

# Grieving a Suicide

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Help for the Aftershock

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Someone you know has committed suicide. You are facing a very hard, dark reality. You feel rocked, hurt, betrayed, and confused. You are experiencing a whole range of emotions and reactions. Each one is painful. Your initial reaction was probably shock and disbelief. Now you are trying to make sense of what happened. How do you come to terms with the suicide of someone you know? Can you make any sense out of such a senseless act? Can you find hope in the aftermath of such a desperate choice? How does knowing God make a difference as you grieve?

## **What You Are Facing**

*You are experiencing a storm of emotions and feelings.* First, you are feeling the natural response of deep grief. Someone you know and love has died. So you feel the emptiness and sorrow of loss. That alone is extremely hard. But suicide adds many other painful reactions to the heartache that death brings. The death was self-inflicted. You are probably also experiencing one or more of these emotions:

- *Confusion and disorientation.* What happened is confusing and disorienting. Suicide is never neat and tidy. Most likely you are still struggling to accept the reality of this tragedy.
- *Anger and betrayal.* By definition, suicide cuts other people off. So you may experience feelings of anger and a sense of betrayal.
- *Guilt and responsibility.* It's normal to wonder, *Could I have done something? Or, If only I'd done \_\_\_\_\_.* Or, *Why didn't I notice \_\_\_\_\_?*
- *Fear of doing the same thing.* Someone else's suicide might make you fearful that you could do the same thing. You might be afraid that you also are at risk for suicidal behavior.

*You are facing unanswerable questions.* Everyone who is touched by suicide wrestles with “Why? Why did this happen? Why did it have to come to this? Why couldn't it be stopped?” But no matter what reasons there were for the suicide, in the end, it can never be completely explained. You are left with questions

that can't be answered because the person who committed suicide is gone. (For help in understanding the reasons for suicidal thoughts and actions, see, *I Just Want to Die: Replacing Suicidal Thoughts with Hope*<sup>1</sup>).

## **Facing a Suicide by Faith**

How can you deal with this painful experience? There is no quick and easy solution to what you are facing. And God, in the Bible, doesn't offer you platitudes and pat answers. He gives you something much better—in response to your sorrow, your emotions, and your unanswered questions, he gives you himself.

Edith Schaeffer once used a tapestry metaphor to talk about the difficult things in life. She pointed out that the front of the tapestry was a beautiful pattern, but the back was a mass of knots and tangled threads. Your loved one's suicide is one of the tangled and knotted areas on the back of your tapestry. No matter how long you look at it, you won't be able to make sense out of it. This is one of life's broken, dark experiences in which you must find that the promises and presence

of your God and Savior are real. In the midst of this grave darkness, God calls you to live a life where faith and love still shine.

One day, you will see the front side of the tapestry, instead of just the tangled back. One part of the beauty of the tapestry will be the way you learn to know God and love others by going through difficult experiences. Is that the whole answer to why God let it happen? No. There are things about his will and his purposes that are beyond us. The Bible says, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29).

The reasons for the suicide of the one you love are among “the secret things” that belong to the Lord. But “the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever.” God isn’t only talking about his laws; he’s also talking about his promises, his purposes, his revelation of himself in Jesus and the Word. What has been revealed is given so you can live. What hasn’t been