

Behind the Mask

Self-Harm & Suicide

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Week 4

John 10:10, 8:44, 1 Cor. 6:19-20, Gal. 6:2, Psalm 34:18
and 56:8, Hebrews 6:19

Welcome to week four of our series, “Behind the Mask”. We’re dealing with some pretty sensitive issues that we don’t like to talk about, and we don’t like to bring out in the open. We’re talking about what’s going on behind the mask. The part of our lives we don’t like to deal with, or we don’t know how to deal with: mental health: anxiety, worry, stress, depression, and in this message: **self-harm, suicide**.

1. In what ways has deep despair or suicide affected your life or someone you care about?

The statistics are pretty alarming of those who have a family member or friend who has committed suicide, those who have attempted suicide, and those who have practiced, or practice, self-harm.

- Self-harm is when a person deliberately inflicts injury to themselves, without intent to die. Probably the most common form of self-harm involves cutting. But it could be burning yourself, pulling your hair, hitting yourself for throwing yourself against the wall or picking a wound to either prevent it from healing. 1 in 6 of us will self-harm in our lifetime (17%) and the average age we begin is 13.
- Suicide is when there is self-injury with the intent to die. Right now, we are experiencing the highest rate of suicide in history. More than any other time or circumstance. 1 in 10 of all of us have at least thought about it. CDC reported that since Covid, 1 of every 4 under the age of 30 have considered suicide. Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for 10–24-year-olds. In America, you are twice as likely to die by suicide than homicide.

Some people may self-harm as a punishment for something they’ve done. Others may injure themselves to make their invisible and unexplainable pain visible. And others even admit to self-harm in order to stop suicidal thoughts. The majority of people who have a suicidal ideation most often struggle with overwhelming negative emotions and problems that seem unsolvable. There’s likely a significant mental health disorder, which is usually major depression. And when in pain or severely depressed or dealing with one blow after another with no end in sight, we sometimes just want it to end.

2. When pain feels unrelenting, what thoughts can start to take hold in a person’s mind?

When it comes to our thoughts associated with self-harm and suicide, more often than not, they are the result of lies we have told ourselves. Lies we have believed and lies we have lived. And those lies are destructive.

Jesus said that he has an agenda for your life-- *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.* (John 10:10, ESV)

On the other hand, Satan (who is the father or the originator or the source of all lies), wants to destroy, annihilate, twist, distort, stop and destroy anything of God--includes you. He knows that the life God has for us and the life God wants with us is better than anything else we can imagine. He does not want that for you. So, he will steal it from you, kill it and even destroy you. And if he can get you to do those things against yourself, all the better.

In John 8 Jesus said, *He (Satan) was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.* (John 8:44a, ESV)

Go all the way back to the first pages of the Scripture with Adam and Eve who enjoyed an amazing relationship with God. And his one instruction, "Everything is yours just don't eat of that tree. That's where death comes from." And Satan dangled doubt in their mind: "Did God really say that? Yeah, that's not true". And they believed the lie over the truth of God. Literally bit the lie and sin entered their lives and the world. And it brought death. His entire existence is to bring death, and he accomplishes that through lies.

3. When pain is deep, lies can start to feel true. Like, "they'll be better off without me OR I wouldn't be missed OR it's just not worth it." Have you ever found yourself wrestling with thoughts like these?

Jesus calling us, inviting us, laying before us a better way to live. An abundant life. A full life. Which is life better than anything we can imagine. And it's found in Jesus. And with Jesus. Suicide highjacks the full and abundant life that God wants for us.

Now, here is a question that gets often asked in regard to suicide-- "Is suicide a sin?"

One of the original 10 Commandments is, "Do not murder." And it's based on the value that God cherished all life. Suicide is self-murder; it prematurely ends a life. And it replaces Thy Will with My Will.

And if you are a follower of Jesus, a Christian, who has submitted to his leadership, your life belongs to God. The apostle Paul: *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, ESV). Your life has been paid for by Jesus. Your very life belongs to him.

The question behind the question is usually: "Is suicide an unforgivable sin?" That idea has been used a lot to instill fear in someone as a way to prevent them from taking their life. And it likely grew out of a teaching that says you have to confess your sins before you die, or you carry them with you. And obviously, once you take your own life, repentance becomes impossible. You don't get that opportunity.

Not to minimize the seriousness of suicide, but would you agree that all of us are going to die with sins we've never acknowledged and confessed? Our salvation does not hang on the last thing we did, but on what Jesus did when he hung on the cross. It is never God's will to take a life, but it's always God's will to forgive. A majority

of suicide originates from desperation. In other words, many are not ending their life as much as they are ending their pain.

4. How does remembering that our hope is rooted in the grace of God through Christ, shape the way you think about people who are struggling deeply?

King David wrote: *You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.* (Psalm 56:8, NLT)

God is more likely to keep track of our tears than to keep track of our sins. So, while suicide is a serious sin, it's not unforgivable. Nothing we do, even if it's the last thing we do, can undo what Jesus has done.

So, this is real, and this is urgent, and it requires us to act to prevent the next person from taking their life.

There are three groups of people we need to keep in mind:

- **First Group:** You know someone who is thinking about hurting themselves. You've observed something. Or maybe they've actually told you something.

One of the things the church was intended for: *Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ* (Galatians 6:2, ESV). What people are dealing with is an extremely serious and heavy weight and we could be the person that God uses at just the right time to help carry it. This can happen by acknowledging it out of love and concern and grace, not shutting someone down or judging or offering a quick fix. And if you think that by acknowledging it, we might actually be planting a thought that doesn't exist, know this: The truth is that talking about it actually lowers the risk of someone hurting themselves. There's no longer quiet desperation, but the chance for healthy and open conversation.

5. Do you know someone that is thinking about hurting themselves?

Resources to Help:

- 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline
- May 19-20. ASIST is a two-day in-person workshop where you'll learn how to recognize when someone may be thinking about suicide, and how to provide a skilled intervention and develop a safety plan with the person to connect them to further support. Register at: e91church.com/mask

- **Second Group:** You have lost a loved one to suicide.

For each completed suicide, an average of 6-10 very closely and intimately connected people are left to pick up the pieces and go on. That's you. You have lost a loved one. You're shattered. You can't articulate the pain. Their burden is now on you. Maybe even have guilt when you have a good day.

King David said: *The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.* (Psalm 34:18, ESV)

Some deaths are tougher to walk through than others. You likely have strong feelings: anger, sadness, confusion.... Tell God about it. Be honest how you feel. Your feelings are legitimate except maybe one - guilt.

Don't make pain worse by owning blame that's not yours. Blame is the weapon of our enemy. It wasn't your fault.

- **Third Group: You have thought or are thinking about hurting yourself**

You have those thoughts, maybe even those plans. And behind the smiles are the whispers, the shouts and the noise from inside. Let's be clear here: You're not a bad person. You're not a bad Christian. It doesn't mean that your faith is weak. You are not your struggle. You are here because God created you. He saw your birth, and it was good. He declares every day of your life as precious. Your life is good even when it doesn't feel good.

If you are self-harming and having thoughts of not wanting to live, please invite someone in. Let someone around you right now help carry the load. Do not leave here without talking to someone. And then seek out some professional, Christian help.

This stuff is so important, and we might possibly prevent the next person from choosing a permanent solution to what could potentially be a temporary problem. Because suicide prematurely ends a life. It robs people of their potential as a creation of God who bear his image. It hijacks the full life that God wants you to experience.

And it is the gospel of Jesus that gives us the Hope we're so desperately looking and longing for. The writer of Hebrews says, *This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls.* (Hebrews 6:19, NLT).

6. What steps will you take to cling to the hope that is in Jesus Christ?

Next Steps:

- Come to our Behind the Mask small group (e91church.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/3405286)
- Check out: e91church.com/mask
- 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline