

Suicide **2 Samuel 17:23**

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 12-15-2013

Introduction

Suicide may seem like a morbid topic to be preaching on today, but it is a temptation for some Christians, and it needs to be addressed. Even godly Christians like William Cowper (which is actually pronounced Cooper), have either been tempted to do so or have succeeded. I know two godly OPC ministers who committed suicide, and it was a shock to everybody who knew them. Both Job and Elijah were certainly tempted to end their lives, though they resisted it. So I believe it is important for us to guard our hearts by understanding what the Bible says about the subject.

But it is also important to know how to counsel others who are suicidal. You may be the only one to stand between them and death. Over the last decade there has been a lot legal debate in almost every state on this subject. For example, physician assisted suicide was legalized in Oregon, Washington, and Vermont, and is gaining momentum in Montana and other states.

But even in states like Nebraska where it is still illegal, assisted suicide and even involuntary euthanasia has happened – and the law is turning a blind eye to it. Let me give you one example that was an emotional roller coaster for me: In our previous church I had to organize a group of pastors, lawyers, doctors, and citizens to try to save the life of an elderly lady who was a member of our church. She had broken her hip and had been admitted to the hospital. When we went to visit her one time she was in an artificially induced coma – supposedly to relieve the pain. But one of the nurses in our church noticed that she was being deliberately starved and dehydrated. On investigation, it became apparent that a doctor and an unbelieving relative were deliberately engaging in an act of supposed “mercy killing.” They said that with her arthritis she didn’t have quality of life, and that her broken hip gave them all the legal rights they need to not resuscitate. And we were thinking, this has nothing to do with resuscitation; you have put her in an artificially induced coma. And besides, I had just talked with her and knew that she didn’t want to die. She had spoken about the subject to me and was hoping to live to see her relatives come to Christ. Some of our doctors testified to the hospital’s board that there was

© Copyright 2013 by Phillip G. Kayser. Permission is granted to individuals to download, print, or distribute this sermon on paper or electronically, provided that each reprint bears this copyright notice, current address, and telephone number, and provided that all such reproductions are distributed without charge. They may not be sold or issued in book form, CD-ROM form, or microfiche without prior permission. All rights reserved.

Phillip G. Kayser • Dominion Covenant Church • 307.N 41st Ave. Omaha, NE 68131 • 402.934.3300

absolutely no reason to necessitate an artificially induced coma. In fact, every time she would start coming out of the coma and try to talk, they quickly added more medicine to put her under so that she could not object to what they were doing. It quickly became clear that their goal was to kill her. And we fought it tooth and nail. We petitioned the hospital's board with the testimonies of doctors and lawyers. We picketed the hospital. We tried to get a court order. We exhausted every legal avenue we could to protect her life, but she died before we could get the courts to rule. And that happened right here in Omaha, Nebraska. If Obamacare is not overturned, you will likely see involuntary euthanasia imposed on the elderly, but certainly voluntary assisted suicide will likely increase. In fact, there is a death board that is a part of the plan. So it is a very timely and very relevant subject that we need to think through.

And in fact, there is an increase of suicides this time of year by discouraged people from broken families. Worldwide, suicide is the tenth leading cause of death, with males being three to four times more likely to commit suicide than females. In any given year there are anywhere from 10 to 20 million attempted (but unsuccessful) suicides worldwide, and upwards of a million successful suicides - anywhere from 600,000 to one million. But that's astonishing – upward of one million suicides per year. In 2008 11.4% of all deaths in America were deaths by suicide. But if you focus on the younger generation, the statistics are much higher. Among adolescent males in the developed world, it accounts for 30% of all adolescent deaths. And in America it has recently become the second most common cause of death in adolescents, and in young males is second only to accidental death. With such staggering statistics, it is important that we have a clear understanding of what the Bible says about this subject.

But here's the problem. Unfortunately, there are Christians who think there is nothing wrong with assisted suicide,¹ and they will appeal to passages like this one to prove that it is not wrong. They say that since God did not rebuke Ahithophel's actions, and since it records his action as a very understandable act, it is obviously OK. So this is actually one of the texts that people will use to support voluntary suicide.

¹ For a couple examples: See <http://www.suicide.org/suicide-is-not-a-sin.html> Also see Roland's comments at this site claiming that Augustine was the first to consider it sin: <http://hipandthigh.blogspot.com/2008/09/suicide-and-assisted-suicide-in-bible.html>

I. Ahithophel was a sinner, not a model for suicide (v. 23a)

A. He is a type of Judas

And I will be the first to admit that this verse doesn't give any moral or theological commentary on the suicide. It doesn't say it's good; it doesn't say it's bad. It's simply a historical statement of what had happened. But we must allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. And the first thing that the rest of Scripture shows us is that Ahithophel was a wicked sinner, and not a role model to be imitated.

There are three indications that he was not a role model. The first is that Scripture portrays this verse as making Ahithophel a type or prophetic picture or a prophetic foreshadowing of Judas, the betrayer of Jesus. And there are ten levels at which he foreshadows Judas. You won't have time to write these down – I'm just going to quickly list them. 1) Both betrayed their friend. 2) Both had economic incentive to do so. 3) Both showed no conscience issues over other immorality. 4) Both dishonored their master: Ahithophel dishonored David horribly when he told Absalom to go into David's concubines. And Judas dishonored Jesus horribly by rebuking the woman for anointing Jesus with oil. Maybe he didn't realize it, but in the process he was rebuking Jesus for accepting the anointing. He in effect accused Jesus of being a poor steward. 5) Both engaged in theft from their master. 6) Both turned their masters over to the authorities and were willing to accompany soldiers to catch their master. 7) Both had regrets over what they had done. 8) Neither one truly repented. 9) Both committed suicide by hanging. 10) Both were buried on their own property. So on ten levels he stands as a type of Judas.

Here's the point: if Ahithophel is a type of Judas, then by itself that would indicate that he is not being presented here as a good role model to imitate. So even though some Christians have used Ahithophel and Saul as examples of the legitimacy of suicide, this Judas connection strongly speaks against it.

B. Scripture portrays him as lawless (16:21-22; Psalm 28; 36; 37; 39; 40; 41; 55; 62)

Second, the Bible portrays Ahithophel as being lawless. We've already seen in chapter 16 that he advised Absalom to commit incest and adultery with his father's ten concubines. That is horrible, and he nowhere shows any remorse for that action. And I have listed eight Psalms written during this period that portray Ahithophel as being a wicked and lawless

man. In Psalm 9 this wicked man was ensnared by the work of his own hands. Psalm 28 indicates that though he spoke peace, wickedness was in his heart. Psalm 37 characterizes the actions of Ahithophel as the transgression of the wicked, no fear of God before his eyes, hatred, iniquity, devising wickedness, failing to abhor evil, etc. I won't go through all the Psalms that are in your outline, but let me have you turn to Psalm 55, and I will give a third characteristic that demonstrates that the Scripture is clearly portraying Ahithophel as a person who is not a good role model.

C. He went to hell (Ps. 55:12-15)

Psalm 55 indicates that it may have seemed like an easy way out for Ahithophel, it actually was not. He went straight to hell. Psalm 55, beginning at verse 1.

Psa. 55:1 Give ear to my prayer, O God, And do not hide Yourself from my supplication.

Psa. 55:2 Attend to me, and hear me; I am restless in my complaint, and moan noisily,

Psa. 55:3 Because of the voice of the enemy, Because of the oppression of the wicked; For they bring down trouble upon me, And in wrath they hate me.

Psa. 55:4 My heart is severely pained within me, And the terrors of death have fallen upon me.

Psa. 55:5 Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me, And horror has overwhelmed me.

Psa. 55:6 So I said, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest.

Psa. 55:7 Indeed, I would wander far off, *And* remain in the wilderness. Selah

Psa. 55:8 I would hasten my escape From the windy storm *and* tempest."

Let's skip down to verse 12:

Psa. 55:12 For *it is* not an enemy *who* reproaches me; Then I could bear *it*. Nor *is it* one *who* hates me who has exalted *himself* against me; Then I could hide from him.

Psa. 55:13 But *it was* you, a man my equal, My companion and my acquaintance.

Psa. 55:14 We took sweet counsel together, *And* walked to the house of God in the throng.

So he is clearly talking about Ahithophel. But in verse 15 he goes on to say,

Psa. 55:15 Let death seize them; Let them go down alive into hell, For wickedness *is* in their dwellings *and* among them.

Psa. 55:16 As for me, I will call upon God, And the LORD shall save me.

Psa. 55:17 Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, And He shall hear my voice.

Psa. 55:18 He has redeemed my soul in peace from the battle *that was* against me, For there were many against me.

Psa. 55:19 God will hear, and afflict them, Even He who abides from of old.
Selah Because they do not change, Therefore they do not fear God.

Psa. 55:20 He has put forth his hands against those who were at peace with him; he has broken his covenant.

Psa. 55:21 *The words* of his mouth were smoother than butter, But war *was* in his heart; His words were softer than oil, Yet they *were* drawn swords.

Psa. 55:22 Cast your burden on the LORD, And He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.

Psa. 55:23 But You, O God, shall bring them down to the pit of destruction; Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; But I will trust in You.

Verses 15 and 23 condemned him to hell. Jewish interpreters say that even that last verse had Ahithophel especially in mind – dying a premature death. In any case, though Ahithophel was as wise as an angel of God in terms of seeing options and seeing future repercussions, the Bible leaves no mistake about the fact that he was not a reliable guide to imitate. So the first pillar of so-called Christian suicide is removed when you look at how other Scriptures interpret this verse.

II. His motives for suicide were unlawful (v. 23b)

A. The only lawful motives for suicide are listed in Larger Catechism 135-136: public justice, lawful war, necessary defense

Point II deals with motives; sinful motives. Look at 2 Samuel 17, and verse 23. This verse does not identify the motives with *precision*, but it does give the reason that made him decide to commit suicide.

2Sam. 17:23 Now when Ahithophel saw that his advice was not followed, [There is the reason for his suicide. And I want you to notice that it doesn't say, "When he saw what he did was wrong." No, it says the opposite – "Now when Ahithophel saw that his advice was not followed,"] he saddled a donkey, and arose and went home to his house, to his city. Then he put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died; and he was buried in his father's tomb.

So we are given a reason, but we have to guess at the motives tied up in that reason by putting two and two together. We know he didn't repent of his rebellion because it was their *failure* to follow his advice that led to the suicide, not any change in his heart whatsoever.

But before we tease apart various motives that commentators believe drove him to suicide, let me read to you from the Larger Catechism's exposition of the sixth commandment. It's a wonderful summary of the Bible's teaching, and part of it relates to suicide. Larger catechism 135 says,

Q. 135. *What are the duties required in the sixth commandment?*

A. The duties required in the sixth commandment are, all careful studies, and lawful endeavors, to preserve the life of ourselves and others by resisting all thoughts and purposes, subduing all passions, and avoiding all occasions, temptations, and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life of any; by just defense thereof against violence, patient bearing of the hand of God, quietness of mind, cheerfulness of spirit; a sober use of meat, drink, physic, sleep, labor, and recreations; by charitable thoughts, love, compassion, meekness, gentleness, kindness; peaceable, mild and courteous speeches and behavior; forbearance, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing and forgiving of injuries, and requiting good for evil; comforting and succoring the distressed, and protecting and defending the innocent.

That is an amazing summary of our positive duties with respect to the sixth commandment. And if you were to count verses in the footnotes you would see 99 very pointed verses that support each word and phrase in that definition. But the key phrases are the great care we must take “to preserve the life of ourselves” and that we must avoid “all occasions, temptations, and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life...” of anyone (including ourselves) and then the phrase, “patient bearing of the hand of God.” The next catechism looks at the negative. It asks:

Q. 136. *What are the sins forbidden in the sixth commandment?*

A. The sins forbidden in the sixth commandment are, all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except [and here come the three exceptions that the Scripture allows: “except”] in case of public justice, lawful war, or necessary defense; [and it goes on to say that the sixth commandment forbids] the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life; sinful anger, hatred, envy, desire of revenge; all excessive passions, distracting cares; immoderate use of meat, drink, labor, and recreations; provoking words, oppression, quarreling, striking, wounding, and [then this key phrase:] whatsoever else tends to the destruction of the life of any.

And the footnotes give an additional 39 verses plus two whole chapters (one from Exodus and one from Deuteronomy) that deal with these implications. The key phrases are: “all taking away the life of ourselves” (with only three exceptions, which we will look at in a bit). The other phrases are, “the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life” and “whatsoever else tends to the destruction of the life of any.” That would define Ahithophel’s suicide as murder (self-murder). It is clearly a sin. It is clearly a violation of the sixth commandment.

But let me bring up the three exceptions so that you can see that *some* suicides are indeed noble and righteous *because the law of God authorizes them*. Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s

life for his friends.” Jesus laid down His life willingly, saying that no man took it from Him. So if He laid it down and no one took it from Him, there was a sense in which it was a suicide. But it was a suicide to save the lives of others. He took our place so that we would not have to die. There have been prisoners who have taken the place of another in execution. There have been soldiers who have jumped on a grenade in order to save the whole squad from being killed. Such a soldier is sacrificing his life in order to save many lives. The Bible would define that as noble and good. So preserving the life of others by laying down our own (*if that is the only way to preserve their lives* – and that’s a very important qualification) is a very legitimate reason for suicide.

A second exception is lawful war. There are some battles that almost guarantee your death. Scripture honors a soldier who dies in defense of his family and his nation. And some might object, “But that’s not a suicide. Someone else is killing you.” But let’s think about that. If you were in Pickett’s last charge, you might think the command to charge up that hill was suicidal. And historians call it suicidal. But you could go with a clean conscience before God that you were doing a noble and a righteous thing. You would hope that General Robert E. Lee knew what he was doing when he sent you up there. But if you have ever been on that hill, you know the feeling - you are deliberately walking into death. Certainly it feels nobler to die in a battle that you know is going to win the day. Most people would prefer not to be in Pickett’s charge. But Scripture portrays such a laying down of one’s life for a good cause in battle to be lawful.

The third exception is stated as in the case of public justice. How would the laying down of your life in the case of public justice ever be a suicide? Well, think of Achan in the book of Joshua. He was given the opportunity to plead “Not guilty,” and they hadn’t discovered the stolen goods yet. But Joshua encouraged him to give glory to God by pleading guilty if indeed he had done it. He did so, and saved everyone a bunch of time. But pleading guilty meant his death. Even though it was someone else’s sword that took his life, he was willing to lay his life down. The apostle Paul said in Acts 25:11,

For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar.”

He was saying that he wouldn’t object to being executed if he was indeed guilty. He wouldn’t fight it. In fact, he would plead guilty. That’s the right thing to do. But he was going to fight tooth and nail to preserve his

own life since he was innocent. He was bound by the law of God to preserve his life in all situations except the three exceptions that we have looked at. To not defend yourself in court and to not object to being executed is laying down your life for public justice. Now, if you pleaded guilty when not being guilty it would be a double sin: self-murder and perjury. It is allowing yourself to be *unjustly* killed.

But those are the only exceptions that the Larger Catechism gives. All other forms are sin. And when Exodus 20:13 forbids murder, the Bible goes on to define murder as the taking of any life unauthorized by God's law.

And so Deuteronomy 30:19 commands us, "choose life in order that you may live..." Don't be suicidal. That's a moral imperative – choose life in order that you may live. In Acts 16 it says of the Philippian jailer, "the jailer was about to kill himself, but Paul said, 'Do yourself no harm.'" 1 Corinthians 6:19 says, "your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you... you are not your own." To destroy your body is to destroy something that belongs to God without His permission. Ephesians 5:29 says that we are to treat our wives like we treat our own bodies, and nourish her and cherish her and protect her, which implies that we are to care for and protect our own life. And there are many other Scriptures that indicate that God only allows those three exceptions to the prohibition of suicide.

B. The reason given for the suicide hints at ungodly motives: pride? shame? anger? guilt? Concern for family welfare?

Well, with that as a background, what was the reason given in verse 23 for Ahithophel's suicide? Could any of those three exceptions fit in here? No. Look at it again. It simply says, "...when Ahithophel saw that his advice was not followed..." There was no grenade to fall on; no immediate danger; no admission of guilt and handing himself over to the civil magistrate. In fact, by doing this he is avoiding being charged for criminal conduct by David. He was not handing himself over for public justice. This was a selfish act of escape.

And though I don't want to guess what Ahithophel's motives were, (like most commentators have done), I will go through the motives that various commentators have ascribed to Ahithophel and show how each one is an inadequate motive.

Most of my commentaries assume that he committed suicide out of pride. Their reasoning? He had never had his wisdom questioned before, and *to have Absalom and all of these elders* say that he was wrong was such a

blow to his ego that he couldn't live with it. These commentators believe that he felt disgraced. If that was the case, and if he had been a believer, he should have treated his pride as an enemy and welcomed this as an opportunity to crucify his pride. But rarely do people deal with pride as an enemy during a time of crisis if they have not already been used to dealing with pride as an enemy much earlier. So a word to the wise – treat your pride as a mortal enemy. Take preventative medicine against this motive for suicide. In any case, pride would definitely be a sinful motive.

Others have said that it was shame. And this could be shame that his advice had not been followed, or shame of having to face David in the future and be tried publically as a criminal, or both. Shame of getting caught has been the reason for many suicides. You may remember R. Budd Dwyer's suicide. He was caught taking bribes while in office and he was so embarrassed at having been caught that he blew his brains out. Shame at having been caught in adultery has led some people to take the easy way out. But this too flows from pride, and should be crucified. Christ was willing to bear the shame of identifying with us and being misrepresented as a criminal. Why? Because He loved His own. And too many people do not think of the hurt and grief that a suicide will bring to those that they will leave behind. It's not loving. To commit suicide out of shame is really selfish, and a person could grow hugely in grace if they would take that shame to Christ and allow Him to put pride to death.

Some people commit suicide out of anger; out of a desire to get even. Kids have sometimes felt this way: "I wish I was dead, and then she would feel sorry." And weirdly enough, adults have committed suicide to get even; to make someone else feel bad. I am skeptical that this was Ahithophel's motivation, but if it had been, those feelings should have been an indicator to him that his heart was not right with God. And this is a good reminder that we always need to evaluate our motivations by the cross of Christ. If we are not sanctifying our motivations by grace when things are going well, those sinful motivations can lead us to bizarre behavior when things go poorly.

Others have thought that with the Judas connection, there might have been some guilt. I don't see that in this verse, even though guilt is often dealt with through suicide in America. But the Christian response is to do what? It is to take our guilt to the cross of Jesus Christ and to find security in the Father's approval through Christ's righteousness. Guilt should only drive us to the cross. If it drives us anywhere else, it is a false guilt that can be manipulated by Satan. Beware when guilt makes you hide from people and avoid people. If you are walking in grace, you can admit guilt and still feel

comfortable talking with others about your sin. Why? Because the cross-centered approach finds security in Jesus, not in what others think about us. In fact, the cross-centered approach makes us realize that we are far worse than any human could possibly guess, and so it doesn't bother us when people know some of our sin. But we are going through these motivations so that you can deal with them before a crisis comes that might make you suicidal. If these motivations are replaced now with Christ-centered ones, we will have the inward protection against suicidal thought.

Some have thought that Ahithophel was motivated by a concern for his family. And it is true that he was getting his books in order and making provision for an inheritance to be passed on to his family – maybe so that David would not get it. That may indeed have been a factor, but he could have given everything away prior to David returning and faced the music like a man. He still could have protected his family. But in any case, this is a faulty motive that has led to suicides by those who have disabilities. They think they are doing their family a favor, little realizing the incredible trauma that suicide leaves for their loved ones. It is not a lawful motive.

The last reason sometimes given is that Ahithophel was trying to avoid the consequences of having to face David's retribution. And that likely was at least one motivation. But again, maturity in Christ allows us to handle the consequences of our sins without escaping. And this is why it is so important that we be secure in God's grace.

III. His method for suicide was unlawful (vv. 23b-c)

A. Hanging versus a court of law (v. 23b)

From everything we have said so far, point III is almost superfluous. If everything we have said so far is true, then of course his methods were not lawful. If instead of hanging himself, he had confessed to being guilty before a court of law once David got back in power, then that would have been a lawful way to end his life. But this was not.

B. Premeditated with no emergency (v. 23b)

Second, this was obviously premeditated. Some suicides are impulsively entered into, and when the person can be talked out of it he later realizes that it was a stupid move. And hopefully this sermon will give you an understanding that will help you to never do anything that impulsive. Some commit suicide while out of their senses on drugs. Some commit suicide shortly after a horrible event because they are not emotionally

thinking straight. But this was very deliberately planned and methodically premeditated. It almost seems like he was doing it with a very cool head.

Consider the evidence. He took the time to saddle his donkey so that he could ride in comfort for the twelve-mile trip from Jerusalem to Giloh (on Google maps - 31° 37', 35° 4'). So that would have taken a while. Then once he got there, he got his books and his estate in order, and the literal Hebrew indicates that he gave a command with respect to his household. It may have been a command via writing, but it looks more like at least one other person was in on what was going to happen and went along with it. So this was not a rash mistake. This was premeditated. It makes it doubly sinful.

C. Self-inflicted (v. 23c)

And when it says that he hanged himself, it indicates that this was self-inflicted, not a request for someone else to hang him. So he used unlawful methods.

The atheist David Hume tried to justify suicide as being no different from any other death at the hands of Providence (and why an atheist would talk of Providence, I have no idea). But he said it would be no different than if the death "...had proceeded from a lion, a precipice, or a fever."² He strongly argued for the right to suicide. And William Plumer responded with one of the best point-by-point refutations of Hume's arguments that I have seen. It's old language, but I think it is great reasoning. Let me quote a portion of his refutation. After saying that Hume's arguments would logically lead us to be justified in killing anyone else for the same reasons we might be tempted to kill ourselves, he gave the following six additional arguments:

The whole argument in favour of suicide goes on the supposition of the truth of the principles which are clearly false. 1, That man has the right to dispose of his own life; whereas none but the Author of our existence can lawfully do so; 2, That we are competent judges of the question whether we have lived long enough or not; whereas a large proportion of mankind have been very useful after they supposed they could do no more good; 3, That we owe no obligations to parents, or children, or others, who may be dependent upon our exertions; whereas we may entail upon them untold miseries by taking our own lives; 4, that God has not legislated on the subject; whereas the sixth commandment clearly forbids it; 5, that salvation is not an object worth seeking, whereas it is the only thing claiming our

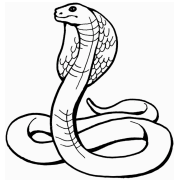
² Quoted in William S. Plumer, *The Law of God As Contained in the Ten Commandments Explained and Enforced*(Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1864), p. 409.

supreme attention; 6, That it is heroic to sink under distress or play the coward in suffering wrong; whereas a large part of the best moral lessons, taught by example, has been delivered to mankind in the depths of affliction.³

³ Plumer, *The Law of God*, pp. 409-410.

Conclusion – helping those who are tempted to suicide

It's a well-worded rebuttal. So hopefully I have adequately presented to you a theology of suicide that shows that it really is a serious sin against God. But I want to end by giving you some suggestions of what you can do to help someone who is suicidal. One of the biggest things that you can do is to get them to postpone their decision until they can get help. But to do that you sometimes have to give them perspective. Let me do a little experiment with you. I'm going to take a piece of paper and ask you what you see.



Most people immediately focus in on what is the center of their vision, and they can only see a snake. When asked if there is anything else that they see, they do see a black dot. But few see that 95% of the page is white. And that's what Satan wants us to do with the page of our lives. He wants us to see everything that is dark, ugly, hopeless, and beyond repair. And he wants us to despair over it. He doesn't want us to see anything light and filled with hope. And part of what we must do is give perspective when people are suicidal. Sympathy can be good because it can show others that we care. But too much sympathy will actually cause harm. Too much sympathy can make it seem as if we too think there is nothing on the page of their lives but a lousy snake – because that's all we talk about when we sympathize. In effect we have confirmed their reasons for suicide if we only sympathize with their wretched circumstances. Our focus is wrong. On the other hand, if we go to the opposite extreme and we refuse to see the snake on the page of their lives (which they can see all too clearly) they won't take any of our counsel seriously. Denial is not helpful. So be sympathetic and agree with them about the presence of the snakes of depression, disaster, hard times, and – yes, even the horrible wickedness of their sin. Don't downplay it. If you agree with them that their sin deserves hellfire, but that Christ has taken that for them, they might take you more seriously than if you try to downplay how serious the sin is. They know it is serious and they hate it.

So let me try to give you some sample ways to give people perspective: If it is guilt that is driving them to suicide, we can encourage them to do as David did in Psalm 51, and to believe that even so horrendous an evil as murder and adultery can find full forgiveness and cleansing in Jesus Christ. You can explain that it would have been extremely difficult for David to face a nation about his adultery and murder if he was shame focused. But since instead he chose to find security in God and to lay his shame at the feet of a God who loves him and cares for him, he was able to handle the shame a bit better. Ahithophel was only looking to the pain and shame and was not looking to the freedom and healing that comes from the cross. Hebrews 7:25 says that Jesus is able to save to the uttermost *those who come to God through Christ*. But we can't hide from God. We've got to come to God through Christ. One evangelist said that He can save to the uttermost also means that he can save from the guttermost.

This gives hope to those caught in the bondage of horrible sins. Why don't you turn with me to 1 Corinthians 6. At the top of the list of sins that

have led people to commit suicide are homosexuality, adultery, pedophilia, embezzlement, drunkenness, and extortion, yet 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 says this of people who had engaged in those very sins,

1Cor. 6:9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? [“Wo! Wo! Wo! Paul. That’s not good advice. This guy’s depressed enough about his sins. Right?” Wrong. Notice that Paul is not downplaying the seriousness of these sins. He’s not saying, “Oh, you aren’t as bad as you think. You just need a little self-esteem.” No, he does the exact opposite. In fact, Paul is making the sins far more serious than any suicidal person has probably taken them. He is pointing out the eternal consequences. So Paul says, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?”] Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,

1Cor. 6:10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

But then comes the good news:

1Cor. 6:11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

Such *were* some of you. David was in that number. He was no longer an adulterer or a murderer. He was cleansed and changed. Such *were* some of you. Unfortunately, that was not true of Ahithophel because He did not go to the cross of Christ. So there is a Scripture that can give hope. Such *were* some of you. You can change. God’s grace is powerful.

And if you are the one who tends to lose hope, preach hope to yourself. When you think, “It’s impossible. I can’t go on.” Tell yourself, “Self. I will not believe those feelings because God’s Word says, ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.’ And it says, ‘The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.’ Help me God.”

If you are tempted to think, “I can no longer manage,” tell yourself, “I refuse to believe that lie because God’s word says, “my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

When you are tempted to suicide with demonic thoughts that nobody loves you, rebuke yourself for calling God a liar, and preach the Scriptures of God’s unfailing love to your heart.

When you are tempted by thoughts that you are all alone, preach Hebrews 13:5 to yourself, where God says, “I will never leave you or forsake you.”

When you are tempted to think that you don't even have the strength to even preach to yourself in this way, call out to God and say, "Lord I believe. Help Thou mine unbelief. You have said in Your word, 'He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength.' I need your strength. Help me Lord." But don't give in to the demonic lies of Satan.

Some people are so far gone that they just keep saying, "I can't; I can't; I just can't go on." And it might be helpful to tell them during the emergency, "I'm not asking you to go on by yourself. I'm here to help, and there are professionals who can help. Just give us a chance."

When I have not been able to get anywhere with that approach, there have been a couple of situations where I have taken a frontal approach and said, "You may think that your situation is bad, but you are making it far worse by calling God a liar. That is blasphemy." "No, I'm not calling God a liar." "Yes you are. Let me read the promise of a God who cannot lie, and encourage you to believe Him rather than believing yourself. And on two occasions I have read to them 1 Corinthians 10:13,

1Cor. 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*.

And I told them, "I'm here to help you find that way of escape, and suicide is not it. Please don't keep calling God a liar. God doesn't want you to take this false solution. He says that there is a way of escape, and I am here to help you to find it." Occasionally you might have to take a real frontal approach like that.

Some counter that nothing good could come out of continuing to live. But God assures us over and over again that much good can come out of troubles if we will only look to Him in faith. This is why James 1:2-4 calls upon us to consider it all joy when we fall into various troubles, knowing that the trying of our faith produces..., and he lists a number of wonderful things that troubles bring to us. We have to consider it because it sure doesn't feel that way, but by faith we apply our minds to consider the good that can come out of remaining alive and enduring. We are forcing ourselves to look at the white on the page.

With some people suicide does not flow from hopelessness, but simply because it seems like an easier way out. And you might have to take

a different tack with such people - perhaps showing the eternal consequences; that it is not an easy way out.

Some people use the same argument with their bodies that they do with abortion: "I can do whatever I want with my body. My body belongs to me and I have a right to kill myself." But 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 denies that our bodies belong to us. They belong to God, and we are accountable to God for how we handle our bodies. Romans 12:1-2 commands us to offer up our bodies to God as a living sacrifice, not as a dead one. Other Scriptures command us to glorify God with our body.

Some people object that their lives don't count for anything, and one response can be, "No, that's not true. Your life does count to me. It does count to God. And I believe it does count to your loved ones." "You are made in the image of God. Of course your life counts."

Some might counter that their life no longer has dignity, and that they prefer to die with dignity. There is a lot of that propaganda out there, making cripples and elderly people feel guilty because their life is not "productive." But God said that Adam and Eve had value before they had done a thing. He didn't value them for what they had done. He valued them for who they were. One pro-suicide website has, "Your donation helps us continue to advocate for the right of the terminally ill to die with dignity." But it is clear from the website that they believe there is no dignity to being a mongoloid child, or being bed-ridden, or being crippled with arthritis.

It's sad. And it is such a lie. Let me tell you something: some of the greatest prayer warriors have been completely bed ridden. And even those who are in a coma and can't do anything have been used by God to bring sanctification and the growth of self-sacrificial love into the lives of their family in a way that would not have been possible otherwise. Some of the sweetest works of God's grace have happened in the families of those who have had a Mongoloid child.

But the concept of death with dignity is ridiculous. There is nothing more undignifying than implying that elderly people are no longer useful and that they need to die with dignity. That's horrible. It can sometimes be appropriate to point out that God does not give dignity as a good reason for death. Exodus 23:7 says absolutely: "Do not kill the innocent and righteous." If you kill yourself when you are not guilty of a capital crime, then you violate that Scripture. But even if you have committed a sin that is a capital crime, such as murder or adultery, you still can't execute yourself since God's only lawful instrument of vengeance is a civil magistrate, and the

process of having a person go through the legal system may slow things down enough to lead to his salvation (or if a believer, to his sanctification).

But in any case we can turn their attention away from the pain and the false idea of dignity and help them to look at the situation from an eternal perspective. For example, a lot of people commit suicide when they lose their life savings. But Luke 12:15 seeks to convince us that the worth of our life does not consist in the abundance of our possessions. And if it is a maelstrom of afflictions that is tempting us with suicide, 2 Corinthians 4:16-17 says that the afflictions we are going through cannot be compared to the glories of heaven. In fact, those very afflictions are producing for us an eternal weight of glory if we will respond to them by faith in Christ.

There are many arguments like this that we can use with ourselves and with others to help shift the focus away from the snake in the middle of the page, and onto Jesus, the Rock of our Salvation who took our sins in His body and gives us His righteousness. So even though this is not a pleasant subject, I hope it is a subject that has at least helped you to examine your own motivations, to give you some hope, and to give you some ideas on how to minister to those who are suicidal. May it be so Lord Jesus. Amen.

Suicide

2 Samuel 17:23

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 12-15-2013

Introduction

- I. Ahithophel was a sinner, not a model for suicide (v. 23a)
 - A. He is a type of Judas

 - B. Scripture portrays him as lawless (16:21-22; Psalm 28; 36; 37; 39; 40; 41; 55; 62)

 - C. He went to hell (Ps. 55:12-15)

- II. His motives for suicide were unlawful (v. 23b)
 - A. The only lawful motives for suicide are listed in Larger Catechism 135-136:
public justice, lawful war, necessary defense

 - B. The reason given for the suicide hints at ungodly motives: pride? shame? anger?
guilt? Concern for family welfare?

- III. His method for suicide was unlawful (vv. 23b-c)
 - A. Hanging versus a court of law (v. 23b)
 - B. Premeditated with no emergency (v. 23b)
 - C. Self-inflicted (v. 23c)

Conclusion – helping those who are tempted to suicide