

**Theological Trauma: Healing for Survivors and the Church**  
***Participant's Statement of Informed Consent***

***What does the researcher hope to accomplish?***

I am exploring the concept of theological trauma (mental, emotional, or spiritual distress suffered by the theological concept of a god who shames, banishes, and condemns) as experienced or witnessed by people at Highland Baptist Church. In focus groups of 6-7 participants, I will invite you and other participants to share about (1<sup>st</sup> session) your religious background, (2<sup>nd</sup> session) experiences when you witnessed or experienced God as one who shames, condemns, or banishes, and (3<sup>rd</sup> sessions) reasons you are still involved in a church. The goal of the focus groups will be to help develop an approach and possible methods of healing for survivors, witnesses, and the church.

***What is the participant's role?***

You will participate in three group sessions that will last 60-90 minutes sharing stories and reflections about your religious background and experience in churches as you feel comfortable. Before each session, you will receive reflection questions that will invite you to be thinking in advance about the session's subject.

***What is the researcher's role?***

I will lead the focus groups by asking questions that evoke personal experiences and reflections from the group. While I serve as Associate Pastor of Faith Formation and Congregational Engagement at Highland, I will not be teaching or intentionally forming any participants during the time of these interviews. My primary task will be to listen, take notes, and ask questions. If there are critical pastoral concerns that are raised during the focus groups, I will talk with the individual at another time in order to offer pastoral care. However, this pastoral care will be in my ministry at Highland Baptist and separate from the research and writing of this DMin Thesis.

There may be an additional person who serves as my assistant during the focus groups. This person will be someone that I believe can serve as an additional note-taker and who understands the confidentiality of the focus group. The individual will be determined based on his or her availability for those dates and times of the focus groups. Should that be the case, the name of that person will be shared before the focus group begins. Anyone who is uncomfortable with the assistant's presence in the room is encouraged to speak with me in advance so that I can make the necessary accommodations.

***Who is being invited to participate in the focus groups?***

All those who attend Adult Bible Studies at Highland Baptist Church are invited to participate in the focus groups. Many of our Bible studies are already engaged in conversations about how one's theology from birth has changed and evolved over time so these focus groups will pull from these same similar themes. Furthermore, Highland's Adult Bible Studies value safety as a key value of group settings. Safety will be an essential value to be upheld throughout the focus groups in order to ensure that all can share freely and openly about their past without fear of judgment or inappropriate sharing outside of the focus groups.

***When will these groups be held?***

Individuals who are interested in participating will receive an online survey of possible dates and times to show his or her availability to the researcher. These times will remain anonymous to others. These groups will not be held on Sunday mornings in order to honor our sacred times in Bible study and worship together.

***How will the information be stored and used?***

Audio from the group sessions will be recorded on a password-protected mobile device. Transcripts of the recordings will be made, and then the recordings will be deleted. All names will be replaced with pseudonyms within the transcript in order to keep the information confidential. Transcripts will only be viewed by me. Stories and reflections will be incorporated into my Doctor of Ministry Thesis. Names and identifiable information will not be used within the thesis to protect your confidentiality.

***Will my name or identifying information be used?***

The Thesis will help tell the stories of people at Highland Baptist Church who have experienced or witnessed theological trauma. Since you are part of this community, some people could be able to guess who is participating because he or she is also part of this community. Even so, I will make it very difficult for anyone to know who the participant is by giving participants a different name and protecting identifying information about the participant.

Before you agree to participate, I hope you consider the limitations of focus groups in ensuring the privacy of participants. While I as the researcher will take all appropriate measures to protect your confidentiality, I cannot promise that another focus group member will not repeat something that was said by you or another focus group member.

***What are the benefits of participating in this project?***

I hope that participants find healing through reflecting and sharing one's own story *and* from hearing stories and reflections from others. You may receive a closer bond with your fellow participants through sharing sacred space together. Furthermore, you will be helping me to develop an approach to survivors of theological trauma and a vision for the church that cares for those who have been wounded by the church.

***What if the participant changes his or her mind?***

You can decide to stop participating at any time. You can also change your mind about whether your stories can be used. In either case, you can communicate your desires to me and I will comply without questions asked. If you make changes, there are no negative consequences.

***Who can the participant contact if he or she has questions?***

Feel free to contact me by calling 502-451-3735 or emailing me at [Carol@HBCLouisville.org](mailto:Carol@HBCLouisville.org).

***What does signing below mean?***

1. You received an explanation of this study, had your questions answered, and agree to participate.
2. You have been told that your participation in this study is strictly voluntary.

3. You received a copy of this form to keep.
4. You consent to participate in a three-week focus group whose audio will be recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

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Researcher (Carol Harston)