

Handling With Humility the 5 Most Difficult Suicide-Related Situations

In nearly all suicide cases, there is far more than one victim. Family and close friends are left with an unrelenting pain the deceased no longer can feel.

Discussing death-related questions to give clear, compassionate and reasonable explanations usually leaves pastors groping for answers and should leave us more humble and dependent on God. If you're not currently facing these questions, get ready, because as pressures increase at the end of the age, ministry leaders will be faced with more of them.

I just returned from a ministry trip in North Carolina where an elderly pastor apparently shot his wife and then committed suicide. "They were a happy couple who loved life," said a relative.

One morning soon after I returned, the first item I saw on the news was from my former hometown in Atlanta where senior church leader David Huskins reportedly shot himself after a long series of medical problems mixed with medications and overwhelming ministry demands. The report echoed recent comments from Ben Stein warning of antidepressants and how they almost did him in.

Suicides are increasing, and we need to be equipped with biblical answers, plus recognize them as God-ordained opportunities to cultivate humility, provide comfort and connect with the lost and unchurched.

Five Suicide-Related Situations

In the aftermath of Robin Williams' suicide, I posted a

commentary that I commend for your reading. Let's go deeper, as situations arise requiring the wisdom of Solomon. "Remember, it is the glory of God to conceal things, it is the glory of kings to search things out" (Prov. 25:2).

1. Intentional Suicide

In America there is a suicide every 13 minutes. Many of these tragedies involve people who deliberately and willingly take their own life.

Suicide is not the will of God and although it is not the unpardonable sin (unbelief and rejection of Jesus Christ is), it is a grave transgression against our Creator who commands us not to murder (suicide is equivalent to murder). He is the Author of life, Who ever remains "an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (Heb. 6:19).

The eternal destiny of someone in deep depression and deception, communicating remorsefully to God in their closing minutes, repenting of sins and truly putting his trust in Jesus Christ alone as his Lord and Savior (which is what the Bible teaches is essential for salvation [Rom. 10:9]), is a matter we must entrust to a just and loving God. In these most difficult situations, we must never presume of God or communicate an image of God that is not aligned with Scripture.

"My God would never send a person to hell!"

Actually, your "God" is a product of your own imagination, inconsistent with the holy and merciful God revealed in the Bible. Hell, created for the devil and his demons, is real and is the eternal destination for all who reject the gospel (good news)—the "free gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

In this situation, we do well to avoid speculation but should look to the Lord for ways to communicate genuine comfort and

practical assistance to family and friends. Some people do cry out in their anguish, but only God knows what transpires in those final seconds.

2. Mentally Impaired Suicide

“I fear for the future” ... “I’m afraid what’s going to happen” ... “I’m so stressed out and depressed. I’m fearful all the time. It’s getting worse!”

Jesus described the end of the age with “men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth;” (Luke 21:26).

Those of us who are spiritually, emotionally and mentally healthy easily declare, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear: because fear has torment” (1 John 4:18). We add: “God hasn’t given us a spirit of fear but of love, power and a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7).

What if someone does not have that “sound mind”? What should we do when we encounter situations where someone committed suicide after battling tormenting fears, debilitating depression, biological disorders and forms of mental illness that clouded their judgment so they weren’t thinking clearly and rationally in the throes of their crisis?

- Military with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Women with severe postpartum or menopausal depression
- Fragile individuals experiencing multiple surgeries and “cocktail” meds resulting in chemical imbalances, confusion and dark depression.
- Godly people such as Rick Warren’s 27-year-old son, Matthew, who was rescued many times from the brink of suicide but killed himself after a lifelong battle with mental illness. Rick put it this way, “My son took his life. It was his choice. He was a young man with a tender heart and a tortured

mind.”

What does God mean when he instructs us to “comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men” (1 Thess. 5:14)? We must be careful not to oversimplify or spiritualize: “Just pray it away!”... “Cast that thing out!”... “Confess the Word!”... “Man up!”... “Go put your big-girl pants on!”

Don’t hear what I’m *not* saying here. God does tell us to renew our minds, confess His Word, lay hold of His promises, and persevere amidst life’s adversities. Yet sometimes people face such overwhelming and life-threatening hardships that they declare with Paul and his team, “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death” (2 Cor. 1:8-9).

Paul did go on to state, “But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On Him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us...” (2 Cor. 9b-10).

In these perilous times, may we nurture a culture of transparency so no one has to hide their internal struggles. And as caring Christians, may we be ambassadors of hope and understanding in these sensitive areas.

3. Accidental Suicide

What about multitudes, especially young people, who are seduced by the allurements of carnal culture and before they hear the gospel (or having responded previously are drifting) spiral off into drugs, alcohol, or recklessness and deviant sexual practices that destroy lives?

With drug experimentation, did things go awry and an overdose occurred that was not really a suicide at all? Was a son,

daughter or spouse attempting to get the attention of loved ones when their threat became a tragic, accidental reality?

Because of pornography and rampant perversion in our culture, some people are found in what appear to be suicidal hangings. Actually they have engaged in auto-erotic asphyxiation that backfired. You may recall David Carradine, the actor who was found hanging in a closet in an apparent suicide but later it was ruled "accidental erotic asp[hyxiation]."

In situations like these, one should be tenderhearted and careful with what is communicated. While we don't want to give false assurance, we must not alienate grieving friends and relatives. I usually state something like, "In this painful time of grieving, let's reflect on the positives in his/her life. We can trust God who is all-loving and just."

4. Avoidance Suicide

Approaching this area, let me state up front that I am NOT advocating anything but simply addressing something that happens. Consider an example: Some who have concussions and find themselves in highly stressful situations may not respond ideally. They can exhibit dramatic mood swings, confusion, sleep deprivation, and act out of character.

"Pressure reveals the person," but if the person is in a weakened state they may choose avoidance at a critical time. My appeal is that we don't heartlessly condemn people to damnation when God calls us to understand. My friend and prophetic teacher James Goll told me regarding suicide questions, "My views have adjusted some in recent years. They used to be pretty black and white, but I've adjusted some. Only God ultimately knows."

After the Bible, one of the classics that has profoundly influenced Christians for centuries is *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. Reading the accounts of believers undergoing unbelievable persecution and yet shining as beacons inspires leaders in

every generation.

Knowing “Dying grace does not come until the dying hour” and that “God’s grace is sufficient for us and His power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9), this fourth situation requires acute sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. May we never have to face the persecution others do in the world, but it’s important we be prepared even as we believe God can supernaturally rescue anyone in any circumstance at any time.

If someone faces extreme, brutal savagery leading to an inevitable, torturous death, might God in His infinite mercy make allowance for someone’s bringing their life to an end? For those who believe that suicide is always murder warranting eternal damnation, please consider the following: With the Islamic State in Iraq, where people are beheaded, women and children are hacked to death, and men face unfathomable, torturous deaths if they will not convert to Islam, do you think God extends mercy to some who fall on a sword, drink poison or flee knowing they will be immediately gunned down?

If someone is overwhelmed by terror dreading a savage, inevitable death and cries out to God in repentance for ending their life, do you really believe God would sentence them to hell? Can the God who forgave Moses, David and Paul for their participation in murder extend mercy in these types of extenuating and excruciating circumstances?

I don’t think it’s deception to believe that persecuted and incapacitated Christians in certain circumstances can be reprieved for hastening inevitable death to be ushered into the presence of the living God.

5. Physician-Assisted Suicide

Euthanasia comes from Greek words meaning “good death.” Alternative and equally misleading terms used for actively taking someone’s life are “mercy killing,” “death with dignity” and “physician-assisted suicide.”

Scripture tells us that all life is sacred, and the command is clear, "You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13). The seriousness of this is seen when David ordered capital punishment for the man who assisted Saul in his suicide act (2 Sam. 1:1-16).

The further Western civilization drifts from our Judeo-Christian foundations, the more countries embrace euthanasia along with abortion and infanticide. Euthanasia is legal in Belgium, Colombia, India, Ireland, Luxembourg, Mexico and the Netherlands. Seventy-three percent of French doctors admit using drugs to end an infant's life.

Like homosexual "marriage," euthanasia is gaining ground in America as we now see physician-assisted suicide legal in Washington, Oregon, Montana, Vermont and New Mexico. Barring revival, it is coming to a neighborhood near you!

With economic debt skyrocketing, the baby-boom population aging (78 million strong) and socialized medicine becoming a reality, we need to make preparation now for end-of-life decisions as "death panels" will slowly be introduced as they are in Canada and elsewhere.

When my wife and I worked on our Living Will, we incorporated these guidelines from the National Right to Life Committee.

The smooth and seductive reasoning presented by advocates of euthanasia needs to be exposed and resisted vigorously by people of faith. Doctors putting suffering elderly people or those with dementia, depression or severe injuries out of their misery with lethal doses of medicine is contrary to the will of God.

Now there is a clear difference between actively killing someone and passively allowing a person to yield to inevitable death as we see in the Bible with Jesus, Stephen, Jacob and others. This is not suicide. Also, our Christian faith requires us to compassionately care for all people approaching death as well as those with reasonable hope of recovery.

Sometimes an individual refuses chemotherapy when told they are in stage 4 terminal cancer. While not refusing minimal nourishment, others refuse a feeding tube and other extraordinary measures so as not to delay but hasten their home-going experience.

My sister and I flanked my 87-year-old mother as we swabbed her lips and gently encouraged her to let go. As I read the 91st Psalm, she yielded her spirit as I said these words, "For He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands ..."

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Ps. 116:15).

Larry Tomczak is a best-selling author and cultural commentator with 42 years of trusted ministry experience. His passion is to bring perspective, analysis and insight from a biblical worldview. He loves awakening people to today's cultural realities and responses needed for a restored, influential church. Please visit and follow him on Facebook or at @larrytomczak on Twitter.