

Suicide

Listed Scriptures

1 Kgs 17-19; Acts 16:23-40; Num 11; Jon 4; 1 Pet 5:7; Jn 14:18; Is 41:10

Lesson Aim

- 1) To identify the reasons why people ask for death.
- 2) To understand that we are all made in God's image and that our lives are in His hands.
- 3) To focus on God's blessings and learn to give thanks.
- 4) To be determined to do God's work and lead meaningful and productive lives.

Memory Verse

"For in You, O Lord, I hope; You will hear, O Lord my God." (Psalm 38:15)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Hosea 7-9

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



There is no Bible Background for this lesson.

W A R M U P



Sing hymn 336: Does Jesus Care?

Have you ever felt really down? What went through your mind at those times? Who did you turn to? Has there been a time when you felt so low that you felt there was no way out? What did you do? (Give students time to reflect and answer)

Did you know that we live in a death-fascinated society? There are “How To” books being written on suicide and an ever increasing number of songs that pound home lyrics that advocate suicide. In the past decade, there has been a 400% increase in teenage suicides. It is now the second leading cause of death among teenagers and college students. Leaving familiar community and family support systems and adjusting to the demands and responsibilities of a new environment is stressful, especially for freshmen. This is one reason why college students are at high risk.

Here are some myths about suicide. (Put up the following myths on the board or overhead for your students to see.) Discuss them with a partner, saying whether you agree or disagree and why. (After you have given your students time to discuss, give them the facts.)

Myth: People who talk about suicide don't commit suicide.

Fact: Eight out of 10 people who have killed themselves have verbalized their intent beforehand.

Myth: Only certain types of people commit suicide.

Fact: All types of people commit suicide—male and female, young and old, rich and poor, country people and city people. It happens in every racial, ethnic and religious group.

Myth: When a suicidal person begins to feel better, the danger is over.

Fact: Most suicides occur within 90 days following improvement in the person's mental-emotional status.

Myth: People who attempt suicide are merely looking for attention.

Fact: People who threaten or attempt suicide are really reaching out for help. Calling this manipulative in no way diminishes the potential lethality of their actions.

Today, we will be looking into the reasons why people contemplate suicide and how we can overcome this with the help of the Lord.

B I B L E S T U D Y



Part 1

What Does the Bible Teach About Suicide?



A. It Breaks the Sixth Commandment

Exodus 20:13 states “You shall not murder.” Note that this commandment does not say, “You shall not murder someone,” but rather, “You shall not murder,” which includes our own life. Human life is sacred. We must cherish it. The Bible records how, on a few occasions, some people did commit suicide. Interestingly enough though, those who did commit suicide were not good men. Every biblical account of suicide reveals an individual whose lifestyle was not honoring God. All were living outside the sphere of the standards of God. These were:

- a. King Saul and his armor bearer. They killed themselves by falling on their swords because they refused to be killed by their enemies (1 Sam 31:3–5). Saul had walked in his own ways, and was forsaken by the Lord when he turned to witchcraft.
- b. Ahithophel had devised a plan for Absalom to kill King David. But they did not follow his counsel. Consequently, he went home and hung himself (2 Sam 17:1–4, 23).
- c. Zimri, military commander of half the chariots in the army of Israel, conspired against the king, struck him and killed him and declared himself king. He killed all the household of Basha, not leaving him any heirs. When the people found out what had happened, they appointed Omri, military commander, as king. The army marched on and besieged Tirzah and defeated the soldiers loyal to Zimri. When Zimri saw that the city was taken he went into the citadel of the king's house and burned the king's house down upon himself with fire (1 Kgs 16:8–20).
- d. Judas Iscariot, who betrayed the Lord, hung himself by thrusting himself on a pointed beam causing his insides to gush out (Mt 27:3–5; Acts 1:18).

From these four examples, it is quite evident that those who walk in the paths of sin find themselves at a dead end. Therefore, in order for us not to break the sixth commandment, we need to learn to keep our paths in the way of the Lord.



B. It Deprives Us of the Opportunity to Live for the Lord

When we walk outside the boundaries of God's grace and mercy, we have no hope (Eph 2:12). However, when we trust in the Lord Jesus and walk in His way, we will find purpose and direction in our lives: "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 20:31). We need to "trust in the Lord with all [our] heart, and lean not on [our] own understanding; In all [our] ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct [our] paths" (Prov 3:3-5.) We need to entrust our lives to the Lord for He will see us through our trials (1 Cor 10:13). We must remember that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit and that our body is not our own, "For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor 6:19f).



C. It is Selfish

The root of suicide is self-centeredness. When we take away our own lives, we are not only depriving ourselves of the opportunity to live for Christ, but also for Christ to live in and through us. We are basically taking away what is the Lord's. Moreover, suicide allows us to cater to our own desires and our own will and ignores the effects it has on others—our parents, our siblings, our teachers, our church brethren, our friends, our roommates. Apostle Paul reminds us in Philippians 2:3, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself."



D. It is Rebellion Against God

When we take our own life, we are saying that we don't care about God's purpose and plan for our life. We are rebelling against Him, and in a way denying His sovereign power and authority. We are making a decision in the place of God. Instead, we must remember that the Lord is "able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us" (Eph 3:20). Let us therefore "walk worthy of the calling with which you were called" (Eph 4:1).



E. It is Playing into Satan's Hands

Satan's purpose is to kill and destroy (John 10:10). He wants people to join him in hell. Therefore he deceives us into believing that there is no way out (Rev 12:9; 20:7f). Don't be deceived and fall into his trap.



Part 2

Why Do People Ask for Death?

In the majority of cases, people attempt suicide because they feel a sense of hopelessness, helplessness, despair and loneliness. These feelings are real to the individual but many times he/she may not be without hope or help. The problem is that the individual has lost perspective. They view life as meaningless and empty and are trying to find a permanent solution for their temporary problems. Let us look into some of the common reasons behind suicide.



A. No Hope

Acts 16:25-31 records how the keeper of the prison wanted to kill himself. As keeper of the prison, his duty was to make sure that everyone was locked up safely. When he saw that the prison doors were open, he thought that all the prisoners had fled. This would mean that his life was on the line, as he did not keep charge of the prisoners. He lost hope and felt that his life would not be worth living anymore.

Many people live in a state of hopelessness. Some believers believe that they are so deep in sin that God could never forgive them. But the Lord promised us in 1 John 1:9 that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." We must remember that our hope is in the Lord (Ps 39:7).

Hopelessness often derives from depression. In fact, half of all suicides are due to depression and the inability to deal with life's challenges and problems. As Christians, we must continue to look to the Lord for help and hope. Indeed, this world does not offer us hope, but in the Lord, there is hope! (Ps 43:5).



B. Satan's Trap (2 Cor 2:11; 1 Tim 3:7)

The devil is indeed very cunning. He deceives us into thinking that there's no hope. Moreover, not only does he give us the idea that suicide may be the only way out, but once we start to fall into his hands, we are trapped. He creates doubt in our hearts, just like he did to Eve (Gen 3:1-5).

There is a testimony of how a sister committed suicide. It was indeed a very sad occasion. After the funeral service, the pastor, his wife and some brethren went to this sister's house to see what they could do to help the family. When they got there, they saw the noose hanging from the ceiling, which the sister had used to kill herself. Curious, the pastor's wife went up to the noose and stuck her head in. She couldn't understand how this noose could actually take someone's life away. It seemed impossible, as it wasn't that high up. However, as soon as she stuck her head in, the noose began to tighten and her legs dangled. She was screaming and choking. The pastor and the other brethren ran up to her and shouted, "Hallelujah!" It was only at this moment that the noose loosened and the pastor's wife was set free. From this incident we can clearly see that if we leave a foothold for Satan, he will use it and act on it immediately. Even though it seemed impossible that this noose could tragically take away the sister's life, because she had the thought of committing suicide, Satan allowed it to happen and accomplished the goal for her. Therefore, we must be very careful not to fall into Satan's trap, or be blinded by him. Let us be wise and not give place to the devil (Eph 4:27).



C. Frustrated (Num 11)


As a result of the work that the Lord had assigned Moses to do, he suffered physically, mentally and spiritually. The responsibility of leading the Israelites through the wilderness to the promised land was weighing heavily on his shoulders. He was displeased because of the constant moaning and groaning of the Israelites and he was also displeased with the Lord. Moses had continuously endured the burden of the Israelites since they left Egypt. He felt it was too much of a responsibility. He had given them what they wanted. He felt that he was alone in bearing this burden. There was no one there to help him. What he needed was a co-worker with whom he could share this burden. Moses had finally come to the end of the rope: he felt that his only outlet was death. He could not deal with such a big burden any longer.

Sometimes we feel that we have too much work on our plates and the responsibility is too heavy to carry. We feel frustrated that we have done a lot but cannot fulfill our duty. But if we look at Numbers 11:16–20, we see that God addressed Moses' problem from the fundamental point of view—He chose 70 elders to whom He gave His spirit so they would be strong enough to carry the burden with Moses. Sometimes in church, we carry too many burdens and this causes frustration. If we do holy work in a collective and unified way, we will feel less frustrated.

Elijah was led into the desert. The desert signifies pain and living without direction.

It is a place where many get lost. Elijah being led into the desert signifies that he was lost in faith. He lost his purpose, his goal, his spiritual life. Everything seemed nebulous. He was lost because of his own glory and his frustration.

Elijah first became lost on Mount Carmel when everyone was praising him. He spent so much effort reviving their faith and could not understand why he was their target for death. When we work, for whom do we labor? Are we working for our own glory or for the Lord? We may come to a stage where we feel that only we are working. We may think that we are doing everything. We see holy work as a burden rather than a joy. We feel that there is no encouragement, only discouragement. Moreover, like Elijah, we may also have fear within us. When we fear, we will feel lost. Perhaps we are afraid of not living up to the standard of the job. Therefore, we have to constantly check ourselves so that we are not working for our own glory or triumph but are instead working for the Lord. Do not let ourselves lose focus, but "let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb 12:1f).



D. Overburdened and Lonely

In the past, Elijah very bravely worked for God, yet after the victory on Mount Carmel he became weak. This is perhaps due to the fact that he felt that all his previous work was due to himself: it was he who resurrected the widow's son, he who boldly spoke to King Ahab, and he who defeated the false prophets. He felt that it was he alone who was left as a prophet of God (1 Kgs 18:22; 19:10,14). Thus, he felt that after having done all this work himself, no one appreciated it but rather wanted to kill him. He became afraid. Even though he had been through worse situations, he still could not seem to get through this one. He had been in the situation where he was by the brook waiting for the ravens to feed him (1 Kgs 17:1–7), in Zarephath surviving on a little flour and oil (1 Kgs 17:8–16), witnessing the resurrection of a child (1 Kgs 17:17–24), witnessing the almighty power of the Lord on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18:19–40) and seeing how the skies opened up after 3 years of drought (1 Kgs 18:41–46). Yet all this was overshadowed by Jezebel's death threat.

As human beings we often change our emotions according to the environment. Our faith, however, should not be dependent on others. We should not let people's criticisms or slandering cause us to become weak. We need to realize that it is not because of us that the church is prospering, but rather the work of the Lord. Moreover, we need to eliminate our self-centeredness and rely completely on and entrust everything to the Lord. Constantly remind ourselves that it is the Lord who

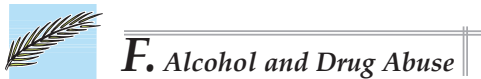
works in us, and not we ourselves.

In addition, Elijah felt very lonely. He had no co-workers so he hid in the cave. What did God do to correct Elijah's spiritual status? God asked him to stand in the entrance of the cave and He showed him His mighty power. After Elijah witnessed this he still hid in the cave. Therefore God asked him again what he was doing there. Then the Lord reminded him of two things. First, he had anointed a successor for him. Second, He had reserved seven thousand people for Himself (1 Kgs 19:16–18). Elijah was not aware of this. He thought he was alone. Alone to accomplish the work of God.

Likewise, we may think that only we are able to do God's work. Only we are pure and righteous. But, do we realize that for the purpose of God, He has already prepared others? The affairs of the church are the affairs of the Lord. We are only a vessel, instruments of God. Never think that we are in this alone. "Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Josh 1:9).



God wanted Jonah to preach to the city of Nineveh. But Jonah had his own personal idea. He did not want to see the people in Nineveh repent. Perhaps it was out of patriotism that he would rather see his enemies be destroyed by God. He had his own will, which is why he ran away from God (Jon 4:1–4). But God was merciful to Jonah and to the city of Nineveh. If God did not have mercy for Jonah, He would have destroyed him at the beginning when he tried to run away. Before God executes His justice, He exercises His mercy. God arranged many miraculous ways to remind Jonah. God tried to teach Jonah to be more merciful (Jon 4:10) and not to solely emphasize on justice. If he could be more merciful, he would not be so frustrated. Jonah's problem was his mindset: he wanted justice rather than mercy. His heart was unforgiving and vindictive. Sometimes, people attempt suicide because of their own mindset. They are set in their own ways and are unwilling to change. Don't be a Jonah. Look mercifully on others.



Alcohol and drug abuse account for a quarter of all suicides. They are deadly weapons in the devil's hands. People usually turn to alcohol and drugs in an attempt to fill the void in their lives. But these things do not satisfy. Instead, they will destroy our bodies and souls.

"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's" (1 Cor 6:19f). Remember: our bodies belong to Christ. We must not abuse them.



Part 3

What Should We Do If We Have Suicidal Thoughts?



A. Tell it to the Lord

When we feel we have reached the end of the rope and we feel weariness in our souls, we can tell the Lord that we want to quit, just like Elijah (1 Kgs 19:4–5). However, after we have told the Lord, fast and pray and see what He says. It is inevitable that we will face difficulties in our journey of faith. We can bravely tell the Lord that we have had enough.

It is important that we tell the Lord how we feel because He is our Master. However, do not tell other people that we have had enough. Not even the person closest to us. Elijah didn't even tell his servant. Instead, he left him behind (1 Kgs 19:3). After Elijah heard that Jezebel wanted to kill him he ran for his life and quit. He left his servant behind because he did not want to drag him down. Likewise, if we are tired of this spiritual journey and feel that people are talking about us or slandering us, be like Elijah. Do not bring or drag others down with us. We need to ponder on the word of God, listening and meditating. Pray and be filled with the Holy Spirit. By doing so, we will be able to revive our spiritual strength so we can run again and be close to God.



B. Entrust it to the Lord

During a time of hopelessness, the Lord restored hope to the keeper of the prison by granting him salvation (Acts 16:25–31). In times of despair, we will often feel that there is no hope for us. Everything around us will seem dark and dismal and we may feel that the only way out is death. But through this keeper's experience, we know that when there is no way out, God will always open a way. When we think that death is the only solution, the Lord will provide us with an answer. God will resolve our problems.

Once Moses turned to the Lord for help, the Lord appointed 70 elders to help him. Moses did not believe this, but the Lord told Moses He would help him (Num 11:23). We only need to entrust everything to the Lord and just do our part. We need not worry. God has His own timing and His own spirit to move people's hearts.

It is interesting to see how Moses turned to the Lord for help. In every situation when he was in need, Moses unfailingly turned to the Lord. This shows his intimate relationship with the Lord. He understood that the Lord would deliver him out of his most difficult times. This is something that we need to learn: in our times of need, we need to entrust everything to the Lord.

In the same manner, Elijah was able to fall fast asleep because he had told the Lord what he wanted (1 Kgs 19:4f). He relied on the Lord, entrusting everything to him, laying all his burdens aside. If we were in the same situation, would we have been able to fall fast asleep after asking for death? Surely we would be tossing and turning all night. But Elijah's experience reminds us that as long as we entrust all to the Lord, He will take care of it. The Lord will then give us the strength to continue on this spiritual journey.



C. Allow the Power of the Spirit to Strengthen Us

Since our strength is limited there is also a limit to how far we can run; thus Elijah could only go a day's journey. After that he had to sit down and rest under a broom tree. Likewise, in our spiritual lives, our strength and endurance are limited. It is only the power of the spirit dwelling in us which can help sustain us on this spiritual journey.

1 Kings 19:5–8 records how an angel brought bread and water for Elijah to eat. This showed the love of God. This bread was baked on coals, just like what the Lord Jesus did for the apostles when they were weak and returned to their own profession (Jn 21:9). God gave Elijah strength through the word of the Lord and through water—His spirit. When we do holy work, God will provide us with bread to eat and water to drink. When we feel we are weak and need help to continue on this spiritual journey, the Lord will satisfy us and nourish us with His tender love.

Elijah, the jailer and Moses all asked for death in times of despair. However, they did not turn to those around them for help. Instead, they confided in the Lord. Because they turned to the Lord in times of need, the Lord delivered them, opened a way and gave them the strength to carry on. We need to learn from this and

know that in our times of need, it is the Lord alone who can carry us through. When we feel that the road ahead is dark and lonely and there seems to be no way out, turn to the Lord. He will make a way.

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



1

How does committing suicide break the sixth commandment?

2

What are the main reasons why people commit suicide?

3

How is committing suicide a trap from Satan?

4

What should we do if we have suicidal thoughts?

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



Part A: "Casting All Your Cares Upon Him, For He Cares For You" (1 Pet 5: 7)

In the Bible study section we looked into different biblical characters who asked for death. Many of their reasons were similar: hopelessness, feeling unloved, weariness, Satan's deception, being over-burdened. Satan's trap is to deceive people into thinking that there is no hope, that no one loves them. This results in people becoming withdrawn and feeling hopeless. But the Lord promised us that He will constantly take care of us as long as we look to Him for help.

Here are the lyrics to a much-loved hymn entitled "God Will Make a Way":

Teaching Tips

If you have a copy of this song, play it to your students while they read the lyrics. It is more effective that way, as they will feel the power of the words and the emotions behind them.

"God will make a way where there seems to be no way,
He works in ways we cannot see,
He will make a way for me,
He will be my guide, hold me closely to His side,

With love and strength for each new day,
He will make a way, He will make a way.”

Think about the lyrics. Have there been times in your life where you felt there was no way out? How did you manage to cope with the demands of school, family and church? How has the Lord provided a way for you? Share your thoughts with the class. Please also share some Bible verses which helped you in your darkest moments and that you think would help others too. (The following are some verses, but students can come up with their own.)

- a. “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.” (Jn 14:18)
- b. “Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.” (Is 41:10)
- c. “My soul melts from heaviness; Strengthen me according to Your word.” (Ps 119:28)
- d. “I will lift up my eyes to the hills—From whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber...The Lord is your keeper; The Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, Nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore.” (Ps 121:1–8)

Part B: Case Studies

Below are some real life stories of young Christians who have contemplated suicide. Read them and discuss them with the rest of the class. Try to identify the reasons why the person wants to attempt suicide, and think of ways you could encourage him or her.

Case 1: I feel like God has abandoned me and I don't know why!

I believe in God. Yes, I pray and I ask for His guidance. I remember that not long after my conversion, I truly felt God's presence in my life. I felt He was guiding my every step and answered all my questions. But now, I feel that God doesn't seem to be listening to me anymore. My questions are unanswered. I pray to Him, to ask Him to help me, but I feel He has abandoned me. I haven't committed any great sin or anything. Just perhaps the usual ... a white lie here and there. Nothing mortal though. So why do I feel God is not with me? Why do I feel all alone? I just want to quit this world now.

Case 2: I am a Christian, but suicidal too

Where is God? I feel really down. Things aren't going great at home. Since dad passed away, mom's been shutting herself indoors all the time. She doesn't communicate much with us. I miss dad! There's no one really to talk to here. I don't seem to have the energy or the stamina to do anything anymore. Even attending R.E. classes has become a struggle for me. I know my teachers care, but I just don't want to face people. I'd rather stay in and be on my own. I don't even feel like going out with my friends anymore. I just feel there's no meaning to anything. Sometimes I just want to ask God to take away my life so I can be with dad. I really miss him!

Case 3: I can't bear it anymore!

Everything seems to be going wrong. I studied hard to go to college, yet did not get the grades I needed. At church everyone is giving me all the church work to do—teach choir, lead Bible studies, play the piano, teach R.E. I feel overburdened and overwhelmed. Why doesn't someone help me? At home, family life seems unbearable. My sister doesn't come to church anymore. She's hanging out with a bad crowd. Nothing I say or do seems to change her. Mom is worried and dad's no help either. I feel no joy at school, church or home. Where is God? Where is the joy I'm supposed to feel as a Christian? Wouldn't it be better to leave all this behind and go to heaven? Why all this suffering? It's just not worth it!

Case 4: Help!

I started getting involved with a bad crowd a few months back. I experimented with many things. Yes, even alcohol and drugs. I was lucky to be able to get out of it though. No, it wasn't luck. It was definitely God's guidance and I am really thankful to Him for that. But I still feel so sinful. I feel so unworthy to be called His child anymore. I don't know. The sins I committed in the past—I just don't think God would forgive me. I'm so unworthy to be His child. There's just no hope anymore.

Part C: Look to the Cross!

Teaching Tips

You need to have internet access to be able to view this flash. It is a very moving flash which shows the Lord Jesus giving the little boy a cross to hold until He comes back. You are advised to view it first before you allow your students to view it. If you are unable to have access to this, you can tell the students the story and tell them to view it for themselves at home. It is preferable, however, that you view it as a class and then discuss it as it is very powerful!

<http://www.donghaeng.net/english/duty.htm>

This is a story of how the Lord Jesus gives the little boy a cross to hold until He comes back again. The boy agrees and holds this cross. He waits and waits, but the Lord Jesus still hasn't returned. The boy begins to get very tired and weary. It begins to rain, then storms come and the rain becomes heavier. The boy becomes weak and is unable to bear this cross anymore. Eventually the cross becomes too heavy. The environment seems to be against him too. He falls down and gives up. But then, at that moment, he remembers the promise that he had made to Lord Jesus: he will carry the cross for Him until the Lord returns. On remembering this, the boy gets up and picks up the cross again. No matter how hard it is he continues to hold the cross because the Lord promised He would return. In the end, the Lord comes back and the boy is rewarded. The boy is extremely joyful and he forgets all the pain he endured. The storms and the rain cease and in their place is sunshine!

After you have viewed this flash with your students, discuss it with them.
(<http://www.donghaeng.net/english/duty.htm>)

Questions to think about:

1. Why do you think this boy was able to hold the cross for so long?
2. What do you think were the reasons behind his fall? Why was he unable to bear the cross anymore? What parallels can you draw between his reasons and your own reasons?
3. In the end, what helped him get back on his feet and bear the cross again? How can this help you?

R E F L E C T I O N & P R A Y E R



Sing hymn 523: What a Day That Will Be.

This is a hymn of hope and encouragement. It provides us with great joy and hope for the future. Nothing is as bleak as it seems, for "the Lord will wipe all tears from their eyes" (Rev 21:4). In times of desperation, in times of hopelessness, in times of distress, in times of need, we need to turn to the Lord. Only He can provide us with the strength we need to carry on. Only He can save us, comfort us, and give us peace and hope. In the end, the storms and rain will pass. In its place will be beautiful sunshine!