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For God & Country

*A Journal for
Military-related
Seventh-day Adventists*





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CHOOSE LIFE

Death causes a certain curiosity in the human psyche. Perhaps the knowledge that all humans will die prompts contemplation about the unknown, abhorrent and repulsive as death can be. Yet, the media, and even twisted philosophy portrays death as an attractive alternative. That is another lie from the creator of lying—the devil. The other side of life is oblivion, total cessation, nothing.

God created humans to live forever. When the results of sin interrupted life with death, Divinity intervened and made possible the restoration of life that will live again in perfect harmony with the Life-giver. However, since ancient times humans have chosen to end their lives by taking their own life. The first named person to do so was Samson

when he sought vengeance on the Philistines (Judges 16:23-31). When wounded in battle Israelite King Saul fell on his own sword rather than be captured or killed by the enemy (1 Samuel 31). And the betrayer, Judas, hung himself when he realized his plot to manipulate Jesus and the Sanhedrin failed (Matthew 27:1-10). Many Christians believe suicide is an “unpardonable sin,” because it ends any chance of healing the pain that damages relationships.

Suicide is the ultimate expression of rage, turned internally, but often with the intent to externally punish others emotionally in perceived failed relationships. Demeaning put-downs (children and youth have limited life-experience to counteract negative messages from authority figures),

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perceived and real failures, guilt and a host of other factors accumulate over the years into diminished self-respect and worth. Humans are so harshly judgmental of one another!

When a person begins to question their own value, or fails to live up to imposed expectations (often self-imposed), feelings of helplessness can take possession. While some people blame others, many secretly, even subconsciously fault themselves and feel trapped to change. They become their own worst enemy. Unless intervention occurs, the resulting emotional and mental damage causes hopelessness. The trap of hopelessness becomes too unbearable. When alcohol and drugs do not bring sufficient relief, the person seeks to escape the pain by ending their life.

Every fourteen minutes someone in the United States commits suicide; it is the eleventh leading cause of death. Globally, over one million people annually commit suicide and the rate has steadily increased the last 45 years.

So how can suicide be prevented? Or can it be stopped?

Regrettably, the number of suicides is rising, particularly by military service members. During my ministry, numerous Christians were among those who ended their own lives. And on occasion, Seventh-day Adventists have endured so much emotional pain, disappointment with relationships, and spiritual guilt, that they, too, have killed themselves. This issue of *For God and Country* is dedicated to addressing this concern in hopes even one person will be deterred from doing the unthinkable and will choose life instead. I commend chaplains, pastors, leaders, teachers, and friends who have learned to recognize the warning signs and do not hesitate to intervene in order to save a life. For anyone hurting and even thinking about suicide, choose life by seeking and receiving help. God is not finished with you—yet. Hope, help, and life await.

WHAT IS YOUR STORY?

Many Seventh-day Adventists have faithfully served God and country through military service. This is a legacy that should be shared with family, friends, and the church at large.

Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries is seeking stories about Adventists serving on Active Duty, in the Guard or Reserve, or from veterans about their service experiences. Please contact the editor at Deena.Bartel-Wagner@nad.adventist.org to learn how your story can be told.



THE COST OF SUICIDE,
The Price of Life



Suicide is defined as a “self-inflicted behavior that results in a fatal injury and for which there is evidence of some intent to die as a result of the behavior.” During the past decade, suicide rates in the military have been on the rise. From 1 January 2012, one military suicide per day has taken place. This is the fastest growth of military suicides on record.

With troops no longer fighting in Iraq, the escalation of suicides on the home-front is a strong concern for the Department of Defense. A second concern is what these statistics could indicate over the next decade as many service members return from Afghanistan as well.

A RIPPLE EFFECT

A suicide in the military affects a great number of people. On Christmas morning, Sunday, 25 December 2011, one of our airmen took his life, leaving behind a wife and two young sons. Response to such an incident is well planned. The First Sergeant, Commander, Chaplain, and emergency personnel are called to the scene immediately.

Care is given to the family and a Family Liaison Officer (FLO) is put into place for the family to begin making arrangements. As a part of this particular response, family had to be contacted and air tickets secured on a day in which family and Christmas meals are to be celebrated.

It affected not only the devastated family, but also all the families who were a part of the response team, the unit, and beyond, leaving an emotional scar on many.

WHY SO MUCH PAIN?

After many years of random surveys, researchers believe they now have a finding that gives direction to a much-needed response for our men and women in uniform.

In a recent *USA Today* article, researchers explained the very first results of a “scientific study” about the rate of military suicides. Military service members gave 33 reasons for contemplating suicide. Among those responses the one most often cited was “a desire to end intense emotional distress.”

Researchers believe they now have a finding that gives direction to a much-needed response for our men and women in uniform.

The emotional distress mentioned most likely results from extreme sadness related to a divorce or separation. This category was 25 percent higher



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among married respondents than among single or married individuals. These statistics have no doubt escalated due to long separations from family during deployments, as well as multiple deployments.

Your conversation with a chaplain is considered “privileged” so long as you are doing it as an official act and you intend it to be confidential.

Additionally, distress over the death of unit members, survivor remorse, and cutback of manpower are also among reasons for the recent escalation of suicides. Depressive emotions can include, but are not inclusive of, deploying to a combat zone; survivor remorse; reintegration (coming home); stress in the workplace due to manpower cutbacks; leaving a unit, or leaving the military. Research shows that when seeking help, the cause of the depression should be the focus of treatment.

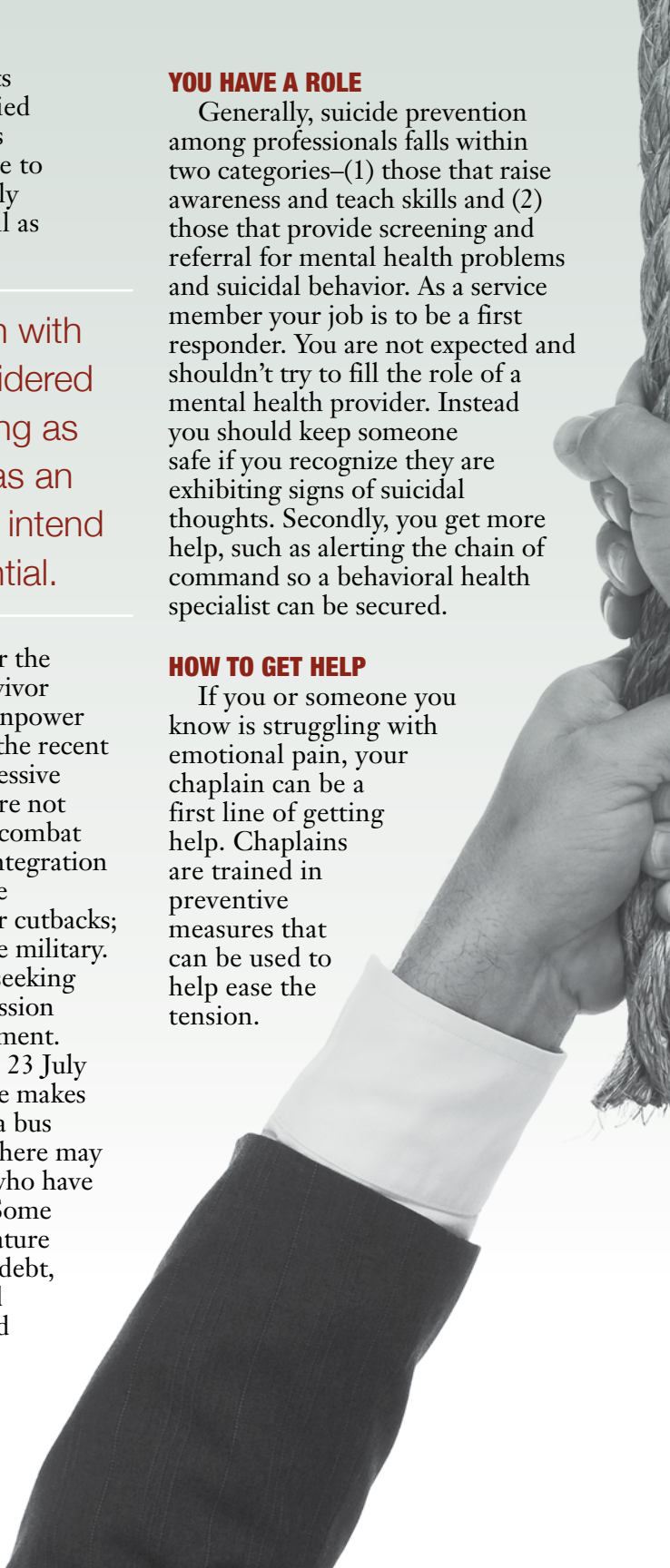
The feature article in the 23 July 2012 issue of *Time* magazine makes the point that the moment a bus arrives full of new recruits there may already be many on board who have potential suicidal triggers. Some of those risks include premature parenthood and marriages, debt, substance abuse, unresolved dysfunctional behaviors, and difficulty with authority.

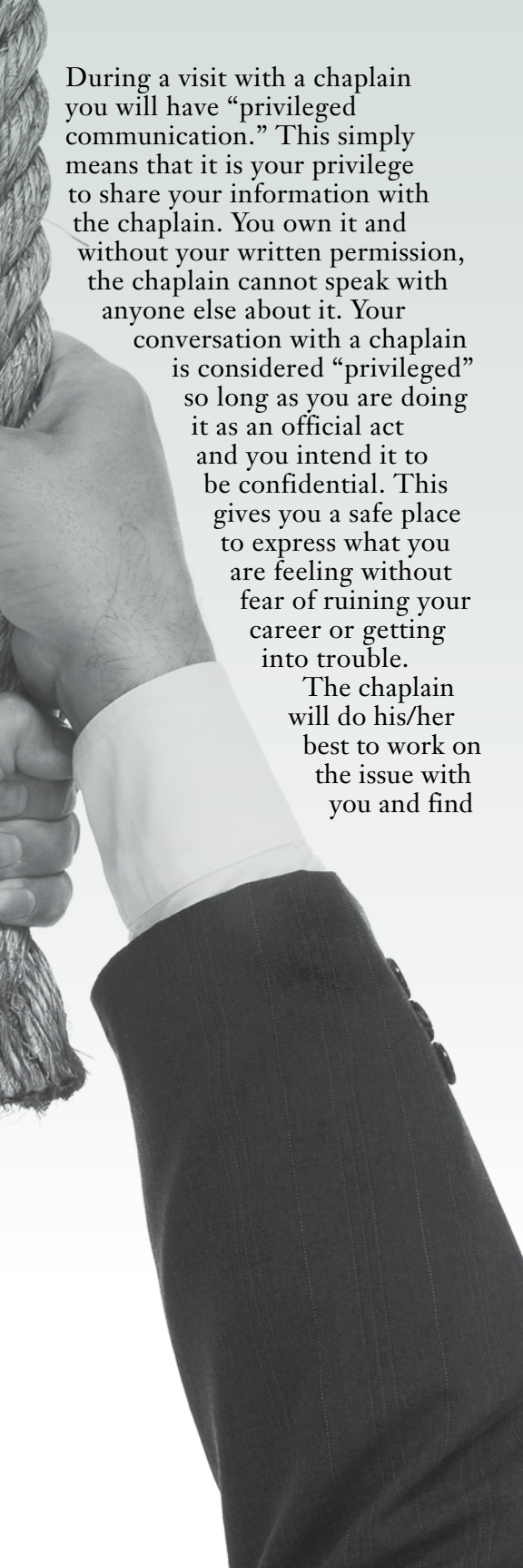
YOU HAVE A ROLE

Generally, suicide prevention among professionals falls within two categories—(1) those that raise awareness and teach skills and (2) those that provide screening and referral for mental health problems and suicidal behavior. As a service member your job is to be a first responder. You are not expected and shouldn't try to fill the role of a mental health provider. Instead you should keep someone safe if you recognize they are exhibiting signs of suicidal thoughts. Secondly, you get more help, such as alerting the chain of command so a behavioral health specialist can be secured.

HOW TO GET HELP

If you or someone you know is struggling with emotional pain, your chaplain can be a first line of getting help. Chaplains are trained in preventive measures that can be used to help ease the tension.





During a visit with a chaplain you will have “privileged communication.” This simply means that it is your privilege to share your information with the chaplain. You own it and without your written permission, the chaplain cannot speak with anyone else about it. Your conversation with a chaplain is considered “privileged” so long as you are doing it as an official act and you intend it to be confidential. This gives you a safe place to express what you are feeling without fear of ruining your career or getting into trouble.

The chaplain will do his/her best to work on the issue with you and find

a balance between safeguarding you and/or the public and protecting your privacy rights.

A chaplain is considered a frontline responder for persons under psychological, spiritual, or emotional duress. If more help is needed, the chaplain may recommend that you be referred to mental health counselors, the Military Family Life Consultant (MFLC), or others.

Your chaplain will also help you implement “positive life coping skills.” These can help you deal with issues such as alcohol abuse, financial management, stress, anger reduction, conflict management, parenting and family life skills. They may recommend you attend a Strong Bonds or MarriageCare weekend seminar.

Imitative or copy cat suicides must be prevented. A chaplain may immediately make a visit to the unit so that an open discussion of thoughts and feelings can be shared by its members. Listening to their hurts and allowing them to express their feelings is one way in which chaplains help a commander deal with a suicide related event in their squadron. One of the joys I have seen is how supportive Airmen have been in welcoming back to their unit one who had attempted suicide.

A suicide is a horrific human cost. But it is a literal cost as well. Men and women in uniform are often called “an asset.” The education, training, and investment in the nation’s servicemen and women can literally be millions of dollars. Suicide is a tragic event. If you or someone you know is contemplating finding a permanent way out, get help before you act. Life has no price tag. It is simply invaluable.



Supper waited and would wait all night for Martha's* troubled teenager to join the family. Anxiously, Martha walked the path by the creek she knew he used as his private refuge. Not far from the house Martha found her son—hanging from a stout limb. In her anguish Martha related the dreadful discovery, pleading through remorseful sobs for any glimmer of hope that she might see him alive in heaven some day.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Many Christians believe taking one's own life is the unpardonable sin. With that judgment they too easily dismiss further thinking about suicide. But is it that simple?

Self-inflicted death raises numbers of questions: Should a Christian funeral or memorial service be conducted for the deceased? Can voluntarily choosing death over unbearable, terminal suffering ever be justified? Is there any difference between sacrificing oneself to save another's life in a valorous heroic act

and suicide? Is martyrdom for a noble cause, even religious belief, the same as committing suicide? What does the Bible say about suicide?

The Bible records six deaths that possibly could be suicidal: Abimelech (Judges 9:50-54), Samson (Judges 16:23-31), King Saul (1 Samuel 31:1-6), Ahithophel (2 Samuel 17:23), Zimri (1 Kings 16:15-20) and Judas (Matthew 27:3-10). None of the accounts explicitly condemn suicide. So where does the idea come from that suicide is sin?

Some early Christians regarded suicide as virtuous; i.e., as a means to avoid rape. Later, in the 4th century St. Augustine argued against such thinking and said the command to not kill applies to one's own life as well as the life of others. He held that the act of suicide was a sin against God. In the Middle Ages, church councils declared suicide an act of murder (Synod of Aries, AD 452), denied church rites to the deceased (Synod of Braga, AD 563), excommunicated the deceased (Synod of Toledo,

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SUICIDE: Is it Unpardonable?

AD 693), and refused burial of the deceased in a churchyard or city (Synod of Nimes, AD 1096). The influential Catholic theologian of the 12th century, Thomas Aquinas, said suicide is a sin against self, neighbor, and God. He reasoned, “To bring death upon oneself in order to escape the other afflictions of this life is to adopt a greater evil in order to avoid a lesser...Suicide is the most fatal of sins, because it cannot be repented of” (*Summa Theologica* 2-2, q. 64 and 65).

IS IT UNPARDONABLE?

Protestant thinking differed little. As late as 1790, John Wesley advocated for a law to publicly hang the body of every “self-murderer” in chains hoping to deter the rising number of suicides in England. Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer also echoed Augustine, “Even if a person’s earthly life has become a torment for him, he must commit it intact to God’s hand, from which it came” (*Ethics*, pp. 124-5).

God created man and woman to

live forever, but they chose to believe a lie. The results of their distrust brought death to all humans. The truism of death is known to all. So if a Christian commits suicide, and it is sinful, can he or she be forgiven? Obviously, the dead cannot repent, but all of us commit sins that we fail to recognize for the sins they are, and we all die with sins of which we have not named and repented. Salvation is not based on what you do. Salvation is God’s prerogative that proceeds from His character of love, mercy, and grace. The only way to be saved is to trust Jesus, who grants forgiveness and eternal life. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8 NKJV). Repentance does not earn salvation; it results from salvation. In fact, “the goodness of God leads you to repentance” (Romans 2:4b). God grants repentance to the Christian, so he or she will know the truth and turn away from sinning (2 Timothy 2:25). The only biblical reference to an

unforgiveable sin is Christ's response to the Pharisees who attributed His miracles to the devil. See (Matthew 12:22-32; Mark 3:28-30 and Luke 12:10; Ephesians 4:30).

Even if suicide is considered self-murder, murderers like Moses and David were redeemed. True, they repented, and suicide prevents that act, but that does not mean the person is lost. On the cross Jesus paid the price for sin by His death, including suicide. If suicide is not covered, then that one sin undoes the entire substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. Either His death atones for all sins, or it does not atone for any.

WHO DO SOME CHOOSE DEATH?

Some people accidentally kill themselves by excessive risk-taking or other unwise acts. "Stupidity" does not remove us from the grace of God.

Regardless of many effective programs to prevent suicide, the numbers of people who take their own life continues unabated (once every 17 minutes in the United States). Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young adults. The heart asks, why?

Dr. Lewis B. Smedes of Fuller Theological Seminary says, "Young people kill themselves mainly for one reason: they cannot believe their lives are precious enough to make them worth living." These are people who look in the mirror and hate what they see. Childhood messages, mistakes, and failures make them feel worthless. Despair, depression, self-loathing lead to hopelessness. These are the real killers. Dr. Smedes believes, "Christians should worry less about whether those who have killed themselves go to heaven, and worry more about how we can help people like them find hope and joy in

living. Our most urgent problem is not the morality of suicide, but the spiritual and mental despair that drags people down to it" ("Is Suicide Unforgivable?", *Christianity Today*, 10 July 2000).

HOW CAN I HELP?

No one theory or approach to the complex issue of suicide can explain or prevent the chosen behavior. Christians should have informed understanding about how to assist people intent on suicide or who attempt it. Given the Adventist perspective on the holistic nature of human beings, we can provide help from several approaches: physical by removing the means to harm and obtaining help, mental by helping reduce stress, emotional by genuine caring, volitional by offering positive alternatives, relational by sensitive listening, and spiritual by assuring realistic hope.

Everyone has a skeleton in the closet, but the person who kills her or himself leaves their skeleton in another's closet. We need to be especially understanding of families and friends who have experienced someone close who has committed suicide. Rather than attempt to rationalize the act by saying whoever commits suicide is insane at the moment and therefore not responsible, we should safely trust the judgment of a gracious God who does understand all things. Enough presumed guilt will be present, and more need not be added to the alienation and resentment that commonly occurs in the lives of family and friends following a suicide. Angry feelings are very common even toward the deceased. Our burden should be for those whose spirits are slipping

silently toward death by their own hands and work to prevent suicide before it happens. An understanding of the theological implications about life and death can serve as a foundational basis for living.

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As the Author of Life and our Creator, God made us stewards of all creation, including our own life. Even though God is in total control of the affairs of the universes and this little planet called Earth, we are His appointed caretakers, entrusted with decision-making about the management of all creation. The Christian's brief existence is not limited to a few decades of living. Jesus gives eternal life to His disciples (John 10:28). Death may temporarily interrupt that life, but it is secure forever in the heart of God who will restore it someday soon at the Second Coming (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Yet today, death is portrayed in the media and movies as a better world to be desired. Death permits escape from the troubles of this life to a happier existence. However, theologian Donal P. O'Mathuna observes, "The Bible never uses the hope of the after-life to devalue this life. It emphasizes the significance of this life and the service we can give to others" ("Suicide: Answering Against Eternity" by C. Wayne Mayhall, *Christian Research Journal*, Vol 31, Num 3, 2008).

Thoughts of heaven and eternal life should lead to a greater desire to please the Lord in this life by serving others and even suffering with them.

When our bodies deteriorate and our lives are full of errors and failures, we remain "bought at a price" by God through which He can be glorified in these bodies (1 Corinthians 6:20 and Philippians 1:20). Voluntary death ends that possibility. The Apostle Paul calls death "an enemy" (1 Corinthians 15:26) and gave us an example of putting mission ahead of self-interests. O'Mathuna believes that how we face death is a gift to those who remain after we die. Suicide denies them this gift.

The premise of a booklet entitled, *On Suicide* by Nicholas A. Berdyaev (Paris: YMCA Press, 1931), says suicide is a transgression against life and death. Berdyaev believes suicide is "a refusal of one's cross, a betrayal of Christ that is in deep contradiction to Christianity." Suicide is self-deception, a refusal of the immortality that God promises those who believe in Jesus Christ. The focus of a person killing her or himself is introspective. Berdyaev states, "My life is not mine merely, upon which I possess an absolute right of ownership, but is as it were a life on loan; it is first of all a life belonging to God, Who alone has in it an absolute right of ownership, and it is likewise a life relating to those near and dear for me, other people, my nation, society, and ultimately, all the world, which has need of me." However, let us not judge the one committing suicide. Instead, let us condemn the act of suicide as a spiritual failing and weakness that betrays the Cross-and all it represents.

*pseudonym

CREATING a COMMUNITY of **HOPE**



By Jorge Torres,
CH () U. S. Army

As I checked my Blackberry following a video teleconference (VTC) that seemed to have no end in sight, I noticed that I had three missed calls from the same number. I didn't recognize the number but I knew it was from our military base since it had the prefix numbers of our organization. A voice mail relayed the message, "Chaplain Torres, your presence is immediately needed on range X. One of our trainees has killed himself."

I quickly returned the call to get more details, and then hurried

to find our BDE Chaplain who had just left the VTC. I shared this terrible news and we prayed together before heading out to deal with the aftermath.

ON THE SCENE

Arriving at the scene I was met by a drill sergeant who pointed me out to three trainees that needed to talk to me. The first was the victim's battle buddy. The second was the one that had talked earlier to the Drill Sergeants about the victim's actions. The third was the trainee who actually found the victim. I was able to conduct a critical stress debrief and then meet with them individually. Through the entire process I realized the enormity of pain and suffering one act can cause for a unit. The waves of sorrow are truly immeasurable for those left behind who pick up the pieces which result after one terrible choice a person decides to make. Their choice could be avoided if only they realized

that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

A CALL FOR HELP

A few months passed and I received another call on my Blackberry. I was on my way home at around 1745 when I answered the phone to hear a drill sergeant crying hysterically. Through his tears I heard him say,

Through the entire process I realized the enormity of pain and suffering one act can cause for a unit.

“Chaplain, I can’t take this anymore. I need to talk to you.” I knew by the tone of his voice that this was serious so I asked him where he was. I was literally a block away from his house when the call came in. I was able to make it there in less than a minute. In those short moments I called my wife, Evelyn, and told her I would be late and to please pray for him.

As soon as I arrived we embraced and he led me into his house where we sat down and began to talk. It is ironic that this Drill Sergeant was first on the scene when the trainee committed suicide. Now after having serious difficulties in his marriage, he was thinking of suicide himself. To him, it seemed like the right choice because of the incredible amount of pain he was experiencing. He



couldn't see beyond the suffering he was dealing with now. His vision had become focused in a vortex of despair that was sucking him in. Suicide would have been a permanent solution to a temporary problem if no one intervened.

PROGRAM ASIST

Months earlier I had found myself surrounded by chaplains taking a course we were all “voluntold” (i.e. you were volunteered to be there). It was a course to become trainers for trainers in the Army's ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) program. After five days of training I was completely sold on the program. Why?

Many programs in the past dealt with preventative measures but no program actually dealt with intervention. Most of the soldiers who I counsel with are not in the preventative stages of suicide. Many of them have thoughts and are seriously contemplating it. ASIST deals with the intervention where they are at right now.

In the past the most common course of action was that of referral and prescription medications. Mental health facilities and chaplains' offices have been overwhelmed with the number of referrals. Suicide prevention has to have a larger scope, which includes

all the leadership knowing what to do when someone is suicidal and how to adequately intervene.

There are a lot of hurting people that in their darkest moments in life at times don't seem to see any light at the end of the tunnel.

If you go to your chaplain with thoughts of suicide what type of response can you expect? If the chaplain utilizes the ASIST program or something similar, you will first be asked to talk about the current stresses in your life. The chaplain will ask you a number of questions that will better aid both of you in easing some of the issues you are experiencing.

Together you will develop a plan for utilizing further resources that can help you cope and stay safe. Your

chaplain cares about you and will work with you for a solution. He/she will make a commitment to follow-up with you to find out how you are doing.

DOES ASIST ACTUALLY WORK?

I believe the meeting with the drill sergeant was a divine appointment that evening. A week later I received an email from the Suicide Prevention Program Manager, Army Substance Abuse Program (ASAP) US Army Garrison & Maneuver Center of Excellence Fort Benning, GA.

It read as follows:

“Good Morning,

I received an email earlier this week with a story to encourage you about what you do on a daily basis to make a difference and save lives. The individual who sent me the story has taken ASIST and works with soldiers; they are also an active duty family member.

Just wanted to write you a quick email about something that happened last night. In a nutshell-my neighbor is a soldier here at Fort Benning. His wife left him last

week...while he was at work and has not communicated with him since. Both are great people, it just gets complicated.

Last night we went over to his house with a pot of chili for him and the kids. He was visibly upset and crying and was talking with a chaplain. We all had prayer for him and the chaplain left.

Our neighbor said he was having a really hard day and that he was so low at one point he intended to go to the closet and get his gun to end it all...but he saw, out of the corner of his eye, one of the suicide prevention cards and decided to call the chaplain instead.

That split-second decision meant the difference between a life saved or lost. If you ever think what you do doesn't matter, it really does and I want to thank you. :) (BTW, we took his guns out of the house and are babysitting the kids for a little while)”

A wise man once said people don't care what you know, they just want to know that you care. There are a lot of hurting people that in their darkest moments in life at times don't seem to see any light at the end of the tunnel. God has given us an awesome opportunity to bring light into their world and the hope that they so desperately need. Don't neglect this opportunity of saving a life. You can make a difference if you only take the time to *connect, understand, and assist*. In doing so you will be saving a life and creating a community of hope.



FINDING RESILIENCY



By Dan Bray, Chaplain,
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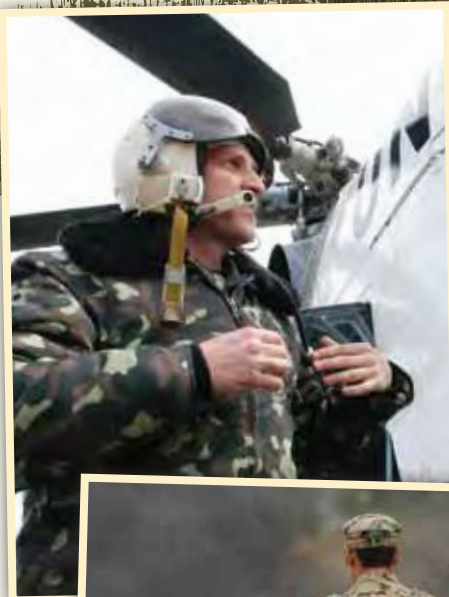
For the past several years, increasing amounts of attention have been focused on the issues and concerns regarding military service members and their families as they attempt to cope with the stressors of deployment, reunion, reintegration, and resiliency. Often, some service members would hide or deny they had any difficulties personally or with his/her family members for fear of losing such things as their duty position, peer support, or security clearance.

WHAT ARE THE STRESSORS?

The drawdown of soldiers in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts points out the struggles and frustration of our service members across the nation. A brief look at some of the stressors of deployment and downsizing can help identify what types of practical resiliency can lighten these events in our lives or in the lives of those close to us.

Deployment can be, and often is, one of the most traumatic events a family will ever experience. One of the first thoughts is the potential that the service member will not come home alive. Secondly, if he/she does return home, there might be injuries such as loss of an arm or leg. The recent conflicts have given birth to the term “PTSD” or post-traumatic stress disorder. Actually, warriors of past wars and battles have gone through this but it was called other names such as “battle fatigue” or “shellshock.” Our nation likely will see the scars from PTSD for many years to come.

One interesting perspective of PTSD is that a service member does not have to go through combat to have PTSD. Any event that produces unusual stress (i.e. family separation, automobile accident, etc.) can lead to symptoms of PTSD. Some behavioral health clinicians even prefer the term “PTS” rather



than adding on the “D” for disorder because of the thought it is a typical human reaction to an inhuman event (combat, death, and suffering).

Once a service member returns home following a year of deployment (deployment times will vary from six to twelve months if not longer) there is the experience of reunion with family and friends. A long used

Any event that produces unusual stress (i.e. family separation, automobile accident, etc.) can lead to symptoms of PTSD.

rule-of-thumb formula said that for every month a service member was deployed, then he/she and the family could expect about a week of reunion and reintegration upon return home. For example, if a service-member was deployed for a year (twelve months), then the family could expect 12 weeks of reintegration time just for them to get back to the same level prior to the deployment. There are other theories that suggest this reintegration time actually takes much longer...even upwards of 12-18 months upon re-deployment. It is not unusual for some service members

to experience multiple deployments in a short period of time. There are some instances of the service member going on five or six deployments within a span of seven or eight years. Eventually, these deployments cause incalculable damage to the service member and the respective families. People change and grow. Expectations can be dashed. Left unchecked, the results can lead to suicide or divorce.

In a similar vein, military downsizing causes stress that seemingly is random. A service member and family could face a PCS (permanent change of station) at most any time. Imagine the stress of a move within a month or two of a service member who has just returned home from an extended deployment.

MULTIPLE KINDS OF RESILIENCY

As a way to help with these concerns, individuals need to employ multiple kinds of resiliency. Resiliency is that concept that makes us strong, yet flexible, to the ever changing conditions and environment around us. A tree that is deeply rooted can be resilient to strong winds...it bends, but does not break under trying circumstances.

Activating events can hit almost without notice as we cope with deployment and reintegration. A sample of daily events that could produce some negative stress in our lives include:

- A store clerk asking what combat was like.
- Being in crowds at athletic events or at the mall.
- Hearing loud noises.
- Someone moves your stuff (keys, jacket) without your knowledge.

Points of consideration to help cope include the following:

- Take responsibility. Be accountable and accept responsibility for your actions. Determine the appropriate level of personal responsibility. Limit self-criticism.
- Don't believe that only those who have been there understand.
- Practice communication. Listen, and then listen some more.
- A return to the old ways of doing things may not be possible...if ever. That is not all bad because there now may be better ways of doing things.
- Put yourself in each other's shoes.
- Address the question, "Am I still needed and loved?"
- Assess the cause of the problem. Don't believe you are the sole cause of every problem you encounter.
- Look outward. Ask the critical question: How did others and the deployment contribute?
- What are the facts about what happened?
- Don't think that other people or circumstances are the cause of every problem you encounter.
- Conduct an AAR (After Action Review). Identify what you can and can't change
- Develop a plan of action. Accept reality.
- Look at the facts. Accurately identify factors that contributed to the problem

- Examine how you may have contributed to the problem.
- Don't believe that problems are unchangeable and you have little or no control over them. Ask: What can I control? What do I have to accept?
- Counter helplessness by understanding what you can and cannot control.
- Are my thoughts about the deployment hurting my ability to enjoy life now?
- Could I reasonably have known what would happen
- Counter second-guessing/guilt with accepting and learning.
- Make sure you take good care of yourself. Get regular rest and sleep. Truly re-create yourself as you take a time-out. Get the right kind and amount of good food.
- Keep a written journal of your daily activities with your thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Maintain your spiritual connections and growth. The temptation arises when we think we can do it all by ourselves. At this point, we might neglect God and the realization that He has led us and will continue to guide us as we allow Him to do that. Spiritual issues can often lead to family stresses. If this turns out to be a problem for you, don't assume that you can solve these problems by yourself. Seek out the assistance of your church pastor or your unit chaplain. If you feel like your level of faith has changed during this separation, take some time and negotiate the changes you have made with your family. Often a crisis in



belief can be resolved given time. Don't push or force it, but open yourself up to all your options.

God made us to be happy. Life is far too short for it to be spent worrying about things that don't matter in the long run. Enjoy the present and the little things, but make plans for eternity.



POSTVENTION: SUPPORTING

The call came on a Sunday afternoon. A senior NCO in my unit had committed suicide. I knew him. I knew some of his struggles. I knew his family and his coworkers. We were all shocked.

The next morning, I was at the unit. The XO gathered all the full-time staff together and told them what had happened. Then he turned it over to me.

The day before I received that call I had completed a three-day training in Critical Incident Stress

Management: Individual and Group Crisis Intervention. One of the applications for the group process is for follow-up in a workplace setting when a co-worker commits suicide. On Sunday, I was able to present the commander with a plan for ministering to our full-time staff.

That Monday morning we started the day with a Crisis Management Briefing. The XO told the staff what we knew. We were starting the day with a shock, but we still had to get through the day. My initial



THOSE LEFT BEHIND

presentation was simple, following the model I had just learned. I identified common stress reactions that the staff should be aware of, and gave suggestions for how to manage that stress during the day. I would be with them all day for individual counseling, assisted by a behavioral health specialist. At the end of the day we would have a “Defusing” to share together some of our feelings and reactions before heading home. At the end of that “Defusing” I reiterated what I had said earlier about common reactions—thus normalizing their experience—and the coping skills to help deal with those reactions.

The emotional reactions to the suicide of a friend or loved one are the normal emotions associated with grief, but two emotions are especially powerful: anger and guilt. Anger at the person for doing this—guilt, because we wonder what signs we missed, what actions we might have taken but didn’t—and anger at ourselves and at God for letting it happen.

When confronted with any stressful situation, it is the whole body that reacts. That is true for survivors of suicide. There are physical symptoms, including fatigue, chest pain, sweating, rapid heart rate, elevated blood pressure, difficulty breathing. Mental processes are affected, inducing confusion, lack of ability to concentrate, disorientation, poor problem solving, memory problems, hyper-vigilance. Behavior may change, including withdrawal, pacing, erratic movements, loss or increase of appetite, increased alcohol consumption, inability to rest (Mitchell 2006, p. 219).

Theological questions will be raised. What happens to the person who commits suicide? Have they “grieved the Holy Spirit”? Have they committed a sin for which they were unable to ask forgiveness? Are they lost? We bring our own theological framework to bear, but also have to keep in mind the theological framework of the person asking these questions. A Buddhist or a Roman

Catholic may answer them differently than we might (and we might find our own Adventist colleagues answer them differently than we might). (See *Suicide: Is It Unpardonable?* on page 8 for more background.)

Sharing of questions and emotions helps individuals to see that others have the same questions. We can implement coping skills against the stress by remembering to eat right, to rest, to get exercise, continuing normal routines, drawing upon spiritual resources, taking comfort from family and friends, and to seeking professional counseling if needed.

And these texts remind us that when our own problems seem to overwhelm us, there is One who understands.

At the graveside, when a service member or veteran dies, military honors are rendered. The flag is folded and presented. A volley is fired. Taps is played. In the Texas Army National Guard, these honors are rendered regardless of the circumstances in which the service member has died. They are simple and dignified. The symbols speak silently, without extraneous words, floating above the sea of emotions present around the graveside.

THERE IS HEALING, AND PEACE CAN COME. BUT THE AFTERMATH OF A SUICIDE REVEALS THE DEPTH OF THE TRAGEDY OF TAKING ONE'S OWN LIFE.

The funeral and/or unit memorial service or ceremony (if there is one) are important ritual elements of the grieving process. We gather together with people with similar emotions, connected to one another by this tragedy. Stories will be told. Tears and anger will be mixed with laughter. Prayers will unite our thoughts and feelings as they are offered up to God. Breaking open the bread of life will provide strength and hope.

I find solace in the promises of the book of Hebrews (2:14-18; 4:14-16) that we have an eternal High Priest who ministers before the Father's throne—not one who cannot sympathize with our weakness, but one who was made like his brothers in every respect, who was tempted in all points like we are, and who therefore can be a faithful and merciful High Priest. We can entrust our loved ones to Him.

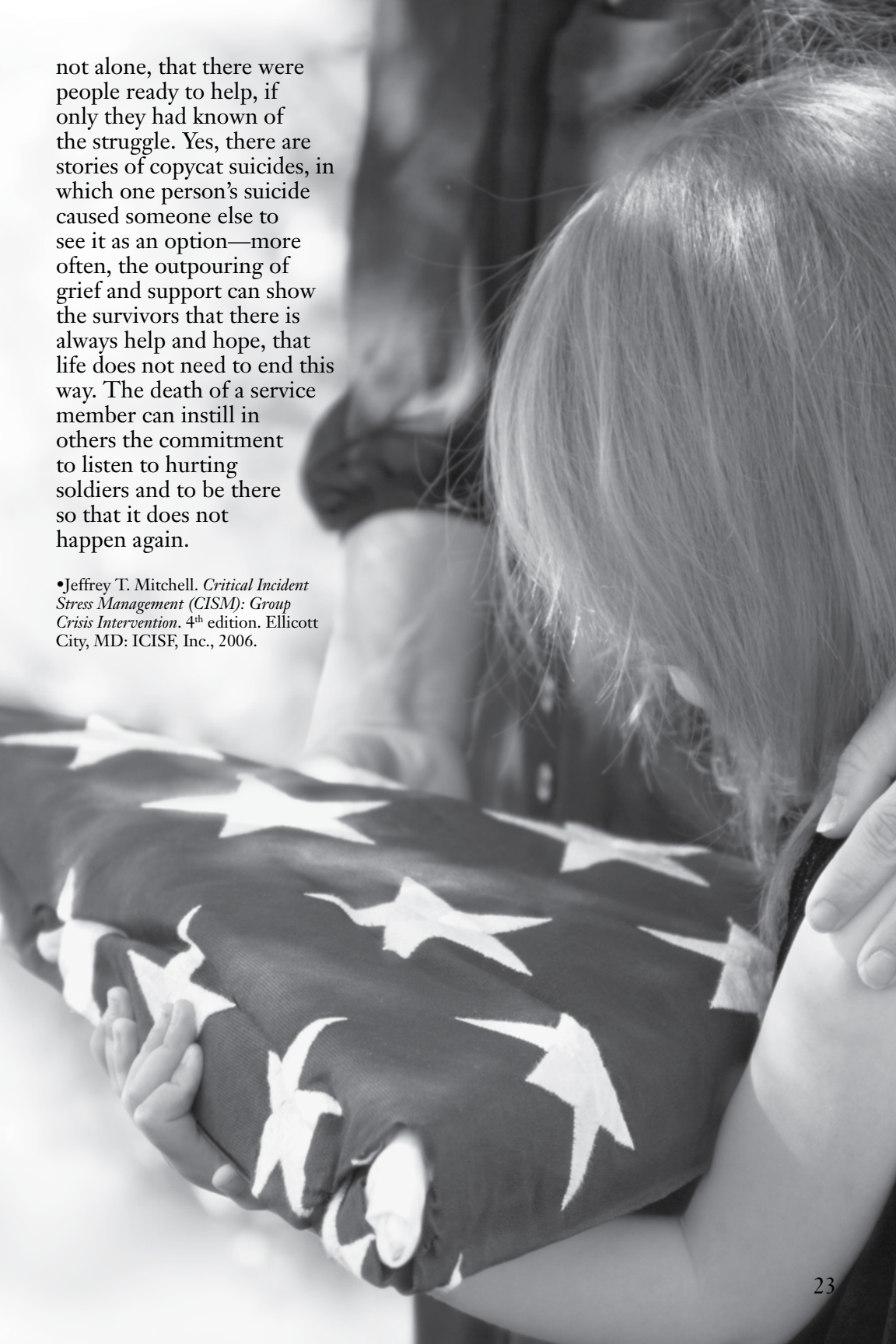
The memorial service or ceremony is a time for the military unit to render its own honors. In the Army, a memorial display consisting of rifle, boots, helmet, and dog-tags is the focal point. The commander has some words, as does the chaplain. There is a final roll call, the playing of taps, a final salute, and often the laying of coins or other mementos at the memorial display.

The Casualty Assistance Officer will work with the family on the details of benefits and insurance. This person is usually someone who knows the family, and who is also affected.

There is healing, and peace can come. But the aftermath of a suicide reveals the depth of the tragedy of taking one's own life. The person who commits suicide sees themselves as alone, with no resources, with no way out. But in the wake of their death, we see clearly that they were

not alone, that there were people ready to help, if only they had known of the struggle. Yes, there are stories of copycat suicides, in which one person's suicide caused someone else to see it as an option—more often, the outpouring of grief and support can show the survivors that there is always help and hope, that life does not need to end this way. The death of a service member can instill in others the commitment to listen to hurting soldiers and to be there so that it does not happen again.

•Jeffrey T. Mitchell. *Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM): Group Crisis Intervention*. 4th edition. Ellicott City, MD: ICISE, Inc., 2006.



YOU HAVE VALUE



by Bob Davidson, M.Div., M.Ed., LMFT, CSAT
Director, Family Institute, P.C.

When depression and discouragement set in and struggles with living ensue, it is a dangerous combination. Living gets extremely difficult. The energy and desire to live is zapped from the body and mind. Depending on the set of problems or stressors in the life, the ability to get out and choose to live is sometimes extremely difficult. There are some who struggle with it most of their lives.

As a chaplain and a Marriage and Family Therapist, I used to think that I had all the answers. I don't. However, I have found there are several concepts that are easily conveyed, make sense to me, and have helped a few others.

My belief is that God helps us learn to focus on Him instead of on ourselves. I have personally experienced this on my knees, late at night, out in the parade field, in the woods, during personal devotions, and even in the privacy of the bathroom.

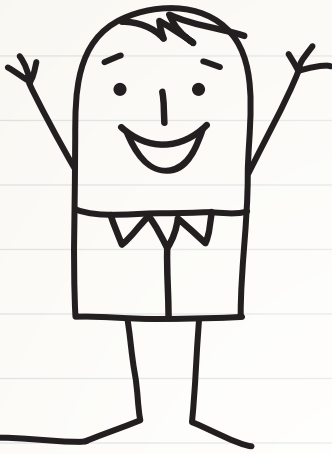
God's Word really helps. I have also found that the Psalms are powerful

in helping to focus on God, His power, His might, His love, His awesome strength. This is where God makes all things possible.

VALUE OF A PERSON

CONCEPT	CULTURE TEACHES (LIE)
BEING ALIVE (FROM GOD)	50% 10%
BEING HUMAN (FROM GOD)	30% 10%
CHOICES WE MAKE	10% 30%
SKILLS WE HAVE	10% 50%

This one concept has helped a lot of people and I'd like to share it with you. The concept is how and where we "get" an understanding about the value of a person. Another way to put it is in a form of a question: "Where does our value come from?" If it comes from our parents, culture,



awesome value. However, there are two other concepts that need to be included, and to which *we contribute*. One is *choices* that we make. The other is *skills* that we develop, skills to market or use in helping ourselves (employment) and others. Since most of our value comes from God, there is a small percentage left for us, that which we have control of. It makes sense to me that both choices and skills are 10 percent each. Some of those choices that we make have a huge impact on our value, but, God treats it as not that important. For example, Saul of Tarsus was involved and responsible for killing Christians. He changed when confronted by God, then God changed him. His *choices* were wrong and had negative results. But the power of God can even change the negative to a positive outcome.

Culture teaches that the majority of our value comes from the *choices* we make and the amount of *skills* we develop. The more educational degrees or *things* we have dictates how we are treated. Five years ago I bought a little diesel VW Bug for commuting to speaking appointments. More recently I have been using our diesel Mercedes Benz. I have noticed a change in how people have treated me significantly different (more friendly, polite, professional, and courteous).

That's my point Our value doesn't come from what we hold in our hands, skills, or choices that we make. Our value comes from an All Powerful God who cares, loves, and redeemed us. My hope for you is that you accept Jesus into your life (just ask Him to come and He will) and He will help you see your value and give you peace.

Check out the list of psalms on the following page that I personally have found helpful.

“It's not what you hold in your hand that makes you valuable; it is what you hold in your heart!”

(Dan Weaver, *Review*, July 26, 2012)

ourselves, or what we have in our hand, we will find and experience an empty hole inside that never gets filled. I believe that we have to look outside ourselves...to find that value and purpose. If we look inside ourselves, it will always come up short.

Have you ever struggled with your value and how much value God or others give you or place on your life (being)? The chart to the left has helped me explain this concept to others.

Personally, I believe that 100 percent of our value comes from God. God illustrated how much He loves us when Christ died for us. That is unbelievable value. It's

RESOURCES

List of Helpful Psalms

- Psalm 91-The Secret Place of Security, Protection
- Psalm 86-Supplication to a Compassionate God
- Psalm 47-The Sovereign God
- Psalm 43-Hope in God
- Psalm 42-Longing for God
- Psalm 37-Trust in the Lord
- Psalm 131-Secure, Trust, Relaxed in the Lord
- Psalm 40-The Frailty of Man
- Psalm 31-A Plea for God's Protection
- Psalm 22-The Suffering Savior, Gives Life
- Psalm 23-He Tenderly Cares for His Sheep
- Psalm 146-Blessed is He Whose Help is the God of Jacob
- Psalm 46-God, Our Refuge and Strength
- Psalm 50-God, The Almighty Judge
- Psalm 116-I Love the Lord, He Heard My Voice
- Psalm 105-Give Thanks, A Recall of History
- Psalm 10-A Plea for God's Judgment
- Psalm 107-Give Thanks to the Lord
- Psalm 55-False Friends
- Psalm 46-God Our Refuge and Strength
- Psalm 63-Thirsting for God
- Psalm 54-The Cry for Deliverance
- Psalm 51-Psalms of Penitence

Remember To ACE

If you suspect that a fellow Soldier is thinking about suicide, **TAKE ACTION**

ASK YOUR BUDDY

- Have the courage to ask the question, but stay calm
- Ask the question directly, e.g. Are you thinking of killing yourself?

CARE FOR YOUR BUDDY

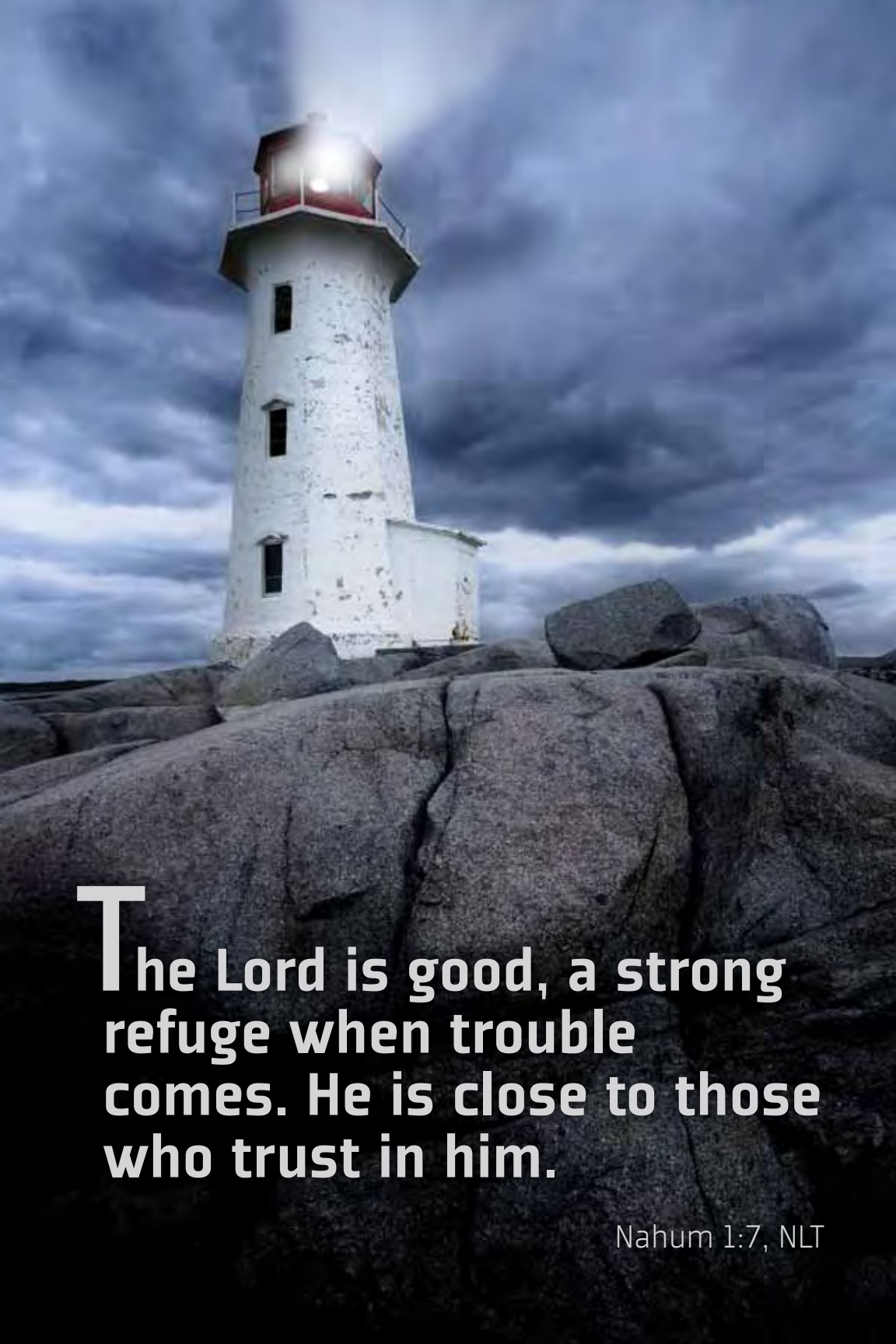
- Remove any means that could be used for self-injury
- Calmly control the situation; do not use force

ESCORT YOUR BUDDY

- Never leave your buddy alone
- Escort to the chain of command, a Chaplain, a behavioral health professional, or a primary care provider

Online Self-Worth & Suicide Prevention

- www.suicideoutreach.org – DoD/VA Suicide Outreach (Resources for Suicide Prevention)
- www.afspp.afms.mil/idc/groups/public - Air Force Suicide Prevention Program
- www.armyg1.army.mil/hr/suicide - Army Suicide Prevention Program
- www.public.navy.mil/bupers-npc/suicide - Navy Suicide Prevention Program
- www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide – U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- www.sprc.org – Suicide Prevention Resource Center



The Lord is good, a strong
refuge when trouble
comes. He is close to those
who trust in him.

Nahum 1:7, NLT



Justin Bond knows what it means to have his life dreams die.

During a firefight in Fallujah, Iraq Bond suffered an AK-47 round through both knees. “I spent the next year and a half in the hospital, and faced 33 surgeries that were meant to try and repair the physical damage done during that battle,” recalls Justin. “With the thirty-third surgery, I made the decision to have my leg amputated.”

The amputation, along with PTSD issues, sent Justin into a tailspin. “I struggled with depression, PTSD, and being non-ambulatory,” says Justin. “My wife and I were also grieving the loss of our twin babies. It seemed like all of my dreams had either died or were dying.”

Then Justin met another veteran who gave him the encouragement

he needed. The vet told Justin he needed to find a new mission in life. “I began to think about what I wanted to do. Reaching out to other vets was something that appealed to me,” says Justin.

SERVICE BEGINS THE HEALING

Emotional healing came as Justin began to serve other vets. “I felt like I was making a difference and this changed my own life,” says Justin. For the next three years Justin sought out vets and helped meet their physical needs. “Some of our projects included donating Segways as a mode of transportation and building homes,” says Justin. “I believed these things were helping.” When Justin began to check back with the families who had been helped he learned that the emotional pain for the vet still hadn’t

been overcome. “Nine of the guys we tried to help eventually took their own lives,” says Justin. That’s when Justin began hearing statistics that shook him.

SOBERING NUMBERS

“Eighteen veterans a day are choosing suicide,” says Justin. “That translates into 33,000+ individuals who have lost hope and ended their lives during the last five years. That number is higher than the combined casualties suffered in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

The numbers devastated Justin. These were his comrades who were feeling too much pain to continue living. “Those numbers are probably higher,” says Justin. “Only 44 states have reported suicide deaths. The numbers also do not include those individuals who accidentally overdose on painkillers. We know that those average about 2,000 cases annually.”

As Justin thought about these statistics he knew he had to do something more in his outreach. “As members of the military we are trained to defend the United States,” says Justin. “For 10 years that was my mission and it came to a crashing halt with a gunshot to my knees. Returning vets often feel like they don’t know their family or friends. They may feel like there is no place for them in a now unfamiliar world. They go from being a hero with a mission to having nothing to do.”





A DREAM IN AN AIRPORT

A missed flight and falling asleep in an airport gave Justin the kernel idea of what direction he should go with his outreach. “I dreamed about a set of cabins in what seemed like a tropical setting,” says Justin. “I was helping others around those cabins.”

“Sometime later I met a gentleman who owns Vision Quest Ranch, which houses exotic animals,” says Justin. “He invited my family to come and visit the animals. When we arrived I couldn’t believe my eyes. I leaned over to my wife and said, ‘Those are the exact same cabins I saw in my dream!’”

Justin envisioned a new thrust to his mission after his experience at Vision Quest Ranch. “I believed that those cabins and the animals could become a place of emotional healing for the vets I worked with.” It didn’t take long for the owner to agree with the plan and *A Healing Safari*, a part of *Our Heroes Dreams*, was born.



A HEALING SAFARI

With a location in place, Justin began to make other plans. “We wanted to provide counseling and guidance services that would make a difference,” says Justin. “We use Vietnam vets, who have successfully re-integrated into life, volunteer their time. They are able to tell vets, ‘I know what it is like today, what it will be like tomorrow. I want to tell you what it can be like 10 years from now.’”

Other services included during the 5-day stay encompass financial counseling, debt management, and other resources as well as time to spend reconnecting with family.



“One of the important parts of *A Healing Safari* is the therapy that the animals provide,” says Justin. “We’ve seen a vet who hadn’t hugged his family in five years reconnect with his family.” There are many stories to be told of vets who have been helped. One man went on a three-and-a-half hour elephant ride with his son who he barely knew and they established a new relationship. Another man who had lost all of his limbs found release from his nightmares when *Our Heroes Dreams* took him scuba diving.

NO END TO OUR MISSION

“Our mission doesn’t end with a five-day safari,” says Justin. “An integral component of the program is helping each person find their own personal mission to pursue. This is what gives them a reason to get up every morning and face another day.”

Justin and the other team members learn what each individual has a passion to do. Then they find a way to tie that passion to a mission. “One man loved to go backpacking, hiking, and camping,” says Justin. “I called the forest service and made arrangements for him to be assigned a trail that he would be responsible to keep clean and in good repair. Everyday he is on his trail fulfilling his new mission.”

Another veteran who went through the program had been homeless as a child. Today his mission is to work with the homeless vets in his community.

Our Heroes Dreams is making a difference. In the past year 44 veterans have completed the program and so far it’s a 100 percent success rate in keeping them safe and helping them establish their mission. For Justin Bond this is just the beginning of “Mission Accomplished.”

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Success is
not final,
failure is not
total. It is the
courage to
continue that
counts.

—Winston Churchill



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