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# For God & Country

*A Journal for Seventh-day  
Adventists in Military and  
Public Service*





# IT'S PERPLEXING

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**S**uicide comes in different ways. Not all suicides are created equal. That is why it is a very perplexing matter and not easily explained. Not all suicides are the result of mental illness. People end their lives for many reasons, but some are not considered legal and or approved universally.<sup>1</sup>

At different times, there have been countries which legislated a legal suicide. This is commonly called “assisted suicide” and or “physician-assisted suicide.” Generally, there are certain criteria that must be met, which varies according to the country where this has been legalized.

Most people who think about dying by suicide and or do die by suicide suffer from great emotional pain, despair, hopelessness, and/or helplessness. In English literature, the

famous Shakespearean legendary play “Romeo and Juliet” portrays death by suicide. When the lovers are not able to publicly live out their love for each other, they end their lives. Even though the story is fictional, it reflects suicidal ideations of real-life people.

As a chaplain, one day, I was visiting a patient suffering from a terminal disease. She looked at me and said. *“We are more merciful to animals than to humans. When a horse breaks a leg, we put it out of its misery by shooting it. I am in pain. I have only a few weeks to live, but the doctors keep on testing me to see how rapidly my disease is advancing. Why they don’t have mercy on me and help me die soon?”*

I am not advocating or making a case for assisted suicide, but that scenario played out many times over makes you think about the ravages of sin on the human body. This can cause

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a person to wish for death.

King Saul, the first king of Israel, chose to die by suicide. He saw the battle was lost and faced being taken captive. He knew the prospect of unspeakable horror, pain, and suffering that would be his lot as a captive of the enemy. According to the biblical record, he took his own life.

*“Then said Saul to his armorbearer, draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armorbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore, Saul took his sword, and fell upon it. And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he likewise fell upon his sword, and died with him.”*<sup>2</sup>

Suicide is a very complicated issue.<sup>3</sup> In many cultures it is considered an honorable death. In those cultures, as in the case of King Saul, death by suicide is often found in the military culture.

Following World War II, we heard stories of commanders, mainly from Asian cultures, who faced disgrace, defeat, and embarrassment. Like King Saul, they “fell on their swords” or shot themselves. Several years ago, a United States Navy Admiral faced public embarrassment due to the inappropriate use of military citations, and took his life.

Suicide can be the result of mental illness. Regardless of the form of suicide, physician-assisted suicide (PAS) or physician administered suicide (PAE) or suicide in any

form, the action is serious and not something to be taken lightly.

We can’t speak about suicide without reviewing what many of us call the sanctity of life. Sanctity of life is defined as *“the belief that, because people are made in God’s image,<sup>4</sup> human life has an inherently sacred attribute that should be protected and respected at all times. While God gave humanity the authority to kill and eat other forms of life,<sup>5</sup> the murdering of other human beings is expressly forbidden, with the penalty being death.”*<sup>6, 7</sup>

As God-fearing people with the belief that we are created by God and the understanding that we are temples of the Holy Spirit<sup>8</sup> suicide is problematic.

I am not attempting to answer all the question, and or dilemmas that suicides present to us. In the pages of this magazine others will speak on this very important issue that will be with us as long as we live on this earth where sin and death abounds.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.intechopen.com/books/bioethics-medical-ethical-and-legal-perspectives/-assisted-dying-a-view-of-the-legal-social-ethical-and-clinical-perspectives>

<sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel 31: 4-6, ASV

<sup>3</sup> <https://projectsemicolon.com/what-is-suicide/>

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 1:26-27, ESV

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 9:3, ESV

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 9:6, ESV.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/sanctity-of-life.html>

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:19, ESV

# A DEATH LIKE NO OTHER

**BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE, HOPE, AND  
COMFORT IN THE FACE OF SUICIDE**

By Chaplain O. Kris Widmer, M.Div., Palliative Care Chaplain



For those who contemplate it, those who fail at  
it, those who succeed at it;  
And the families and friends who mourn them;  
And those who minister to them all.

Chaplain O. Kris Widmer

## INTRODUCTION

Many ecclesiastical theologies regarding suicide conclude that there is no salvation available to one who dies by suicide. The common conclusion is that those who kill themselves are beyond the saving grace of God and will be among the lost in the final judgment. It is deemed necessary, when one also teaches an immediate continuation of existence in heaven at death. Why wouldn't one kill themselves and go to glory. Thus, the fear of the final fire gives a strong incentive to live on here. However, such a theology offers little hope for mourners and those who comfort them.

Suicide is certainly “a death like no other.” No one questions the salvation of believers who die by other means: accident, illness, age, murder, disasters, or predators. However, what about a death that is self-caused? This article is my attempt to say, “Wait. Not so fast! Maybe we should reconsider our theology.”

## SUICIDE ON THE RISE

Suicide rates are increasing in all segments of the world's population. It is said that the United States military experiences as many as twenty-two suicide deaths each day, among both active duty and retired personnel. Worldwide, there are 850,000 successful suicides every year – that is 2,329 each day.

Few things will stretch a person's soul and theology more than finding comforting words to say to a grieving family and community when one has died by suicide.



## WORDS MATTER

Read those last three words again – “died by suicide.” The usual phrase is, “committed suicide.” This came from the era when suicide was a crime, much like committing larceny or adultery. “Committed” conveys shame and stigma even to this day. I now use the more neutral phrase – “died by suicide.”

## THE BIBLE ROGUE’S GALLERY

The idea that suicide is tantamount to an unpardonable sin comes through the ancient church theologians of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, along with Dante’s *Inferno*. Suicide was considered self-murder, breaking the sixth commandment. Since the victim couldn’t go to confession there is no salvation for them.

This view is supported biblically by referencing King Saul,<sup>1</sup> the Apostle Judas,<sup>2</sup> as well as the lesser known Ahithophel,<sup>3</sup> and Israel’s King Zimri.<sup>4</sup>

However, we should refrain from passing judgment on the eternal destinies of Bible characters, given our limited knowledge from the accounts. Who are we to judge? All four of these souls could be said to be “lost” based on the *trending habits of their lives*, not the means of their deaths.

King Saul had drifted away from

God, as evidenced by his numerous disobediences of Samuel’s instructions. Even the prophet withdrew and never saw Saul’s face again.<sup>5</sup> Saul’s Endor séance would justify such condemnation, regardless of the way he died. Judas’ embezzlement, his marginal discipleship, and his betrayal kiss determine his destiny, rather than his mode of death.

## THE BIBLE’S REDEEMED GALLERY

There are other Bible biographies to ponder besides Saul and Judas. Let’s consider those who we have good reason to believe will be raised in the resurrection of the righteous.

### SAMSON

Consider a name from Hebrews 11:32 - Samson. What! The Israelite judge who was a triple womanizer and who used his divine strength as a toy! The “suicide pusher” of temple pillars, whose intentional act resulted in his own death, along with 3,000 enemies.<sup>6</sup> Why does he get to be listed among the faithful? Well, “the hair of his head began to grow,”<sup>7</sup> evidence that he and God had important conversations as he pushed that millstone. So, perhaps a person can die by suicide and also be right with God.

We should refrain from passing judgment on the eternal destinies of Bible characters, given our limited knowledge from the accounts.

## THE ARMOR BEARER

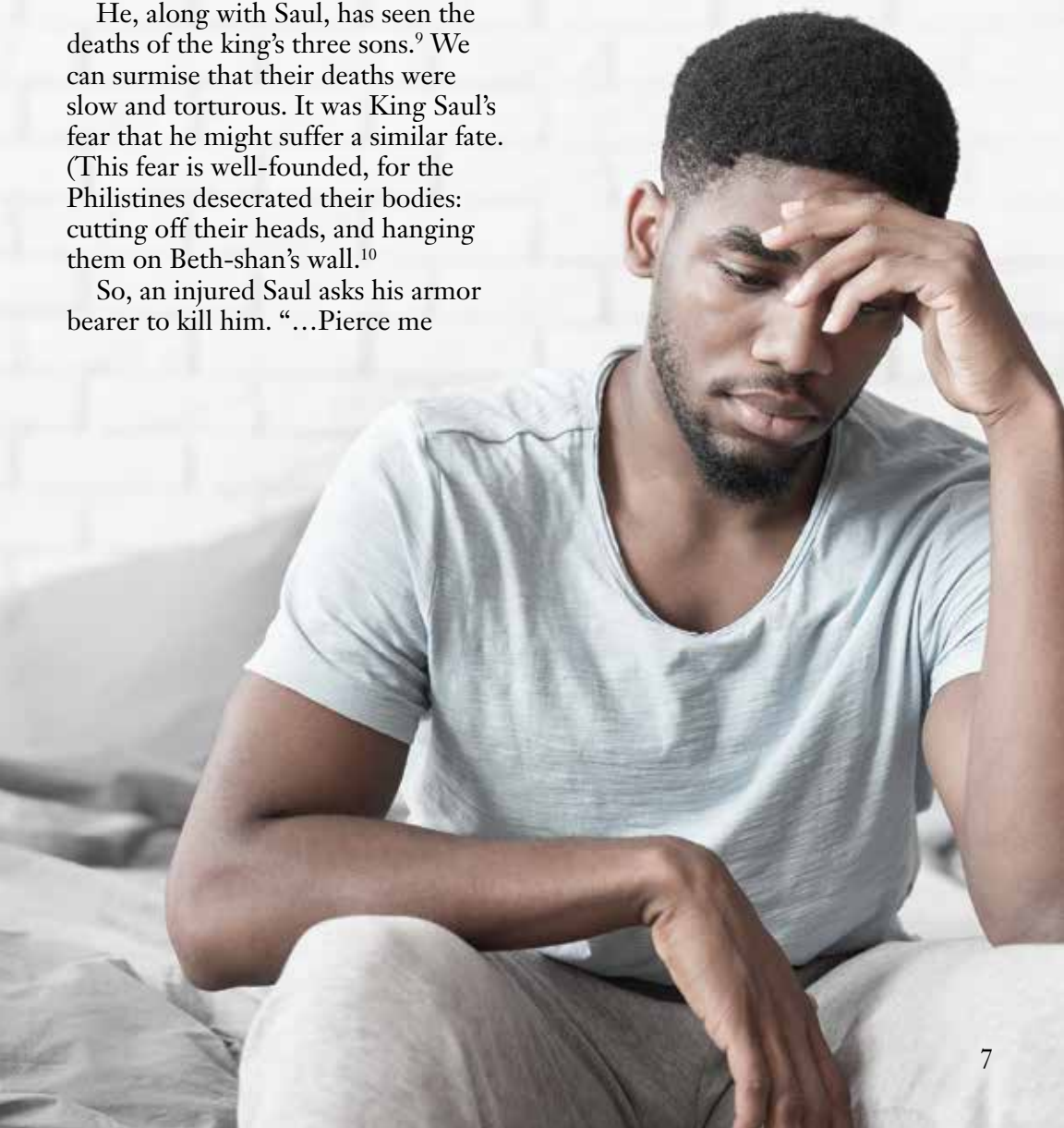
In our haste to convict King Saul, we have often missed the quivering form of a frightened armor bearer. “And when his armor bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell upon his sword and died with him.”<sup>8</sup>

I have taken to calling him – PFC Jacob Jacobson (That is *Private First Class*, for those of us without a military lexicon.) He has been conscripted to drag Saul’s equipment around. He has a uniform and a sword.

He, along with Saul, has seen the deaths of the king’s three sons.<sup>9</sup> We can surmise that their deaths were slow and torturous. It was King Saul’s fear that he might suffer a similar fate. (This fear is well-founded, for the Philistines desecrated their bodies: cutting off their heads, and hanging them on Beth-shan’s wall.<sup>10</sup>

So, an injured Saul asks his armor bearer to kill him. “...Pierce me

through...lest these uncircumcised come...and make sport of me.”<sup>11</sup> But PFC Jacobson refuses this order “being greatly afraid.” I can picture him offering a shaky salute. “*W-w-with...due re-re-respect, Your M-m-majesty, I will n-n-not lift m-m-my hand against the L-L-Lord’s anointed.*” He answers “No.” And so King Saul falls on his own sword, a suicide that has influenced theology for the past three thousand years.



Keep living! You are loved! Stay with us, please. We'll assist you getting the help you need.

Now PFC Jacobson looks around. The King and his sons are dead. The battle is lost. Rather than face a torturous death, this military hero also dies by suicide! I am unwilling to teach that this soldier should be considered lost due to his desperate, final act.

## JESUS

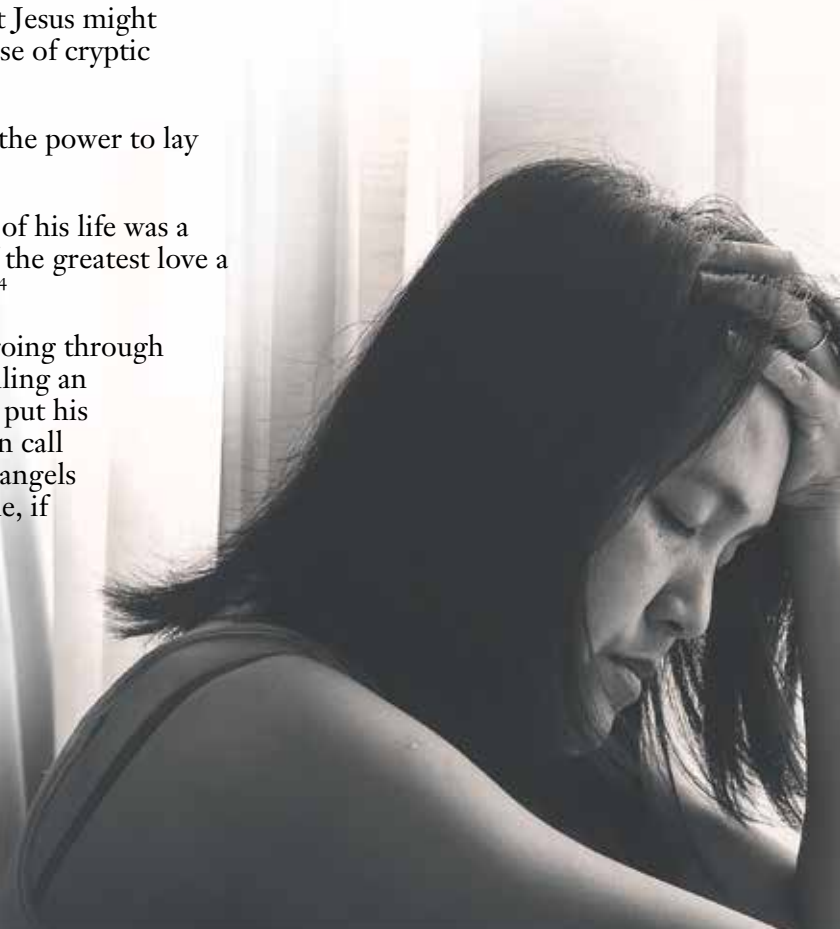
And it could be said that Jesus also died by suicide. I will keep my reasoning brief but clear.

- The Jews thought Jesus might kill himself because of cryptic statements.<sup>12</sup>
- Jesus said he had the power to lay his life down.<sup>13</sup>
- The laying down of his life was a demonstration of the greatest love a person can have.<sup>14</sup>
- Jesus insisted in going through with the cross, telling an armed disciple to put his sword away. "I can call twelve legions of angels to come rescue me, if I so desire."<sup>15</sup>

- Jesus died by his own choice and actions...so that we might have abundant life.<sup>16</sup>

## TO THE SUICIDAL I SAY:

If you believe that suicide is not pardonable by God (based on Saul and Judas), and **this** is what prevents you from ending your life ... **keep believing this!** Keep living! You are loved! Stay with us, please. We'll assist you getting the help you need.





## TO THE GRIEVING SURVIVORS I SAY:

I am so sorry about the death of your loved one. Tell me about what they meant to you? (Listening opportunity.) Then, consider the Bible stories mentioned above: Samson, the Armor Bearer, and Jesus. Your loved one is safe with God.

Next, ponder Romans 8:35-39: **Nothing** can separate us from the love of God. Nothing means **nothing!** Trust your loved one to the God who understands and is merciful. In the resurrection, Jesus will put arms of love around them as He smiles and asks, “What were you thinking?”

## TRENDING NOW

I also find great comfort in this quotation from the inspired prophet in my church tradition: Mrs. Ellen G. White.

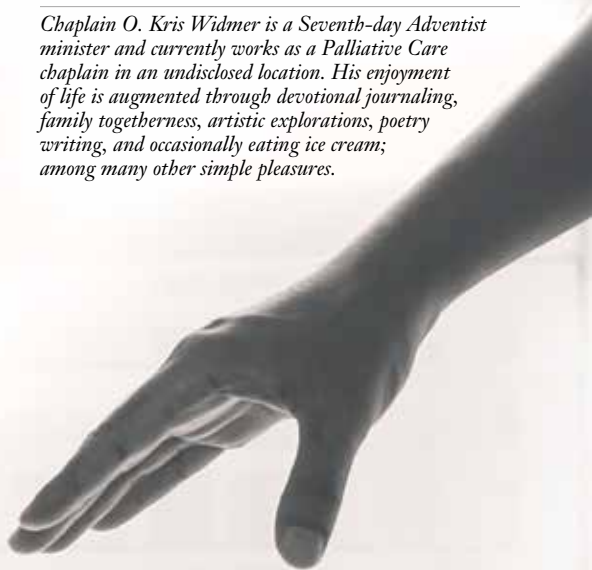
“It is the trend of the life, the direction in which one is going that we must measure the fruit of a prophet’s life (*or anyone’s life*). All good people occasionally do bad things, and all bad people occasionally do

good things. Every life has a trend – a very sobering thought, once you come to think about it. My life has a trend. So does yours. What is the nature of that trend? It is this *trend of the life* that the test of “fruits” seeks to measure.”<sup>17</sup>

Suicide can be seen as a good person doing the occasional bad thing, one that is undoable. We must trust them, as we trust all the rest of our beloved dead, to the grace, mercy, and power of our loving God.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel 31:4

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 27:3-5

<sup>3</sup> 2 Samuel 17:23

<sup>4</sup> 1 Kings 16:15-20

<sup>5</sup> 1 Samuel 15:35

<sup>6</sup> Judges 16:27

<sup>7</sup> Judges 16:22

<sup>8</sup> 1 Samuel 31:5, NASB

<sup>9</sup> 1 Samuel 31:2

<sup>10</sup> 1 Samuel 31:8-10

<sup>11</sup> 1 Samuel 31:4

<sup>12</sup> John 8:21, 22

<sup>13</sup> John 10:17, 18

<sup>14</sup> John 15:13, 14

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 26:52-54

<sup>16</sup> John 10:10

<sup>17</sup> White, Ellen G. *Heralds of New Light*, page 17.



# FOSTERING HOPE

**By William J. Cork, M.Div.**

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In 1993, Canadian Major-General Roméo Dallaire was assigned as Force Commander of UNAMIR (United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda). His mission was to oversee the implementation of the Arusha Accords, which were to bring peace to the country. Instead of peace, Dallaire witnessed genocide. His units were ill-equipped, and he found his hands tied by bureaucratic red tape and the unwillingness of the international community to get involved. In his 2016 book, *Waiting for First Light: My Ongoing Battle with PTSD*, Dallaire writes about the invisible scars he bears as a result. These include moral injury, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and repeated bouts of suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts.

Veterans and victims of all the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries resonate with the issues that Dallaire has faced. Witnessing civilian casualties, environmental destruction, wrestling with questions of the morality and legality of military actions, suffering from physical and mental trauma. Each of these produces wounds in veterans that go without healing. The images of the battlefield intrude in nightmares and waking flashbacks. Anxiety, guilt, shame tear at the soul and the self-image.

I served as a chaplain in reserve forces in the United States for 20 years (1986-1996, 2009-2019), and I noticed significant differences in the second period as compared with the first. I had one Soldier suicide in the first ten years and counseled no one with thoughts of suicide.

When I returned to service in 2009, I was quickly surprised by the numbers of suicides and incidents of suicidal

The church has a role to play in bringing healing to all the wounds of war—and in advocating alternatives to violence in solving the conflicts that lead to war.

ideation I was responding to. Added to that was the number of counseling sessions with those suffering from Traumatic Brain Injury, PTSD, and/or Military Sexual Trauma.

This is not an issue only for chaplains and the military. Our congregations include military veterans of many nations and refugees from multiple wars. Missionaries and ADRA employees can return from overseas service with the same mental and spiritual wounds as refugees and veterans.

The church has a role to play in bringing healing to all the wounds of war—and in advocating alternatives to violence in solving the conflicts that lead to war.

For many Christians and churches—even for some pastors—mental health issues and suicide carry a sense of stigma. The Seventh-day Adventist health message, with its holistic

The best way for us to respond to this crisis is through a public health approach of education, destigmatization, and the creation of networks of safety in our communities.

approach, is well suited to breaking down this stigma. We need to teach and preach that there is healing and hope for those wounded. We need to do so both in our own churches and in the communities in which we live.

Most pastors receive little training in college or in seminary on mental health issues and suicide. But resources are available that can benefit pastors, chaplains, and lay members alike.

I am a trainer in two evidence-based programs produced by LivingWorks in Calgary, Alberta (<https://www.livingworks.net>), the leader in suicide intervention training for over thirty years. Their programs are used by community mental





health agencies worldwide. ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) is a two-day workshop in which participants learn to recognize possible signs of suicidal thoughts. They also practice fundamental skills that can help individuals develop a plan to stay safe. Another LivingWorks program, safeTALK, is a four-hour workshop that teaches how to recognize suicide signs, ask about suicide, and make a connection to a resource with intervention skills. An online program, LivingWorks Start, is accessible to anyone with a computer who wishes to become more aware of suicide and how to help.

Chaplains who are trained in these programs (and others, like Mental Health First Aid) can offer themselves as resources to local churches, hospitals, and conferences. I have trained pastors, other chaplains, as well as Pathfinder and Adventurer leaders. Yes, sadly, suicide is not just an issue facing those who have survived tragedies and the trauma of war. Increasingly, it affects even elementary school-aged children.

Suicide is a global public health problem. The World Health Organization estimates that 800,000 people die by suicide each year. "There are indications that for each adult who died by suicide, there may have been more than 20 others attempting suicide." The highest rates are in Russia, eastern Europe, West Africa, and India, while the lowest rates tend to be in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region.<sup>2</sup>

The best way for us to respond to this crisis is through a public health approach of education, destigmatization, and the creation of networks of safety in our

communities. This would increase the number of points at which those thinking of suicide connect with individuals and agencies trained in mental health and suicide awareness. As a chaplain to part-time Soldiers, I knew we only connected with our Soldiers face-to-face one weekend a month. We had no way of knowing what was happening in their lives the rest of the time. So, I started looking for ways to expand our reach. I encouraged non-commissioned officers to make contact with their Soldiers between drills. I began to notice that most of the suicide interventions I did came after another Soldier saw a friend say something on Facebook or Twitter. With this realization, I encouraged leaders to follow their Soldiers on social media.

I learned that the veterans hospital in my community held an annual Mental Health Summit, which brought together community leaders to learn about the issues veterans face. Additionally, they learned about resources and made connections. (I was then invited to be part of the planning committee). I asked our community mental health agency if I could help them teaching ASIST, and they were glad for the help.

The Veterans Administration (VA) uses the Community Clergy Training Program to reach out to local clergy, especially in areas without a VA hospital or clinic. This program teaches about the issues faced by veterans and service members, and informs about VA resources.

Each of our communities can do more to build these kinds of connections between veteran service

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# ACT NOW

By LTC (CH) Dan Bray, U. S. Army, Retired MS, MDiv.  
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**"At some point in our lives, we all  
have thought of killing ourselves."**

Those words were often spoken by me as I used to provide suicide prevention training meetings for military members over the years. Some in the gathering undoubtedly would reassure themselves silently that this statement could not possibly apply to them. The theory here is that if we have ever listened to a story about a suicide, read about one in the news, or saw it acted out in a movie or television show then, yes, we have thought about ending our lives.

For a short second, our brain begins the process of playing the "what-if" game with us and we speculate what would become of us if we, too, committed this final act. Many of us quickly dismiss the idea and then move on.

In my job at the Army medical center, I am often called into the Emergency Department to help evaluate a potential suicidal candidate. In many situations, people are stressed, depressed, or feeling anxious about the break-up of a relationship. Historically the failure of a relationship

# People who are thinking of ending their life may feel some relief knowing that their friend recognizes something is not just right.

is the number one reason people seriously contemplate ending their own lives.

When questioned about the lethality of their thoughts or even verbal remarks, some will state that “it was just a lingering thought, or it was a fleeting moment.” A service member’s battle-buddy is often the first person who notices changes in their friend. And, it is this battle-buddy that often alerts the chain of command to take the friend to the closest medical facility for help and treatment.

However, there is a certain segment of our population that does more than think about it. As a rule of thumb, it is said that the “more detailed the plan a person has to end his/her life, then the more likely they are to accomplish it.” For example, if someone were to say “I am just so stressed out over this project, I think I’ll die” then their level of plan does not seem too serious. On the contrary, if someone else were to state, “At 11:15 pm tomorrow night, I will drive my vehicle going 100 miles per hour and will crash it into the cement median at mile marker 38 on Interstate 10” then we should directly intervene to help save a life.

Some will argue that if a person is determined to end his/her life, then there is unlikely anything that can

be done in the long-term. There is a segment of truth there. We cannot possibly be with every potential suicidal candidate for every moment for the rest of their lives. This person will find time and opportunity to carry out their final wish.

It has been said that most people who are suicidal don’t really wish to die. They just want the pain or the struggle to be over.

So, what can we do if we encounter someone or a friend who may be a candidate for suicide?

My best recommendation is to ask them if they are suicidal. I know this is a seeming odd question to ask a friend. But, they will appreciate your effort. People who are thinking of ending their life may feel some relief knowing that their friend recognizes something is not just right. Then, if they admit they have a plan, escort them to the closest medical facility or emergency clinic.

One completed suicide is one too many. We’ve had too many lives that could have been saved if perhaps we had acted sooner. Suicide does not discriminate in matters of gender, race, religion, culture, military branch, officer, enlisted, or civilian.

Decide now how you might intervene to help.



From his childhood,  
Michael knew God  
placed a call on his life  
to help others.

**T**he speech-halting images danced across the television screen on that sunshine-filled Tuesday morning in September. Michael Bates watched as firefighters rushed forward and into buildings while the occupants pushed their way out of the horror. Away from the flames and the terror. Nothing made sense. Except for Michael.

“Many boys dream of becoming a firefighter. A field trip to our local fire station as a young child was my first encounter with public safety and the people who work in those jobs,” says Michael. “After that trip, I’d tell people I wanted to be a fireman.”

Then September 11, 2001 dawned and with it came a renewed sense of

mission. “As a sixth-grade student, watching the events of September 11 created very intense feelings in me,” says Michael. “If I’d been 18, I probably would have enlisted on the spot. But the images of the firefighters imprinted themselves in my mind.”

Michael went to college and began a teaching career in high school science. His teaching work paid the bills, but then an encounter with a volunteer firefighter brought another change. “I realized that I could both teach and follow my passion of working as a firefighter,” says Michael. “I signed up for the training and began a new chapter in my life.”



# PUTTING THE WET STUFF ON THE RED STUFF

**By Michael Bates,**

Paramedic/Firefighter, Hamilton County Emergency Medical Service and  
Tri-Community Volunteer Fire Department with Deena Bartel-Wagner

## FIREFIGHTER ON BOARD

Ten years and eight months following those September attacks, Michael donned the title of firefighter. “I spent the next year working as a volunteer and enjoyed my work immensely,” says Michael.

The most difficult call he’s ever responded to came just two weeks after he’d graduated from the Fire Academy. “The alarm went out for a house fire. As a volunteer, I could choose not to respond and go to my teaching job at the school. Thirty minutes after the first alarm, a second request went out for assistance and the announcement that a firefighter was down,” says Michael. “I decided

I needed to go and help. When I arrived on scene, the response had changed from offensive to defensive tactics. The fire was massive, and everyone was outside spraying water to try and extinguish the blaze. Suddenly, a car rapidly approached the scene. A man jumped out and yelled, ‘Where’s my wife and child?’ My heart sunk. If they were inside, there was no hope of their survival.”

As Michael recounts the scene, the pain of that moment shows in his eyes. He remembers how the unit conducted the post-fire recovery and everything that accompanied the retrieval of the remains. It was in those moments and the days

“I understood God gave me a unique set of skills. By using them, I am able to serve Him and fulfill His calling on my life.”

following that Michael began to understand the importance of self-care and appropriately coping with the exposure to trauma that first responders regularly face.

During his first year working as a volunteer firefighter, Michael recognized teaching didn't hold his heart. "I am a person with a strong sense of duty," says Michael. "I understood God gave me a unique set of skills. By using them, I am able to serve Him and fulfill His calling on my life." Working as a volunteer didn't pay the bills and finding a salaried firefighter position was unlikely.

"I decided to train to become a paramedic and work with Emergency Services," says Michael. "I could also continue as a volunteer firefighter."

During his time in Emergency Services school Michael worked at a local Trauma 1 medical center in the Emergency Department. Additionally, he worked with a local ambulance service, and both opportunities provided training that he wouldn't gain from books.

Today, Michael serves as a paramedic with the Hamilton County Emergency Medical Service in Chattanooga, Tennessee, which covers a 576 square mile territory. They serve over 360,000 citizens with a fleet of 15 ambulance stations. Annually, they respond to approximately 37,000 calls.

As he begins each shift, Michael assumes a combo role. "My job is to turn chaos into organized chaos," says Michael. "Paramedics are a triad of nurse, respiratory therapist, and detective. We can administer meds, clear airways, and then we ask the

questions of what happened to cause this situation.

"The first few calls in my paramedic career were absolutely terrifying. I didn't take it lightly that I was responsible for the life of another person as I responded to their crisis."

As the ambulance rolls out of the station, Michael is busy formulating a game plan. "Dispatch notes don't tell you everything," says Michael. "I get a general idea and work through the possible scenarios."

On the scene Michael performs an initial triage and determines whether he and his partner will "stay and play" (treat on the scene) or "load and go" (immediately transport patient to a hospital).

During these moments, Michael must also take command of the scene. "The dynamics of the situation can vary from people reacting negatively to others who are feeling completely helpless. There can be anger, grief, shock, and more," says Michael. "If I don't give clear, direct commands about what I expect, the situation can rapidly grow out of control."



Michael and Shiloh Bates



“Some people have a hard time understanding my faith, but I try to live it daily in all my interactions.”

## THE BEST CALLS

Making a positive impact out of a negative situation are the best calls for Michael. “Once, during a vehicular accident response, I recognized symptoms in the victim that caused me to recommend he be transported to the local trauma center. I suspected he might be having a stroke,” says Michael. “It was rewarding later to learn he’d made a full recovery. That call was one where everything fell into place into perfect order. I’d recognized the symptoms. We rapidly transported to a hospital that specialized in stroke treatment. The stroke team was ready for the patient and supplied the necessary treatment within the ideal timeframe.”

In addition to his work on the ambulance, Michael volunteers for the 150 member Tri-Community Volunteer Fire Department, which serves the communities of Apison, Collegedale, and Ooltewah. He holds the position of firefighter/paramedic with specializations in vehicle extrication, pump operation, and confined space rescue. “We put the wet stuff on the red stuff, but we also respond to everything else including the cats in trees calls,” says Michael with a grin.

When the inevitable “Help, I’ve fallen and can’t get up call” comes in, Michael is conscious of how difficult it is for an individual to make such a call. “They’re usually embarrassed and

don’t want to be a burden,” says Michael. “I want to treat them as though they are one of my loved ones. They are entitled to respect and helping them maintain their dignity as much as possible.”

## DOER OF THE WORD

Daily living his faith is a natural part of Michael’s demeanor. “Riding with my partners for 24 hours on the truck and then working in life-threatening situations provides a lot of opportunities to have deep conversations,” says Michael. “Some people have a hard time understanding my faith, but I try to live it daily in all my interactions. In this line of work, it’s not uncommon for profanity to be used. Everyone who knows me recognizes that’s not part of my life. Some people have mentioned it, and so I know it’s part of my witness.”

## THERE’S MORE TO DO

In a typical week, Michael works a rotating 24-hour shift on the ambulance with 48 hours off and spends eight hours at the firehouse responding to calls and in training. He’s also involved in his local church. “When Shiloh, my wife, and I began looking for a church, we wanted to find one where we would have the opportunity to be involved. We call the Chattanooga First Seventh-day Adventist Church our church home.”

As a part of his church family, Michael shares his talents as a member of the safety committee and until



“Once you know God has called you, be true to yourself and your faith. Influences can hamper or build your faith. Choose wisely.”

recently served as the head deacon. “In the next few weeks I’m going to move into the position of Pathfinder Director,” says Michael.

Another pursuit that Michael hopes to follow is to become a part of helping in the mental health arena for public safety providers. Assisting others in maintaining good mental health is another opportunity to live out his faith. “First responders trained in critical incident stress management can help their fellow responders develop the coping skills to face the stress and trauma of the work they do,” says Michael.

## ARE YOU CALLED?

For Michael, being a paramedic and firefighter isn’t a job. He’s fulfilling a calling that God placed on his life as a young boy. “If you are considering this kind of role, make sure you are called to do it,” says Michael. “It’s tough physical, mental, and emotional work. All of that can impact your spiritual life. Things you see are going to have a lasting effect on your life. The hard calls make me want to go home, and by that, I don’t mean my earthly home.”

“Once you know God has called you,” Michael says, “Be true to yourself and your faith. Influences can hamper or build your faith. Choose wisely.”

You often hear about being the hands and feet of Jesus. Michael Bates chooses to embody this every time his ambulance or fire truck rolls out of the station. “As I respond to each call, I choose to make a positive impact on the worst possible day for the victims I encounter,” says Michael.



Working for Hamilton County EMS as a paramedic provides Michael the opportunity to meet many different people and help them in their time of crisis.

*continued from page 13*

organizations and community resources. Chaplains, pastors, churches, and hospitals can all play a role. Several cities in the U.S. are participating in the *Mayor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families*. This approach brings together Law Enforcement and Fire departments, mental health agencies, charitable, and veterans organizations. Together they are seeking ways to standardize protocols, identify gaps, and build partnerships to increase the safety of our local veterans community, which is one of the largest. I helped to identify faith-based organizations and networks to make sure they are part of the discussion.

Adventists are respected in the health care community. I was invited by our county Public Health Department to be part of a strategic planning process. Time and again, I heard the praise about Adventist community health clinics. County officials asked me to spread the word that churches who are planning these should let them know, so they can support.

These are a few examples of how I have worked within my own community to help address the problem of suicide as a public health issue that requires a coordinated response. I saw it was necessary to provide support for reserve Soldiers and veterans. What if each pastor, chaplain, or congregation did the same? Regardless of your setting, you are a part of your community and have a voice. You also have special skills that can benefit your community and those who hurt in them. Working together, we can build networks of compassion and care that will enable us to hear cries of hurt, and foster hope.

<sup>1</sup> Roméo Dallaire, *Waiting for First Light: My Ongoing Battle with PTSD* (Toronto: Random House Canada, Ltd., 2016).

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.who.int/mental\\_health/prevention/suicide/suicideprevent/en/](https://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/suicideprevent/en/)

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# ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES RECEIVE ADVENTIST BOOK

By Edward Rodriguez with Rodolfo Bautista, Jr.

Representatives of the Seventh-day Adventist church recently attended a flag raising ceremony regularly attended by government officials and employees. This extended to them the opportunity to distribute Adventist literature to the uniformed men and women of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

The distribution was done by the Bagong Usbong na Lingkod Bayan (BULB), an organization of Adventists in government service. It followed a values formation event held at the AFP General Headquarters in Camp Emilio Aguinaldo. Captain Marlon Antonio, the first Adventist chaplain in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) together with other civilian Adventist employees co-facilitated the meeting in coordination with the Philippine military hierarchy.

The BULB organizers and its sub-organization Philippine Adventists in Uniform Services (PAUS), in

partnership with the Philippine Publishing House (PPH), presented over 10,000 copies of the book *Power of Hope* to top-brass officers who in turn will pass the books to their rank and file.

The *Power of Hope* book is described as a holistic literature which deals appropriately with stress, depression, anxiety, and guilt. It contains stories of inspiration and practical pieces of advice on overcoming mental and spiritual challenges one experiences in the workplace.

Vice Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Salvador B. Mison, Jr. and Chief Chaplain Brigadier General Tirso Dolina received the books and expressed their appreciation on behalf of the thousands of employees who will receive this meaningful literature.

“We value the partnership we establish with groups and organizations who have the welfare of the security forces in their agenda,”



says Vice Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Salvador B. Mison, Jr. “We are thankful for the Adventist church for this gift you extended to us and for your plans of organizing similar activities in the future.”

In appreciation of the Adventist church’s gesture of kindness, the AFP awarded the church with a plaque recognizing the efforts of the Adventists in the development of spirituality and morality of public servants who face various challenges in their fields of assignments. With this partnership, both parties are preparing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that will signify stronger cooperation between the AFP and the Seventh-day Adventist Church which includes 1) to allow Adventists as an endorsing agency for future AFP Adventist chaplains; and 2) the propagation of the Values Enrichment and Spiritual Transformation (VEST) programs in camps and offices, through the coming years.

“This sector clearly is the most vulnerable sector for emotional and mental issues,” says Rodolfo Bautista, Jr., Public Affairs and Religious Liberty director of the Adventist church in Central Luzon, Philippines. “It is with joy that we are one with the armed forces leadership in developing an atmosphere of strong spirituality and positive morale for our uniformed men and women.”

Aside from the 10,000 copies of the *Power of Hope* book distributed in this meeting, 10,000 copies of the same literature were also distributed in December 2018 to the Philippine National Police (PNP) and earlier in 2019, 1,500 copies to the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR).





## NAD Director's Thoughts



## THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

In 2009, Andy Andrews published a book titled *The Butterfly Effect: How Your Life Matters*. In it, he explains and expounds upon a theory posited in 1963 by Edward Lorenz, to the New York Academy of Science.

Lorenz's thought: "A butterfly could flap its wings and set molecules of air in motion, which would move other molecules of air, in turn moving more molecules of air – eventually capable of starting a hurricane on the other side of the planet."

This theory was not accepted. In fact, it was ridiculed as preposterous, until in the 1990s the theory was ratified by peer-reviewed research as authentic, accurate, and viable. Lorenz's theory was vindicated and elevated from laughable theory to a newly codified law of physics titled "The Law of Sensitive Dependence Upon Initial Conditions."

I commend this book to all of our readers because we all need reminders that our lives matter and that the small things that we do may loom large in the lives of others. I am reminded of a story that I read about a young boy who witnessed a younger, smaller student struggling to carry home a lot of paraphernalia from school. Rather than tease the student as others had, he opted to help him carry his load.

As they walked, they talked. Upon arrival at the younger student's house, the older student offered a word of encouragement and the off-handed comment that he would see him tomorrow. Years later, the younger student wrote to the older student that his one act of kindness had given him pause and instilled enough hope to live another day instead of suiciding.

We live in a world of stress, stressors, tensions, and myriad electronic waves from our gadgets that have innumerable effects on our bodies and minds. Some of us are more resilient than others. We all have an impact on those around us, either intentionally or collaterally, positively or negatively.

## WILL THE WIND OF YOUR INFLUENCE, THE WORDS YOU SPEAK, THE PROJECTION OF YOUR COUNTENANCE, THE ACTIONS THAT YOU TAKE, THE IMPETI THAT YOU PURSUE, LEAVE YOUR AURA WITH POSITIVE INTENT OR THE OPPOSITE?

Hopefully, more positive than negative.

A congruent biblical example may be the story of the boy who shared his lunch with Jesus. At the end of the day, over 5,000 people were fed, and there was plenty left over. The intent of the mother who lovingly packed a lunch for her son created an unintended consequence. The Butterfly Effect of her small action met the immediate felt need of thousands of hungry people.

Her demonstration of love to her son may have been the catalyst of his act of volunteering what little he had with Jesus. A small but meaningful act of faith moved, the heart of God, suspended the laws of physics, and accomplished a miracle.

In the quarter of the year following this publication, I challenge you to consider your effect. Will the wind of your influence, the words you speak, the projection of your countenance, the actions that you take, the impeti that you pursue, leave your aura with positive intent or the opposite? Often, intent matters more than content.

May the words of our mouths and the intents within our hearts, be reflected in ways that move the molecules of miracles into practical and positive effect in the lives of those whom we serve and love. May every visit, every interaction, or intervention have a cavalcade of good deeds and blessings in the lives of our co-workers and superiors. Consider in all of your doings, the Butterfly Effect.

<sup>1</sup> Andrews, Andy, 2009, *The Butterfly Effect: How Your Life Matters*; Simple truths, LLC, Naperville, Illinois, pg. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Paul S. Anderson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping loop at the end of the last name.

## Home Protection: **YOUR FAMILY MATTERS**



**Captain (Chaplain) Washington Johnson II,  
D.Min, U.S. Navy Reserves**

Assistant Director, Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries  
North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists



Whether your family is military or civilian there seems to be no end to the challenging matters of the family—divorce, single parenting, addictions, teen pregnancies, job loss, physical illness, and more—that contribute to disruption of the family. No family is immune to the variation of life's issues and problems that have resulted from today's society. From the exterior, homes have never looked better, yet many are filled with intense conflict, bitterness, and unhappiness within. These issues seem to be no respecter of families, regardless of their dynamics.

Inevitably, every family is unique with its own combination of strengths and weaknesses, and we are all members of one of those unique family units, whether it is traditional, blended, extended, single parent, grandparent, or foster parented. Despite the challenges in the family circle, there is hope. The Creator of the universe happens to

have also created the family, beginning with Adam and Eve, to whom He gave dominion over the entire world. Although the first family fell far short of God's ideal, His plan of grace and redemption allows all families to be fully restored in His image.

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Since the family is the foundation of the church and society, the Christian family should set a standard that is both admired and respected. My prayer is that you and your family will respond to God's call and allow Jesus to become the nucleus of your family. To assist you in achieving this goal, I have listed ten steps which can help build a healthy family structure. It will require diligent work, but the results are priceless.

## ..... 1 .....

**Put God first.** You can't go wrong when your desires are His, and you look outside yourself to focus on Him. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." (Mark 12:30). Further, seek His kingdom and His righteousness first and everything else will be added, including special blessings for your family. (Matthew 6:33)

## ..... 2 .....

**Engage in worship** together as a family and get involved with your local church. Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve ... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. (Joshua 24:15) Family, personal, and corporate worship are great ways to keep God first, while building and restoring family unity.

## ..... 3 .....

**Express affirmation, warmth, and encouragement.** Family members who audibly express warmth, compassion, and kind words help to strengthen the family bond. Parents,

in particular, have the best opportunity to make the home a safe place where children feel secure. "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." Colossians 3:21 Proverbs 15:1

## ..... 4 .....

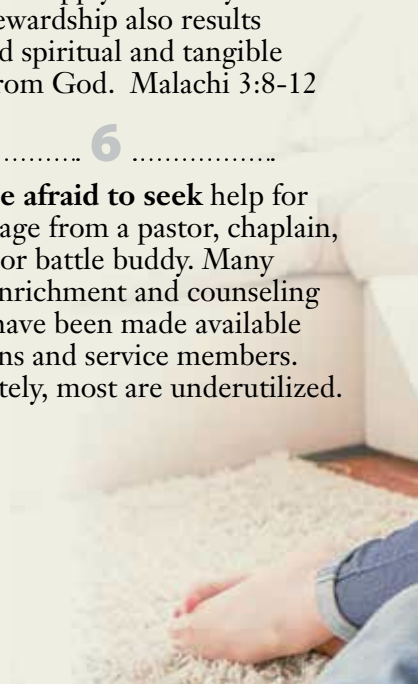
**Pick a good book on marriage to read**—or to read together. Look for ideas to improve your strengths as a spouse—or identify some weaknesses which you need to address. The focus should be on you—not identifying the problems with your husband or wife.

## ..... 5 .....

**Stewardship.** Setting and achieving financial goals such as saving for your children's education or purchasing a home are important. But more importantly, returning a faithful tithe and offering will help to eliminate selfish traits and teach us to depend upon God to supply our every need. Faithful stewardship also results in promised spiritual and tangible blessings from God. Malachi 3:8-12

## ..... 6 .....

**Don't be afraid to seek help** for your marriage from a pastor, chaplain, counselor, or battle buddy. Many marriage enrichment and counseling resources have been made available for chaplains and service members. Unfortunately, most are underutilized.





## 7

**Effective communication** takes place in an environment of acceptance, understanding and trust. To speak in love is to communicate the truth in kind and gentle terms. Often, it has less to do with what you say than with how you say it.

## 8

**Forgiveness** If you maintain an unforgiving spirit, you are likely to experience bitterness, anger, and depression. “Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath.” Ephesians 4:26

## 9

**Invest in your marriage** by spending quality time together as a couple and family. Don’t let your professional ambition conflict with what should be only second to your relationship with God—your family.

## 10

**Take time to care** for your health and well-being. Exercise, try to eat healthy foods, and take some time to relax. Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. 3 John 2



Oh, that you would  
choose life, so that you  
and your descendants  
might live!

– Deuteronomy 30:19, New Living Translation



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# “LET GOD’S PROMISES SHINE ON YOUR PROBLEMS.”

—Corrie ten Boom



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God &+  
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