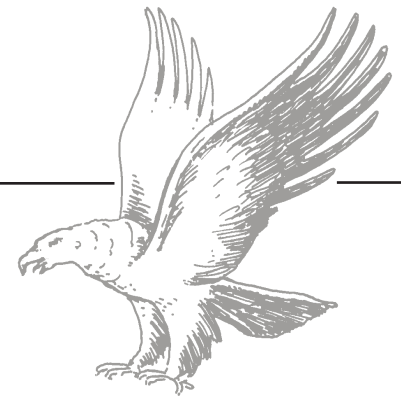


Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



April 2, 2017

The Bible and Suicide

The Bible does not directly address the subject of suicide, but it does reveal some clues that help us understand the chief problem that underlies the desire to take one's own life.

“My soul chooses strangling and death rather than my body. I loathe my life . . .” (Job 7:15-16).



According to a recent news report, the suicide rate among Americans has risen sharply over the past thirty years, especially among women and middle-aged people (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/22/health/us-suicide-rate-surges-to-a-30-year-high>). Why do people choose to end their own life? And what does the Bible say about this?

Some insist that all suicide is a sin that condemns its victim to hell. Others argue that suicide is a perfectly rational life choice, and even advocate for physician-assisted suicide to make it a less traumatic experience.

There are three considerations we need to take into account when discussing suicide.

First, how do we define it? Sometimes people sacrifice themselves to save others. Think of the soldier who throws himself on a grenade to protect his buddies, or the man who gives up his seat in a lifeboat to allow a woman to

survive. These people make a deliberate decision to end their lives, but it is for a higher purpose than themselves. The death of Samson falls in this category. He died in the destruction of the Philistine temple, but it was an act of war to deliver his people from affliction.

Second, what is the mental state of the victim? Some people are so overwhelmed by physical or mental disabilities that they cannot think rationally about what they are doing. It's not our place to judge someone who, for example, is coping with a horrible disease that has clouded their ability to reason.

In the remaining cases of suicide, we're dealing with people who have simply given up hope. They see no value in their life, and view suicide as the only way out of their miserable existence.

We see this in several Bible characters who committed suicide. King Saul fell on his sword in a disastrous battle. Ahithophel, David's traitorous advisor, hanged himself. Zimri, an Israelite king, immolated himself in a civil war he was destined to lose. Judas hanged himself after betraying Jesus. The details were

different, but the common thread that links all these stories is *a life that was motivated entirely by selfish interests*. God played little or no role in their decision making. Their suicide was simply the final act of self-centeredness in a life devoid of divine guidance.

It should not surprise us, therefore, to witness a rising suicide rate among Americans that tracks closely with a growing tide of secularism in the population. As people cast God out of their lives, they must fall back on their own resources to deal with the hard edges of life. But we were not designed to function as autonomous creatures. We *need* God in our lives, and when we shut Him out and the walls begin to fall in, it's easy to convince ourselves that we no longer have a reason for living.

In the midst of his deep pain, Job despaired of life, preferring death over his current condition. Yet he refused to act on that impulse. Life was God's prerogative, not his own, and he chose to leave that decision with God. Life can be hard, but if we trust in God, we can find strength to endure.

– David King