

Suicide

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What Does the Bible Say About... / Suicide / Judges 9:50–55; 1 Samuel 31:1–10; 2 Samuel 17:23; 1 Kings 16:18; Matthew 27:3–10; Deuteronomy 30:15–20

In this lesson, we shall learn what the Bible says about suicide.

Introduction

I am starting a series of messages that I am calling, “What Does the Bible Say About...?”

I plan to tackle various topics, such as suicide, homosexuality, what happens after death, speaking in tongues, divorce, remarriage, and so on.

These messages will not be an exposition of a passage of Scripture. Rather, they will be an exposition of a particular topic.

In this message, I would like to ask, “What Does the Bible Say About Suicide?”

I hope that we will learn what the Bible teaches about suicide.

Scripture

I would like to read a passage of Scripture to set a foundation for what I want to say. I would like to read from the book of Deuteronomy. Moses wrote the book of Deuteronomy, and the passage I want to read is near the end of the book. It is Moses’ third speech, and in his final exhortation to the people of God, he is urging them to accept God’s covenant.

Let’s read [Deuteronomy 30:15-20](#):

¹⁵ “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. ¹⁶ If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are

entering to take possession of it. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, ²⁰ loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

Lesson

In this lesson, we shall learn what the Bible says about suicide.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Foundation Considerations
2. Biblical Issues
3. Pastoral Concerns

I. Foundational Considerations

First, let's look at some foundational considerations.

There are many considerations surrounding the matter of suicide. We cannot cover all of them in this lesson. However, let's look at several questions.

A. What Is Suicide?

First, what is suicide?

A simple definition of suicide is “the act of taking one's own life” (Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, and R. K. Harrison, Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds., *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995]).

A more comprehensive definition of suicide is “the taking of one’s own life, or causing it to be taken by another, regardless of motive, circumstances, or method used” (J. T. Clemons, “Suicide,” ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised* [Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988], 652).

Suicide is sometimes described as “self-murder.”

Because suicide is the direct killing of oneself, it is different from indirect, unintentional, and accidental self-death.

The word “suicide” comes from two Latin words: *sui*, which means “self,” and *caedere*, which means “to kill.”

The word “suicide” does not occur in the Bible.

There are no laws in the Bible specifically against suicide.

Nevertheless, the Bible does give examples of suicide, which we shall examine shortly.

B. Why Do People Commit Suicide?

Second, why do people commit suicide?

There is no single answer to the question of why people commit suicide.

People who commit suicide have an overwhelming sense of helplessness, hopelessness, or worthlessness. Many circumstances lead to an act of suicide.

Some of the factors that may lead to suicide are unresolved feelings or events that eventually seem impossible to overcome. One writer notes:

Among them are depression, alcoholism, substance abuse, anger, revenge, illness, physical infirmity, loss of a loved one, loss of a close friend, loss of a job or other financial setback, public humiliation or loss of social status, and schizophrenia or personality disorders (Gary Stewart, *Basic Questions on Suicide and Euthanasia: Are They Ever Right?*, BioBasics Series [Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998], 16).

Suicide is often seen as a solution to what appears to be an insoluble problem.

Sadly, suicide always causes more pain than it alleviates.

C. What Are Some Myths Regarding Suicide?

Third, what are some myths regarding suicide?

There are several myths regarding suicide. Here are some common myths:

- Myth: People who talk about committing suicide do not actually do it.
 - Reality: Eighty percent of those who commit suicide have given some indication, especially in verbal statements. Comments such as, “I can’t see any way out” or, “You’ll be sorry when I’m gone” are definite red flags.
- Myth: Suicidal people are fully intent on dying or are certain to commit suicide.
 - Reality: Most people who are suicidal are undecided about living or dying, and they gamble with death, leaving it to others to save them. Relatively few people commit suicide without letting someone know how they are feeling. The final act most often takes place in isolation, but the circumstances leading up to it often are not. Most suicidal people do not want death; they only want to stop what they consider to be unbearable emotional pain or psychological distress. Nevertheless, there are quite a few cases where signs of a potential suicide are intentionally kept from those close to a suicidal person. When people actually believe that they want or need to die, they often shut out the world around them. Sometimes they leave a suicide note, other times they do not.
- Myth: Once suicidal, always suicidal.
 - Reality: Most people are only suicidal for a limited period of time. Feelings change with circumstances, and suicidal thoughts often pass with time as the events causing the despair change or are resolved. Certainly, this is not the case with all suicidal people, but it is for many.
- Myth: People who make one suicide attempt will not make subsequent attempts.

- Reality: Most people do not attempt suicide more than once, but 10 percent of those who make an attempt will eventually succeed in committing suicide.
- Myth: Suicide is an act of impulse with no previous planning.
 - Reality: Most suicides are carefully planned or considered for weeks before the act. This is certainly not an absolute, however. Every suicide has its own peculiarities, but the norm involves considerable forethought before an attempt.
- Myth: People considering suicide are unwilling to seek help.
 - Reality: More than half of those who commit suicide will have received medical care or counseling within the six months preceding the act.
- Myth: Improvement means the risk of suicide is over.
 - Reality: Most suicides occur within the first months following the beginning of improvement. Often during a crisis, the individual does not have the emotional energy to perform the act. However, once there has been some improvement, the individual may attempt or commit suicide to avoid “ever being that low again” or “ever going through that again.”
- Myth: Women only threaten suicide, but men accomplish it.
 - Reality: Both women and men threaten, attempt, and complete the act of suicide. Suicide is not a gender-specific problem, nor is there a “suicide gene.” It is an equal-opportunity crisis for individuals. It is true that five times as many men as women commit suicide and twice as many women as men make suicide gestures and attempts, but suicide seriously affects both genders.
- Myth: If you ask a person directly, “Are you suicidal?” you will prompt a suicide attempt.
 - Reality: Asking a person directly about a suicidal intent or inclination will often relieve anxiety the individual has about his or her feelings and may thereby act as a deterrent to suicidal behavior. Communication helps rather than hurts.

- Myth: Only certain types of people commit suicide; others are completely immune from it.
- Reality: Under extremely strenuous or tragic circumstances or a combination of these, *anyone is susceptible to suicide*. It is true that there are risk factors and profiles for individuals who are especially prone to suicide. However, we cannot know with certainty how we will respond to the many trials, traumas, and temptations of life. For some people, suicide might be very unlikely, but it is never impossible (Gary Stewart, *Basic Questions on Suicide and Euthanasia: Are They Ever Right?*, BioBasics Series [Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998], 12–15).

D. What Is Assisted Suicide or Physician-Assisted Suicide?

And fourth, what is assisted suicide or physician-assisted suicide?

Assisted suicide, and especially physician-assisted suicide, is a serious and growing issue in our society today. It may be defined as follows:

Assisted suicide is suicide that occurs when someone either provides the means by which a person ends his or her own life or otherwise enables the suicide to occur. Physician-assisted suicide is when the physician provides that assistance (Gary Stewart, *Basic Questions on Suicide and Euthanasia: Are They Ever Right?*, BioBasics Series [Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998], 18).

More states are permitting physician-assisted suicide. There is a growing movement that seeks to help people “die with dignity.” There are all kinds of arguments made to support a person’s right to die. But they are all flawed.

II. Biblical Issues

Second, let’s examine Biblical issues.

Again, there are several Biblical issues.

A. Are There Examples of Suicide in the Bible?

First, are there examples of suicide in the Bible?

There are six examples of suicide in the Bible, five in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament.

Samson is sometimes said to have committed suicide (see [Judges 16:23-31](#)). You recall that Samson was captured by the Philistines. His eyes were gouged out. He languished in prison. Eventually, the Philistines had a massive party. They called Samson in to entertain them. He grasped two pillars and caused the building to collapse on the Philistines. By that act, Samson killed thousands of Philistines, including himself.

However, many, as do I, do not regard Samson's act as suicidal since that was not his intention. He intended to destroy his enemies rather than to commit suicide. Therefore, Samson's death is not considered to be an act of suicide.

Now, let's look briefly at each example of suicide.

1. Old Testament Examples of Suicide

Let's begin by looking at the Old Testament examples of suicide.

a. Abimelech

The first Old Testament example of suicide is Abimelech.

Abimelech was the son of Gideon. When Abimelech was wounded in battle, he commanded his armor-bearer to hasten his death by killing him. We read in [Judges 9:50-55](#):

⁵⁰ Then Abimelech went to Thebez and encamped against Thebez and captured it. ⁵¹ But there was a strong tower within the city, and all the men and women and all the leaders of the city fled to it and shut themselves in, and they went up to the roof of the tower. ⁵² And Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it and drew near to the door of the tower to burn it with fire. ⁵³ And a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull. ⁵⁴ Then he called quickly to the young man his armor-bearer and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, lest they say of me, 'A woman killed him.'" And his young man thrust him through, and he died. ⁵⁵ And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, everyone departed to his home.

b. Saul

The second Old Testament example of suicide is Saul.

Like Abimelech, King Saul was also wounded in battle. Let's read about his suicide in [1 Samuel 31:1-6](#):

¹ Now the Philistines were fighting against Israel, and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. ² And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons, and the Philistines struck down Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua, the sons of Saul. ³ The battle pressed hard against Saul, and the archers found him, and he was badly wounded by the archers. ⁴ Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and mistreat me." But his armor-bearer would not, for he feared greatly. Therefore Saul took his own sword and fell upon it. ⁵ And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell upon his sword and died with him. ⁶ Thus Saul died, and his three sons, and his armor-bearer, and all his men, on the same day together.

c. Saul's Armor Bearer

The third Old Testament example of suicide is Saul's armor bearer.

The armor-bearer's suicide is described in [1 Samuel 31:5-6](#), the text we just read.

d. Ahithophel

The fourth Old Testament example of suicide is Ahithophel.

Ahithophel was an advisor to King David and his son Absalom. Ahithophel's suicide is recorded in [2 Samuel 17:23](#), where we read, "When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed [by Absalom], he saddled his donkey and went off home to his own city. He set his house in order and hanged himself, and he died and was buried in the tomb of his father."

e. Zimri

And the fifth Old Testament example of suicide is Zimri.

Zimri was king of Israel for just seven days. He burned the palace, killing himself (and probably others) rather than being captured by his enemies. We read of his

suicide in [1 Kings 16:18](#), “And when Zimri saw that the city was taken, he went into the citadel of the king’s house and burned the king’s house over him with fire and died.”

2. New Testament Example of Suicide

Let’s notice the New Testament example of suicide.

There is just one example of suicide in the New Testament. One of Jesus’ disciples, Judas Iscariot, hanged himself after he had remorse following his betrayal of Jesus. We read of Judas’ suicide in [Matthew 27:3-5](#):

³ Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, ⁴ saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” ⁵ And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.

III. Pastoral Concerns

And third, let’s note some pastoral concerns.

Let me mention just two pastoral concerns.

A. How Does God View Suicide?

First, how does God view suicide?

It is important to note that none of the six examples of suicide in the Bible is viewed favorably. Neither is suicide in the Bible viewed as a legitimate option, even in the most difficult of circumstances.

Life is viewed as a gift from God, and no person has the right to take any life—his own or anyone else’s—apart from proper Biblical warrant.

So, for example, the taking of life in a legitimate war is sanctioned by Scripture. And the taking of life for intentional murder after proper, legal approval is sanctioned by Scripture.

But in no other instance, is the taking of life Scripturally sanctioned.

B. Is Suicide an Unpardonable Sin?

And second, is suicide an unpardonable sin?

Some people say that suicide is unpardonable because the person committing suicide cannot ask for forgiveness and therefore receives eternal punishment.

Others say that because suicide is self-murder, it is therefore unpardonable. Moreover, because the person has died, forgiveness is no longer possible.

Let me say that these views grossly misunderstand Biblical truth. Let me try to untangle it for you.

Yes, suicide is a sin. But it is not a sin that will automatically result in a person's eternal condemnation.

Here is the Biblical truth. A person's eternal destiny is based on *justification* and not *sanctification*.

Question 32 of *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* asks, "What is justification?" And the answer is:

Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone (*The Westminster Shorter Catechism: With Scripture Proofs*, 3rd edition. [Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996]).

What sins does God pardon? Note that God pardons "all our sins," not just "some of our sins." God pardons *all* our past sins, *all* our present sins, and *all* our future sins. All our sins are pardoned at the moment we are justified.

When a person is justified, the *penalty* of sin is erased but the *power* and *presence* of sin are not erased.

Every justified person sins after being justified and pardoned. He does not want to sin but because of the power and presence of sin, he will still sin. Sanctification enables that person more and more to overcome sin in his life. But he will never completely eradicate sin until he steps into glory.

So, a justified person will sin. He may commit suicide. In fact, he may even commit murder. But, if he is justified, he will never lose his salvation.

Therefore, suicide is not an unpardonable sin.

Conclusion

Suicide is very difficult for everyone.

It is a horrendous decision that is made by the person committing suicide.

It is also horrifying for the remaining family and friends who are affected by that suicide.

Suicide not only has temporal ramifications but eternal implications as well.

If a person is not a Christian and commits suicide, that person will face an eternity in hell. There will never be any chance to change one's destiny. So, the best thing for any non-Christian is to turn to Christ and find hope in him alone.

If a person is a Christian and commits suicide, I hope you understand that the person will not forfeit his or her salvation.

Nevertheless, Christians should be reminded of God's promise that one day "he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" ([Revelation 21:4](#)).

By God's enabling grace, always choose life. Remember the covenant promise of God in [Deuteronomy 30:19-20](#):

¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, ²⁰ loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."