

Dealing with Suicide: Surviving and Healing – A Bible Study and DVD

This Bible study comes out of listening to the stories of people who have experienced suicide in their lives. Christians are in a unique position to provide care for survivors by using the Word of God, and letting the Lord do the healing. The goal of the study is to help participants understand the dynamics of suicide, and offer ideas for how their faith can help them carry another's burden in appropriate ways.

The DVD is about 26 minutes long and could be used in a limited one-time study. However, it is recommended that three sessions be planned to allow for discussion. Included are several pages of worksheets for participants and guidelines for the presenter. It is suggested to review the questions before viewing the DVD and possibly show the DVD more than one time. Also, add Biblical study cases to each session.

Open- Introduction *(1 minute)*

Dealing with suicide is an emotional and spiritual challenge. Christian caregivers, be they family, friends or pastors, can share their love for Jesus and make a difference in the lives of hurting souls.

This presentation is a Christian tool to stimulate discussion, education, and guidance. It is not a comprehensive study. Study the interconnected presentation as a whole.

Keep in mind that someone watching the video with you may have been either touched by a suicide or has wrestled themselves with this temptation. Be prepared to allow time for Christians who want to bring up their own experiences. Many have tried to talk about a suicide experience, but they have been prevented by others who are not comfortable or who want to change the subject. Recognize that this might be their time for expressing grief and questions even though the experience happened many years ago.

May the Holy Spirit enlighten and encourage you to continue in your Christian care-giving.

Survivors – Part One *(9 minutes)*

Bill, whose mother tried to kill him and then later committed suicide herself, has also attempted suicide. Thankfully, the Lord rescued him. Bill is now a Christian. Julie survives the suicide of her son with the support of her faith and her fellow Christians. Paul, also the parent of a son who committed suicide, gives witness as a WELS pastor to God's grace in his life.

Prevention – Part Two (8 minutes)

Prevention of suicide is discussed in this section. Note the word, try. The efforts of Christian caregivers may or may not be “successful.” Early warning signs and some of the “dos” and “don’ts” are discussed about someone who is thinking of suicide.

Aftermath – Part Three (7 minutes)

The aftermath of a suicide is covered in this section. Christians learn that survivors often endure a silent but intense grief due to the stigma that suicide still carries. The unique ministry here demands patience, listening, and support beyond what one may have planned.

Gaining more education from the Bible and other resources is always helpful. Christians are in a unique position of using the Word of God and letting the Lord do the healing. The internet offers additional resources on the subject of suicide.

Close (1 minute)

St. Paul in Galatians 6:2 encourages us to **“Carry each others burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”**

Dealing with suicide and carrying each other’s burdens means sharing the saving love of Jesus for all sinners, especially for burdened hearts. Listen patiently to their pain just as the Lord listens to your heart. Take their hurting and disturbing words seriously. Be ready to call for help. With compassion, allow survivors to express their feelings and thoughts even if they are not always Biblically correct. Corrections can come later. Be ready to hear the same story of the suicide repeatedly. Educate yourself on how to walk with survivors of suicide.

Understand that your Christian care-giving will not be easy. You might be the only one listening. Recognize that care-giving will take much more time and love than you had planned.

Remember Jesus’ saving love will strengthen and direct your heart. You can make a difference in the lives of people dealing with suicide. God bless your Christian care-giving.



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Dealing with Suicide: Surviving and Healing – A Bible Study Worksheet

Part 1 INCREASE YOUR LISTENING-FROM-THE-HEART SKILLS

(Divide into small groups, discuss, and bring thoughts to larger group.)

Listening to Bill

- 1) List three sinful attitudes which tempted Bill when he was planning his own suicide.

- 2) Describe two changes in Bill's faith.

- 3) Read Acts 16:25-34 to determine as many similarities as you can with Bill and the Jailer at Philippi.

Listening to Julie

- 1) Recall three statements Julie makes about her son.

- 2) Point out three specific ways in which Julie describes her grief.

- 3) Read John 11: 20-27 to write down similar ways in which Julie's and Martha's faith supported them in their grief.

Listening to Pastor Paul

- 1) Identify the difference Paul learned about his own grief and those who came to support him.

- 2) List two ways faith can work to help and comfort.

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Read I Samuel 31:1-5; II Samuel 2:4-7. Define the action of the supporting people whom David and Pastor Paul appreciated.

Part 2 PREVENTION OF SUICIDE

- 1) List three steps to build a relationship with a person at risk of suicide.

- 2) Read Matthew 26:49-50 and describe the approach Jesus used to try to help Judas.

- 3) Identify three possible warning signs before a suicide.

- 4) Read Matthew 27:3-5. Point out the behavioral warning sign which Judas exhibited.

- 5) Suggest three ways one can try to prevent a person from committing suicide. Describe how Christians can use John 3:16; I John 1:7; and Romans 8:28 to try to turn someone away from suicide.

Part 3 AFTERMATH OF A SUICIDE

- 1) Write down three specific actions you can say or do to support the survivor(s) of suicide. Read: I Samuel 15:35; Job 5:11; Matthew 5:4

- 2) List words and actions which are not helpful and helpful.
Ask: How can I help?

- 3) Identify the fruits of faith that Christians can use to support and comfort survivors. Read Galatians 6:2; & 5:22; James 3:17-18; Proverbs 12:14; 2Corinthians 1: 3-7; I Peter 4: 10-11

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for page 1 of worksheet – part 1

- A) Listening with a Christian heart** is the goal of the first presentation. "Instead of thinking about how uncomfortable you are, or what to say, or how to correct that person, listen to the other person's experience, pain, and thoughts of the future."

As time allows, have the viewers/participants look at the questions before or after the presentation. You could also pause after each presentation to discuss every section more thoroughly.

B) Listening to Bill

- 1) Selfishness: Bill was thinking only about himself when he contemplated committing suicide. He did not care about anything or others.
- 2) Anger: Bill felt God left him with only one way out his problems, namely, suicide.
- 3) Wrong thinking: Bill felt it was okay with God to kill himself.
- 4) Forgiveness from God and works by oneself does not equal grace: The grace of God is free and has full forgiveness. The grace of God makes things better. This grace from God gives hope and assurance of God's day to day presence.
- 5) Like the Jailer of Philippi, Bill, by the grace of God, did not end his life and he came to know the saving love of Jesus (Acts 16:31). His spiritual questions became answered (verse 29). He learned the blessings of his baptism (verse 33). He is thrilled to be with "believers in God" (verse 34).

C) Listening to Julie

- 1) Julie talks about her son by name, shows pictures, describes him as having a firm handshake, super loving, troubled by addictions, tired of life, kept in contact with mother until the day of his suicide.
- 2) In her grief Julie describes herself as first being shielded by God; and the to have the numbness wear off. Real hard grief began about six months later when family and friends were not so present.

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- 3) She was disappointed with those who withheld information even though they meant well. She appreciated support from pastor and friends. Years later she still cries with hurt and has hard days. She now looks forward in her faith to be with him in heaven.
- 4) They go and cry to Jesus for help. They believe in God's promised resurrection and everlasting life. They confidently confess their faith in Jesus to the praise of God and for the blessing of others.

D) Listening to Pastor Paul

- 1) He was astonished how people not directly connected to his son's death could just keep going on with their daily lives. He couldn't understand why they did not feel the way he did.
- 2) One "flash event" in his son's life did not mean that his son's faith was voided or destroyed. The Lord had been present and continues to be present, great in His saving compassion.
- 3) After the unbelieving Saul committed suicide (I Samuel 31:1-7), the people of Jabesh Gilead showed kindness by giving respect and a decent burial. Showing kindness and respect even under difficult circumstances is part of Christian care-giving.

Examples in the Bible which have suicide cases or suicide-like expressions:

- Abimelech: Judges 9:54-56
- Samson: Judges 16: 28-30
- Saul & armor-bearer: I Samuel 31:4-5 & I Chronicles 10:1-14
- II Samuel 1:1-16: this version gives a different angle on the Saul event but does not necessarily negate the other recordings. Assisted suicide is also confronted.
- Ahithophel: II Samuel 17: 23
- Zimri: I Kings 16: 18-19
- Devil tempts Jesus: Matthew 4:5-7; Luke 4: 9-12 (Hebrews 2:18 & 4:15)
- Judas: Matthew 27: 3-5; Luke 22: 3; Acts 1:15-20 & 25
- Jailer at Philippi: Acts 16:25-34

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Other Resources

- 1) Suicide Prevention Action Network USA www.spanusa.org
- 2) National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK(8255)
- 3) Suicide Awareness/Voices of Education www.save.org
- 4) Helping Others Prevent & Educate about Suicide www.hopes-wi.org

Part 2 – Prevention of Suicide

1) Gently empathize with them. “Wow you are really sad or angry!” Start talking about the hard times of life and acknowledge you hear how they feel about it - sad or angry. Help them to review that others care about them (parents, spouse, children). Review how suicide is a selfish act and it hurts those who love them. Ask: “From what are you trying to escape?” Compare suicide with misusing alcohol or drugs which does not solve problems. Comment on how life has pain, but God can make things better. “Don’t miss the next day of His miraculous help!” The Lord wonderfully loves and forgives. “Watch for the great things God can do.”

2) Jesus, the Son of God, knew what was going to happen to Judas, but He still tries to reach out to him by calling him, “Friend.” Even though Jesus had the divine power to stop Judas, He did not. Our efforts also may not be enough to prevent a suicide.

3) Some warning signs can be: depression; isolation; changes in social life or withdrawing from others; personality changes; talking about dying or tired of life; putting closure on things; thanking you for things in the past; doing things that are out of character for that person; easy access to drugs, alcohol, or guns.

Listen for statements such as: “I don’t feel like living anymore.” Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) caused by another person’s death, personal or job problems, or military types of stress also may serve as warning signs. And, don’t overlook little children. Their depression, isolation, personality changes, etc. may be warning signs as well.

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- 4) Read Mt 27:3-5 Judas felt sorry for himself. By himself he tries to make things “right” and returns the “blood” money. He does not turn to God for forgiveness and help.
- 5) Trust your gut feeling when that person appears to be in danger of hurting him/her self. Come right out and ask them if they are thinking of killing him/her self. Give them a helpline number.
- 6) When a suicide attempt is imminent, stop talking and call 911 for them.

The message of the gospel is always ready to go to help people (Romans 1:16). Jesus Christ is always right there with you whether they believe it or not. Get them to rethink that God still loves and is working for them no matter how badly they have messed up. Use the early messed up life of St. Paul as an example of God’s amazing love for sinners. “Point to the God of grace and keep that grace coming at them.” Pray for them openly or silently in your heart as you are talking with them.

Part 3 Aftermath of a suicide

1) Learn from the survivor’s feelings, guilt, anger, shame, fears and about the intensity of their grief. Ask the survivor(s) to teach you about their hurt or if you say something painful. Listen with your heart and don’t be afraid of talking about their loved one by name even if it makes them cry. Say: “I am sorry about your loss.” Recall some of the good parts of the victim’s life. Be ready and patient to hear their story again and again. Sometimes saying nothing but just listening and being present nearby with a hug or a handhold helps more than words. Even a phone call can be supportive. Do not be afraid of being silent in their grieving moments.

In I Samuel 15:35, Samuel mourns over Saul; in Job 5:11, mourning has God’s blessing; in Romans 12:15, mourning is part our Christianity; in Matthew 5:4, Jesus encourages the concept of mourning. Mourning is a process not to be ignored or shortened. Good mental health needs time to process this unique grief and understand that it never completely goes away. One has to learn how to live with it. Today people in a fast pace society try to get rid of sadness as if it were shameful or avoid talking about it. Denial drives the grief deeper inside instead opening up to the healing process needed.

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2) Don't say:

- “Hang in there! (Bad wording);
- “I know how you feel.” (You don't.);
- “Don't worry, you can have (or have) other children.” (That's cruel);
- “You just have to forget he/she ever existed.” (Dumb);
- “They are in hell now.” (Unbelief brings judgment.);
- “Don't talk about it.” (Mental health depends on acknowledgement.);
- “Be brave! Don't cry!” (Tears are a natural expression of grief.);
- “Didn't you see it coming?” (No need to imply more guilt.)
- “Why?” (This question will have no adequate or complete answer.)
- “It is time to get over it! You have been sad for long enough.”
(Survivors need privacy and time to process their grief alone and with others.)

Christians do speak poorly at times and need to ask for forgiveness from survivors and the Lord.

3) Be careful about using nice words without real facts. Direct them to the goodness of God. Suicide is not an automatic ticket to heaven or hell. Faith in Jesus holds the saving love of God. God does not change. He was there at the time of the suicide and is still here today.

Christians have a God-given patience and forgiveness that can help survivors in “carrying each others burdens.” (Galatians 6:2). Share the gospel and the healing comfort of Jesus. Recognize that some Christians have more comforting gifts than others and should be asked to help. Be ready to offer more time and patience than planned. Understand that their whole life (family, holidays, faith, and daily tasks) is being reconstructed.



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