

Suicide Silence

Her name was Theresa, a woman who killed herself at the end of December 2004 by jumping from a cliff on a hill near my home. She left behind eight kids, a broken marriage, and saddened friends. I knew Theresa a little because a few years before she died I answered an ad she placed at a local music store for people to form a band. We played together a couple of times; she was gifted with writing songs and playing keyboard and guitar. It didn't work out for us to keep playing together because she lived in a town about 45 minutes away, so I mostly lost touch with her except for a couple of emails. Once she attended a Bible study we had in our home but as I remember the distance again was too great so she didn't keep coming. I was reacquainted with her when I saw the newspaper article telling of her death.

I thought at first that she could not possibly have committed suicide, because the last I knew she seemed to be well adjusted if melancholy and bitter over her divorce. She had, I heard, solid relationships with a Baptist church she attended after she moved to our town, loved her kids, and had various friends. I suspected foul play; she couldn't have jumped; she must have been pushed. But as the details were related to me, they found her footprints at the top of the cliff showing she was running towards the edge, and she had to jump far enough to clear a ledge just below the lip of the cliff. What sort of pain and anger, I wondered at the time, drove her to run toward her own destruction like that?

More recently a nephew of mine also decided to end his life. I didn't know him at all, really, because he lived in another state and he's the son from a previous marriage of my sister-in-law's second husband. I met him a couple of times when he was a teenager. He was a likeable, quiet kid who was into computers and was an amateur astronomer. According to friends he was smart and had two astronomy magazine articles written about some of his work. Like Theresa, he also seemed stable and there was no warning that he was feeling suicidal. Neither left a note, so we can only guess at the final straw that caused them to self-depart this physical plane.

As I understand it, for a few days before Theresa killed herself she wore duct tape over her mouth. One of her kids asked her why, and she said "no one was listening to her anyway." She was right, in a way. We don't want to hear it when someone is contemplating their own demise. After they're dead we wonder why they didn't seek help, but before they go it's too uncomfortable to consider. Even if they did talk people have difficulty with answering. We can't even talk about it very well after our loved ones are gone, so how much harder is it when they're alive?

The thing is we don't talk very much about suicide. We don't talk about substance much as it is, but especially not about suicide. Silence is not golden in this; more like lead weights dragging us down. That's why I can't use the name of my nephew in this article. We're too concerned about hurt feelings. Or getting condemned for our lifestyle choices, which we don't want to give up. The people who are still around generally hurt too much to discuss anything. Later, after the pain and anger fade, we don't really want to bring back the bad feelings. In the meantime, the living try to assuage our feelings by thinking the best and hoping the dead made it to heaven, and we don't want anyone to tell us otherwise. So we don't talk. A lot of times the suicidal person just doesn't want to hear the truth anyway. Theresa should've put the tape over her ears too, because

she wasn't listening to people telling her that she was wrong. She felt justified in her bitterness and didn't want anyone to take it away from her. But silence means those left behind are not allowed to explore all the reasons for suicide and make a judgment about their own lives. Silence keeps us from teaching, and keeps us from learning from whatever mistakes were made.

Some say that suicide is an unforgivable sin because of the prohibition of murder and the fact that the person cannot repent. I believe it is a sin, but according to Jesus there is no unforgivable sin except blaspheming (which means calling the works of God evil) the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:29). Whether suicide falls under that heading or not I don't know. You have to wonder though at the condition of a heart that kills itself. Is it hard or soft? There are five examples of suicide in the Bible (Samson, Judges 16:28-31; Saul, 1 Samuel 31:4; Saul's armor bearer, 1 Samuel 31:5; Ahithophel, 2 Samuel 17:23; Judas, Matthew 27:1-10). None of them were under good circumstances. There is nothing in the Word one way or the other about the acceptability of suicide to God or a specific forgiveness for it, but I suspect it isn't a good thing.

There are, I suppose, many reasons people have for terminating their own existence in this material world. Pride is one, and pride is at the root of sin. Could be anger. Sometimes shame for a sin or sins. Maybe a desire to get back at someone. Release from physical injuries or disease is another. Some tell me that suicide is the last act of trying to exert control over things happening beyond our (perceived) control. Samson sacrificed his life to get out of bondage and take a bunch of key enemies with him (pride). Saul wanted to avoid the things his enemies might do to him after his defeat in war (pride). Ahithophel was a trusted counselor to David, later betraying him to help David's son Absalom plot to take David's life and kingship. David prayed that Ahithophel's normally "god like" counsel would be turned to confusion, and after God answered that prayer Ahithophel killed himself (pride). Judas killed himself out of remorse for the betrayal of Jesus to the Jewish religious leaders. This one we might not lay to pride, but I think in general it seems that taking one's own life at its root is an act of pride. The thing is we can make up all kinds of reasons to bail out, but God put us here to be in His family and do what He says. Bad situations occur because we make decisions contrary to what God wants, or suffer from other's bad decisions as they depart from what God says. Either way, God wants us to live and glorify Him with our lives or we wouldn't be here. Suicide doesn't help accomplish this very well.

A contributing factor to Theresa's death was a bad divorce (like there are any good ones?). The fallout from it really bothered her, which I knew from the few times we had played music together. The rejection by her husband was a bitter pill to swallow. This bitterness affected everyone around her, and tended to drive people away. I have no idea what led to the divorce or how much work was put into the marriage by either of them, but even if she was completely at fault (which I don't think is true) suicide is not the answer. In my nephew's case I believe a contributing factor was that he chose a homosexual lifestyle, although as I said there was no written testimony that this was connected. It was just an additional coincidence I guess that his friend moved out of the home a few weeks earlier and his mom moved out at the same time. Both Theresa and my nephew were quiet in life and quiet about their reasons for choosing death. Again, we are not allowed to talk about it.

Divorce is a lot like death. In some ways it is closely related to suicide because it kills part of our soul. So much is killed by what are essentially (in most cases) selfish people fixated on the

greener grass over the fence. Love dies. The relationship between man and wife is killed. Relationships with kids are killed. Friends are affected too. New relationships (marriages, step-kids, new friends) all have the taint of the death of the previous marriage to contend with. Rarely is divorce a good thing. Sometimes the only thing, but not a good thing. True, some don't ask for a divorce to be handed them. Sometimes there is no getting around it for one reason or another. Still, something dies in most divorce and the stink hits everyone. Like a virus the majority of divorce infects everyone with dysfunction and more death in the form of crushed hope.

Those who are involved in suicide counseling say that depression is the number one reason people kill themselves. A good definition of depression I've heard is "anger without enthusiasm." But I think the biggest factor generating the anger (with or without enthusiasm) is a loss of hope. Hope in a turnaround. Hope for forgiveness. Hope that whatever bad stuff is happening will be over soon. Or hope that there is a greater purpose for suffering. Silence drives the lack of hope because of either a refusal to grab hold of hope offered by people who care, or a genuine belief that there isn't any hope along with the refusal to go looking for hope.

The world is destroying hope, because our only hope is God and the world is desperately trying to remove Him from their midst. Lack of hope is one reason why the godless communist nation of Cuba has the highest suicide rate in the western hemisphere. God gets short shrift in many ways in our modern era, and one of the evidences is a rise in the suicide rate (38,000 in 2010) which has passed the rate of death from auto accidents (34,000 in 2010) in the U. S. Some attribute this to drugs for depression not working as well anymore, but why would we need drugs in the first place? Does depression come from a lack of chemicals? (That's a rhetorical question.)

I don't think it is a coincidence that the rise in depression and suicides is in proportion to the rejection of God in society and God's Law in the church. As our culture has gotten more industrialized, less time has to be devoted to eking out a living and we have more free time. What have we done with it? Immersed ourselves in God's ways and tried to build a better society? Or do we selfishly indulge every whim for amusement or entertainment? Do we spend more time reading the Bible or watching TV? We have selfishly indulged, and the more we do that the more divorce and homosexuality and other sins we inflict on ourselves, the more depression we have, and the more suicides there are. I can't see a connection, can you? (He says with facetiousness.)

One survey says divorced people are three times more likely to die from suicide as married people (National Institute for Healthcare Research). Children of divorce are more at risk for depression and other behavior problems (such as homosexuality) because they often blame themselves for the breakup or they just don't have the stability that two parents (of opposite gender) bring. Homosexual men are six times more likely to attempt suicide than straight men (highest of any group). This means my nephew had perhaps a nine times greater chance of suicide. Still don't think there was a connection? Of course not. Let's be silent about that too. These facts people will dismiss as coincidence. We can't talk about it. We don't like the fact that there are connections between selfishness, divorce, homosexuality, depression and suicide. We don't want to be reminded that our choices have consequences, which is at the heart of our silence, and silencing others. We're not allowed to explore the potential causes in order to stop

the self-slaughter. Many would rather the depressed person just off themselves and be permanently quiet. They are making too much noise. Another roll of duct tape please.

People blame homosexual suicide on bullying or lack of approval of gay marriage. I'm not kidding. The Center for Disease Control has a number of references in the search results for lack of gay marriage approval as a cause of homosexual suicide. The hate-filled homosexual lobby is working overtime to convince us that it's really other people's fault that the gay lifestyle is so deadly. They want to silence all those who object to their perversity and know how hateful their "alternate lifestyle" really is. Shifting word definitions, using "official" organizations and "scientific" studies slanted their way, attacking people (homosexuals in general are the worst bullies on the planet, see Sodom, Genesis 19 or any of their "parades") rather than ideas, and labeling studies that don't go their way as "controversial" are just some of the weapons used.

The problem with their line of attack is that lots of people regardless of choice of sex partners are bullied all the time. Homosexuals even bully their own in order to keep them from getting out of the homosexual lifestyle. To them, a dead homosexual (even self-killed) is better than a live one that has repented. A dead homosexual can't repent and prove that the arguments in favor of homosexuality are lacking intelligence, science and morality. Most of us just remove ourselves from the vicinity of bullies, fight back, or ignore it. We don't generally think to kill ourselves to get back at the bully. I have to think there are more powerful factors than bullying or marriage recognition that would drive a homosexual to self-murder. If you examine the lifestyle of the homosexual it's easy to see that it is the lifestyle itself that contributes heavily to suicide.

In an effort to justify sin there are people who say that homosexuals are "born that way." I don't buy the justification, but I do buy the fact that homosexuals are born that way. Of course they are. Sin is natural, and we are all born with the tendency to sin. However, God has provided a way out of the slavery to sin through the death and resurrection of Him who knew no sin. He has given us hope and power to choose a better way. We can turn from death to life. The homosexual argument is intended to remove responsibility, but all it really does is rob people of this hope. Most instinctively know that their choice is wrong, and there are those who seek a way out. In seeking to justify themselves and avoid responsibility homosexual bullies change hope into despair and drive many to suicide. It is homosexuals that are killing homosexuals.

The homosexual choice is regressive meaning that after a while, as with drugs, the beginning stuff doesn't have the appeal it started with. So a homosexual has to do more and more perverse, hateful, shameful and hurtful behavior over time to get the same feelings as at first. Homosexuality is hate. Hate for God, hate for good, and hate for self. There's no dodging the fact that the lifestyle makes hearts harder as time goes on. And gets people closer to suicide. The shame and guilt come from inside and being out of whack with their Creator, not from outside. Divorce is regressive too, judging by the number of repeat divorces.

Roughly half of marriages break down. This statistic is skewed because divorced people usually remarry at least once or twice. My natural mom was married seven times that I know of, so she was really skewed. If I remember right her mother was on number 13 last I knew. There are more people in long term marriages than not, which if more broadly known would encourage hope. The divorced ones keep the statistics high by making divorce into an art form. They just won't

keep it together. I'm pretty experienced in the effects of divorce on other lives, having been through six of them when I was a child. One divorce is hard, two almost impossible, but six is just freakin' nuts. Add that to five foster homes and this might explain my own depression I had for a while. My natural mother was one of those who couldn't keep it together. In her case, however, she just refused to be anything other than selfish.

But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. (Malachi 2:14-15, ESV)

Not only am I an expert on the effects of silence and divorce on kids, I'm pretty knowledgeable on the effects of homosexuality too. I was abused by one. Not very badly, but it was bad enough I still remember it clearly. I haven't told anyone about this until recently (there's that silence again), but when I was about 12 a guy in a trailer park next to my apartment complex befriended me. Gene was a nice guy father-figure type at a time when I was between fathers. He had a small motorcycle called a Honda Trail 90 and took me out to ride it. People who work in the counseling field will recognize something called "grooming" was going on here, but at 12 I just thought he was being a friend. Things were fine until we got to rough housing a little in his trailer and he stuck his hand down my pants.

After a moment of shocked immobility I left and never went back. It was obvious that he was taking advantage of my broken life to groom me for his own purposes. Keep in mind too that this was about 42 years ago. It's only gotten worse since then. Homosexuals work this way. They create more confusion and take advantage of it to lure uncertain people into a lifestyle change. They like to start young if they can because it is easier to confuse. Former homosexual Andrew Comiskey in his book, Pursuing Sexual Wholeness states, "After my first homosexual experience at age sixteen, I quickly developed an addiction to it because of the affirmation and sense of acceptance I was finally receiving from other men." Once you are in the lifestyle, guilt and shame coupled with silence keep you in it. Don't try to sell me the usual tripe put out by homosexual activists that Gene was a pedophile and not a homosexual. They are evil in the same way. It may be that a pedophile can work his or her evil on either gender, but the core behavior and motivation is the same. Homosexuality is a predatory sin. Just because there are different flavors of bad doesn't mean any of them are good.

My nephew probably got lured in by similar means. Someone took advantage of his shy, quiet nature, a broken home, the fact that he was a little effeminate because of being raised by a strongly selfish mom (as was I in my early years), had perhaps a little difficulty with girls, and convinced him he was a homosexual. Maybe this person even "loved" him or acted like it. My suspicion is that my nephew thought he was "in love" and going to be in his new found relationship forever, just like a heterosexual male would think about a marriage. I'm guessing it was a shock to find out that there is no such thing as a monogamous homosexual relationship. In fact, according to homosexual books and articles, a homosexual relationship is healthy only when there is no sexual fidelity at all. The average homosexual has 300 to 500 partners in a lifetime (20 to 106 a year), and a large percentage have 1,000 or more. This lifetime is also 20

years shorter than the average straight male (60 years compared to 80). I don't have any doubt that the broken relationship along with the shame and guilt of the sin of homosexuality did my nephew in.

He couldn't talk to his father because as nice as he is, and in some ways a better man than me, he doesn't like to talk about anything unpleasant. He routinely shuts down conversations he doesn't like. It wouldn't have mattered if my nephew would've opened up; his father isn't a believer and wouldn't have had any good answers anyway. He would've affirmed his son's negative behavior and cemented the eventual suicide option. His mother went to church but my impression is she's one of those mushy Christians-in-name-only that won't speak up about what is right either. My other nephew (brother to the one who killed himself) oddly enough has turned out to be a solid Christian and has married an excellent Christian woman too. But not so odd I guess – I did too.

You wouldn't have thought it could happen knowing my early childhood, but in my case I was fortunate enough to be adopted at 14 by good parents that helped point me in the right direction. My (other) nephew and I are among those that are proof that God can rescue from even the toughest circumstances. However, Christians are condemned and told to keep silent before we even open our mouths. Partly this is because some Christians don't know what they are talking about and should just keep their mouths shut, but mostly it is undeserved. God has the answers and shutting His people up just robs others of hope. The answer to depression, divorce, homosexuality and other sin is to turn away from it toward God's ways outlined for us in the Bible. But we don't want to do that. Silence enables us to just keep going as we want to. We want freedom to choose self-indulgence so much that we'll ignore any evidence that the result of our choice to depart from God is universally deadly.

The church is silent about both divorce and homosexuality (and many more sins), doesn't discipline sinning members, and throws out the Law so they're not reminded of how they're falling down on the job. It does not teach love in the biblical sense. It teaches mostly sentiment and confuses that with love. My son was the unknowing target in a church of the start of a grooming process by the sound guy. He wanted to learn how to do the sound, he hung around the sound guy trying to learn (and was started on the grooming process), then we found out the guy had been involved in previous incidents with other boys. It was stopped by the pastor, because the pastor knew what had happened before but didn't say anything to protect the abuser. He was promoting an unbiblical idea of love. Happily in this case the silence was broken, but it was almost too late and certainly too little.

In addition to the church's silence in proper Bible teaching about these subjects, we are silent about affirmation or reassurance of the good choices people make. We don't encourage each other to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24) as we should. Love is truth, and it is applying the truth by doing what is right and just. The grievously wrong idea that silence doesn't kill people is a crock. We might think that by keeping silent (or shutting other people up) we aren't hurting anyone, but we aren't helping either. Our silence does not come from loving God or the truth. We actually contribute quite a bit to the problems. Silence equates to just standing there at a car accident while people die. We are not allowed to say that divorce or homosexuality increase the chances of suicide (or are generally destructive period), or warn people who participate in such behavior of what is likely to happen to them. Our silence allows people to fall into tar pits of sin

and we don't even mark the trail as hazardous. To be politically correct is to be practically useless.

I think the reason many don't want to talk about tough subjects such as divorce or homosexuality especially in the context of suicide is we don't want to hear that our opinions about it are (usually) wrong. Real love is hard to show, and comes from the Word dwelling richly in our hearts and lives. Yet we don't read His Word and we don't follow the whole package. We also want to indulge ourselves with a pity party, and we don't want anyone sidetracking us from doing whatever our little pea-picking heart's desire. We don't want to say other people are wrong because we might want to do the same things. Silence starts long before the actual suicide when we silence the Bible in our lives.

We want to believe that the deceased are in heaven, because the alternative is horrible to contemplate. However, if we get caught in silence we are in danger of losing more people to self-killing. If we can't talk, we can't warn. We can't use the example of the dead to help the living avoid the same mistakes. If your friend told you they were going to take the car this afternoon and drive off a cliff, would you do everything you could to head them off? Even if you had to tie them up till they came to their senses? So why are we silent when a friend says they are going to divorce? Why shut up about homosexuality? How is it love to stand by and watch them drive (or run) over the cliff? We may not be able to stop them, or might not have the opportunity for a specific friend (like Theresa or my nephew) but we can still do everything we can. That includes having frank and truthful discussion beforehand about God's Word and exposing the truth about the consequences of sinful behavior. We can forego silence by taking in all of God's words into our heart of flesh, living them out, and telling others about them.

If the dead could come back, I'm sure we'd hear all about how wrong it is to self-murder. We'd hear regret and sorrow about the pain inflicted on those they left behind. There'd be sadness about a life cut short, and how much the dead could've done for good and God with the life they had left if they could do it over (Luke 16:19-31). There would be solid teaching on the truth of God's Word and the importance of repentance and living it out. I'm sure the dead would have excellent testimony about the reality of God and the finality of death. I also don't think it would be heard because it would interfere with our selfish aims. But one thing's for sure: I don't think you would hear anyone extol the virtue of suicide.

So I'm taking the duct tape off of my mouth. Certain people in my family don't want to talk, but they can't shut me up. All they can do is put duct tape over their ears. The two people I describe here were adults. Younger people who suicide (such as the 12 year-old daughter of a friend of mine who shot herself) might need a whole other article. As adults, Theresa and my nephew (he reached 30 years old, Theresa was in her 40's) made their own decisions and were responsible. In both cases there was help available in God, family and friends. They just either didn't take it (duct tape on the ears) or wouldn't seek it (duct tape on the mouth). They got so self-focused that everyone else and every other opinion just didn't make it into their thinking. They knew better, they just chose different.

Intended or not, suicide is generally the epitome of hateful, selfish behavior. I say this not for the dead, but for the living, and I think most of the dead would agree with me (now anyway). There

is nothing good about it, and it doesn't solve anything. The sun rises the next day, and the next, and the next. A few sad feelings linger to remind us of friends or family no longer here, but I've got news for those contemplating ending it all – life goes on. After a few days, other than a few sad feelings, most will hardly know you're gone. You will not make a difference with your self-termination. The best difference you could make is in turning anger into humble obedience to God and abiding in the whole of His living oracles. You will make more of a difference with the death of your old or natural man (the flesh or a soul opposed to God) or woman (1 Corinthians 2:14) and a resurrected life in the newness of the gospel through the blood of Jesus the Messiah shed for you. If you want to kill, then crucify the flesh (the part that hates God and doesn't follow His Word - Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20, 5:24) with its sinful passions and desires. Repent and be baptized. It's not that hard. Forgiveness is readily available. Humble yourself and submit to His Word.

Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. (James 1:21, ESV)

Everyone will have to answer for their actions, and suicide (along with divorce, murder, theft, homosexuality, and other lawlessness) is going to be very hard to explain to a loving and just God (Revelation 22:15). I do not know if self-killers are going to be in heaven. That decision has already been cemented one way or the other and is between the deceased and God. The living need to examine the mistakes of the dead and learn from them. Hopefully we learn to stay away from the destructive behavior that God says is an abomination. Hopefully we can start talking about it. Hopefully the church can go back to teaching the plain meaning of the Word of Life so people have a reason to continue. Hopefully we can go back to love as it is shown and taught by God, including His Laws. It's not my call whether someone is in heaven or hell. But don't take the chance. There is a lot to live for and help is available. At least take the duct tape off of the mouth or the ears. Read His Word. Talk about it. Listen to hope. Grab hold. Flee from sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18). Love.

Shalom
Bruce Scott Bertram