Love God
Love Others
Share the Good News

SUMMIT CHURCH

Being Jesus Christ to the World

Theme: What Is God Thinking?

"The Will of God"

Jeff Huber, October 31-November 1, 2026, at Summit Church, Durango

Weekly Memory Verse:

5 But I trust in your unfailing love.
I will rejoice because you have rescued me. – Psalm 13:5

SLIDE Struggling with Suicide

I was serving as a youth pastor in my very first church in Aurora, Colorado when I got a call from one of my best friends in Colorado Springs. She and I had known each other since our first years in college because we were active in our campus ministry together. Her husband and I were roommates for a short time in college, and I had just played softball with him two months earlier on a softball team in South Denver.

She called to tell me that Chuck had driven up to a piece of property they owned near South Park and had crawled into the trunk of their car and shot himself. We were all in our mid-20s at the time and it was devastating. I can still see the twinkle in his blue eyes and his silly thin blonde mustache I made fun of constantly because you could hardly tell he had one. Chuck had lost his job and was struggling with demons from his past and who knows what else. I felt like I should've noticed something, but I didn't.

GRAPHIC Jeff and Chuck

At his funeral, we all were wondering, **"What happened to Chuck? Where is he now?"** Today we look at a very important reality that our community has faced in very public ways in my 24 years here as your pastor. I have done funerals for 22 people who have taken their lives in those years and worked with many more families and individuals struggling with the grief and trauma of suicide. It's a topic we addressed when a **middle-school counselor** ended his life. Around that same time, I did funerals for **two middle school students** who died by suicide. We have had an **elementary school teacher** end her life that cause ripples throughout the school system here.

This sermon is like the ones I have preached following those traumatic events. Some of you have were here for those, but many of us were not and I have had several of you call me and email me and say, **"Would you do that sermon again?** I need to hear again what the scriptures teach about suicide and depression." Suicide is a topic that we seldom hear sermons preached upon and even in the broader society we don't talk very much about it. Yet it is so important for us to consider and ponder, especially in the light of our faith.

In the United States, over **50,000 people died by suicide in 2025**, and most experts believe the number is quite a bit higher as many are ruled accidental deaths because of the stigma around suicide.

- **By Sex: Males account for nearly four times as many suicide deaths as females.**
- **Women are four times more likely to attempt to take their own life, but men are three times more likely to succeed at taking their own life by suicide.**
- **Suicide is the second leading cause of death for people under the age of 24, after car accidents.**
- **By Method: Firearms are the most common method, accounting for 57% of all suicide deaths.**

- **By Race/Ethnicity: Non-Hispanic American Indian and Alaska Native populations experience the highest rate, followed by non-Hispanic White populations.**
- **Attempts and Ideation: An estimated 15 million adults had serious thoughts of suicide, over 5 million planned an attempt, and 2.5 million attempted suicide in 2025.**
- **Once every 15 minutes someone in the United States takes their own life.**
- **Veteran's day is this week, and 18 veterans a day end their life by suicide, more than 6,000 a year.**

That number has been growing steadily each year for the past five years. In Colorado, the suicide rate is 2 times the national average. Here in La Plata County, the suicide rate is 4 times the national average. I ran into someone in our community this week who lost a friend to suicide recently and I shared these numbers and she asked the question many of us ask, **"Why is the suicide rate higher here?"**

There was an article in National Geographic many years back with research on what they called "The Suicide Belt," that runs through the Rockies from Canada to Arizona, typically what we call the Mountain West, and includes Alaska. Here are some of those reasons.

GRAPHIC **The Suicide Belt**

SLIDE **Reasons for the "Suicide Belt"** (have fly in)

- **Isolation**
- **Demographics**
- **Firearm Access**
- **Altitude**
- **Healthcare Access**

- **Isolation:** We are more spread out in our communities in the mountain west.
- **Demographics:** The population includes a high proportion of middle-aged and aging, unattached men, alongside rural isolation.

When men lose the ability to ski and mountain bike and enjoy the outdoors (the reason many move here) the lose a sense of purpose.

- **Firearm Access:** High rates of gun ownership and higher per-capita rates of firearm-related suicides strongly correlate with regional data.
- **Altitude:** Scientific studies, including research from the University of Utah School of Medicine, have explored potential links between high altitude, **reduced brain serotonin levels**, and elevated mood or anxiety disorders.
- **Healthcare Access:** Severe shortages of mental health providers, geographic distance, transportation barriers, and cultural stigmas surrounding help-seeking are common in rural and resort communities.

The leading factor that takes people toward suicide as an adult in the US is **clinical depression**. For many adolescents, it can be a quick decision in a moment of darkness that is a new experience for them as they leave the relative safety of childhood and enter a world that is often confusing.

SLIDE "Death by suicide," or "Completed suicide"

One of the things I want to note at the beginning of this sermon is the strong movement by those in the mental health community to change our language when it comes to suicide and not use the word, ***"commit."*** We have often used this word to talk about suicide, but the truth is that people ***commit crimes*** and **suicide is NOT a crime**. To use the word, "commit," can be a hurtful thing for families who are survivors of suicide. Instead, it would be helpful to use phrases like, "death by suicide," or "take their own life," or they "completed suicide." We must retrain our thinking in some ways so we can be more sensitive as we minister and care for those who had a loved one who ended their life by suicide.

I am going to spend the **first part of this message** looking at **suicide from the perspective of the Scriptures** and how they speak to us, especially geared towards those who struggle with suicidal thoughts and depression. I'm hoping that you might hear God's word for you today. According to most surveys and research, about 19% of the population of the United States is clinically depressed at any given time. There will be 1000 of you who will listen to this message at some point which tells me that at least 200 people who are watching or listening to this sermon may be struggling with depression or suicidal thoughts. I would like to share with you what I think God might say to you as part of this message today.

Let's begin by recognizing how it feels when we walk into a place of utter despair or darkness, and it feels like there is no hope. A woman spoke to me once and said these words that I shared with you a few weeks ago:

> ***"Pastor Jeff, I want you to know that every single day I pray for God to kill me. I won't take my own life because my mother took her life and I don't want to do that to my children. I know the impact it had on me and my siblings, and I don't want to do that to anyone, but I pray the car will hit me. I sometimes pray that I will die of heart attack. I pray that somehow, I would die today before I go to bed, so I don't have to deal with this darkness tomorrow."***

I told her what I would tell each one of you. If you have those thoughts, then you're in good company, because they're a whole lot of people in the Bible who had seasons of darkness in their lives where they prayed that same prayer. Let me remind you of a few of those places. In our **desire to declare God's goodness** and the joy of the good news, **we sometimes forget** these important parts of our story. Most of us humans struggle with complicated feelings.

GRAPHIC Moses

Moses was known as the great lawgiver. He led the people of Israel out of slavery. He led them through the Red Sea and into the wilderness. They were wandering in the wilderness, and it became almost unbearable to lead these people for Moses. Some of the people came to hate Moses, and they voted to find a new leader to lead them back to Egypt and slavery where at least they had cucumbers and leaks. Moses is feeling exhausted and empty from all of this, both physically and emotionally. He comes to a place where he feels completely rejected and during his despair, we read these words in Numbers 11. This is his prayer he utters to God.

BIBLE

> ***10 Moses heard all the families standing in the doorways of their tents whining, and the Lord became extremely angry. Moses was also very aggravated. 11 And Moses said to the Lord, "Why are you treating me, your servant, so harshly? Have mercy on me! What did I do to deserve the burden of all these people? 12 Did I give birth to them? Did I bring them into the world? Why did you tell me to carry them in my arms like a mother carries a nursing baby? How can I carry them to the land you swore to give their ancestors? 13 Where am I supposed to get meat for all these people? They keep whining to me, saying, 'Give us meat to eat!' 14 I can't carry all these people by myself! The load is far too heavy! 15 If this is how you intend to treat me, just go ahead and kill me. Do me a favor and spare me this misery!"***

Sometimes we joke about this passage, but I don't think Moses was kidding, and I don't think he was being facetious. I think he was describing the despair and anguish that he was feeling at that moment and asking God to take his life so he wouldn't have to deal with this pain anymore.

The greatest King that Israel ever knew was **King David**. He wrote much of the book of Psalms and many of them are songs of complaint

or lament. These are Psalms where the writer appears to be deeply depressed and overwhelmed by the situation they are facing. That's what we find in Psalm 13 where David writes these words as a young boy fleeing for his life from King Saul who wants to kill him.

BIBLE

> ***1 O Lord, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long will you look the other way? 2 How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul, with sorrow in my heart every day?***

Clearly David is wrestling with overwhelming grief and sorrow, hopelessness and despair. **God seems nowhere to be found**. So, we see the greatest lawgiver in the Hebrew Bible, Moses struggle with depression. We see the greatest King in history of Israel, David struggle with the same feelings.

The greatest prophet in the Old Testament is Elijah. In 1 Kings 19 he has a battle with the followers of Baal who was a false god of the ancient near East. He goes to the top of Mount Carmel and has this great battle in which he calls upon God, and he is successful in defeating these **prophets who sacrificed children**. Elijah wins the battle for the good, but then Queen Jezebel, whose name is synonymous with evil, puts a bounty on Elijah's head. The great prophet of Israel goes fleeing into the wilderness, afraid that he will be hunted down and killed. He is all by himself, alone in that wilderness.

BIBLE

> ***3 Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. 4 Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died."***

Elijah was alone and defeated that he prayed to God that he

might die, not unlike another character that we find in the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible or what we call the Old Testament. Here's an image of a Broom Tree in Israel with a group under it, finding shelter in God's grace. Even in the middle of the desert, he is desperate.

GRAPHIC Team under Broom Tree

You might remember in the epic poem of Job how he lost his children and his livestock and his farm. He lost his health and his wealth and ended up with sores all over his body. It was his wife who comes to him and says, ***"Job, I don't know what you did, but it must've been bad for God to punish you this way. Why don't you curse God and die!"*** **How's that for a helpful wife?**

Job's **friends** come along and pile on and say, "Job you must've **done something very bad** or all these terrible things wouldn't have happened to you." Part of the reason for the book of Job is to teach us that **when terrible things happen it's not God who is doing** it to us or trying to punish us, which is what people believed 700 years before Jesus and the Jewish community. **That was the common logic** and theology of the time, and it still is for many people today. If something bad happens, then God must be doing it and it's because you did something wrong. But Job didn't do anything wrong. Job comes to a place where he is so overwhelmed with sorrow, but he says these words in Job 7: 11 and 13-16.

BIBLE

> ***11"I cannot keep from speaking. I must express my anguish. My bitter soul must complain….***

BIBLE

> ***13 I think, 'My bed will comfort me, and sleep will ease my misery,' 14 but then you shatter me with dreams and terrify me with visions. 15 I would rather be strangled—rather die than suffer like this. 16 I hate my life and don't want to go on living.***

Oh, leave me alone for my few remaining days.

Have you ever felt that way? Because that's real and that's how Job felt. The main point I want you to see is that **even those who are closest to God, even those who are heroes** of the faith, struggled at times with what we **would call today clinical depression**. They struggled with moments where **life felt utterly hopeless** and they felt helpless. The pain of this life seemed so hard that they wanted this life to come to an end, so if you ever feel that way, **you are in good company**. These folks, and many others that we don't have time to name, felt the same way and experienced that kind of grief in their hearts and souls.

Clinical depression becomes devastating when we **believe there is no hope.** We begin to believe that what we are going through today is what **we are going to go through tomorrow** and the next day and the next day for the rest of our lives. What happens when we begin to wrestle with suicidal thoughts is that **we get tunnel vision** and in that tunnel vision we can't see beyond our current circumstances. There **seems to be a mountain of pain** or adversity or difficult circumstances, and we can't see anything else. We can't see that on the other side of the mountain there are oceans of joy and moments of peace. All we can see is the pain or difficulty or adversity of the present circumstance.

We come to believe in two things.

1. ***The first thing we come to believe is that this will never change and things will never get better. This is what it's going to be like forever.***

2. ***We also come to believe that everyone else would be better off if we were not here.***

We begin to listen to those voices that tell us we are worthless and that we are not worth anything and that people in the world would be better if we were not in it. One of the main images of the

devil in Scripture is as a liar or deceiver and we begin to believe that lie and deception that we aren't worth anything. That's the only voice we can hear, and he begins to overwhelm us.

We lose the ability to see the pain it would cause others if we took our life. All we can see is this tunnel vision and this narrow focus and we can't envision all that will happen when we take our lives. We just know that the pain we're feeling right now will be over and we focus on that alone.

Maybe some of you listing to this sermon right now have had that experience and have those thoughts, **"The world would be better off without me."**

I want us to think together about these **two assumptions** that are whispers that we hear about ourselves telling us that we should take our own life and that there is no reason to continue to go on. Let's start with this idea of other people being better off if we weren't around. **I've read several letters of people** who have taken their own lives and in one of them a husband wrote these words to his wife before he took his own life.

> ***I love you dearly. This is not my giving up. This is my setting you free.***

The idea is that it would be better for you. I have seen this kind of note **written to parents and to spouses and to children**. What we don't see is what I see when I walk **into the house** after someone has taken their life or when I **walk into an ICU waiting room** of a family clinging to hope that their loved one will survive the attempt on their own life. I see spouses who are in utter pain and shock because of the death of their loved one. **I see parents crumpled in fetal positions**, not knowing how they are going to breathe because of the loss they feel. **Survivors of suicide carry the grief for a very long time.**

I have held children and wondered if they would **ever stop crying**. I have held children and wondered if they would **ever start crying**. The

pain is so deep that **sometimes it's hard to even express it** and so it gets stuffed. I experienced all those things and more as I walked the halls of Miller Middle School and sat with student after student after one of their friends had ended their life with a gun.

There are lost hopes and lost dreams. There is an emptiness that next **Father's Day or Mother's Day** or birthday or Christmas. Most of the people I know who have taken their own lives, I know, were **good people and would never want to inflict that kind of hurt** or pain on their loved ones. It was not going to be better for them if they took their life, but **they couldn't see that**. I have spent time with parents and siblings and grandparents and friends of those who have ended their life by suicide, and I am confident that the person who ended their life would not have wanted to cause them the kind of pain their families experienced.

You might know that there is an **increased likelihood** that the close family members or friends of someone who has taken their life will **consider taking their own life as well**. This is one of the greatest fears I know of many at our schools and in our community and I don't name it to hurt anyone who has died by suicide, or their family any further. I do need to be clear about the truth of what happens for those family members and survivors of a suicide and **the thoughts they** begin to have. I know this because I have sat with these family members and friends as their pastor and I can say with almost 100% certainty that people who choose to end their life would not want any of their friends or family to do the same. Nobody would wish to inflict that on their friends or their families, but it is **an unintended consequence** that we can't ignore during a time like this.

One of the funerals I did here was for Sawyer who was an 8th grader at Miller. I met Sawyer at youth group a couple of times and I listened to many of his family and friends about him as a loving and caring friend with a great heart. I know two things for sure. He had no idea the pain his death would cause, AND he would not have wanted

anyone else to harm themselves.

Here's the second lie that begins to consume us. ***It will never get any better and it will always be this painful.*** I have felt that at times and surely many of you have felt that in certain situations. We feel this fear and anxiety that we are stuck, and it will never get better.

Let me remind you of these biblical characters that we have already heard from today and where they were during their depression and where they ended up after that moment where they prayed for God to take their life. ***First of all, let's remember that God did not answer their prayer and take their lives.***

Moses prayed in the wilderness for God to take his life, but God does not answer that prayer. **Over the next 30+ years God leads Moses** through the wilderness with the cloud of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night. All the people who have been complaining and grousing at Moses either **go their own way or die of old age in the wilderness** and **new generation is born** who look at **Moses as their great leader**. They love and **treasure him and will follow** him anywhere. He can **teach them the ways of God,** and he gives them the law once more before they enter the Promised Land. Just before he dies at a ripe old age he is **taken to the top of Mount Nebo** on the other side of the Dead Sea in Jordan. He looks over the Promised Land and God allows him to see what awaits these people he has been leading for all these years. **Most of Moses' great experiences would happen after that day** that he prayed, "God, please take me now. I do want to live anymore."

GRAPHIC Mount Nebo Israel

The same thing is true of **King David** who prayed often these words of sorrow and desperation, feeling as if God had abandoned him. **David goes on to become the greatest King** that Israel would ever know and while he had moments of sorrow in his life, there were also moments of unbelievable joy. **He watched children and grandchildren** be born and lived to a ripe old age that was filled with wisdom and a

deep sense of God's presence. Most of the best years of his life came after his moments of great depression.

While Elijah is in the wilderness, thinking he is the only one left and that he has been abandoned by God, here is God's voice whispering in his ear, "**You are not the only one. There are 7000 more prophets set aside just like you throughout the land and you will unite with them, but it will be okay. Trust me."** He has his profound experience of hearing the still, small voice of God and after that he ends up mentoring young Elisha. They serve God together until the end of his days when, if you remember the story, **Elijah is taken up into the heavens to be with God on a chariot of fire**. This all happened because **God did not answer his prayer** when he prayed that he might die.

When we get to the end of Job, we find that he and his whole life are restored. After those years of terrible moments, Job continues to cling to his faith and refuses to give up on God, regardless of what anyone else says. Job has this powerful line in chapter 13.

BIBLE

15 God might kill me, but I have no other hope.
I am going to argue my case with him.
16 But this is what will save me—I am not godless.
If I were, I could not stand before him.

I love this part of Job where he holds on by his fingernails and he argues with God. He gets angry with God because God can take it and at least when you are angry you are still in a relationship. Finally, we come to the end of Job, and we read these words in chapter 42.

BIBLE

12 So the Lord blessed Job in the second half of his life even more than in the beginning. For now he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 teams of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. 13 He also gave Job seven more sons and three more daughters.

BIBLE

> **16 Job lived 140 years after that, living to see four generations of his children and grandchildren. 17 Then he died, an old man who had lived a long, full life.**

All his best years were ahead of him when he thought to himself, "I would rather be strangled than to live in this body."

In the New Testament there is one man who is successful in taking his own life and his name was Judas, the disciple who betrayed Jesus. One of the people closest to Jesus and one of his closest companions takes his own life. Jesus spent three years with this man, and he thinks he knows him, and for reasons that we really are unsure of, he betrays Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. When Jesus is taken off to be crucified after being betrayed, Judas sees this and feels tremendous guilt. He returns the 30 pieces of silver, and he goes to a place called the Potter's Field. He puts the noose around his neck, and he hangs himself from a tree.

GRAPHIC Potter's Field Israel

I got to see this field from a distance on our trip to the Holy. This is a picture of the Potter's Field. It overlooks Gehenna, which is the New Testament name for hell, and it is a valley where the **trash was burned** in the first century in Jerusalem and the fires burned all day and all night. You can see that from this field. Those rocks with holes in them are tombs where monastics were buried. That **tree you see** in the middle of the field is one that has been replanted over the past 2000 years, whenever one dies. That lone tree stands there in the middle of the Potter's Field to remind you of Judas Iscariot, coming there in total despair and taking his own life.

When I see this field, I can't help but wonder what would've happened if Judas had waited three days. If he hadn't taken his life when Jesus was taken to be crucified, but instead had waited for just three days, then **what would've happened? Jesus would've risen from the grave after those three days**. What do you believe Jesus would've

done if Judas had come to Jesus and fallen on his knees and begged for forgiveness? **Jesus asked God to forgive those people who crucified** him while he was hanging on the cross, so **what do you think he would've said to Judas?** I think he would've said, "Of course I forgive you Judas. **You belong to me and it's going to be okay."**

What kind of ministry do you think Judas would've had from that time forward? What kind of **impact might he have had**, traveling throughout the Roman Empire telling his story? **Can you imagine the sermons he would've preached?** "I sold Jesus out for 30 pieces of silver. I was the one responsible for him being crucified. But after he was **raised from the grave, he forgave me.** He gave me a new beginning and a fresh start and if he can do that for me, can't Jesus do that for you?" **Can't you hear Judas preaching this word of grace** and mercy and being one of the most powerful witnesses to the Christian faith and the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ? **If he had only waited three days, imagine what could've happened.**

I remember an **18-year-old senior in high school** coming to me when I was serving as a full-time youth pastor. She was in total despair because her **parents were getting divorced** and she **didn't get into the college** that she wanted, and she was afraid she was never going to have the career she hoped for. **Her boyfriend broke up with her** and **was already dating someone else** after one week and she confided in me that she felt like killing herself. She **went to the hospital with me**, and **she began to see a counselor** and take appropriate medication for the depression in which she found herself and she graduated from high school. She went on to a different college and then to med school and **now she is an oncologist**, married and with a couple of children and bringing hope to those with cancer. I am **so glad she held on through those moments** that felt overwhelming because her best days continue to be ahead of her. **She has joy she could never imagine** when she was 18 years old and in the throes of depression, thinking that **all her hopes and dreams were dashed.**

I think of a man who came to me many years ago in the middle of **dealing with a terrible illness.** He didn't want to go on with life, and he wanted to end it because of **the pain of the treatments**. We talked about trusting that God will walk with us even through those painful moments and how he could **hold on through the valley of the shadow of death.** He **lived for four more years** and during that time he got to **celebrate many moments with his family**. He was a profound witness to the **light of Christ shining through him** because he didn't end his life when he first thought about it.

I think of the **man who was out of work for two years** and started **his car while it was in the garage** and close the garage door and waited. Somebody found him and he spent several weeks in the hospital recovering. Initially he was angry that people had stopped him from taking his own life, but **today he would tell you that he's grateful that it didn't work**. He did find a new job and while it wasn't a dream job and doesn't pay what he hoped, he has discovered a new sense of joy about life beyond his work with an **excellent therapist** and some **good medication** that helps the chemical activity in his brain work correctly.

I want to recognize that **all of us hear voices** and I'm not talking about **schizophrenia or mental illness**. I'm talking about the **mental tapes** that you got when you were a kid from your family or friends, some of which are **positive** and some of which are **negative**. Our conscience is one of those voices. Our culture speaks to us as do the people around us, but also the Holy Spirit longs to speak to us. Whether you believe in a **literal devil or just a force of darkness**, I would argue that there is a **dark voice which speaks to us** as well sometimes.

That dark voice whispers to us, **"You are worthless. There is no reason for you to keep going. There is no hope. Things are just going to get worse. Life will never get better. Everybody will be better off without you. Just end it now."**

Can I tell you that **that voice is never the voice of God?** In John 10:10 Jesus said:

BIBLE

> **10 The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.**

There are no hopeless causes with God. God promises to **always walk with us**, even through the darkest places. Even if we can't feel God, God is still walking with us and **there is joy on the other side** of the pain. **As people of faith, we keep holding on as best we can and don't give up.**

I'm not whispering to you today. I feel like God is calling me to tell you in as **firm a voice** as possible, ***"Don't give up. There is always hope. Hold on because of better days coming. The worst thing in your life will never be the last thing in your life."*** We choose which voices we want to listen to, and I am inviting you to listen to the voice of God today which speaks words of life.

One of the things I want to recognize today is the need for us to be aware, as best we can, that our young people might be hearing those voices of the thief that visits in the darkness. I would like you to hear from some students, all of whom have either contemplated attempted suicide, telling us how we might prevent tragedies like this past week from happening again.

VIDEO Teen Suicide Prevention

There are many resources on the web which is why we've given you this resource guide inside of your bulletin this week, complete with a list of counselors and also places to go if you are struggling with depression. We also have resources for those who are struggling with the grief and the trauma when someone has taken their life. We have Stephen Ministers and counselors who are here after each service and they would love to talk to you. Let me remind you of what they said in

the video.

SLIDE You know your kid better than anyone else

SLIDE Pay attention to sudden changes of behavior

SLIDE We often have no idea they are struggling

SLIDE Say Something – Don't be afraid to ask

SLIDE Ask straight out, "Are you thinking of killing yourself?"

SLIDE They want somebody to ask

SLIDE The best prevention is to ask

SLIDE Asking does NOT put the idea in their head

SLIDE Don't downplay their feelings

SLIDE Make a list of people who can support

SLIDE Make sure your home is safe

SLIDE Trust your gut

I want you to notice what happens in the Psalm of David that we read earlier. There is a shift that begins to happen in Psalm 13.

BIBLE

> ***3 Turn and answer me, O Lord my God! Restore the sparkle to my eyes, or I will die. 4 Don't let my enemies gloat, saying, "We have defeated him!" Don't let them rejoice at my downfall. 5 But I trust in your unfailing love. I will rejoice because you have rescued me. 6 I will sing to the Lord because he is good to me.***

We always find this at the end of the complaint Psalms. What David does and Moses and Elijah and Job do are the same thing. They say in essence, ***"I can't see God right now, but I trust that you are there. I don't feel you and my circumstances are bleak, but I trust that you can deliver me and you will not abandon me. I remember what you've done for me in the past and that you long for me to have a future filled with hope and goodness and joy. I choose to believe that***

you will guide me in the future and you will never leave me and the worst thing in my life will never be the last thing in my life."

This is a part of what we offer as the church. It is our faith in Christ and our **trust that we will be delivered**. In David's case he would sing this and not just say these words. That singing would raise his spirits. That's what we do when we **gather for worship** and why we're always singing songs of worship in every service.

I also know that we are **social creatures and we need to be connected to each other.** When we get **clinically depressed, we withdraw** and it is the very thing that is worst thing for us and it's the thing that we often do when we get depressed. This is why **being in a small group is so important** and why we have many of them here in this church. This is why we are always encouraging you to find a group and to connect, because we need those relationships.

Some of you are watching this at home online and it's because maybe you are sick or you're out of town or you are stuck somewhere, and we are glad you're here. But some of you are clinically depressed and you're in your bathrobe and you just don't want to go to church and **deal with people**. We are glad that you are joining us online in this way right now, **but I hope you will take a risk and call us or connect** here at the church in some way because the very act of being around people may be the very thing that you most need.

Every weekend when I ask you to **stand and greet one another**, I know some of you don't like to do that. You don't like to touch each other but let me remind you that **20% of the people around you**, it was all they could do to make it here today and they **need your touch**. When you shake their hands, you are **offering therapy**. You take someone's hand and you look them in the eye, and you smile at them and **you say, "I see you. You are not invisible. I noticed that you are here and I care about you."** That's part of why we do that at the beginning of every service. Singing together and praying together and

then greet each other before the service is over, is all part of the **therapeutic process of connecting and being God's people together**. **We need other human beings to notice that we are still alive** and we are still here.

We need good friends. We need **good doctors and we might need medication**. We **need a counselor** that we can talk to and learn skills for dealing and coping with depression. **We need pastors** who will pray with us and **help see the Scriptures** and how we might apply them in our lives. We need to **gather to sing and praise God.** We need to **learn to trust and not give up**. I can't feel God or see God right now, but I will **trust that God is with me** and God will not abandon me and **there is always hope**.

This is the primary message of the Christian faith. Some people think the **Bible is this book about how everything will be happy** and we will always be filled with joy when we follow Jesus Christ. That is not the story of the Bible. The Bible is a story, page after page, of where **God's people go through difficult things** because we live in a world where people do horrible things to each other and bad things happen, but they don't give up on God. **Somehow God takes that pain and brings good from it.**

As I was thinking about the events of this last week with the flooding and some of the overwhelming feelings we can have when disaster strikes, I visited with several people who are struggling with a darkness and sadness that feels like it will never end. One of them was angry because someone said to them a phrase, I have encouraged you NOT to use during this series of sermons, "God won't give you more than you can handle." I remind you that this is NOWHERE in the Bible and the Bible is filled with stories of people who got WAY more than they can handle, to the point that they wanted to die! Instead, the Bible tells us this truth. We have some cards leftover when I preached on this phrase that have Psalm 46 imprinted on them and you can find at the Welcome Center.

SLIDE God helps us handle what comes our way.

BIBLE

[1] God is our refuge and strength,
always ready to help in times of trouble.
[2] So we will not fear when earthquakes come
and the mountains crumble into the sea.
[3] Let the oceans roar and foam.
Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge!

That leads me to some **closing words for those of you who have survived the loss of someone** who has taken their own life. One of the first things I want to recognize is that those who feel closest to someone who takes their own life **feel a sense of guilt.** We think about the last time we saw them and if **we could've said something** different or done something to encourage them. I must confess to you that every time I get called into a situation where someone has taken their own life and they are a **part of the congregation** I serve, **I feel like a failure**. **How did we not say the right thing or do the right thing or somehow give them hope?** You are going to feel the same thing if you are close to that person.

Here is what I've come to realize. I'm going to **wrestle a bit with that guilt,** but it also will **lead me to preach a sermon like this today**. I'm preaching this sermon today and I hope and pray it will make a difference.

I also recognize that **none of us are perfect**. Had you known when that person close to you was going to take their life and you knew the exact time it was going to happen and the exact place then I'm guessing **most of you would be there to stop them**. But the truth is we don't know. If we knew exactly the right thing to say then I'm sure all of you would've said it, but **we didn't know and there is no way to know every single time. If you were there, you would have done something.** Somewhere in there I want as your pastor, for you to hear this word of

grace.

SLIDE **You are not responsible for someone else taking their life. It was not your fault.**

I have preached multiple times at funerals for people who have taken their life, and each time there is one question that is first and foremost in people's hearts, **"What happened to my loved one? Will I ever see them again?"**

The reason that we ask that question is because the church, throughout the ages, has **taught** that if you took your own life, you **were committing murder**. You have **usurped God's authority and there is no chance to repent**. This was part of the logic of some in the church. The other part of the logic was asking the question, **"How do we keep people from taking their own lives?"**

Here is why we feel some tension around this question. I preach about heaven on occasion and we talk about **heaven as being a great place.** It is paradise and in heaven there is **no more sorrow or pain**. There are no more tears and **if you are living with hell on earth** and many tears, then **that sounds pretty darn good**. **So how do you keep people from making that choice?**

I **sat with a student once** who said to me, "The only thing keeping me from taking my own life is that **I'm afraid I will go to hell."** What do you say to that? Do you tell them, **"No, you won't go to hell"?** Part of me wants that person to keep thinking that so they won't take their own life. **"If that's keeping you from taking your own life, then you just keep believing that." Then we go get some help!**

But **I would rather have you find other reasons** to avoid taking your own life than your fear of going to hell. That's why I tell you it's going to **hurt the people you love** the most, and **it's a lie to think they will be better off without you**. I have tried to convince you that there is **always hope and the darkness** you are going through now is not the darkness you will live with for the rest of your life. I have tried to teach

you today that God walks with you through everything and that it is never God's will for you to take your own life.

But I also know that when there is **somebody, a child of God, and they are in such intense despair** that they can't imagine going on in life, and for whatever reason, **whether mental illness or the darkness** which is afflicting them, in that moment takes their own life, am I going to tell you that **God will push them away** and tell them, "I'm going to be mad at you forever and you will be punished forever"? As if they **didn't go through enough hell on earth already**, we are going to say they are going through more hell because of a choice they felt no way around? I don't believe that. **I don't believe that our God will pile that on to someone** who is already feeling so far away from Him, they can't see any light.

SLIDE **"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."** Jesus of Nazareth – Luke 23:34

When **Jesus was hanging on the cross**, he looked at the people who put him there and said, **"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."** There is no such thing as the "unforgivable sin" and those words of Jesus some 2000 years ago are meant for us today when we feel far away from God because of something we did do, or something we didn't do.

That brings me back to my friend Chuck. Can I tell you what I think? I think at that moment, he crawled in the **trunk of his car** because **he couldn't think of any way out** and in that moment that he ended his life, **I see him standing with Christ** and I hear **God saying** to him, "Chuck, I am so sad. **I feel such pain because I saw the future and I knew what I had in store for you.** There were things that were going to happen and **joy that you couldn't imagine.** You wouldn't be without work forever and **there was healing** I was going to **bring from** your **demons in the past.** You were going to make a difference in the world, and **I was going to redeem those broken places** in your life. There was

so much beauty that **you couldn't see at the age of 25**. There was so much joy yet to come. I was going to take those hard things and bring good from them if only you could've held on."

"But Chuck, you are my child, and I love you. Come here."

I picture God wrapping his arms around Chuck and **holding him tight and giving him life.** I'm sorry, but which of you **if you have children and they were in mental anguish and complete despair**, would push **them away and say, "Go away!"** I'm pretty sure that none of you would do that to your children. **Instead, you would reach out and love them** with all the strength that you have and that I think is what God does with those in anguish who take their own life. **They belong to God and God will not let them go** or **punish them** anymore than they already have felt punished.

I end with this. **We who remain after the death of a loved one** to suicide, sometimes feel, **"Why should I go on?"** The mothers and fathers I have talked with have asked this question. They wonder if they need to end their own life. I will say the same thing to you. **God can bring something beautiful from that pain.** The Scriptures teach us that **God gives us beauty for ashes and brings joy in the morning**. God works all things and brings them together for his good and while ***God doesn't cause those bad things to happen, he will force them to accomplish his good.***

Chuck's wife Alane went through that hell of losing her husband. I sat with her and watched her in a **fetal position for three days**, in pain and wishing to be dead herself. Do you know what she did next? She went to seminary at Boston University and she is now a **United Methodist pastor at Delta United Methodist Church**. She's one of the most amazing pastors I know and took a church in Salt Lake City that was dying and **turned it around** and helped them sell their old building and buy new property and be reborn in a new location where they have a chance at new life. **She knows firsthand what it means for God to**

bring beauty out of ashes and I have gotten to watch God do that in her life. I know that experience of losing her husband has profoundly shaped her ministry and it has **become a gift to others**. **God takes the pain, and put in his hands, will bring something good from it**.

Whenever I do a funeral for someone who has died from taking their own life, I think of the hymn that so many know, even those not in the church. It was **written by a former slave owner**, John Newton, who was responsible for the imprisonment and death of many slaves before he found Christ.

SLIDE ***Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,***
that saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind but now I see.

SLIDE ***Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,***
and mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the veil
a life of joy and peace.

SLIDE ***When we've been there 10,000 years***
bright shining as the sun,
we've no less days to sing God's praise
than when we first begun

I do believe that Chuck now rests with his heavenly father. If you are struggling with thoughts of suicide, then **please let us help you**. This is **not God's dream for your life or your death**. There is always hope.

Let's pray...

SLIDE **Prayer**

While your heads are bowed and your eyes are closed, you may not know what to pray. Maybe it's been a long time since you prayed. I would like to help you to be able to do that and maybe in your own words you can pray and commit or recommit your life to God. If you're

not sure what to say you might just say these words after me. You can whisper them under your breath.

I trust you oh God with my life…

Help me in my dark moments…

to remember that you are there…

Help me to listen for your voice…

Help me to trust that there is always hope…

Lord, I know there are people in this place today who are struggling with pain. Help us to reach out to them and to each other. Help us to love, comfort and encourage them in the losses we have felt and, in those moments, where we feel alone. Into your hands oh God we commit our spirits. We pray this in your holy name. Amen.

November 7-8 Order

1. Countdown
2. Ryan welcomes people, inviting them to stand in body or spirit.
3. Song – "I Thank God"
4. Song – "O Come to the Altar"
5. Jeff welcomes and shares:
    A. QR Code
    B. Connect Card
    C. Suicide Resources
    D. Invites people to greet each other
6. Sermon Video Intro
7. Sermon
8. Prayer
9. Med Moments
10. Offering (Flood Recovery, Suicide Resources)
11. Song – "No Longer Slaves"
12. Prayer and Lord's Prayer
13. Care Ministers
14. The Bridge
15. Dinner with the Pastor
16. Food Drive November 17 for Native Hope
17. Bless Native Hope Rebuild and Restore Team (Sat Night.)
18. GRAPHIC Native Hope Team (Sunday)
19. Closing Prayer