

A Case Study on Suicide

Written by Bob Stone

Eric's dad died when Eric was 15. They had been very close, so when his mom remarried about a year later, Eric had a hard time adjusting. His stepdad talked about how much God loved him, but Eric didn't want to hear it... just like he didn't want to hear the stranger in the school assembly say things get better; that suicide isn't any answer. Eric had lived through three years of anger, pain, and emptiness looking for better. It didn't exist.

Drugs and alcohol numbed the pain. Eric remembers: "What really led me into suicide was drugs and alcohol. I never figured I would get to that point. It started when I was probably 10 years old, smoking grapevines in the woods behind our house."

Eric separated himself from reality and from the people who loved him. "There were people in my life that cared about me," Eric said. "The way I wrote to them in my suicide letters was so deep. Why couldn't I go to them and say, 'I am about to kill myself. I need your help'? The world of drugs I was in separated me from my relationship with them."

On Thanksgiving Day, 1990, Eric hit bottom. Already in danger of losing his driver's license, he got another ticket. He was already facing a possible \$5,000 fine or 30 days in jail for possession of deer out of season. Also, he could lose his guns, all handed down to him by his father.

As he lay in bed that night, he felt tired. Tired of the pressure. Tired of the anger. Tired of the hurt. Tired of living.

He got out of bed and put on his best clothes. He wrote his will and good-bye letters to his family and friends. He was so angry at his father for dying, he decided to kill himself over his father's grave. Eric sat in the cemetery with his roommate's rifle under his chin. He tried to pull the trigger, but couldn't. He tried again and again. Completely frustrated with himself, he downed a fifth of whiskey. Then he put the rifle under his chin and pulled the trigger.

At 4 a.m. Eric lay in his own blood, unable to move a muscle. He couldn't see, or hear, or yell for help. But he could feel pain.

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Was he dead? Was this hell? If he was still alive, would he be left here to bleed to death? Eric had put himself to the test, and now he knew he didn't want to die. It was his senior year. He wanted to live, to find the right answers, a way out of the pain. But he had chosen a highway to nowhere. Was this the end?

Who could he turn to? Who would help him? In that dark moment, Eric remembered the things his stepfather had told him--that God loved him and was always there for him if he'd only ask. For the first time in his life Eric prayed, "God, I need your help."

The police report from that night shows God's intervention. Eric managed to get to his car and pull himself into the driver's seat. The sheriff's department clocked Eric at speeds over 110 m.p.h. as he drove himself to the hospital. The surgeons worked for 17 hours in emergency reconstructive surgery. He went into a coma. A few weeks later, his aunt sat down on his catheter, and he woke up.

Eric was alive, but the exit he had taken meant bumpy roads ahead. When he looked in the mirror for the first time and saw his disfigured reflection, he cried. Yet he somehow knew that God was there, just as He had been in the cemetery. Tears of anguish became tears of joy as Eric realized how God had spared his life. "That was the day I found hope," Eric said.

Eric had to fight to hold on to that hope. Just as his physical recovery was a process, his spiritual and emotional recovery was step by step. Eric says he didn't even accept Jesus as his Savior until a year after God came to his rescue, and even then he struggled.

"It was instant relief and contentment when I first invited Christ into my life," Eric said. "It was instant peace and joy. And for a period of time I gave up the drugs and alcohol. But all I really focused on was the emotional or sensational aspect of Christianity... the way I felt. There wasn't a real foundation there."

Eric knew God loved him. He knew God could save him from anything, even from himself. But he chose the hard way. He still prayed, but he was not committed to God. Eric said, "I needed an anniversary or something to say, "Okay. This is the day I'm going to change my life."

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One more accident, and Eric had his anniversary. He shattered his ankle mountain climbing. Finally, he understood he couldn't change himself. He turned his life over to God. He started going to church, reading the Bible, and leaning on Christian friends. "It is the actual foundation in the Word that has made my relationship with God what it is; that has made my life what it is today," he says.

Today, Eric is the stranger speaking at school assemblies telling teens suicide isn't the answer. Through T.A.P.S. [Teenage Awareness Preventing Suicide] he is a flesh-and-blood example that there is a way out of their maze of pain.

What does Eric tell teens on the edge?

The answers "I love you" and "You will make it" were not enough for Eric. But when God says it, it's enough. Eric knows that now. His message is the hope Christ brings, not empty promises but PLANS! "For I know the PLANS I have for you," declares the Lord, "PLANS to prosper you and not to harm you, PLANS to give you hope and a future"--Jeremiah 29:11 [NIV].

Before Eric tried suicide, he reasoned, "Why would anyone want to go through life wishing for death?" His suicide letters spell out his desire for hope, happiness, and meaning: "I hope I can find a world where I'm happy. I hope I can find this wonderful place called heaven. Keep my memories alive like Dad's. Hopefully in my journey I will find him."

Eric's Heavenly Father found him. God loves him--pain, hurt, confusion, mistakes, even disfigurement included. "When I was in the hospital, my mom didn't care how many scars I came out of there with. She wanted me to live and be happy with my life. God is the same way. He doesn't care what kind of scars you have. All scars show is that you have hurt. And that you've healed.

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Robin and Eric were married in December 1995.

When you look at Eric Renegar's wedding picture you probably will not guess that he attempted suicide five years ago. He was 18. He borrowed a roommate's 30/30 hunting rifle, put it under his chin, and fired.

Like the approximately 1,000 teens who attempt suicide every day in the U.S. [18 succeed], Eric couldn't find a way out of life's pain and troubles.

Help When Suicide

Seems the Only Answer

Please, if you feel like suicide is the only way to deal with your pain, before you do anything call one of the following numbers. There is no charge for calling the 800 numbers. There are people who care and who can help you resolve your hurt, your disappointment, and your fear.

Jeremiah 29:11 is God's promise to you, too. "For I know the plans I have for you .. plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future." [NIV].

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Help For You

Emerge Counseling Ministries 1-800-621-5207

Enrich 800 Help Line [For ministers and their family members] 1-800-867-4011

Shepherd Ministries/Dawson McAllister Counseling.. 1-800-394-HOPE [4673]

Rapha Counseling Services 1-800-383-HOPE [4673]

Prayer Center [Assemblies of God; call for prayer] 1-800-477-2937

Signs of Suicidal Intention

- Someone has made an attempt to commit suicide.
 - Someone talks about a plan to commit suicide, or even hints that he/she thinks about it.
 - Someone has the weapon [including pills, alcohol, razor blades, ropes, hoses, guns] to use to commit suicide.
 - Someone demonstrates suicidal symptoms in conversation, behavior [such as depression], or talking about personal thoughts.
 - Someone has experienced a recent, deeply-felt crisis.
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Helping a Suicidal Friend

- Stay in contact by telephone or in person. Ask him/her to tell you as much as possible
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about his/her feelings and plans. Listen and show compassion.

- Try to find out what the major problems are in your friend's life.
- Try to know for sure what potential your friend has shown for committing suicide. Has he tried to hurt himself before? Does he have a plan? Has he experienced a crisis? Does he have a weapon or a way to hurt himself? Is he depressed? Is he under a lot of stress? Is he withdrawn, staying to himself?
- Ask someone you trust to help you know what to do: a pastor, a parent, a school counselor or teacher, a doctor, a police officer.
- Pray for God's intervention and guidance.