



Seeing
SUICIDE
through
Scriptures

by
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Life in this world can be difficult, and some find it too hard to continue. The statistics around suicide are alarming.

- It is the tenth leading cause of death in America, resulting in the loss of 38,000 lives a year.
- Approximately 250,000 people a year become suicide survivors.
- It is the second leading cause of death in the world for people between the ages of 15-24.
- Males represent almost 80% of successful suicide attempts in America.
- Only 1 in every 25 attempts is successful.

What is the act of suicide?

Suicide is a terrible act. It is the deliberate killing of oneself. It is self-murder. Suicide can be done quickly or slowly. When a person tries to end their life slowly, it usually takes the form of drug or alcohol abuse. If another person aids a suicide, it is referred to as assisted suicide. Another form is when the act is committed as a part of some religious ritual or a sense of honor or loyalty to a cause or leader.

Being an accurate reflection of the human experience, the Bible records several of these kinds of self-murder. King Saul killed himself to avoid the humiliation and possible torture from enemies who were about to capture him.

- **1 Samuel 31:4**—Then Saul said to his armor bearer, “Draw your sword and pierce me through with it, otherwise these uncircumcised will come and pierce me through and make sport of me.” But his armor bearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. So Saul took his sword and fell on it.

Saul’s armor-bearer committed suicide out of loyalty to his king.

- **1 Samuel 31:5**—When his armor bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword and died with him.

Abimelech’s servant participated in assisted suicide as he followed his master’s order.

- **Judges 9:54**—Then he called quickly to the young man, his armor bearer, and said to him, “Draw your sword and kill me, so that it will not be said of me, ‘A woman slew him.’ ” So the young man pierced him through, and he died.

David’s advisor, Ahithophel, chose to kill himself after being humiliated publicly. He *“set his house in order, and strangled himself”* (2 Sam.17:23). The details indicate that he planned his own murder.

How should one think about suicide in light of Biblical truth?

If we compress the message of the bible on suicide down to one sentence, it might read like this: **Suicide is serious sin, but God’s grace is greater.** Everyone touched by suicide needs to know and believe that statement.

Since suicide is self-murder, it breaks the sixth commandment, *“You shall not commit murder”* (Ex.20:13). The taking of human life destroys the handiwork of God. All people, no matter how vile or sinful, have in them the image of their creator. So, whether you kill someone or you kill yourself, you destroy that image. Attempting to destroy the image of a perfectly holy God is a serious matter. Self-murder is a refusal to love and honor God. If a child were to take an expensive birthday gift and then mangle and throw it away, the parent would surely feel that neither honor nor love were being shown. The act of destroying one’s self demonstrates how little one thinks of the gift of life and the giver of life. Attempting to dishonor and despise the God who is love is a serious matter.

In the book of Malachi, God responds to the rebelliousness of Israel by taking their sin very personally. He says in verse 6 of the first chapter, *"A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?"* He is not here speaking about suicide but about their poor worship of Him. However, if He takes offense at sloppy worship, how much more will He at those who would wreck His wondrous gift of life?

God's sovereignty is also despised by anyone committing the act. God arranged every aspect of your life, even the difficult and ugly parts. Suicide is an attempt to end what God began, a human life with a certain course of life set in motion by God Himself (*Ps.139.16*). Attempting to cut short your days is attempting to wrestle control out of God's hands and into your own (*Heb.9:27 and Deut.32:39*).

But suicide isn't just a sin against God. Killing one's self (or just attempting to) breaks the command to love others since it produces pain and confusion for all those who are left. In fact, suicide sometimes inspires others to commit the same act against themselves. David Powlison, a biblical counselor, suggests that survivors are left with many questions they can't answer: why did the victim not ask for help? Why couldn't they see the signs, or if they did know, why did their efforts to help fail?

Surprisingly, only about 1 in 25 attempts are successful. Often, the attempt leaves lasting injuries or disabilities. Even those that use a gun may not succeed. Besides the physical damage, those who survive their attempts at self-murder do not feel better after having tried and failed.

So, while suicide is a serious sin, remember that God's grace is greater!

It is possible for even Christians to despair of life. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:8, *"For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; that he despaired even of life."* If Paul can be so low, then how hard is to think that the rest of us who do not have Paul's spiritual strength, could easily find ourselves feeling that low? Paul needed God's grace to continue.

If you keep reading Paul's letter, you find that it was God's grace that kept and strengthened him. In chapter 7, Paul describes God as one *"who comforts the depressed"* (*2 Cor.7:6*). This comforting is not merely a "spiritual" hug or pat on the back. God's comfort brings strength to continue through the difficulties. In chapter 4 of the same book, Paul explains that God's power in him allowed him to push through persecution, abandonment, and injury so that he was not destroyed (see *2 Cor.4:7-9*).

Paul later explains that he prayed for God to relieve a particular stress. There is much speculation as to what it was, but that is to miss the point. Ultimately, God told him that His grace was sufficient for Paul to endure. He learned that he could be content with all his weaknesses and difficulties because the truth was that when he was weak, that was when God's grace made him strong (see *2 Cor.12:7-10*). God's grace is equally effective for those who are considering taking their lives as it is for those affected by someone who succeeded in self-murder.

One of the saddest books in the Bible is Lamentations. Yet within its chapters is one of the most hopeful sets of verses:

- **Lamentations 3:19–24**—Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness.
²⁰ Surely my soul remembers and is bowed down within me. ²¹ This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope.
²² The LORD's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. ²⁴ "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I have hope in Him."

We can rise each morning confident that God's faithful compassions and lovingkindesses are there for us. When we know God is our portion, losing all else is of less consequence.

How can you tell if someone might commit suicide?

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline says several possible signs of immediate suicide risk are:

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill themselves
- Looking for a way to kill themselves, like searching online or buying a gun
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or isolating themselves
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Extreme mood swings

People rarely commit suicide impulsively. Usually, there is a slow build up that happens as a person's soul is consumed by destructive thinking. They can come to believe that there is nothing in life left to care about. Or, they may be convinced that things will never change, and death is the only way out of their pain or difficulties. Believing there is no hope allows one to conclude that death is the only logical solution.

If you think someone might consider self-murder, you should not be afraid to ask them directly. It is a myth that bringing up suicide to a depressed person will give them an idea they hadn't considered. It is very likely that the idea has occurred to them already. Talking with them can be preventative. You can bring up the matter in a non-threatening way. One expert suggests that you use language like this, "I see you're hurting very deeply. I'm so sorry and really want to help. Is it bad enough that you've been thinking about taking your own life?" Whatever words you use, be direct.

The second thing you must do is remain calm. You must appear to be someone who will take them seriously and without any drama. Many who are suicidal do not tell others how they really feel without prompting. If they begin to open up, but the person listening belittles their feelings or situation, or somehow appears unwilling to truly see their pain, they will likely not open up.

Some counselors suggest that it is not uncommon for someone who is suicidal to initially deny that they are having such thoughts. So, if you have any suspicion that they may be having such thoughts, ask them more than once. The way to do this is to ask in different ways, possibly even being more specific. For example, you might ask if they have ever considered using a gun to kill himself. You could ask if they have ever had even a fleeting thought.

What do you say to someone who is thinking of suicide?

What you do next requires discernment. You must determine how high the threat level is. The greatest threat is when the person is poised to commit the act at the moment. If this is the case or it seems it's likely to be so very quickly, call 911. Alternatively, you may suggest the person call a crisis line like 800-273-TALK (8255).

After you realize the person is at risk, assess the degree of risk. You can ask, "How would you harm or kill yourself?" If they have no plan, the risk is low, but not altogether absent. If they do have a plan, then you can get a sense of how strong the threat is that they will act soon. The following acronym can be a guide¹.

S – Specific – details in the "plan of attack"

What you want to gain a sense of is how specific are the details they provide. The more specific, the greater the likelihood they will attempt to kill themselves.

L – Lethality – level of the proposed method

Another aspect is how lethal is the method they speak of they are planning to use. The use of a firearm is the most lethal, and so should raise the greatest concern. However, use of drugs, either legal or illegal, is very dangerous as well.

A – Availability – of the proposed method

The question here is, do they have the needed supply on hand or not? In other words, does the person have a gun nearby? Do they already have a rope? Or are there several steps needed to obtain what they need and thereby reducing the likelihood of a suicide attempt occurring very soon.

P – Proximity – of helping resources

This refers to how near they are to anyone that can help. Is there anyone in the house or apartment? The more physically isolated the person is, the greater the risk.

You may also want to ask if they have ever actually attempted suicide in the past. Any previous attempt seriously raises the potential of another attempt if they are feeling the same triggers.

The last thing to consider while trying to assess how great the risk is of an imminent attempt is to ask what they are likely to do tomorrow (or next week) when suicidal thoughts come their way again. This can lead to a plan for how you or someone else could be available for them to call or see should they feel like they will try to take their life.

Above all, you must listen intently. You cannot afford to be judgmental, nor can they afford for you to jump to conclusions about what the issues really are. You must give them two things: a sympathetic ear and hope. This is the structure of Matthew 11:28. Affirm the weariness and the heavy burdens. Proclaim that there is rest for those that go to Jesus. You can counter some of the destructive and sinful thought patterns by helping the person understand and embrace these truths.

¹ Warning: This approach may not be a reliable technique with alcoholics, drug addicts, psychotics, or others with highly impulsive personalities. If someone has become irrational or is having hallucinations, things are highly unpredictable. Seek outside help immediately.

True and lasting peace can be had by anyone in Christ who obeys the command to pray with thanksgiving.

- **Philippians 4:6-7**—Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

God promises that we already have all we need to live.

- **2 Peter 1:3-4**—seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. ⁴ For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

God claims lordship over them, even their bodies.

1 Corinthians 6:19—Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

What mistakes should you avoid in trying to help someone who is suicidal?

The first mistake is not to take someone seriously. If a person indicates they are thinking of taking their life, do not downplay the idea or feeling. While it is true that some people use the idea to just get attention with no real intent, you cannot know what the intent actually is if you immediately dismiss the person.

Do not leave the person alone until you have a reasonable assurance that they are not in danger. Stay with them until help arrives, or take them to help if possible.

Do not engage in a debate or argument. This does not mean that you accept everything they say as true, but you don't want to agitate them, nor cause them to feel that you are another person that isn't listening to them. Saying things like killing yourself is stupid, or you have no good reason to kill yourself, do not help.

In the same vein, don't use platitudes, like "just cheer up," or "everyone has problems," or "other people have problems, too."

You must remain calm and patient.

Do not promise to keep their intentions a secret. If the threat seems high, call 911. Also, do not put yourself in danger.

What are common misconceptions about suicide?

- *Hell is the only option for those who commit suicide.*
There is nothing in the Bible to indicate that a believer in Christ can ever lose their salvation, their eternal security. The Apostle Paul is clear that there is now, therefore, no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (*Rom.8:1*). Paul continues in that chapter to state that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ, including death—by any means (*Rom.8:28-39*).

Jesus Himself guarantees us: "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one" (John 10:28-30). Jesus died to save us from our sins—every sin, including suicide.²

- *Suicide is better than suffering.*

Joni Tada has written much about viewing suffering through the lens of Biblical truth. Here is one quote from a blog post she wrote:

Tell your friends that life with quadriplegia is supremely preferable over three grams of Phenobarbital in the veins. Yes, there is virtue to be found in suffering. Most of all, suffering is what can drive a hurting person into the arms of their Savior. And that is the *best* argument against cutting your life short—there is no greater suffering than facing a Christ-less eternity on the other side of your tombstone³.

What are the common motivations for suicide?

There are many reasons people consider killing themselves. The broadest overall category might be the idea of escape. The following list can help you understand the range of motivations that can spur someone towards self-murder.

The Great Escape⁴

Suicide is the desperate attempt to get out of what seems to be an intolerable situation. It becomes the way of escape from the pain of living.

Excessive Loss

- Loss of spouse
- Loss of employment
- Loss of finances
- Loss of desired goals
- Loss of a romance
- Loss of intact family
- Loss of reputation
- Loss of friend to suicide

Social Isolation

- Lack of involvement in social activities
- Lack of acceptance by family and friends
- Lack of meaningful relationships
- Lack of relationship with God
- Feeling unloved
- Feeling insignificant

² Bob Kellemen, "Suicide, Salvation, and Eternal Security," Biblical Counseling Coalition, <http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2011/06/28/suicide-salvation-and-eternal-security/>

³ Joni Eareckson Tada, "Assisted Suicide: A Quadriplegic's Perspective," Revive Our Hearts, <https://www.reviveourhearts.com/true-woman/blog/assisted-suicide-quadriplegics-perspective/>

⁴Hunt, J. Biblical Counseling Keys on Suicide Prevention: Hope When Life Seems Hopeless, p.8. Dallas, TX: Hope for The Heart, 2008

- Feeling abandoned

Critical Illness

- Chronic pain
- Major surgery
- Chronic depression
- Terminal illness

Abusive Background

- Sexual abuse
- Physical abuse
- Mental and emotional abuse
- Satanic involvement

Psychological Disorder

- Clinical depression
- Multiple Personality Disorder (Dissociative Identity Disorder)
- Chemical imbalance
- Neurotic attempt to get attention
- Unbalanced desire for revenge

Excessive Guilt

- Extreme remorse over sin
- Legalistic religion
- Unnatural sexual deviations
- Perfectionism
- Shame of feeling defective
- Failure to meet unrealistic expectations

What are the common feelings troubling those left behind?

Guilt

Those who knew the person who committed suicide often struggle with some level of guilt. They feel that somehow it is their fault. Their thoughts begin with words like "If only I had...; I should have...; What if...; I should have..." While it is always true we could have done things differently—and in many cases we should have acted differently—each of us is responsible for our own actions. Romans 14:12 shows that we shall give account for our own actions. You may be responsible for sins against the person that killed himself, but you are not responsible for the choice that person made in response.

Whatever sins are truly yours, repent of them. Remember, God's grace is greater than our sin!

Overwhelm

The better you knew the deceased, the greater the feelings of grief and confusion you are likely to experience. The more they meant to you, the more you feel the loss. But you must not believe that your sense of grief or loss is greater than you, with God by your side, can handle. The troubles that this world brings our way are all under the sovereign hand of God. Jesus comforts us with these words, "*These things I*

have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Confusion

Suicide always leaves a trail of questions. How could a good God allow this? Does God care? Is God really in control of all things? We must remember that we cannot answer all the questions that can be legitimately asked. True understanding of our place in God's creation is how limited we are and how unlimited God is. God reminds us in Isaiah 55:8–9 that *"...My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts."*

Devastation

Suicide can leave those left behind shattered. They may feel that life can never be the same—can never be enjoyed again. They may feel that it is not possible to ever stop crying and mourning the loss. Those who have lived with the loss of loved ones can tell you that while life does return to normalcy, the void is never completely filled. But such tragedy need not cause permanent ruin. We only need wisdom from God about how we can move forward (*James 1:5*).

Conclusion

What trips many of us up when we are exhausted and exasperated is the false idea that no one has experienced what we are dealing with and that no help can make a difference. Remember, there is no circumstance, no pressure, no loss or devastation that others have not already experienced and had the grace from God to push through to the other side (see 1 Cor.10:13).

The Bible affirms that our losses, pressures, devastations, sins are real. It also tells us that God can help us to endure. Help is nothing less than His grace. It is nothing less than He Himself. *"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt.11:28).*

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