

A Study Of Moral Issues: Suicide

Introduction. Last year, *13 Reasons Why* debuted on Netflix to positive reviews from critics and audiences. The series revolved around seventeen-year-old high school student, Clay Jensen, and his deceased friend Hannah Baker, who has killed herself after having to face a culture of gossip and sexual assault at her high school and a lack of support from her friends and her school. A box of cassette tapes recorded by Hannah in the lead up to her suicide detail thirteen reasons why she ended her life. The marketing analytics firm Jumpshot determined the first season was the second-most viewed Netflix season in the first 30 days after it premiered.

Suicide rates are increasing in almost every state, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In more than half of the states, the rate increased more than 30 percent between 1999 and 2016. Last year, nearly 45,000 people died by suicide. Suicides resulted in 828,000 global deaths in 2015, an increase from 712,000 deaths in 1990. This makes suicide the 10th leading cause of death worldwide. About 1 in 5 consider suicide (it's not a fleeting thought; they have a plan). Rates of completed suicides are generally higher among men than among women.

Suicide is a horrific tragedy that leaves people asking, "Why?" Bad times will come in life. As much as your family and friends love you, they cannot protect you from the evils of life, nor can they fully prepare you for them. The pain of rejection, failure, betrayal, violence, death, etc., has to be experienced to be fully understood. Bad happens, and it sometimes seems to happen all at the same time. When it does, remember that it is only one moment. Rise above the temptation to live only in that moment and see life for what it really is — a series of days, events, and circumstances. The storm may be great, but it will soon pass.

I. Attitudes Of Suicide

- A. "This isn't the way I wanted everything to turn out."
 1. God commanded Jonah to preach to the city of Nineveh. The people of Nineveh were enemies of Israel. At first, Jonah was so opposed to the idea of God extending mercy to these people that he fled, but after spending three days in the fish, Jonah changed his mind and, reluctantly, he did as he was told. The entire city repented and God's wrath was suspended. Everyone was happy — except Jonah (Jonah 4:1-3).
 2. Jonah knew that God was merciful. He believed that the people of Nineveh were unworthy of compassion and mercy, and he wanted the city to be destroyed. Jonah was angry with God for sparing the city. If we could have asked him, Jonah probably would have said that he felt betrayed by God. This is not how Jonah wanted it to turn out. In his opinion, it was better for him to die than to live with the reality that God had extended mercy to his enemies. There are some important lessons to learn from Jonah's response.
 - a) Everything in life does not always turn out the way we plan. There is nothing wrong with making plans, but we have to realize that life does not revolve around us. There are many elements in life that are out of our control, and it is important we learn to accept these situations.

- b) Jonah made these statements while he was disappointed and angry. Decisions made when one is in a highly emotional state are often regretted (e.g. the man who jumped from the Golden Gate Bridge). Some decisions, like suicide, have permanent consequences. There is nothing wrong with getting angry and disappointed, but we must learn not to make rash decisions while we are in such a state.
 - c) Consider Jonah's lack of respect for human life. He was angry because God had spared an entire city full of people — many of whom were innocent (4:11). Human life is precious and sacred, but not everyone sees it that way. Our society grants abortion on demand. Those who argue in favor of abortion insist it is a choice. Those who commit suicide are only taking this choice and applying it to themselves instead of an unborn child.
 - d) Even in his distraught state, Jonah understood that he could not take his own life. His request was for God to take his life from him. Humans belong to the Lord and they do not have the right to end their life (Ezekiel 18:4).
- B. "I can't do anything right."
- 1. Few feelings are as discouraging as feeling like a failure. Sometimes young people feel pressured to excel in academics, sports, music, and relationships. In some cases, this pressure to succeed can become so great that they lose sight of the fact that their family and friends truly love them for who they are. Their life becomes goal-oriented rather than character-oriented. When this happens, they determine their self-worth by how well they do rather than by what kind of person they are. Thus, when they fail at doing something, they consider themselves failures.
 - 2. Elijah was a mighty prophet of God, but there was a time when he felt like a failure. After Elijah had won a great victory, all of Israel seemed to be convinced that the Lord was God, except for one (1 Kings 18:1-46). When Jezebel heard that Elijah had killed her prophets, she threatened him (1 Kings 19:2). Elijah responded by running away (v. 4). He considered himself to be no good and prayed for death because he failed to convince one person.
 - 3. This is an easy trap. No matter how many people give us compliments, the voice of a lone critic will often ring so loud that we forget everyone else's praise and support. Elijah focused on one person who wanted to take his life. He was unaware of the fact that 7,000 people were on his side. He had made a difference in the lives of many people, but he did not realize it because he was lost in self-pity. But God also made it clear that Elijah had more work to do (vv. 15-17). It was not time for him to give up.
 - 4. Life consists of moments of success and failure, but neither define who we truly are. Our character is shown in the way we choose to respond to moments of success and failure (Matthew 26:75; 27:5). Just because we have failed in one task does not mean we are a failure. Maybe you may have failed at something, and maybe it was very important, but you are not a quitter. There is more for you to do.
- C. "I can't do this all by myself."
- 1. Moses is remembered as a great man of faith, but there was one occasion in which he asked God for death. Despite the fact that Moses was leading the

- Israelites out of Egyptian bondage, he was often heavily criticized by the very people who were benefiting from his efforts. It can be frustrating to be the object of constant criticism, and on one occasion, Moses' frustration got the best of him (Numbers 11:11-15).
2. If God intended for Moses to bear this burden for the rest of his life, then Moses felt that he had no hope. He asked God to kill him so he would not have to endure another minute of what had become a miserable experience.
 3. Many people have stood where Moses stood. They have done all they know to do, and despite their best efforts, they feel like they are in over their heads and are incapable of pleasing anyone. It is not uncommon for young people, who are beginning to experience the responsibilities of adulthood, to feel overwhelmed. Sometimes they tire from trying reach the "unrealistic" expectations others have placed on them. These pressures can become more than they think they can handle.
 4. God heard Moses' plea. He told Moses to gather 70 men of the elders of the people (v. 17). Every person needs to be able to bear his own load (Galatians 6:5), but there are times when we all need help (v. 2). There are people who are more than willing to help you through your hard times. Sometimes a suicide is a cry for help, but unfortunately it is a cry that no one can answer because it removes the opportunity to show love and concern.
- D. "I need a way of escape."
1. David endured many struggles in his life, and he recorded some of his thoughts as he endured them (Psalm 55:4-5). David's heart was severely pained within him. He felt the terrors of death. He did not see a way out.
 2. David's initial reaction was to escape (vv. 6-7). Today some seek a momentary escape from the sorrows of life through drugs and alcohol. For others, the pain becomes so overwhelming that they lose all hope and seek to escape life altogether through suicide.
 3. While "running away" may appear to be an attractive option, it is not an effective way to handle life's problems. Even David realized this later in his psalm (v. 22). Whatever troubles us, God will take it seriously. He knows, He cares, He listens, and He has promised to see us through it if we will turn to Him for help (Psalm 38:15).
 4. Some may feel that since they are not Christians, or are not currently in the "best kind of relationship" with the Lord, that this option is not available for them. God is always ready to help you. He is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:27). God does not ask that you prove yourself to Him, but that you give yourself to Him.
 5. In a moment of hopeless desperation, the Philippian jailer was ready to kill himself. Shortly thereafter he was rejoicing (Acts 16:27, 33). The gospel will give you eternal life (Romans 1:16), and it will also give you a reason to live.

II. What Contributes To Suicide

A. Mental illness.

1. Half of all people who die by suicide may have major depressive disorder; having this or one of the other mood disorders increases the risk of suicide

- 20-fold. Other conditions implicated include schizophrenia (14%), personality disorders (8%), bipolar disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, and posttraumatic stress disorder.
2. The CDC found that 54 percent of people who committed suicide did not have a known diagnosed mental health condition when they died. Principal Deputy Director Anne Schuchat noted this number could be low because people might have had a condition but it wasn't diagnosed or their loved ones might not have known about it.
 3. People who struggle with mental illness often need specialized help and prayers without ceasing made on their behalf. Their lives are special and sacred. Man was made as the crowning piece of God's creative work. We are special and unique in that we alone have been made in our Creator's image (Genesis 1:26-27; Psalm 139:14).
- B. Physical problems.
1. Substance abuse is the second most common risk factor for suicide after major depression and bipolar disorder. Both chronic substance abuse as well as acute intoxication are associated with higher suicide rates. When combined with personal grief, such as bereavement, the risk is further increased. Substance abuse is also associated with mental health disorders.
 2. Childhood trauma is a risk factor for suicide. Some may take their own lives to escape bullying or prejudice. A history of childhood sexual abuse and time spent in foster care are also risk factors. Sexual abuse is believed to contribute to approximately 20% of the overall risk.
 3. Job was a good and upright man who feared God and shunned evil. He was blessed with ten children, and his possessions made him one of the greatest men of his day (Job 1:1-3). When Job lost it all, he did what many people in similar situations do: he began to wish that he had never been born (Job 3:1, 11-13, 16-17). Job did not know why it was happening to him; he just wanted it to stop and be "at rest" from his present sorrows.
 4. We can see Job's life in a way concealed from him. We can see his life as a complete picture. Although he suffered terribly, we know that it was temporary. He enjoyed great blessings before these events took place, and God blessed him even more afterwards (Job 42:10-17). We also know why all this happened to him (Job 1-2). However, we have to live like Job did — one day at a time. Most days are normal, some days are great, and some days bring incredible tragedy and heartache. Job helps us to see that there is more to life than just one day.
- C. Medical conditions.
1. There is an association between suicide and physical health problems such as chronic pain, traumatic brain injury, cancer, kidney failure (requiring dialysis), HIV, and lupus. The diagnosis of cancer approximately doubles the subsequent frequency of suicide. In Japan, health problems are listed as the primary justification for suicide.
 2. Additionally, and a subject that cannot be ignored given the current societal climate, the transgender suicide rate is 40% for both pre- and post-op

- transgenders. The only other demographics in human history that have had a suicide rate that high were Jews living under Nazi rule and schizophrenics.
3. God gives grace to the afflicted (2 Corinthians 12:9). The Bible declares that heaven is a place of comfort and rest to be enjoyed after a life of faithful service (2 Corinthians 4:17-18; Revelation 2:10; 14:13). Do not do anything to jeopardize that.
- D. Overemphasizing materialism.
1. God made man with an eternal spirit. The spirit of man longs for fellowship with God. However, when men attempt to satisfy this spiritual longing with something physical and material, they will be frustrated and incomplete.
 2. Along these lines, between 12 and 24% of pathological gamblers attempt suicide. The thrill and greed associated with gambling takes a high toll. Furthermore, the rate of suicide among their spouses is three times greater than that of the general population.
 3. I have heard a grieving father state that he gave his son everything that he could have wanted — yet the young man still chose to take his life. We cannot take our young people away from God and fill that void in their souls with something material (Luke 12:15). There is a hole in our spirit that only God can fill (Ecclesiastes 3:11).
- E. Overemphasizing human relationships.
1. God created man as a social being (Genesis 2:18). While human relationships are very important, they are not our only basis for living. One's worth is not determined by whether or not someone wants to date them.
 2. Ending a relationship with someone is painful. People who are older have learned that there is much more to life than high school. Human relationships are important, but they do not take the place of having fellowship with God. Before trying to bring joy to your life through human relationships, bring stability to your life by developing a relationship with God who will never leave you (Hebrews 13:5).
- F. Misguided comfort.
1. If you have ever attended a funeral of someone who has taken their life, you may have been disappointed with the content of the message spoken on that occasion. Every life deserves to be honored and respected, and every family deserves to be comforted. It is not always easy to speak comforting words in that circumstance.
 2. However, most of us know that funerals are occasions to speak to the living. When someone says, "Our departed loved one is not hurting any longer," followed by, "We will be with them again one day," he has done a poor job in addressing the needs of people who are dealing with an immense amount of confusion, pain, and sorrow. They desperately need to be encouraged to choose life (Deuteronomy 30:19) and choose God (1 Kings 18:21).

Conclusion. Those in the grave may be at rest from the sorrows of life, but they are missing out on the blessings that life brings to the living. While suicide is a terrible tragedy, suicide is also a terrible mistake.