

Moral Injury

Dr. Tim Mallard

Well, thank you again very much. And by the way, thanks to everybody who's online today from all over the world. It's very exciting.

to be in a really a global forum of experts in the profession of arms and particularly pastoral care and in the profession of arms. I do want to make sure and highlight at the outset I have two email addresses up on this title slide and you're welcome to contact me at either of those email addresses.

My wife Sharon and I have just finished a a 13-month research fellowship at the University of Durham in England, in which I was pleased to be able to provide a few lectures in the Department of Theology and Religion, but to take a sabbatical after almost 37 years in uniform when I retired last year. And to be able to write this book that you see there in terms of the title slide. Today's presentation is on that book, Moral Injury and Spiritual Injury and War, Russo-Ukraine, Israel, Iran, and Beyond.

And if I can convey one thing, this is a pastoral theology about moral and spiritual injury. And I'll talk more about the delineation between those two concepts in just a moment. it's not an academic theology about moral injury alone.

It's a comparison and contrast of two injuries that I think I've seen over my time in the profession of arms and war.

And if I can convey one thing that I would ask everyone to take away the central idea of the of this book is that moral and spiritual injury are now internal wounds of war that impact externally, not only warriors, but also their families, communities, forces, and nations.

One of the things that I'm attempting to do in this book is to broach the idea that there is such a thing obviously as moral injury. There is also such a thing in a pastoral vein as spiritual injury, but that these are not injuries that affect only the individual warrior. And the reason I take that tack is I'm also at Durham University, a part of the International Center for moral injury.

So, I sit on the board of that center. But the field of moral injury studies really since the late 1980s, early 1990s. principally in America, has been dominated by the idea of moral injury being almost attenuated solely at the individual warrior level.

So, the focus has been on how the injury occurs within a warrior, how that warrior internalizes that injury, perhaps how he or she externalizes it to some people around them, but not really taking a focus on relationships and then how to treat that injury.

principally through clinical methods. So one of the observations that I wanted to make in this book follows from the paradigm of the paradigmatic work of Jonathan Shay in the early 1990s when he wrote his classic work, *Achilles in Vietnam*. I highly recommend it to you if you haven't read that book.

But Shay had two truisms from his look at how American land forces in Vietnam experienced moral injury after they came home from that conflict that I think over time were lost on the professional field of moral injury studies.

And that is that moral injury is both relational impacting relationships up and down the chain of command. And it is a leadership function. And so Shay emphasized in his work the moral nature of war, but also the moral nature of leadership in war.

And over time, as the discussion about moral injury gravitated more and more, toward a clinically based assessment, those two, those two really foundational ideas of Shays were lost. Well, I wanted to recapture those in my book, which is just published, by the way, in June by Stone Tower Press. You can buy it on Amazon. I will say, by the way, if you buy the The Kindle version, some people overseas have bought the Kindle version. The software seems to have changed some of the spelling, so I apologize for that.

in advance. If you can get the paper version, I highly recommend that. But again, I wanted to highlight in this book that moral and spiritual injury are again, wounds that impact the warrior, yes, but their families, communities, forces, and nations.

Really kind of returning to Shay's foundational work in that regard.

So why did I write this book? Well, like many of us who have served in the profession of arms, I saw these internal wounds in my warriors and their families for well over three decades in the United States Army.

Now that said, and I wanted to give voice to their lingering pain and injuries. Now that said, I have seen these same wounds not only in army forces in the United States, but also in Marines, Navy, Air Force, Space Force. I was privileged to teach for the United States Space Force two years ago, and saw the same wounds in many of my students there.

That said, the more I have spoken and worked internationally on this issue, the more I have seen members of professions of arms from other nations, not just America.

Jason Huntley- Voicing the same idea about moral injury. And I think in many cases. Jason Huntley- Without perhaps having the concept of spiritual injury also voicing the fact that their militaries and their families, communities, forces, and nations have suffered from these same injuries.

So, this is not solely an American malady at all. These are not American maladies at all. They're in fact universal.

And also, I began to see that they were becoming a trend across the profession of arms. Again, not only in the individual warrior in their family, and in our nation and other nations. So I wanted to raise awareness of these injuries and to offer a word of hope to anyone suffering for them.

The book is necessarily an examination of these types of injuries at the tactical, operational, and the strategic level of war.

In essence, I also want to contend that these injuries are not only problems that we must attend to in our individual pastoral work with with the people in uniform whom we serve, they are injuries that affect the entire professions of arms.

you know within our nation states and and within the forces that serve those nation states So I necessarily examine it in terms of its strategic impact.

And I'm really grateful for the commentary of a colleague and man I consider a mentor and friend lieutenant general Jim Dubik who's just written a review on this that will be published in military review. He amplifies this very point that these are not just injuries that we can only look at in isolation with an individual person.

We have to look at how they impact our entire forces, our professions, and even our nation states. So, that these are the principal reasons I wrote this book.

So that said, you'll note that the title is Moral and Spiritual Injury and More So briefly and broadly, how are these defined? Well, moral injury has multiple definitions, as many of you know.

If you've done any kind of reading in moral injury studies, there are a number of definitions. You have Shay's original definitions that had three qualifiers – betrayal, by one in authority, and high stakes. This definition was focused principally on its impact within military forces.

Later on, in the, in the early nineties and, and then really in 2009, The definitive clinical definition came about with Brett Litz, Shira Magen, others at the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

And probably the two verbs that come to mind in describing those is, Shay spoke of moral injury as a betrayal of what's right by a person in authority in a high stakes situation. Those were his three qualifiers, but he talked about betrayal.

Magan and Litz broadened that and I think in some senses, sort of, I don't want to say watered it down, but I think they neutralized it a bit by talking about it as a transgression.

But it was the standard definition that they use is is a passive voice definition so there's not an active subject who is the one who is doing the transgression who is the one who is receiving the transgression So if you just think betrayal and transgression, Mark, my good friend, Mark Lavecki, who's spoken here before, It talks about it as moral bruising. I mean, there's a number of different definitions out there. How do I define it? Well, there's a chapter in the book on moral injury. I sketch all this out.

And I talk about either a betrayal or a violation of deeply held core values, principles, and beliefs in a person or group.

And I want to focus on that as an ethicist.

One of the things that I focus on is that moral injury and spiritual injury both center around deeply held core values, principles, beliefs, again, in a person or in a group.

But moral injury is principally, I think, understood as a wound of the mind.

And yet it produces this emotional disequilibrium, as my colleague at Durham, Brian Powers, has talked about.

It's this disequilibrium emotionally with really powerful emotions when one feels like those core values, principles, or beliefs have been abrogated. But as well in my work pastorally with soldiers and families over years, I saw an ethical dissonance that for many soldiers, long after the emotional trauma and the feelings had dissipated, They were still wrestling for years with this ethical dissonance. Did I do the right thing? Should I have done something differently? Why did this happen to me? Where was God in the midst of all this? There was this ethical practice of reflection, and I categorize that as dissonance.

But that led me to also want to categorize a new type of injury, and that's spiritual injury. Now, the term spiritual injury is actually older than the term moral injury. So there's a chapter in my book on spiritual injury predates it a few years. But I categorize spiritual injury as The deep wounding of the soul arising from life altering trauma that misbalances one's core sense of self and threatens one's relationship to others and to god and so there you see, I think the relational nature in in my definition of that now that said that said

You'll also note that I am categorically making a distinction, I'm making a claim that a soldier has a soul. Now that George Marshall's famous line that the soul of the soldier is everything from his famous 1941 speech to Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut.

I don't think that the profession of arms, at least in the American context, and I can only speak for the American context, would agree with Marshall completely anymore.

But I have also met many people in the profession of arms again in America only who would, in fact, contest that a soldier has a soul.

So, I'm making the claim here that a soldier does have a soul and that that type of wounding is different than moral injury. It is a wound principle of the soul. Again, I define it in concentric woundedness. So, if you think about ripples, in a pond, if you throw a rock in a pond, it radiates outward from an individual to the unit, to the family, to the community, to the nation and then even existentially to God. That's one of the reasons I feel like this type of injury is so deleterious.

Because if not treated, it can completely rupture that person or even beyond a relationship to God that could last into eternity.

I further defined it in the book, and you can read these with eight different markers of spiritual injury.

Some of these are understanding genuine evil, wrestling with paralyzing doubt, retaining an inability to forgive, perhaps themselves or to others, or to experience God's forgiveness. So at any rate, these are how I broadly define moral and spiritual injury.

We can talk about these more in the Q&A in just a minute. Why is this a problem for our nation and others? Well, again, I consider that these are pervasive to the core of a person and they are persistent over the whole of life.

I mean, just like Shay and Magadan Litz and others, they were dealing with warriors who long after they had left the battlefield, the battle Donald Field had never left them. Their physical injuries had healed, maybe even their mental injuries had healed, but they were still wrestling with deep-seated moral injury either centered around betrayal or transgression, or as I contend, a type of spiritual injury.

I also think it's a problem for our nation because these are, again, not only individual but communal types of injuries and I do believe that the wars in both Ukraine and in the Middle East bear this out. These types of wounds play themselves out over time across entire professions, nation states, and societies.

Now, this is something that's a real critique for me of America. We are so focused, hyper focused on the individual and individual rights in our nation that sometimes we lose sight of the forest for the individual trees. But I think if we're honest about looking at these types of injuries in other contexts of war, we'll see that these can have incredibly broad effects across entire nation states, thus the strategic level.

And that said, they're applicable not only to the profession of arms, but also other vocations and experiences, as I put here. Now you're beginning to see people in business ethics in the United States, but in the United Kingdom and others, talk about moral injury in business.

you're beginning to, particularly in the healthcare profession, begin to have a number of people who are voicing doubts about the efficacy of moral injury. They know that it impacted the healthcare profession, but now they're saying, wait a minute, we have something deeper in ourselves.

And there's something even deeper, you know, and I think really what they're talking about is the souls of doctors, nurses, anesthetists, others.

caregivers who worked and who continue to work in that field and how these injuries impact them.

I've heard it in education. I've heard it in victims of sexual trauma. I've heard it in survivors of racism and domestic violence, I shouldn't say victims, I should say survivors.

All of these are areas in which you see the understanding that moral injury and spiritual injury have broad effects, not only on the individual, but across our nation and across many nations.

So how do the wars in Ukraine and Israel illustrate these problems at the strategic level? Well, first of all, in the book, I talk about the fact that Theoreticians of war talk about the nature of war and the character of war. So nature is those things that do not change about war.

Clausewitz's famous dictum that war is politics.

by an extension by politics of other means is a dictum that doesn't change, that war is continually about.

really politics using violence. But the character of war changes.

That changes by conflict, context, aims, and ideologies. However, I think both of these wars illustrate that values, principles, and beliefs are often still endemic to war, even at the nation state level. I think if you look at people in Ukraine defending um their their freedoms i think if you look at people in israel responding to the october 7th attacks of 2023 There was an understanding that we have to collectively defend our values and fight.

But these must be rediscussed and re-revalidated throughout time. One of the ones that I talk about in the book that we might presume to be a value that is completely non-negotiable is non-combatant immunity. But I think both these wars, particularly with the prevalence of drones on the battlefield, have begun to really call into question, do we really hold to non-combatant immunity? Because so many civilians have died in the urban context of these wars. Also, that both these wars illustrate that the lives of our people in uniform, and frankly, even our sons and daughters who are civilians that are caught up in the midst of war, there's an opportunity cost for the nation. If those lives are expended there, in conflict, in war, whether they're uniformed warriors or civilians or family members. What is the long-term cost to the

nation A great example is, I mentioned that I just came from England. In England, and we're in the United Kingdom, So England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland but also in the Republic of Ireland. There is still a very, very powerful sense that while they know that many lives were lost in World War II, there's a collective memory about the the gaping hole left in the nation of the lives lost in World War I.

And so, the Great War, as it's called in England, is every November 11th, very movingly celebrated. And there's this sense that the nation lost an entire generation here. And in some senses, they still have yet to recover from the loss of of all those young, principal young men in that war. That's what I'm talking about in terms of opportunity cost.

So, recognizing that as a strategic factor of war, I think gives us a voice in the profession of arms.

But also, I'm concerned that nation state war is the paradigm for war in the next 10 to 20 years. But that the scale of war, particularly if there's a theater or a global war that originates in the Pacific.

The scale of war will simply dwarf what we've experienced in either Ukraine or in the Middle East. And I am concerned that that our peoples, our professions, our nation states must be prepared for that. We must, if anybody be sounding the gong for within our nations about the opportunity cost of how precious our sons and daughters are.

if we expend them and more. And I think, again, this goes back to the Christian ideal of the Imago Dei. Every single one is...

person is created in the image of God. Something is lost when they die in war. Are we willing to pay that cost? Yes, it may be necessary.

But have we counted that cost? That's one of the things that I'm concerned that we lead our forces to do.

So finally, what do I hope people will take away from this book? First, a new understanding of moral and spiritual injury across the nation.

or across our nations and how we can mitigate these impacts through individual and communal development of core values and practices and spiritual disciplines. An example, in two weeks I'm speaking in Huntsville, Alabama at a religious freedom conference.

And one of the things that I'm going to ask about religious freedom and liberty is, is this something that we believe so strongly and value so much that we're willing to go to war for, that we're willing to fight and defend.

the ability of perhaps us and those around us, but maybe people we will never see to have the freedom to worship and to and to follow their practice of faith wherever they are. Even if I don't

necessarily theologically agree with it. What do I or we believe? In essence, I hope this book engenders a discussion about what it is that we believe at a communal and societal level, and are we willing to go to war over that to defend those rights or those values, principles, and beliefs? Again, having just come from the English context, I can tell you they're beginning to have that discussion right now.

Secondly, a new understanding and commitment. And this is where I challenge the church. I have very, very, frankly some critical observations of communities of faith in at least the American context. Again, I can't speak of other nations, but in the American context.

That that, in essence, this is our profession of arms we as the uniformed members are of that profession or servants of the nation.

But one of the things I want to do is challenge communities of faith to step forward and take ownership of that profession of arms as well.

to not only see that, to those who are in uniform or to policymakers, but to again reclaim that in the best tradition of civil-military relations.

And then lasting, lastly, obviously, I do want to give voice and language concept.

to people and their families who may be experiencing moral and spiritual injury or more.

and how they might regain a fresh sense of hope from that. That also is...

is something I hope that people will take away from this book. One of my favorite things that I've heard from people as they talk to me is, Now I understand what my father went through when he came home from World War II or what my brother went through when he came home from Afghanistan.

and how these types of injuries can can literally creep into and divide families, and yet they need not be. Because I want to finish on a word of hope. Neither moral or spiritual injury are supposed to be permanent. They're pervasive and they're persistent, but they're not supposed to be permanent. In Christ particularly And I'm writing another book right now on redemptive suffering in which I'm going to bring this out.

Suffering is always meant to help us grow into the image of Christ.

And so these injuries, though very, very serious, are not supposed to be permanent.

I think that we can lead our professions, I hope, to see those. To be understandable or to be sober about the effects across Again, with individuals, units, families, forces, and nations. But to give the final word of hope that these are not necessarily to be permanent, that people can

experience moral and spiritual injury and war, but they need not be permanently disabled from those things.

they can in fact recover and grow from them, particularly with God's help. So that concludes my presentation. I hope that I'll.

I tell you what, I'll stop sharing my screen now so that I can see everyone's face. Let me just click back to the first title slide. Again, that's the cover of the book, by the way. Again, it's on Amazon if you're interested.

But let me just highlight timothy@bts.edu if you'd like to write me happy to dialogue with you more about that.

So, I'm going to continue sharing my screen. But what I'm not going to do is keep the slides up so I can see please your face, and then listen to you as we go to Q&A.

please go ahead with questions and we'll have a professional dialogue. Thank you very much.

Okay, Doug Anson here. Thanks, Dr. Maller. I appreciate what you shared with us and a really important point.

A question that I have is, In your experience, have you seen a difference in the moral injuries and spiritual injuries among those people genuine believers versus so believing soldiers versus those who are nonbelievers.

in other words have you seen our true believing soldiers being better able to withstand and deal with these challenges than perhaps those who do not have a biblical worldview.

Doug, thank you very much for that question. It's really, really important. And the short answer is yes to your question. Now, Let me be very, very candid, however.

I have seen people of deeply held biblical faith, including Christians.

renounce that faith because of unspeakable traumas.

that they either witnessed or they experienced themselves. And by the way, this is where I've seen this most acutely.

is in my work with victims of sexual trauma. When they have as an example. They might have had an internal value or a principle or a belief that because I trust in God, God will protect me. God will guide me. God will... And they may have never...

thought about that as a conscious level, but maybe they grew up with that. When that is violated, when they are sexually violated, that becomes very, very hard for victims of particularly sexual trauma or serious trauma and more.

It can take them decades to come back to the point of perhaps confessing faith again.

But to your question, the answer is yes. And, and my colleague Mark Levesque and I have done some work on that course.

He's written on that, the fact that grounding in one's faith and a really well developed sense of ethical belief from that faith can be a type of protection against these types of injuries and more, at least to the point that short of serious violated trauma or violating trauma, that such people of faith can recover faster from these.

That they are not as deleterious in the long run as people who have no biblical worldview or faith at all.

Right. So, yes, the answer to your question is and I think that that that should give.

chaplains, pastors, leaders, pastoral theologians, impetus to want to work to help our soldiers prepare for war in the deepest part of their person.

that every time I step into a pulpit or every time I sit in the counseling room or session or lead a Bible study, I may be imparting biblical truth. I may be perhaps leading someone to faith in Christ. But for that believer, for that person, There's a type of moral preparation and ethical preparation in biblical values in preparing them for combat and for war.

I may not think about it, but that's in fact also something that's happening there.

That makes our work absolutely critical in the profession of arms. So I say that as an encouragement and answer to your question to everybody on the line here.

What we do is absolutely vital to to the health of those individuals, but it's also vital to the profession of arms. So, yep. Thank you. Great question. Yeah. Thank you.

Others, please.

Tim, Doug Carver, I've already bought your book while we're lecturing, so I look forward to reading it. It's supposed to come tomorrow.

Thank you very much. I've got two questions, but first of all, and my memory could be failing a little bit, but in 1976, I was a young commander at Fort Carson, Colorado before I was a chaplain.

And I remember signing in the personnel asset inventory, PAI, which is all automated now, but it was local paper.

I remember signing for 110 souls, Charlie battery person, 19th field artillery, uh, it still impacted me back then. I don't... I'm going to look through my boxes of...

military paperwork and see if I can find that because I do believe that our commanders have authority regarding the souls of those that are under their charge.

Two quick questions. One, you gave an excellent presentation, I would say, in the descriptive nature of. Right.

of moral injury. I'd like to hear maybe a little more on the prescriptive, and you kind of generally touched on that, but I know we've talked about confession, repentance.

purging, those kinds of things. You may have that in the book. It would be helpful. Then the second thing I read this recently in the Chaplaincy Innovation Lab, which I'm still trying to figure those guys out, but they were talking about...

We're facing in the 21st century...

a changing delivery system for spiritual things, the spiritual infrastructure, they call it. In other words, instead of folks going to churches for religious healing and worship and celebration, they're going to these Harry Potter Alliance fandom forward groups where they tackle topics even like moral injury. And I'd kind of be curious about your thoughts on that if the spiritual infrastructure system is going to be a challenge in the future. Charlie Kirk's turning point would say something differently than that as we see these young people flocking.

to their faith. But I do think there's a challenge in this increasingly secular culture in which we live. So I'll pause and get off and let you kind of respond to whatever you want to.

Okay, sir. Thank you. Well, thanks. And by the way, it's good to see you again. I'd be interested in that paperwork as well.

So I hope you're able to find that perhaps in your stash of records. In terms of being prescriptive about moral injury.

you've hit on one of the real problems in terms of moral injury studies. And the reason this is a problem And I've had this...

I won't say it's an argument, it's a debate. I've had this debate with a lot of, leading scholars in moral injury studies, particularly those who come from the clinical professions.

They don't wish to be prescriptive. They want to be descriptive because in order to maintain I think, a vein of objectivity, particularly in the clinical setting. They want to describe what they're seeing. They want to describe the conditions they're seeing in the individual. I do...

talk fairly candidly, I think, in a prescriptive manner, however, particularly at the strategic level about how these These types of injuries, particularly moral injury, but also spiritual injury, um in fact our being in in some senses are attenuated by the systems that we set up within our nation

states professions forces and professions right um So let me just give an example. Let me give an example.

um in i was not in the united kingdom during covet 19. um i was stationed in germany at u.s army europe and africa But even today, people in the United Kingdom talk about how painful in terms of a violation of values, principles, and beliefs The policies were that the government set up through the National Health Service in trying to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 virus.

across the United Kingdom. Perhaps inadvertently, but perhaps with not enough forethought those policies became, in fact, a means of extending the injury of not only the sickness of one individual, but to a family system. Let me give you an example from the American context. My daughter worked at a hospital on Capitol Hill. She had no medical background at all.

The hospital hired her during COVID-19.

to take an iPad and a phone around every person who had COVID-19 and was going to die of COVID-19 And she would, before she went into every meeting, She would completely Tyvek up and she had the N95 mask and everything. But she was the last human contact with with that person who was, and they were often terminal. I think she had 13 patients that died on her. Their families were often outside the door But we're not allowed because of local health regulations or policy to go inside, even at the point of death.

to be able to say goodbye with perhaps healthful protocols. And families today still talk about how in the United Kingdom, That was perhaps even more painful than the death of the loved one by the disease itself.

There's this latent sense of bitterness and anger in some senses against the government there.

In a prescriptive sense, I think that that's one of the things that governments, nation states, and professions particularly have to think about.

What are the systems that we are setting up that could be exacerbating these types of injuries even at the local level. Now, The second question, this is one of the reasons I wrote the book, sir. I had a discussion one night And I'll get back to the issue of, I have a section in the book on the ontology of the warrior.

I was riding in a bus from the airport in San Antonio to Fort Sam Houston to do a lecture. And I was on the, it was on the bus going to the rental car center and, And I'm an introvert, so I don't talk to people naturally in a very gregarious way. I sort of keep myself to myself.

But this young woman was sitting beside me and she was clearly an extrovert. And I thought, okay, well, I can't get away from this one. She was very nice.

It turns out she was in the army. She said, what are you going to Fort Sam Houston for? I told her.

I'm a chaplain, I'm going to do a lecture. She said, oh, oh my gosh, we need you all so much. I said, okay, why is that? She said, well, I'm a nurse. And I said, okay. And she said, and you know, we don't really think about our patients as people.

And I said, you don't. And she said, no, they're just pink bags. And I said, pink bags? What do you mean by that? Well, you know, they're just bags filled with water, tissue, blood, bone. And she said, now, in some senses, we have to do that in order to be able to treat him.

But she said, after a while, you begin to devalue the person who's sitting there in front of you. Even when their life is not under threat, you begin to devalue them. And I saw it.

You know, that's where we have a voice to be able to say, in fact, Marshall was right. The soul of the soldier is everything.

If we lose our ability to understand that about people as individuals, and people collectively, our peoples, then we have abrogated our responsibility to the profession of arms.

So to that end, I would say your second observation, I would say the spiritual, I'm sorry, I can't remember the name of the term.

is I would say they're absolutely incorrect. I would say they're fundamentally wrong in that prospect.

The night before I left at Durham University, New students had come in, the cathedral had held, The university had an open day, but the cathedral had an open day. They had over 1500 students show up.

at that cathedral just to meet people and to go to evening prayer.

And all across, I think, principally Western countries, but others as well, there is a sense in which technology particularly is not able to answer the fundamental needs that I have as an individual who is a soul.

And so I think, in fact, the move toward artificial intelligence is only going to exacerbate and create the conditions for people to want to come seek us out to find out some sort of deeper sense of identity, meaning, and purpose. I write about that in the book.

These are fundamental things that I think we have the ability to help them answer and find a sense of, of hope for in the future beyond the conditions that they find in the world around them. I think if the chaplaincies Give that up. And again, I can only speak in the American

context. We are fundamentally ceding the ground to a false proposition that the soul of the soldier is in fact not vital. It is, it's paramount.

And we have to hold to that, I think. But thanks, sir. Appreciate it. I hope that answered your question.

Other questions? Jeff, I'll stay on as long as we need to.

Yeah, Dr. Mallard, Terry Wickard here. I'm the Executive Director of ACTS now, but...

A number of years ago, I worked for another ministry. Well, I don't mind naming it. It was the military ministry of the navigators.

over saw a bunch of staff and uh anyway we had a young staff member who was a um had done nine years as a naval aviator and then gotten out of the Navy and joined the staff, but he was also a father of nine kids.

And so in addition to the work they did with the navigators, he held a part-time job that was related to what he was trained to do on active duty.

And anyway, to make a much longer and sad story short, About a year into his time on the staff with us, he went out for a morning run and and didn't return. And so when he was found, he'd taken a pistol with him and committed suicide.

and left a widow with nine children at home. But as then we began to investigate this and discover what happened here, well, he he was a drone operator who was going inside a 56-foot can and flying attack drones in Afghanistan And then would leave and pick up a caramel latte on the way to his son's, you know, six year old son's soccer game.

And he simply could not reconcile those two worlds. And so the question is, as warfare becomes increasingly DQ, humanized? Is this contributing, you know, to things like that and moral injury? And secondly, if that is the case, what can we do? You know, obviously we want to continue to treat.

moral injury when it occurs, but what can we do in terms of prevention? And then the final part of the question would be, you know, acts as a way of lead and organization, ministry that comes alongside military Christian fellowships who are who are also lay-led and so what role might we have to play and others of course who do that have to play in this area of prevention. And I don't know if I have any of that right, but anyway, I don't see any thoughts on it.

Well, thanks, Terry. Appreciate it. Please help me circle back. My memory is not so good. I know you got your part. Your question had three parts, but I want to make sure and and answer them in turn. By the way, I had almost that same discussion with an operator in Georgia who had left

active duty. He was an E6 and he went to work almost immediately for a contractor as a civilian, but he was doing the same thing in terms of drone operations.

And he said, Chaplain, now what do I do? I'm supposed to go to Applebee's and meet my my wife and kids, like, but he couldn't tell them, right. He couldn't even tell his wife or children. Um, the one person he could tell by the way was, was me.

Because at least in the American system as a chaplain, I had prescriptive uh, confidential or, uh, I, I was a, the recipient of, of privileged communication and confidence and I had held confidentiality for him, for him.

But this gets to, I think, one of the The broad point in answer to all three of the sub points of your question, and unfortunately the tragic story of your colleague, is something that General Dubik and I have talked about, and I'm writing an essay on that right now.

And that is to remind the profession of arms of the moral nature of war. You simply, Don Snyder has talked about the fact.

that every decision we make in the profession of arms every day, even in peacetime, is fraught with a moral component. Even if I'm evaluating a subordinate and recommending for the potential for assignment or promotion, that's a moral decision, right? But do I as a leader understand that? um technology can't make that kind of judgment right i i have to that only becomes exacerbated in more And then as the story of your colleague points out, those types of injuries can linger for years.

I think that that should give us pause within the Christian community to make sure that we are attending to those on our right and left and to not think that we are immune to to these types of injuries ourselves or those around us. Like you, I've had lots of subordinate chaplains And I, by the way, I write in the book, I own the wounds of which I write. I'm candid about that. I have experienced these as well as the son of an army chaplain.

as well. But I think that we have to make sure and attend to and care for one another on our right and our left, particularly those involved in ministry.

because they may be accumulating the burden of caring for others over time, as well as their own residual trauma, either in terms of moral injury or spiritual injury from combat. So the first thing I would say is we need to make sure and care for those who are carrying for the warriors around us and their families. The second thing I think We would need to, again, remind the profession of arms that one thing that technology cannot do is rob the nature of war of its moral component. Even if we have distance and you're exactly right, I'm working with a group called Moral Injury Partnership and Simon Edwards in Ukraine.

And the Ukrainians are absolutely in the vanguard of perfecting drone technology. But one of the things that they are seeing is that there is a limit to the amount of war even those drone operators can do in and through those drones on the battlefield. Because now, The granularity, the fidelity in terms of video feed, sound feed, everything is bringing, is shortening that distance between drone and operator. And the drone operators are simply bearing a cost besides being really critical high-value targets for the Russians.

So Moral Injury Partnership is working to take them off the battlefield and to work with them in a proactive way to help them.

The third thing, and thank you for bringing up the lay nature of access.

Because this is also absolutely critical, whether it's lay ministries like Acts, or whether it's professional ministries like chaplaincies, or whether it's Christians who are well-formed pastors body and soul leaders in critical positions. All of us have got to be in the vanguard of reminding the profession that war has a cost. It cannot only be antiseptic. There is no such thing as a fight that doesn't have an effect.

As I said, the warrior leaves the battlefield, the battlefield may never leave that warrior. Yeah. But the injuries don't have to be permanent.

They don't have to be permanent. And so I think Axe has an incredible, and let me just kind of, This means it is kind of cut so close to home for me as a chaplain.

You know, I loved the army and I love the army chaplaincy.

But I will be candid with you, Terry.

particularly in the last 10 to 15 years of my career in the United States Army, at least that's all I can speak for.

I began to sense a growing dismissiveness of chaplains on the part of and chaplaincy ministries on the part of leaders.

For some, perhaps, who didn't want to be bothered with concern about violating lines of separation of church and state.

For some, because they were drifting into patterns of irreligiosity on their part.

For some who, like Chaplain Carver was saying earlier, were assuming that that young people coming in were not religious or spiritually searching on their own part.

I encountered all those things. And so I increasingly felt frankly, somewhat sidelined or as I was having to fight for not only a seat at the table, but a voice at the table. Not all commanders, but many.

Acts plays a critical role or other lay ministries in voicing through chains of command. Wait a minute, no, this is not something that is simply a responsibility of the chaplains or of professional ministries.

This is our responsibility because this is the effect of these types of injuries on our people. And moreover, If we are a profession that is subordinate to the peoples we serve, This is important to America or to whatever nation our military forces are.

because we, again, are their servants. This is not something that commanders can simply, I think, shelf or sideline because they don't want to be bothered with it. I think lay ministries, besides doing incredible groundwork in bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to people.

ground. I think lay ministries can have an augmenting voice on the part of chaplaincies and religious denominations to say, no, this is important.

to us as a people and it's important to us as a chain of command. So those are some thoughts.

Thank you. And I just want to follow up and say one thing. We love our chaplains, by the way.

We want to support them in any way we can. So thank you. Very well said. Thanks. I appreciate that, Terry. Other questions? Doctor, maybe if I can just say a word of thanks.

While we were presenting, I was still trying to figure out how I managed to survive the ambush in 2022.

After losing my 40s, my lower jaw bone is fractured.

But above all, during my time of recovery, it was so painful when I saw my child of five years The first time he saw me donning the uniform during recovery, he told the mom, who is my wife, that mom, You see that he's donning again the uniform, which he was shot at.

while dressing, tell him never to dress that uniform again. He's going to be shorter. This is a younger boy of five years.

I have a trauma, first of all myself, I'm looking at how I survived. I was asking myself many questions. God, why me? Why me? Why did you allow all this to reach on me? I've served you, I've tried to do whatever you want. All those questions as they were coming in, now I'm looking again at this younger boy.

On top of that, my wife is being told, you know what, that soldier is now gone. Just try and see a way of running away. Leave him there.

But I want to thank you so much for asking, because people like Elder Noel, I think he's on right now.

the team of Elizabeth, Emanuela, and all the trauma healing team, they had done already a great job through us, a small team of us.

And the entire artist family, how they came in, responding with messages, kind of such messages of encouragement and so on. Even my home church came in with so many messages, scriptures and so on every time and again.

But now when you are presenting, I imagine of a soldier who is an unbeliever, who doesn't have such a family, such a society.

to encourage him using scriptures and so on. To me, I think there is so much need that he Making this awareness across our uniform society will do a lot to help us and help our soldiers stand firm.

no matter what they will encounter. But again, it is a big challenge, especially when I talk about our side, where such programs are no-go zone areas. So getting them penetrating into the system is not easy. But as MCF at our level, I think we need to find a way of making this as much as aware to all to all our MCF families. I know, I believe it can do a lot. Being with such a family, like ACT, like my home church and so on, it helped me to recover quickly.

The recovery was too quick because I had the people who knew what suffering is and how Jesus went through it all.

So I just want to thank you so much. This is one of the topics I cry so much that it should take the lead in our militaries because it has been a long overdue, like in our militaries, boys and girls have faced a lot on combat, but they don't have these messages. They don't have somebody to speak to them in this angle. So thank you so much, doctor.

Please call me Timothy. And thank you for your testimony and for speaking up. You've raised a really, really critical point.

First of all, thank you again for Thank you for your suffering and your willingness to share about that.

And you've raised a really critical point that I raise in the book.

And that is.

By way of affirming what you just said, my family became for me almost like a mirror that when I looked into that mirror, I saw my own woundedness. They saw my woundedness before I did, right? By the same token, then they became the vessel through which God began to work healing.

And so my injury became their injury, but our healing became my healing.

And the role of family, and I'm sorry I should have mentioned this before more with like Terry's question.

This is also something that we can do to highlight to the profession of arms.

The potential for these injuries to impact is always felt in and through the family system, as you just were willing to share about your son.

right? As he sees you putting on that uniform, he's concerned about his father again. And again, He's also experiencing a type of injury through you and doesn't want to see you hurt anymore.

By the same token, even though our wounds are real and the pain is real and the suffering may take years to overcome, with Christ's help, The family, God uses the family so powerfully to be the vessel through which that healing takes place.

And then ironically, the family system becomes stronger over time.

We become just like an individual, the family becomes stronger because of that suffering. So going back to Chaplain Carver's question, I think this is also another issue, another way in which both chaplaincies, churches and lay ministries can talk about how important commanders attending to this is because when the soldier suffers, the family suffers.

But when the family heals, the soldier heals. You know, they go both ways.

You've also raised another really critical point. What happens when those soldiers come into our forces? And they come from a broken family. Maybe they don't have an extended family that's strong and viable and healthy.

I think that becomes another way in which the church, the body of Christ can become their family in a new and fresh and powerful way.

become a safe space for them to voice their suffering. But then like a family, an organic family, wife, husband, children, maybe even grandchildren, can become the church, the family of God can become their family and affect healing for them. But by the way, it will take...

courage on the part of leaders much like yourself. So thank you again for being able to share their own painful stories.

And that has been a real challenge for me. I talked about my sense of being an introvert. I don't speak publicly very well.

about my own woundedness. But I know that when I do, it gives permission to somebody else to say, well, hang on, that's what I'm experiencing.

And if the chaplain is experiencing or if, if Colonel so-and-so is experiencing or Sergeant so-and-so, then maybe if they can talk about it, I can talk about it. So thank you also for your...

your courage and sharing that with us. But that said, again, for everybody on here, the family is a critical ideal in terms of affecting healing on behalf of God from these types of injuries. So thank you very much. Other questions? By the way, if we've reached index, that's fine by me. But I only want to go on as long as there's a need to.

Jeff, I think you're speaking, but you're muted. To be fair to everybody, we're coming real close to ending the session, but...

Please, this is kind of a last call if you have questions or statements. Please say everything. If not, you will have...

Timothy's email address. And please, Timothy, if you're up to this, Please have an extended conversation because you're a wealth of information. Thank you, Timothy, for sharing this across the world.

My pleasure, Cal. Thanks. Great to see you again.

Okay, well, thanks, everybody. I'm sorry, was there a question or another comment? It's a statement.

really. It's Noel. Thank you very much indeed for that.

the whole presentation, but particularly to Jude for the affirmation.

I'm getting old, but I'm not sure I'm an elder. I just wanted to ask your prayers.

Many of you know that I've been involved for numbers of years now in bringing healing from post-traumatic stress and moral injury and spiritual injury.

to men and women from the armed forces who come to retreats.

in upstate New York on the right-hand side of the state, the Vermont side, and we call it the Welcome Home Initiative. And I'd just like to ask your prayers for the next retreat, which is coming up on the 17th 18th and 19th of November. And we have at the moment about 25 male and female veterans coming, which includes three spouses.

And in our experience over the years, we found perhaps that more people are suffering from moral injury than are suffering from post-traumatic stress.

It's sometimes difficult to separate the two, but the deep healing. And we'd simply listen, to them talking and listen to their stories. We love them and we pray for them. We don't try to

counsel them or anything, we just simply and let the Holy Spirit come and counsel them as they are listening and as we're praying. So I'd certainly appreciate your prayers for that.

If I may ask that. And Jeff, if I could share a poster with you.

I'd be most grateful if you could circulate that around this group to remind them of this time so that they I'll be glad to do that, Noel. Please send that. Yeah, thank you very much.

Incidentally, the speaker who's coming to this and speaking, a former speaker, has been Chaplin Carver.

to this particular retreat is Former Air Force and Army chaplain, I understand, Steve West, who many of you will know, the endorser for the NAE Commission on Chaplains.

Yeah.

Well, hearing no more questions, Jeff, let me just go ahead and close. And thanks, everybody. And Noel, thank you for that. I'll certainly personally be in prayer about that.

But thanks to everybody for your time and your attention and participation today. And Jeff, thanks again for the invitation. And I'll turn it back over to you.

Okay, thanks again, Timothy. And you and I need to have a real good long conversation about this.

I really love what you put out today. As most of you know, I've written extensively on this too. And I think he gave us some very pure gold today from God. But there's just three things I'd like to leave you with.

The first thing is this. Moral injury is one of the places where The evidence of our society is meeting with what we've always believed is Christians.

And they're finding empirical evidence now of what these things do to us as people.

and it's kind of how god created us to be god created us to be value bearers and have a sense of right and wrong and these moral issues hit society at a lot of different angles and levels And sometimes we ask the questions about moral injury in terms of I heard it said today, and it was a valid question, but what about true believers? Well, sometimes you get a group of people and if they're true believers or not, just goes out the window, but they're all reacting to the same event because they're going through the thing at the same event. So what's affecting them? And what's causing them to ask really deep, serious questions that kind of transcend our theological constructions of reality.

Tim, you said the word mirror.

And that mirror is not just a reflection. The evidence is showing that mirror works as a movie projector. We're watching things, we're hearing things, we're going through these things time and time and time again. And that affects us incredibly deeply.

and the last thing i would say is that there there's a whole spectrum of how we react to these injuries from a bruising from Mark Lavecki talks about to almost an amputation.

that we experience. And God has everything to do with that conversation.

And so they call it spiritual-oriented care.

They're trying to cast a big umbrella to it, but our MCFs are a part of spiritually oriented care.

We act upon our faith and we touch each other as fellow believers and people we care about.

Jude, you brought that out very well today. Thank you for doing that.

That's all I have for anybody, but can we please close in prayer, and would you be so kind to let me be the one to close us off today? Heavenly Father, we thank you for this day. We thank you that you're a God who cares. We thank you that you come.

And you're with us at some of the most trying, hard times of our lives, whether...

We're spectators to it or whether we're deeply involved with it on a personal level. Father, we thank you that you are the Lord of everything.

Please go with us this week as we go with you and help us to abide by your word in our lives. We ask this in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Amen. Thank you to all, and I'll get a transcript and a link to a video of this.

Thank you everybody.