

What Does the Bible Say About Suicide? Selected Verses

Good morning! I hope you're all doing well this morning. I hope you're all feeling good and has a zest for life and actually are hopeful about the future. I sincerely hope that. You know why? Because today, someone out there is attempting to end his or her life. According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, in 2017, there were 1.4 million suicide attempts. That's about 3,888 suicides per day which translates to an attempt every 20 seconds. They said that this figure could even be higher because these are only the reported cases. Imagine that. 20 seconds from now, there's an attempted suicide. Then another one after 20 seconds.

Those are attempts. How about the successful suicides? In 2017, 47,173 died by suicide in the US. On average, there are 129 suicides per day. Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the US. And you know what, the rate of suicide among people between the ages of 15 and 25 was calculated to be approximately 13.2 out of 100,000 in 2016. That makes suicide the second leading cause of death for young people.

Now, if it's any comfort at all, the US ranks #27 among countries with the highest suicide rate. #1 is Lithuania, a little unknown country in Europe. Second is Russia. Do you know the ranking of the Philippines? 163! You would think it would be closer to the top because of the poverty, the corruption, the pollution and all evils of society. Well, that just goes to show how resilient Filipinos are. So, if you want to live longer, go to the Philippines.

Now, I don't want to talk lightly about this serious matter. Because I believe that if there's anything that you want to fail at in life, it is suicide. We don't want to see any successful suicides. There's no happiness in that.

This morning I'd like to start a new series called "Some More Big Questions about the God, the Bible, God, and Life". A few months back we did "Big Questions..." if you remember. We answered some questions using the Bible as our basis. In this series, I'd like to deal with some more questions. Therefore, this could be a 4 or 5 part series. And you guessed it right! There will some more early next year.

Anyway, this morning I'd like to answer a question that, perhaps, is in the mind of many people nowadays. In fact, this is a question that summarizes many questions that are in people's minds like is "Is suicide a sin?", "Do you go to hell when you commit suicide?", "Is suicide the unpardonable sin?", "Is it okay for Christians to seek psychiatric counseling?", "Are there godly people in the Bible who had thoughts of suicide?"

So, this morning, the question I'd like to answer is "What does the Bible say about suicide?" You see, the Bible is not silent about suicide. The Bible can enlighten us about this hard issue of suicide.

I'm talking about suicide because it is a hot topic nowadays. It is receiving much attention these days because of celebrities who took their own life recently like Anthony Bourdain, a chef, author, and travel documentarian, and also Kate Spade, a famous fashion designer. I'm sure you've heard of them. But have you heard also that there's quite a number of Christians who have taken their own lives recently? And many of these are pastors. Like Andrew Stocklein, lead pastor of a megachurch in Corona, California who killed himself in August of last year. And most recently, in fact, just two weeks ago on Sept. 9th, the day after the start of the National Suicide Prevention Week, Jarrid Wilson committed suicide. He was an associate pastor at Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside CA, the very church which Greg Laurie, a popular evangelist pastors. It's interesting that these two

pastors were advocates of mental health but were also open about their depression and bouts with anxiety.

As we would expect, many people offered comfort and encouragement to the widows and families of these two men. But some were not understanding. In Stocklein's case, some people in his church criticized him for being selfish or lacking maturity or they directed their criticism against his family for not seeking help or praying more.

So, I want to shed some light on suicide in order for us to gain a better perspective on it. And also, I hope to offer hope from the Bible for anyone who may be thinking of walking on this lonely road.

First of all,

1. What causes suicide?

Many people say it is caused by financial problems or a lingering illness or a failed relationship or failure to pass a college exam, which commonly happens in Japan, or business failure or something else. But each of these is just a trigger to what actually happens inside a person. Usually, after encountering a great difficulty which a person couldn't handle, depression sets in. Depression is a condition in which a person is overwhelmed by his trying circumstances and causes much pain mentally and emotionally to that person. When it is untreated and prolonged, the person loses the will to live. And the person would like to end the pain by ending his or her life. The person sees suicide as the only way out.

The Bible records several persons who committed suicide. There is King Saul, for example. After being defeated in a battle and seeing his sons die, he said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and run me through and abuse me.' But his armor-bearer was terrified and would not do it; so Saul took his own sword and fell on it." (1 Samuel 31:4) The Bible tells us that his armor-bearer killed himself as

well. “When the armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and died with him.” (1 Samuel 31:5)

There is also Ahithophel. He was King David’s counselor but turned against him and gave advice to David’s son Absalom on how to defeat his father. The Bible says, “When Ahithophel saw that his advice had not been followed, he saddled his donkey and set out for his house in his hometown. He put his house in order and then hanged himself. So he died and was buried in his father’s tomb.” (1 Samuel 17:23)

And, of course, there is Judas, who, after betraying Jesus, felt shame and guilt by what he did and became so depressed. The Bible tells us “When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. ‘I have sinned,’ he said, ‘for I have betrayed innocent blood.’ ‘What is that to us?’ they replied. ‘That’s your responsibility.’ So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.” (Matthew 27:3-5)

Depression is a mental illness according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). They say, “Depressive disorder, frequently referred to simply as depression, is more than just feeling sad or going through a rough patch. It’s a serious mental health condition that requires understanding and medical care. Left untreated, depression can be devastating for those who have it and their families.”

What are the symptoms of depression? These are the common symptoms:

- Changes in sleep
- Changes in appetite
- Lack of concentration
- Loss of energy
- Lack of interest in activities

- Hopelessness or guilty thoughts
- Changes in movement (less activity or agitation)
- Physical aches and pains
- Suicidal thoughts

The last symptom is the most dangerous of them all. When a person starts having those then you know that help is really needed.

Some people, however, don't understand depression enough that they don't offer the help that is needed. They dismiss it just like a headache. "C'mon, you'll snap out of it in time" "Just read a good book" "Go shopping".

Because it is an illness, depression must be treated like one. If necessary, the person who is depressed should see a counselor or a psychiatrist or a psychologist. Or be given anti-depressants or undergo psychotherapy. Surprisingly, some Christians are opposed to this. They think it's a spiritual issue and so they would rather that a person just read the Bible often, pray more, maybe fast, confess their sins and other spiritual disciplines. No harm in those. However, mental illness is like a physical illness that should be treated with proper medical treatment. God also uses people and medicines to make a person well. For sure, God can cure someone without the help of others or things but, in general, he doesn't work that way. When Jesus was on earth, sometimes he uses things to heal like when he put mud on a blind man's eyes to make him see. And Paul instructed Timothy to "use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities." (1 Tim. 5:23)

You know why it's an illness? Because our minds can only take so much. Like our bodies. If you work so hard and don't get enough sleep or you don't eat enough food, your body breaks down and you get sick. In the same way, when the pressures of life bear on you, and you keep thinking about them, you worry and fret, then your mind breaks down and you get depressed. Depression is from the

Latin word that means pressed down. You get depressed because of **pressures that press you down**. Again, depression is a disease that should get proper medical treatment.

2. Is suicide a sin?

a. It is sinful to take one's own life.

The answer is yes. It is a sin. It is sinful to take one's own life. God is the source of life, the giver of life and he alone can take it back. **Job 12:10** says, "In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind."

b. It violates the sixth commandment.

It is also a violation of the sixth commandment. "You shall not murder" (**Ex. 20:13**). You're murdering yourself when you commit suicide.

c. It disregards the second greatest commandment.

By committing suicide, the person disregards the second greatest commandment, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself". (**Matt. 22:39**) You see, implicit in this commandment is the commandment to love oneself.

Life is sacred. It is a privilege to live. It is a gift of God. Taking one's own life is an affront to the holiness and faithfulness and love of God. It is throwing away a precious gift just because it doesn't suit your purpose anymore. God, therefore, is grieved when someone takes one's life. He still loves you but he is grieved nonetheless.

3. Is suicide the unpardonable sin?

The answer is no. Some teach that it is unpardonable because a person cannot ask forgiveness after committing suicide. If that were true, then how about while you were driving, someone cut you on the road, and you forgot you were a Christian for a second, and you shouted and cursed at the person and gave him the finger and the next thing you knew you lost control of the steering wheel and your

car crashed and you died and you never got a chance to ask forgiveness for your unchristianlike behavior. Would you have committed the unpardonable sin as well?

To put this in its proper context, let's look at what truly Jesus means when he says in Mark 3:28-29, "Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin."

In the verses prior to these, the Pharisees were slandering Jesus by telling him that he had an impure spirit. They couldn't just accept the fact of the Holy Spirit's work in the life of Jesus. Remember, the Pharisees knew that God's spirit can descend upon a person to empower that person just like in the Old Testament. What they didn't know was that the Holy Spirit is God himself being the third person in the Trinity. In effect, Jesus is telling them that they were blaspheming against God himself. In fact, they were reviling the work of God in Jesus. In short, they didn't accept Jesus as the Messiah and Savior. Thus, anyone who doesn't accept Jesus as Lord and Savior until they die has committed the unpardonable sin. This is the sin that cannot be forgiven when a person dies without Jesus because he has no chance anymore to accept God's offer of salvation through Jesus.

4. Does a person who commits suicide go to hell?

Yes and No. Yes, the person goes to hell if the person has committed the unpardonable sin. As I mentioned already, the unpardonable is not accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior of one's life. So, if the person did not acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus in his or her life until his or her last breath, then that person is condemned and faces an existence in hell forever.

No, the person doesn't go to hell if the person is a Christian. You see, being a Christian means being forgiven of your sins, past, present, and future. Your salvation doesn't depend on what you do or have done but what Christ has done for you. If it all depends on what we've done, then all of us are on the same boat, we

all stand condemned. But God knows that we cannot save ourselves by what we do and so he sent Jesus his son to die for us. His death on the cross has covered every sin we have made or will ever make including the sin of suicide. No sin is big enough to fall outside the grace of God. **GRACE can be defined as God's Richness At Christ's Expense.** That Richness consists of his forgiveness, his love, faithfulness, and everything that makes God God.

The good news is that in salvation, Christ not only forgives our sin, but He gives us His righteousness! It is Christ's righteousness that makes us pleasing to God –without which we cannot enter heaven. **Romans 5:18 (NLT) says, "Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness (which is his death on the cross) brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone."**

Christ's righteousness is a gift that we didn't earn. And if we never did anything to deserve it in the first place, we certainly can't do anything to lose it. Instead, it is a covering over our sin that allows God to see us the way He sees His Son –even when we commit sin -including suicide.

5. What do I do when I have suicidal thoughts?

The answer is don't entertain them. Suicidal thoughts are symptoms of mental illness like changes in sleep and changes in appetite. They are not sinful but entertaining them can cause you to commit the sin of suicide. They're also like temptations of the flesh that will cause you to commit a sexual sin if you succumb to them. You have control over these thoughts. If it's hard to control, seek professional help like the counsel of your pastor or a Christian counselor or psychiatrist. Get help.

One person in the Bible who went through a period of depression that was characterized by suicidal thoughts is the prophet Elijah. In 1 Kings 19, he had just faced an entire nation, challenging them to turn to God and leave the pagan god

Baal. Single-handedly, he stood up for the Lord as God exhibited His power showing whose God was really God! Queen Jezebel threatened his life because of it, and he fled in fear.

Elijah was ready to die. The Bible says, “But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, ‘It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!’” (1 Kings 19:4 NKJV). He thought the situation was hopeless. He was wrong. Twice when God asked him what was wrong, Elijah replied “I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.” (19:10,14 NKJV). It was true that the people of Israel had done those terrible things, but Elijah was wrong to think that he was alone (19:18).

No matter how he felt, Elijah was not alone. But notice what destructive things Elijah did to conclude that all was hopeless—he isolated himself (19:3-4,9), he forgot about God’s deliverance from the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:17-40), he indulged in self-pity (19:10,14), he became pessimistic (19:10,14), and by doing all of those things, he continued feeding his depression.

What did God tell him to do to relieve his depression? He told him to get busy doing the Lord’s work (19:15-16). He also told him that his pessimistic attitude about the nation was wrong (19:18). Someone once said, “I must lose myself in service lest I wither in despair.” God knew that service, action, and setting the prophet’s thinking straight would deliver him from his suicidal depression. Surely there is something in there for us to learn.

In the middle of a severe, prolonged depression, and apparently hopeless odds, many people take their own lives. Their depression has distorted their

thinking. Depression always distorts our thinking! That's why a depressed person need professional help and, most importantly, God's help.

6. How do I minister to those contemplating suicide?

The answer is, first of all, recognize the signs of suicide. These include: talking about suicide; statements about hopelessness, helplessness, worthlessness; preoccupation with death; sudden happiness and calm; loss of interest in material things; disposal of material things; visiting loved ones; setting one's affairs in order.

Second of all, offer practical responses like:

- Ask pointed questions if you suspect someone is suicidal.
- Persuade them—even take them—to get help (e.g., crisis hotline, emergency room, family, counseling, etc.).
- Refer them to available resources and **stay involved in their life** (e.g., support group, church, etc.).

Now, I want to share with you a conference on mental health and wellness that's going to take place this Saturday at Fairfax High School. It's sponsored by FCPS. It's called the Sixth Annual Mental Health and Wellness Conference. From 8 – 12:30 pm.

This is open to both parents and high school kids. They have a special session for children. So, I encourage parents especially with high school children to check it out.

7. What is the answer to suicide?

The answer is Jesus! In Acts, 16:25-34, we read the story of the jailer. Let's turn to this passage. So, here we see that the Philippian jailer chose to escape his predicament through Jesus Christ rather than through death. Death is never the solution. Christ is always the solution! You just wait. Isaiah 40:31 says, "But they

who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

You see, Jesus came to help us. He delivers the discouraged and the distraught. In Luke 4:17-19, we read “and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,

19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”[a]

Folks, Jesus seeks to give the weary rest. He seeks the weary and heavy-hearted to give them rest—not rest in peace but rest in the Lord. He says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”
(Matthew 11:28-30).