



CONNIE CAREY

Life lessons & laughter.



For Loved Ones of Suicide: Healing Truths to Know and Live By

If you have lost a loved one to suicide, you feel stunned, confused, hurt and betrayed. As you face unanswerable questions, I'd like to share with you truths that helped me and brought comfort to my soul as I wrestled with and grieved my father's suicide. Through this dark experience I found that the promises and presence of God are real. The anchor holds. When walking through this painful time, I pray that you will find comfort as you soak your mind and heart in the following truths.

1. We don't know why God allowed this, when it was within His power to stop it.

Sometimes God intervenes in a suicide attempt and at other times He doesn't. Although God has all knowledge, there are some things He doesn't tell us.

Deuteronomy 29:29. "The secret things belong to the Lord our God..."

Isaiah 55:8-9. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways."

1 Corinthians 13:12. "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

2. The feeling of massive guilt is common, if not universal, among loved ones of suicide.

Every conversation and act is revisited over and over. If there is something about which you feel guilty, tell the Lord "the whole truth and nothing but the truth" regarding your feelings. Let Him cleanse you. Then know this. The burden of responsibility for this suicide rests solely on the shoulders of the one who chose it. We don't make anyone die by suicide. Do not take on what is not yours to bear.

3. Suicide is not the unpardonable sin.

Whatever momentary weakness or feeling of hopelessness caused your loved one to take his life is a mystery. But the final act of suicide is just as forgiven as the final act of murder, theft, gossip or any other sin.

The Bible tells us that our destiny is determined not by our works, but by our trust in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2: 8,9)

Sometimes we hear the claim that since a person didn't have time to repent of his sins, he must be in hell.

For example, suppose I have an awful argument with my husband in which I am completely in the wrong, then in anger and pride, spew vicious words, slam the door on the way out, jump into my car, run a red light, get hit by a truck and die instantly. I did not have time to repent, nor was I in any mood to repent! Would I go to heaven?

The biblical answer is "Yes". The sacrifice of Jesus Christ earned for me the righteousness of Christ by faith alone when I trusted Him as my Lord and Savior. To make the last act of a person's life so supremely important is to misunderstand the incredible grace of our Lord.

If you don't know for sure that your loved one had trusted Christ, entrust him to God. The Bible offers hope even for the person who has been away from God all his life. (I'm not referring to the false hope that all who die regardless of faith will go to heaven. We take Jesus seriously when He says that there is a heaven and a hell, and all of us will someday see one or the other.) Luke records the story of the thief on the cross who called to Jesus for mercy: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:42-43). Jesus says that a heart change at the last moment is sufficient. Those who call upon the Lord will be saved.

Who is to say whether or not someone in his final moments did business with God and made things right? We must be willing to live with mystery.

4. Grieve.

Weep until you cannot weep anymore. A few months later, when your weeping subsides, you may realize that you are very angry. This is good and natural and is evidence that you are beginning to come out of your deepest grief. And you have a right to be angry. Work out your anger in ways that are not hurtful to yourself or others. (Punch a pillow, go for a run, swim laps, etc.)

5. Write a letter to your loved one.

One of the most insidious aspects of suicide is that there is no closure, no opportunity to say goodbye or to resolve conflicts that may have contributed to the event. In writing a letter to your loved one, say all the things you wanted to say but didn't. List any regrets, express your outrage toward the person, recount the ways that his or her decision has affected you and other family members, tell him what you wish he had done instead, write about your feelings concerning your loved one and the choice he made. Say it all. Then speak of your love for him and the things you miss about him. Finally, by God's grace, forgive him. Entrust him to God as you tell him goodbye.

6. Avoid revisiting the final moment. To dwell more on the final moment than your loved one's whole life is a dishonor to him. Your cherished memories of tender, proud and hilarious moments are just as important as his final moment. This will require discipline of the mind, especially if you are the one who discovered the body. Having discovered my father's body, I was particularly troubled and haunted by the visual scene. A counselor friend shared this very simple, yet helpful technique for dealing with the troubling thought:

- If you are in a place where you can do this without people looking at you like you've lost your mind, say out loud, "STOP!" This will jolt the brain and actually interrupt the thought. (I don't recommend it during church or at the movies!) If you are in a public place and cannot say it out loud, then say it very strongly in your mind.
- Be ready with a true, wonderful and comforting thought to replace the former thought. The thought with which I comfort myself is the knowledge that my dad was a believer in Christ. I picture my father, not in the confused, tormented state he was in just before he died, but as the whole, healthy father he is now. In my mind's eye I see him waiting expectantly for me at the Eastern Gate, with a big smile and maybe even a bouquet of flowers in hand! Not stooped, as the years of pain and sorrow had made him, but standing tall. He will scoop me into his arms and we'll cry tears of joy, because somehow our great God will have made everything right. I'll say, "You old rascal...what were you *thinking?*" He'll say something like, "Not the smartest thing I ever did." We'll laugh, because that is how right God will make the wrongs of this crazy, fallen world. And we'll pick right up where we left off, only without tears.

If you don't know for certain that your loved one was a believer, rejoice in the fact that suicide does not mean that hell is the default destination. Rejoice that God knew your loved one and every circumstance better than you and He is perfect in justice, kindness and mercy. He does all things right.

7. Eventually, comfort others with the comfort God has given you.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” (2 Corinthians 1: 3,4)

God is going to bring you through this. And He's going to give you incredible truths, forged within your fire. When He does that, bring comfort to others with what He's done for you.

Through music, life lessons and laughter, Connie Carey's messages remind us that our great God is with us, always weaving a beautiful tapestry behind the scenes of our lives. We can trust Him, even when it's darkest. For more info, visit www.conniecarey.com.