take initiative to assess many aspects of her or his life, including spiritual maturity and gifting, as well as practical equipping. Beyond these areas, elders and disciplers should help members (1) evaluate their perceptions of and expectations for self, the world, and God in relation to suffering and (2) re-form or strengthen plausibility structures to include the application of robust resurrection theology.

These two aims may be accomplished in a myriad of ways. I offer five suggestions: (1) studying and applying the above passages and others in Paul's epistles, narratives from Acts, and a broader biblical theology of suffering and resurrection; (2) reading and discussing novels and biographies with relevant themes; (3) providing preemptive counseling to consider past experiences of suffering; (4) consistently praying together for the persecuted church; and (5) serving vulnerable populations, whether in refugee communities, inner city schools, or other local mercy ministries. Beyond these, church leaders and other members should form meaningful relationships with potential missionaries that provide continuity through the entire process of training, sending, and serving. Since the church retains primary accountability for missionaries' care (Heb 13:17), some members need to be aware of their plausibility structures both to strengthen them before they go and to continue regular care after they reach the field.

Academic institutions supply focused theological training, a major factor in the formation of durable plausibility structures. In the academy, preparation for missions cannot be relegated to missions professors, missions classes, or students claiming a missions emphasis. Every Christian responds in some way to Jesus's commission to make disciples of all nations, and every student preparing for ministry is potentially a cross-cultural missionary. Therefore, across the curriculum, theological education should cultivate a global mindset, aiming at the formation of resilient servants who will follow Jesus into and through severe suffering.

Every professor should view their students as saints who will suffer on mission and seek to aid the construction of sturdy plausibility structures with the unique but related contributions of their discipline. For instance, systematic theology provides an interpretive grid for processing otherwise inexplicable experiences. The doctrine of resurrection threads through multiple loci, creating the categories needed to accurately

understand and evaluate suffering. When a missionary faces the existential problem of evil, constructing logical arguments at that time would likely fail to comfort. However, every locus contributes in advance to a theological framework that can center a sufferer on the stability of God's person and promises in those moments of severe loss. Beyond systematics, biblical studies augment perspective by locating each individual saint within the story of God's redemption, which culminates in resurrection. Scripture's narrative is essential to form a view of the resurrection that enters the narrative of our lives. No genre or division of Scripture can be overlooked: "to consider such a vibrant topic as resurrection hope, we will need the whole Bible" (Chase 2022, 16). Additionally, church history provides abundant examples of saints who faithfully suffered, committing themselves to Christ and confidently hoping in resurrection and eternal life. Finally, ministry studies refine and solidify the application of truth, providing context for the resurrection's relevance to daily life.

Furthermore, an academic emphasis in missions should include at least two classes perhaps outside the typical scope. First, a course on principles of biblical counseling, or the personal ministry of the Word, affords opportunities to cultivate self-awareness and understand the process of personal growth and change. Second, studying crisis and trauma counseling equips potential missionaries with tools to face their own struggles as well as care for new believers and teammates. Missionaries would benefit from a basic awareness of trauma and theological perspective on trauma, including both spiritual and physical dimensions: pre-existing beliefs, the potential impact of overwhelming events, and typical responses. Missionaries need to be aware that certain physical health issues may indicate trauma or excessive stress, along with taking steps in advance to strengthen health as possible. Essentially, counseling training helps students process their own past experiences and prepare for faithful responses when suffering on mission.[15]

Conclusion

Though it is not the only relevant doctrine, bodily resurrection contributes essential perspective to the formation of plausibility structures able to bear the weight of death and suffering. Missions training should include guidance to carefully evaluate perceptions of and expectations for self, the world, and God. The doctrine of bodily resurrection should be thoroughly understood and applied to those perceptions and expectations. Trauma often unravels a person's concept of a meaningful existence in an

[15] Additionally, such classes would address the need that Rance sees for pre-field training in "interpersonal skills and conflict resolution" (2021, 238–39).

ordered world; however, like the apostle Paul's, our perception of meaning must be re-ordered according to God's eternal purposes and not our own independent self-conception (1 Cor 15:50–57; 2 Cor 4:7, 15). Death and danger neither conclude our story nor determine its ultimate meaning: Jesus does. Through death and resurrection, Jesus accomplished the work of redemption and inaugurated his total victory (1 Cor 15:25–28). The resurrection frees the saint to perceive suffering and death not as the end of meaning but as a momentary trouble, trusting God to accomplish his good designs in his world. The most plausible outcome is the one God has guaranteed: eternal life with him, in a resurrected body and a renewed world.

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