

SUICIDE AND EUTHANASIA

When I was in Grade 8 I had a friend who's older brother killed himself. One night when his parents were not home he went out in to the garage and turned on the car engine and sat in the front seat of the car with the windows down until he died of Carbon Monoxide poisoning. I remember when I heard about it I said to the person who told me that it was a tragic accident, didn't his brother know that Carbon Monoxide was dangerous. The person who told me about it answered "yes, that is why he did it! He killed himself intentionally." I remember sitting there thinking to myself, "well, that makes no sense. Why would someone want to do something like that?"

Today we are concluding our series Choose Life. God has created you for a purpose, and you can use or refuse that purpose. Today I want to speak about suicide and euthanasia.

Job 3:1-7 After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. 2 He said: 3 May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, 'A boy is born!' 4 That day -- may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no light shine upon it. 5 May darkness and deep shadow claim it once more; may a cloud settle over it; may blackness overwhelm its light. 6 That night -- may thick darkness seize it; may it not be included among the days of the year nor be entered in any of the months. 7 May that night be barren; may no shout of joy be heard in it... 11 Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?

Have you ever felt like that? You are in such despair, you are so depressed that you wish you had never been born?

1. What is Suicide?

We see suicide in many pages of the bible. Samson had been betrayed, captured and blinded by the Philistines. He was a prisoner with no hope of ever being set free. He saw his death as being a way to escape and to punish his enemies.

Judges 16:29-30 Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, 30 Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived.

Saul was in an intense battle with the Philistines and had been wounded by an arrow. His son Jonathan was dead. There seemed like there was no way out, so he killed himself.

1 Chronicles 10:4-5 Saul said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and abuse me." But his armor-bearer was terrified and would not do it; so Saul took his own sword and fell on it. 5 When the armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and died.

Ahithophel (*Akheethophel*) was an advisor to King David. He was known his wisdom. When Absalom lead a revolt against his father David he turned to Ahithophel for advice as to what to do. Ahithophel gave him sound advice. If he had followed it, David could have been killed. However, God frustrated the mind of Absalom so that he went with a different plan. Ahithophel had betrayed David, and his betrayal was clear to everyone. Ahithophel knew that one day he would have to pay for what he had done, there was no way out for him. No hope.

2 Samuel 17:23 When Ahithophel saw that his advice had not been followed, he saddled his donkey and set out for his house in his hometown. He put his house in order and then hanged himself. So he died and was buried in his father's tomb.

One of the evil kings of Israel was Zimri. He was an official who murdered King Elah, son of Baasha. He went on to kill the king's whole family. When the truth of what he had done came out his army turned against him. He killed himself because there was no way out.

1 Kings 16:16-18 When the Israelites in the camp heard that Zimri had plotted against the king and murdered him, they proclaimed Omri, the commander of the army, king over Israel that very day there in the camp. 17 Then Omri and all the Israelites with him withdrew from Gibbethon and laid siege to Tirzah. 18 When Zimri saw that the city was taken, he went into the citadel of the royal palace and set the palace on fire around him. So he died,

In the New Testament we remember the story of Judas. He betrayed Jesus for 30 silver coins. When he realized what he had done, he believed that there was no way of redemption. He felt that there was no way he could make for what he had done, so he killed himself.

Matthew 27:3-5 When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. 4 I have sinned, he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility." 5 So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

In each one of these instances there is one thing in common, a sense of hopelessness. There is a sense that the person is in a hopeless situation, so the person kills themselves thinking that the pain of death is easier to deal with than the pain of going on living.

Along with hopelessness, suicide is often the result of long term depression or other mental illness. It is a result of faulty thinking. Every suicide is an attempt to say, "I NEED HELP." They say things like, "nobody cares about me," "I wish I were dead," "this world would be better off without me." It is faulty reasoning that makes us think like that. There are times in life when it seems like the weight of the world is on your shoulders. You are hurting, you are lonely, you face constant pressure. You just want the pain to go away. At times this the devil can also attack. He tells you to end your life. Only then will you stop hurting.

Suicide has been said to be a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

In 2009 there were 3,890 suicides in Canada. When you think of suicide what comes to your mind? Let's look at the numbers. The suicide rate is at least 3 times higher for males than for females, in every age brackets. The highest suicide rates were for those between 40 and 59 years old. The rate for both men and women was higher for single, divorced or widowed people than for married people. Certainly loneliness is a huge contributing factor in suicide.

2. Why is it Wrong?

Suicide is wrong because it goes against God's plan for our lives. You know what happens when people commit suicide? They are playing God. They are trying to take God's role, and take their life into their own hands. It is faithlessness.

1 Samuel 2:6 The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up.

Suicide is a sin. One question that often comes up when you talk about suicide is this: if someone kills them self, do they go to heaven or hell? That question depends on the person's salvation. If someone is a Christian, and they commit suicide, do they still go to heaven?

The idea that suicide removes your salvation come from the Catholic church. For many years, the conventional thought of many in the Catholic church was that suicide is an unforgivable sin. Augustine argued in the fifth century that suicide was a violation of the sixth commandment, "You shall not murder." Later, Thomas Aquinas, being catholic and believing that confession of sin must be made prior to departure from one world to the next, taught that suicide was the most fatal of all sins because the victim could not repent of it. If a person kills himself or herself they are committing a sinful act of which they are unable to confess and ask forgiveness for.

This is not the biblical view. When a Christian accepts Jesus as their savior, God's grace covers all their sins - past, present, and future. Those suicide victims who are children of God are redeemed souls in the eyes of God. You may be thinking, "but what about the unforgivable sin?"

Matthew 12:31-32 And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. 32 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Jesus promises to forgive every sin of man if they'll accept him, but the only sin that won't be forgiven is blasphemy against the Spirit. What does that mean? To blaspheme against the Spirit means to reject the Holy Spirit's calling to salvation. It is to resist the leading of the Holy Spirit to receiving God's gift of eternal life. You hear the Gospel and you feel you should respond. You feel lead to accept Jesus, but you resist that leading. The next time you hear the Gospel, that leading is diminished, it is less than it was before because you have hardened your heart to the Holy Spirit. The next time is even less, until finally you are unable to feel God's leading at all. At that point you are lost because you have severed the only means by which God has to draw you to salvation.

Is suicide blasphemy against the Spirit? Absolutely not. It is a sin, but it is not an unforgivable sin. On the cross, Jesus bore all our sin. All of it.

Lewis Smedes, professor of theology and ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary summarizes his thoughts on the Church's response to suicide in this way, "I believe that, as Christians, we should worry less about whether Christians who have killed themselves go to heaven, and worry more about how we can help people like them find hope and joy in living. Our most urgent problem is not the morality of suicide but the spiritual and mental despair that drags people down to it. Loved ones who have died at their own hands we can safely trust to our gracious God. Loved ones whose spirits are even now slipping so silently toward death, these are our burden."

Suicide is an act of selfishness. Again, it is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. Even though life's problems have got you down on life, God has created you and you are alive for His purposes!

John 16:33 says, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Jesus himself admits life isn't going to be easy, but he also lets us know that He has overcome the world, and that he's there so that we can turn to him. In this world we will have trouble. Life is not fair. People will kick you when you are down. There will be times the road is long and you battle with despair and depression. You will face rejection. That is just part of life.

It is interesting that the highest suicide rates often come from countries that have the most to be thankful for. The suicide rate for Syria is 2.4 deaths per 100,000. The suicide rate for the USA is 13.7 deaths per 100,000, almost 6 times higher. Why is that? Perhaps it is because people who live in difficult areas of the world know that life is difficult, so they are prepared for it. Often people in from wealthier countries believe that life is easy and you never have any problems so they are unprepared when trials come.

When a person commits suicide, it can be a very selfish, unthinking act. It is often designed only to gratify themselves and cause remorse for those around them. In those circumstances, a person does not consider God or His plan for their life. But there are also other times, when suicide is the result of a mental illness or incapacity of rational thought. Some people who go through the difficulty of bi-polar disorders, or suffer from severe depression can be dangerously susceptible to suicide, especially if they are not receiving medical treatment or counseling.

The bible assures us that in this life we will have troubles, but that God is with us in the trials and that they are temporary.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

There is always hope. There is always light at the end of the tunnel. God has promised us a future, no matter what we find ourselves going through in the present.

3. Where does Euthanasia fit in?

Euthanasia is generally referred to as assisted suicide. It is helping a person who wants to die to kill them self.

First let me clarify what we're talking about here. We are not talking about someone who is on life support, and the decision is made to turn off the machines and let "nature take its course." That is something totally different. Euthanasia, on the other hand, is the intentional killing of someone whose life is deemed not worth living. Another common term used to describe euthanasia is "mercy killing." It is terminating a person's life in the attempt to spare them from pain.

I know that there may be people here that have wrestled with the idea of life support in the past. Often in the course of medical treatment for grave physical crises it is necessary to use artificial means – respirators, ventilators, heart machines – to keep patients alive. Sometimes when persons are placed on life support, the days that follow reveal that the person's condition is irreversible, that the person is brain dead and will not recover. Often family members agonize over the decision to withdraw life support.

Some have erroneously called this decision “passive euthanasia.” However, this is not the case. The decision to withdraw life support in individuals who are dying and who can no longer sustain their own life apart from artificial means is not a form of euthanasia. The key distinction is the difference between acts of omission and commission. Withdrawing life support is simply allowing a terminal disease or condition to run its course. In suicide and euthanasia it is an act – the willful termination of a life either by injection or gun or pills, that takes the life of the individual.

In euthanasia, you are trying to rush the natural process in an attempt to save the patient from suffering. On the surface that seems to be a very compassionate thing to do. The problem again is that it is a short cut. It is playing god with a person’s life. The reality is that none of us knows the days that God has ordained for us. To cut short even one day is to miss God’s plan.

I do not want to minimize the suffering that people often go through when they are dying. Death is an ugly, miserable thing sometimes. For many it is a long painful road. My father died of liver cancer which was a result of prostate cancer years before. It was a slow and painful death. At the end I am sure he just wanted to get through the pain and go home. He could have avoided it by simply giving up months before he did.

Naomi and I were already living in Kuwait at the time. I called home to his hospital room. I did not know that he had basically slipped away at that point and was unconscious. Yet, when the phone rang he sat up and picked up the phone and spoke with me. We had a good talk. Then we hung up. A few days later he was gone.

I have heard so many stories of how Christians who were terminally ill were used by God during their final days on earth to make a difference and to be a witness to the people around them. Because they persevered to the end God used their testimony.

Euthanasia became legal in Canada in June 2016. I think this decision was a huge mistake. I think that it is yet another decision that erodes the sanctity of life as God intended it.

We have been given assurances by everyone pushing euthanasia that there will be many safeguards, and that it is only for those in great pain with no chance of recovery. I recently read an article recently from England that I think is very relevant to Canada. I quote from the article “When abortion was legalized in Britain in 1967 we were assured of the safeguards. Abortions would be carried out, we were told, only if the continuation of the pregnancy involved risk to the life of the mother. Thirty five years on and millions of abortions later, what do those safeguards count for now? How the reformers scoffed when they were warned that the 1967 abortion act was just the thin edge of the wedge. And how they scoff now when they are warned that the legalization of euthanasia will be the beginning of the end of all respect for the lives of the old and the ill. In the Netherlands, Euthanasia was legalized back in 2002. That decision fundamentally changed the relationship between doctors and patient. More than 10,000 people have started carrying documents begging doctors not to kill them if they fall ill. The fear expressed by American lawyer Alexander Capron, has become real for the people of Holland: “I never want to have to wonder whether the Doctor coming into my hospital room is wearing the white coat of the healer or the black hood of the executioner”.

This past April, Dutch authorities were investigating cases in which doctors had killed 5 people suffering from Alzheimer’s. In one case the doctor drugged the patient’s coffee without them knowing. They still had to physically hold the woman down while she was given a lethal injection.

Dr. Leo Alexander was a medical consultant in the Nuremberg Trials after the second world war. He had access to accused Nazi war criminals in the medical community. He wrote in the New England Journal of Medicine, arguing that compassionate killing of the terminally ill in Germany in the 1930s set the stage for the Holocaust:

“Whatever proportions these crimes finally assumed, it became evident to all who investigated them that they had started from small beginnings. The beginnings at first were merely a subtle shift in emphasis in the basic attitude of the physicians. It started with the acceptance of the attitude... that there is such a thing as life not worthy to be lived. This attitude in its early stages concerned itself merely with the severely and chronically sick. Gradually the sphere of those to be included in this category was enlarged to encompass the socially unproductive, the ideologically unwanted, the racially unwanted, and finally all non-Germans.”

When you start taking short cuts with life, where does it end? As believers in Jesus Christ we believe that all people are created in the image of God and therefore have value and dignity. We believe that God has a plan for every person, and the purpose of life is to discover that plan and to live your life according to it. Any attempt to bypass God’s plan or make short cuts to it is wrong. Whether it is through abortion which ends the life, or transgender which rejects life, or suicide or euthanasia which takes life, God has numbered our days.

Psalms 139:16 your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

Ephesians 1:4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will

God has a plan for your life. It is a good plan. There will be hills and there will be valleys. I just want to encourage you today, don’t stop running until the race is over.

I have faced many struggles and challenges in my life, difficult and devastating events but I have never felt the depth of despair that can drive one to consider suicide. Nor have I ever had to face serious illness, lifelong debilitating pain or inability to care for myself. My heart goes out to all who have ever considered suicide, who have ever had to face the thought of removing life support from someone. My heart breaks for those who look at euthanasia as a way out of being a burden to their family, who feel that their life is no longer worth living. As a church we need to show tremendous compassion and concern for those in these crisis situations. We need to be there for them, love them, hold on to them and help them get professional help if need be.