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Tower of Strength

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”

—Proverbs 18:10

“Do Not Harm Yourself!”

Robin Williams’ suicide has so affected the national psyche that his picture was on the cover of Time Magazine. It is difficult for many of us to understand why a successful and wealthy and famous man, and one who was always goofing off and making others laugh, would take his own life.

I have never experienced feelings of depression, and I do not presume to know what was going on in Williams’ heart. He is quoted in the lead article as walking off a comedy stage where the whole room was standing and cheering his name, and saying, “Isn’t it strange that I can bring such great happiness to all these people but not to myself?”

Nor do I have any expertise in solving depression. Sometimes I believe it is caused by sin and guilt, but many times I believe it is caused by hard-to-explain things outside a person’s control, such as an injury or chemical depletion.

Whatever the cause of the impulse to take one’s own life, I do feel confident in saying that suicide is not the answer, and that it is sinful and against God’s will. The media is on the verge of glorifying Williams’ decision, but I see no quarter for that

position in God's word. We should, during a time of joy, sobriety, and strength, determine that we will never commit suicide. No matter how dark or depressed our thoughts become, no matter the cause of the problem, suicide is wrong.

First of all, suicide usurps God's sovereignty. God created man in His own image (Gen. 1:27). No human life is valueless or meaningless, regardless of a person's physical prowess, mental abilities, or social station. God is the one who gives life, causing a soul to enter the world (Gen. 30:22). God is the one who sustains and prolongs life, if it is within His will (2 Kings 20:6). God is even the one who takes life (1 Samuel 2:25, 1 Kings 14:12–13, Luke 12:20). Nowhere does God relinquish this right. He says in Deut. 32:39, "there is no god besides Me; it is I who put to death and give life."

Second, suicide is murder. The Ten Commandments state briefly but forcefully, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). There are certain exceptions in which killing is not defined as murder (see Exodus 21:12 and 22:2 for examples). But suicide is murder; it is self-murder, but it is murder all the same. And in most circumstances, it is a sin that can't really be repented of. We have no right to end the life of another, and we have no right to end our own.

Third, I can't think of a single time in Scripture where suicide is glorified. Now, on a few occasions when I've had this discussion, people have hastened to bring up the example of Samson, who collapsed the house upon his Philistine tormenters (Judges 16:28–31), fully knowing that he would die in the process. But I don't see how the text approves of his actions any more than the other silly and stupid things that Samson did, such as lying, womanizing, and picking fights. Sure, God used Samson's sinful actions to destroy the Philistines, but it wouldn't be the first time that God has allowed the sinful actions of man work out for the furtherance of His will, without necessarily approving of those actions. Same with Abimelech (Judges 9:54) and Saul (1 Sam. 31:4–5), who both asked to be mercy-killed so that they wouldn't die ingloriously. Same, to a greater degree, with Judas in Matt. 27:5, whose great remorse led him to suicide, and destined him

for eternal perdition. If God is holding the actions of these men up for applause or emulation, I have missed it somewhere! Quite the opposite! What all these men have in common is that they ended badly, and could have done much better—Samson suffered for his many foolish sins, Abimelech and Saul were enemies of God and became targets of His wrath, and Judas could have repented and (I am convinced) had the same outcome as Peter. But now we will never know. Do not hasten to hold up these passages as proof that suicide is acceptable.

Instead, let's take a moment to appreciate Job, the greatest sufferer of the Bible. Job hurt so badly at the loss of his finances, family, and health, that he prayed for God to take his life and alleviate his suffering. "Oh, that my request would come to pass, and that God would grant my longing. Would that God were willing to crush me, that He would loose His hand and cut me off!" (Job 6:8–10, *cf.* 3:20–26, 10:18–22, 14:13, 17:13–16). Incidentally, I believe it is perfectly acceptable to pray for God to end physical life so that eternal life may begin; is that not the same thing that Paul says in Philippians 1:21–25?

To me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ...I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake...

Respect for the sanctity of human life does not require one to struggle for every last wheeze. One can surely look forward to being with Christ as soon as possible! But—and here's the key—Job *did not end his own life*. He wanted to die; he asked God to let him die; but he did not take matters into his own hands. He left God in charge (1 Peter 5:6–7).

And from our perspective, we learn that God indeed had a purpose in his suffering. Job didn't understand this at the time, but he submitted his life to the will of God, and he glorified God as a result. Think of the great encouragement we would have missed if Job had decided to look up Dr. Kervorkian's number in the yellow pages and commit physician assisted suicide!

Thus, the Bible teaches that suicide should be struck from our minds. If you ever find yourself in a situation where you are contemplating suicide, please do the following:

1.) Wait. Things usually get better. Teens especially have a warped perspective, and kill themselves for things that seem to them absolutely apocalyptic at the time—a breakup, social strife, family angst—but which years later seem minor, even laughable or perhaps beneficial. In fact, think about the joys that Job himself would have missed out on had he ended his life. God restored his fortunes, gave him a new beautiful family, and in God’s good time, “Job died an old man and full of days” (42:10–13).

Or, think about the blessings that the Philippian jailer would have missed out on. In Acts 16:22–34, when he saw that the prisoners had escaped, “he drew his sword and was about to kill himself,” but Paul shouted, “do not harm yourself!” And before the night was over, the Philippian jailer possessed salvation for himself and his household.

2.) Seek help. This may start with a spouse, a friend, a minister, or a shepherd. It will likely require a professional counselor and perhaps even a doctor who can prescribe treatments and medications.

3.) Begin to change things. Endeavor to find joy and blessing again. While a failure to seek God is not always the cause of depression, finding God is most definitely part of the solution, for hope in Christ is the steady anchor of the soul (Heb. 6:29).

4.) Think of eternity. God grants us life not only to enjoy, but also to ready us for glory. Let nothing spoil that or endanger that! It may be that suffering, especially toward the end of life, is a means of preparing the soul for eternity, and serving as a powerful example to others who do not know God. “We do not lose heart, for though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day ... producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4:16–5:4).

—John Guzzetta

Quote of the Week:

“To ease another’s heartache is to forget one’s own.” —Abe Lincoln