

## **“NOTHING CAN SEPERATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD”**

Suicide is a complex and tragic and heart-breaking phenomenon.

According to one writer, suicide involves overcoming our most powerful instinct: self-preservation. Because it involves such potent forces, suicide has become a magnet for a wide assortment of mythologies. Many of these myths are common across cultures, such as the myth that someone who is suicidal is determined to die and cannot be stopped. The World Health Organization combats this particular myth, upholding that *“On the contrary, suicidal people are often [mixed feelings] about living or dying. Someone may act impulsively by drinking pesticides, for instance, and die a few days later, even though they would have liked to live on. Access to emotional support at the right time can prevent suicide.”*

But in this essay, [the writer] would like to discuss and dispel several **myths** that are particular to Christianity. [His] earnest aim is to capture the **diversity of beliefs** among **Catholics, Protestants, and other Christian** traditions.

*I hope that these ideas are helpful in clarifying your beliefs and perspectives on suicide, such that you feel better equipped to help those struggling with suicidality.*

- **Myth [Untruth]:** *“Thoughts of suicide are incompatible with faith in Christ.”*

Fact: Thoughts of suicide have occurred to many Biblical figures with strong faith, including Moses and Elijah. Many saints have had thoughts of suicide, as well, including St. Therese of Lisieux, St. Faustina, and Mother Teresa. This myth seems to be intertwined with what has been called the emotional prosperity gospel. Similar to the prosperity “gospel” that teaches that faith will guarantee financial prosperity, the emotional prosperity gospel holds up the false notion that if you have strong faith, then you are guaranteed to be free of mental despair and anguish. However, this notion is false, as *Scripture clearly teaches that following Christ demands the willingness to suffer.* Moreover, many Christians uphold that thoughts of suicide are intrusions by [s]atan into the minds of those who follow Christ to discourage them from their faith. From that perspective, thoughts of suicide might in certain circumstances be a sign of strong faith, because the devil is making great efforts to try to dissuade you from Christ’s calling.

- **Myth [Untruth]:** *“Suicide requires the person to abandon their faith.”*

Fact: This myth is based upon a misunderstanding of suicide. Suicide is not typically the result of a long rational process but is instead a sudden decision in the midst of emotional turmoil. In fact, most suicide attempts occur within 15 minutes from when the current thought of suicide comes upon the person. People can unfortunately become caught up in a crisis state that alters the way they think, feel, and act in profound ways. A death by suicide most often occurs in the midst of this sort of suicidal crisis, where the

person experiences dysfunctional thought patterns, emotional instability, and behavioral agitation. *In this state, a person's core values and beliefs, including their faith in Christ, is still present, but is not immediately accessible to the individual.* This loss of accessibility of their core beliefs is also evident in the fact that many people who have died by suicide have been loving spouses and parents [and youth and young adults]. In this suicidal crisis, characterized by a desperate feeling of being trapped, the person is prone to temporarily lose touch with these essential relationships. Although some who die by suicide may abandon their faith prior to the act, the evidence would suggest this is rare.

- **Myth [Untruth]:** “Christianity teaches that those who die by suicide are condemned to Hell.”

Fact: Historically the church has held positions on suicide that have stigmatized suicide, including forbidding those who died by suicide from last rites and a Christian burial.

These early church positions were initially based upon very real concerns that Christians were willingly martyring themselves through suicide. Tragically, these church positions were slow to recognize that suicide was often caused by other factors. Nevertheless, the contemporary perspective on suicide is starkly different, such that no major religious tradition or denomination teaches that all who die by suicide are condemned to Hell. Across denominations, the view of suicide is one of grace and compassion. The Catholic Catechism teaches, “Grave psychological disturbances, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering, or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide.” The catechism goes on to say, “We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives.” Both the United Methodist Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America *offer comfort that nothing can separate from the love of God, including suicide.* Southern Baptists *uphold the importance of caring for survivors of suicide, “families who have lost a member to suicide deserve great care, concern, and compassion from Christians and their churches, including the assurance that those in Christ cannot be separated from the eternal love of God that is in Christ Jesus”*

- **Myth [Untruth]:** “Suicide is an unforgivable sin.”

Fact: Although most [religious] traditions argue that suicide is a violation of the sixth commandment, “thou shalt not kill,” it is also understood that the sin of suicide remains forgivable. It is true that the individual who dies by suicide often does not have opportunity to repent of their sin following the act. However, many Christian traditions do not believe that repentance is a requisite aspect of forgiveness by God. Moreover, there are many individuals who have testified that they experienced regret immediately after a lethal suicide attempt. *[ONLY] God knows the hearts of those who die by suicide ... [no one else knows]*

[Read below what several demominations teach about suicide:](#)



## THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

### **The Nurturing Community: Suicide**

Book of Discipline, Social Principles ¶¶161.O

#### **Suicide**

We believe that suicide is not the way a human life should end. Often suicide is the result of untreated depression, or untreated pain and suffering. The Church has an obligation to see that all persons have access to needed pastoral and medical care and therapy in those circumstances that lead to loss of self-worth, suicidal despair, and/or the desire to seek physician-assisted suicide. We encourage the Church to provide education to address the biblical, theological, social, and ethical issues related to death and dying, including suicide. United Methodist theological seminary courses should also focus on issues of death and dying, including suicide.

A Christian perspective on suicide begins with an affirmation of faith that nothing, including suicide, separates us from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39). Therefore, we deplore the condemnation of people who complete suicide, and we consider unjust the stigma that so often falls on surviving family and friends.

We encourage pastors and faith communities to address this issue through preaching and teaching. We urge pastors and faith communities to provide pastoral care to those at risk, survivors, and their families, and to those families who have lost loved ones to suicide, seeking always to remove the oppressive stigma around suicide. The Church opposes assisted suicide and euthanasia.

## Catechism of the Catholic Church

### Suicide

2280 Everyone is responsible for his life before God who has given it to him.

It is God who remains the sovereign Master of life.

We are obliged to accept life gratefully and preserve it for his honor and the salvation of our souls. We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us.

It is not ours to dispose of.

2281 Suicide contradicts the natural inclination of the human being to preserve and perpetuate his life. It is gravely contrary to the just love of self.

It likewise offends love of neighbor because it unjustly breaks the ties of solidarity with family, nation, and other human societies to which we continue to have obligations.

Suicide is contrary to love for the living God.

2282 If suicide is committed with the intention of setting an example, especially to the young, it also takes on the gravity of scandal.

Voluntary co-operation in suicide is contrary to the moral law. Grave psychological disturbances, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering, or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide.

2283 We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. the Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives.



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

## EVANGELICA LUTHERAN CHURCH

Suicide is among the most common causes of death in the United States, especially among young people who are 15 to 24. More people die by suicide than by homicide every year and millions have suicidal thoughts. Behind such troubling statistics are people: real individuals whose stories and relationships are unique and who live in our families, congregations, neighborhoods and work places.

Mindful of both the size of the problem and the lives affected, the ELCA Church Council adopted "Suicide Prevention" in 1999 as a call to members, congregations and affiliated institutions to learn more about suicide and its prevention in their communities, to ask what they can do and to work with others to prevent suicide.

The message affirms that life is God's good and precious gift, but explains that suicide testifies to the tragic brokenness of living that some experience as a torment without hope. The message beckons God's people to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2) when it is easier to ignore, reject or shy away from those who despair of life. It proclaims that God's boundless love in Jesus Christ will leave no one alone and abandoned. It offers suggestions for pastoral care when suicide does occur while emphasizing means for prevention through becoming aware and challenging false attitudes about suicide. The message has a practical bent in offering specific information about receiving and giving care, even providing lists of resources and organizations dedicated to providing support. While some of the information is now dated, the message remains completely relevant in providing a comprehensive message about suicide and a clear call for concerted and collaborative efforts from all sectors of society and the church to prevent suicide.

Suicide is the deliberate act of ending one's own life. Suicide is self-murder.

The reason for violating God's command against murder (Exodus 20:13), as well as the mental health of the suicide victim, both raise serious questions of responsibility and accountability. [\(THIS IS A UNBELIEVABLE STATEMENT / LB\)](#)

The specific instances of suicide recorded in Scripture—Saul and his armor bearer (1 Samuel 31:4,5), Ahithophel (2 Samuel 17:23), Zimri (1 Kings 16:18), and Judas Iscariot (Matthew 27:5)—all seem to have had sad spiritual as well as physical ends.

Some have called Samson's death a heroic suicide, but it seems more likely that his death was the unavoidable result of his heroic action against the pagan Philistines (Judges 16:28-31).

And Scripture says clearly that those redeemed by God have been forgiven for all their sins—past, present, and future (Colossians 2:13-14).

Paul says in Romans 8:38-39 that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

So if a true Christian would commit suicide in a time of extreme weakness, he or she would be received into heaven (Jude 24).

A Christian, with the help of the Holy Spirit, should be able to cope with the stresses that sometimes lead to suicide. But we must exercise caution in declaring that all persons who commit suicide are eternally lost.

But we rightly question the faith of those who take their lives or even consider it seriously—it may well be that they have never been truly saved.

I say that because God's children are defined repeatedly in Scripture as those who have hope (Acts 24:15; Romans 5:2-5, 8:24; 2 Corinthians 1:10, etc.) and purpose in life (Luke 9:23-25; Romans 8:28; Colossians 1:29).

And those who think of committing suicide do so because they have neither hope nor purpose in their lives. Furthermore, one who repeatedly considers suicide is practicing sin in his heart (Proverbs 23:7), and 1 John 3:9 says that "no one who is born of God practices sin."

And finally, suicide is often the ultimate evidence of a heart that rejects the lordship of Jesus Christ, because it is an act where the sinner is taking his life into his own hands completely rather than submitting to God's will for it.

### **Concerns**

A suicide has an enormous impact on the immediate family and on society. The bereaved suffer catastrophic feelings of guilt for supposed neglect which allowed the suicide to happen. This pain is compounded by normal concerns about the eternal destiny of the suicide victim.

Family members should leave the matter of eternal destiny in the hands of the Lord. He alone knows the thoughts and intent of the heart as well as the mental condition of the victim at the time of the suicide.