

What the Bible Says About Suicide

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[0:00] The subject is suicide.

I'd say interesting, not an enjoyable subject, an important subject, though honestly, there's there aren't any specific references in the Bible where God is teaching us, instructing us explicitly on the subject of suicide.

There's plenty of the Bible there that will instruct us on the conclusions that we must come to about suicide. And certainly, there's plenty of instruction in God's Word on how we, as the body of Christ, can minister to families who have experienced suicide and that have been devastated by it.

I don't think that I have pastored a church yet where I didn't have some members who experienced suicide in their immediate family.

And I'm not sure about here yet. I haven't discovered that. I know extended family, I've already heard about that tonight, and maybe some others. But I mean some horrendous experiences.

[1:45] My last church, we had a mother who came home from work to find her son's dead body in his bedroom. And he had literally blown his head off with a shotgun, committed suicide.

And she found his body. And I've heard that story many, many times. In fact, I know at least twice in my ministry, two instances that's been the case.

And so, suicide's a terrible, terrible thing. It's not an enjoyable subject. It is a sad reality in our culture and a growing reality.

That's why I thought I would start with just some alarming statistics. Maybe you don't know how big a deal it is, how big a problem it is in our culture.

I think we all have a sense of it, certainly. But we may not know some specific facts. Now, some of these stats that I'm going to give you, the most recent I could find would be 2007.

[2:59] And I scoured the Internet for them, and I don't know why we don't have more recent data. But 2007, some of these numbers come from 2005.

And yet, it gives us a sense of just how big this thing is. And so, let's just kind of go down through here. On average, one suicide occurs every 15 minutes.

This is in America. One every 15 minutes. Approximately 90 per day. Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death for all Americans.

All Americans, all ages, all genders. And we'll break it down a little bit more finely than that. It's the fourth leading cause of death for adults between the ages of 18 and 65.

Fourth. And these numbers, by the way, are going to go down as we go. Third leading cause of death for young people aged 15 to 24.

[4:13] I think I included there, it's fifth, believe it or not, leading cause among 15 to 14. Can you imagine? I mean, 5 to 14, excuse me. Then as we move on down, it's the second leading cause of death for 25 to 34 year olds.

In that kind of age grouping. Second leading cause of death among college students. That's pretty alarming, isn't it?

Think about it. The next one. More males die from suicide than females. And here's the ratio. Four to one. Four to one on males to females.

Who commit suicide. More people die from suicide than from homicide. I did not know that.

Then this last one. Because not everyone succeeds in committing suicide. And you lump them all together. And there were over 800,000 suicide attempts in 2005.

[5:34] That's the most recent figure I could get. Think about that. 800,000 attempts. Suicide. Pretty alarming.

So, you know, the question, of course, the question is what does the Bible say about suicide? It's a very important question. Though, I would imagine that right here in this room, we would all pretty

much be in agreement about the spiritual position, the biblical position on suicide.

And yet there are differing views. Now, when you get to the Bible, though I said at the outset that the Bible does not have an explicit verse that says thou shalt not commit suicide.

Now, we'll get to the thou shalt not, because it clearly does say thou shalt not murder. We'll get to that when we get on into it. But the Bible does record, at the most, seven instances of suicide.

Some would argue on a few of these, but I think it's pretty clear. If we define suicide as taking one's life, just taking one's own life, regardless of the circumstances, then these seven would qualify.

[7:03] The first one is Abimelech, and I don't think I have anything for you to fill in there. I do have a little information to just kind of remind you of the instance, and you can jot this down if you want to, but I think some of these are going to be very familiar.

But Abimelech, in Judges 9.54, Abimelech was the son of Gideon. We're talking about Gideon the judge. And he became king of Shechem, and he was morally wounded when a woman dropped a millstone off of the wall of the city, and it hit him and did not kill him.

And so he ordered his armor bearer to kill him with his sword, and he did. And so he, in effect, took his own life. So that's why we would label that or identify that as suicide.

The second one, of course, is Samson, and you might not put him in this category, but if you don't, then you open yourself to saying there are some justifiable causes for taking one's own life.

And the scripture about Samson is vague enough that it's difficult to know exactly what his motivation was. But anyway, you remember the story, Samson being captured by the Philistines, you know the story, Delilah, and how all that transpired, and the Philistines, of course, imprisoned him, gouged his eyes out, and so forth.

[8:35] And at one point, they were celebrating, having a big party, a kind of celebration of their god Dagon. And they brought Samson out, the Bible says, to make sport of him.

You know, he was a big prize for them because he had been one of their biggest sources of affliction.

He had killed many of them single-handedly. And you know the story about Samson. And so they chained him, you remember, between two pillars, two supporting pillars, of their temple to Dagon. And the Bible doesn't tell us just how many Philistines were in there, but here he is. You know, he's tied, and you've all seen the movie. I think it's Victor Mature, played Samson. And so you know exactly how it looked that day.

And it may have looked like that, I don't know. But it's a pretty good movie. Well, anyway. And so there he is, you know, he's chained there. And he asked, you know, a little servant boy to help him feel those pillars so that he could, evidently close enough where he could, even though it shows Victor Mature pulling chains, evidently Samson was able to get his arms around these or at least push them in some way.

[9:51] And then, you know, he asked God to restore his strength. Now everybody points to the source and says, well, his hair grew and so his strength came back, but Samson's strength was not in his hair.

Okay. That's a misunderstanding of Scripture. God had given him strength. The hair, the long hair, was a symbol of the vow he had taken.

But anyway, so God grants his request. Now, Samson said that he wanted, he asked God to give him strength so that he could take vengeance against the Philistines who had plucked his eyes out. So I don't know what Samson's motivation was. He clearly says because he just wanted to get these people back. But clearly God gave Samson strength back to him so that he could judge the Philistines.

And so, Samson, of course, pulls the temple, those pillars and the whole temple collapses and kills. More Philistines at that one moment kills more, the Bible says, in his death than he did in his life.

[10:54] But he did clearly take his own life. All right. The third one would be King Saul. And you know this story, I'm sure, in 1 Samuel 31. He was wounded in battle with the Philistines.

The Israelites were, the army had gone out against the Philistines. They lost that battle with the Philistines. And in the course of that battle, Saul and Jonathan, his son, were killed.

But Saul, of course, was wounded and he commanded his armor bearer to take his sword and kill him. And his armor bearer refused. And so Saul fell on his own sword and took his life.

All right. And then, that leads to the fourth one in that same text. The Bible says, when Saul's armor bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword and died with him.

And so he took his own life too. All right. Regardless of, you know, a person's interpretation of the text, whether, you know, whether it was justifiable or whether, you know, whatever, he clearly took his own life.

[12:05] So it's an example of suicide. Sixth, or fifth, rather, would be Ahithophel. This one you may not remember. King David, Ahithophel was David's counselor.

And, but he joined Absalom, David's son, joined Absalom in Absalom's revolt and desire to take his father's throne.

And so he joined with him. And, but when the plot to overthrow David failed, he went home and hanged himself, the Bible says. So he took his own life. So it's a case of suicide.

Zimri, be the sixth one, 1st Kings 16. He was a chariot. You probably don't know, remember about this one. There's not a lot. I don't think I've ever heard a sermon out of this text.

But, anyway, he was the chariot commander under Elah, king of Israel. That is the northern kingdom when you have the divided kingdom, north and the south, Israel and Judah.

[13:09] And in the north was Elah, king of Israel. And, Zimri assassinated Elah so that he could become king. And he took, kind of took the throne and crowned himself king, but he only held the throne for seven days.

His, his reign was quite short because all Israel rose up against him and besieged the capital city at that time was a place called Tirzah there in the north.

And so the Bible says when Zimri saw that the city was taken, he burned the king's house down upon himself with fire and died.

So he took his own life in a cowardly way. And then the last one, of course, is perhaps the most known instance of suicide.

It would be Judas Iscariot. and he hung himself after he betrayed Jesus. So there, there are seven examples. I don't know of any others.

[14:11] Again, some would argue as to whether some of these qualify as modified suicide, but they're clear there. Now, the striking thing about these examples from Scripture is that we do not have the Bible in these passages, in these instances, whether it's a prophet saying a word or the narrator who wrote the book of the Bible.

We don't have any condemnation, any word, any principle given about the rightness or wrongness, the sinfulness of suicide.

And we kind of wish there would be something like that. It's not there. But we, I'll go ahead and tell you, we don't need it. We don't need it because the Bible is pretty clear in another way. And so with that, then let's just run down through kind of a historical survey of Christian views.

Kind of the, you know, in the, from the early centuries of Christianity kind of on, and it's not going to be a detailed or exhaustive survey, survey, but there have been some movements, some changes of viewpoints in regard to suicide.

And first one, the early Christians, when I say the early Christians, I'm talking about those Christians in the first few centuries of the church. And really, I think I would, you know, have to qualify this.

[15:48] It's not all Christians, all right? But in that period, there developed a Christian, or perspective within the Christian community that held that, you know, suicide was an opportunity for martyrdom, is basically the idea.

They practiced, in a sense, practiced suicide as martyrdom during their Roman persecution. what they would do, apparently, historians tell us, they would put themselves, deliberately put themselves in situations where they would be killed.

Situations with, say, Roman soldiers or Roman leaders or in some situation where they would be killed and they could die for their faith.

so it's kind of a forced martyrdom, you know, which I don't think the Bible teaches anywhere that Christians should do such a thing.

But this is what was kind of happening within the church and it apparently was a growing thing. You know, they believed and developed this theology that martyrdom guaranteed them entrance into heaven.

[17:07] See? Seventy virgins? Huh? Well, not quite like that, but the same kind of error. Same, similar thing.

Others, but not all believed necessarily that, but others also believed that, you know, this kind of martyrdom where they would just willfully and determinately sacrifice their very lives for their faith if they believed that that was just a very profound demonstration of their commitment to Christ. And so, they would force it, in a sense. Alright, so they're not taking their own life in the sense that by their own hand, they're committing suicide in that sense, but they are committing suicide in that they are deliberately, how do it be just like if you were deciding, and many do today, yeah, a person take the car and just veer over and get involved in a head-on collision to take their own life, you know, so distraught, or whatever it may be.

So, it's not that they took a knife or took a gun, but someone else obliged them, but they put themselves in that situation. So, this was the problem.

Now, the biblical answer, of course, and I want to kind of interject in some of these, the biblical answer, according to the Bible, the sacrifice required of all Christians is to live for Christ.

[18:40] Now, here's the first, I think, biblical principle that answers the question about what does the Bible say about suicide? Nowhere does the Bible require us in a deliberate way to sacrifice our physical life for the cause of Christ.

Now, we may be called upon to do that, and God may grant us martyrdom for His greater glory, and it's difficult for us to see that, and certainly we would not want that, but God may require that, and it would be for His glory.

But He does not require that of all Christians. The supreme command or requirement of all believers is not to die, but to live.

Live for Christ. And Romans 12, 1 and 2 is the clear passage, therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies what?

A living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. I also would have you note Philippians 1.21.

[20:00] These are all very familiar passages, but again here, these really begin to answer the question, does the Bible have anything to say about suicide? And though the word suicide is not there, and the context is not suicide per se, but the principle informs us about how we ought to, what our view of suicide ought to be.

In Philippians 1.21, the Bible says, for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Now you say, well, there it is. Paul said there that dying is better. Is that what he means? No. It is better, I guess, in the sense in which he's saying it, but it's not a case for suicide.

We need to read on. But if I live on in the flesh that is in this body, this will mean fruit from my labor. Yet what I should choose I cannot tell.

Not I cannot tell, I'm just not going to tell you. I can't make up my mind. For I am hard pressed, he said, between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

[21:19] And it is, isn't it? Nevertheless, to remain in this body is more needful for you. And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith and so forth.

And so what's the principle here? God wants to use us here. He's far more interested in us living for him and bearing fruit for him in this life and being a benefit to those around us that God has given to us to influence, to minister to, whether it's family or friends or in the context of the church, whatever. So the principle is pretty clear. And you could look over to Philippians chapter 4 and verse 11 and point out one of the most misapplied passages of Scripture in the Bible.

But it says here, not that I speak in regard of need, for I have learned in whatever state I'm in, or I am, to be content.

I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere in all things I've learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

[22:50] That means I can be rock bottom, I know how to live there, and I can be way up on the mountaintop, I know how to live there, and how did he know to do that, or how was he able to do that?

He said because I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. That's an important principle, isn't it? Yet, we tend only to want to apply that passage, I can do all things through Christ who strengthen me, only apply it in a positive sense.

But Paul is putting both things together. He's saying, I can know how to be rock bottom. I can know how to live there and be content, spiritually, because I can do all things through Christ who

strengthen, who strengthen, strengthens me.

That's a tongue twister, isn't it? Now, how does this apply to suicide, you think? It's pretty clear, isn't it? Or that is what the Bible would say against that route, that opportunity.

Well, the causes of suicide are almost always when a person is discouraged, depressed, mentally not thinking correct, and there may be some physiological things going on as well, and that really just hit rock bottom.

[24 : 17] And so the decision by many, and we've seen the statistics, a growing number, is to just check out and end it all. Though a Christian knows that suicide doesn't end at all, does it?

Before a Christian, a Christian should not make that decision because they ought to be able to have the same testimony that Paul had. I know how to be a base, I know how to abound, to have nothing, to have more than I need because through Christ, I can do all things.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. So, that I think is a biblical answer, and I might also just bring up the case of Peter when I look at the text, but in Luke 22, 31, kind of interesting, it's at that time when Jesus informs Peter that he's going to deny him three times.

In fact, first he says to Peter, Peter, the devil desires to sit to you, and I'm praying for you. And, you know, what does Peter say?

He says, ultimately, he says, I'm willing to die for you. I'll die for you. And he was willing to do that. He said, I'll go to prison and I'll die for you.

[25 : 42] And, it was one thing he left out. He didn't say I'd live for you. It's much easier to die, believe it or not, and you know it, it's easier to die for Christ than it would be to live for him.

And, Peter learned a valuable lesson. Of course, Jesus said, you're going to deny me three times, and he, of course, did. All right, secondly, as we move along here, kind of thinking about the historical development of Christian views on suicide.

Secondly, Augustine was the first theologian to declare a distinction between suicide and martyrdom. Now, you can see how this fits historically.

The trend among the early Christians was moving toward deliberate suicide in the sense of putting themselves in a place where they would be assured martyrdom.

And, Augustine was the first one to say, no, this isn't right. Now, he didn't go far enough, but he did make a distinction and it was in the 5th century he argued that suicide was an act of murdering oneself and therefore was a violation of the 6th commandment.

[27 : 07] Now, there's the clear text that we should go to to find out what the Bible says about suicide, whether it's for it or against it.

And it's definitely against it. And suicide is self-murder. It is. Whether you are taking a gun to another man and pulling that trigger and ending his life, or whether you turn that gun into yourself and in your own life, it's murder either way.

And it's a violation of the 6th commandment in Augustine. was the one who brought that back into the thinking of Christians. Now, he did, though, at the same time, conclude that suicide was an unrepentable sin.

Now, how could he come to that conclusion? Is there any opportunity to repent after you're dead?

No. Now, the problem then with that is that, you know, as it evolved within the church, and I say primarily the Catholic church, then thirdly, you have Thomas Aquinas later classifying suicide as a mortal sin, that's the word you need there, mortal sin, that cannot be forgiven.

You see how they've come to this conclusion? You know, you have to bring into play some of their other doctrinal positions about sin, understand this whole idea of mortal sin, and this is the, and still today, though they've softened it some, it's the historic Catholic view that suicide is unforgivable, it's the unpardonable sin, one of several, by the way.

[29 : 02] It's a mortal sin. Now, according to the Catholic doctrine, certain sins are considered mortal because certain sins like murder, adultery, and some others, they're mortal because they separate a person, in their view, separate a person from God's saving grace.

So you can be in His grace and commit a mortal sin, and if that sin is not confessed, repented of, and absolved, then if you die, you're going to hell.

Because that sin separated you from God's saving grace. That's their view. That's a mortal sin. As opposed to venial sin, which are sins that, you know, like if I went over there to Mike and I said, Mike, you're a rascal.

I hate you. I'll just slap him or something like that. You know, some sins like that. Now, venial sins can eventually lead to mortal sins in the Catholic view.

Alright, so they came up with that. So, unless a mortal sin is confessed, forgiven, and fully absolved, it will condemn a person to hell after death.

[30 : 19] That's their view. Alright, so let's just think of this logically then. Since suicide is murder, self-murder, and since murder is a mortal sin, and since the one committing the suicide, self-murder, has no opportunity to confess his or her sin and be absolved of it, then suicide is therefore considered unforgivable.

Make sense? I mean, in this view. It's just the way it would have to work. And until the Reformation, suicide were condemned by the Catholic Church, and not only the church, but the state, which was like saying the same thing, church and state.

Suicides were, suicide victims were denied burial on consecrated ground, all the way up until about 1823 according to history.

Denied burial. Instead, they were buried at night without a service. I don't know why this, but at a crossroads somewhere, and with a state driven through their heart.

That sounds like something you see in a horror movie. Well, that's what you did to vampires, but anyway. And their possessions, not only that, but their possessions would be confiscated by the state.

[31 : 44] I mean, they were very serious about it. Those who committed suicide, this was a mortal sin. It was a terrible sin, and it was the unpardonable sin, because the one who committed suicide could never confess and never be absolved.

And that was the basic view, and still is the view of most Catholics today. The biblical answer, of course, is twofold. Well, I'll just put it this way. The only sin the Bible declares as unforgivable or unpardonable is blasphemy Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

That's Matthew 12, 31 and 32. If an unbeliever commits suicide, an unbeliever, he or she is just simply choosing to go to hell sooner rather than later, basically.

Not going to hell because he or she committed suicide, but rather because he or she rejected Christ and salvation through Christ.

If a believer commits suicide, it is certainly sin, but it's covered by the blood of Jesus. And so that leads us to the final view, which really has been the prevalent view from the Reformation on among evangelical Christians.

[33 : 06] And they've generally viewed suicide as sin. It's just sin. Like any other sin. Now, it's a serious sin. I'm not minimizing that. But it's sin.

And here's kind of the Baptist, I would say the Baptist view on suicide. Suicide is not what determines whether or not a person gains entrance into heaven or whether a person sends himself or herself to hell.

It's not about that. From the moment the sinner truly repents and believes in Christ, he or she is granted a full pardon for sin, born again, and receives eternal life.

A number of passages we could go to. John 3.16 for one. Or Colossians 1.12, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

[34 : 08] And that includes suicide. See, as born-again Christians, we can know beyond any doubt that we possess eternal life. 1 John 5.13, These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

D, nothing can separate a Christian from God's love. Now, see, these are passages that speak to the question, what does the Bible say about suicide?

It may not be explicit references to suicide per se, but you put all these together and we understand the biblical position.

And so, here is Romans 8.38, one of our favorite passages where I'm persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come nor height nor depth nor any other created thing.

And I'm a created thing, and if I commit suicide, then does my suicide separate me from the love of God? He says, no, not even any created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God

which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[35:29] Now, that's a promise to Christians. You must be in Christ for this to apply. We're not talking about unbelievers committing suicide. That's sin, like all sin, and they're going to be judged according to the rejection of the gospel, and they're going to be judged based upon their sin.

But for a believer, not anything can separate us from the love of God. See, Jesus died for all our sins, and if a true Christian in a time of spiritual attack and weakness commits suicide, that would still be a sin covered by the blood of Christ.

1 Corinthians 3.13. 1 Corinthians 3.13. It says here, each one's work will become clear, that is all of our works in life will become clear for the day, we'll declare it, because it will be revealed by fire, and fire will test each one's work of what sort it is.

If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

That is, all that's going to be burned away, and you commit suicide, that evil work, that's all been judged, and it will be gone, and you're going to make it even though through the fire.

[36:59] So, we don't have to worry about it as a believer. Suicide, though, however, I'm quick to say, F there, suicide is a serious sin against God, there's no doubt about that.

And, I would add that current trends in the church, really beginning to view suicide more as a symptom than a sin.

I don't think we should ever take our eyes off of the reality that suicide is sin. See, we have a tendency in our culture to do this with a lot of things in society, like alcoholism, for one.

Instead of calling it a sin, we define it more as a sickness. Now, it becomes a sickness, but it starts out as a sin sickness. And then it affects, of course, the body and the mind, and it spreads out from there, and it's a devastating thing on a person's life and family and a culture, no doubt.

But let's not divorce it from what it is primarily, and it's sin. And suicide is sin. And so, we don't treat it just simply as a symptom of some sickness or some illness.

[38:21] Now, it is that too. But it is sin, and we cannot divorce it from that. Finally, there is no circumstance that can justify someone, especially a Christian, justifies someone taking his or her own life.

Because Christians are called to live their lives for God. And the decision on when to die is whose decision? It's God's.

God's and God's alone. And that, I think, pretty much covers it. I would add, just in conclusion, that there are, of course, other viewpoints on suicide, but would not call them Christian.

I mean, we have for years, and in recent years, been dealing with this maybe in a more intense way, and that is this whole idea of physician-assisted suicide.

And the justifying of taking one's own life because of physical circumstances, or whatever it may be, and the whole issue of euthanasia, and such, I just chose not to get into because I do not believe those are Christian views.

[39:38] We're looking at what the Bible says, and I think that pretty much covers it.