

# OpenTheo

## How Can I Comfort Christian Families That Have Lost Loved Ones to Suicide?

November 21, 2022



### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Question about how a minister can comfort Christian families that have lost loved ones to suicide, are wrestling with thoughts that the suicide has resulted in a loved one possibly being a lost soul forever, and are close to walking away from God.

\* How can a minister comfort Christian families that have lost loved ones to suicide, are wrestling with thoughts that the suicide has resulted in a loved one possibly being a lost soul forever, and are close to walking away from God?

### Transcript

#STRask How Can I Comfort Christian Families That Have Lost Loved Ones to Suicide? Welcome to Stand to Reason's #STRask podcast. I'm Amy Hall and with me is Greg Koukl and we're here to answer your questions that you send on Twitter with the #STRask or through our website. And that's it, Greg.

Greg Koukl, down to business. Now you all know what this show is about and we can move on to the questions. So Greg, we're going to start with a question from James Kuruga from Kenya.

From Kenya. Wow, good. How Can a Christian Minister Comfort Born Again Christian Families That Have Lost Love Ones to Suicide? And their Christian faith is on a precipice or they want to walk away from God.

Also, they're wrestling with thoughts that the suicide has resulted in a loved one possibly being a lost soul forever. Well, this is a challenging issue. I don't think it's so challenging theologically, but it certainly is challenging relationally.

And this is one reason I'm not a pastor because I'm not so good. These kind of circumstances, my brother was a pastor and he was much better at this. But let's take the two issues in reverse because I think the second is related to the first.

And that is the suicide question. I mean, this comes up with some regularity partly because suicide is such a big concern. That is a lot of young people are committing suicide and they just lose hope and they feel they're better off dead.

And when we have the sessions in reality every year for the last four years or so, we've had workshops on the issue of suicide. John noises handled that. It's so hard for him because so many people pack into his room because they need to hear about this for the kinds of reasons.

You can imagine either they're troubled deeply losing hope or they have friends that have lost hope and have taken their own lives. But one thing that John emphasizes and so do I regarding this issue is that and let me just back up for a moment to answer the question about suicide and salvation in this way. Why is it that Jesus died on a cross? Well, he died on a cross for our sins.

Okay. And what does that mean? How does that how do we benefit from that? Well, we put our confidence or a trust in Jesus and that he paid for us either he pays or we pay if we accept that payment if we believe in Jesus. And there are lots of ways to characterize the simple act of trust in him to rescue us.

If we've done that, then we are rescued. We are saved. But how can we saved be saved when we are sinners? And the way we are saved is that the sin that we commit or will commit has been paid for.

Our sins are paid for, which is why we have now eternal life. We don't get it. We have it now.

It starts right away. And we have the promise of heaven when we die to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, etc, etc. Most people are aware of these verses, but I want I want them to zero in on one concept.

What is it that washes away sin? And you can tell by my metaphor, I'm giving a hint, the thing that washes away sin that tones for sin that makes amends for sins that satisfies God's anger and wrath against us is the blood of Christ. That is the sacrifice or punishment that Jesus took for us. Okay, good.

That's all good solid theology. Almost everyone would agree with that. It is Christ's work on the cross that pays for sins that put another way, cancels out sin.

Well, if Christ's cross cancels out sin, then how can sin cancel out Christ's cross? That's the equation. That's the calculus. And that answers the question about suicide.

If we are if we are actually trusting in Christ, look at it is certainly possible for a Christian to get so down and depressed that they end up losing hope in this life and take their life. They feel they'd be better off dead. And so they take their life.

This isn't Christian thinking. But there's a whole lot of things that Christians think that are not consistent with Christianity. It's because they're fallen.

They live in a fallen world. And all of us can identify with discouragement, disappointment, and even doubt, even though we're regenerate. This happens.

And occasionally it happens to the extent that somebody who is actually regenerate. It comes to the end of the rope and slips off. It takes their life.

Is suicide a sin? Yes. Taking the life of an innocent human being is a sin. It's called murder and suicide is self-murder.

Yes, it's a sin. Is it forgivable? Of course it's forgivable. Every sin is forgivable.

It's more than that. Every sin is forgiven if you're under Christ. And that's what I think parents need to hear.

That every sin is forgiven if you're under Christ. So if you have a loved one who does trust in Christ and is going through a difficult time and slips off the end of the rope, so to speak, that doesn't mean they're going to hell because they've committed this crime for, as it sometimes characterized, you can't repent from killing yourself. So therefore you can't be forgiven.

Well, forgiveness of a sin is not dependent on repentance from that sin. This is a complete misunderstanding people have. And it's not what the Bible teaches anyway.

So you don't have to repent from every sin in order to be forgiven from every sin. How do I know that? Because look at Jesus said the great commandments are love God and love with your whole heart, mind, soul, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. You know how many times we all sin against both of those every single day and the next day and the next day and the next day.

And we don't actively repent. This isn't to encourage unrighteousness. It's just to talk about the nature of the cross and what the cross accomplishes in the life of a believer.

So the suicide is not the unforgivable sin. If you're under Christ, then even when you commit sins as a result of depression or loss of hope that doesn't mean those sins aren't forgiven. By the way, even if a person doesn't take his life, it arguably lots of the anguish or depression spiritually speaking as a result of lack of trust in God.

Is that a sin? Of course it's a sin, you know, but we don't say, oh, you don't trust God because you're depressed. And I'm not saying all depression is like that, but some is. Therefore you're going to hell because that's a sin that the blood of Christ didn't cover.

Now, John Newton had a very close friend that lived with him for a long time. His maybe I'll think of his name in a moment. Cooper.

What's the Z. O. W. P. R. But I think it's oh, yeah, I always read a calper. Right. It is.

Okay. Cool. Yeah.

Yeah, William Cooper. And he was very depressed and John Newton had to save him many times from taking his life. He was always there with him to build him up.

He ended up dying a natural death, though he's a wonderful Christian and wrote many hymns with John Newton. He's famous for his Christian hymns. Even so, he was deeply troubled and many times on the verge of suicide.

Presumably, he could have committed suicide. Does that mean he wasn't really a Christian? No. So I want to put that issue to rest once and for all.

If you understand the work of the cross, you understand that all sins are forgiven through Christ past, present and whatever will be done in the future. Christ died in our past for our whole life. There is forgiveness at the cross.

There's only one sacrifice once for all that constantly cleanses. He always lives to make intercession for us. That's the grace of God.

Now with that in mind, suicide is still a tragedy and really difficult for those who are left behind. But one difficulty I don't want them to have to struggle with is the difficulty of wondering that just in virtue of the suicide, that means their loved one was not a Christian and will be separated from them forever. So that's the second issue in the question in James's question.

The first issue though, I'm not quite clear on because he said they're doubtful now when they are tempted with walking away from Christ. So my question would be, why would you be tempted to walk away from Christ because someone close to you committed a sin, even a terrible sin, like suicide? It might be because of a false understanding of forgiveness. If I believed in Christ now, then I would be believing that that person went to hell that I love.

So I can't believe that so I won't believe in Christ. But hopefully what I've just offered in terms of the theology behind the cross as it applies to things like suicide or any other great sin will help resolve that for them. But I'm not sure why they would walk away.

You would walk away, I think, because you believe that the things that you had believed about Christ were false. But I don't know how someone's suicide, even a close friend of the family would indicate that the Christian view, the Christian way of thinking, the Christian view of reality is false somehow. I don't know what's going on there.

Now some people might walk away just in the sense that they, I don't know, for lack of a better word backslide, they're just wore out, they're just hurt. They don't want to talk to

God. They don't want to do any of that.

They prayed and prayed and prayed. And here's the result, suicide. God didn't answer my prayer.

And I'm just running out of steam. Well, I understand that. And I think that happens to people.

In fact, it's a threat. I think through a lot of people, even people in Christian work, because all our prayers don't get answered. And the fact is that Christians run into hardship and difficulty in their life that they wish were different.

And God doesn't rescue them from that. And so it's easy to lose heart. All right.

But walk away like this isn't true anymore. I don't believe it's so. Okay, where are you going to go to atheism? Some other religion? As if those are going to be any more satisfying? I don't know.

So I'm a little confused about the first one, Amy. Maybe you have some more insight to that. But I don't know why a tragedy would result in somebody saying Christianity is false, unless they had a false understanding of what to expect out of Christianity.

Those are emotional objections, as far as I could tell, but they could be very entrenched. I think what you've said there at the end, Greg has a lot to do with this. Just looking at this question in terms of suffering, because I think this applies to a lot of people's suffering, because obviously there are a lot of terrible things that happen to people all the time.

And what I've seen over time is that what intense suffering tends to do is either turn people much closer to God or turn them away from Him. And you can look back to various people who have left God. And many times you can trace it back to a very difficult situation, where at that moment it revealed whether or not they were going to trust God.

Maybe even whether or not they really were trusting God to begin with. I don't know about that. But so what happens is, and I think this does have to do with having a false understanding of what they should expect from God.

But I think this is something we all deal with, because even if intellectually we know that God is not going to make everything turn out right in our lives, there's still something in us that thinks that if we do everything right, God will make everything go right for us. I really think that's the case. And there comes a point in everybody's life where they realize that's not the case.

And it hits home because you're actually facing this terrible suffering. And this is where

the danger comes where you think either God has let you down because you thought he had promised this wouldn't happen to you, or you think God hasn't loved you, or he's not worth following, or maybe even he's not good. And so I think everybody to a certain extent has to deal with these questions.

And the way that I deal with it, there's a theologian named Derek Rishmawi who wrote this post once that had a huge impact on me, because I think it's so helpful and so simple. And what he said was that the answer to the problem of evil is we look at the cross. So when I, and this is something very simple to remember, looking at the cross, what do we see on the cross? Well, first of all, we see that God is wise and sovereign because he brought about this entire plan of redemption from the beginning of the world to that point, all the things he brought together, and he put together, and he brought to this particular time and place with a particular people.

And he brought about the cross where Jesus would die for our sins. So we see God's sovereignty, we see his wisdom. But secondly, we see his power.

We see that he raised Jesus from the dead. So, so I'm just going to interject here. This is something objective because the problem of what you express so well, Greg, is not rational to turn away from God because something bad happened to you.

That's not a rational problem. Nothing that we believe to be true about the Christian worldview changes because hardship fails in our life unless we have a twisted theology, but we're just presuming people understand, you know, in this world you have tribulation, Jesus said. So it's an emotional issue.

So the way to fight emotional issues in this case is to hang on to something that's objective and visible to us. So the cross we see as wisdom, we see a sovereignty, we see God's power, his ability to raise Jesus from the dead because if he can do that, he can do anything. And then finally, we see an objective expression of God's love for us as individuals.

It's he died for you. And that's proven on the cross. We see that there.

We can hang onto that objectively. So when you put all those things together, I think that is where our comfort can come from because we know that God is in control. Yes, he didn't stop this from happening, but we also know it's not because he didn't love us or he wasn't good because if he was willing to give up his own son, he's already proved he's good.

He's already proved he loves. So since we know those things for sure, and we know that he it wasn't that it things were out of control, all we can do then is rest in trust without knowing why any of this happened, without knowing what will come of this or what the reasons were or any of those things, we can hang on to these objective things that we

can then rest in to a certain extent. Obviously, we still have grief.

We still have all these issues, but you need something objective when your emotions are taking you away from God. It's interesting that the question has two parts, but the answer is one part. And in both issues, whether the suicide being the unforgivable sin or walking away because of discouragement, which is the first part of the pastoral concern here that James asked about, both are answered the same way by looking at the cross, but a different aspect of the cross, the work of the cross to accomplish a full forgiveness or the significance of what the cross says about God and his sovereign control, his love for us and his power.

And look at the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead, and now we've got the resurrection. He proved that we will be resurrected at the end of time. This is not the end.

This is not the end. So the resurrection is another aspect of the cross that we can hang on to at a time like this. And then I just want to offer some encouragement to anyone out there who is struggling with depression and ready to give up.

And I just want to encourage you that you're always better off. It may feel like you're better off being disobedient in this and ending your life, but you are never better off being disobedient. We are so tempted to think that either we're missing out on something and we need to go against what God has said because otherwise we're going to miss out or if we go against what God said, then we can relieve some of our suffering and things can be better off.

But that is never the case. God only wants good for us. He wants to make us like Christ.

He wants to help us to know him better. And we should not end that process. We need to trust him and trust that being obedient is always better than being disobedient.

Paul says, "Should we continue to sin if there's grace?" - Yeah. Problem six. - Yeah.

By no means, he says, "No, that's not the fact that God gives grace for our sins doesn't give us the permission to sin." It's still not only wrong, but it hurts us. And we don't know exactly how that will play out ultimately, but you're obviously hurting a lot of other people too. And I think people who are in this situation understand that, but I just want to encourage you to hang on because it is always better to be obedient.

You have to increase your trust in God. Look at what he's done. Look at what he's done on the cross, but look at what he's done over time.

Look at what he's done in your life. There are so many things that we can do to know him better so that we don't give up. - Amy said to hang on if you're in a circumstance like that, but it's very difficult to hang on alone.

And so as a very action guide item here, if you're in a desperate circumstance like this, feeling depressed and feeling at the end of your open, feeling like you might slip off, et cetera, you need to talk to someone, talk to somebody, and just bring it out in the open. Talk to somebody who you have reason to believe will be sympathetic to your concerns. And there's even suicide help lines that will do that.

One would like to think that there's a sympathetic brother, Christian, and Christ, brother, sister in Christ that will be available. - Someone like John Newton. - Like John Newton, yeah, but there you go.

John Newton saved Cooper's life many times over. But he paid a price to do so. The important thing, though, to leave you with in terms of action guide, though, is don't agonize in silence.

Talk to somebody. You will be amazed at how much that relieves the pressure and the discomfort and even the discouragement and will help you press forward and press on. - Well, thank you so much, James, for your question.

It's really nice to hear someone from Kenya. That's great. We're really glad you're listening, and I'm sorry you're having to deal with this right now, but we pray that God will enable you to give comfort to these families that you're trying to comfort.

And to all of you out there, we pray for your comfort also. Well, thank you, and we look forward to hearing from you on Twitter with your questions. And if you've had a question for a while, now's the time.

You can send that through our website, too. We've been getting a lot of questions through our website, which is great because I think it's opened up a lot of opportunities for people to ask questions. All right, thank you for listening.

This is Amy Hall and Greg Kockel for Stand to Reason.