

## **Entrust 10/21/21 - How to Care for Those in Despair and Suicidal**

1. Biblical View of Despair/Depression
  - A. Depression is only possible in a fallen world (Gen 3; Rom 5)
  - B. Depression is the only logical, rationally consistent conclusion of living without God (Eph 2:11; Titus 1:2; 1 Tim 1:2; Rom 15:4, 13)
  - C. Deliverance from depression, which is one of the effects of the fall, is made possible through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ for us and the work of the Holy Spirit in us.
  - D. Practical and experiential deliverance from depression and many of the other effects of the fall is not the automatic, involuntary result of regeneration and redemption (Phil 2:12-13; Gal 5:22, 23; 1 Cor 3:16).
2. We must understand that man is both body and soul.
  - A. What affects the soul may affect the body (Prov 14:30.)
  - B. What affects the body may affect the soul (Job 2).
  - C. One's social environment may affect the soul and body.
  - D. Depression will always have a spiritual part and may include a physical part.
  - E. The weakness of the body does not mean a hinderance of one's spiritual growth.
3. Depression is possible even for believers because we still:
  - A. Struggle with indwelling sin
  - B. Have not perfectly put off the old man with its corrupt patterns and practices and put on the new man which is renewed in true righteousness and holiness
  - C. Have the temptations of difficult circumstances and people
  - D. Struggle with the world, the flesh, and the devil

- E. Live in a fallen world with sin cursed bodies as we wait for glorified bodies.  
Depression reminds us that we are not yet in heaven.
- 4. Believers will eventually experience complete and continuous, uninterrupted deliverance from depression and all other effects of the fall (Rev 21-22).
- 5. Causes for Despair
  - A. Spiritual
    - i. Overwhelming circumstances (Job 1-2; 2 Sam 17:23)
    - ii. Injustice (Ps 73:2-14)
    - iii. Relationships (Jer 17:5-6)
  - B. Physical
    - i. Brain diseases
    - ii. Substance abuse
    - iii. Physical exhaustion
  - C. Unknown - We still live with fallen bodies in a fallen world. At times we may feel sad or struggle with depression for no known cause.
  - D. Despair may be the result of responding to an awareness of personal sin and failure in an unbiblical way.
  - E. Despair may be the result of a failure to realize certain goals that are deemed to be highly desirable and necessary for life to be worthwhile and happy.
  - F. Despair is often the result of unbiblical thinking.
  - G. Despair is often the result of unbiblical responses or reactions to hard and unpleasant circumstances.
- 6. How to Help those in Despair
  - A. Show lots of grace and compassion
  - B. Read about men and women of faith who have struggled with depression.
    - i. C.H. Spurgeon - "I am the subject of depressions of spirit so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I go to."
    - ii. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

iii. John Bunyan

C. Get plenty of information

- i. Know the problem to them
- ii. Causes
- iii. Medical history - encourage a medical exam
- iv. Who else is affected by their depression
- v. What has been helpful

D. Personal relationship – offer lots of encouragement

E. Encourage them to use a journal to record truths about God, right thoughts, etc.

F. Dependent Prayer

## Understanding Suicide.<sup>1</sup>

1. Suicide is a growing problem.
  - a. In 2020, 181 suicides were recorded among Wyoming residents compared to 170 in 2019, 148 in 2018, 157 in 2017, 143 in 2016, 155 in 2015, 121 in 2014, 129 in 2013, 171 in 2012 and 129 in 2011.
  - b. Affects those from pre-teens to the elderly
2. Suicide denies God's sovereignty over all aspects of your life.
  - a. Ps. 139:16
  - b. Heb. 9:27
  - c. Dt. 32:39
3. Suicide harms those left behind.
4. Myths with the topic of Suicide<sup>2</sup>
  - a. Talking about Suicide doesn't make a person suicidal
  - b. Talking about Suicide is just a ploy to get attention
  - c. If someone attempts a suicide but doesn't complete it, he was just looking for attention
  - d. If they live after an attempt, they will no longer be at risk
  - e. A person will always be suicidal
  - f. Suicidal people are depressed
  - g. Suicidal people are mentally ill
  - h. The risk goes down when the mood goes up
  - i. Talking about suicide to a suicidal subject encourages him to do it
  - j. A true believer cannot commit suicide Heb. 11:32-33
5. Biblical Cases of Suicide
  - a. Judges 16:29–30 – Samson
  - b. 1 Kings 16:18–19 – Zimri
  - c. 2 Sam. 17:23 – Ahithophel
  - d. Matt. 27:3–5 – Judas
  - e. Judg. 9:54 – Abimelech
  - f. 1 Sam. 31:4 – Saul (c.f. 1 Chron 10)

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Jim Newheiser and Stuart Scott ACBC conference notes

<sup>2</sup> Appreciation to Bruce Ray who discusses many myths in his booklet on Suicide (Shepherd's Press).

- g. 1 Sam. 31:5 – Saul’s armor bearer
6. Why do people take their own lives?
- a. They have lost hope (2 Cor 1:8)
  - b. Unsolvable problems. 2 Sam. 17:23 (Ahithophel tried to get David caught but failed so he hung himself), 1 Sam. 31:4-5 (Saul’s armor bearer)
  - c. Reasons may include anger, jealousy, depression, self-pity, pride, shame, guilt, revenge, to avoid greater pain, loneliness, rejection, loss of status/money/power, boredom, proving autonomy, divorce, death of spouse, stress, medical diagnosis
  - d. “Suicide is actually more about living than dying. Suicidal subjects are unhappy with their lives. It’s not so much that they want to die as they don’t want to go on living the way they are.” (Bruce Ray)
  - e. “A core feature in suicidal thinking is the belief that there are only two choices: pain or cessation of consciousness.” (Jeffery S. Black)
  - f. A large percentage of those who take their own lives have high levels of drugs and/or alcohol in their systems.
  - g. A person may have many influences in his life, but none of these is determinative.
7. Warning Signs to Consider<sup>3</sup>
- a. Expressions of Hopelessness
  - b. Talking about or joking about taking their life or dying
  - c. Preparing for death (e.g. giving away property, making a will, etc.)
  - d. Previous suicide attempt
  - e. Recent loss of a loved one
  - f. Persistently depressed
  - g. Withdrawal
  - h. Alcohol and drug abuse
  - i. Inordinate/unnecessary risk taking
  - j. Extreme mood swings, anger at self
  - k. Behavioral signs to look out for
    - i. Specific plan.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://crisiscentre> Frequently asked Questions

- ii. Lethality.
    - iii. Availability (of means).
    - iv. Proximity (of help).
  - 1. Often family and friends do not recognize the signs until after the fact.
8. Counseling the threat of a suicidal Non-Christian
- a. Pray – for wisdom, patience, calmness
  - b. If weapons, drugs or endangerment to others is involved, contact the police as soon as possible (Rom 13)
  - c. Care – Encourage him that you care and that you are sure that God cares
  - d. Listen – Encourage him to talk (Prv 18:13). Gather a lot of personal data. Don't minimize his feelings or conclusions he may express about himself or his problem. (Talk seriously about all negative self-evaluations)
  - e. Generally, now is not the time to contradict any statements, just listen
  - f. If he says that life is not worth living, believe him. Probably for him, in his present state, it doesn't seem like it. Remember living a life of vanity is a hopeless life (Ecclesiastes).
  - g. Explore Other Options – Assure the individual that there is a solution for his problems and suicide isn't it. Let him know that you will work with him or find him the help needed to explore other options. There is hope if he turns to Christ. (Matt. 11:28–30; Eph 2:12; 1 Tim. 1:1)
  - h. Jesus and the Gospel – Explain various aspects of the Gospel to him as you are able (usually can't all be done at that time). (Rom. 1:16; Matt. 11:28–30)
  - i. If he desires to confess Christ as Lord and Savior of his life, share with him what that means. (Luke 9:23; 14:25-35; John 10:9–10)
  - j. If he doesn't confess Christ as Lord and Savior of his life share with him your dependence on Christ and His ability to change lives.

- k. Explain to him your dependence on Christ and the Word of God in your counseling (2 Tim. 3:16–17; Heb 4:12)
- l. Explain the inability for your counsel to be successful without Christ and the Word. In the book of Ecclesiastes, this living without God is called “Vanity.”
- m. Warn him, yes, warn him – if he is opposed to the truth. You are wise to warn him of hell that awaits if he goes through the threshold of death. This is one of Satan’s greatest deceptions – that all will be better, or all of the pain will go away. Actually, the pain will be more Nothing Instant – Emphasize the fact that all of his problems won’t just disappear. It will take effort but can be done if in Christ.
- n. Direction and Hope – Give the counselee specific direction (in the moment – pray for wisdom). A specific verse about God and Hope are helpful here (e.g. Isa 59:1; John 14:6;)
- o. No Isolation – Don’t leave them without supervision. If you can’t make sure someone can be with them than contact the police in order to have them under suicidal watch.
- p. Make plans for the future (meet daily until they have some hope).
- q. Should the person carry out a suicide, in your grief and possibly shock, remember that it was their decision (they are responsible for their own decisions, Ezk 18) and God is perfectly Sovereign (He works everything according to His will; Isa 46:9-11; Eph 1:11). Who killed King Saul? Compare 1 Chron 10:4-5; 13-14.

9. Counseling the threat of a suicidal Professing Christian

- a. Pray for wisdom, patience and calmness – Speaking with a suicidal person requires great tact and patience.
- b. If weapons, drugs or potentially endangering someone else is involved, contact the police as soon as possible (Rom 13)
- c. Care – Encourage him that you care and that you are sure that God cares

- d. Listen – Encourage them to talk. Gather a lot of personal data (Prv 18:13). Don't minimize feelings or conclusions he may express about himself or his problem. (Talk seriously about all negative self-evaluations)
- e. Explore Other Options – Assure the individual that there is a solution for his problems and suicide isn't it. Let him know that you will work with him or find him the help needed to explore other options. There is hope if He turns to Christ. (Matt. 11:28–30; Eph 2:12; 1 Tim. 1:1)
- f. Jesus and the Gospel – Explain various aspects of the Gospel to him as you are able (usually can't all be done at that time). (Rom. 1:16; Matt. 11:28–30)
- g. Explain to him your dependence on Christ and the Word of God in your counseling (2 Tim. 3:16–17)
- h. Explain the inability for your counsel to be successful without Christ and the Word. In the book of Ecclesiastes, this living without God is called "Vanity."
- i. Warn him, yes, warn him – if he is opposed to the truth. This is very difficult because if they say they "follow Christ" but are in direct disobedience in taking their own life, this is contradictory (Mat 7:21). You are wise to warn him that hell might await him if he goes through the threshold of death. This is one of Satan's greatest deceptions – that all will be better, or all of the pain will go away. Actually, the pain will be more intense and never cease if he is truly unsaved (Prov.13:15; 16:25; Mark 9:44)
- j. No Assurance – if he doesn't follow Christ and His Word – there can't be the assurance that he is a believer. He may need a reminder of hell if he is possibly not saved. Assurance comes as we walk in the truth not when we are disobeying God's Word and want to be "God" ourselves over our body and take our own life.
- k. Nothing Instant – Emphasize the fact that all of his problems won't just disappear. It will take effort but can be done if in Christ.



- l. Direction and Hope – Give the counselee specific direction (in the moment – keep praying for wisdom). A specific verse about God and Hope are helpful here (e.g. Gen 18:14; Jer 32:27; Isa 59:1; John 14:6; etc.)
- m. No Isolation – Don't leave them without supervision. If you can't make sure someone can be with him than contact the police in order to have him under suicidal watch.
- n. Seek a Team to help (Gal 6:1). It's wiser to gather a few others to be part of a counseling team to help him. Often, the demands on one counselor are too much to handle by themselves.
- o. Make plans for the future (meet daily until they have some hope).
- p. Be sure you check up on him and meet with him regularly. It's best if they aren't left alone. Keep specific tabs on them at regular intervals. When they face disappointments pay careful attention to where their hope is at. Involve his pastor if possible.
- q. Meeting regularly with assigning homework (Growth projects). Focus first on hope.
  - i. Crying out to God. Psalm 38, 42-43
  - ii. Fighting despair with truth and faith. Psalm 42
  - iii. Enduring with Christ. Heb. 12:1ff
  - iv. Gaining a heavenly perspective. Psalm 73, 37
- r. After looking at past problems, urge him to nourish himself with the Word. (Ps. 19:7; Jer. 15:16; Ps. 119:97, 105, 143)
- s. Show the need for godly Christian fellowship (Heb.10:24–25)
  - i. Part of a Gospel believing Church and faithful friendships (Prov. 17:17; 27:17)
  - ii. Christians wither without fellowship. One reason is that '*koinonia*' encourages us to practice those spiritual disciplines that promote spiritual health. Christians engaged in those disciplines that lead to godliness, such as the intake of God's Word, prayer, public and private worship, serving, etc., are examples and exhorters for us to do the same. When I am discouraged in prayer, for example, I hear someone talk about an exciting answer to prayer and that

reinvigorates my own prayer life. But without fellowship to stimulate good spiritual habits we develop bad ones, the kind that lead to spiritual illness.”<sup>4</sup>

- t. Work with their thoughts (one thought at a time) Phil 4:8. Make a plan-of-attack for when old sinful thoughts return.
- u. Help them to see their idolatry (James 1; Prov 4:23)
  - i. What are they worshipping? What do they desire out of life, their circumstance? What are their ruling thoughts and motives for doing or not doing things.
  - ii. Are they desiring to feel better or go back to “normal?” Whatever the cause for their despair may not go away.
- v. Confession (1 John 1:8–9)
- w. Quoting scriptural promises (1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Pt 1)
- x. Make no provision for the flesh. (Rom. 13:14)
- y. Establish a list of phone numbers to call when the suicidal thoughts return –List should include yourself, his pastor, godly friends (try for 5 #'s). You must answer if he calls.
- z. Give lots of hope! (notice the theme of hope and how it should be shared often. Not hope in circumstances changing, but in Christ alone) Explain a verse for him to memorize that will encourage and instill hope for the week.
  - i. Explain his need to focus on the Lord and loving and serving others and not only on his problems. (Matt. 14:27–32; 22:37-40)
  - ii. Assert Christ’s ability to fully change a situation as serious as this one. (Heb. 4:15–16)
  - iii. Remind of God’s unending love. (Heb. 13:5; John 13:1)
  - iv. Explain the implications of being God’s children. (John 1:12)

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<sup>4</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church* (Chicago: Moody), 153.

- v. Teach of God's forgiveness and restoration. (Prov. 28:13 and 1 John 1:9)
- aa. Their decision – Should the person carry out a suicide, in your grief and possibly shock, remember that it was their decision (they are responsible for their own decisions, Ezk 18) and God is perfectly Sovereign (He works everything according to His will; Isa 46:9-11; Eph 1:11)