

## Fierce Goodbye

*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:37-39 ESV*

*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. 27 And He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. Romans 8:26-28 ESV*

When people are depressed they don't make good decisions. They also don't have good problem solving skills. The suicidal person is not thinking at their best. All they can see is that nothing else seems to work. The person who takes his or her life is experiencing deep pain and doesn't see any other way out. They don't realize the deep pain they inflict upon their loved ones.

Do you know someone who has taken their own life? What effect has this had on that person's family?

Because of the stigma of suicide people are not encouraged to talk about their loss. The family often grieves alone because people don't know what to say or do to help them. People don't talk about suicide because they're not sure that the person who lost the loved one wants to talk about it. It is important to not give those who are grieving "pat answers". Just be there so that the hurting person is not alone.

When difficult situations arise do you tend to talk about them or keep your feelings inside?

Grieving a suicide can be very complex. Suicide can be embarrassing, knowing that people are often judgmental and gossipy. Sometimes family members blame themselves for the death wondering if they could have done something that would have made a difference. They can even be angry at the loved one who made the wrong decision instead of trying to understand his or her desperation. Sometimes suicides are spontaneous and completely unexpected. Other suicides come after long periods of discouragement.

Giving people permission to talk about painful things is one of the most important roles for pastoral leadership. We're not doing enough in our faith communities for long term grieving. The church needs to have follow-up, some kind of training on reaching out to people who have experienced loss. The church needs to be a healing station for the family. Not all churches are safe places for those who are grieving.

Where do you go when you need a safe place to heal?

After a suicide the family is devastated. A large part of the grieving process is learning to deal with questions that cannot be answered. The family needs to learn to integrate the loss into their lives as opposed to "getting over it". Not all families allow healthy grieving. Sometimes parents refuse to talk about their grief, leaving the children to fend for themselves.

Is your home a place where family members can talk over problems?

The people who seem to be the most resilient are the ones that reach out to help others. It takes awhile for survivors to want to look for joy. The grieving person needs to find some way to express feelings. It can be painting, writing, gardening, talking ... anything that helps get the feelings to come out. Alcohol and drugs tempt many people with a place to run and hide, but they are never healers, and only create more pain.

What brings you peace and joy when you are discouraged?

*Dear Lord, You alone can see into every heart and life. Give hope to the hurting. In Matthew 11:28 You invite, "Come unto Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Please give Your rest to those who are depressed and discouraged. Touch our hearts with Your healing grace. Shine Your light and peace through us so that we can be messengers of hope to those who are in distress. Bless and keep Your people. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.*