



Choosing
LIFE

A Christian
Perspective
on Suicide

by Doug Batchelor

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Do You Need Help Now?

If you are thinking about ending your life or know someone who is, immediate help is available.

- Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255 anytime, day or night, for support.

- If you are seeking Christian-based counseling, we recommend New Life Clinics, which are located throughout the United States. Call 800-639-5433 to locate a clinic near you.

- We also recommend the Nedley Depression and Anxiety Recovery Program. Call 580-226-8007 for more information.

Introduction

About 40,000 people in North America take their own lives each year, and many more try unsuccessfully. You may have been directly affected by this tragedy or know someone who has been affected by it in one way or another.

Suicide is also a difficult subject to talk about. Few things are more serious or sobering. Perhaps that's why many try to avoid dealing with it at all. But it's a necessary topic for Christians to discuss openly—and to find a way to address in a biblical manner.

Why? Because life is everything. Without life, we do not feel, we do not know, we cannot love—we can't even comprehend the words printed on this page. Most people inherently know this. Every year, we spend billions on medicines, surgeries, exercise regimens, and supplements to prolong our lives. When a heart monitor flatlines, medical teams regularly spring into action to resuscitate.

Life is also the greatest gift. From the very beginning, God intended for our lives to be joyful, abundant, and exhilarating. That's why He made everything to be good, good, and "very good" (Genesis 1:31). But with the fall of humanity, thorns appeared on the roses and tears preceded the joy of birth. With sin, pain invaded God's Creation.

Yet even while stained by spells of sorrow, life is still a wonderful thing. Jesus said, "In the world you will

have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). He also affirmed, “I am the bread of life ... which I shall give for the life of the world” (John 6:48, 51). God gave you life because He wants you to live!

God also wired you with a powerful instinct to preserve your own life. Even so, some become overwhelmed with their physical, mental, or emotional pain. Their heartache seems unbearable; they cannot see beyond the dark clouds. They believe that ending their lives is the best or even the only option available to them.

But it is a drastic “solution.” Once “the silver cord is loosed, or the golden bowl is broken,” there is no going back; suicide ends all hope and all other options (Ecclesiastes 12:6). And for all we know, a person just might be one day away from a bright future or better circumstance—and will miss all that God has planned for them.

If you have a friend or loved one who took his or her own life, keep reading. I’m trusting you will find some hope and encouragement.

If you’re thinking about suicide, I’ve been there. I know it sounds simplistic but—please *don’t do it!* For your sake, the sake of others, and for God’s sake, keep living. “Choose life, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19). And keep on reading this book.

CHAPTER 1

My Darkest Days

At age 13, I wanted to die.

I was continually in trouble at school and wondering if I'd ever amount to anything. My parents were divorced, and my mother worked full time. On this evening, like many others, she was out with friends. To complicate matters, my brother had recently gone to live with my dad in Florida. So, there I was, all alone with my questions in my mother's New York apartment.

Was there any reason to live? Some of my mother's friends were quite famous in show business—but I knew their fame and popularity didn't make them happy. My multimillionaire father was the picture of success, but he didn't seem happy either. Instead, he worked 16-hour days, six days a week, and he drank himself to sleep most nights. He also had little time to spare for me. What was the point of anything? It all seemed miserable.

Reeling in the aftermath of a big fight at school, the disapproval of the teacher and the harsh words of the principal, I decided to end my suffering. I would find my mother's sleeping pills, take the entire bottle, and fall asleep forever. At that moment, it made sense: I was just hurrying along the inexorable process of becoming fertilizer.

But as I opened my mother's medicine cabinet, I faced a dilemma. Which of the many bottles was the right

one? None of them read “sleeping pills,” and I didn’t recognize their names. I finally just chose one that seemed likely and poured the entire bottle into my hand. But as I reached for a glass of water, a thought crossed my mind. What if these weren’t sleeping pills? Worse yet, what if they were actually medication for ladies? “If I take these,” I thought, “there’s no telling what might happen!” I poured the pills back into the bottle and postponed my suicide.

A few weeks later, my report card came out. My grades were a disaster, and I dreaded what would happen when my mother came home. There would be yelling—and potentially much worse consequences. Maybe it was better to end it all before she found out.

I took the elevator to the top floor of our apartment building, where the door to the roof was usually left unlocked by the janitor. I climbed onto the ledge and looked down to the street, hoping the wind might knock me over so I wouldn’t have to find the courage to jump. Then I remembered the story of a man who had fallen eight stories and landed on a parked car. Instead of dying, he’d ended up with a missing arm and a broken back. A lifetime of being paralyzed sounded worse than death.

I climbed off the ledge and back onto the roof. The lyrics of a beer commercial ran through my mind: “You only go around once in life. Grab all the gusto you can.” Living recklessly, without a care—well, if I was going to end up in the ground anyway, I might as well have fun on my way there.

My story has taken many turns since those dark, godless days as a teen. I found plenty of thrills: running away, drugs, thieving. No adventure was too dangerous because I had no purpose except doing what I wanted. The worst that could happen was that I would die sooner rather than later.

By age 16, I had moved into a cave in the San Jacinto Mountains. The quiet work of living in the hills gave rhythm to my days. But one day, I picked up a Bible a hiker had previously left—and finally, everything clicked. I realized that the way I was living—living to die—wasn't what we were made for at all. That's when the real transformation began. Today, serving God gives my life joy, purpose, and meaning. Today, I am truly living.¹

Erasing the Stigma

My story might be very different from yours. But I share it to encourage those who are struggling, to tell them that there is hope—and also to help erase the stigma of suicide.

In some communities, having suicidal feelings is like wearing a scarlet letter. Hurting individuals may face anger, shock, or accusations of attention-seeking when they share their feelings. Families who have lost a loved one may be reluctant to disclose the true cause of death. Many Christians believe that someone who has taken his own life can't be saved. As a result, these extremely painful situations are often hidden.

But not talking about suicide makes it hard to process. Stanford University graduate professor JD Schramm, who gave a TED Talk on surviving a suicide attempt, said this: “Because of our taboos around suicide, we’re not sure what to say, and so quite often we say nothing. And that furthers the isolation [of people like me].”²

Isolation, silence, or gossip—all are factors that could add up at a very crucial time. On the other hand, a supportive community can help process the difficult emotions that lead to suicidal thoughts or a suicide attempt. A community that is willing to talk openly and listen carefully may also ease the complicated grief of losing a loved one to suicide. Just as we would not ignore a person in need or a cry for help, we are to reach out a hand to those struggling with thoughts of suicide.

A Common Temptation

Suicidal thoughts are a common temptation. A 2019 study found that “4.8% of adults age 18 and older in the United States had serious thoughts about suicide”³—that’s 12 million people! In the same year, approximately 1.4 million adults attempted suicide, and that’s not including the number that go unreported. If you struggle or have struggled with suicidal thoughts, *you are not alone*. Others who have walked this path have found help and healing, and it’s available for you too.

Each person has a story as unique as he or she is. There are many reasons people contemplate their own death: sexual abuse, childhood trauma, domestic violence,

bullying, chronic pain, addiction, social isolation, side effects of medication, a terminal illness, postpartum depression, miscarriage, and even the loss of an important relationship, job, or status. The list goes on. Often, multiple factors overlap. Additionally, as many as 90 percent of people who die of suicide have a psychiatric disorder, such as major depression, bipolar disorder, or post-traumatic stress disorder—disorders that are all treatable.⁴

Suicide affects people of all ages and all walks of life. I was an unbeliever when I struggled with suicidal thoughts. And while religion has been scientifically proven to protect against suicide to some degree, there are still genuine Christians who become depressed and discouraged enough to ponder ending their own life—and some who actually do.^{5,6}

I've seen it in my own ministry: an elderly church member who suffered intense and chronic pain, a nine-year-old child, a mother suffering from terminal illness, a teenage girl who, after taking a bottle of pills, called 911, seized with fear and regret, pleading, "Don't let me die." But it was too late. I presided over her very difficult funeral. Even great prophets like Elijah, Jeremiah, Jonah, and Moses wanted to die at certain times.

The Bible does not shy away from suicide. It is not some taboo subject on which we have no counsel. In the Scriptures, there are seven actual examples of suicide (Judges 9:52–54; 16:28–30; 1 Samuel 31:1–6; 2 Samuel 17:23; 1 Kings 16:18; 1 Chronicles 10:1–6; Matthew 27:3–5). In comparing those who did take their own lives with those

who did not, the Bible clearly urges the latter, offering special encouragement to those who think they have no other option and hope to those who feel they can no longer go on.

Suicide comes with real issues and real questions. Sometimes discouraged Christians wonder if they can say a prayer, take their own life, and wake up in heaven. Grieving friends and family wonder if there is any hope for the loved one they have lost. Caring bystanders wonder what they can do to help those who are struggling with these tendencies.

The Bible offers real answers and real solutions for each of these people. In the following pages, I will address each group in turn. And it is my prayer that all will be edified.

CHAPTER 2

To Discouraged Christians

You may have heard that real Christians are “too blessed to be depressed,” but the reality is that genuine Christians do become depressed. Consider the words of David, the man after God’s own heart:

My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?
Why are You so far from helping Me,
And from the words of My groaning?
O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear;
And in the night season, and am not silent
(Psalm 22:1, 2).

Save me, O God!
For the waters have come up to my neck.
I sink in deep mire,
Where there is no standing;
I have come into deep waters,
Where the floods overflow me.
I am weary with my crying;
My throat is dry;
My eyes fail while I wait for my God (Psalm 69:1-3).

David knew suffering. And if you've picked up a book like this, you do too. Perhaps you find yourself struggling with suicidal thoughts. Perhaps you're at the point of asking yourself, "Should I take my own life?"

Before I begin, let me express my sorrow that you're going through such difficulty. No one considers suicide without having shouldered significant pain. That kind of pain is difficult to process! Yet I want to firmly and kindly say that suicide is not a true solution—for several reasons.

Whose Life Is It?

At the heart of the matter, suicide violates the sixth commandment: "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). As a Christian, your life doesn't really belong to you: "For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:20). Your life belongs to God, who bought you with the life of His Son Jesus Christ. And even when you are not experiencing joy, God still has a purpose for your life.

Sometimes we think that our life ought to be happy, comfortable, and pleasant. Instead, as Christians, our purpose is to glorify God, no matter what our circumstances and no matter how much we're suffering.

Job chose to glorify God in spite of severe trials. In a single day, Job lost all his possessions and all his children. Next, he lost his health and then endured the ridicule of his wife and friends. During these trials, Job longed for his life to end:

Oh, that I might have my request, that God would grant me the thing that I long for! That it would please God to crush me, that He would loose His hand and cut me off (Job 6:8, 9).

Nevertheless, Job hung on. He refused to “curse God and die,” as his wife suggested (2:9). Instead, he praised God through the pain. “He also shall be my salvation,” Job said of God (13:16). Because of that choice, Job's story has inspired many people to persevere through their own trials.

You may feel on the verge of despair. You may feel there is no reason for your existence. But even now, your life is a gift from God. As Christians, we need to trust that if we're alive, God still has a purpose for us. You may not know what it is, but He does—and He will lead you to it. In fact, your current suffering may someday help you to live out His purpose for you.

Today, His purpose for you may be the simple, yet difficult, choice to praise Him through your trials. He can give

you the grace and strength to do so: “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6, 7).

Love for God, Others, and Yourself

Jesus said that the greatest commandments were to “love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. ... And ... love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37–39).

Sometimes, we can be so immersed in our own personal pain, we do not consider the profound shock waves of pain our death would cause to family and community.

In a remote town where we once lived, a friend of our son, discouraged and struggling with drugs, shot himself. Soon after, he was discovered—still alive. A call was made for an air ambulance to rush him to the nearest hospital.

In the midst of a stormy and heavy rain, the helicopter took off in poor visibility in the dark of night. But en route to the rescue, the helicopter flew into a mountain, killing the three on board, an experienced pilot and two medical technicians. The young man also died from his gunshot wound. Soon after, the young man’s father also died from a heart attack. The tsunami of grief that went through our community is hard to describe. If that young man had had

any idea how much pain his decision ended up causing others, I doubt he would have pulled the trigger.

Think about the heart of Jesus. He would rather give His own life so that every one of us would not have to—and *did*. How horribly your death would hurt Him, who “[has] loved you with an everlasting love” (Jeremiah 31:3).

Think about what suicide would deprive you of. When we are so focused on our own pain, of course everything looks hopeless. If you’re looking at a black hole, of course all you’re going to see and think about is that black hole. Quite probably, you’re going to believe that the only thing left to do is fall down that black hole.

But if you just look in another direction—upward—you would see the bright sunlight. You would realize that black is not the only color in existence and that going downward is not the only option given to you. “There is no pit so deep, that God’s love is not deeper still,” was the oft-loved maxim of Holocaust survivor Corrie ten Boom. If you train your eyes to look upon Someone else, you would “see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” (John 1:51). Jesus Christ is the ladder to a new beginning of fulfilled promises and answered hopes. Let us turn our eyes upon our Savior, “the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2).

Your Story Isn’t Over

My mother was a beautiful woman who worked in show business, where physical appearance and

youthfulness are highly prized. When she turned 40 years old, she feared that her best years were behind her. When she told me she was considering suicide, I shared an idea that helped me when I was a young teen: “Mom, the nice thing about suicide is you can always postpone it. There’s always another day. But once you do die, that’s it. You’ll never find out what would have happened if you had stayed.” A naturally curious person, she decided to live—and it turned out that her most successful days happened in her 50s.

Friend, God’s story for you isn’t over yet either! For those who seek and accept the Lord’s help, your end will never be one of failure and despair but always reconciliation, restoration, and redemption: “I will ... repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it,” God says of His people (Amos 9:11).

It’s never God’s will for anyone to take his life to escape from the pain of this world. God wants you to live! In fact, Jesus said, “I have come that they may *have life*, and that they may *have it more abundantly*” (John 10:10, emphasis mine). That was exactly Job’s experience. Job suffered immensely; but after going through that, “the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning” (Job 42:12). That is God’s promise to us all: “I will ... do better for you than at your beginnings” (Ezekiel 36:11). God has an abundant life in store for you—why not commit to seeing what happens next in His story for you?

CHAPTER 3

Finding Hope

Author and public speaker Terry Wise struggled with depression for many years. Even at 10 years old, she remembers wishing for her life to end. For a while, she was able to put her tough experiences on the back burner. But when she lost her husband to Lou Gehrig's disease, all the long-simmering pots simultaneously came to a full boil, and she attempted to end her life. "Life became an endurance test," she shared.

Today, Terry describes her life as "fulfilling" and "enriched."⁷ Her journey to hope was a process, involving a compassionate therapist and a lot of journaling.

"Suicide doesn't stand alone. It doesn't just happen as the result of nothing out of nowhere. It's the result of something,"⁸ said Terry. This is actually a hope-filled statement. If suicidal tendencies are the result of something real, then real help for those tendencies is possible too.

Seventy Helpers

One winter night, long before Robert Louis Stevenson became famous for his adventure story *Treasure Island*, when he was just a child, his nanny came to check on him. Robert was out of bed, his hands and nose pressed against the window. His nanny firmly told him to get back in bed before he got a chill.

But Robert said to her, “Come to the window, and see what I’m seeing.”

The nanny came to see. Down below, there was a lamplighter making his way up the street, one by one lighting the streetlights. “Look,” said Robert, “a man is poking holes in the darkness!”⁹

We all need people around us that will poke holes of light in the devil’s darkness.

Moses experienced a surprising moment on his 40-year journey of immense responsibilities. Not only was he God’s instrument for freeing the enslaved Israelites, he was tasked with leading their entire society through the wilderness. There were logistical issues: Where would a group that size find sufficient food and water? How would they protect themselves? But the emotional issues weighed most on Moses.

The Israelites were given to constant complaining. On one occasion, the Bible records the people were weeping, “everyone at the door of his tent” (Numbers 11:10). Instead of being grateful for their freedom, they missed the land of their captivity! “We remember the fish we ate freely in Egypt,” they moaned (v. 5). “But now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!” (v. 6).

Moses’ strength was dried up too. The people were sick of manna, but he was sick of the people! So, Moses prayed to God, “Why have You afflicted Your servant?” (v. 11). “I am not able to bear all this people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me. If You treat me like this,

please kill me here and now—if I have found favor in Your sight—and do not let me see my wretchedness!” (vv. 14, 15). Moses was so burdened by the people that he preferred to die than continue caring for them.

How did God draw near when Moses was so discouraged that he wanted to die? God instructed Moses to find 70 elders from among the people. “They shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone,” He said (v. 17). Moses was not simply to “have more faith,” as some have been told, or to be pacified by shallow platitudes. Moses needed practical relief from a situation that was too much for him to bear—and God compassionately provided it.

When an Angel Cooked Breakfast

Elijah was another man of God who experienced profound discouragement. In the midst of a devastating drought, there came a showdown between God’s prophet and a slew of idolatrous prophets on Mount Carmel. In the end, it was Elijah’s God who answered His servant’s prayer, bringing fire down from heaven upon the sacrifice.

As a result, the people, utterly in awe, worshiped the Lord, and Elijah proceeded to execute every one of the false prophets of Baal. Then, rain began to fall—for the first time in three years. (See 1 Kings 18:20–46.)

Imagine Elijah that night. What a victory that day had been! What adrenaline must have been coursing through his veins—why, in his excitement he had even run all the way to the city ahead of the king’s chariot. Perhaps

he thought that the day's events would finally vanquish the idolatry in the land. Perhaps he thought the king and queen would be convinced by God's display of power. Certainly, he was mentally and physically drained from the rigors of the day. Yet it is often after a great triumph when we are most exposed to temptation.

So it followed that directly after Elijah's victory on Mount Carmel, Jezebel's messenger arrived—with a threat. Now, Elijah had just spent three years hiding from the king, and God had protected him. But Jezebel's message hit a sensitive nerve, and Elijah ran for his life. (See 1 Kings 19:1-3.)

Exhausted, discouraged, and completely alone in the wilderness, he prayed, "It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" (v. 4). He was disgusted with himself; he was finished with life altogether.

How did God draw near when Elijah was so discouraged he wanted to die? First, God recognized exhaustion, hunger, and thirst were affecting his emotions, and He sent an angel to cook breakfast! In fact, the angel woke the prophet, gave him food and drink, allowed him to sleep again, then fed him a second time.

Perhaps this is why more people take their lives in the evening than in the morning.¹⁰ They are tired or hungry or discouraged by the events of the day, not realizing what a difference a meal and a good night's rest would make. What if those simple provisions would have changed their whole perspective? What if they would have given them the strength to hope and cope?

Practical Compassion

It may seem like too easy of a solution, but our physical life always affects our emotional life. God designed our minds and our bodies that way, as one interconnected whole: “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). What helps the body helps the mind. God desires for us to be of sound mind and body, and He has provided readily available, individually sustainable methods to that end.

His intensely practical response to Elijah highlights this truth. But that’s not all God did! The angel also expressed God’s tenderness, empathy, and compassion for Elijah. “Arise and eat,” the angel told him, “because the journey is too great for you” (1 Kings 19:7).

Friend, sometimes life’s journey is too great for us. It can be too hard, too lonely, and too painful. It’s as if our griefs and discouragements have us in the dark. But we should take the counsel of the apostle Paul in those moments: “They should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27). What does one do when one is trying to find his way around a dark room? One usually starts walking slowly forward with his hands out in front of him, searching for the light switch. Well, God is that light; He is the Lamplighter—we simply need to muster the effort to look for Him.

In his book *Depression: The Way Out*, physician Neil Nedley shares just such research-based lifestyle

tools proven to alleviate and even reverse depression. His Depression Recovery Program is an in-house treatment that implements these same lifestyle changes to “an unprecedented 98 percent response rate in attendees.”¹¹

ICU nurse Christy had attempted suicide five times before she enrolled in the Depression Recovery Program. More than halfway through, she was sick of it. She wanted to have a smoke and “wanted nothing to do with God.”¹² But as she was attempting to leave, she was visited by the program administrator, who began to cry as she spoke with her. Christy was baffled. She didn’t understand why “someone would care so much about [her].”¹³

Christy ended up staying and sticking with the regimen. Today, she is “depression free, anxiety free, and medication free.”¹⁴ Practical change coupled with the unconditional love shown her—by the program administrator, her nurse who gave her Bible studies, the staff who all “continued to go out of their way to make sure of [her] success”—made all the difference.¹⁵

God has endlessly more love for you than even what Christy experienced! In the words of the psalmist: “The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18 ESV). Whatever obstacles you face, God is the way to finding help and hope.

A Conversation with God

But let’s return to Elijah. His journey to finding hope was not yet complete. While breakfast served by an angel was part of the process, Elijah continued 40 days farther

into the wilderness, to Mount Horeb. God met him there, and Elijah poured out his discouragement: “I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts. ... I alone am left; and they seek to take my life” (1 Kings 19:14). To Elijah, all seemed lost. Everything seemed hopeless; everything seemed pointless.

How did God handle Elijah’s discouragement? God reminded Elijah that his work wasn’t finished. He still had a purpose for His prophet! But God tenderly met Elijah’s emotional needs, too, reassuring him that there were still 7,000 believers in Israel. God even shared the name of one of them—a man named Elisha who was to be trained as Elijah’s replacement. Elijah was not the last believer!

Sometimes, we can believe something about a situation that turns out not to be true; we were mistaken. This was what happened to Elijah, and it completely flipped how he felt about his life and what he thought about himself. His conversation with God allowed him to see that there was still hope for the cause he cared about.

Friend, there is still hope in your case too. You may be facing suffering, pain, and discouragement. But God still has plans for your life. He has a purpose for you—a work only you can do! And God’s plans for you are good:

I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11).

The Importance of People

Did you notice that God directed both of his discouraged prophets toward other people? He prompted them to realize that they were not alone, that there were others who could and would carry the burden with them and even lift it from them.

For Moses, 70 pairs of helping hands were part of the solution to assuage his despondency. For Elijah, the task to train his replacement was an offensive attack against his overwhelming problems; it kept him moving forward with purpose. Whether in emotional or practical support, other people are an integral part of the journey to hope.

If you're struggling with thoughts of suicide, please tell someone. There may be a friend or family member you can trust or even a trained professional. Experienced doctors and counselors are there to be a listening ear, to diagnose and to offer treatment; helpful resources are listed inside the cover of this book. Just as God led His prophets to just the right people to help them, He can lead you: "The LORD, your Redeemer, ... leads you by the way you should go" (Isaiah 48:17).

When Sin Causes Despair

David was another man of God who experienced profound depression. In at least one case, David attributed the cause of his depression to his sins: "For my iniquities have gone over my head. ... I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long" (Psalm 38:4, 6).

Sometimes, it is our own decisions and actions that cause us to despair. We cannot stand what we've done; we cannot stand what we've become—and where is there left to go when you cannot live with yourself any longer? Well, David knew where to go.

Even though he was in the throes of anguish, David knew that there was Someone who could lead him through. To God, he wrote: "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy" (16:11). God is joy and life; sin is sorrow and death. When turning to sin, you will undoubtedly turn away from God, and vice versa—every time, without fail.

Thankfully, we are not stuck with the burden of sin! David was certainly someone who was drowning in his own sin. But even at that dire point, he turned to God in repentance, acknowledged his sins, and asked God to cleanse him—and God did. "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit" was his prayer (51:12). You won't become a new person overnight, but God's promise is as good as done (Numbers 23:19; Isaiah 55:11). And His promise is ours to claim: "Everlasting joy shall be theirs" (61:7).

Finding Strength and Faith

The apostle Paul discovered God's strength when he struggled with a vexing physical ailment. We don't know what it was, but we know he prayed many times for it to

be removed. Instead, God told him, “My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Make no mistake, there will be times when God allows us to go through extremely difficult circumstances. The temptation to take one’s own life is the ultimate version of this experience. But we are promised victory every time through the power of Jesus Christ:

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:15, 16).

It’s not easy when God says “no,” but there is always a reason for His answer, whether we are made aware of it or not. It is in those moments that God wants His strength to shine through our weakness. Paul learned to be content with his ailment, for when he was at his weakest, he was actually at his strongest! (2 Corinthians 12:10). When you are at the very bottom of the barrel, by God’s power, you can hope even when it seems that all is lost.

Suicide is the opposite of that. It often is the result of losing faith and hope. Romans 1:17 makes it clear that “the just shall *live* by faith” (emphasis mine); and

Solomon tells us that “whoever is among the *living* has hope” (Ecclesiastes 9:4 NET, emphasis mine). What suicide actually does is make your bad circumstances permanent—they can’t be reversed.

Do not be deceived. Suicide is not an escape; suicide is not the cure. When shameful thoughts and feelings seek to overwhelm you, recognize them as the attack of “the accuser of our brethren” (Revelation 12:10), Satan. The Bible promises us: “Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:7, 8). Notice that your ability to resist the devil is contingent upon your submitting to God. Go to God for the strength to rebuke the devil’s temptations.

You do not have to bear these burdens alone. Jesus offers you this invitation: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Though the storms around you blow, taking God’s yoke makes your troubles “easy” and “light” in very real ways (v. 30).

Many have found comfort in the words of Psalm 139:

O LORD, You have searched me and known me.
You know my sitting down and my rising up;
You understand my thought afar off.
You comprehend my path and my lying down,
And are acquainted with all my ways.
For there is not a word on my tongue,
But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.
You have hedged me behind and before,
And laid Your hand upon me (vv. 1-5).

You are intimately and lovingly known. God sees your situation, your heart, and your pain. Friend, He made you. He loves you. His help is available, and it will be tailor-made for your situation.

We are implored to “present [our] bodies a *living* sacrifice ... to God”—not a dead one—and once we do so, we will “be transformed by the renewing of [our] mind” (Romans 12:1, 2, emphasis mine). Friend, that promise is for you!

CHAPTER 4

To Grieving Loved Ones

When Irene’s son Christopher took his own life, she was completely shocked. It was a glorious and sunny day just before Labor Day; all three of her sons were coming to the family barbeque. Irene was never happier than when her whole family was together.

Then the phone call came. Her eldest, Christopher, was in critical condition and on life support after a suicide attempt, and he soon passed away.

The long-anticipated barbecue never happened. Instead, Irene began a journey she never imagined taking—the journey of grieving a loved one lost to suicide, “a journey that no one would volunteer for.”¹⁶

Losing a loved one to suicide is a complicated grief, and survivors of suicide loss experience a wide range of emotions. Irene experienced shock: “No one even remotely

saw this coming," she writes about her son's death. "It was completely out of character."¹⁷ For Irene there were sleepless nights and incessant replays of the tragedy.

For Allison first and foremost was guilt. "As someone who has ... struggled with mental illness the majority of my life, I was ashamed that I didn't see the immediate signs and that I wasn't there to intervene,"¹⁸ she writes of her friend Sylvia's suicide.

Lindsay felt "abandonment, betrayal, and confusion" when she lost her dad to suicide.¹⁹ "Not only was I trying to piece together why my Dad took his life, but everyone else who knew and loved him were looking to me for answers...answers I did not, and still don't have."²⁰

There may be feelings of anger, numbness, rejection. Perhaps you're afraid that others might abandon you. Perhaps there's a sense of relief because your loved one suffered from chronic ailments.

You may even struggle with suicidal thoughts yourself. And it makes sense. Maybe you wish you could take that person's place; maybe you blame yourself for that person's death. Or maybe you yourself are in a deep depression, like Katherine, whose best friend Adam ended his own life. "This is also one of the worst parts of a loved one's suicide," she writes. "It can be contagious."²¹

Whatever you are feeling, you are not alone. Many others have walked this difficult journey, and individual help as well as support groups are available.

A Time to Weep

Death is a disruption of God's plan. While death is the expected end for all humans, it isn't what God intended for His children. In fact, Paul calls death an "enemy," and Hebrews says the devil himself "had the power of death" (1 Corinthians 15:26; Hebrews 2:14). It makes sense that we greet death—and especially the untimely death of suicide—with shock, fear, pain, and a host of other difficult emotions.

But while death is the work of an enemy, our mourning in response is a good and even holy work. The suffering we experience is a direct result of our love for the person we lost. After Nicholas Wolterstorff lost his son in a mountain climbing accident, he wrote, "Suffering is for the loving. If I hadn't loved him, there wouldn't be this agony."²²

Sometimes, Christians feel pressure to be joyful all the time. They may feel guilty when they do not feel hope, as if their faith is faulty. But the truth is that the Bible recognizes the entire range of emotions. The book of Lamentations is the recording of the prophet Jeremiah's sorrow over the devastated city of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army. In it, he wrote, "For these things I weep; my eye, my eye overflows with water; because the comforter, who should restore my life, is far from me. My children are desolate because the enemy prevailed" (Lamentations 1:16). When the enemy gains a victory in

death, grief and mourning is the natural response, born out of great love for the individual.

Even God laments. A few days before His death on the cross, Jesus rode a donkey from the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem. A whole multitude accompanied Him, singing His praises. But in contrast to the jubilant crowd, Jesus “saw the city and wept over it,” saying, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes” (Luke 19:41, 42). Again, we see the beloved city of Jerusalem being wept over—but this time at its second destruction and by the Son of God Himself. In both occasions, it is not only the actual city that is being mourned but much more its poor residents—it is the loss of people that is felt the most.

Many who are grieving a suicide feel an intense longing for their loved one, the utter pain of not being able to keep them close and protected. Know that Jesus grieves with you. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! ... How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Matthew 23:37).

When Death Dies

The pain of losing a loved one to suicide can be overwhelming, and the journey through grief is not a straight line. There will be hard days and sudden tears. However, there is reason to hope. Jesus joined the human family so

“that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14). Jesus rose from the dead as a down payment on the promise that someday all death would end. “He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet,” the apostle Paul tells us (1 Corinthians 15:25); “the last enemy that will be destroyed is death” (v. 26). Author Albert Hsu, who lost his father to suicide, put it this way: “In the end, death itself will die.”²³

A glorious day is coming when “God will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

As we wait for the fulfillment of those promises, I urge you to take care of yourself. Seek out supporters who understand the kind of grief you’re experiencing. Find a place to talk openly and allow others to care for you.

Finally, remember the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Devastated by the loss of their beloved Master, Jesus, after His death, “they talked together of all these things which had happened” (Luke 24:14). When Jesus, having since been resurrected, “drew near and went with them,” they had no idea who He was (v. 15). He initiated conversation with them, noting their crestfallen countenance. When they told Him of their sorrows, He proceeded to turn their thoughts to the prophecies and promises found in the Word of God, “[expounding] to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (v. 27). It was only when sitting down to a meal with Him that the disciples’ “eyes were opened and they knew Him” (v. 31).

Instead of a heart of grief, Christ had caused “[their] heart [to] burn within [them],” to brim once more with inspiration, conviction, and hope (v. 32). How interesting that clarity here also comes with a healthy morsel.

Just as with the disciples, the Lord is walking right beside you in your times of grief. May He reveal His presence to you as well.

CHAPTER 5

Will I See My Loved One in Heaven?

The definition and morality of suicide has been debated by Christian thinkers since ancient times. In the early days of Christianity, when persecution and martyrdom were common, martyrs were praised for their commitment to Christ.

However, at least one early offshoot of Christianity, the Circumcellions, ended up with a misguided view. Some voluntarily jumped off cliffs. Some violently attacked innocent passersby in order to be killed in retaliation. Some committed crimes in order to be sentenced to death by a court of law.²⁴

Augustine, an influential church father, may have had instances like these in mind when he wrote about Christians who thought suicide was an effective way to prevent themselves from sinning. Instead, Augustine argued, they were actually committing a greater sin by breaking the commandment to not kill.²⁵

In the time of Protestant Reformer John Calvin, the Christian church's stance against suicide intensified. In Geneva, suicide was discouraged by making a public spectacle of those who died. Throughout the Middle Ages, those who died by suicide were not allowed to be buried in church graveyards, and their belongings often confiscated by the state.²⁶ Attempted suicide was punished by excommunication from the church.²⁷

With such a history, it's no wonder that many have questions about their loved one's salvation. They wonder if suicide can be forgiven, or if it is possible to see their loved one in heaven.

A Perfect God

First, we must remember who God is. God is perfectly just, which means He is perfectly loving. Psalm 89:14 ties these characteristics together: "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you" (ESV).

God's perfect justice means that He holds us accountable only for what we know. The apostle Paul preached that "times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). James clarified, "To him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

God's perfect love means that He loves infinitely more those we've lost than we do. These are the children He designed in their mothers' wombs (Jeremiah 1:5). These

are the ones He sent His only Son to save (John 3:16, 17). If God can save someone, He will.

Additionally, God's wisdom and knowledge is absolute (Psalm 147:5; Romans 16:27). He understands each of us intimately (Psalm 139). Suicide may leave unanswered questions for us, but God is never confused.

Because of His great love, because of His perfect justice, and because of His complete wisdom, we can trust Him with our loved ones. He will do what is best and right.

Can Someone Who Ends His or Her Life by Suicide Be Saved?

In 2001, during the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, several people trapped in the upper floors jumped to their deaths before the buildings imploded. Some were even seen holding hands as they leapt from the broken windows. Why did they jump? With the impact of the plane and the building on fire, there was no escape; and some reports even describe the act as instinctual, given the extreme temperature of the explosion.

You could argue that it was technically suicide, but at the same time, those people were also victims of inevitable death. They simply chose the path with the lesser amount of pain. How can we judge in such a situation? Only God knows what they were going through.

With God's character in mind, let's return to the questions we often face after the loss of a loved one. Can suicide be forgiven? It's true that suicide is not what God wants for us, and that it breaks His commandments. But

the idea that suicide is the unpardonable sin comes from the concept that God judges people based on the last 60 minutes of their life.

I have known wonderful Christians that lived consistent lives of service and commitment. But then they began to show signs of dementia; sometimes their personalities changed. They became angry and difficult, sometimes even shocking their family with a cuss word. So, how will they be judged—by their final illness or their former life?

Christian author Ellen White put it this way: “The character is revealed, not by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts.”²⁸ I do not believe that God judges the panorama of a person’s life based on one deadly spell of depression or one wrong act at the time of one’s death. What matters more is how we’ve walked with God during our lifetime.

On the other hand, this also doesn’t exclude the chance that a person can be forgiven in the final hours of his life. When a career criminal, crucified next to Jesus, admitted the gravity of his sin and asked Jesus to remember him, Jesus, seeing his heart of sincere repentance, promised him, “You will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). After a lifetime of wrong choices, the thief was led to his Savior where, even while he was dying, Christ forgave his sins.

Suicide is usually the result of extreme depression, unbalanced brain chemistry, compromised thinking, and immense pain. Those who attempt suicide have

commonly faced multiple problems. Additionally, the action itself occurs “often during a brief period of heightened vulnerability.”²⁹ In one study, survivors of suicide attempts were asked how much time passed between the time they decided to try suicide and when they attempted it. Twenty-four percent answered with “less than five minutes”; 47 percent attempted in “an hour or less.”³⁰ At times, suicide is a rash decision.

Sometimes, it may be out of character with the life of the individual. In one case, a church member was on several medications for a serious health problem. The medications affected his reason, and one day, he decided to take an entire bottle of pills. Thankfully, he was discovered and saved before it was too late. Later, he believed that if it weren’t for the medications’ effect on his mind, he never would have attempted suicide. “I just wasn’t thinking clearly,” he told me.

Each Individual Case

Ultimately, I believe God will judge each situation individually, through His perfect wisdom and immense love. Take the suicides of Judas and Samson. When praying about His disciples, Jesus specifically mentioned Judas: “None of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled” (John 17:12).

On the other hand, the book of Hebrews includes Samson in the chapter of faithful heroes (11:32–34). Samson’s suicide was also a sacrifice—he gave his life to conquer Israel’s enemies, and God Himself answered

Samson's prayer, restoring his strength to collapse the Philistines' temple (Judges 16:28–30). These points must be taken into consideration when judging Samson's case.

Of course, what God wants for each of us is an abundant life; He longs for us to choose faith in Him in all circumstances. But in the end, judgment rests with God. He alone is able to read the human heart; God alone was present in those final moments.

Often, survivors of suicide loss long for an understanding of why the suicide occurred. Perhaps you find yourself in this category, wishing for answers and for certainty. In the words of Albert Hsu: "We do not have complete understanding of the situation, but we do have a Great Physician who knows how to bring healing and restoration to our broken hearts and broken lives."³¹ This side of heaven, we may never reach certainty—but the Bible does offer us reason to hope.

My prayer for you, as you grieve the loss of your loved one, is that you will come to a place of hope, leaning on God, who alone is able to heal and sustain you.

CHAPTER 6

To the Helpers

Sergeant Kevin Briggs served for 18 years as a California Highway Patrol officer near the Golden Gate Bridge. The beautiful San Francisco icon, however, has a dark side—it is the second-most-used suicide site in the world. During his years of service there, Briggs helped save the lives of more than 200 people.

Briggs' used any means possible to connect with hurting individuals. The bridge can be a cold and windy place, even in the middle of summer. But if a suicidal individual wore short sleeves, Briggs took off his jacket too. On some occasions, shivering together gave him a reason to say, "Hey, man, it's cold! Why don't we get outta here and get some hot chocolate?"³²

During one conversation, Briggs spoke with Kevin Berthia, who had already jumped over the rail and was standing on the narrow I-beam below. Their conversation lasted 90 minutes, but Briggs spoke for only four or five minutes. The rest of the time, he listened. "Don't argue, blame, or tell the person you know how they feel," Briggs suggests. "You probably don't."³³

But even Briggs, with all his experience, wasn't able to dissuade everyone. Jason Garber was an intelligent young man from New Jersey who had traveled to the Golden Gate Bridge in order to attempt suicide on two prior occasions. Briggs met Jason on his third and final trip. During their

conversation, Jason, sitting on the I-beam under the rail, simply leaned to one side and was gone. After Briggs had followed procedure to mark the location with a flare, he was alerted to a second body in the water—another person had jumped from a different location on the bridge while he had been talking to Jason. Even experts can't prevent every tragedy.³⁴

Warning Signs

It's not always possible to identify when a person is suicidal, but there are some common warning signs. Suicidal individuals often feel hopeless, helpless, and trapped, believing nothing can be done to improve their situation. You may hear them talking about suicide or saying things like "I wish I were dead." They may talk about being a burden to others. Mood swings, risky behavior, and changes in routine are also indicators. People with suicidal intent may say goodbye to others, write personal notes asking for forgiveness, give away their belongings, or generally get their affairs in order. Social withdrawal and a loss of interest in life is very common. Then, once their plans for suicide are in place, it is common for their mood to brighten; they often feel relief, thinking their pain will be ending.

Prevention Action Steps

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention present the following five evidence-based steps to talk to someone who may be considering suicide.³⁵

1. ASK

Sometimes concerned and caring people are afraid to bring up the topic of suicide. We're afraid we may plant ideas that aren't there, afraid of offending, or just plain afraid of the subject. But taking the initiative to ask someone if they're experiencing suicidal feelings can open an avenue that may save a life.

Simply asking, "Are you thinking about suicide?" shows that you can talk about it without judgment. Then, listen with the aim of understanding. It is also important to never promise to keep suicidal thoughts a secret.

Catherine, a survivor of a suicide attempt, says, "What I wished for ... was to be listened to, without interjection, until I was done saying what I had to say. I did not want judgment or worry or threats of hospitalizations. I did not want to be told that people knew how I felt, because that was a lie and a condescension. ... I wanted to get all the thoughts that were trapped inside my head out into the air, so that maybe they would leave me alone."³⁶

2. *BE THERE*

Do what you can to reverse the person's withdrawal from social connections: Be with the person—in person, on the phone, or in some other way. However, be sure not to commit to something you aren't able to do. If you're not available to be there in person, talk to them about who else can be. Here again, listen to their opinions on who they trust to help.

Another survivor, Penny, says, “I was incredibly lonely. I needed people to spend time with me, show they cared about me regularly. Call me, come over, invite me out. I felt completely repulsive, unlovable, disgusting. Having people say that they cared about me would have been great; having people show that love in their actions would have been even better.”³⁷

Increasing connection is a preventative measure that deescalates suicidal thoughts from turning into action.

3. *KEEP THEM SAFE*

After you've discovered someone is considering suicide, more information is needed. How detailed is the person's plan—is there a date, a time, a method? Does the person have the means to carry out this plan? Are there prior suicide attempts in the person's past?

Next, remove items that could be used in a suicide attempt. Do whatever you can to “[put] **time** and **distance** between the person and their chosen method, especially

methods that have shown higher lethality (like firearms and medications).”³⁸

Counselor Jennifer Jill Schwirzer’s website provides several resources for suicide prevention, including this acronym T.I.P. M.A.P., which can be helpful in remembering what information to gather: Does the suicidal person have Thoughts, Intentions, Plans, Method, Access, or Past history of attempted suicide?³⁹ The further along the person is in the planning, the more danger he or she is in.

If you think someone may try suicide, get help from a trained professional as soon as possible. Don’t try to manage it on your own. Call 911, your local crisis number, or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-TALK).

4. HELP THEM CONNECT

Help the person find access to ongoing support. The Lifeline phone number is a great place to start. You can also explore with the person the idea of seeing a mental health professional and discovering what other mental health resources his or her community offers. Additionally, actively set up “a safety plan,”⁴⁰ basic steps for the person to follow when his or her suicidal thoughts start up again.

5. FOLLOW UP

Studies have shown that for patients treated for suicide attempts, simple follow-up postcards from their health care provider can reduce repeated attempts. Following up is evidence that you care. Call, text, or drop by to find out

how the person is doing. Ask if there is something else you can do for him or her; update the person on the progress you've made in assisting him or her.

We Are All Here

For those who live in the far north or south of the planet, the long dark winters can be times of chronic depression. The beautiful village of Rjukan, Norway, is situated in a deep valley where mountains block the sun's rays for up to six months a year. This keeps the 3,400 residents in a state of shade, and sometimes depressing darkness, throughout the winter. But in October 2013, when a local artist revisited a century-old idea, Rjukan installed an array of three roughly 550 square foot mirrors on a nearby mountain nearly 1,500 feet above the town. The computer-controlled and solar-powered mirrors track the sun through the winter months and reflect a giant beam of sunshine down into the town square. If you visit Rjukan today in the winter, you can often see people gathered in the town square, bathing in the reflected sunshine.

Like those mirrors on the mountain, the Bible says that Christians are to reflect the light of Jesus, the light of hope to those trapped in the darkness of suicide.

In the book of Acts, we read the story of Paul and Silas' imprisonment in the Philippi jail. After "[being] beaten with rods," the two Christians were "put ... into the inner prison" by the jailer (16:22, 24). But Paul and Silas, far from being defeated, sang praises to God deep into the night, as the other prisoners listened.

Then, all of a sudden, everywhere around them began to shake. It “was a great earthquake,” which knocked open the doors of the jail cells and loosened everyone’s chains (v. 26). After the shaking stopped, the jailer, naturally assuming that all the prisoners had escaped and that he would be held responsible, “drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, ‘Do yourself no harm, for we are all here’” (vv. 27, 28).

The jailer ran in and, to his amazement, found all the prisoners still in their cells. He saw that Paul and Silas were reflecting a love so powerful and pure, a love that he wanted too. The one question he had for them: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (v. 30). Paul and Silas answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (v. 31). That love the jailer had seen was the love of Christ, the great Savior of the world. The jailer did believe, and “immediately he and all his family were baptized” (v. 33).

It may be that God has placed us in a position like Paul’s—near enough to call out to someone on the brink of suicide. Those who are in great pain need a community that says, “Please don’t hurt yourself, because we are all here for you.” Most important, they need a community that reflects the light from the true Son and points them to our great Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:14–16).

I praise God for your desire to be that supportive presence in someone else's life! May He guide your efforts and make them successful.

Endnotes

- 1 More of my story can be found in my book *The Richest Caveman: The Doug Batchelor Story*, available at afbookstore.com or by calling 800-538-7275.
- 2 [https://www.ted.com/talks/jd_schramm_break_the_silence_for_suicide_attempt_survivors/up-next](https://www.ted.com/talks/jd_schramm_break_the_silence_for_suicide_attempt_survivors_up-next)
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- 10 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2014/06/04/suicides-are-more-likely-late-at-night-researchers-find/>
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- 13 Ibid.
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Search for Comfort, Answers, and Hope (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2017), 63.

- 23 Hsu, 74.
- 24 *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, eds. Charles G. Herbermann, Edward A. Pace, Condé B. Pallen, Thomas J. Shahan, John J. Wynne, vol. 5 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909), s.v. "Circumcellions," <https://books.google.com/books?id=v7RAAQAAIAAJ&dq=circumcellions%20israelites&pg=PA125#v=onepage&q=circumcellions%20israelites&f=false>.
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- 28 E. G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1892), 57.
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- 36 <https://eewc.com/christians-contemplate-suicide/>
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 <https://www.bethelto.com/bethelto-steps-evidence/>
- 39 <https://www.abidecounseling.us/the-abide-toolbox/>. To access this specific resource, select "Suicide_Self-Harm"; then, select "TIP MAP.docx."
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