

3 Lessons to Tell Your Kids From Robin Williams' Suicide

The best-selling biography of Robin Williams, *Robin*, is a compelling and comprehensive portrait of the comic genius. I devoured the 530-page book about this man whose life was both a triumph and a tragedy.

The revelatory biography gleaned from a hundred original interviews with family, friends and colleagues as well as extensive archival research. It's riveting reading. It illustrates the vanity of life apart from God with sledgehammer effect.

Robin is an insightful and intimate chronicle of a cultural icon who catapulted onto the scene of entertainment 40 years ago like a hyperkinetic comet but crashed, leaving the world in shock. His sordid history and perverted passions (today he'd be arrested for his public behavior) were often concealed behind his funny facade.

There are three cautionary lessons that should be shared with young people easily seduced to follow this performer's pathway. First, consider the accolades and achievements he accumulated.

Fame and Fortune

Robin Williams was one of the best known, admired celebrities in all the world. He was a super-superstar. "His face was as known as the Coca-Cola logo and he had zillions of dollars."

He appeared in 68 movies and was nominated for four Academy Awards, winning one. His legacy includes multiple Golden Globe and Emmy awards. Remember *Mrs. Doubtfire*, *Dead Poets Society*, *Good Morning Vietnam*, *Awakenings*, *The Fisher King*, *Good Will Hunting*, *Hook*, *Aladdin*, *Patch Adams* and *Popeye*? Don't forget

Mork and Mindy back in the 70s!

He won multiple Grammys for “Best Comedy Albums” from his regular comedy specials and lucrative touring. He appeared on *Saturday Night Live*, *Friends*, *Law and Order* plus daytime and late-night shows.

Steven Spielberg called him “one of the best actors in Hollywood!” When Carson ended his 30 year *Tonight Show*, he had Robin as one of his two guests. When Letterman came back from heart surgery, Robin opened the curtain.

Robin Williams was part of a pantheon of performers; a one-of-a-kind, brilliant, Hall of Famer.

This multitalented entertainer was a multimillionaire, paid \$15 million for a movie. Recognized wherever he went, he enjoyed a security staff, nannies, drivers, house and grounds keepers plus adoration from the masses.

“He was as big a star as he had ever been, and seemed untouchable.”

Understanding His Unraveling

Tracing Robin’s descent and demise is captured in his last tour’s title, *Weapons of Self-Destruction*. He self-destructed because of wrong choices in three areas of deception that ensnared him.

Parents, coaches and educators should engage youth in sharing these insights before they’re seduced onto a broad road that leads to destruction.

1. There is “pleasure in sin for a season” (see), but there comes a day of reckoning.

- The Bible directs us: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and

perfect will of God” ().

- There’s no indication that Williams ever trusted Jesus as his Lord and Savior. “You will know them by their fruit” (Matt.7:16a). Authentic Christ-followers are recognized by their character and conformity to His Word.

Robin could be hilarious, charming and generous but he regularly snorted cocaine, drank excessively, fornicated and committed adultery (he was married three times). He sexually assaulted women like his *Mork and Mindy* costar, Pam Dawber, profaned God, spoke perversely and spewed profanities profusely in his performances.

Williams craved affirmation from adoring audiences and feared being displaced. He disregarded laws of God and nature regarding health and sleep. Projecting the outward image of the cool clown, on the inside, he was fearful, stressed and careening slowly but surely into the canyon of eventual destruction.

“Be sure your sin will find you out” (b).

2. Those disregarding God’s Word are unprepared for life’s challenges.

In the greatest sermon ever given by the greatest Teacher who ever lived, Jesus concluded His Sermon on the Mount with a staggering claim: obedience to His teaching is the only safe foundation for life as unexpected adversity comes to all. As a carpenter He knew how to build to withstand storms.

“And everyone who hears these sayings of Mine and does not do them will be likened to a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house. And it fell. And its fall was great” (Matt.7:26-27).

When Robin faced divorces, deaths, an unexpected lawsuit, failing projects, fading fame, financial difficulties and finally health problems, he couldn't handle it. Distracting himself with entertainment, consulting therapists and friends, trying anti-depressants—nothing solved the problems or numbed the pain.

He was anxious and couldn't sleep. He began drinking again. He was listless and a shell of his former self. Remember: Satan has no happy old people. Robin had been set up and our archenemy was moving in for the kill.

3. Insecure and in desperate need is time to turn to God.

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that cheer is grief (-13). "Humor is the mistress of sorrow," said Ralph Waldo Emerson.

When someone has stiff-armed God and masked the problem of sinful independence, it's time to stop camouflaging with humor and humble oneself to yield unreservedly to God.

The Crossroads

Daniel 5 is the account of King Belshazzar feasting and drinking while basking in the adulation of a thousand adoring fans. In an atmosphere of mirth, merriment and mockery of God led by a popular figure who followed the vanities of life, God suddenly "numbered" his days and declared, "You have been weighed in the balances and found wanting." The self-sufficient star of the show quickly found his "countenance was changed ... his thoughts troubled him ... his knees struck against one another ... he cried aloud." Shortly thereafter, his life ended.

Nathan Lane, a Tony award-winning actor and costar with Robin Williams in their gay comedy film, *The Birdcage*, admitted "We are the two most insecure, neediest people I've ever seen in

my life.”

Were the years of self-indulgent living catching up to Robin? He settled a long-standing multimillion dollar lawsuit from a former girlfriend who said he gave her an STD but coughing, dizziness and finally major heart surgery put him in a place of deep fear and anxiety. He admitted, “a death scare changes all!”

As Robin entered his 60s, and his downward spiral continued. He tried a TV series “for the money,” living by himself in a small apartment. He reached out to his son. He was lonely.

His weight loss was severe, and his motor impairment was growing harder to disguise. His once-photographic memory was fading, and he couldn’t remember his lines. He suffered panic attacks and wondered if audiences still loved him. “It was gut wrenching to watch him,” someone observed sadly.

Becoming increasingly paranoid, he grew fearful that his collection of designer wrist watches would be stolen so he stuffed them in a sock and took them to a friend’s house for safekeeping. And despite encouragement that Parkinson’s patients can keep their symptoms in check, he remained depressed.

Finally, at the age of 63, roaming back-and-forth late one evening in his home, he made cuts on his wrist, placed a towel between a belt and his neck and hung himself in the bedroom.

Here’s the Deal: Robin Williams, like Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe, Michael Jackson and other larger-than-life superstars was, like every person on planet Earth, dead in his sins and in need of the transformative message of the gospel. May we never be fooled by people’s projected images of having it all together as we share our faith in lifestyle evangelism.

“The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.” –Henry David Thoreau