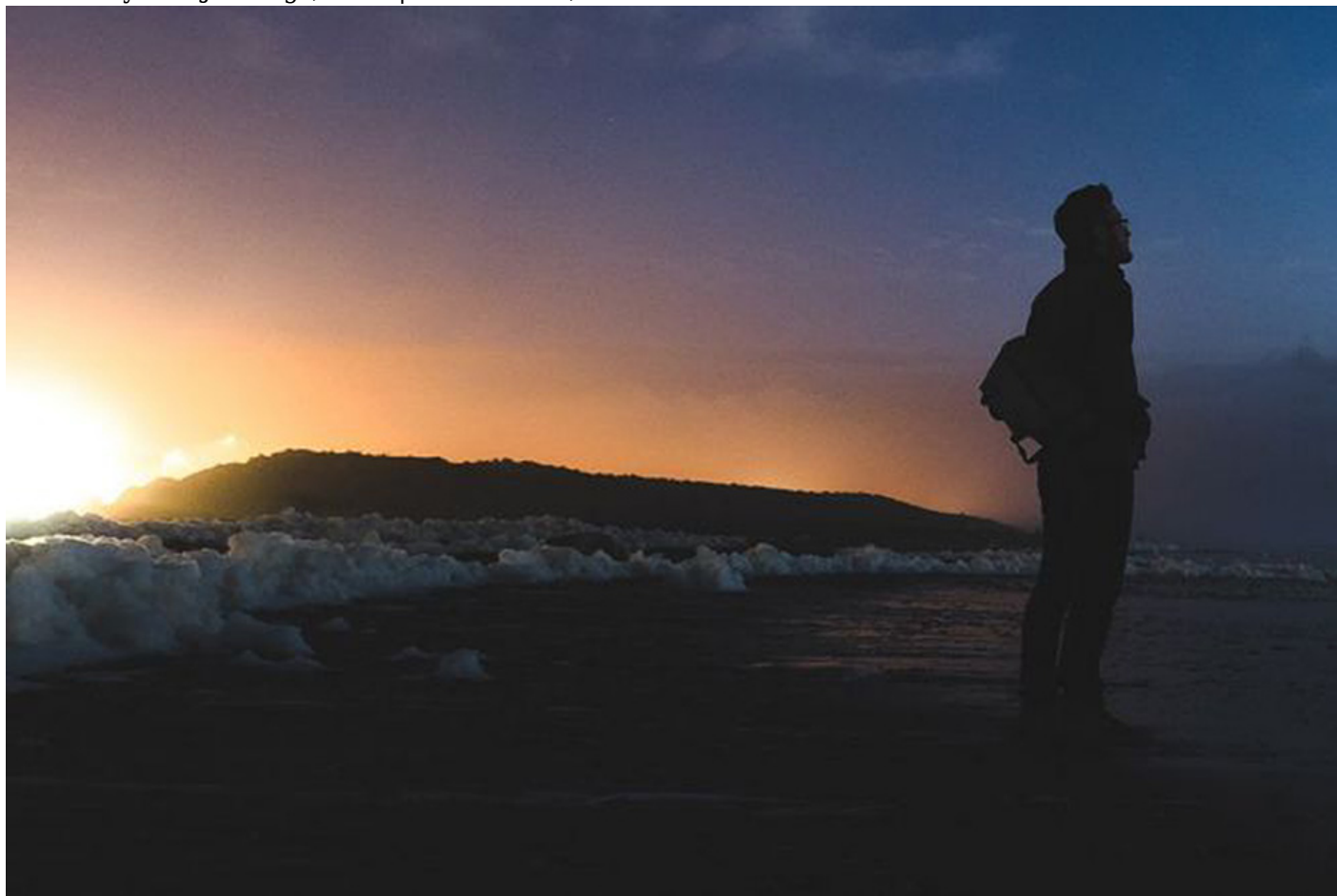


# Suicide and the Myth of Lost Salvation

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | December 3, 2017



According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 13 out of every 100,000 people will die by suicide. Most people have been impacted by this tragedy in one way or another, including me. Several years ago, after the death of his wife of fifty years, my great uncle ended his own life; he was simply unable to cope with the heartache, pain, and loneliness.

As a psychiatrist, I know all too well how the severely depressed can be overwhelmed by thoughts of suicide. I also know that in the aftermath of a suicide, those who loved the victims struggle with their own faith and worry that they will not see their loved ones in heaven.

This subject recently roared back into my mind when I received an email from a concerned parent who listens to our program online. He wrote to tell me that his daughter attends a Christian high school where another student had committed suicide. I can't imagine the heartache that young man's family is now going through, and my prayers and thoughts go out to them.

However, adding to this heartache, the daughter of our listener—along with other students and even some of the faculty—was struggling because she'd been told that the young man had committed an act of sin in the taking of his own life. He was even compared to Judas, and the students were told that because he, like Judas, committed suicide, he would be eternally lost.

I don't condemn those who said these things, but it's important to set the record straight about this unfortunate falsehood—a lie that misrepresents a loving God, one that likely injured vulnerable young people who are searching for meaningful answers in their grief. Because I fear such a misrepresentation will turn some of these students away from God, I believe it's vital to address this subject.

### **The Real Reason Judas Was Lost**

Judas is not eternally lost because he committed suicide; he is eternally lost because he rejected Jesus. Without Jesus, he became overwhelmed by guilt and committed suicide to escape this unbearable burden. Judas is *not* an example of what happens to those who commit suicide—he is an example of what happens to those who reject Jesus.

If we use the logic of those who hold Judas up as evidence that those who commit suicide are lost, we must then conclude, that, if like Samson, a person commits mass murder while committing suicide—they will be saved. After all, Sampson was reconciled to God and received supernatural strength to end his own life and the thousands in the temple with him. It's clear that suicide bombers today don't go to heaven because they killed others while killing themselves, even in the name of religion.

Death by suicide does not determine one's eternal destiny. Why? Because suicide is almost always a *symptom* of an illness, a problem, or overwhelming distress—and not an act of sin, not a willful rebellion against God. Instead, suicide almost always happens when a person is in some type of horrible pain in which they lose all hope of escape. In that mindset, suicide becomes their only perceived avenue of escape from the pain. We help those who are struggling with thoughts of suicide by offering hope—the hope of escape from their pain. We help identify the source of the pain and provide real interventions that restore them to wellness. Sadly, though, not everyone realizes these other options of escape are available—and some, like my great uncle, succumb to suicide.

Many factors contribute to people finding themselves at increased risk of suicide—some of which the individual has no control over. Age, race, birth month, socioeconomic status, marital status, relationship stress, mental illness, physical illness, genetic vulnerabilities, geographic location, lack of sunshine, pollution, infections, trauma, and intoxicating substances—these are all factors that contribute to increased risk for suicide.

In our human experience, almost everyone has times of pain, heartache, discouragement, and hopelessness in which the idea that death might be better than life occurs. Even great heroes of God—remember Elijah?—can struggle with such discouragement. Yet we must remember that with God there is always hope, a hope based on a real God with real resources to heal and restore!

### **The Source of the Lie**

From where does this idea that suicide is an act of sin that results in eternal loss come? It comes from accepting the lie that God's law functions like human law—a system of rules with no consequence other than the ruling authority keeps track of what laws were broken and then punishes lawbreakers. For those who believe this way about God's law, sin becomes all about behavior—the acts and deeds. The wrong deed or act, in this way of thinking, requires the direct infliction of punishment. Such thinking promotes this idea that God, rather than being merciful to the teen who lost the struggle against depression, hopelessness, and pain, will then inflict further torture and pain upon him as punishment for having committed suicide.

When we return to the truths that God is our Creator and His laws are the protocols upon which life and health are constructed to operate, we realize that deviations from His designs result in pain, suffering, and death. We understand that all nature groans under the weight of sin (Romans 8:22). This means our physical condition can groan under the weight of mental illness, which can express itself as a variety of symptoms—including suicide. We realize that suicide is a symptom of other issues and not an act of deliberate rebelliousness and sin.

We can also know that God is constantly working to heal and restore His children.

So the questions we need to ask are: What is the condition of the heart of those who are suffering suicidal thoughts? Are these people like Elijah, a champion of God, whose heart was right with God, yet who suffered emotional discouragement, depression, and suicidal thinking? Or are their hearts like Judas, consumed with selfishness and who reject Jesus?

Suicide is a tragedy; it is never the best answer to a problem. In my practice, I often treat suicidal patients. My goal is to help them realize that what they almost always truly want is to escape their pain and not to die. Then I offer them other avenues of escape. And when they experience resolution of their pain, the suicidal thoughts resolve.

For those who have found themselves trapped in some situation, spiraling down into a pit of despair and who were unable to see other options of escape, and have died by suicide—what then? We must realize that such an act does not mean eternal loss. In these situations, we need to offer hope to those suffering from such loss; we must promote the truth about our God of love, and realize, that like Sampson, it isn't how one ends their life on earth that determines their eternal destiny—it is whether or not they loved Jesus that determines their eternal destiny.

*If you or someone you know is suffering from suicidal thoughts, please call the national suicide prevention hotline at 1-800-273-8255.*