**Suicide**

By Gerard Feller July 2011

According to the (Dutch) Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) 1525 persons in the Netherlands committed suicide in 2009. (1)Every year there are minimal 15,000 attempts of suicide. In the ages of 15-30 this is the cause of death. Often counselors and family members had no previous warning and they suddenly are confronted with a suicide. Because suicide is in reality *self-murder*there is a serious moral content involved in this act of desperation and hopelessness. In this article I want to consider both the psychosocial aspects and Biblical references to this subject. One specific form of suicide, that of euthanasia, will not be discussed. Sometime later a separate article on this matter will be published.

**Fascination with death**

We are living in a culture in which people are fascinated by death. Euthanasia and abortion , it would appear, are stations which we have already passed. On the internet there are more and more sites telling you how to end your life in a humanly fitting manner. Step by step is explained how to use razorblades, a pistol, drowning or with drugs to end your life. In lots of the modern music suicide is offered as the solution for your problems .(2)(For example: Ozzie Ozborne’s ‘Suicide Solution’). The band **Suicidal Tendencies**produced an album ‘Suicide‘s an Alternative’ and every number has death or suicide as a theme. The number ”Spring” from the German metalband is about a person who is encouraged to commit suicide while standing on a bridge at a great height. The number ”Lie” from Herman Brood is about the suicide of a junkie who doesn’t want to continue living a lie. Eventually Brood also committed suicide. Unfortunately the suicide of a pop model results in others following the example.

After the suicide last year of Antonie Kamerling that was also the result. This is known as the “Werther-effect” named after the person in a novel by Goethe ‘Die Leiden van jungen Werthers’, a book that was published in 1774, after which a large number of young people took their lives in the same way the main person in the book had done.(8) Contacts with the occult can also lead to suicidal tendencies. This was possibly the motivation of Tristan v.d.V (9) from Alphen who committed suicide at a young age. Collective suicides are well known. For example the collective suicide of 909 followers of Jim Jones on November 18, 1978. In Switzerland and Japan there have also been collective suicides of the members of sects in recent years. In past history there was the massive suicide of Jews at Massada. Suicide as a heroic deed to save another is not usually regarded as suicide. For instance the heroic soldier who falls on a grenade to save the his commander from a certain death. This is usually called self-sacrificing. (13) The statistics are not deceptive: in the United States every year two million people attempt suicide. Eighty percent of those successful have either previously made an attempt or have threatened to do so. Frequently heard erroneous statement is that a failed attempt is nothing more than an attempt to attract attention. About 15% of those who fail try again within two years. Three times as many women as men attempt suicide, but it is also so that men are three times more successful than women. Those with higher education like doctors, dentists, lawyers, but also popstars and idols have a high percentage of suicide. Holidays and special days like Christmas, birthdays and NewYears Day are known to have high scores. Others are victims of psychiatric sicknesses like schizophrenia, depression, loneliness, fears and occult involvement. Many suicides are not reported publically because this could have a cumulative effect. The percentage of 95% (3) is reported of individuals with serious psychiatric complaints in which personality disturbances play a significant role. For instance people with bipolar personality symptoms or people with fantasies and hallucinations. Untreated serious depressions can also lead to suicide. And finally, there are many traffic deaths not included in the statistics where the individual (in a blackout) suddenly steered the vehicle off the road or into an obstacle.

**An Evil Age**

Jeff Fountain, staff member of Youth for Christ Netherlands, observes just like others a relationship between the number of suicides in Europe and the disintegration of social controls. “The 20th century has caused Europe very much damage. First the Holocaust, then seventy to eighty years of communism. .”(4) Faith in the future has not yet returned to eastern Europe. The EU project, bearing something of a Christian fundament, is of great historical importance. The influence of Marx, Freud, Darwin and Nietzsche continues up to the present. Young people are living in that field of tension” He sees that structured families are disappearing. “The high numbers of suicides in parts of Europe I see as the result of the collapse of families and the community of love. Young people who embrace sex, materialism and drugs soon discover their worthlessness. Hopelessness follows and they begin flirting with death as the false answer.”

Fountain speaks about spiritual sickness in Europe. Church has been discarded but the youth has not yet discovered the reality of Jesus. We need to keep searching for the soul of Europe and a spiritual basis. Don’t expect it from government, here is an important responsibility for Gods folk - demonstrating His love tangibly. Without the presence of the church and good youth work it will become much worse in many countries. Many young people can still find help via official and less official channels.

Suicide is a fact that presents itself in all forms of civilization, but according to the place, time and religious beliefs it has been and still is judged differently. **Buddhism**, **Judaism** and **Christianity** reject suicide, **shintoism** does not (recall **harakiri** and **kamikaze**). **Hinduism** rejects suicide as well, but many hindu wives throw themselves into the flames when their husbands are cremated. (11) Islam also rejects suicide with the exception of the countless suicidal martyrs who think they will get a heavenly reward for their deeds. Of all the world religions **Judaism** and **Christianity**are the strongest in their opposing suicide. The Council of Arles (432 A.D.) declared suicide to be crime and the **Catholic Church**states that suicide is seriously in conflict with **righteousness, hope and love,**and that it is forbidden by the sixth command-ment. In their view, however, severe psychic disorders, fear or intensive stress from trials, suffering or torture can reduce the responsibility of the suicidal person. (6) In ancient times suicide occurred rather frequently in **Greece**, the **Roman Empire** and **India.**Well known are the suicides of **Cato** in 46 B.C. and **Seneca** in 65 A.D. During the Middle Ages this phenomena was not very common in Europe but began to increase in the 17th and 18th century and even more so in the 19th. Dante, the 13th century writer believed that the worst part of hell was reserved for the victims of suicide. In his book, Dante’s Inferno, the most horrible chapter is about suicide. Those individuals were boiled in their own blood and tormented by vultures.

**The church and suicide**.

Augustine, the church father argued in the 5th century that suicide was a violation of the sixth commandment: ´Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13)

Later, Thomas Aquinas taught that the confession of sin precedes the progressing from this world to the following, and that suicide was the most fatal of all sins, because the victim could not demonstrate remorse. For a long time people who died as a result of suicide could not be buried in Christian cemeteries because that was “holy ground”. This is clearly not the teaching of the Bible because the Bible teaches that we are saved by the grace of God, not by works (Eph. 2:8-9) and that nothing can separate a Christian from the love of God (Rom. 8:37-39). (Read also John 5:24; John 10:27-29; I John 1:11-13) Killing is not only forbidden by the sixth commandment. Whether is it is caused by carelessness (Deut.22:8) or by wantonness (Lev. 19:13) or by hate, revenge or anger (Lev. 19:17,18) human life is holy because it is created in the image of God. The commandment is clear; it doesn’t say don’t kill another person, it states clearly “Thou shalt not kill”. Not even yourself. Suicide is sinful conduct notwith- standing all the understanding we might have for the individual. There are enough examples of suicide in the Bible, none of which are considered right. Pastor David Brown gives several examples on his website Logos Resources Pages (5).

I Samuel 31:3-5 King Saul committed suicide by falling on his sword. Saul’s contact with the Lord was broken when he sought help by a witch instead of seeking God and being obedient.

I Samuel 31:5 Saul’s armor bearer was impulsive, he wanted to die with his boss. About 40% of the suicides by the youth are impulsive.

2 Samuel 17:1-14 and 23. Ahithophel was planning to kill David; when his plan failed he hung himself.

I Kings 16:18-20 Zimri, the military captain of half of the Israeli army makes plans to murder the king of Israel. He kills the king and all the male descendants of the king’s family. When the people of Israel discovered what he had done, they made Omri their military captain who in turn defeated the army of Zimri at Tirzah. When Zimri saw that his city had been taken he retreated to the king’s palace and set it on fire. He perished in the flames.

Matthew 27: 3-5 Acts 1:18 Judas, who betrayed the Lord, repented, fled and hanged himself.

The Bible is quite clear on this matter. If you ‘walk in the way of sinners’ you discover that it is a dead end street. People often commit suicide in distress. Proverbs 14:12 says: “*There is a way that seemeth right unto man, but the end thereof are the ways of death”*. If you turn your back on God, you are entering dangerous territory. You will find life to be difficult, restless and distressing. But it doesn’t have to keep on that way. Contrary to what suicidal people are thinking, the truth is that everyone who lives and breathes can receive forgivness and the abundant and inexhaustible grace of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus receives every individual who repents and turns to Him. He wants to save everyone who feels lost. Ezekiel 33:11 says: “*Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”*Recognize that it is never too late is to turn to Jesus. God knows your life and is involved with you. He does not make our decisions. He is not responsible for all that we do. (See Mathew 23:37)

**What happens to an unbeliever who commits suicide?**

In the Dutch legal system suicide and attempted suicide is not punishable by law. Assisting or encouraging suicide is punishable. (art 294 in the Wetboek van Strafrecht) What does the Bible say about this? Every victim is in reality desperately crying out for help. Most suicide victims do so in order to finally escape everything. But does it make an end to everything? The Bible makes very clear that after physical death there is still a conscious existence. Luke 16:19-31 describes with realistic words the distressful situation of a rich man who died. In verse 24 we read that he is tortured. In verse 25 it is obvious that he can remember things. Verse 28 tells us that this takes place in a literal hell. It is true that suicide is the end of something, namely the natural life here on earth. An unsaved person will never have a chance to receive Christ as his personal Savior. (Hebr. 9:27) For an unsaved person who commits suicide is the result the same as for every unbeliever who dies. Naturally we must leave the final decision up to God, but the Bible is quite clear about it: the unbelievers will stand before Gods Great White Throne and will be judged according the works they did in their mortal bodies. The activities of their lives will be reviewed and they will be cast into the lake of fire where they will suffer for eternity. (Rev. 20:12-15) Hell will be worse that we can possibly imagine.

**What happens to a believer who commits suicide?**

Perhaps we should first ask the question: Can a believer commit suicide? Some are incorrectly convinced that a true believer cannot end his own life. There are examples in the Bible of people who thought about suicide. (Rebecca, Moses, Elijah, Jonah) Suicide is the sin of killing oneself. In the Bible there is no substantial difference given for different forms of taking a human life. King David committed the sins of adultery and murder. And yet from Romans 4:6-8 and Hebrews 11:32-33 we know that David was a true believer. Suicide is not a worse or less serious sin than adultery. Suicide is murder, murdering oneself. In Judges 16:25-30 is the account of the suicide of Samson, but in Hebrews 11:32 his name appears in the list of O.T believers. Simply stated, a believer can actually commit suicide but it clearly is and remains a sin. In Philippians 1:23-24 Paul writes*: “For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better. Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you” .*The Bible teaches that in addition to the grace of eternal life, the believer can also receive rewards. 2 John 8 says that we can lose this reward (but not lose eternal life!). In II Cor. 5:10-11 we read that we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, where all will receive rewards for what we did while in the body, whether it be good or bad. This judgment seat is the *bema,*not to be judged by a judge, but where the prizes are awarded after it is determined if a person is worthy of them. I Cor. 3:15 says that we can “suffer loss”. Suicide can be a sin which causes this! No single believer has the right to take his own life. His body and his life belong to the Lord (I Cor. 6:19-20). In every situation you can come to Christ. (Matt 11:28- 30) No matter how far one has strayed, God will receive the repentant sinner with open arms. (Isaiah 55:7. I John. 1:9) A believer may always realize that God is bigger than his problem. (I Cor. 10:13, 17; I Peter 5:6)

**Possible warnings, conduct and situations of people who are considering suicide.**

Obviously not everyone who demonstrates such symptoms is a potential victim.

1. Seriously disturbed patterns of sleep longer than 10 days.
2. Serious changes in eating habits. Sudden loss or gain of weight.
3. Serious mood changes. One moment laughing boisterously and the next crying hysterically.
4. Isolation, withdrawal from contact with family, friends, church and leaving former hobbies and activities (such a sport, work, etc.)
5. Strong changes in personality. From extrovert to introvert and visa versa.
6. Excessive use of alcohol and drugs.
7. Giving away a valuable possessions.
8. Exaggerated self-criticism, depersonalizing.
9. Threatening or desiring suicide. About 75% of those who commit suicide give signals that are not recognized.

10) Numerous contacts with occult such as fortune telling, spiritism, whichcraft

. and satanism.

11) Sexual confusion, conflicts about homosexuality.

12) Joining “last days” sects, or extreme militant groups.

13) Following sexual misuse, serious (financial) loss or threatening judicial actions.

**Practical tips for anyone in their neighborhood.**

In Proverbs 24:11 we read :“*Forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain”.*

Always take a threat of suicide seriously. Do not let someone who is seriously thinking about suicide alone. Pray with him or her. Speak about the suffering and the love of Jesus. Remove any possible weapons of suicide. Send him or her to the doctor for a medical check-up. In order to discover the extent of suicide plans, suicidal prevention centers have formed a specific protocol. Typical questions are: how long does the person have this kind of plans? ; how definitive are the plans?; has the person decided on a method, such a which weapon, or poison or which other method? Ask then several rather general questions. “What is your greatest problem? What would you like most of all?” Show that you understand why he sees things the way he does (this does not mean you have to agree with him) and try to be as positive as possible without telling lies to soften the blow. Faith and trust are very important. Suicidal persons need help with safety and involvement. They often feel fearful, guilty, vulnerable, helpless and worthless. Counselors and those surrounding them should make use of every possibility to reduce these feelings. This can be done with social interaction, anti-depressives, cognitive therapy and pastoral counseling. The right kind of help can be the difference between life and death. Affirmation and positive encouragement of better feelings and attention for basic needs are important. (10) A few examples: Affirmation can take place via certain forms of physical contact. : “The voices said that I should die. I became frightened. The pastoral worker came, spoke to me and hugged me; my fears went away”. Another way to help is taking a walk out in the fresh air; suicidal patients feel better when they are out in fresh air and they can then talk more freely with their helper. Sometimes care for personal hygiene can be taken over; even in their personal surroundings they feel better when they are clean and fresh. It is important to listen to them without judging and to assure them that you understand them. Also worthwhile is helping and stimulating the person to restore contact with others and to renew relationships. Personal and supportive prayer is important. In the book *Suicidal Behavior*by McGee and Hiltner it is stated that the pastor plays an important role with possible victim s as well as relatives. This is due to the fact that the roots of the problem are often feelings of guilt and inferiority and sometimes also a lack of a forgiving spirit. For those who believe in God there is a solution for these problems! However, this does not mean the giving of a shallow answer to a complex problem or using Bible verses as a magic formula. It is clear that many people have been harmed by this kind of treatment. The pastor should be a sounding board. He can suggest solutions and advice. He can demonstrate the broad comforting smile of Jesus and attempt together with the patient to rebuild the broken life.

**A Chapter for the person thinking about suicide.**

If you are the person who has lost all hope is life, please read further. Let me talk with you personally. I realize that you have probably already are planning to end your life or have already tried to do so. You are thinking only about how hopeless your life is and that you cannot go on like this. The pain is severe. Nobody understands the burdens you are bearing and the emotional torment you are experiencing. Find help!! Get in touch with your surroundings, your family, your friends, your church and your counselors or telephone helpline. Let them know that you are desperate and that you need help. Even if you are disappointed in people and yourself, or that you have to deal with an enormous loss in your life or that you feel disoriented. Many depressive feelings have a physical origin, for example too few neurotransmitters, a material that helps one to be calmer. You can’t trust your feelings and your depression . Feelings are not an objective truth. Feelings are quite subjective and you need to examine the thoughts that have lead you to consider suicide. If you continue to think about suicide you are believing lies about life and the future. Suicide is the biggest lie that exists. You are actually saying “God placed me here by accident. My life is in vain. It has no real purpose, so I will finish it.” That makes God a liar. You are perhaps thinking “If He really had a good plan for me, then He would not have wanted my life to be such a failure. God will be happy if I am dead.” *But God says “Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God, and not that he should return from his ways and live.”*(Ezekiel 18:23) Jude hanged himself because he refused to believe that Jesus could ever forgive him. It is the same way today, thousands are confronted with the ‘Jude-dilemma’. Jesus forgives all sin no matter how serious and awful it may be, but His offer must be accepted.” *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*.” (I John 1:9) Suicide is a satanic temptation and deception. Satan tries especially to make you doubt Gods promises, he wants to make you mad at God so you will want to get revenge. That revenge leads to self destruction. Lots of people say, “How can I trust God if He allows this to happen in my life?” God is not responsible for everything we do. He offers us His help but He does not force it on us. He respects our will. (Matthew 23:37) In the end God will do what is right. Pain, sorrow, lonesomeness, betrayal – He bore it all on the cross. He knows our pain like no one else, and he promises to be with us even in moments that we do not feel His presence. In the past many have wrestled with depression but they did not give in to suicide thoughts, especially not trusting those thoughts. They had the courage to go on, they had the courage to believe that their future and their lives could be different.

One such person wrote this about his depression “It was as if I had no contact with reality. Life seemed to be a vague spot, often not in focus. My life was only a ‘make believe’ and a fantasy. Nobody cared about me, I thought. Not even God. Sometimes suicide seemed to be the only solution” (7) Ask God and others for help and try to answer the following questions.

What is the background of my depressive feelings and thoughts?

What is behind my feelings of guilt?

What about my thinking…is all that I am thinking realistic?

What are my fears? What am I afraid of?

Are the relationship problems solvable?

And above all else: Can God help me when I cannot help myself?

Give yourself to Christ, receive Him as your Savior, place your trust in Him, confess that you have sinned and that He dies for your sins. And He is resurrected and will give you a new life, together with Him. Read the following Bible verses attentively.

God loves you. (I John 3:16) You are a sinner (Romans 3:23) You need to be saved from eternal damnation (Romans 6:23, Rev. 21:8) Your good works will not save you, salvation is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9) Christ has paid for our sin

(I John 2:2) He is the only way to salvation (John 14:6) Repent of your sins and ask forgiveness (Luke 13:3) Ask Christ to come into your life (Romans 10:13)

When you have made this new start you will still need more help to put your life back in order. Pray for the right help and path which God will bless. Find other believers and discover how you can involve God in your life more and more.

**A letter from someone who was planning suicide.**

This letter is one of examples found in the book ‘*Suicide*’ written by David Wilkerson (chapter 12, page 23)

“You have finally said something to which I can relate. I am what they call suicidal. With thanks to God, I don’t have to fight that intention anymore. What makes one want to commit suicide? Depression! A depression that is so deep that you go to bed, hoping never to wake up. And then you have nightmares all night long. Reluctantly you wake up with the anticipation ‘Another awful day!’ Then you comfort yourself with the thought that by the evening you will be dead. Oh yes, I heard that God doesn’t want us to take our life. But no one ever showed me exactly where that can be found in the Bible. I did read I Cor. 3:16-17 that you showed me but it didn’t really convince me. I was really far down in the dumps. What prevented me? Only the grace of God. I ended up under doctor’s care. At times medical help has made life even more unbearable. I was schizophrenic and some of the medicines undermined my resistance to conflicting and twisted thoughts and sensations which continually invaded my thinking. I read the science fiction book *People and Suicide.*There it was determined that death was returning to the Creator and suicide meant coming there with an unfulfilled purpose. I read elsewhere about a successful suicide who previously had a near-death experience in which he heard that there was a special hell for suicide victims. He changed his mind. I have also read the following theory that God has a plan for everybody. Sort of a goal. How quickly we reach that goal depends on our own attitude. God is patient. If we take our time, God has an ocean full of time. But if we end our life our chance is over. We can never become that for which we were created and the result of that is that a part of Gods plan is destroyed. Look at the advantage suicide has for satan. What can dispel that obsession? Possibly coming from your example: forgiveness. But for some reason or another I could not avoid that abnormality. I needed healing; was it baptism? God has done miracles but I was healed gradually. What finished my suicidal tendencies? Nothing more than pure, unexplained, spontaneous praise. Following my baptism with the Holy Spirit one day I had the suicide urge stronger than ever before. I was fully aware that the river was not far from our house. I was home alone. Nobody could stop me. But I now finally had a reason for staying alive. On a Spring morning I went into the garden to do some digging. My confusion was total. Nothing was right. I knew I needed to find a reason to be thankful. But in my self-pity I could not think of anybody I needed to thank. I was alone so I dared to sing. I choose the eightfold Hallelujah because it was a song of praise but there was no special reason to choose that one. All the time I was still digging and this lasted the whole morning. When the urge for suicide left me I was really encouraged. Since then I have never again had to fight suicide. Hallelujah!”

**Survivors/Relatives**

Survivors are often confronted with feelings of sorrow, guilt and anger. The first reaction is a mixture of disbelief and shame. This awful thing cannot really have happened? But it has happened. Gradually these reactions change into hostility and guilt. Hostility creates difficulty; if the survivor is not careful it can result in being reproachful toward the deceased for the rest of his life. In this way a child can feel reproachfulness for his whole life toward a father or mother who committed suicide. If we end up experiencing all these emotions personally we can finally start asking the question: Was this awful death my fault? It would be unrealistic to say: “Come on now, I did all that I could.” Who has actually done ALL that he could? No one! But that is clearly something different than blaming yourself for being responsible for this death. When we accept our own imperfections we are at the beginning of the healing process. Any possible anger can be brought to God. For partners is it often difficult to engage in a new relationship with love and trust. Sometimes survivors disguise the real causes of death. In a few cases even the police have been willing to alter evidence. (11) This is done to protect the good name and social position of the victim. Eventually this can lead to even more complicated developments in which the survivors find themselves caught. Suicide is a confusing death. People living an intense life often end up taking their life. People who are hopeless cut themselves off from the love that surrounds them. Many who had no part in the whole tragedy still feel left with mourning, sorrow and guilt feelings. The best way for survivors is to recognize reality and to be actively busy with learning how to cope with it. How can you comfort a survivor? Kees Roest, a Christian psychologist, gives the following advice: “By conducting yourself in exactly the same way you would by a normal death. Show concern, first of all by acting normally. Be open for a conversation, but not forced. Listen to what the other wants to say, without introducing your own story. Talk about good memories you share with the deceased. And because every person is different, ask if there is some way you can help.”

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