

Suicide Talks: The “S” Word— What does God think of it, and how the heck should I handle it?

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Overview

Suicide is never the answer for escaping our pain and problems. God loves us too much to desire any one of His children to choose suicide as an option for solving their pain. We can rest assured in the comfort that our Savior, Jesus, has experienced terrible suffering and humiliation Himself, and He understands exactly what we're going through. We look forward to heaven, and strengthen each other to get through the difficulties of this life as brothers and sisters in Christ, together clinging to the promise that “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1).

This study is designed to be used both proactively and reactively. It can be used with youth who are currently struggling after the suicide of a friend or loved one, it can be used for youth wrestling with their own suicidal feelings, or it can be used for youth working through difficult topics they desire to know more about.

What You Need

- Bitter object for each student to taste (cut sour lemons, unsweetened cocoa, horseradish, etc.)
- New, unwrinkled \$20 bill
- Pencil or pen
- Bible

Opening

(Hand out a bitter object to each youth.)

As we taste these things, we can see how bitter they are. We wouldn't normally eat things like these willingly, right? But this is reflective of our lives—sometimes we deal with very bitter things.

What are some of the bitter things we deal with in life?

Some of the terribly bitter things we deal with include divorce, betrayal, broken friendships, failed relationships, physical illness or injury, and death. Of all of these things, one of the bitterest is “the S word”—suicide.

What does God think about suicide?

Have you known someone who committed suicide? How did this affect you, your friends, or your family? Why do you think people commit suicide?

What is God's view on suicide? Check out Exodus 20:13. (“You shall not murder.”)

What does this Bible verse say about ending a life? Does this verse include suicide, in your opinion? Why or why not?

Why does it matter if someone commits suicide? Check out Genesis 1:26-27 for the answer.

(“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to our likeness; ...’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”)

According to Genesis, we are created in God's image—we are a part of God's family. He designed us, and fashioned each one of us uniquely with different gifts and talents. Suicide destroys a special part of God's family.

So, the question becomes, who do we belong to? If we belong to ourselves, maybe we could be justified in doing whatever we want.

But do we belong to ourselves, or do we belong to God? Let's look at 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 for the answer.

(“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”)

Clearly, we see that each one of us belongs to God. But, how do we know exactly how much God values each one of us? What do you think—does God value us? If so, how much? Read Matthew 10:29-31 and then comment.

(“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”)

So if God loves us so much, why do people still commit suicide? Well, we simply don't know all the reasons—sometimes people have been through a traumatic event, or some sort of suffering, or they see no other way out. We'll never be able to figure out the answer to the question of why a particular person committed suicide, as the answer has died with this person. It was a choice that the person made—obviously a bad one.

In Scripture, several people intentionally killed themselves, including Judas. Let's look briefly at Matthew 27:3-5 and see if we can get a glimpse into what he might have been feeling.

Open your Bibles to Matthew 27:3-5 and read these verses.

Matthew 27:3-5: "Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' And they said, 'What is that to us? You see to it!' Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself."

Why did Judas kill himself? What do you think his state of mind was at this time? Why?

Sometimes it seems impossible to deal with the pain and suffering in your life. Like Judas, you might have betrayed someone and you're overcome with guilt. You might feel like your future is hopeless.

But, let's take a look at someone who did the exact same thing as Judas—someone who betrayed Jesus multiple times. This person was the first disciple who dropped everything to follow Jesus. He saw him perform miracles first-hand (even participating in miracles himself!) and was named the "Rock" by Jesus—but he still lied about even knowing Jesus. You guessed it: it's Peter.

Read Matthew 26:69-75. What was Peter's reaction? How is it different from the reaction of Judas? Why?

Matthew 26:69-75: "Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. 'You also were with Jesus of Galilee,' she said. But he denied it before them all. 'I don't know what you're talking about,' he said. Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, 'This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.' He denied it again, with an oath: 'I don't know the man!' After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, 'Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away.' Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, 'I don't know the man!' Immediately a rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: 'Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly."

Although the Bible does not tell us exactly everything that happened with Peter after this point, he goes on to become an incredibly powerful witness for Christ. Peter is considered one of the most impacting Christians of all time, and is a household name even today. Though he had fallen far from grace by rejecting Jesus, his life was far from meaningless and pointless. God used him as an influential instrument, and his legacy continues even to this day. If he had chosen to end his life, history as we know it would've been dramatically different.

Peter and Judas stand in stark contrast to each other. Both were hopeless and tormented by their guilt. In Judas, we see what the result of him isolating himself and separating himself from God was: suicide. In Peter, however, we see how leaning on Christ's promises of forgiveness can lead to a fresh new start and an exciting, meaningful future. Let's examine this idea of forgiveness a bit more.

How then do we handle our pain?

What do you think—does God forgive us, even when we've done something terrible, or are trapped in hopelessness and depression, or are so guilt-ridden that we feel we can't go on?

According to Jeremiah 33:8, God promises, "I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me." God is always willing to rescue us from our sin, no matter what sort of terrible things we may have done.

What sort of things do we encounter in our lives that cause us to feel so hopeless or depressed?

Instead of choosing to take our own lives, how can we appropriately deal with the feelings we're experiencing in our lives?

It's important to cling to Jesus in our times of pain. As it says in Psalm 46:1, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." Even in the midst of our most painful moments, we have an incredible God who loves us. He is

walking with us, every step of our lives. He knows exactly what we're going through, and He knows exactly how much we're hurting. He sent His Son, Jesus, to free us from this pain, cleanse us from all the sins and mistakes we've made, and to give us the hope of eternal life with Him in Heaven.

Can we be sure that we won't ever lose God's love? Let's see what Romans 8:38-39 says about it.

("For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.")

Jesus himself was rejected, hated, and ultimately tortured and killed by people who hated him. How was he able to endure all of this? Hebrews 12:2-3 tells us, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

Jesus endured torture because He knew what joy lay before Him. We must not lose heart, even in the deepest valleys of our lives. We must "fix our eyes on Jesus" and look to our future in heaven with Him. We can "cast all of our cares" on Jesus, because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). After all, God promises, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5).

Closing Object Lesson

Each of you are incredibly special to God. You are all wonderfully created. In my pocket here, I have a \$20 bill. (Pull out \$20 bill).

Do any of you want this? (wait for responses).

Oh, so you do want it. I guess it's because you know it's valuable and it's brand new.

But wait, do you want it now? (crumple it up).

Okay, who wants it now? (wait for responses). But, it's not nice and unwrinkled anymore—you mean you still want a wrinkled bill?

Fine, then, what if I mark it up with this pencil? (mark up the bill)

Now that it's marked up, none of you want it now, right? But why? It's not perfect anymore.

(Next, rip a small corner off). Now it's ripped up. It can't be worth anything to anyone...right? (wait for students to disagree).

You know, you are right. It is worth the same no matter what happens to it. In the same way, it doesn't matter what happens to us—God still values us and loves us just the same. It doesn't matter how we look, what we do, if we're wrinkled, if we're missing pieces of ourselves, if we're scarred, or what happens to us—He knows each of us is worth more than anything else.

Suicide is not the answer for solving problems. It only makes things worse—and the pain it inflicts on our friends and family can be crippling and permanent. There are much better options for dealing with our pain. As we said, cast your cares on God. Be open about your pain, and find other caring people who can help you through your low points in life. Sometimes it's hard or embarrassing to ask for help, but it's even more difficult to ask your friends and family to deal with your suicide.

In Christ, we have an exciting and wonderful future to look forward to. As it says in 1 Corinthians 2:9, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him". In Jeremiah 29:11, God tells us that He has plans to "prosper us and not to harm us, plans to give us a hope and a future".

In heaven, we will no longer deal with pain, death, and suffering. Revelation 21:4 tells us that "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

If you hang onto any Bible verse from this lesson, let it be Psalm 46:1, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." Let that become your mantra, as you navigate the challenging ups and downs of life.

You will experience times of loss, pain, and suffering—but rest assured that God is your refuge and your strength, and is always present for you in your times of trouble.

There is hope in Jesus—cling to that!

How should we handle suicide?

What Should You Do if You Are Thinking about Suicide?

If you're thinking about killing yourself, don't keep it to yourself. Share your feelings with a trusted parent, teacher, youth leader, pastor, school counselor, nurse, doctor, or friend. Don't be embarrassed or ashamed of sharing your feelings. Regardless of how you might be feeling, there are people in your life who truly want to help you.

Know that people do get through this—even people who have felt just as miserable as you do now. Just because you are feeling something doesn't mean you have to act on it immediately. Try to put some distance between your suicidal feelings and a suicidal action. Hold yourself to talking to someone about your pain before you continue to dwell on thoughts of suicide. Through talking to others, you may feel some relief from your pain. And remember, relief is a feeling—one that you have to be alive to feel. If you are dead, you will not feel the relief you want.

You can always call one of the hot lines listed here at any time: 1.800.SUICIDE (1.800.784.2433) or 1.800.273.TALK (1.800.273.8255). If you are in imminent danger of hurting yourself, contact 911 immediately or get to a hospital and tell them that you are wrestling with suicidal thoughts.

What Should You Do If You Know Someone Who is Contemplating Suicide?

If you know someone who is suicidal, it's always better to err on the side of overestimating their seriousness than not taking them seriously enough. You'll rest easier if you know you did everything you could for this person.

Don't be afraid to ask, "Are you thinking about committing suicide?" or "Do you have a plan for killing yourself?" These questions are not likely to make someone think about committing suicide, nor are they offensive. Make sure you tell your friend, "I love you, and I won't abandon you during this difficult time. How can I help you?"

If the suicide risk is very high, encourage your friend to call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1.800.273.TALK) or 1.800.SUICIDE (1.800.784.2433). If your friend won't do this, you can call 911 for an emergency response team. If this does not work, get your friend to an emergency room for evaluation by the hospital staff. Don't leave your friend until you get him or her to one of these places.

If the suicide risk seems low, it's still important to stay with the person and be a caring and supporting friend. Get your friend connected with a counselor, psychologist, pastor, youth leader, or family doctor. Go with your friend to these professionals, and keep praying for them and reminding them of God's love for them.

As Galatians 6:2 says, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Warning Signs of Suicide Risk

The presence of three or more of these warning signs may be viewed as red flags and should warrant contacting a professional immediately.

- Dramatic change in personality (becoming withdrawn, anxious, sad, irritable, tired, indecisive, apathetic)
- Change in behavior (can't concentrate on work or school)
- Change in sleeping pattern
- Change in eating habits
- Loss of hope for the future
- Loss of interest in hobbies, friends, or activities usually enjoyed
- Loss of faith
- Feelings of severe shame, guilt, or self-hatred
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Fear of "going crazy", harming others or self, or losing control
- Nightmares
- Sudden cheerfulness after a time of depression
- Putting his/her affairs in order (giving away personal possessions, throwing away belongings, etc.)
- Verbal statements such as, "I won't be a problem much longer," "Nothing matters anymore," or "I won't see you anymore"
- Increased risk after recent loss of a loved one through death, separation, divorce, or a broken relationship
- Increased risk after loss of job, status, self-confidence, self-esteem, or money