



## A Pastoral Theological Study Of Faithfulness Tested Through Relational Wounds And Rehabilitation In A Trauma-Informed Perspective

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		<b>Abstract</b>
Received: Revised: Accepted:	07 July 2025 16 July 2025 23 July 2025	<i>In human connections, loyalty serves as the bedrock, frequently challenged by acts of disloyalty, letdowns, and emotional scars from relationships. Such injuries inflict not just psychological pain but also disrupt one's spiritual equilibrium, leading to a profound loss of confidence in self, fellow beings, and even the divine. From a Christian viewpoint, concepts of fidelity and treachery are framed within the promise of healing through Christ's boundless affection. This investigation seeks to examine the interplay of steadfastness under strain from interpersonal harms and its mending process, guided by a pastoral theology attuned to trauma. Employing a qualitative methodology centered on literary review, information is gathered from scriptural passages, writings on pastoral divinity, insights from trauma psychology, and modern analyses of ecclesiastical practices. Proceeds descriptively and analytically, juxtaposing doctrinal concepts with trauma viewpoints to forge a practical framework for pastoral application. Findings reveal that tested loyalty transcends mere moral concerns, intertwining deeply with the essence of one's belief system. Pastoral theology stresses that mending relational breaches should anchor in unwavering devotion to the Almighty, acknowledging that complete human reconciliation may remain elusive. A trauma-sensitive pastoral strategy proves apt, as it prioritizes establishing secure environments, weaving in elements of devotion and ritual, and viewing absolution as an ongoing journey rather than a swift mandate. Within the Reformed GMIM framework, such relational afflictions are seen as facets of flawed humanity, yet redeemable into avenues for spiritual maturation via divine mercy. Ultimately, this inquiry underscores that authentic renewal surpasses simple interpersonal mending, evolving into a holistic life metamorphosis grounded in the Lord's enduring compassion and reliability.</i>
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### INTRODUCTION

Loyalty is the main foundation in every human relationship, whether in marriage, friendship, or congregational life (Waruwu & Aggression, 2024; Surentu, & Imitate, 2024). However, social and spiritual realities show that loyalty is often tested by experiences of betrayal, disappointment, or relational trauma that cause deep emotional wounds (Gintings, 2024). These wounds not only have implications

for the psychological aspect, but also shake the spiritual dimension, so that trust in oneself, others, and even in God can be eroded. This experience shows that the issue of loyalty is not only an ethical issue, but also touches on a person's identity of faith and spirituality.

In the light of the Christian faith, loyalty and betrayal never stand alone, but are always associated with the horizon of restoration (Tarumingi, 2024). Pastoral theology is present as a discipline that bridges theological reflection with the practice of companionship, so that the wounds of infidelity can be processed in the light of Christ's love (Harianto, 2021; Dogomo, 2025). Christ's redeeming love not only offers forgiveness, but also gives hope and confidence to rebuild broken relationships and foster the courage to trust again. More deeply, the concept of faithfulness in Christian theology can be traced back to God's covenant with His people, as described in the Old and New Testaments. Faithfulness (hesed in Hebrew) reflects God's unwavering commitment, which is the model for human relationships (Priyono, et al, 2024; Sirait, 2024). However, in the modern context, factors such as globalization, social media, and social change exacerbate the test of loyalty, where betrayal is often relational and systemic, such as racial discrimination or domestic violence. Relational trauma, as defined in pastoral literature, involves wounds arising from damaged interpersonal relationships, which can stifle spiritual growth and lead to isolation from the faith community.

Theological studies provide a concrete illustration of the dynamics of faithfulness being tested. The story of Ruth and Naomi displays both relational and spiritual loyalty, where Ruth's courage to remain faithful paves the way for restoration and God's blessing (Baok, et al. 2025). However, this experience also raises a relevant theological question in the pastoral context: does forgiveness always result in full reconciliation? The facts show that not every fractured relationship can be fully restored. This is where it is seen that loyalty to God must be a top priority, even when human relationships are not restored.

It is within this framework, the trauma-informed pastoral care approach offers a new perspective that is more sensitive to the complexity of relational wounds (Wior, 2025). This approach emphasizes the creation of safe spaces, the process of forgiveness, and the integration of biblical narratives as realistic yet hopeful means of healing. Although recovery is complex and time-consuming, pastoral research shows that this practice is able to strengthen marriage commitments, restore spiritual identity, and foster spiritual growth (Sianturi, et al. 2025). Thus, pastoral theology provides not only normative reflections, but also a relevant practical framework for responding to social and personal traumas that test fidelity in relationships.

The article shows that the study of pastoral theology informed by a trauma perspective can be an important contribution to academic discourse as well as church ministry practice. The novelty of the research lies in the integration of the dimensions of trauma, biblical narratives, and pastoral praxis, in a single framework that emphasizes transformation through Christ. This focus affirms that true recovery

does not stop at relational reconciliation alone, but moves toward a transformation of life rooted in God's hope and love.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a library research method (Adlini, 2022; Nurrisa, 2025). Her main focus is to analyze the concept of faithfulness tested through relational wounds and restoration in the light of pastoral theology as well as trauma-informed perspectives. Data sources consist of biblical texts, pastoral theology literature, studies of trauma psychology, and contemporary writings relevant to church praxis. The analysis is carried out in a descriptive-analytical manner, that is, describing theological ideas, comparing them with the perspective of trauma, and then arranging them in an applicable pastoral framework.

In this study, the biblical text is treated not only as a normative source, but also as a narrative that provides a model of recovery. By presenting the stories of biblical characters who experienced betrayal, it is examined hermeneutically to find patterns of faithfulness, wounds, and healing that are relevant to today's pastoral ministry. Furthermore, data from the trauma psychology literature were used to enrich the analytical framework, resulting in a synthesis of pastoral theology that is trauma-informed. With this method, research does not aim to produce statistical generalizations, but rather to deepen theological and pastoral understanding of faithfulness, relational wounds, and transformative healing processes.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Foundations of Relational and Restorative Wound Theology**

Pastoral theology views relational wounds as an integral part of the fallen human condition, in which betrayal and trauma are not merely consequences of individual sin, but also manifestations of broken social dynamics (Watters, 2020). Wounds like this are rooted in the reality of human life, both at the personal and communal levels, so they cannot be separated from the framework of loyalty that is affirmed as the foundation of relationships (Waruwu & Aggression, 2024; Surentu & Imitation, 2024). Relational trauma, which is often rooted in childhood experiences or abusive adult relationships, has a destructive effect on spiritual growth. Feelings of inadequacy, disbelief, and fear of closeness to God and others are direct consequences that close the space for loyalty and hope (Dolongseda et al., 2025).

However, the strength-based approach in Christian theology presents an alternative perspective. Instead of viewing trauma as just a devastating wound, the suffering can be reframed as a catalyst for post-traumatic growth. This perspective is in line with 2 Corinthians 12:9, where human weakness is the vehicle for Christ's power. Thus, the wound is no longer seen as an end point, but rather an entrance to a deeper relationship with the suffering Christ. This perspective is important, because loyalty tested by relational wounds is not only an ethical issue, but also a momentum to live a more radical faith in God (Tarumingi, 2024).

In addition, social traumas such as discrimination, collective betrayal, or even structural injustices hurt the Body of Christ communally. This wound violates the

principle of faith solidarity affirmed in 1 Corinthians 12:12–26 (Watters, 2020). In other words, relational wounds are not just an individual burden, but a disruption to the faithfulness of the community that functions as the body of Christ. Therefore, spiritual values such as hope, resilience, and love must be understood not only as personal virtues, but as the foundation of collective recovery. Restoration becomes possible through liturgical practices, sacramental celebrations, and church community support that reaffirms the identity of the people as the body of Christ united by the Holy Spirit (Oematan, 2025).

Within the framework of reframing trauma theology, relational wounds are placed on the stress-trauma continuum. Identification with Christ's suffering can help individuals and communities find meaning behind suffering, but it is risky if it is not balanced with a resurrection perspective (Holton, 2023). If suffering is seen only as a means of identification with the suffering Christ without looking at the resurrection horizon, then theology is stuck in glorifying suffering. Pastoral theology must therefore strike a balance between the reality of the wound and the promise of eschatological restoration rooted in the resurrection of Christ. Trauma-sensitive theology also demands inclusivity to marginal experiences. Victims of domestic violence, racial discrimination, or social exclusion find theological resonance in the life of Jesus, who historically endured rejection and suffering, but also present an example of resilience and hope (Wulf, 2018). Here restoration is understood not as the removal of wounds, but as an acknowledgment of the damaged potential that God redeemed through His love (Jibiliza & Kumalo, 2021). The body of Christ's resurrection becomes the main paradigm: the wound remains, but in a form transformed so that it becomes a sign of recovery. Holistic healing includes physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects, without demanding the complete removal of scars.

The Incarnation of God through Christ demonstrates divine solidarity with human wounds, while at the same time extending the scope of pastoral theology into contemporary reality. In the digital age, new trauma appears in the form of cyberbullying, online violence, or social isolation due to digital media (O'Donnell & Cross, 2022). A church that is faithful to its calling cannot close its eyes, but rather is called to be a safe space that provides recognition, acceptance, and transformation for victims of relational wounds, both traditional and digital. In practice, the community of faith becomes a medium in which wounds are acknowledged, processed, and transformed into a force that affirms faithfulness to God as a top priority. The theology of relational wounds and restoration provides not only a normative framework for reflection, but also a direction of pastoral praxis that is relevant to the modern context. Relational restoration is a dynamic spiritual process, in which faithfulness is tested, deepened, and redirected to God. Faithfulness in the light of wounds ultimately finds its form not in the avoidance of suffering, but in the courage to face wounds, reinterpret suffering, and build new relationships rooted in God's love and restoration.

### **Biblical Examples of Tested Faithfulness**

The Bible presents a diverse narrative of faithfulness tested through betrayal, providing a neutral lesson on relational wounds and healing without favoring forced resolution.

<b>Bible Characters</b>	<b>Description of Relational Wounds</b>	<b>Loyalty Test</b>	<b>Recovery Process</b>	<b>Bible Verses</b>	<b>Correlation with Anxiety</b>
Ruth and Naomi	Family loss, poverty, and cultural separation lead to collective trauma.	Ruth chose loyalty to Naomi even though she could return to Moab, showing relational loyalty in the midst of loss.	Loyalty unlocks God's blessings, including marriage and offspring, but without removing the wounds of the past completely.	Ruth 1:16-17	Answering whether full reconciliation always occurs: Here, yes, but the priority of faithfulness to God comes first.
Joseph and His Brothers	Sibling betrayal, slavery, and family isolation create deep trauma.	Joseph's loyalty to God was tested by betrayal, but he remained faithful.	Forgiveness brought family reconciliation, but Joseph acknowledged the wound as part of God's plan.	Genesis 37:23-28; 50:20	Acknowledging that forgiveness is not always instant; the priority of God's faithfulness allows for partial restoration.
Jesus and Judas	The betrayal of the closest disciple causes physical and emotional suffering.	Jesus' faithfulness to the Father's mission remained steadfast even when betrayed.	The resurrection brings redemption, but the wound remains symbolic, without reconciliation with Judas.	Matthew 26:47; John 13:21	Showing forgiveness does not always lead to reconciliation; Faithfulness to God is a priority.

David and Jonathan	Family conflicts from Saul led to threats and separation.	Friendship loyalty is tested by power, but it remains strong.	Faith-strengthening relationships, even if they end tragically, emphasize spiritual recovery rather than full relationality.	1 Samuel 20:4	Correlated with the priority of God's faithfulness in the midst of a broken relationship.
Peter and Jesus	Triple denial creates guilt and relational wounds.	Peter's faithfulness was tested by fear, but he returned through forgiveness.	Restorative dialogue makes Peter the leader, but the wound remains a reminder.	Luke 22:54-62; John 21:15-19	Answers to anxiety: Forgiveness allows for recovery, but it doesn't remove complexity.
The Samaritan Woman and Jesus	The social trauma of discrimination and marital failure.	Jesus' faithfulness approached the wounded, testing his faith.	Conversation opens up living waters, turning them into witnesses, without full reconciliation of the past.	John 4:1-26	Emphasizing spiritual transformation as a priority over the relational.

This table illustrates that loyalty to God becomes a priority, even if human relationships are not fully restored, correlated with undivided unrest. Narratives such as Joseph's show how betrayal is transformed into divine goodness, while Peter's story emphasizes a transformative but realistic process of forgiveness. In the context of trauma, this example offers a pastoral model for retelling experiences, avoiding bias by acknowledging the variations of recovery.

Further, the story of David and Absalom in 2 Samuel adds a layer, where the child's betrayal leads to rebellion, but David in faithfulness to God brings about the restoration of the kingdom even with permanent emotional wounds. This shows that

forgiveness can exist without a return to a whole, priority relationship to God's will. Similarly, Esau's betrayal of Jacob in Genesis 27 led to exile, but their subsequent meeting showed a cautious, not always trusting forgiveness. These examples answer anxiety with balance, acknowledging that recovery is often partial, context-dependent, and always directed at divine faithfulness.

### **Pastoral Implications for Relational Trauma**

The trauma-informed approach in pastoral ministry presents a new paradigm that places the church as a *safe space* for injured individuals and communities (Hati, 2023). This safe space means not only a place physically, but also an inner and spiritual atmosphere where individuals feel valued, trusted, and not judged. A pastor who serves with this paradigm is required to continue to educate himself or herself about the dynamics of trauma, including understanding how psychological wounds can manifest in everyday behavior, such as a tendency to isolate oneself, emotional outbursts, or even psychosomatic symptoms. This awareness is the basis for pastors to avoid bias, to be empathetic neutral, and not to get caught up in the simplistic mindset that "strong faith automatically heals wounds".

The main principle of this approach includes three interrelated things. First, confidentiality, which emphasizes that every story shared by the congregation must be maintained. Second, the integration of prayer and liturgy, in which symbols of faith such as confession and intercession prayers, is understood not as mere formal rituals, but as a means of spiritual healing that connects the church with the healing God. Third, the awareness that forgiveness is a process, not an instant obligation. In this way, the victim is not forced to "immediately forgive" the perpetrator, but is given space to process the wound according to the rhythm of his recovery, while still being directed to the horizon of hope in Christ.

Practically, there are four main steps that can be taken by a servant of God in assisting relational trauma.

**Getting to Know the Individual.** The servant of God trains himself to listen deeply to the story of the congregation with empathy, without rushing to give solutions or judgments. A good listener is able to understand that trauma affects the body, for example in the form of hypervigilance (excessive alertness) or the inability to relax. With this attitude, the servant of God presents the loving presence of Christ without imposing an untimely reconciliation.

**Reclaiming the body.** Trauma often makes a person feel disconnected from their own body, such as having no control over their physical and emotional responses. Pastors can encourage simple practices such as breathing or grounding techniques, and then connect them to the theology of the resurrection body. The message conveyed is that the body that has been injured is not a disgrace, but a part of God's precious creation, even Christ himself rose with a body that still bears the wounds.

**Retelling the Story.** One of the strengths of pastoral care is that it helps victims integrate traumatic experiences into the narrative of faith. Through Bible stories such as the parable of the good Samaritan, the congregation is invited to see that they are not alone. There are examples of friendliness, solidarity, and a willingness

to help without bias. In this way, personal experiences are transformed into part of a larger narrative, that of God's work of salvation.

Helping to Live in the Moment. Trauma often drags a person to live in the past or fear of the future. Ministers of God can help the congregation focus on small, realistic steps, such as establishing a daily routine, finding community support, or strengthening personal prayer. However, in this process, it is important for servants of God to also take care of themselves so as not to get caught up in *empathy fatigue*, emotional exhaustion due to accompanying too many wounds without *self-care*. By establishing healthy boundaries, pastors can still accompany consistently without losing energy and empathy.

This pastoral implication is even more significant when viewed in the context of Christian marriage. Trauma-informed pastoral counseling emphasizes the integration between forgiveness, spiritual communication, and an awareness of relational boundaries. Not every partner who has experienced betrayal can be restored to the original form of relationship, and in some cases, pastoral priorities should be directed to the emotional and spiritual safety of the injured individual, not to forced reconciliation. This answers the anxiety of the people, because it emphasizes that loyalty to God is more important than maintaining relationships that have the potential to continue to hurt. Trust can be restored, but always with healthy boundaries and an awareness of the possibility that the wound remains as a reminder as well as a source of wisdom.

On a broader scale, the church must also be sensitive to social trauma, such as racial discrimination, gender-based violence, or the marginalization of certain communities. This kind of wound is not only a matter of the individual, but also relates to the body of Christ collectively (Watters, 2020). The pastoral implication is that the church should not be passive neutral, but should actively build solidarity and advocacy for justice. This solidarity is not just rhetoric, but a concrete manifestation of God's love that heals social wounds without practical political impartiality, but is rooted in the mission of Gospel reconciliation. To make all of that happen, churches need to build the capacity of special ministers and congregations through trauma-informed training. Training materials include *self-awareness*, *self-care* practices to prevent *compassion fatigue*, and empathetic active listening skills. Thus, pastoral ministry does not stop at momentary emotional assistance, but becomes a process of transformation of a resilient community in the face of wounds. The controversy surrounding forced forgiveness can be answered through the theology of *remaining wounds*, in which wounds are not removed but are recognized as part of the journey of faith. A scar that remains, as in the resurrected body of Christ, is a sign that true recovery is not synonymous with forgetting, but with coexisting with the memory of the wound that has been transformed (Jibiliza & Kumalo, 2021).

These pastoral implications are closely correlated with the direction of the discussion from the beginning. If at first fidelity was understood as a foundation that is often tested by betrayal and trauma (Gintings, 2024), then at this point pastoral theology presents a pragmatic answer: loyalty to God is manifested in the

courage of the church to be present in the midst of wounds, acknowledge the complexity of healing, and channel the transformative love of Christ. Thus, transformation through Christ does not stop at the restored individual, but extends to a community of faith that is increasingly mature in living solidarity, hope, and love in a wounded world.

### **Relational Restoration in a Reformed Perspective (GMIM)**

In the Reformed perspective embraced by the Evangelical Church in Minahasa (GMIM), relational wounds are understood in the framework of total depravity, which is the fragile human condition due to original sin (Sarimbangun, 2020). Betrayal, rejection, and social trauma are seen as manifestations of broken human nature, which in turn shakes the spiritual foundations of individuals and communities. However, the Reformed tradition does not stop at the diagnosis of damage; through the doctrine of God's providence, suffering can be reframed as a means of sanctification, where wounds become opportunities to grow in faithfulness to God. As John Calvin affirmed, pastoral ministry is an extension of Christ as the Shepherd, with the Bible as the center of companionship and the church community as a container of accountability. In contrast to the tradition that emphasizes the sacramental dimension, GMIM emphasizes that restoration is driven by God's grace, not by the intermediary of certain rituals.

The restoration strategy in the Reformed tradition of GMIM places the experience of the faith of the congregation as the main axis. First, the personal relationship with Christ is affirmed through the meditation of the Word, in which human suffering is identified with Christ's suffering that validates the wound. Second, the process of inner healing is supported by the awareness of *imago Dei*, so that the congregation is called to acknowledge trauma and process it through repentance as a way to reconnect with God. Third, the journey of recovery is lived with realistic expectations, as Romans 15:13 emphasizes that the source of hope lies in God's faithfulness, not in the instant results of reconciliation. Fourth, the community plays the role of wise guides, using practical pastoral methods such as ABCA (achieve contact, boil down problems, cope actively, accept reality), which helps the congregation face reality without ignoring the expectations of faith. Fifth, the principle of relational improvement is directed at creating a new rhythm of life, maintaining self-awareness, and embracing vulnerability through prayer, while avoiding the coercion of reconciliation that risks deepening wounds.

The pastoral practice of GMIM within this framework is seen through simple rites that are grounded. Daily prayer as inherited by Calvin, shared Bible study, and a minimalist but meaningful liturgy are means of healing and integration of wounds into the horizon of faith. Servants of God are required to maintain their emotional resilience through self-care, such as centering exercises, so as not to fall into exhausting empathy. In addition, the prevention of relational wounds is done through seminars on healthy relationships, family strengthening, and gospel-centered parenting as reflected in the prophecy of Ezekiel 18, which affirms that patterns of sin and trauma do not have to be passed down across generations. In cases of complex trauma, such as dating violence or intergenerational wounds, the

church is encouraged to collaborate with clinical psychology, while maintaining a theological framework rooted in the Gospel.

The theological implications of this approach affirm that loyalty to God is always paramount to human relational reconciliation. Forgiveness is understood as a grace-driven process that cannot be forced, and does not always end in a restored relationship. Wounds, in the light of Reformed theology, can still be part of the redemptive narrative, just as the wounds of Christ's resurrection are not removed but transformed into signs of restoration. Thus, the experience of trauma is no longer seen as an end, but as an opportunity to experience the presence of Christ more deeply.

Furthermore, GMIM Reformed theology views social traumas such as discrimination or family conflict as wounds that wound the body of Christ collectively, in line with Paul's portrayal in 1 Corinthians 12:12–26. Solidarity of faith is the key to recovery, because the suffering of one member of the congregation cannot be separated from the suffering of the whole body. In the context of egalitarian Minahasa culture, this approach finds resonance: the community is not just a witness, but also a safe space that sustains the healing process by affirming the priority of faithfulness to God.

Thus, the relational restoration in the Reformed tradition of GMIM makes an important contribution to contemporary pastoral theology. The integration between trauma-informed care, the doctrine of providence, and simple yet contextual pastoral practices results in a unique approach that affirms that faithfulness is tested not the end, but rather an opportunity for spiritual transformation. The Church is invited to continue to reflect on its practices so as not to get caught up in the legalism of reconciliation, but affirms that forgiveness is a long process rooted in God's grace. From this it is clear that recovery is not just about restoring the whole human relationship, but about living the loyalty that puts God first, so that the wounds that have been healed can actually be transformed into a testimony of faith that brings hope.

## CONCLUSION

Faithfulness tested through relational wounds is not just an ethical issue, but a theological issue that touches on the identity of faith and spirituality. Relational trauma, both personal and social, can shake the foundations of a life of faith, but that is precisely where pastoral theology acts as a bridge between faith reflection and the practice of restoration. The trauma-informed approach shows that true recovery does not necessarily mean a rebuilding relationship, but rather the courage to face wounds, process them, and rediscover faithfulness rooted in God. The biblical narrative, from Ruth's story to Peter's experience, shows that restoration is always partial and complex, yet it still leaves room for transformation through the love of Christ. In the perspective of the Reformed GMIM, relational restoration is placed within the horizon of God's grace and providence, where the wound is not removed, but is transformed into a sign of recovery as the wound in the resurrected body of Christ.

Thus, trauma-sensitive pastoral theology provides a practical framework for the church to be present as a safe space, foster solidarity of faith, and live forgiveness without coercion. Faithfulness to God remains a top priority, even when human reconciliation is not fully achieved. From this, it is clear that wounds are not the end, but rather an opportunity for spiritual growth and a witness of faith that affirms God's love in a wounded world.

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