

How Should We Think About People Who Take Their Own Lives?

Flights were grounded at Orlando's International Airport last Saturday morning after a TSA officer jumped to his death. His successful suicide from a hotel balcony and into the atrium area at the airport prompted the Federal Aviation Administration to take actions which led to massive lines and delayed departures.

Here in Southern California, we have recently had two pastors commit suicide after struggling with mental illness for several years. In one case, some speculated the well-liked leader may have "gone off his meds."

Suicide is the leading cause of death among 15-to-24-year-olds. In the last decade, there has been a 30 percent increase of suicides for those in their mid-40s to mid-60s.

Studies show that someone in America intentionally takes their own life every 13 minutes. That is some 38,000 suicides every year! Eventually, each of us may seriously battle with life-threatening depression or know someone who has taken their own life. These families will need sensitive prayers and compassionate support from the body of Christ.

There were people in the Bible who took their own lives or wanted to die. They include Saul, Moses, Elijah, Jonah, Zimri, Ahithophel, Abimelech and Judas. Since Sampson is honored in Hebrews 11 for his heroic actions, most would not consider his collapsing a building on himself as suicide, but rather martyrdom.

The Bible states that murderers will have their "portion in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone" (Rev. 21:8b) and

other Scriptures suggest that suicide is a great sin, equivalent to murder, and therefore it is not God's will. However, it is not the unpardonable sin, which John 3:16-21 states is unbelief and rejection of Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Usually, family and friends can look back and see contributing factors to the self-inflicted death, which may have clouded or impaired godly judgment in the face of personal crises. The departed may have felt desperation from genuine mental illness, debilitating depression or certain biological disorders. Perhaps these are the ones being described when Paul told the Thessalonians to "comfort the faint-hearted, support the weak, and be patient toward everyone" (1 Thess. 5:14b).

However, Hebrews 10:26-31 warns us about sinning willfully, which may call into question the genuineness of our repentance and subsequent forgiveness of our sins (Acts 2:38). One should never presume on God's grace and risk gambling their eternal destiny by this drastic and permanent solution to a temporary problem.

Author Larry Tomczak has a very helpful book; *Becoming an Informed Influencer in Today's Changing Culture*. His final chapter on "Suicide and Death with Dignity" identifies several "Suicide-Related Situations": intentional suicide, mentally impaired suicide, accidental suicide and avoidance suicide.

Tomczak offers this thought-provoking observation: "The further our civilization drifts from our Judeo-Christian foundations, the more countries embrace euthanasia coupled with abortion and infanticide."

Life-and-death decisions will increasingly be made by believers and non-believers alike, as we approach the end of this age. The difference between the two groups will be the hope which the Holy Spirit infuses in us to strengthen us so we may be able to patiently endure so we may be able to

comfort others. However, Jesus described the end of the age, with non-believing “men fainting from fear and expectation of what is coming on the inhabited earth” (Luke 21:26a).

See 2 Corinthians 1:3-11, to understand Paul’s perspective on tribulations and afflictions. In verses 8-9a he said that he and his team had felt under great pressure, far above their human ability to endure. They “despaired even of life” and felt the “sentence of death” itself.

Then, in verses 9b-10 Paul said they battled these pressures and depression “so we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.” They came to happily acknowledge that “He *delivered* us from so great a death and *does deliver us*. In Him we trust that *He will still deliver us*.”

Paul told the Corinthians that God allowed a “thorn in the flesh” to afflict him so he would not boast about his special visions and revelations. He prayed three times to be delivered from this spiritual pressure and affliction, but the Lord Jesus told him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weaknesses” (2 Cor. 12:9). {eo}

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