**Suicide and The God of All Comfort**

Helping Suicidal Counselees and Their Loved Ones Draw Near to God

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1. **Intro:**
2. What you need to know:

Galatians 6:1-2

1. It is “Go Time”
2. **The Suicidal Sufferer**

* A case history

1. **The Suffering Survivor**

* A case history

1. **Medical Facts and Suicide Statistics**
2. 45,000 per year in US, 800,000 worldwide
3. Methods: guns, ropes, overdose
4. Suicidal ideation
5. Risk factors
6. Consequences of Sin: Jay Adams Quote
7. **Counseling the Suicidal Sufferer**
8. Ask good questions Proverbs 20:5
9. How you must think
10. Bringing up the topic of suicide
11. A list of questions
12. Have you ever tried to commit suicide before, and if so, how?
13. Do you have a plan, or have you been planning to end your life?
14. How would you do it?
15. Where would you do it?
16. Do you have the means (drugs, gun, rope) that you would use?
17. Where is it right now?
18. Do you have a timeline in mind for ending your life?
19. Plans to follow through?
20. **Prioritizing Next Steps to Provide Practical Help**
21. Calling for help
22. Don’t leave them alone
23. Remove means of suicide
24. Get support system enlisted
25. Keeping them safe: police, mental health authorities, hospitalization
26. What about the hospital?
27. Resources in your community
28. **Should I Have My Counselee Sign a Suicide Contract?**
29. Old thinking
30. New thinking
31. **Counseling the threat of a suicidal Non-Christian with Truth, Hope and Comfort**
32. The counselee is safe- now the counseling begins
33. 6 examples of suicide in the Bible: 1 Samuel 31:3-5, 2 Samuel 17:23, 1 Kings 16:18, Matthew 27:3-5, Judges 9:54
34. Biblical commands? Exodus 20:13
35. Pray – for wisdom, patience, calmness – speaking with a suicidal person requires great tact and patience
36. Try and meet with the person immediately for persuasion/counsel
37. Express your care and desire to help
38. If weapons, drugs or endangerment to others is involved, contact the police as soon as possible (Rom 13)
39. Care – Encourage him that you care and that you are sure that God cares.
40. 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)
41. Generally, now is not the time to contradict any statements, just listen
42. 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).
43. Explore Other Options – Assure the individual that there is a solution for his problems and suicide is not it. Let him know 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)

### Jesus and the Gospel – Explain various aspects of the Gospel to him as you are able (usually it cannot all be done at that time). Rom. 1:16; Matt. 11:28–30

1. 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)
2. 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.
3. Explain to him your dependence on Christ and the Word of God in your counseling (2 Tim. 3:16–17; Heb 4:12)
4. 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.”

### 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 as an unbeliever. 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 and eternal (for the unsaved). There is no second choice after death.

### There will be nothing instant about working through the issues – Emphasize the fact that all of his problems will not just disappear (he can only work on them here)

### 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;

### 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.

### Make plans for the future (meet daily until they have some hope).

### 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). e,g., Who killed King Saul? Compare 1 Chron 10:4-5; 13-14.

1. **Counseling the threat of a suicidal ‘Professing’ Christian (not always sure)**
2. Pray for wisdom, patience and calmness – Speaking with a suicidal person requires great tact, love and patience.
3. If weapons, drugs or potentially endangering someone else is involved, contact the police as soon as possible (Rom 13)
4. Care – Encourage him that you care and that you are sure that God cares
5. 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)
6. Explore Other Options – Assure the individual that there is a solution for his problems and suicide is not 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)
7. Maybe say, “I agree about the hardships but God does not agree (and neither do I) with you’re the sinful solution of taking your life.”
8. Encourage them with God’s children who were despairing but didn’t give up on life (Elijah 1 Kings 18-19; Asaph Ps 73; Paul 2 Cor 1,4)

### Jesus and the Gospel – Explain various aspects of the Gospel to him as you are able (usually it cannot all be done at that time). Rom. 1:16; Matt. 11:28–30

* 1. Explain to him your dependence on Christ and the Word of God in your counseling (2 Tim. 3:16–17)
  2. 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.”
  3. 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 as an unbeliever. 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)
  4. 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.

### Nothing Instant – Emphasize the fact that all of his problems will not just disappear. It will take effort but can be done if in Christ.

### 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.)

### No Isolation – Don’t leave them without supervision. If you can’t make sure someone can be with him then contact the police in order to have him under suicidal watch.

### 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.

### Make plans for the future (meet daily until they have some hope).

1. 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.
2. Meeting regularly with assigning homework (Growth projects)
   * 1. After looking at past problems, urge him to nourish himself with the Word. They will need to read, meditate on and apply the Scriptures to their lives – always beholding Christ (Ps. 19:7; Jer. 15:16; Ps. 119:97, 105, 143; 2 Cor 3:18)
     2. Show the need for godly Christian fellowship (Heb.10:24–25)
     3. Part of a Gospel believing Church and faithful friendships (Prov. 17:17; 27:17)

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.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

1. Work with their thoughts (one thought at a time) Phil 4:8. Make a plan–of–attack for when old sinful thoughts return.
2. Confession if sin is involved (1 John 1:8–9)
3. Quoting scriptural promises (1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Pt 1)
4. Make no provision for the flesh. (Rom. 13:14)
5. 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.
6. Give lots of hope! Explain a verse for him to memorize that will encourage and instill hope for the week. Topics like:
7. 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)
8. Assert Christ’s care and ability to fully change a situation as serious as this one. (Heb. 4:15–16)
9. Remind of God’s unending love. (Heb. 13:5; John 13:1)
10. Explain the implications of being God’s children. (John 1:12)
11. Teach of God’s forgiveness and restoration. (Prov. 28:13 and 1 John 1:9)

### Their decision – Should the person carry out a suicide, in your grief and possibly shock, remember that is 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)

1. **Discerning the Primary Sources of Their Suffering**
2. External pressures of life

* Biblical examples: Saul, Ahithophel, Zimri and Abimelech

1. Internal pains of the heart

* Biblical example: Judas
* Depression- see below

1. Godly view of suffering: Romans 8:29, James 1:2-4, Hebrews 12:3-11
2. God’s compassion: Isaiah 42:3, Hebrews 4:15
3. The importance of salvation

* The eternal importance of guilt
* Saved, but no assurance of salvation
* Saved but suffering Matthew 11:28-30

1. **Addressing the Role of Depression in Suicidal Ideation**
2. Biblical definition of depression
3. How depressed people think
4. The use of medication
5. The importance of giving hope
6. **Counseling the Suffering Survivor**
7. Consider the privilege
8. Definitions: Victim/Survivor
9. **Preparing for the First Conversation**
10. Your qualification: Romans 15:14
11. Noutheteo=instruct!
12. The importance of good listening: Proverbs 18:13

PANEL time: Responding to a Survivor’s Hard Questions

1. Speaking the truth in love: Ephesians 4:15
2. The lies the victims believed: 2 Corinthians 11:3; John 8:44
3. Is suicide a sin?
4. Why it is a sin
5. Who is it a sin against?
6. The God who forgives sin: Romans 8:1, 38-39; Philipians 1:6
7. Unforgiveable sins
8. Is the survivor a believer?
9. More tragedy: Ezekiel 18:4; Matthew 7:23; John 15:6
10. Is it okay for me to be angry?

* Okay to be angry, not okay to sin: Ephesians 4:26

1. Will I ever be able to forgive them?
2. Avoid bitterness
3. Heart of forgiveness: Matthew 18:21-35
4. Is it my fault they died?
5. Being guilty vs. feeling guilty
6. The victim is guilty of their sin: Ezekiel 18:20; Romans 14:12
7. Combatting the feeling of guilt
8. The sinning survivor is not to blame for the victim’s sin
9. Should I just kill myself too?

* The prevalence of this lie: families, schools, media

1. Where is God in all of this?
2. This is more than I can take!
3. God didn’t have anything to do with this awful situation!
4. God was wrong to let my loved one die!
5. My loved one’s suicide has ruined my life!
6. **A Final Word About Biblical Hope**
7. No Jesus-No hope! Know Jesus/Know Hope!
8. Promises for believers: 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; James 1:2-4; Romans 8:28-29
9. Isaiah 43:2- Paul Tautges quote
10. **Suicide Prevention Resources**
11. Suicide Prevention and Protocol

Questions to Ask if you Suspect Suicidal Tendencies:

There is a common belief that asking questions may encourage them to act or put ideas in their minds. The research does not support this notion, and the risk of NOT asking these questions is too great. You must have the courage to ask these questions directly and compassionately, and then be willing to respond accordingly (please know that any “yes” answer will initiate the “Next Steps” below!). It is always better to err on the side of caution and contact others or refer them to someone for professional and/or medical intervention. That is NOT a counseling failure, it is often a necessary and responsible decision.

Here are a series of questions to ask to screen someone for suicidal tendencies.[[2]](#footnote-3)

I want to care for you well, and make sure you’re ok. Can I ask you some direct questions?

1. In the past few weeks, have you wished you were dead?
2. In the past few weeks, have you felt that you or your family would be better off if you were dead?
3. In the past week, have you been having thoughts about killing yourself?
4. Have you ever tried to kill yourself?

If yes, how? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

When? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

If the individual answers YES to any of the above, ask the following question:

1. Are you having thoughts of killing yourself right now? O Yes O No

If yes, how/where would you do it? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Do you have the (drugs, gun, rope, car, bridge, etc.) that you would use? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Where is it right now? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

NEXT STEPS:

* If counselee answers “No” to all questions 1 through 4, screening is complete (not necessary to ask question #5). No intervention is necessary (\*Note: clinical judgment can always override a negative screen).
* If patient answers “Yes” to any of questions 1 through 4, or refuses to answer, they are considered a positive screen. Ask question #5 to assess how clear and definite their suicide ideation might be.
  + “Yes” to questions #5 = acute positive screen (imminent risk identified)
    - Counselee requires a full mental health evaluation.
    - Counselee cannot leave until evaluated for safety.
    - Keep counselee in sight. Remove dangerous objects from the room. Call doctor, clinician, hotline, or 911.
* “No” to question #5 = non-acute positive screen (potential risk identified)
  + Counselee requires a brief suicide safety assessment to determine if a full mental health evaluation is needed. Patient cannot leave until evaluated for safety.
    - Call doctor, clinician, hotline, or 911.

Protocol for Caring for Someone with Suicidal Tendencies:

If the counselee is found to have suicidal tendencies based on the assessment on page 1 you MUST call the suicide hotline immediately. Affirm your love and care for them, your desire to help, and your appreciation for their transparency. Seek to persuade them to engage in the process, but do not seek to restrain or detain them. Call 911 if they refuse to stay.

1. (Insert your local number here) (24/7 Regional Crisis Line), or 911, National hotline 1-800-273-8255

Call one of the above hotlines in the session, ask to speak with a mental health professional, put the phone on speaker and have the crisis hotline screener ask the questions and make the assessment.

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Name of Screener Date Time

The crisis screener will give you direction as to your next steps. Stay with the counselee if at all possible. Record the instructions given to you by the crisis screener.

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Collaborate with the crisis screener to develop a safety plan. The steps you will be directed to take will likely include, but not be limited to, elements of the following.

1. If the crisis screener doesn’t recommend a hospital evaluation (calling 911 or taking to the ER at Sacred Heart) make sure that they are passed personally to someone so that they will not be left alone. Ask them, “Who is the person you trust the most?” Have them contact this family/friends/etc. in your presence (if they won’t, then do it yourself). If you do transport someone yourself, it is best to not do so alone.
2. Call a pastor/elder of counseling (or any other church leader you can reach) and strategize if it is possible to structure care and secure the counselee’s commitment to be transparent and involved relationally in the life of the church (fellowship, accountability, care, etc.).
3. Attempt to make whatever arrangements necessary to remove the things they have considered using to harm themselves (i.e., remove guns, ropes, drugs, vehicles [keys], etc., from wherever they will be staying). Also have access removed to things that may increase risk (alcohol, drugs, etc.).

Tell them what you’re doing, and why: “It is best for us to remove things that you might use to hurt yourself as soon as we can. If we do this, it will be harder to harm yourself if you find yourself under stress or having thoughts of killing yourself.”

1. Scripture to Give Hope to the Suicidal
2. Valuing Man/Life Because Everyone is an Image-Bearer
3. The grounds for forbidding murder and punishing the murderer is that it is a crime against the image of God-it is equivalent to destroying God’s image, not just your own! Genesis 9:6; Exodus 20:13
4. God’s desire to not have his image denigrated is so strong that he says it is the basis for forbidding us from even *wishing* evil in others. James 3:8-9
5. The Desire and Design of Death is of the Devil. John 10:10; 2 Corinthians 10:5; 1 Peter 5:8
6. God Desires the Preservation of Your Life and Your Loyal Service. Psalm 33:18-19; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17
7. God is Seeking to Do Something Through Your Affliction. Romans 5:1-5; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Hebrews 12:11; 1 Peter 5:6-8,10
8. God Longs to Hear You and Be Your Ultimate Source of Hope and Peace. Psalm 34:17-19; Psalm 55:22; Psalm 62:5; Psalm 71: 5; Isaiah 26:3-4; Philippians 4:6-7
9. **Additional Resources**

Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling*, Zondervan, 1970, p. 138.

Kevin Carson, “Care After a Suicide,” (lecture, ACBC Conference, Cordova, TN, October 7–9, 2019), <https://biblicalcounseling.com/product/kevin-carson-plenary-session-4-care-after-a-suicide/>.

Nicholas Ellen, “Understanding and Dealing with Suicide,” (lecture, ACBC Conference, Cordova, TN, October 7–9, 2019), <https://biblicalcounseling.com‌/resource‌-library/conference-messages/understanding-and-dealing-with-suicide/>.

Julie Gossack, *Hope Beyond Despair: Finding Truth After a Loved One’s Suicide,* Chapter 3: A Smorgasbord of Lies and the Truth of God’s Word, Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2017, p. 22-37.

Stuart Scott, “Handling Suicidal Threats,” (lecture, ACBC Conference, Cordova, TN, October 7–9, 2019), <https://biblicalcounseling.com/product/stuart-scott-handling-suicidal-threats/>.

Depression Resources

Jim Berg, “Session 2-Stabilizing Truths for Noisy Souls: The Knowledge of God” in *Taking Time to Quiet Your Soul*, BJU Press, 2005, p. 4-5.

Charles Hodges, “Chapter 5: Depression or Sadness: Two Ways to Consider the Diagnosis,” in *Good Mood, Bad Mood*: *Help and Hope for Depression and Bipolar Disorder*, Shepherd Press, 2012, p. 61-64.

Wayne Mack, “Why Do People Get Depressed?” in *Dealing with the Blues of Depression and Loneliness*, Focus Publishing 2006, p.37-57.

Arthur W. Pink, *The Attributes of God,* Baker Books, 1975,

Paul Tautges, *A Small Book for the Hurting Heart: Meditations on Loss, Grief, and Healing,* Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2020, P. 151.

Milton Vincent*, A Gospel Primer for Christians*, Focus Publishing, 2008

Edward Welch, *Depression: Looking Up from the Stubborn Darkness,* Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2011.

1. Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church* (Chicago: Moody), 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Adapted from the ASQ Suicide Risk Screening Toolkit, from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/research/research-conducted-at-nimh/asq-toolkit-materials>. If you do eventually call a DCR (Designated Crisis Responder), you can indicate you used the questions from this tool. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)