

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

HISTORY OF SUICIDOLOGY:
LEARNING FROM THE PAST FOR A BETTER FUTURE

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ABSTRACT

Since 2008, suicide has ranked among the top 10 leading causes of death in the United States. In 2016, suicide was the second leading cause of death for individuals ages 10-34 and the fourth leading cause of death for individuals ages 35-54. From 1999 through 2017, the suicide rate has increased by 33%.¹ To say that suicide is a problem in our country would be a huge understatement. With each new year as statistics are released data reveals the truth that suicide is only becoming more and more prevalent. But why does it seem like no one is talking about it? Why is discussion regarding suicide often done in private, behind closed doors, or not at all. This thesis will take a look back at the long-term negative affect the past has had and still has to this day regarding the discussion of suicide. It will also partially suggest changes to advance the discussion moving forward.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db330.htm>

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Introduction

Suicide; What is your immediate reaction when you read that word? Does it catch you off guard? Does it elicit a sense of uneasiness? Does it cause your stomach to turn just thinking about it? If so, you are not alone. Suicide has become taboo in our society. It's become a dirty subject in general. It's not something that is easily talked about or even brought up in normal conversation. Because of our fear and uneasiness surrounding this word it has become a stigma. We simply sweep it under the rug as if it didn't exist. Growing up it seemed that all we needed to know about suicide was that it was wrong and we should never do it. The lack of discussion seemed to imply that anyone who committed suicide or even thought about committing suicide had serious problems. So when does suicide come up in conversation? When is it talked about? Usually when it is all too late. But what if suicide doesn't affect us? Only certain people need to be concerned about suicide because only some people are suicidal, right? What would you think if you found out a family member, a friend, or someone you knew was suicidal? Would this make suicide seem more real to you? Would it seem like a more pressing matter? Well, facts say that you probably do. In 2017 there were an estimated 1.3 million suicide attempts in the United States alone.² Chances are very high that you know someone who has contemplated or even attempted suicide.

San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge is one of the most beautiful places on earth. It ranks among the top tourist attractions in the U.S. and is visited by millions every year. But not everyone who visits the bridge is there to sight see. The Golden Gate Bridge is among the most visited places on earth for people to commit suicide. Since its opening in 1937, 1,700 people

² <https://afsp.org/about-suicide/suicide-statistics/>

have willingly taken their life there.³ That being said, not everyone who visits the bridge with the intent of killing themselves goes through with it. In 2016 alone, 39 people died from jumping off of the bridge. Another 184 came with the intent of jumping off but were stopped.⁴ What stopped them? In almost all of these cases someone stepped in to talk the person off the ledge. They listened to their struggle and convinced them, in one way or another, to change their mind. More often than not that person was a law enforcement officer who was assigned to watch over the bridge. Kevin Briggs, a retired California Highway Patrol officer, spent the majority of his 23 years of service patrolling the Golden Gate Bridge. During his tenure he assisted in the prevention of a large number of suicides. In 2014 he was asked to speak at a TED Talk regarding his experience. During his discussion Briggs made a statement that stressed the importance of reaching out to those struggling:

The very few that have jumped off the bridge and lived and can talk about it, that one to two percent, most of those folks have said that the second that they let go of that rail they knew that they had made a huge mistake.⁵

Of the more than 1,700 who have jumped off the bridge, only 25 are known to have survived the fall.⁶ Kevin Hines is one of those survivors. In an interview with BuzzFeed, Hines retold the story of how he jumped off the bridge and survived. In his retelling of that event Hines said something that backed up Officer Briggs' claim.

3 <https://people.com/human-interest/kevin-hines-survived-suicide-jump-from-golden-gate-bridge/>

4 https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/04/14/after-years-and-hundreds-of-suicides-off-the-golden-gate-bridge-a-new-net-could-save-lives/?utm_term=.a416a63280bf

5 Kevin Briggs. "The bridge between suicide and life." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CIq4mtiamY>

6 <https://people.com/human-interest/kevin-hines-survived-suicide-jump-from-golden-gate-bridge/>

I ran forward and using my two hands I catapulted myself into freefall. What I'm about to say is the exact same thing that 19 Golden Gate Bridge jump survivors have also said: the millisecond my hands left the rail it was an instant regret.⁷

It was a miracle that Hines survived the 220 foot drop. But it's unfortunate that it had to happen in the first place. Unlike the many who have been convinced otherwise, there was no one there to talk Hines off of the ledge that day. The sad thing is that more often than not there is no one there when suicide is on someone's mind and they're contemplating taking their own life. But what can be done about this? Instead of starting the discussion moments before the person wants to act, the discussion needs to begin way before that. Suicide needs to be something that can be talked about in everyday life. It needs to be something that kids feel open discussing with their parents, friends, pastors and teachers. It needs to be something that we are comfortable talking about if the thought of suicide has been on our mind. But why isn't this already the case? One of the biggest contributions to this fact is our past. The past has failed in its treatment of suicide. In order to understand our current failures it is invaluable for us to see what got us here. As we look back at the history of suicidology we see how the stigma surrounding suicide was formed, we see the mistreatment of suicides for thousands of year, and we see the discussion of suicide form and evolve to what it is today.

Suicide seems to have been a lot more open to discussion in the past. Much more than it is today. That doesn't mean that the discussion was always positive by any means. There were many who openly spoke up about suicide in and outside of the church. Some of them benefited the discussion of suicide, while others hindered it. Our goal as we move forward needs to be for a better discussion regarding suicide. Rick Warren, an American evangelical Christian pastor,

⁷ BuzzFeed Video. "I Jumped Off The Golden Gate Bridge." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcSUs9iZv-g&t=44s>

wrote in one of his books, “We are products of our past, but we don't have to be prisoners of it.”⁸

This is so true when it comes to our understanding of suicide. With each new day we have opportunity to learn more about suicide and how we can help. With each new day we can advance the discussion regarding suicide.

⁸ Richard Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: Devotional for Kids* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderkidz), 2015.

PART ONE: THE PAST

Discussion begins in the ancient world

When approaching the discussion surrounding suicide the first question that comes to mind is where do we begin? If we jump into the discussion as it is in full swing or nearing its end we risk missing out on critical data that will only benefit our overall understanding. So where does one begin when it comes to suicidology? Is there a date that we can look to where a groundbreaking event took place that shaped the field of study forever? The simple answer to this question would have to be no. Rather than starting on a single day, month, or even year, experts in suicidology see the discussion slowly progress over time. The origin of this discussion can be traced back all the way to the ancient world. In Ancient Greece, suicide was discussed in the realm of philosophy. Sadly enough, suicide was rarely talked about in an empathetic way. Rather, it was just a part of intellectual discussion. In Ancient Rome, suicide seemed to be a part of everyday life. Each person had the right to decide whether their life was worth living or not. As pioneers in the realm of suicide, the ancient world sure failed to set a good foundation to stand on. While following the timeline of suicidology, it is fairly easy to see the negative influence the ancient world had on the treatment of suicide going forward. These negative trends seemed to form bad habits in the years that followed, some of which still affect the treatment of suicide today.

Greek Philosophy Discusses Suicide

Since its beginning, philosophy has always had great concern regarding the topics of life and death. This was true going all the way back to its early years in antiquity when philosophy reigned as king of the academic world. Suicide became such a hot topic because of the wide range of disagreement that developed. Each philosophical school had its own stance regarding

suicide, whether it was categorical opposition or a welcoming approval.⁹ Many of these viewpoints would be adopted and adapted for millennia to come. Understanding these preliminary opinions concerning suicide are of grave importance because of the long lasting effect they had.

Arguably the most well-known stance that derived from the ancient world of philosophy came from Plato. Credited by many to be one of the most influential philosophers in history, Plato was very vocal regarding his view on suicide and openly spoke against it in a number of his works. In his dialogue titled *Laws*, he condemned suicide as a disgraceful act against the gods. He gave only four exceptions to this straightforward principle:

- 1) When one's mind is morally corrupted and one's character can therefore not be salvaged.
- 2) When the self-killing is done by judicial order.
- 3) When the self-killing is compelled by extreme and unavoidable personal misfortune.
- 4) When the self-killing results from shame at having participated in grossly unjust actions.¹⁰

With the exception of these four reasons, Plato labeled suicide as a cowardice act that was made by individuals too frail to face the difficulties of life. He argued that public burial should be refused to anyone who kills themselves because they are violently robbing themselves of their fate-given share of life.¹¹ This was Plato's primary problem with suicide. He saw it as a sin against one's self that robbed a person of a full life. Plato saw life as a gift, suicide threw that gift away. Because of this wasted gift, he suggested that suicides should instead be buried in

9 George Minois, *History of suicide: Voluntary death in western culture. Comprehending Suicide: Landmarks in 20th-century Suicidology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 43.

10 <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/suicide/>

11 Minois, 45.

unmarked, solitary graves in deserted areas.¹² To him, they did not deserve the same treatment as someone who lived a full life and died at their proper time.

Another Greek philosopher who shared a very similar attitude to that of Plato's happened to be a former student of his named Aristotle. Considered to be another giant of philosophy, Aristotle also addressed suicide in a number of his written works. Regarding suicide, however, Aristotle did not stress it as a sin against the individual like Plato did. Instead, he saw it as a wrong toward society.¹³ To take one's own life, in Aristotle's opinion, was not only cowardice but it openly disobeyed the laws the state had established:

Whether a man can treat himself unjustly or not, is evident from what has been said. For one class of just acts are those acts in accordance with any virtue which are prescribed by the law; e.g the law does not expressly permit suicide, and what it does not expressly permit it forbids. Again, when a man in violation of the law harms another (otherwise than in retaliation) voluntarily, he acts unjustly.¹⁴

Aristotle treated suicide as a fight within. This battle could take place in the mind of anyone. Those who fought off wicked desires to end it early were brave and courageous beings. Those who didn't were too weak and feeble to fight off these inclinations. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle addresses this argument.

Now the end of every activity is conformity to the corresponding state of character. This is true, therefore, of the brave man as well as of others. But courage is noble. Therefore the end also is noble; for each thing is defined by its end. Therefore it is for a noble end that the brave man endures and acts as courage directs.¹⁵

12 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1761665/>

13 Massimo Pigliucci, "The Philosophy of Suicide." <http://rationallyspeaking.blogspot.com/2013/12/the-philosophy-of-suicide.html>

14 <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/selections/aristotle/>

15 <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/selections/aristotle/>

This condemnatory attitude toward suicide of Plato and Aristotle would be discussed by intellectuals and theologians for centuries to come. To speak in support of or to condone suicide would have been to blatantly contradict the stance that these philosophical giants had made in regards to the treatment of suicide. There were many opposing philosophical schools that did just that. Although Plato and Aristotle's opinions were recognized and respected they were not accepted by all. Many schools of philosophy rose to denounce their views.

Criticism towards Plato and Aristotle's condemnation of suicide began to grow as the age of Greek philosophy was coming to an end during the Hellenistic period.¹⁶ There were a number of schools of philosophy in existence that not only supported suicide but even encouraged it. The Cyrenaics, the Cynics, the Epicureans, and the Stoics were among some of the most notable examples of philosophy that directly contradicted the ideals of Plato and Aristotle. Every one of these schools in one way or another stressed the supreme worth of the individual, saying that it was their liberty to choose whether to live or die. They understood that only a good life filled with more satisfaction than anguish was worth living.¹⁷ Although these schools agreed in general on their stance regarding suicide, they all came to this conclusion through different means. The Cyrenaics taught that the greatest concern in life was the fulfillment of immediate pleasures.¹⁸ You can quickly presume how the idea of suicide would come into the picture if those pleasures weren't being fulfilled. One of their own masters, Hegesias, was expelled from Alexandria¹⁹ following the writing of his book titled *Death By Starvation*, which argued that

16 The Hellenistic period covers the period of Mediterranean history between the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC and the emergence of the Roman Empire.

17 Minois, 44.

18 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cyrenaic>

19 The School of Alexandria was founded by Alexander the Great in the mid-2nd century A.D. It was the first Christian institution of higher learning.

death was superior to living.²⁰ The Cynics taught that complete separation from life was necessary if one could not live in accordance to reason. Antisthenes, regarded by many to be the father of cynicism, was of the opinion that it would be better for people of lower intelligence to hang themselves than to live.²¹ According to Epicureans, wisdom was the authority that decided whether life was tolerable or not, and whether suicide was the best option. It was up to each individual to decide for themselves whether it was better to live or die. The Stoics were also in support of suicide as a possible end to life. Their own founder, Zeno, and his successor Cleanthes, died by suicide.²² For the Stoics value was not found in external or material objects, but rather in the virtue of human beings. Life and death were equally respected in the eyes of the Stoics. Neither one was more significant than the other in the grand scheme of philosophy.²³

When studying the variety of opinions that were taught and believed at this time one can quickly gather that the world of ancient philosophy struggled to find unity on the basis of suicide. At a time when the intellectual world was filled with some of the most respected minds in human history the discussion shouldn't have been whether or not suicide was right or wrong, but how suicide could be prevented. Unfortunately, there was no common ground for discussion. These discussions lacked empathy. There was no desire to understand the reason behind suicide. With the amount of respect the common person gave to the opinion of these philosophers it would be interesting to know how positively suicide could have been affected during this time if they treated suicide differently.

20 <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hp/hpsocratics.htm>

21 Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. "Antisthenes." <https://www.iep.utm.edu/antisthe/>

22 Englert, Walter, "Seneca and the Stoic View of Suicide." <https://orb.binghamton.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1183&context=sagp>

23 Minois, 44.

Rome Combats Suicide For All The Wrong Reasons

As the years go by we see the downfall of Greece and the rise of Rome. With this change of power came a change of opinion regarding suicide. There was a steady decline in support regarding the denial of suicide. There was a growing leniency towards those who took their own life. But, very similar to its Greek counterpart, Rome was far from unanimous in its attitude.²⁴ There were still some who held to the idea that suicide should be forbidden. Some in Rome remained hostile towards suicide and saw it as an anti-social, selfish act. Although suicide was not a sin against the gods, nor was it forbidden by law, that did not mean Rome permitted any and everybody to commit suicide. Certain instances where suicide was condemned was mainly for economic reasons. The three social categories that were forbidden from ending their lives early were slaves, criminals, and soldiers.²⁵ Slaves, for instance, were considered to be the property of their masters. To commit suicide would mean actively disobeying their owner, thus ending their right to work prematurely. That being said, unlike the other two categories, there were no repercussions for slaves who took their own life. The main reason this was the case was because punishment was almost impossible. There was no property to seize and usually no family to collect from. As for criminals, it was against the law for them to take their life before they served their sentence. This was because the state could take no legal action against their property until they were found guilty. For many prisoners, this only encouraged them to take their life before trial in order that the state would have no right to their property and their family

²⁴ Minois, 47.

²⁵ Mark Oliver, "10 Insane Laws People Had To Live By In Ancient Rome." <http://listverse.com/2016/10/14/10-insane-laws-people-had-to-live-by-in-ancient-rome/>

would not be punished for their crime.²⁶ In order to fight against this loophole in the system, Emperor Domitian, in the first century A.D. denied the right of any prisoner who died before trial to pass on their property to a descendant.

The worst punishment among these three was reserved for the soldier who took his own life rather than fight for the empire. Anyone that fell under this category was publicly disgraced and proclaimed either a traitor or deserter of Rome. They would have their citizenship stripped from them, which meant that everything they left behind was no longer theirs, it now belonged to the Emperor.²⁷ The greatest honor at the time of Rome was given to a soldier. Anyone who refused to fight did not deserve such honor, therefore they were punished more severely than anyone else.

Rome's fight against suicide was not a concern for the suicidal. It was instead a concern for the economy. Suicide was "bad for business," as the phrase goes. In order to prevent suicide Rome made threats toward those they couldn't afford to lose. Not only did they threaten to punish the suicidal, they threatened to punish their loved ones too. The livelihood of a family could be destroyed following a suicide. Rome's heartless opposition against suicide was almost as damaging to the discussion as its support for it.

Ancient World Glorifies Suicide

On the other side of the coin we see that not every soldier suicide was to be punished. In fact many of them were to be glorified. As stated before, Rome saw suicide from two different sides of the coin. The one was not very welcoming of the act, while the other was. The other side

26 Domagoj Valjak, "Euthanasia in Ancient Rome." <https://www.thevintagenews.com/2018/02/28/ancient-rome-suicide/>

27 <https://www.thevintagenews.com/2018/02/28/ancient-rome-suicide/>

viewed it as a beautiful demonstration of the individual's freedom that permitted a way out for a number of reasons.²⁸ One of those reasons was granted to a soldier who was surrounded by adversaries on every side of the battlefield with no hope of victory or escape. This form of suicide was considered honorable and patriotic because it showed that the soldier would rather take his own life than fall by the sword of his enemies.²⁹ The greatest example of suicide that we know in Ancient Rome is that of Cato the Younger. Cato was a Roman Senator and defender of the Republic against Julius Caesar. He was an incredibly respected and successful war general who was a thorn in Caesar's flesh for quite some time. But that thorn would be plucked when Cato realized the inevitable at the Battle of Thapsus in North Africa. With over 60,000 enemy soldiers knocking at his door, Cato withdrew to a quiet place in Utica among family, friends and fellow soldiers. It was here that he took his life quietly, and in so doing became the face of glorified self-death in Roman culture.

Cato was not the only famously glorified Roman suicide. Less than 20 years after Cato died, the tragic tale of Lucius Annaeus Seneca took place. Seneca, a longtime tutor and adviser to Emperor Nero, was placed in a difficult situation when it was discovered that he played part in an unsuccessful coup against the emperor while in retirement. It wasn't long before soldiers were knocking on his door and he was interrogated regarding the situation. After it was confirmed that Seneca played a part in such an unsuccessful uprising, the order was given from Emperor Nero for him to end his own life. Seneca, a proud stoic, did not find a problem with the order he was given. Earlier in his life Seneca expressed his stoic tendencies in his *Moral Letters to Lucilius*:

Accordingly, the wise man will live as long as he ought, not as long as he can. He will mark in what place, with whom, and how he is to conduct his existence, and what he is about to do. He always reflects concerning the quality, and not the quantity, of his life. As

28 Minois, 47.

29 <https://www.thevintagenews.com/2018/02/28/ancient-rome-suicide/>

soon as there are many events in his life that give him trouble and disturb his peace of mind, he sets himself free. And this privilege is his, not only when the crisis is upon him, but as soon as fortune seems to be playing him false; then he looks about carefully and sees whether he ought, or ought not, to end his life on that account.³⁰

With this thinking in mind, Seneca listened to Nero's orders, cutting open his own veins near the arteries in hopes of bleeding out. As the story goes, however, he was so old that the blood barely escaped his body. After some time he asked for hemlock to quicken the process, but that was about as unsuccessful as the first attempt. It wasn't until his slaves carried him to the bath tub where he suffocated in the steam that the process was complete.³¹ As morbid as this story is to us, Rome glorified Seneca as another honorable example of suicide. Even though he had betrayed the state by being part of an uprising against the emperor, the fact that he obeyed the emperor's command to take his own life was a most noble act.

Rome was not distinct from Greece when it came to glorified suicides. With a very similar respect for the soldier, the prototype for heroic suicide in the Greek world was the valiant death of Ajax. Ajax was depicted in Homer's *Iliad* as a most valiant soldier during the Trojan War, second only to Achilles. Following Achilles' death, controversy arose as to whom would receive his armor. Some argued that Ajax deserved the armor, while others said Odysseus. The dispute was brought before the council to be discussed by both parties. Using his cunning and eloquent speech, Odysseus won the argument and received the armor. So distraught by these events was Ajax that he ran himself through with his sword.³²

30 <https://ethicsofselfdestruction.lib.utah.edu/selections/seneca/>

31 <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2014/10/09/how-stoical-was-seneca/>

32 Ronald Maris, Alan Berman, and Morton Silverman, *Comprehensive Textbook of Suicidology*. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2000), 98.

The list goes on and on when it comes to suicidal heroes in the ancient world. This glorification of suicides led to a destructive downplaying of the gift of life. This idea made its way into the everyday life of Rome. Suicide became so common that it was actually something the commoner could request if they saw their situation was severe enough. All they needed to do was approach the senate and plead their case for why they should be allowed to end their life. If the senate saw their case as legitimate they would grant their request, and in certain instances even be provided with hemlock free of charge.³³

Of all the Western civilization's treatments of suicide in history, Rome has been credited to be one of the most favorable towards suicide.³⁴ With its glorification of suicidal heroes as well as its support for the suicide of the peasants, Rome only deterred the progression of understanding. There was no desire to understand or to prevent. Rome only advanced the already lousy treatment of suicide. With the demise of the Roman Empire the pendulum begins to swing back towards disapproval of suicide with the rise of Christianity in the Middle Ages.

Suicide During the Middle Ages

Compared to the ancient world, the Middle Ages seems to have discussed suicide on a much more regular basis. Defending this belief is the steady growth of records concerning suicide we can find during this time period. Although suicides were most certainly committed before this there seemed to be no need to record them on a regular basis. Libraries of legitimate and dependable sources were previously non-existent. This would all change starting with the Middle Ages. Such a wide range of sources can be found and studied in the Middle Ages. The

33 <https://www.thevintagenews.com/2016/09/02/priority-ancient-rome-people-wanted-commit-suicide-applied-senate-petitions-approved-given-free-hemlock/>

34 Minois, 46.

majority of documentation that comes from this time period can be split into three categories, all of them bringing their own unique perspective to further the study of suicide.³⁵ The first category was that of chronicles or factual narratives. Fortunately, this category brings a unique viewpoint on suicide by showing its presence in all classes of society. Unfortunately this category holds the least amount of information compared to the rest. The second category is that of legal records. Ecclesiastical law quickly began to affect civil law making legal records a new place to track and study suicide. The last category is that of religious narratives.³⁶ These accounts are primarily filled with the stories of martyrs who eagerly gave their life for the church, at times, too eagerly and unnecessarily.

Sources available to us from this time prove that suicide was not limited to or biased toward certain classes of society. That being said, direct suicide was much more common among the lower class in comparison to the nobles.³⁷ The biggest contributor to this fact was the wide variety of opportunities the noble class had to expose themselves to death. Instead of having to take their own life there were plenty of opportunities to put themselves in harm's way in hopes of the same outcome. These opportunities included tournaments, hunting, wars, and crusades.³⁸ Any and all of these events warranted a possibility that the participant would not leave alive. These indirect forms of suicide contained the majority of noble suicides at this time. Regarding

35 <http://psychiatry.queensu.ca/assets/Synergy/synergyfall12.pdf>

36 <http://psychiatry.queensu.ca/assets/Synergy/synergyfall12.pdf>

37 Minois, 16.

38 Ibid, 16

the peasants on the other hand, it has been said that they were limited to the rope or the river as their options.³⁹

Blatant Condemnation From The Church

The Middle ages in no way continued the custom of the ancient world with a lackadaisical attitude toward suicide. There was no such thing as glorified heroic deaths, no hemlock provided, no positive approval regarding the matter at all. In the medieval times, suicide was seen as a giving in to the devil's temptation on account of despair or mad behavior.⁴⁰ The leading voice proclaiming this doctrine throughout the Middle Ages quickly became the church. In its early stages the church was not very outspoken on self-killing. Instead of openly supporting or condemning the act, the church encouraged its members to do all they could to prevent one another from carrying out such a destructive deed.⁴¹ It wasn't until the 4th century that the principle rejection of suicide started to take shape. When it came to pressing theological matters the church looked to Saint Augustine as the source of authority and voice of Christendom in the West.⁴² In turn, Augustine looked to Scripture as his authority and guide regarding these matters. He highlighted the fact that not only has God never warranted such an action, but he has explicitly condemned and warned us against the taking of our own lives before the time he has set aside for us.

It is not without significance, that in no passage of the holy canonical books there can be found either divine precept or permission to take away our own life, whether for the sake of entering on the enjoyment of immortality, or of shunning, or ridding ourselves of anything whatever. Nay, the law, rightly interpreted, even prohibits suicide, where it says, "Thou shalt not kill." This is proved especially by the omission of the words "thy

39 Minois, 16.

40 Ibid, 9.

41 Maris, 107.

42 Ibid, 107.

neighbor,” which are inserted when false witness is forbidden: “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.”⁴³

Augustine believed and confessed that God gave man the gift of life and he alone had the power and right to end it.⁴⁴ His book titled *City of God* leaves no room for doubt whether he condemned this action or not.

This we declare and affirm and empathetically accept as true: No man may inflict death upon himself at will merely to escape from temporal difficulties-for this is but to plunge into those which are everlasting; no man may do so even on account of another’s sins, fearing they may lead to a sin of one’s own- for we are not sullied by others’ sins; no man may do so on account of past sins- for to expiate them by penance we need life all the more; no one may end his own life out of a desire to attain a better life which he hopes for after death, because a better life after death is not for those who perish by their own hand.⁴⁵

Defense Against Donatism

Some see Augustine’s outright opposition of suicide as a reflection of Plato’s teachings. Although this is a possibility, the past probably didn’t affect Augustine’s stance nearly as much as the events of his present. Augustine’s stance can primarily be seen as a response to the steady rise for intentional martyrdom in the church. One of the biggest reasons this was the case was due to the excessively strong reaction to and rise of Donatism.⁴⁶ Donatists were a sect that had broken from the Catholic Church under Donatus Magnus in 312 following the election of Caecilian.⁴⁷ In time, they had become a powerhouse of a church body that vehemently opposed Catholicism. The primary issue Donatists had with Catholicism was regarding the sacraments.

43 <https://ethicsof suicide.lib.utah.edu/selections/augustine/>

44 Mark Laskey, “Rites of Desecration: Suicide, Sacrilege, and the Crossroads Burial.” <https://www.cvltnation.com/rites-of-desecration-suicide-sacrilege-and-profane-burial-at-the-crossroads/>

45 Minois, 27.

46 Ibid, 28.

47 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Donatists>

Donatists believed that only sinless people who are in a state of grace can validly celebrate the sacrament.⁴⁸ Anyone who left the Catholic Church to join with the Donatists received a re-baptism and was trained in this new way of Christianity. Augustine's biggest problem with the Donatists was not their disagreement with the Catholic Church on the sacraments but their encouragement of suicide. In his teachings, Donatus encouraged martyrdom by saying that death for the cause of the church, even death by suicide, was holy and would be rewarded with a martyr's crown and eternal life.⁴⁹ This led many to throw themselves off high cliffs while crying out, "*Deo laudes,*" which means "God be praised." This was the adopted slogan of the Donatists to counter the ancient Catholic phrase "*Deo gratias,*" which means "thanks be to God."⁵⁰

The battle between Augustine and the Donatists was not something Augustine took lightly. His concern for the people that this heretical sect hoped to convert with their lethal teachings was so great that he produced a series of writings against them and their beliefs. The bulk of this material was concerning their teaching of the sacraments. A large portion, however, of this material also addressed the topic of suicide. These writings were quickly adopted as the stance of the entire church. These were the first pieces of Christian literature that discussed the church's stance on suicide.

When reading through these writings in isolation, outside the context of Augustine's life, it might be easy to assume that Augustine was cold and heartless in his stance toward suicide. His unqualified opposition and promise of eternal suffering to all those who end their own lives

48 <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/donatism>

49 <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/donatism>

50 <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/donatism>

was clearly stated and repeated throughout his works. As we go back in time to the events that affected Augustine's writing we clearly see that he was not writing out of hatred but earnest concern. The Donatists were ripping many away from the church and leading them down a dark road of despair. The end of that road was a high cliff and false promise of eternal glory and praise. This was their most harmful and grotesque lie of all which Augustine vehemently opposed. Augustine's message was chiefly for those who were thinking about suicide, in order that they not fall into the temptation of these lies. Although brief in length, the Donatists caused great harm to the church during the Middle Ages. Much credit can be given to Augustine for containing such a harmful problem. After the fall of the Donatists, there were a number who returned to the church after falling into the trap of such a heresy. When asked how the church should treat such former heretics Augustine opposed that they be punished in any nature. His concern was always for a return to unity under the Catholic Church and God's Word, not violence.⁵¹ Augustine's stance on suicide was from a heart of love, not hate. Unfortunately, he did not always show that in the most evangelical way. He failed to show an understanding to those who were struggling with suicidal thoughts. He failed to offer any kind of comfort to those who had lost loved ones to this heretical movement. He was so eager to halt progress that he failed to aid a large number who had lost many to the battle.

Aquinas Supports Augustine's View

In the realm of theological influence during the Middle Ages the only person who could rival Augustine would have to be Thomas Aquinas. Like Augustine, Thomas Aquinas vehemently opposed the act of killing oneself. He saw it as the most fatal of sins because there

51 <http://www.augnet.org/en/life-of-augustine/in-africa-again/1208-combating-donatism/>

was no time for repentance.⁵² Aquinas' views were greatly impacted by the world of ancient philosophy. He had great respect for Aristotle and adopted many of his viewpoints. Many see Aquinas' stance on suicide as an amalgamation of Aristotle's philosophy with Catholic doctrine. Rather than contradicting one another, Aquinas saw an intimate connection with faith and reason. Whatever reason was incapable of revealing faith was able to reveal.⁵³ In Aquinas' written work he stated that killing one's self was unlawful for three reasons.

First, because everything loves itself. Therefore, to kill oneself is contrary to natural inclination, and contrary to the charity according to which everyone ought to love himself. Hence self-killing is always a mortal sin, inasmuch as it stands against natural law and charity. Second, because everything that is a part belongs to a whole, every man is part of a community, and as such is of the community. Therefore, he who kills himself injures the community, as is proven by the Philosopher in his Ethics, Book V. Third, because life is a gift divinely given to man, and subject to the power of Him "who kills and makes to live." Therefore, he who deprives himself of life sins against God, just as he who kills another's slave sins against the slave's master, and just as he sins who arrogates to himself power over something not committed to him. To God alone belongs the power over death and life, according to Deuteronomy 32: "I kill and I make to live."⁵⁴

Aquinas was a fervent supporter of Augustine. He had great respect for his writings which guided the church at the beginning and throughout the Middle Ages. Rather than form a new stance apart from Augustine's, Aquinas adopted many of his teachings and added his own ideas to it. These two voiced the opinion of the church in the Middle Ages. A growing support of the church's stance on suicide came with an overwhelming support of mistreatment toward suicide. As the Middle Ages moved on the church became all the more hostile towards suicide.

52 Maris, 108.

53 <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/selections/thomas-aquinas/>

54 <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/selections/thomas-aquinas/>

Crass Mistreatment of Suicides

The church had quickly become the authoritative voice in regard to suicide at this time. Their disapproval became the disapproval of all. This led to a rise in the brutal mistreatment of the bodies of suicides.⁵⁵ This mistreatment was initially spiritual in nature. The first church legislation on the matter was released by the Archbishop of York in 740. This declaration instructed priests to deny the proper Christian burial customs to anyone who took their own life with a sound mind at the time of their death. There was no Mass to be celebrated, no psalms chanted for such a person that took their own life.⁵⁶ Those who were denied such things were also excommunicated from the church. These actions made by the church pronounced a separation from itself and the deceased. This was also the church's way of dooming such a person to an eternal state of purgatory or even worse.⁵⁷

Mistreatment continued even past the spiritual torment for the deceased. Those who had committed such a heinous act in the eyes of the church were treated worse than criminals. Laws were not universal at the time regarding the treatment of suicide so each area adopted their own laws and customs. In many places it was customary to drag the corpse rigorously through the streets in order to not only mock the body but defile it before it would be buried. Other times the corpses were hanged in plain sight at the gallows in order to hinder anyone else from doing the same. In some areas the corpse was treated in a superstitious way as to not allow the spirit to come back and haunt the living. This was done by handling the corpse in a similar fashion to the manner of death. If the suicide was done by stabbing they would then be buried with a wooden

55 Minois, 9.

56 <https://www.cvltnation.com/rites-of-desecration-suicide-sacrilege-and-profane-burial-at-the-crossroads/>

57 Minois, 35.

wedge driven through their skull. If they drown themselves they would be buried near the water's edge. If they died by throwing themselves from a great height they would be buried under a pile of stones with the biggest stones on their head, stomach and feet.⁵⁸ Many accounts at this time also tell of bodies being buried at a crossroads with a wooden stake through their chest. This was done in order to confuse the spirit and hinder it from every haunting the living. This practice continued in England up until the 1820s.⁵⁹

Even after all the physical mistreatment was complete it was still not over for the one who committed suicide. At this point in time *felo de se* law was put into effect.⁶⁰ This law made it possible for the king to seize any property from the estate of a suicide. It was common for the king to seize a large portion of the property and leave the rest for the remaining spouse and children who would then be in a state of terrible poverty.⁶¹ The landless peasants were not left unpunished either. Throughout the Middle Ages it was feudal law for the common peasant to swear their allegiance to the king. This oath made them property of the lord that was over them. Taking their life deprived their lord of the labor they promised to provide. Suicide was then considered to be a form of theft and compensation was necessary.

The end of the Middle Ages made way for the Renaissance, Reformation and Baroque periods. During this time opposition toward the established doctrine of the church began to be challenged once again.

58 Minois, 35.

59 <https://www.cvltnation.com/rites-of-desecration-suicide-sacrilege-and-profane-burial-at-the-crossroads/>

60 *Felo de se* is a Latin term that means "felon of himself."

61 <https://www.cvltnation.com/rites-of-desecration-suicide-sacrilege-and-profane-burial-at-the-crossroads/>

Luther on Suicide

Credit for the inception of the Reformation tends to go to one man and one man alone- Martin Luther. This former Augustinian monk shook the foundation of the Catholic Church by challenging its doctrine. This was true regarding the church's stance on suicide as well. Although the church fervently opposed suicide without qualification and blamed the entire action on the individual, Luther saw suicide as a tool of the devil. In one of his table talks Luther said regarding suicide:

It is very certain that, as to all persons who have hanged themselves, or killed themselves in any other way, 'tis the devil who has put the cord round their necks, or the knife to their throats.⁶²

Luther was familiar with the devil's torment. He recounts in much of his writing the attacks that the devil had on him while at the monastery. In one of Luther's letters of spiritual counsel he writes to a man who is struggling with depression. He states that the depressing thoughts are not his own thoughts "but the cursed devil's, who cannot bear to see us have joyful thoughts."⁶³ These works of the devil are what moved a person to take their own life. For this reason Luther gives hope regarding the eternal fate of such a person. In one of his table talks Luther makes clear confession of his thoughts on the matter.

I don't share the opinion that suicides are certainly to be damned. My reason is that they do not wish to kill themselves but are overcome by the power of the devil. They are like a man who is murdered in the woods by a robber.⁶⁴

Although Luther did not fully agree with the church's stance on suicide he did not support or encourage it in any way. He wanted his stance on the matter to be kept unknown for the most

62 <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/selections/martin-luther/>

63 Martin Luther. *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*. (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2003), 123.

64 <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/selections/martin-luther/>

part in order that no one use it as an excuse to end their own life.⁶⁵ Luther realized the power the devil had and saw no reason to give him anymore.

Luther's own struggle made him more capable of understanding the struggle of others. His understanding regarding suicide and the advice he gave in his letters were completely revolutionary to the field of theological discussion surrounding suicide.

One can expect Satan's persistence until faith is destroyed, but in the midst of depression God is with us. He never leaves us alone. In the midst of trouble He draws near to us. Sometimes the invisible God draws near through visible people, and they become the bearers of God's comforting and strengthening words to troubled souls. What's more, God seeks to assure us of His love and esteem. And through His Word, He counters Satan's lies with His truth.⁶⁶

Calvin on Suicide

The Reformation made way for a number of different sects of Christianity that broke from the Catholic Church. One of those breaks was begun by John Calvin. Like Luther, Calvin discussed the problem of suicide that was prevalent during the Reformation. Unlike Luther he fully supported the already present stance of the church regarding the condemnation of suicide and even took it a step further. Calvin saw suicide as such a disgusting act because he viewed it as the highest form of rebellion toward God and his will.⁶⁷ Anyone that took their life did not trust that the Lord would provide a way out. They placed their trust in themselves instead of in God. Calvin argues that even in the face of the worst suffering a true believer will submit to God's will.

⁶⁵ <https://ethicsofselfharm.lib.utah.edu/selections/martin-luther/>

⁶⁶ <https://www.theaquilareport.com/martin-luther-on-depression/>

⁶⁷ Jeffrey Watt. *Calvin on Suicide*. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 474.

The faithful, however, will always humbly submit to God's will. If God indeed punishes people-as God punished Ahithophel through causing his advise to be rejected- it is not to cause them to despair but rather to bring them back to the right path.⁶⁸

Suicide, in Calvin's opinion, was not an act that a believer committed. Rather than distrusting God in times of trouble a believer would cling to him all the more and see them as opportunities to grow closer to him. Although Calvin's doctrine differed from the Catholic Church he seemed to resemble more Catholic doctrine than protestant. At the Council of Trent the Catholic Church released a statement affirming the already established stance on suicide in the church.

"No man possesses such power over his own life as to be at liberty to put himself to death. Hence we find that the commandment does not say: Thou shalt not kill another, but simply: thou shalt not kill."⁶⁹

Summarizing the Past

When looking back through the history of suicidology it is easy to see the variety of opinions that were voiced from both the secular and religious realm. Going back all the way to antiquity, the discussion regarding suicide has been widely debated from both sides. Overall, the most noticeable problem with this discussion was a lack of understanding- lack of understanding towards those who had committed suicide, lack of understanding or empathy for the family who lost someone to suicide, and a failure to understand the concept of suicide in general. Over the years there have been many who have tried to combat suicide. Very few did so because of a care or concern for the suicidal. More often than not it was discouraged because it would be a hindrance to another party or it would cause dishonor to the suicidal or to someone else. There were many who actually encouraged such an act, seeing it as honorable or glorifiable in the eyes

68 Watt, 466.

69 Minois, 71.

of man and God. To think that there were times this seemed more like the opinion of the majority rather than the minority is quite sickening.

The past is so important to study when it comes to suicide because it reminds us how we got here. The stigma surrounding suicide that is still alive to this day was not formed overnight. It was established thousands of years ago and has been solidified with each new generation. What can be done to change this? Most importantly a growth in understanding. Quite often in the past the loudest voices regarding this topic knew the least amount about it. They weren't among those affected by it. They spoke as if they never struggled with the thought of doing it themselves. They spoke as if only the most vile would commit such an act. If they would have listened more before they spoke they would have realized this was not the case.

Before an opinion can even begin to form regarding such a complex concept there needs to be an enormous amount of growth in comparison to the past. Fortunately it is very clear that such growth has happened and is continuing to happen. Within the last century alone an overwhelming amount of research has benefited this discussion and revealed that we have been looking at the tip of the iceberg when it comes to understanding mental health and suicide. It is our prayer that this growth would only continue in order that the number of suicides would diminish rather than grow moving forward.

PART TWO: THE PRESENT

Recent Advancements Made To Prevent Suicide

Suicide prevention has been a very pressing matter in the United States over the last century. In 1958, the first suicide prevention center was opened in Los Angeles, California, with funding from the U.S. Public Health Service.⁷⁰ It wasn't long before centers were opening all over the United States. Today, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline alone has over 150 crisis centers.⁷¹ Not long after the first prevention center was opened the Center for Studies of Suicide prevention was founded in 1966. This center was established at the National Institute of Mental Health and has had a profound effect on suicidology to this day.⁷² The National Institute of Health noticed the pressing need for drastic action to counter the suicide rate at the time and convened a task force in 1970 that met in Phoenix, Arizona, to discuss the state of suicide prevention. Those who met not only focused on the current state of suicide but also future directions and priorities. This discussion was the precursor to equally important and beneficial meetings that took place in the mid-90s.

By the mid-90s the dialogue regarding suicide was no longer something intended to be kept in the dark. Although suicide prevention was something that was taken seriously it failed to provide palpable results. The number of suicides continued to climb. The number that really struck close to home and sounded the loudest alarm was the continual increase of suicides among the youth at that time. This demanded action. In 1996 the Suicide Prevention Action Network was founded with most of its members being ones who had lost someone to suicide. This network arranged a conference in Reno, Nevada that took place in 1998 in hopes of unifying and

70 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK109918/>

71 <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/our-network/>

72 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK109918/>

expanding the efforts for change. After a very beneficial meeting that produced over eighty recommendations for the future, this conference sounded the alarm and made suicide a nationwide crisis. In 1999, the Surgeon General consolidated these recommendations, including the creation of a National Strategy for Suicide prevention. In 2001 the National Strategy for Suicide prevention was published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This detailed a clear national plan to advance the framework of prevention, including the creation of a technical assistance and resource center.⁷³

Many advancements have been made recently and are currently being made in order to increase understanding regarding suicide. It would be natural to guess that an increase in understanding would mean a decrease in suicides, right? Unfortunately that has not been the case. The suicide rate in the U.S. has actually increased nearly 30% in the last twenty years.⁷⁴ How does this make any sense? If we know more than we ever have in the past, yet more people are committing suicide than ever before, what good is this understanding? It's important to realize that such thorough research into suicide has never been done before. The benefits that have come from these findings has been profound. But to expect decades of work to immediately solve and reverse the consequences that we are facing because of the failures that took place for centuries would be naïve. We cannot directly control the number of suicides. What we can control is what we know about them. It's our job to grow in the latter in hopes of decreasing the former.

73 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK109918/>

74 <https://qz.com/1306176/why-are-americans-so-sad/>

Mental Health

Mental health is like a younger brother to suicide. When suicide is brought up in conversation mental health tends to not be far behind. Unfortunately this leads to the belief that suicide is always a result of mental illness. This is most certainly not the case. Although many who commit suicide have mental health issues, to say that anyone who committed suicide or thought about committing suicide must have had a mental illness would be an overgeneralization and a false assumption. This is one of the most detrimental misconceptions to the stigma surrounding suicide. When it is talked about in this manner it can lead the person who has suicidal thoughts to want to automatically diagnose themselves with a mental illness. Instead of opening up about their struggle they try to fight off these inclinations in hopes of convincing themselves that there is no way they could have a mental issue. This leads the one struggling to plummet even further down into a pit of despair. On the one hand this would lead someone who has a mental health illness to attempt to fight it alone or suppress it and convince themselves it doesn't exist. It leads the other to fight against an illness that doesn't exist. Both of these options are dangerous and damaging to the future of the one combatting these desires.

With these things in mind it is important to realize that mental health does play an enormous role regarding suicide. A recent study by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) concluded that 90% of those who die by suicide have an underlying mental illness.⁷⁵ Although mental health might not always be a cause for suicide it might certainly be the leading cause for the rise of suicides.

That same study completed by the NAMI concluded that 1 in 5 adults in America experience a mental illness, 6.9 % of American adults live with major depression and 18.1 % of

⁷⁵ <https://www.nami.org/nami/media/nami-media/infographics/generalmhfacts.pdf>

adults live with anxiety disorders.⁷⁶ At the same time that researchers were discovering truths about suicide they discovered the even bigger monster that is mental illness. This is one more layer that has been uncovered that helps us understand even more about something that was unknown in the past.

⁷⁶ <https://www.nami.org/nami/media/nami-media/infographics/generalmhfacts.pdf>

PART THREE: THE FUTURE

In Church

The church ought to be the most comforting place for someone struggling with the thought of suicide. It should be a shelter of solace where they can find rest and reassurance from the fight they face. As they gather in God's house they will be surrounded by people who will not judge them for this struggle but instead do all they can to lift them up and provide as much comfort as possible. In this place they will hear God speak to them in his Word as he assures them that he cares very much about their troubles. They will find strength in God as he promises them that he will be with them every step of the way. Most importantly, they will find peace in the loving arms of their Savior.

These are goals that we want to see fulfilled in all of our churches. But how do we meet these goals? Who can play a part in the fulfillment of these goals? One of the most vital parties that needs to be involved is the pastor. The influence that the pastor has on his congregation is tremendous. The manner in which the pastor approaches and talks about suicide will be a manner that his people will likely adopt. As with many other matters the congregation looks to its pastor for guidance. Therefore, it is so vital that the pastor lead with a good example to the many that follow. The places that he can form and familiarize this example are numerous.

One of the places where the pastor can have the most profound effect is in the pulpit. As he prepares his sermon he has opportunity to speak to his people about the problems that they face in their everyday life. As he ponders the text he has his people in mind and is constantly asking how the text addresses and provides the solution God's people require. This is no different when it comes to suicide. But how often do we hear sermons address suicide or mental health? If the answer is not often, why is that the case? Is it because God's Word does not

address it? Absolutely not. Many times over in his Word God provides comfort to those who struggle to find hope in the difficulties of this world. Many times over God provides strength to the weak of spirit.

If this is the case, then why isn't it addressed in sermons more often? I think the most obvious answer is because it's tough to talk about. Suicide is not a discussion that we naturally want to run into. If there is a way we can avoid it we probably will. But this cannot be. In no way should a pastor force an issue on the text that is not there. His purpose when preaching is to express the truths that God has already proclaimed in his Word. If suicide is not a part of the text that week the pastor ought not add it unnaturally. That being said, the pastor needs to intentionally look for opportunities to address this subject and dive into it as often as possible. Before the discussion can possibly progress it first needs to get started. As people listen to the pastor talk about it in the pulpit they will feel more comfortable to bring it up to him outside of the pulpit. The pastor should also encourage his people to do so. From the pulpit he can announce an open invitation for anyone who is struggling to come talk to him for further guidance.

As people begin to come to the pastor for advice it's important that he give as much counsel as he is capable of giving. A pastor is more than qualified to open up and express the promises of Scripture to the struggling sheep. But more often than not the pastor is not qualified to give psychiatric advice or diagnosis. He leaves that to the professionals. Therefore, it is important that the pastor not only do his job in providing the healing that the Word gives, but refer their member so they can get further help from the professional world of mental health.

In Home

The church should not be the only place where the struggling can find comfort in time of trouble. The home can be another place where suicide can be talked about openly. One of the most difficult topics for parents to discuss with their children is death. They face a long list of questions that stand in the way of this conversation ever happening: When do they talk about it? At what age do they bring it up? How do they bring it up? Struggling to answer these questions can lead to a delaying of the conversation with their kids until the conversation is absolutely necessary. If this is true of death how much more of suicide?

So how do we change that? How can the home be a place where kids are comfortable talking to their parents about the thoughts they have going on in their head? It's important that parents bring it up before the kids are forced to. Thea Gallagher, the clinic director at the Center for Treatment and Study of Anxiety in the Perelman School of Medicine encourages an open dialogue with parents and kids. Regarding this idea she has said, "you can't prompt suicide by talking about it or asking about it."⁷⁷ When parents open up about suicide they allow their kids to be comfortable with sharing their battle. They are assured that the house in which they live is a safe place to share with a body of people who love you and want to help you. Parents play a crucial role in allowing kids to open up about possible mental illnesses they could be battling against.

Unfortunately this does not always happen. In a recent study of almost 2,000 teenagers they were asked to write a list of the things that they lie to their parents most often about. Coming in as the number one answer at 31.6%, was suicidal thoughts.⁷⁸ Could you imagine the struggle? The biggest problem that many teenagers face at the present time they are forced to

⁷⁷ <https://www.today.com/parents/experts-explain-how-talk-about-suicide-kids-age-t130589>

⁷⁸ <https://joshshipp.com/teen-survey/>

face alone. I imagine if a teenager would be asked to put this struggle into words it would be something similar to this:

Mommy, daddy, can't you see? How much your words are hurting me? I think of every word you said, at nights when I can't seem to sleep in my bed. Sister, brother, don't you hear? I'm in my room, holding back every tear. I don't want you to know I'm broken, So I'll keep smiling and leave all the pain unspoken.⁷⁹

This has become a very popular quote that has been traveling around the internet recently. It's probable that the attention it has received can be credited to a sense of agreement among the teen community. It would be of great benefit for every parent to take these words to heart and think about them on a regular basis. When a parent ignores the topic of suicide or begins to think their kids are immune to such thoughts, they risk allowing their child to fight the fight alone. They fail to step in and provide the support that child so desperately desires and needs. Let this never be so. Parents ought to always be willing to risk awkwardness and tension in order to open the dialogue and become a part of the discussion of suicide in their child's life.

In General

The big question is, what on earth can we do? If the false assumptions and dealings with suicide have been formed and strengthened for over 2000 years is it even worth attempting to reverse these trends? Absolutely. The reality is that you don't have to be a medical or psychiatric doctor in order to change the negativity surrounding suicide. There are limitless opportunities that you will be presented with in order to be a part of the progress in this discussion. With each new day the dialogue regarding suicide has opportunity to grow even more. It is this author's opinion that as this attitude and treatment grows there will be visible evidence in the future. The

⁷⁹ <https://www.wattpad.com/90979870-self-harm-depression-quotes-mommy-daddy>

struggle we face now involves the past. Learning from the past prevents us from repeating the same mistakes in the future.

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