

MOVING FROM SUICIDE TRAUMA
TO HOPE, EXPLORING HUMOUR

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Rev. Darren Thomas King

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DECLARATION

I Darren Thomas King, declare that this thesis on

MOVING FROM SUICIDE TRAUMA TO HOPE, EXPLORING HUMOUR

CONTRIBUTION TO PASTORAL CARE

Is my own work and the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Darren Thomas King

Date: 2006 – 01-30

1.1 Introduction and background to the study

The following research is going to be conducted within the context of a small group trying to come to terms with the reality that their loved ones have committed suicide and are no longer here with them. We the traumatised still have to carry on living and strive to find hope. Our challenge is how? The purpose of this thesis is to explore how we can move from trauma to healing, exploring it through the healing power of laughter and humour.

The author was brought up in a loving home with a younger brother and sister. My mom and dad emigrated from the United Kingdom when the author was about two years old. We lived in a relatively happy home, and I must say that I never remember experiencing trauma until I had completed school. Dealing with trauma is a personal thing, and it certainly affects each of us in a different way. My first real encounter with trauma was when I lost two friends in the space of one week due to suicide. The author remembers thinking to himself, why? Why didn't they tell someone that they were going to kill themselves? Both of them were experiencing pain, they were in their twenties and seemed to have so much to live for.

It seemed pointless to me that they had hardly lived and they were already fed up with life. The parents were the one's that really suffered, and it was a big shock to see them experiencing trauma. Many lives were ruined through the traumatic occurrence with some of the folk involved, ending up in divorce. The use of humour to heal your hurts and pain seems quite outrageous. By humour I mean seeing the funny side of things and learning to laugh again. The readers digest has a well known slogan that say laughter is the best medicine. The author needs to state pretty early on in this study that I am aware of the fact that humour can be used also to hide pain and avoid dealing with grief. When I look

at the life of my own father who committed suicide almost two years ago in June of 2004 I am reminded of the depth of the trauma and depression experienced by myself and my family.

He seemed to be a very happy person, and one can imagine the shock of finding out what he had done to himself, and the rest of the family. We still often cannot believe why he killed himself, and we are now feeling guilty and are searching for answers. Dad left a short letter saying “sorry”, but there were no further clues as to why he killed himself and this incident made the author ask questions about suicide

We were aware of the financial pressures from having his own business, and we knew that it was extremely stressful trying to get money in order to pay the bills every month and keeping the family together. ‘Why?’ is a question often asked in these situations but what I would hope to get out of my research is how do people move from suicide to a place of getting on with their own lives knowing that we have travelled a hard journey and have asked tough questions. These questions led me back to basic life issues believing that human beings were created to be happy. The book of Proverbs 15:15 shares this thought beautifully, “When a person is gloomy then everything seems to go wrong, when they are cheerful, everything seems right.” The book of Genesis tells us that the Lord created all of the world and the surrounding universe and it was good. (Genesis 1:31) As we are part of God’s creation, we read in Genesis chapter 1 that he made us for a good reason and we are valuable.

God created us to live in community with one another and to enjoy what he had created –Where did things go so wrong that the joy and beauty are lost in our daily lives? The author believes that we were made to be happy especially when one reads Genesis. Barbara Johnson is a wonderful author in helping to explore the concept of happiness. She says that “**we don’t laugh because we**

are happy, but, we are happy because we laugh". (Johnson 1994:13) The author wants to explore this idea, as he believes that laughing can help people move on from a place of trauma and depression to wholeness which will lead a person to healing and peace. Hence the purpose of this thesis is to explore how we can move from trauma into healing.

Paul will be helpful in explaining the issue of wholeness. He showed us through his extraordinary life of being a passionate missionary for God that we can be victors rather than victims. (Phil 1-4) The author is amazed at the traumatic situations he faced on numerous occasions, shipwrecks, being stoned, beatings, dealing with shocking sexual misconduct within his church, disappointment with fellow apostles and imprisonment on many occasions. Despite the abuse Paul could still however always be joyful as he struggled to make meaning out of his traumatic experiences –he said”**we are hard pressed on every side but not crushed, perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not abandoned, struck down but not destroyed. (2 Cor 4:7-9)** We may be at the end of our rope but never at the end of our hope. We are subject to sin and suffering but God never abandons us. (2 Cor 4:7-9) This language also connects very strongly with the language of Kubler-Ross, in the five stages of anger, denial, depression, bargaining and acceptance. In chapter three of this thesis the author will deal in great detail with the above stages of Kubler-Ross, an area that will be helpful when exploring suicide.

A part of me wants to say that God is the only one who can help us carry on. God in Spirit and God through others like counsellors, care givers and organizations that offer pastoral care. God can be a wonderful source of help. People come along side us when we have experienced trauma and their presence supports us. They listen, they make us a cup of tea and they show their love by being there in person. Traumatized folk see God in caregivers who unselfishly give of themselves. Henri Nouwen often speaks of the power of

presence. This power of presence which is required by those who experience pain. In his book, *The Wounded Healer* he speaks of us **“being able to be a source of life for others through our own woundedness. Our loneliness and our isolation has become so much a part of our daily experience that we cry out for a liberator who will take us away from our misery and bring us justice and peace”**. (Nouwen 1996:95) The author agrees with the above idea completely.

Nouwen continues by saying, **“Community arises where the sharing of pain takes place but not as a stifling form of self-complaint, but as recognition of God’s saving promises. Many of us are searching for the encounter that will take our loneliness away, the perfect wife, and the perfect event. Nouwen says that, Our own wounds need to be seen and understood as signs that prevent us from suffering for the wrong reasons”** (Nouwen 1996:92-93) This is extremely helpful to the author as he now realizes that he can help others through his experience of suicide and can become a wounded healer.

The church is called to be a healing community and as the body of Christ, the church calls its members to become healing communities. The church can create an effective healing witness to those who are affected by suicide. When God’s love is manifest in the church only then can it become a powerful healing force. Those who are hurting can come to this place knowing that they won’t be judged but will be cared for, loved for and nurtured.

The responses of the church to suicide

This thesis seeks to explore the pain caused by loved ones who kill themselves through suicide. The problem is that they leave members of the family asking questions and searching for answers about the death of their loved ones.

Why do people end their lives in such a traumatic way? What then is suicide?

Suicide

Definition: (from the <http://en.Wikipedia.org>) Suicide (from the Latin Sui Caedere, to kill oneself) is the act wilfully ending one's own life, it is sometimes a noun for one who has committed or attempted the act.

One cannot help but fearfully ask, I wonder what happens to people who commit suicide? The church has not always been a great help in these situations. Many

Years ago certain Churches would not even perform the funeral of someone who committed suicide. It was classified as a mortal sin, something that was unforgivable. (This issue is also explored in a movie titled Constantine in March 2005)

Many churches would not allow the coffin to be brought into the church, if Death was by suicide. At a masters workshop in Alexandra which took place from the 16th to the 18th of August 2005 a police chaplain shared with us how in the olden days when a policeman committed suicide he was handcuffed in his uniform as a sign of his cowardly action. Another minister shared with us at the same conference about how in Botswana and in Zambia suicide victims were not allowed to be brought into the church, but had to be passed over the fence as they were a disgrace.

The movie "Kingdom of Heaven" explores the difficulties mentioned above. During the time of the Crusades if someone committed suicide then, then the person was regarded as going to hell and so their heads had to be cut off so that they could spend eternity without a head in hell. Berent says "**certain religious groups have likewise recognized the aggression in the suicidal person and for centuries have expressed their disfavour toward the suicide by refusing them burial in hallowed ground.**" (Berent 1981:144) The above mentioned experiences and responses by the church are not helpful to the bereaved, having experienced suicide through the death of my own father. The author knew the pain of rejection by the church, community and friends.

Christians and the church can be extremely insensitive to those of us who have lost loved ones through suicide. How can refusing burial be compassionate and caring to those who are left behind? Nobody really knows what lies beyond death. A newspaper cutting from The Washington Post read, "**Nobody gets out of this life alive!**" (Washington Post 1987:12) and there seems so much truth in that simple statement. Professor Masango once told us of a funeral that took place that was also a suicide. The pastor at least had the sensitivity to comfort the bereaved at the funeral with the following passage of scripture "**Nothing can separate us from the love of God, not even suicide**". (Romans 8:38) That was extremely helpful to the author in a very therapeutic way.

This thesis aims at developing a model that is helpful for those who are left behind. When I was being counselled after the death of my father, my counsellor said something extremely helpful which once again reminded me of the Grace of God. She said "**Darren, God and your dad are going to have a chat.**" Those words were therapeutic, after all if anyone knew what he was going through at the time, God knew. These words helped me move on from a place of anger, denial and depression to a place of acceptance and healing. However grieving is a process and it takes time. Hence this research, which seeks a way of healing.

As we think of the pain of suicide and the process of globalisation which leaves so many people poor, this pandemic and many other problems makes us question the issue of grace. The author kept being reminded of the grace of Jesus. While suffering on the cross He still manages to find the compassion and love to tell a fellow sufferer, and sinner that on that day he will be with Jesus in paradise. (Luke 23). This grace we see so little of in the organizations that are supposed to preach it and live it. Gandhi once said that "**he liked Jesus but saw so little of him in those who were supposed to be his followers. He**

experienced oppression, anger, hatred and exclusion.” (Yancey 2001:163)

Perhaps that same compassion of Jesus was shown to people like my father who were on their crosses as they prepared to leave this world, because they didn't see the light at the end of the tunnel anymore. The church tells those whose loved one's went this way through their lack of concern and compassion, that there is no more hope. The search for this compassionate Jesus raises a picture of what he may be like

The author's picture of Jesus was one of a happy man, playing with children, laughing at his disciples and really being high on life. Perhaps it is time that those of us who follow Jesus realise that maybe this is how we should be living. The death of the author's father led me to question the issue of life and the traumatic way in which we are separated from our loved ones. Death really does affect the very being of our lives, health wise and emotion wise.

The author was a mess. Here are some of the questions he was seeking the answers to:

- a. How was I going to continue with my life after losing such an important person in our family?
- b. What did Jesus say about suicide? He often spoke about the kingdom of God and the after life.
- c. Why do I have faith in him?
- d. When does the pain go away?
- e. Where do I find hope?

The scripture of John 14 came to mind as the author wrestled with the above questions seeking answers to the problem I was facing. These questions had a funny way of leading the author once again to a very important person in his life. This is why the author has faith. If there is nothing when we die, no one will know, but if there is something like a house with many rooms (John 14:6) then we want to be there. Jesus gives much hope, through his teachings about

eternal life. There are few verses in scripture that describe eternal life but those few are rich with promises. The details of eternity are unknown but words like “**I am going to prepare a place for you.**” and “**I will come and get you.**” (John 14:2, 3) fill the author with tremendous hope. These are words that help us look forward to eternal life because Jesus promised it to us. The reader will then ask what is the problem, if there is eternal life

Posing the problem

The main problem is why the church is not supportive to families that are experiencing suicide. Instead they become a problem and seem not to care for the living members of the family. So a challenge for our churches today is that we need to support people suffering from this crisis, of the loss of their loved ones through suicide, reminding them that nothing can separate their loved one from the love of God. (Romans 8:38). The main question is “Why have so many churches failed to say the above words to those who needed to hear them?” Our churches and communities need to help people cope and adapt to the very painful, realistic trauma of suicide.

The challenge to the church is that they empower people to move on. Perhaps not helping them forget, as much as helping them forgive. Jesus through the Gospels seems to be a God that understands that we mess up and make mistakes. Suicide can be a mistake. The author is quite happy with a process that helps us journey with people instead of judging them especially the remaining family.

In continuing with judgement is important to note that “**A cheerful disposition is good for your health**” Proverbs 17:22. How the church needed to follow this advice as a way of caring for the Souls of those left behind. Laughter is an important mechanism for coping with the many stressors that humans encounter in their daily lives. According to Lefcourt and Martin, “**Laughter and humour**

play an important role in the maintenance of both psychological and physiological health, and well-being, in the face of stress.”(Lefcourt, Martin 1986:37). As the author prepared for this thesis he was reading an article about the tragedy of suicide in a small community in Scotland. Three young men committed suicide and the village struggled to understand why. (You magazine March 2005:17) The article was helpful to the author in exploring the subject of suicide, as the author was in the same situation of confusion that this village was experiencing.

How do members of the family continue with life? The author believes God gives us each a gift of life and this is the reason why we live and share it with many others. That is how life goes on. We share the pain together through our experiences; a good example is clearly seen in the groups of Alcoholics Anonymous. A small group of addicted people who support one another through their struggle with alcohol. The above process was adopted by the author in order to start a supportive group. This process allows us to share our common experience. Together we share how our addictions have ruined lives. We admit our weaknesses and we support one another to a place where we can face our weaknesses, admit them and move on with our lives. The authors aim is to develop a model of pastoral care that is relative, effective and helpful to those who have lost loved ones through suicide. Instead of judging, the church too will be helped through this model to be more effective in it's ministry of pastoral care.

As we continue with our journey of pain we come to a day when we will admit our weaknesses and failures. We come to a place where we can laugh and rejoice at the absolute miracle of life. Many who suffered under the oppression of apartheid now laugh at what they survived and what they went through. This coping mechanism has helped them therapeutically. It has made them stronger and given them new hope for a new life. They embrace life and are not

intimidated by others. They share their stories as a warning to others and wonder sometimes how they survived. When we are stricken with sudden death we are shaken and almost forced to examine these issues. One in four people are experiencing suicidal grief at any given moment in South Africa today. (Ashton 1996:69)

This means that there are a lot of people that have to have coping mechanisms in place to move on with their lives. Kubler-Ross exposes one to what people go through when they are in shock. When death strikes, people immediately deny the reality because of shock. This is a normal stage of coping.

Once again Kubler-Ross speaks of the various stages we go through like bargaining, denial, anger, depression and eventually acceptance, a journey that is taken by those who are facing death. (Poling 1999:33-36) Kubler-Ross is important in helping me develop a therapeutic model of healing.

The author will explore these stages through his own experience of suicide, and then break down how he managed to move on with his life with a little help from his friends and the use of humour. The author will also conduct research with various people who have lost spouses, fathers, brothers, sisters and other family members through suicide. Very near to the time when the suicide happened, a close family member of my mothers came out to be with us from overseas. After a few days the author remembered his aunt saying to his mother, as only she could that all she really missed about my dad was her toast and cup of tea in the morning. We all burst out laughing and the healing was tremendous.

Some would think this was incredibly insensitive, but I was amazed at how that well timed comment had us all rolling on the floor in fits of laughter. In this way we were dealing with the death of our father by remembering his life among

ourselves. Those moments of sharing in the family became therapeutic as well as moments of healing. The laughter was incredibly therapeutic. We even forgot our anger towards our dad in that brief moment. Suddenly forgiveness and acceptance all seemed so much easier. It was then that the author wanted to explore the incredible healing power of humour.

The author suddenly thought that this was a God given thing that was meant to help us move on with our lives. There might be a lot of criticism from those who don't like humour or are extremely sensitive. The author however is concerned with people like myself that need to move on as soon as possible. The author cannot help but think that some of the most incredible sermons he has ever heard were not the burning in hell, fire and brimstone sermons, but those that used humour to drive home incredible truths. They were the one that stuck with me. My challenge is how to combine the therapeutic element of humour when dealing with the various stages of grief described by Kubler-Ross in her book on Death and Dying.

1.2 Value of the study

It is difficult to measure the value of my study. The author would be happy if people like me who have been victims of suicide would be able to move on with their lives in a positive way. Therapeutically it would be helpful if victims could struggle with the issue and then move on to live life without the above obstacles. The author wants there to be healing in peoples lives where the church has failed. The church for too long has not dealt with suicide survivors. We have left them with a "time will heal" attitude and we haven't been able to provide them with answers. It seems to be something we don't talk about. The bible doesn't speak a lot about suicide. Even in the commentary's there is little said on the suicide of Judas.

Recovery is the aim of my study. The author wants to work through each stage that a survivor of suicide goes through. This is dealt with in detail in chapter 3 of my research. I have used much of the work of Kubler-Ross but there are additional discoveries that I have made especially regarding the healing power of humour.

Questions that the author found himself asking were:

Did I, through my studies, pastor my sheep?

Did I take them to still waters and greener pastures? (Psalm 23)

Is this what I have been called to do?

There really isn't a better person to journey with than with someone who has walked as the old Indian proverb says in your moccasins. The author has experienced the suicide of his dad and wants to help others who have experienced this trauma so that they may learn how to deal with this issue. The folk that the author has worked with and intended to help have experienced the same. We were all on the same page, so to speak, when it came to trauma. Each knew the pain of the other.

Our hope is in the discoveries we made from our Survivors of Suicide group and if it can be of benefit to others who have survived this trauma. Our laughter became anointing oil and a healing balm as well as a place of safety. We laughed together after we had journeyed through the dark valley. (Psalm 23) We laughed because the time was right for us to do so as we had worked through the pain and trauma. It was like running a marathon and at the end we saw the finish line. We laughed because we had achieved something great and we had recovered. The author hopes that what we discovered from our group and our research can benefit other survivors of suicide. That is the value and the aim of our study - As a group of Christian believers being able to benefit others through their journey from trauma to hope.

The author would like to see people dealing with the traumatic part of suicide in a positive way, and moving from a place of hopelessness and darkness to a place where they can be whole again. The author would like to use humour as a process that will aid people who cannot cope with the life stresses and traumatic experiences of suicide.

The topic of humour has been debated since the time of Aristotle in the fourth century before Christ (Bambrough 1963:26) but only in the sixties did the realisation occur that humour and laughter serve important roles in maintaining and enhancing quality of life. Humour can serve a very specific purpose regarding the release of emotion. (Johnson 1994:25)

To possess a good sense of humour or at least to laugh freely and frequently at pleasurable events is regarded as thoroughly healthy, and desirable by virtually all those who have concerned themselves with the subject of humour. (Lowis MJ 1993:47) The author thinks that one of the questions we will be dealing with in this study is **“Can a sense of humour moderate the psychological effects of stressful life events like suicide?”**

In her book *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman speaks of humour being able to sometimes detoxify the most painful feelings. She speaks of revenge fantasies and how they often lose their terrifying power when people realize that they can be downright silly. We are also talking about serious trauma like incest. In a group environment where members revenge fantasies became manageable after they were transformed into group entertainment. As the fantasies become more and more outrageous, the group dissolves into hilarious laughter. (Herman 1992:229)

1.3 Research design and Methodology – exploring Kubler-Ross and the various stages that trauma takes us through.

In my study I want to work with people who have been through what the author has been through, namely the loss of a loved one due to suicide. The author wants to be able to help them in a practical way by introducing a therapeutic model of dealing with suicide. The method that the author would like to work with is information gathering and interpretation otherwise known as the qualitative method.

Firstly the objective of this research is to understand the experiences being observed, and studied by people who have experienced what the author has. This is what qualitative analysis does. It focuses on understanding rather than explaining social action and events within their particular settings and contexts. This research and its focus is to understand trauma, grief and pain experienced by those who have lost loved ones to suicide. The author wants to find a practical, workable model for those of us affected by suicide.

Secondly this method focuses on understanding people within their contexts rather than explaining what their grief was, and trying to find answers and explain the reasons. Its emphasis is on explanation. Several researchers have said that depression is the most common ingredient in suicide. Suicide is a desperate call for help. Perhaps what we have shared in our small group can make us more sensitive to the desperate cries of others contemplating suicide. The author wants to remain true to people's experiences and backgrounds and their environments. Anybody can lose a loved one to suicide. It is how we cope afterwards that the author wants to understand through the stories of those in my small group. Campbell says **"Pastoral care and shepherding happens in small groups which mediate a sense of integrity, steadfastness and**

wholeness to those in need". (Campbell 1986:37)

How does a pastor like me deal with suicide?

How do others in my group deal with it?

What has this trauma done to our faith?

Do we feel guilty and ashamed because of what our loved ones did?

Thirdly, qualitative analysis attempts to reconstruct people's stories, journeys and hopes that can help others who share similar experiences. In my group work the author will gather, process and interpret the information the author will obtain from my various pilgrims on the surviving suicide journey. The author wants to explore how Christians deal with suicide.

Do we think God can forgive them? What has the church taught us? Why didn't God stop them from doing what they did? These questions are all questions that we ask when we struggle with the trauma of suicide.

The author is hoping that as we analyse our experiences and ask tough questions we can find healing. The author also wants to explore how we know when it is time to start laughing again. How do we allow ourselves to be set free from guilt and lead whole, healed lives that can continue in relation to one another? Qualitative analysis has to understand people in their contexts. It strives to achieve common ground with those whom it is trying to understand. How do we verify our findings and use them to help others if they are not conducted in a way that is sensitive to the contexts of others.

Fourthly I would like to reconstruct people's stories, what they went through and how they are getting on with their lives. How do we move on after something as tragic as a suicide? How do we try and comfort people when they believe what the church taught them about hell and damnation for those who do commit

suicide?

How do we release them from their guilt of having a fight with the spouse and then a suicide occurs? The author wants to understand these above questions not just for the sake of healing others but for himself too. How did the author survive and carry on? It takes profound courage, faithfulness and perseverance to carry on without those whom we really love and care for. The author does not think there is a rule for recovery. An anonymous person once said “**no rule for success will work if you won’t try**”. The aim of the study is to analyse why the church has failed at being effective to those who have lost loved ones through suicide.

The author’s goal would be to find a pastoral support model through books, interviews and group works, which can be used effectively in helping people move on with their lives. The research will be conducted through books that I am reading at the moment on suicide, at the moment but seem to find a gap in really helping people. Being one who has survived suicide, the author wants to develop something from his own pain and experience and create a model of healing, in order to help others with a therapeutic model of healing and support to the family. Our world is a little bit uncaring to those who are grieving. It seems to be a case of get over it and get on with life. Easy to say but how do we help people get over it i.e. get busy living when there is a pain that won’t go away from their lives.

Recovery and grieving is a process and it takes time to heal which the author has learnt from his own personal experience. Paul said in Romans “**that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds**”. (Romans 12:2) If we change our minds our conditions must change too. I think to truly understand the process of

recovery I have to constantly go back and reflect on my journey –a helpful way to do this is through journaling –constantly reflecting on daily experiences and putting them to paper-this is helpful.

John Ortberg asks a very profound question which will be helpful to traumatized people. **“Why is it that for some people failure is energizing while for others failure is paralyzing?”** (Ortberg 2001:140) The author thinks for many folk contemplating suicide failure produces utter defeat. “My life is no good, my life is a mess, people are better off without me”. They become discouraged and lose hope. They desire to leave this life as it no longer brings joy. Ortberg speaks of a cave.

“It is a cave where your props, supports and crutches get stripped away. Whatever your reason may be you find yourself alone” (Ortberg 2001:141). As I write this the author heard this morning on the radio that this week (May 9 – May 15) is suicide awareness week and we are at crucial point in South Africa. We have many thousands of teens dying every year in our country through suicidal activities. One word comes to mind-inadequate. Why do I need to be here? Ortberg says that **“Failure in our day often carries with it shame. It is not just a shame of having experienced failure but also of being a failure. It is not an easy thing to face as a person.”** (Ortberg 2001:141)

One of the biggest concerns about people who commit suicide, besides their depression, is that most of them are more concerned about the thoughts of other people e.g. My dad might have been concerned that people would see him as a failure because of his business failing. Ortberg says that **“When we think about failure, it is not that we haven’t achieved that brings about so much pain but what the other people think”**. (Ortberg 2001:141)

Ortberg say **“One of the great gifts that failure can give us is that we are loved and valued by God precisely when we are in the cave of failure”**.

Ortberg goes on to say that **“as long as my sense of being valuable and significant is tied to my success, it will always be a fragile thing”**. (Ortberg 2001:141) God never brings discouragement .His guidance always leads to motivation and life. I want to explore this.

1.4 Final Comments – The contribution to pastoral care

The author would hope that his experience of suicide and the journey from this trauma would be helpful to others who have experienced something similar. There is always life after trauma-we have to go on regardless of how difficult a situation we have been through. Just sharing with other suicide survivors has been an experience that I could never repay to those who travelled my journey with me.

The model I would like to develop would obviously be a practical one that is easy to apply. One cannot get a better model than the twelve step model used by Alcoholics Anonymous. The author believes that through the simplicity of this model there in lies it’s wonderful success.

If there is one great contribution that the author would like to make to practical theology, it is this: that the church can once again be a place of healing and renewal by caring for people who have been through traumatic experiences. The author would like to see the church making a significant contribution to

those who have lost loved ones to suicide and not just leave them on their own, allowing the grieving process to just pass away with time. Bill Hybels in his book *Courageous Leadership* says that there is **“nothing that works like a local church that gets working.” (Hybels 2000:28)**

Local churches get working when they stop pretending that everything is okay and they get their hands dirty. They come along side people in their hour of need and they journey with them. The model the author is using is of a small group model that needs only one requirement. All her members have experienced suicide in one way or another. All her members want healing and all her members are seeking help from one another. We don't have answers but we have our presence and this is the gift that we can offer to pastoral care and each other.

Campbell says that **“Pastoral care is about shepherding which mediates a sense of integrity, wholeness and steadfastness to those in need.** (Campbell 1986:18) He continues to say that **“pastoral care does not depend primarily on the acquisition of knowledge or the development of skill but rather on a caring attitude towards others which comes from our own experience of pain, fear and loss and our own release from their deadening grip”.** (Campbell 1986:37) From the authors own experience at Northfield Methodist Church, he has seen how coming along side people and caring for them when they need caring really does mediate a sense of wholeness as Campbell explains in the above statement. Jesus leaves us with a wonderful model of pastoral care and clearly told us to **“tend his sheep.”** (John 21:15-17)

Only when we can as Campbell says **“Confront our own weaknesses and**

find God’s healing force at the moment of deepest despair can we as pastoral healers gain power and there is no shortcuts to such healing, no hope without fear and no resurrection without the tomb’s deep darkness.”(Campbell 1986:41-42) He continues by saying “That when we confront our own finitude and wounds is our weaknesses freely acknowledged and the power of God’s love can enter in.” (Campbell 1986:45)

I have seen this for myself and can honestly say that God truly is strong when we are weak and it is in our weakness that God allows his strength to work through us. The Alcoholics Anonymous concept is a classic example of allowing our weaknesses to help strengthen others and this is what we will be exploring over the next few chapters. It is all about human interrelationships and how we can use our individual experiences and personal values to contribute to pastoral care.

Thus far we have dealt with our challenge that lies ahead of us. The church through her members can once again become a place of healing, restoration and renewal by offering hope to those trying to come to terms with the reality and pain of suicide. In chapter two we are going to deal with suicide especially from a Christian perspective.

Chapter 2 – Suicide – A Theological Reflection

2.1 Christian perspectives on suicide

Suicide is not a pleasant and acceptable word among Christians. Christians are supposed to be happy people who can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens them. (Phil 4:13) Our world is on an endless journey to find real joy and happiness through materialism and the importance of status. Those that have something to sell are very quick to tell us what will bring happiness and make us whole. For suicidal folk, the process is different, just to get through each day is a struggle. Some Christians that one speaks to feel that suicide is a mortal sin and one which cannot be forgiven. The author is thankful that people's perspectives are changing and depression is in many cases treatable. For many folk the pain of suicide is not being able to have been there for the person who left. The suicide of a loved is one of the most difficult challenges a person will ever face. It leaves one with a lot of guilt and questions.

The survivors, the ones whom the suicide person has left behind are besieged with intense anger and grief. This grief comes as a result of suicide being unique and different for everyone. One of the first signs of a mental breakdown is in the inability to laugh. Albert Schweitzer once said that **“the tragedy of life is not that we die, but what dies inside a person when they live”**. (Molapo 2003:37) Philip Yancey speaks of a friend whom he counselled through a very bad period in his life. He was struggling with deep depression and eventually the struggles led to a divorce and the loss of his career. For a time he committed himself to an asylum and survived at least three suicide attempts. Yancey met with him, prayed with him and spent long hours on the telephone conversing with him. Most of the time Yancey said **“I felt helpless and useless and the answers I suggested made a little difference”** (Yancy 2000:170). After a while Philip realised that his friend needed his love and not his advice, and so he

made himself available as much as he could. Eventually his friend experienced a healing that brought him back to sanity. Yancey's friend said to him that he had become God to him and he kept believing in God because of the presence of his friend. This links very closely to the love centered therapy that Rogers specializes in. God's presence was made known to the suicidal man through the presence of a friend.

Henri Nouwen wrote of a constant struggle to distinguish between the voice of his wounded self, which never went away and the voice of God. Whenever he looked within he found a badly wounded self. Nouwen made a startling discovery. He says **"I came to see that the voice of God only speaks through wounded selves."** (Nouwen 1979:79) All of us struggle with this part of us and here the process of support is an extremely important part of therapy. I don't think there are too many people who have not contemplated suicide at one or other time in their lives. All human beings sometimes stop and wonder what the point of life is. I have and I know of many other Christians who have also struggled with what the point of life is. In my experience as a pastor I have also noticed that very often those who speak about it rarely go out and do it. Those who don't speak about it are the ones you have to watch.

The authors struggle with this research is "How do I as part of the body of Christ bring true healing to those who have lost loved ones through suicide?" In other words, how does the author start connecting with other believers who fall under the umbrella of the Body of Christ who are struggling to put meaning to life? Yancey asks the question –"Where is the church when it hurts?" If the church does its job of presence when there are disasters like suicide, rape, AIDS, loss, bereavement, hopelessness, feeding the hungry, and housing the homeless - perhaps the world would not ask the question with the same urgency. They would see where God is when it hurts - the church ministering to a fallen world. Yancey says **"that God's presence often comes as a by product of other**

people's presence." (Yancey 2000:170) The author totally agrees with this statement and truly believes that this links very closely to what Jesus said about tending his sheep e.g. the author has experienced the promise of God through the help of other people. Through his own experience the author has seen that God works through the presence of others.

In the Survivors of Suicide groups the author started as part of a healing ministry for Survivors of Suicide he witnessed this firsthand. God was seen in the sharing of our pain and the questions we asked. We found God in the struggle of our pain. So what were the perspectives that we had on suicide? We had to accept that there were some things we could not explain or even understand. Choice is a very powerful gift-God never leaves us during a time of trial, but he doesn't stop us from doing what we want to do. Suicide seems to be a uniquely human trait. Nature doesn't destroy itself when it feels inadequate. In fact, nature does not feel sorry for itself. It seems to adapt to the curveballs that life seems to throw on her way. Human beings also however seem to have the ability to adapt to horrific situations.

We just need to read of some of the horrific experiences people have had throughout history. How did they pull through? How does a man who sees his family put into ovens during the holocaust pull through? How can he possibly make sense of what he has witnessed? Very often the questions we seem to struggle with regarding God come from a misunderstanding of how humanity treats one another. We blame God for the Holocaust yet we seem to forget that humanity and not God did that horrific catastrophe to one another. In Rwanda it was humans who hacked each other to death not God. In the case of suicide it was humans who did what they did to themselves, not God.

In 2.1.1 we will now explore how people in the bible struggled with the issue of suicide, the silence of God, and their own personal struggles. The Psalms are a

great place to see how people faced pain and wrestled with their inner demons.

2.1.1 Christian perspectives on suicide

'I am in desperate need' Psalm 142:6

The author doesn't really know what Christian's perspectives are on suicide. Churches have sometimes been very cold toward those whose loved ones have chosen to close the chapter of their lives through suicide. Scripture has often been used to justify that taking one's own life is sinful. Let us look at situations in scripture where godly people committed suicide. Saul in 1 Samuel 31:1-13 is mentioned as one who committed suicide. 'So Saul took his own sword and fell on it' (1 Samuel 31:4). Samson took his own life when he destroyed the temple of Dagon and brought it down upon himself. (Judges 16:23-30). Judas who betrayed Jesus committed suicide (Matt 27:5) He was the most famous biblical character in the New Testament who took his own life.

In Acts 16:28 Paul shouts to the Philippian jailer not to kill himself. Murder is a sin. God commands us not to commit murder (Exodus 20:13) Suicide is self murder. If a person takes their life it is certain that their reason must have become unbalanced by grief, trouble and anxiety (Sandison 2004:903). There is no doubt that a person who commits suicide is of unsound mind at the time. In thinking of a suicide we must bear in mind the possibility of dementia. Few of us have not secretly wondered 'What's the point of carrying on?' at certain difficult times in our lives - I think it is part of being human.

So what does the church say? Some in the Roman Catholic church teach us that if a person commits suicide – extreme unction is not administered, hence, sins are not pardoned i.e. an unpardonable sin (Towns 2003:75). Some protestant churches have also been influenced by this view believing that Christians who are born again cannot commit suicide. Christians can most certainly become depressed and feel that they have nothing to live for – they can come under physical stress and or heavy sedation and take their lives.

Suicide is a sin, but the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin (1John 1:7) which must include the sin of suicide. I can only believe that like adultery or murder or lying, suicide is a sin and as the above scripture quotes can be forgiven. Suicide must be treated equally with other sins. There is no scriptural authority to justify the view that we have a right to shorten or terminate our existence. Under human law suicide is a crime, and in the early church it was condemned by repudiation and the denial of a Christian burial. (Sandison 2004:383)

Suicide raises lots of questions about pain and suffering. Pain can be emotional, spiritual or physical and any form of suffering lead to questions about suffering. When we experience pain we suffer and as Christians we turn to God in such times for comfort, guidance and healing. The above leads us to connect the topic with the issue of suffering. Tillich has this to say about suffering, **“To suffer alone is the worst suffering of all”** (Tillich 1952:22)

2.2 Where is God when life is painful? – Where is the church?

All of us face questions of why God allows pain. (Yancey 1998: 174) Job is a wonderful book that analyzes the problem of pain, suffering, death and many unanswered questions. One theory that Job refutes is that suffering always comes as a result of sin. Job’s friends incorrectly assume that God’s fairness had to be demonstrated in this life only. (Yancey 1998: 176)

No one has all the facts about suffering; loved ones commit suicide because they are suffering. Those left behind suffer through the pain and reality of knowing that the person is not coming back. They suffer through asking questions of why and wonder why they didn’t read the signs that this person was suffering. As humans we view situations of suffering from a limited perspective. Suffering and pain are linked to faith. Can we continue to trust God when everything goes wrong? Does God hear us when we cry out against

his apparent lack of concern? The genocide of 1 million slaughtered in Ruanda, thousands killed in South Africa, during the struggle, 6 million Jews killed in the Second World War, and other such events seem, to us, to go unnoticed by God. Is God a man made concept? What kind of God can do something yet doesn't? This is known as the theodicy question. It comes from a debate which is as old as theology itself. How can God be justified given the reality of evil and suffering in the world? (Du Toit 1990:) Jurgen Moltmann's answer to the theodicy question is that in Jesus God took death into God's self in order to conquer it. **"Communion helps believers experience how God becomes one with our suffering. All suffering in history becomes part of God's suffering"**. (Du Toit 1990:) My dad struggled with God tremendously – he blamed God for much of the mess our world is in. Job learned two wonderful lessons even though he suffered terribly. My dad unlike Job didn't think that God cared about human beings and he doubted that God was in control of the world. Job learnt that God cares about human beings and that God is in control of the world. My dad got angry with God because of his suffering, which led him to take his life. Yancey says that the book of Job teaches us that **"God cares about us and God is in control of the world and universe. That was enough"** (Yancey 1998: 177)

Many who blame God have anger and hurt either from other people or from the church. Yancey says that **"Many holocaust survivors never regained their faith after the war – it appeared to be an emotional reaction"** (Yancey 1990:152) Wiesel, a holocaust survivor saw his mother, a younger sister and all his family forced into an oven. He saw babies pitch forked, children hung. Perhaps one can understand Psychiatrist Nietzsche screaming **'God is dead'**. Yancey asks **"Does God order our suffering, decree an abusive childhood, orchestrate a jet crash or steer a tornado through a community."** He answers by saying **"that our answers lie in the understanding of our own physical, emotional and spiritual pain"** (Yancey 1990:152). People who go

through suffering have a lot of questions to ask about suffering and pain. When we understand these three types of pain, it helps us understand why we suffer. Tillich says the following **“To believe in love in the face of hatred, in life in the face of death, in day when there is darkness, in good in the face of evil, takes courage and faith. Faith is the courage to accept the acceptance of the unacceptable”** (Tillich 1952:) C S Lewis said in his book “A Grief Observed” that **“my problem with pain is that God seemed awfully quiet. It was as if a door was slammed in my face.”** (Lewis 1975:42)

Vos and Muller in response to the above statement by C.S. Lewis say **“Human suffering can not be explained. The experience is painful and real. Suffering however binds the church to the world as suffering causes a wound which seeks to be healed”** (Du Toit 1990:) Suffering leads us to explore suicide in a deeper way. One way of exploring this is to share something about my support group that I started for survivors of suicide. This leads to our next question, which explores how Christians deal with suicide. Christians find themselves struggling with the same questions that Job wrestled with and the authors of the Psalms. It is through suffering that humans cry out the Psalm that Jesus quoted as He was being crucified, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me” (Psalm 22:1)

2.3 How do Christians deal with suicide? – exploring small groups

In this chapter the author will examine and explore and explain the problems that suicide leaves behind. It is known as qualitative research. Qualitative research looks at understanding rather than explaining. It attempts to remain true to how all in my small group describe their experience. We will attempt to reconstruct our stories and experiences.

We will examine their contexts. The author will attempt to be blatantly truthful and as accurate as he can be. The author is using the Kubler-Ross model and working through the various stages of denial, anger, depression, bargaining and finally acceptance. As the group leader, I am the shepherd who leads the group (the sheep) into healing. There is an element of narrative therapy here too, where folk are encouraged to tell their stories, honestly and without fear of judgement. It is also a love centred therapy meaning that our journey together focuses on our love for Jesus and for one another connecting to what Jesus taught in Luke 10:25-37 – that we are to love our neighbours as ourselves. Jesus loves us and is the good Shepherd who tends to his sheep. When we come to that place after we have worked through the various stages of denial, anger, depression and bargaining in our lives, acceptance needs to become a reality in order that we can move on with our lives. (Poling 1999:35) The author wants to explore how laughter and humour can now be used as a God given gift, in order to bring about healing and joy and hope.

2.3.1 Exploring the small group model

(In order to protect the identity of the group participants the author has referred to them as subject 1, 2, 3 and 4) Several stories you are about to read were shared in group therapy sessions and demonstrate grief. The author will show the various stages of grief that each of us went through as we journeyed to healing in therapy

Group Therapy.

Leader - perhaps we could begin today by gently telling our stories of who we are, where we come from and how the trauma of suicide affected us. The author will start with a friendly reminder that confidentiality is kept by the group. We covenanted with each other as we work therapeutically, and what is said here remains in the room. The object of these meetings is to heal us and help others who may one day travel this road full of pain. In these groups we set the agenda and we listen attentively to one another. There is no criticism or disagreement -we journey together from our individual experiences of suicide with the aim of helping ourselves and others.

Subject 1- you and I have known each other for quite some time and I met you through my son with whom you were good friends. I am from Ireland but have been living here in South Africa for the past 40 years. I am a father of three boys and 'Charles' was my middle son. I am married and have 4 grandkids. My son 'Charles' shot himself in 1990, and that was my first experience of suicide. I couldn't believe it, but what really pissed me off was the fact that he used my gun. What also hurt me was that he left no letter. None of us ever imagined 'Charles' to commit suicide. – Here we see

first hand, denial and anger. The above story clearly demonstrates the stage of anger and the struggle of the man sharing the story.

Subject 2 -yes that is the sad reality of suicide-we never expect those who do it, to do it. When my husband took his life it was absolutely a huge surprise to all of us. Once again we see the process of denial. When I heard the news I remember the church counsellors being around me and all I was concerned about was the fire, and making the house warm. The fact that my husband had written the words sorry in his diary did help tremendously with forgiving him. I never knew that he was in such a bad place. I knew that he had financial problems but not to the point of ending his life. I am a mother of three and had been married to my husband for nearly forty years. I thought I knew him and can't believe what he did; I still think he will come in the gate at home. Once again we see the process of denial

Subject 3 -I remember the day I heard the news about my dad. I was so angry and aggressive towards everyone. I was in denial- I did not want to believe the news that my dad was gone - committed suicide. He didn't even wait for my twenty first birthday. I was angry with him for what he did, but maybe I didn't realize the bad situation he was in. I wanted to be left alone and to this day I don't really share too much about this incident. I am not really a person that opens up easily and I am the youngest of three and am the only daughter. - As we analyse these three scenarios we see the Kubler-Ross Methodology coming through powerfully by some of the group members.

Subject 4- I am the middle child in my family. I have been living overseas for a while and was absolutely blown away by the news of what my father had

done. He was always laughing and telling jokes and making others laugh. Not in a million years would I have imagined him ending his own life. The harsh reality of news like suicide is the very real pain and realisation that you won't see that person ever again. Here we see acceptance at an early stage in the grieving process.

As the group continued sharing the leader said "okay so each of us in this group here have experienced the pain of suicide. Some have experienced it from different angles i.e. a child, dad or a husband, but all present have experienced it in one way or another. The goal of this session is to firstly help one another deal with pain and grief, and then hopefully to allow this information to help others who will be in the same boat as us." The concept of this session is that we should help each other from our own woundedness. A book that Henri Nouwen wrote called "The Wounded Healer" explores this concept but the author also wants to explore how we move to healing, exploring humour. Each one of the people the author has chosen are humorous people who enjoy laughing and have positive outlooks on life. All experienced the trauma of suicide. How did they carry on and get back to their positive outlooks on life?

Subject 1- I must be honest and say that at first I spoke to all of 'Charle's' friends and tried to find out what I could about whether he was unhappy or depressed or suicidal. That didn't really help me much. What really helped me carry on was to keep myself busy. Time definitely heals - this happened nearly sixteen years ago and I will never forget my son but the pain is far easier to bear. Keeping busy and the length in time since it happened have healed me tremendously. This group and being allowed to share with others

who know my pain has also been a tremendous help. I think it is important to be able to speak about it. Sometimes I think we can be embarrassed and we really shouldn't be. - Here we see that our group therapy is working. The group is addressing each individual's pain and through this is helping each person move to a place of healing, which the author feels connects with the acceptance that Kubler-Ross speaks of.

Subject 3- I sometimes feel embarrassed about the cause of death. It is such a violent way to die. Not that any way to die isn't violent but men seem to opt for this route of suicide far more than women. I do sometimes feel embarrassed to tell others about how my dad died when they ask me. If people ask me about my dad I will usually say that he passed away and try not to go into too much detail. People are different; I don't really like to talk about what happened too much. Keeping myself busy has certainly helped me carry on. My mom and I have also grown very close to each other through our experience. Tragedy has a wonderful way of bringing people together.

Subject 4- there is a harsh lesson to be learnt when one experiences suicide. The person is not coming back. The sooner you accept this, the quicker the healing, process for me anyway. Carrying on with my own life and having responsibilities of my own have also helped with the healing. I always remember my dad smiling and laughing, and that is how I want to remember him. It hasn't even been a year yet. Keeping busy with work and family has been therapeutic but this small group helps me deal with the realities. You would be amazed at how just speaking about your pain and hurts can be so healing. I look forward to this small group that can share openly and honestly

with one another. In this group I have realized that humans need one another and none of us are immune from pain. Pain is not something that we have to experience alone. There is an idiom that shares more about pain: "a trouble shared is a trouble halved". There is much wisdom in that statement.

Subject 2- I think I also don't like to talk about this tragedy too much. I have never been a person that is an open book. Through this small group and our reflections it has become easier to share as I realize that I am not the only one who is going through what I am going through. I don't think we were made to be alone. Even when I think of Adam in the garden and the Lord looking at him and saying it is not good for man to be alone Even God lives in community if we think of the trinity. He is not alone and neither should we be. - Here we see the importance of being part of a community where we don't have to grieve alone.

Leader- I am glad that we have met. One thing we all have in common is that we have lost loved ones due to suicide. We all agree that the reality of the situation is this: Our loved ones are gone. They are not coming back. We however have to carry on with our lives without them. In my experience as a minister, there is one thing I have discovered. In life you don't have to travel your journey alone. We had to experience our trauma alone but we carry on this journey together being there for one another along the way. We are exploring how we recovered from the trauma of suicide. The harsh reality is this that life goes on for those of us who are left behind, we cannot stop living

2.3.2 Group reflections

This section will deal with statements faced by members of the family who have experienced suicide, like the father who lost his son who used the father's gun to shoot himself. The father felt that it almost rubbed salt into the wound. Later the author will reflect on these statements therapeutically.

The process of the group therapy did not force anyone to share. We met on a weekly basis for eight weeks, the goal being healing and acceptance. Some of the sessions were very emotional –The author asked each person to keep a journal of their daily experiences and to reflect on it as we met in group. They could share their reflections with our group if they wanted to and sometimes they did. Some shared of dreams they had, and how they saw the person whom had passed away smiling, happy and content. The process also helped bring about much healing and sometimes as they shared there were tears of joy but also tears of sadness.

In one session the author asked each person in the group a question. What would you ask the person if you had a chance to ask them just one question? Each member agreed that they would ask why? Why did you do it? Were things so bad that you had to leave us this way? Having experienced suicide myself I couldn't disagree that why was a question that came up from time to time. We had to accept that there was no easy answer to this question. One thing we did agree on is that when our loved ones did what they did, they were not thinking clearly. Campbell argues in *Rediscovering Pastoral Care* that the wounded healer gains power by acknowledging weakness and by finding God's healing force at the moment of deepest despair. There is no shortcut to such healing, no hope without fear, and no resurrection without the tomb's deep darkness. (Campbell 1986:41-42) Campbell says that **“we become healers of others through confronting our own wounds. As a community of sufferers where**

weakness is freely acknowledged, the power of God's love can enter in." (Campbell 1986:45)

How can hope come out of despair and comfort out of grief? The group was put together with the hope that each individual person would be allowed the time to bring the healing that each person required. When the author blatantly asked his group members to tell me how they carried on, most didn't know. They answered here I am living as usual and making plans for the coming year. They believed their loved ones were still alive, but away from the coldness and cruelty of this world. One thing we never did was encourage anyone to deny their grief. One lady, who had kept her husbands clothes, finally through therapy, found it extremely helpful to take her husbands clothing and give them to the Salvation Army. It helped her on her journey of mourning. The giving away was a start of healing and acceptance.

It was helpful for her to do this. Subject 4 named his son after his late dad and thus by so doing, would keep the memory of his father alive forever. One son vowed to run the comrades marathon in memory of his dad, because the suicide happened the day before the same son was to run in the event the year before. He wanted to do it for his dad. These were simple ways in which we entered our own experiences of loss and in those depths found hope again. For this person to run the comrades in memory of his dad was liberating and a challenge which filled his life with hope. For Subject 4 to name his son after his dad was an honour, and each time he called his son's name he would remember his dad. For Subject 2 to give her husbands clothing to the Salvation Army was something which made sense and which filled her with an incredible sense of peace and joy.

Recalling back she said, "This is what he would have wanted", as she remembers the soft heart her husband had, and that he would give his last cent

if he could. For subject 1 the busyness of life and each day has eased the pain. For Subject 3, being busy also was what helped her reach a level where the pain could be shared. Campbell says that ministers are to not take away the pain but to help others share the pain (Campbell 1981:43). Often in life we can see the damage that it can do to relationships when people pretend that everything is okay. We see it so often in marriages where there is little communication between spouses. We see it everyday in our daily relationships.

Our group wanted to share openly what we were feeling. We wanted to share our hurt, anger and pain because that, we believed would help us address the emotions and feelings we were experiencing through our trauma of loss. Surviving the suicide of a loved one is one of the most difficult challenges one will ever face. The grief is extremely intense and hurts desperately. The most difficult thing for those in our Survivors of Suicide Group was dealing with the facts of suicide. To face the truth was a courageous but extremely difficult thing to do. Often various members in our team spoke about thinking that they were going crazy. We kept reminding ourselves that we were reacting to a devastating blow and it was part of the grieving process.

As part of our healing process our members in the Survivors Of Suicide Group get together and celebrate the anniversary of the suicide of their loved ones. It is not a great celebration but it does help to escape the full brunt of the occasion.

2.3.3. Getting to know one another.

The author would like to start by saying that as a Christian minister who has experienced suicide first hand he doesn't know how he dealt with suicide. In the small group context, as members of the small group we could talk about things that the church has not been able to deal with. We know that certain religious

groups have likewise recognized the aggression in the suicidal person and for centuries expressed their disfavour toward the suicide by refusing them burial in hallowed ground. The Catholics referred to suicide as a mortal sin i.e. unforgivable. Christians in the author's opinion don't deal well with suicide and we don't like to talk about it.

Christians are supposed to be happy. According to Berent “**suicide among strong Christian's families is relatively low because of the emphasis many Churches put on groups and community thus enforcing the sharing of struggles, hurts and pains.**” (Berent 1981:42) Many folk who commit suicide are outsiders, they see themselves as disliked, ignored and avoided by others. In a Christian environment it is difficult to be ignored because all are classified as part of the Christian body. Many Christians helped me through the suicide by saying that I needed always to focus on the grace of God. When I was being counselled, a fellow minister said something very profound to me. She said that I didn't have to fear the judgment of God on my dad taking his life. She said “Darren God and your dad are going to have a chat – if anyone knows where he was and what he is going through – God does!” Those words were extremely helpful to me as I continued to deal with this issue. Suddenly all my images of an angry God giving out a harsh punishment seemed to disappear.

The church helped me to create the above image of a harsh God, but the church helped me create the image of a graceful God too. I don't think that Christians need to fear suicide. Professor Masango shared about a funeral he attended once and I will never forget his words. A preacher shared healing words to the bereaved by quoting Romans 8:38 “**Nothing can separate you from the love of God**” – not even suicide. Christianity helps me deal with suicide. Several passages of scripture come to mind. I read words like John14: “in my father's house there are many Rooms, I'm going to prepare a place for you”. Revelation 3 says “no more tears” and I am comforted. No other religion can comfort me

like the words of Jesus. There seems little hope from other religions in their teaching about the after life. Islam seems to say that if Allah is in a good mood then pretty much anything can be forgiven but if he is not then there will be little compassion. (The author)

No other religion speaks of the afterlife like Christianity does. (The Author)
Having analysed suicide let us now explore the struggle of going through the suicidal journey. We have faced how Christians deal with the loss of loved ones due to suicide, but what about when Christians find themselves dealing with suicide.

2.4 I'm a Christian, How can I be suicidal?

The question to ask is: If I am a Christian and have given my life to the Lord then why is it that I struggle often with suicidal thoughts and depression? The author answers the question that he raised at the start of this sentence. You can be a Christian and still struggle with suicidal thoughts in the same way that you can be a Child of the Lord and get possessed. Whether you are a Christian or not it is estimated that in the U.S.A alone this year there will be over three hundred thousand attempts at suicide. Thirty thousand will be successful. Due to reporting difficulties the number could actually be closer to one hundred thousand suicides each year in the U.S.A. (Jackson 1995:12)

So in the United States of America today there are over five million Americans who have attempted suicide. For every fatal suicide there are ten unsuccessful attempts. This is a disturbing thought. People who contemplate suicide are in deep emotional pain. They say things like: "I don't want to go on" "There is no point." "it is all useless". (Jackson 1995:15) The person who is contemplating suicide is in deep pain like an animal that is hit by a car - if you get out and try to help the wounded animal it will usually attack you because it is in pain. Perhaps

a better word for suicidal people is the word helplessness. It cannot endure anymore of what life has to offer and it is powerless to change anything or anyone who really matters to them. The author remembers speaking to his dad a few days before his suicide and he seemed to be in that state of utter helplessness.

It seems like there was a panic in his life that he had no control over. The author thinks he felt hopeless and inadequate in life and as the various stresses and strains of his business continued to squeeze him, he eventually felt that there was no way out. To rescue ourselves from pain is a normal human condition, and we do all we can to ease the hurt. The author thinks this is why so many people in times of stress turn to the liquor or to drugs so that the burden can be made to feel lighter even if it is only temporary. We think it will rescue us from our inner struggle. Suicidal people think that they are out of options so death becomes totally reasonable and attractive.

Those that contemplate suicide often think that if they leave, those of us that are left behind will be better off. In reality though, the suicide of our loved ones only multiplies the pain and the grief of those of us who are left behind. I think that the answer to the question I originally started with is this. Yes just because you are a Christian does not give one exemption from disappointment, anger, confusion, pain, shame, hopelessness and helplessness. I think even God can be painfully quiet when we really feel that we need him. It is however helpful to realize that great biblical people also struggled with despair. David said "I have no refuge, no one cares for my life.....Listen to my cry for I am in desperate need." (Psalm 142:4, 6) As Christians we however do have someone we can trust. As our relationship with God deepens we realize that human relationships will eventually always disappoint and that we actually are built for a relationship with our creator who cares about our struggles lest they be suicidal.

2.5 Summary.

As I resolved to look at some of the perspectives on suicide, where is God when it is painful and how Christians deal with suicide and other elements of suicide the author has dealt with in this chapter he realised that they are topics that he has really struggled with as he came to terms with the suicide of his own father. The good news is humans are never alone in their struggles. There are always others that are going through the same pain or have been through the same struggles as me, by this we mean people who share common ground. To me this is such an important thread when one is trying to make sense of the trauma of suicide. What about God in these situations? A Christian perspective on suicide will always include the question of 'Where is God in a time like this?' This is a sentence that I have never found in the Bible, but one that really makes a lot of sense. God helps those who help themselves, for example if I study hard for an exam I should pass but if I don't study I cannot expect God to give me the answers in the exam. Many Nazi concentration camp survivors only pulled through because they kept themselves busy in other words they focused on their own activity which resulted in their own managing to survive. (Berent 1981:159) The other important element in their lives that kept them alive was humour.

Humour was used to illustrate this point the following is a short story about a pious orthodox Jew who sat in the synagogue three times a day praying year after year. One morning he was surprised to see Jake the gambler come in after being absent for twenty years from the synagogue. Jake walked to the front and asked God to help his horse win at the races. Jake returned that evening and said thanks God. At this point the pious Jew cried out Why, God, Why? He complained to God about his daughter who had married a poor person, his wife who was ill and his partners who were stealing from him. Why, God, Why? God responded to the pious one saying "I'll tell you why! You bother

me too much!!

The point of the story is this. Jake the gambler was the type of person who paid off the jockey and prayed to God for good measure. (Berent 1981:159) His own activity resulted in his managing to survive-he was his own rescuer, he helped himself. Suicide persons hope magically that rescuers will materialize. In their state of extreme disenchantment with their world they may emit, veiled messages towards the living whom they hope will share the responsibility of their surviving. It seems fitting in this context to quote the poet John Donne: No man is an Island, entire of itself, every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main, and any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. (Berent 1981:160)

As the author summarises this chapter, I have just read an article in the You Magazine telling the story of three young men who in the space of three months had each hung themselves. The impact this had on the community was devastating and left a huge gap. What the community still struggle with was the fact that these three men never let on that they were depressed. They were the lads that were always laughing and joking and the life of the party.

The author thinks what is frightening is how easily human beings can hide their pain through their jokes and laughing. Many people hide their pain through their laughter and this is why it is so difficult to help severely depressed suicidal people. Usually the ones that speak about suicide and threaten to take their lives never do. It is the ones that don't speak that we have to be wary of.

Alcohol often seems to be a factor in suicidal depression. (Miles 1997:12) People drink to cheer themselves up and then end up being more depressed than they were before. People crying out for help tend to mask their pain-it makes rescuing so much harder. (Miles 1997:13) As the author resolved the

various elements of suicide he found it helpful to use the following scientific method in analysing the various factors linked to suicide. The qualitative method helps those who embark on it to explore different dimensions of a phenomenon and not as tracing one single variable, as is, often the case in quantitative research. (Merriam 1988:36)

The objective of qualitative research is to understand the meaning of that experience being observed or studied. Observations in qualitative research help explain. There is a lot we can never explain with regards to the suicide of loved ones, but those of us who are left behind need to carry on living. We need to recover and we need to survive. We are victims of trauma and this study is my attempt to help others who will have to travel the road I already have with other fellow trauma sufferers.

Footnote: The incidence of suicide among abusers of alcohol is high, about 15% the same applies to the incidence of alcohol abuse among suicide attempters, about 15 -30% (Miles 1997:12).

Chapter 3 – Trauma – The methodology of Kubler-Ross experienced in a small group trying to survive the trauma of suicide

In this chapter the author is going to analyse the issue of the promise of heaven and some of the questions asked as people struggle with suicide. In this chapter the author will explore the model of Kubler-Ross and the various stages of denial, anger, depression, bargaining and acceptance. Let us analyse what we as Christians have in terms of promises from the bible regarding another life.

3.1. Suicide hits home – The Promises of Heaven

Christians have to become a part of a community. We have to realize that we are pilgrims on a journey and it is not a journey that we travel alone. The idea of a new place assures us of meeting our beloved. There is a lovely story told about twins inside their mother's womb. The sister talks to her brother and says that she thinks there is life after birth. The brother tells her to be quiet and insists that inside this dark and cosy womb is all there is and won't be convinced otherwise. The sister then angers her brother by saying that she believes outside of the womb there is a mother whom they will see face to face. Her brother becomes furious and says that she must be content with what she has. The sister then asks her brother if he ever feels painful squeezes that occurred every now and then. He replied by saying 'yes'. The sister then says to her brother that she believes that those painful squeezes are getting them ready for that other place, a place that is more beautiful and better than where they are. A place where they will see their mother face to face. The aim of this story links us to what Jesus spoke about finding heaven within and around and among us. (Hudson 2000:308) Jeremiah says in chapter one verse four "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; before you were born I set you apart." Jer 1:4 (NIV) The above story and Jeremiah 1:4 speak of us coming from heaven. Heaven was central to the teaching of Jesus and the one topic Jesus spoke of the most

was The Kingdom of God. (Matthew 13 & Luke 13) As Christians we have hope in this teaching of Jesus that we will meet those who have gone before us again.

Our Survivors of Suicide Group was made up of Christians so when we did speak about this kingdom it filled us with much peace and joy because we had hope of seeing our loved ones again. As a group we journeyed with Trevor Hudson's book called Journey of the Spirit. In week 51 he asks people to **“try and picture what heaven is like, as it is not easy to describe a reality we have not experienced.”** (Hudson 2000:307) In heaven we will no longer be frustrated by the pettiness, failure, guilt, alienation and loneliness that is so much a part of our lives here on earth. As a group we imagined our loved ones being in this place free of the above mentioned frustrations. As we imagined heaven and our loved ones who were there waiting for us, it guided and strengthened our present lives. Like the story told earlier on of the twins in the womb- Dallas Willard says in his book “The Divine Conspiracy” **“that we will see things more clearly including our creator face to face, free of pain.”** (Willard 1998:71)

3.2. Struggling with loss.

This section is going to with a great struggle that human beings wrestle with and that is the struggle of loss and death. Why do people struggle so much with facing loss and death.

“A man can undergo any trauma or torture if he knows the Why of his life.”- Nietzsche. (Yancey 2001:160) Here we have a statement that says if we know why we are here, and what we go through we can learn from, then, it is not in vain. Joni Earekson Tada once said that to ask where is God when it hurts, is

an honest and reasonable question that many of us ask, when trauma and pain knock on our door. Even Jesus used the word “why,” as he hung suffering on the cross feeling forsaken by his father. **“Why have you forsaken me?”** (Matthew 27:46) was the Psalm (Psalm 22:1) Jesus quoted, and, in this moment heard nothing but the silence of God.

The above helps us realize that even God in his humanity through Christ could ask the question why, in times of experiencing great trauma. Why me? Is a question almost every person on earth will ask when suffering especially when trauma knocks on their door? When analysing the book of Job it seems to tell the story of a very good man who is struck by very bad experiences like the loss of his wife, children and wealth. According to Yancey **“there is one theory that the book of Job does seem to refute, and that is, that suffering is not a result of sin.”** (Yancey 2001:175) I can relate too many of the questions Job seemed to ask God during his time of great suffering. His questions do not seem to be any less relevant today. When we suffer the loss of a loved one we cry out against God’s apparent lack of concern. At that time it appears that God is not concerned with our pain.

People who are suffering whether from physical or physiological pain often feel an oppressive sense of aloneness. They feel abandoned and the sense that no one quite understands. They feel that God and others are leaving them to face their pain alone. (Yancey 1990:173). There are so many questions that stem from the word ‘why?’ Why are we here? Why do persons with aids so often not come to church? Why do people commit suicide? Why are there so many alcoholics these days? Why is God so quiet during difficult times when we experience trauma? Judith Herman says that **“the ordinary response to atrocities like trauma is to banish them from our consciousness, however they refuse to be buried”** (Herman 1992:1) The author agrees with Herman and that is why we need to ask questions like ‘Why?’ Our trauma will not be

buried; it needs to be remembered for restoration and healing. (Herman 1992:1)

Why, must be the most asked question in the world, especially when it relates to trauma? The author thinks that one of the most difficult questions to answer is the why question. It will always be a human struggle. The church should perhaps not respond to questions of suffering through argument, but rather through connecting love. Perhaps questions would then not be asked with troubled intensity. Yancey says that **“the united strength of Christ’s body can be a powerful force on behalf of the lonely, traumatized, suffering and the deprived”**. (Yancey 1990:243)

Corrie ten Boom was a well known author of a book titled “The Hiding Place”. She was arrested in Holland for sheltering Jews and was transported to the death camps in Germany. She saw prisoners disappear into ovens, watched her sister die and felt the sting of a whip. She sensed the defilement of all virtue in a world of sovereign evil. At that instant of pain it may seem impossible that good can come out of tragedy. We never know in advance how suffering can be transformed into a cause for celebration. The author believes it breaks God’s heart when people commit suicide. God does not desire people doing this self murder any more than he desired the Holocaust or the death of his own son. I have to say that the why question is unfortunately unanswerable. It is a deep question that helps us to analyse trauma and connect with what Herman said on the importance of not allowing our trauma to be buried. (Herman 1992:1)

We will never know the answer too many things including why our loved ones commit suicide. Good can come out of trauma. We can find ourselves helping others who will go through what we have been through. This is what it means to be part of the Body of Christ. As pilgrims on a journey we help one another carry our burdens of loss and grief. We cry and we laugh together. Time heals and helps us move on with our lives even though our why questions may

remain unanswered. It was Walt Whitman who said that **“it is not always helpful to ask the wounded person how they feel but rather to become the wounded person.”** (Nouwen 1994: 64) Henri Nouwen too, describes this incredible healing which we can give to one another when we become the wounded healers. He says **“Simply being there for someone in their time of need helps them with their why questions”**. (Nouwen 1994:72) In other words, the church needs to be with families that have experienced suicidal death and hence this means to stop judging and to start caring.

3.3 A survivor’s journey in the grieving process

The ‘if’ question is the following one to be analysed.

As the author looks back now on the traumatic experience of suicide he cannot but stop and think about the word ‘if’. If only he had been more sensitive to the pain that his father was in then maybe what happened might not have happened. If I had been more aware of what he was going through then maybe I could have helped. The truth is, this is part of what Kubler-Ross lists under her grieving process and that is first we deny and then we get angry, then we get depressed and then we bargain, it is when we bargain that we ask the ‘if’ question and we finally accept the reality of our situation. (Kubler-Ross 1969: 7).

It seems to be a natural process that all trauma sufferers go through. The ‘if’ question can really haunt a trauma sufferer. We tend to blame the traumatic incident on the rat race life style that so many of us live. If I wasn’t so busy then I could have been there. The truth is that people respond differently to trauma. There is no way to predict a person’s response towards pain and suffering. One of our group members did not want a burial for his son. He did not want to go visit the burial site each week and continuously be reminded that his son was here no more. However other people need to do this as it helps tremendously with the reality that the person is no longer here but they are not forgotten.

Judith Herman says that **“the only people who can teach us about suffering both for the sake of our own preparations and our attempts to comfort others are the sufferers themselves”**. (Herman 1990:165)

Our Survivors of Suicide group helped many of our members to deal with the ‘if’ question. Therapy groups are excellent in dealing with this issue. They improve our self image as many suicide survivors feel embarrassed about what their family members have done. They feel that people will ridicule them and say that their deceased ones couldn’t cope or took the easy route out. Our group helped us relate to one another and as we shared our traumatic experiences through our tears that the ‘if’ question seemed to be dealt with therapeutically. One of our members felt terrible guilt as she had, had a fight with her spouse that day, and later came home to find out that he had taken his life. She was heavily burdened by the ‘if’ question. If only I hadn’t fought with him? If only I had phoned him? In our group we spoke freely and knew that the empathetic responses were genuine as all had suffered similar trauma. We helped her work through her ‘if’ questions and when she realized that all of us had asked it many times, it helped her in her recovery process. She believed that she deserved punishment linking closely to Et Al’s story in “Repairing the damage of a Shepherd” which is linked to Kubler-Ross’s fourth stage namely bargaining. Et Al found herself bargaining with God when she was abused by a minister and blamed herself for what happened. She found herself saying things like “If I promise to be a good girl, please take this pain away” (Poling (ed) 1999:35)

It is strange that as human beings we always feel the need to talk. Sometimes it is okay just to cry in the presence of fellow sufferers. One of our ministers counselled a lady who finally fell asleep through the whole session. She hugged him afterwards and couldn’t thank him enough for the wonderful way in which he helped her. All she needed was someone to be there with her, and

her healing was incredible. Jurgen Moltmann says that **“God is present in the suffering of all human beings”** (Du Toit 1990:). The church should focus on the person who is suffering and how to help and heal rather than trying to find a rationale for the existence of suffering (Du Toit 1990:). Philip Yancey says that **“the good news about suffering, if there can be such a thing, is that no one can package the appropriate response to suffering. There is no magic cure for people in pain.”**(Yancey 1990:168) Judith Herman says **“We try and banish pain from our consciousness and treat it as unspeakable”** (Herman 1992:1).

If we look at the scriptures which we used in our group we noted that many Godly people suffered and struggled with the problem of pain. Trauma is pain no matter how we look at it. Job teaches us that the image people have of God strongly influences how they work through suffering (Du Toit 1990:). Job, David and Jesus reacted to pain the same way we do today. For example, David suffered the trauma of losing a child and found himself crying out, **“if only I hadn’t committed murder and adultery perhaps my child would still be here with me”**. (2 Samuel 12) The sad reality is that we don’t have final, satisfying answers for people in pain. Judith Herman says **“Atrocities refuse to be buried. Until we remember and tell the truth we cannot have restoration or healing”** (Herman 1992:1), while Phillip Yancey says **“Our response to suffering depends largely on how we deal with fear, helplessness, meaning and hope”** (Yancey 1990:169) and this is a struggle for all of us. Trauma often leaves us struggling with these four frontiers and the only way that we can work through our own traumatic experiences and help those who hurt is to love them. We experienced so much love in our group that the ‘if’ question became less important.

Continuing with the theme of love the author is reminded of the Beatles song called “All you need is love” and we found it extremely helpful in our group. This links very strongly with Rogers “Love Centred Therapy”. Suffering people

need love. George Herbert in his poem “The Flower” says the following, “**Grief melts away like snow in May, as IF there were no such cold thing**”. (Yancey 1990:170) Our group concluded that we were not responsible for the decisions of our loved ones. Life must go on. Suffering creates distance but love creates closeness. God takes the initiative to come closer to people and in Jesus we see the human face of God. God’s love overcomes the distance of alienation, misunderstanding and broken relationship among people and between God and People. (Du Toit 1990:) In our group we experienced our suffering being eased by the warmth and presence of others. In each other we saw God’s presence this healed our suffering.

3.4 Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance according to Kubler-Ross

Rev. Trevor Hudson, a friend and colleague of mine tells the story of a friend of his who was a recovering alcoholic. He shared with Trevor over breakfast one morning how he struggled during his difficult drinking days. He told of how he would take a bottle of brandy each day in a brown paper bag to work and drink from it. Trevor asked him why he kept the bottle hidden in a brown paper bag- was it to hide the contents from his work colleagues? To this the friend replied that it was to hide the contents of the bottle from himself. This story illustrates as Trevor says “**rather humorously our struggle to be honest with ourselves and each other**”. (Hudson 2000:36) Analysing the different stages that Kubler-Ross takes us through when dealing with trauma. The first stage in Kubler-Ross’s five stages of dying is ‘denial and isolation’. Kubler-ross says this is a defence that is gradually dropped over time.

3.4.1. Denial and isolation

“**Man barricades against himself**” (Tagore)

Denial is usually a temporary defence and will soon be replaced by partial acceptance. (Kubler Ross 1969:53) It was once said that denial is not a river in Egypt. It seems that when a traumatic situation knocks on our door our bodies seem to immediately deny as a way of protecting our pain. Perhaps it is a natural survival instinct that God has given us. We try to pretend that the news we have just heard is a mistake. Somebody somewhere got his or her facts mixed up. We say things like “my dad would never do that” “my brother was not that selfish” “my mom would never take an overdose”, “not my sister”. This is a normal reaction especially when trauma strikes home.

Unless we overcome denial and begin to confess the less attractive parts of our lives we will find it difficult to grow in our relationship with God and with one another. Perhaps it is something that the Jesus of the gospels enjoyed about those, who were according to the religious leaders of the day outcasts and not acceptable among society. They came to Jesus as they were and depended on his grace and mercy. (Hudson 2000:37) Jesus seemed to have a way of being able to get the truth out of people and by so doing he set them free. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross says **“that perhaps we deny things are happening because we don’t want to damage ourselves”** (Kubler-Ross 1969:15). This is another way of coping with pain and suffering caused by death. We falsely use it as a coping pattern to protect ourselves. **“Some people who have been traumatized through incest or abuse have used their denial to enable them to exist and to slow down the recurring pain”**. (Poling 1999:33).

Self honesty is a journey that for some people, can take a life time to do. Denial has a way as Trevor’s story illustrates of covering the real issues with a brown paper bag. In our group we all realised that we had struggled with denial. This stage is important and must be dealt with properly.

3.4.2 Anger

“When the first stage of denial cannot be maintained any longer, it is replaced by feelings of anger, rage, envy and resentment” (Kubler-Ross 1969:63)

The author once heard a minister say that anger is one letter short of danger. Anger is a human emotion. Even Jesus got angry. We read of him throwing tables over and chasing people out of the temple. Anger that is being spoken about is an anger that comes about when we have worked through our denial. “How could that selfish idiot commit suicide?” “Why didn’t she tell someone before killing herself?” Here are symptoms of anger that are manifested through angry statements.

“I’m so angry at myself for not seeing the signs!” These are some of the things people say when we find ourselves in a time of trauma. This type of anger is dangerous as it refers to bitterness against someone. It is a dangerous emotion that always threatens to leap out of control, and can lead to violence, emotional hurt, increased mental stress and spiritual damage. Anger can also keep us from developing a spirit pleasing to God. According to Kubler-Ross anger is the second stage that is a very acceptable feeling when dealing with trauma. Many people who have experienced anger are uneasy with the intense emotion. In Polings book, Victim to Survivor an account is given by an anonymous woman who suffered abuse at the hands of a priest. She says that **“people want to turn down the volume of your anger. They are uncomfortable with it and ignore the pain behind it.”** (Poling 1999:34)

In our Survivors of Suicide group we never wanted to do this as we knew the importance of sharing our anger if we ever wanted to recover. We wanted to

openly and honestly share our anger towards our loved one's, and what they had done. Remembering is an important part of recovering and so we encouraged it as much as possible. Resentment and anger are natural reactions when people are deprived of something valuable or important to them. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:22 that we are not to nurse anger against our brothers or sisters. Trevor Hudson says that **“there is a difference between anger and hate. Anger is a natural response to hurt, but hate is nurtured anger directed towards another person. Anger is a perfectly natural emotion like fear.”** (Hudson 2000:174 - 176). To be angry at my dad for what he did is a perfectly normal emotion. To hate my dad for what he did is to nurse the anger inside of me. It is essential to face our feelings of anger. It is not wrong to be angry if we face the feeling and acknowledge it. After we have journeyed through the stage of anger it leads us to the next stage of Bargaining.

3.4.3 Bargaining

“If we have been unable to face the sad facts in the first period and have been angry at people and God in the second phase, maybe we can succeed in entering into some sort of an agreement which may postpone the inevitable” (Kubler-Ross 1969:93)

From the above statement Kubler-Ross tells us that bargaining is the third stage that we experience after trauma. **“The bargaining is really an attempt to postpone”** (Kubler-Ross 1969:95) It is interesting to note that most of our bargains are made with God and are usually kept secret or mentioned between the lines or in a chaplains office. In our group the author heard comments like “It’s all my fault.” “I should have been there.” “I was always too busy”. The author sensed that by these bargaining comments the members in the Survivors of Suicide group were postponing the realities that people who commit suicide are doing it for their own reasons and that it is not our fault that the suicide occurred.

How did the author lead the group through the stage of bargaining?

The group was led to search the stage of bargaining by means of a number of questions. As the facilitator the author picked up immediately why many people believe that they are receiving some kind of punishment for some evil that they must have done at some particular time in their lives. The author encouraged the group to discuss their feelings of guilt. The author told a story of how he counselled a lady who is facing the difficult prospect of bowel cancer. She believes that she must be paying a price for something that she did at some time in her life. She believes and bargains with herself that what she must face is what she must have deserved. The group was then asked to discuss this story and to then slowly let go of their guilt as they began to deal with the reality of losing our loved ones to suicide, knowing that it was the choice of the person

who committed it and not our fault.

We also agreed that the lady who had cancer was wrong in thinking she had done something wrong, just like we were wrong in feeling guilty for what our loved ones had done. The author shared another story with the group. In repairing the damage of a shepherd, a short story of abuse is told by a lady who writes under the name of Et Al, Et tells of how she was abused by a priest. This priest knew her childhood background, one of being abused by her father and proceeded to continue to abuse her as an adult. She says that she tried to allow the sexual incidents with her priest in order to try and undo any badness that she may have obtained through the incest of her father. She shares in her story how she tried to bargain for good treatment by being obedient and helpful. In our small groups we were once again asked to share and discuss this story. We agreed that she was wrong to feel guilty for this abuse, thus the author helped the group to deal with the issue of blaming themselves.

We too agreed that we had been abusing ourselves through our guilt. Many of us bargained with ourselves trying to figure out why our loved ones did what they did. Bargaining leads to healing if it helps us find answers to our questions. Bargaining helped us move on with our lives. However there is another stage to go through before acceptance can be achieved and that is Depression.

3.4.4. Depression

The suicidal person is a reminder of our own potential for depression or our own loss of idealism. Why does one kill oneself? Mann quotes the following **“Because one will not, cannot go through the next half hour, next five minutes. Suddenly one comes to a dead end, the point of death. The limit has been reached”**. (Mann 1994:16) There seems hardly any doubt that the state of mind immediately before death can be described as depressive.

Hawton says the following: **“Depression is different from Low-spiritedness or rejection. It goes deeper, lasts longer and influences.”** (Hawton 1995:44).

The author asked the group to discuss the above statements and asked the group to share their last memories of their loved ones and to see if there was any connection to the above statements. The group agreed that depression was the number one factor in people who commit suicide and that what caused suicide in one person caused strength in another. The depression we experienced was so similar to the depression experienced by those who committed suicide, yet because of our Survivors of Suicide group we had a support system in place unlike those who died. They were alone.

The group was asked to think back to what they remembered about their loved ones before the suicide. The author shared how his own dad seemed to have been on edge – like he was wrestling with his struggle. He was constantly pessimistic, sad and was drinking heavily. He didn't seem to be here when you spoke to him. There was desperation in his speech. He certainly was meeting the three patterns of the cognitive triad referred to by Beck as “**the self, the future, and the environment**” and this is what characterizes the depressed person. (Leftcourt Martin (ed) 1986:15). Firstly he had a negative image of himself. He felt worthless and inferior. Even his grandchild whom he adored didn't seem to cheer him up any longer. The group agreed that much of the signs were similar.

The second aspect about him was that he constantly interpreted what happened around him as proof of his inferiority complex. The world made too many demands on him. He was struggling with the pressures of unpaid bills in his business, and there were added pressures of others who had not paid him. Thirdly, dad never saw a way out. He had a negative view about the future (Hawton 1995:45). He expected problems to last forever. The fact that he was adored by his family didn't even matter at that time. His depression continued to affect him. Once again the group could relate.

According to Fredrick “**depression is one of the major risk conditions for suicidal behaviour but it also affects those of us who are left behind. It is almost a feeling of being punished by God.**” (Fredrick 1976:22) It is difficult to receive positive feedback from those who love you and are only trying to help.” Those of us who are left behind struggle tremendously with a low self esteem, and so once again a huge effort from the one grieving and from those who are trying to help is required. The group sharing about our depression was incredibly healing and once all of us were allowed to share their stories of their experiences and many a tear was shed, we experienced an incredible healing. The group agreed that we really were moving through various stages and we agreed that once we had worked through our depression we were ready for the following stage of our journey, acceptance.

3.4.5 Acceptance

Our group was led to the process of acceptance by patiently letting each other share our own experiences at our own pace. The group interaction was essential. The author gradually led the group to each stage as we journeyed together.

This last stage of Kubler-Ross is interesting in that when we experience trauma we don't think that there could be such a stage, but acceptance is something that has to happen if we are to move on with our lives. It is not easy to accept that the person whom you love so much will not be seen again in this life anyway. Acceptance simply means to reflect on the situation and to say 'I am still here – I need to move on with my life'. From the authors experience storms have a way of teaching what nothing else can. Scott peck says that “**due to problems we grow mentally and spiritually**”. Wise people welcome problems and actually welcome the pain of problems. John Ortberg says “**Traumatic events can change our lives, for better or for worse.**” They can bring about deep character and personality change (Ortberg 2002:111) Kamp Staalraad

was a training camp that the Springboks were sent on under the coaching of Rudolph Strauli.

This was an example of controlled trauma designed to foster traits like loyalty and obedience – it failed miserably. The author asked the group to reflect on the reality that they still needed to carry on with their lives. What did this mean to them? By the time we were wrestling with this issue we knew that this was a difficult truth to face. To carry on without our loved ones. The author then spoke about Jesus to the group.

Jesus used controlled trauma with masterful skill. He used controlled trauma to help his disciples take a step towards trust that they would never be able to develop on their own. Dallas Willard says that **“many Christians painfully puzzle over what they may have done wrong, or whether God has been with them. They struggle to accept the curve balls that life throws at them.”** (Willard 2002:35) Acceptance is linked to what kind of people we have become through the trauma we have suffered. How did survivors at the holocaust accept the pain and move on with their lives? The author asked the group to discuss how human beings could survive something as traumatic as the genocide in Ruanda or the holocaust. The group agreed that throughout the course of trauma runs the thread of hope. Kubler-Ross says **“All the suffering must have meaning and pay off eventually if it can be endured for just a little longer.”** She continues by saying **“the most important thing is not avoiding the issues of death and dying but using the time to listen and share.”**(Kubler-Ross 1969:87)

In our group we all experienced the different stages in the process of trauma. Our group seldom gave advice but were patient in letting each other share our own experiences at our own pace. This is where we found healing and discovered that each of us struggled through each stage in one way or another. Our group was led through the process of acceptance by group interaction and

questions fielded by the group facilitator. Questions like “As you look back on your life and what you have been through, what meaning have you derived from your experience?”

Many agreed that the important thing was not avoiding the reality of death but sharing together and making time for one another, listening and sharing. As making time and listening together became easier we had realised that we had become stronger and had dealt with the acceptance of death through suicide.

3.5 Summary.

Our group Survivors of Suicide can honestly say that the stages that Kubler-Ross described were extremely accurate in all cases and each individual in the group did go through the stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance. If there is one thing that the author can add from his own experience, is that it seems that these stages can be reoccurring and even when many in the Survivors of Suicide group had felt that we had achieved acceptance, we still found ourselves getting angry, depressed and even found ourselves bargaining on occasion. The aim of this study was not to disprove Kubler-Ross but to apply her findings into our lives in a meaningful way. This leads me to the following quote by Scott Peck:

“Life is difficult.” -The Road Less Travelled- Scott Peck

The author has dealt with some very difficult issues in this chapter. Some of the questions and issues he has wrestled with are not new. Job, one of the oldest books in the Bible struggled with the problem of trauma, pain and suffering and the questions dealt with in this book are still so relevant today. Human beings struggle with suffering in whatever form. It could be the suffering of grief or the suffering of loss but whatever form the suffering takes, it, is not something human beings handle well. In chapter 4 the author wants to deal with how we

move on with our lives in the face of trauma. From Trauma to Hope, is, one of our prescribed reading books that was so well titled. We will journey on the reasons why we need to keep on living.

We will explore that we are never alone in our trauma and we will see that even humour can be used in a wonderful way to help us get busy living.

One of the ways we deal with trauma is through relationship. The relationships we establish through our support groups. The relationships we establish through our life partners. The relationships we establish in every aspect of our lives. Humanity as John Ortberg points out is” **much like a garden**’. (Ortberg 2003:116). There is no such thing as a low maintenance garden. Where living things are involved work is always required. Without proper attention relationships tend to drift into conflicts and go unresolved, small groups lose touch and families get busy. (Ortberg 2003:116).

Every single interaction that we have with other people involves not only exchanging information or tasks but also influences each others moods and attitudes. Every time people make contact they come away feeling better and more energized or worse and more depleted. (Ortberg 2003:117)

One thing we have learnt dealing with all our emotions at the time of our trauma is that we cannot move on without forgiveness. During the time of the Truth and Reconciliation commission a young girl of sixteen wanted to know who had killed her father, when he disappeared during the liberation struggle in the mid eighties. When asked why she wanted to know who killed her father she simply said”I want to learn to know how to forgive him.” The author thinks there is a deep challenge in this for all of us as forgiveness seems to be such a struggle for human beings. (Hudson 2000:170)

In the Survivors of Suicide group we all struggled to forgive our loved ones for

their suicides. It was not easy. We felt we had every reason to avenge our hurt and to be angry with our loved ones. Only when we truly did learn to forgive, and let go, could healing really begin in our lives. Nothing causes more damage to a family than when one of its members commits suicide.

The scars will remain forever. One thing we learnt in our group was that when we took our minds off ourselves and tried to help others in our group who were struggling, we realised that we too received incredible healing. Our group gave us all a wonderful feeling of worth and the “if” and “why” questions became easier to accept.

In our next section the author will deal with the issue of hope and why those of us who are left behind should have a reason to keep on living. This part of our journey is important because it helps us to face the reality that life gives us.

Chapter 4 – A reason to live

4.1 A reason to live

In chapter 3 we explored the various stages of bereavement that one goes through according to Kubler-Ross when trauma knocks on our door. In this chapter I will explore how acceptance eventually leads to hope. A lack of Ubuntu (humanness) has killed the communal responsibility where you love your neighbor as yourself, and so the church now has a massive role to play in moving people from trauma to hope. (Facing Aids-WCC Document:35)

People need to be encouraged in order to lead a Christian life and this journey can be helpful in making sense of the situation. The church is a place that exists for those that are outside of it unlike country clubs or similar institutions that exist for the exclusivity of their members. The church is a place that needs to promote a reason to live for those that are left behind. How? Through reassurance, emotional support and compassion which could be done through small groups. The group should be structured to foster the development of each of the survivor's strengths and coping abilities, and offer all group members protection against being flooded with overwhelming memories and feelings. One such protective structure is found in the many different self help groups, modeled upon Alcoholics anonymous. These groups have left thousands of lives with a wonderful sense of hope.

One of the author's favourite sayings comes from a movie by the name of "The Shawshank Redemption". One of the inmates never loses hope regardless of the violence, corruption and hopeless situation he finds himself in. In one scene he says to his friend "fear can keep you prisoner but hope can set you free.' The author will never forget those words. We need to keep busy living in such a way that we always have hope. Hope is something that we get from a relationship

with others and a relationship with Jesus.

It is quite frightening to realize how many people live their lives without hope. Read the following stats of what happens to people when they lose hope. The University Of Rochester School Of Medicine found that open heart surgery patients were far more likely to die after surgery if they showed signs of depression. Another study surveyed the mortality rate of 4,500 widowers within six months of their wives deaths. Most of them were depressed and it was discovered that most of them had a mortality rate nearly 40 percent higher than other men the same age. Prisoners of War may die for no other apparent reason than a loss of hope. (Yancey 1990:207) A noted physiologist Harold G Wolf said **“Hope, faith and a purpose in life is medicinal; it has been proven by meticulously controlled scientific experiments.”** (Yancey 1990:208)

The author experienced the power of hope when he spent four days in Modderbee Prison recently. When these prisoners saw that people actually cared for them they were awe struck. The flame of hope was kindled once again into their lives. It is a beautiful thing to see a hopeless life once again injected with hope. Hope means simply the belief that something good lies ahead. (Hudson 1990:210) In our group we discovered too, that hope is not optimism or wishful thinking. Phillip Yancey says **“that this implies a denial of reality”**. (Yancey 1990:211) Hope is often confused with optimism but it seems to save us from being too pessimistic. Realistic hope is what helps us carry on when we fall but also confront reality.

The reality of our situation in our Survivors of Suicide group was that our loved ones were not coming back but that this life is not the end of the road. As Christians we believe that there is another life where chaos does not reign.

4.2 You are not alone we have each other.

It is quite concerning that in a world of plus minus six billion people there are a lot of lonely folk. Trevor Hudson says **“there are many people who live in big cities and are surrounded by swarms of people yet they are lonely.”** (Hudson 2000:42) When we do not have fellowship with other people it is easy to feel like we are strangers. Larry Crabb calls this being disconnected. The author wonders how many people go to church and feel totally lonely. One thing that small groups can teach us is that we are not alone. We are all on a journey that involves challenges, joys, pains, hurts and many other experiences. The author believes that we were created to be in community. “It is not good for man to be alone.”(Genesis 3) This is what God said when he created Adam, and so we are not made to be alone. The author has to always be around people. He does not enjoy being on his own even though he does spend time on his own. The author thinks of the song that was written by the well known sixties band called The Beatles. It was titled “All the lonely people, where do they all come from?” This song describes a world full of people, yet they are so lonely going about their lives with little care from anyone else.

In his book “Everybody’s Normal till you get to know them”, John Ortberg says that **“We as human beings were created for community. It is the one indispensable condition for human flourishing”**. (Ortberg 2003:32) In a survey done in America it was found that of the seven thousand lives that were tracked over a period of nine years those who lived in the most secluded areas where there was little relational connections, were three times more likely to die than those with strong relational connections. Society is still however becoming more and more disconnected from one another. Robert Putman in his book “Bowling Alone” says that **“today in America the level of community is at its lowest point ever and this has affected educational performance, more teen**

pregnancy, greater depression resulting in more and more suicides and higher crime rates". (Putman 2003:33) Again this quotation emphasizes the danger of loneliness.

This seems to be a worldwide trend as even in South Africa a lack of Ubuntu (community) has led to many of the problems the author has listed above. Community or Ubuntu always gives hope to those who belong to them. Ubuntu says "I belong therefore I am." The therapeutic process the author is exploring analyses hope being achieved through belonging to a group and journeying together to healing and hope. John Ortberg believes that community is the very reason that the universe and all in it even exist. Dallas Willard, whom the author has met, said it like this. **"God's aim in human history is the creation of an inclusive community of loving persons with himself included as the primary sustainer and most glorious inhabitant."** (Willard 2003:24)

As life flows back and forth between one person and another it is referred to by Larry Crabb as connecting. This happens in community, small groups, and church groups- anywhere where human beings can be connected with their fellow human beings in community. We were not made for loneliness. Hearing each others stories and struggles is a wonderful opportunity to provide therapy. In my woundedness I help the wounded. This connects with Henri Nouwen's wounded healer therapy. John Ortberg says **"For all our sins, quirks and jagged edges we need each other"**. He goes on to say that **"community is not just a word but a fundamental requirement that has a wonderful way of showing happiness, health, support and growth."** (Ortberg 2003:25).

We are not alone in this world. Our group discovered that when we come together in the community of a small group we realize that we really do have one another for a reason. Somehow the fact that we do have one another

seems to answer the questions so many of us have regarding suffering, loss and the problem of pain. Being in a community of people who struggle with what you struggle with is always helpful. When you know you are not alone there seems to be a point to this challenge called life. Our Survivors of Suicide group needed each other desperately and it was so helpful to know that we were never alone.

4.3 The process of living

One of the author's favourite movies is a movie by the name of "The Shawshank Redemption". It tells of the story of a man accused of murdering his wife, who has to spend the next twenty years of his life behind bars at Shawshank Prison. In the one scene Tim Robbins known as Andy says to his friend Morgan Freeman known as Red that he needs to get busy living or get busy dying. That is the choice we have. The Author was amazed by this comment. Here was a man who had suffered terribly in this place. He had been raped by fellow prisoners, he had seen the bribery and corruption of the wardens and prison guards and yet he could still tell his friend to get busy living. How do some people have the ability to keep living regardless of the pain and suffering they have experienced? Perhaps the authors question should have been, what can be done to help me get busy living once again?

The author spoke to a man the other day who felt incredible guilt for not being there for a friend who seemed to be crying out for help. A week later that friend committed suicide. He said to the author that he should have done something. "How" is such a crucial question at this time? The author does not know how we can always spot the signs. We seem to live in a world that is so busy it does not have time to be sensitive to those who are crying out for help. When they get fed up and decide to leave, those of us who are left behind have to still get busy living, and we do not know how we are going to do it but we do. A running friend

of mine lost a son due to suicide nearly 12 years ago-when he heard of the trauma, I was going through he only said one thing to me. Darren keep yourself busy, time will heal. He was right-I did keep myself busy and time has healed but unfortunately this does not always work for everyone. The author knows of a mother who lost her son due to suicide and couldn't go on with life.

Eventually she got divorced and allowed the tragedy of her son's suicide to ruin her own life as well as the lives of those around her. She is still to this day struggling to talk about her son's suicide. Time has healed her but much help is still needed. Most people wait too long to go for counselling. They think that they can do it on their own without the help of others.

From my group of Survivors of Suicide the author learnt a few wonderful truths that can be helpful to others that want to get on with life. The author was lucky enough to have a wise shepherd who helped him immediately after his traumatic experience. Don't try and carry on with your problem without sharing your experience with a close person you can trust. Do not be afraid to let it all out and speak openly and honestly, even swearing if it helps make you feel better about releasing anger. For those that have died before us the problems of this world are over. Stop worrying about whether the person who is gone is going to go to heaven or not. There is nothing you can do about it except pray. If you believe that God is a God of grace and love, then you must also know that God is a fair judge, and knows what the person was going through at the time of their death.

The author remembers the words of Prof Masango that he shared with us from a funeral he attended. "Nothing can separate us from the love of God not even suicide". Now there was some powerful healing for those in my group Survivors of Suicide. We all decided that this good news is really all we can trust on at the time of pain. No one can scientifically prove that there is a heaven or a God but

we trust that there is through faith. We put our trust in the words of Jesus who spoke of a house with many rooms, and spoke of a place where there is no more pain, and crying and oppression and hatred but a place of unity and love and peace and joy. Too good to be true for many but we're putting our trust in these words, and they have helped us incredibly to keep busy living. These words have also helped many others when the author has conducted funerals. The Word who became flesh seems to have a lot of power. (John 1:1)

Seeking help does not always have to come from a professional. It can be from a family member, friends, neighbours, small groups (in our case) or your pastor. In chapter 2.3 we dealt with small groups extensively. The small groups helped us all find a sense of satisfaction, purpose and a reason to go on. We drew strength from one another and helped one another to get busy living. Larry Crabb speaks of connecting. In a small group this can really be experienced as we share our painful stories. Mbiti says that "You are because we are, and we are because you are. (Mbiti 1977:61) Human beings need to connect. When we feel connected, then we feel a part of the body.

We can make a contribution to this world-I am here for a reason. The problem is that while we are here to enjoy and live relationships with others we are invited to grieve their loss. Grieving is a process. Sometimes it is nice not to have to journey this process alone. C S Lewis in his book *A Grief Observed* had this to say about grief-"in grief nothing stays put. One keeps on emerging from a phase, but it always recurs. Round and round, everything repeats."(Lewis 1961: 67) When one thinks of grief we can relate to the 23rd Psalm of David verse 4 "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for you are with me." In Chapter 3 we dealt with Kubler-Ross and the different stages that we go through in trauma. There are other stages too like shock, submission and reinvestment. Not everyone progresses through these stages of grief in the same order or at the same speed. (Jackson 1992:15)

Normally the worst is over in two to three months when one is mourning however this can be a lot longer for others. People can get stuck in the unfinished stages of grief and may need professional help in order to deal with the next stage. We found in our group of Survivors of Suicide that we didn't keep our emotions in because we were all suffering with the same trauma. Losing a loved one due to suicide. This common ground was extremely helpful as each member knew what the other person was struggling with and going through.

We could be open and honest without worrying what the other person thought. We were looking for answers from one another and although we never got them all, we helped one another to get busy living. This too is a process we had to face -sometimes we call one another when the going gets tough, we meet for coffee and have a chat and we comfort one another through quite simply just being present with the one who was struggling through.

The presence of one wounded person with another. Feelings of anger and guilt often torment the mourner-"If Only?" is the most common words used. What is so helpful is that here we can express our grief openly and honestly, and so walk with each other. We know that we are accepting the reality of our trauma when we can move on without the deceased person's help or companionship. My mom found it extremely helpful to take all of my dad's clothes and give them to the Salvation Army as a way of dealing with grief. There seemed to be incredible healing. As she cleaned out his things there seemed to be an acceptance that she had to carry on. She returned to work and got back into the routine of daily living. Acceptance is making decisions and moving on. Life is not over even though it will always be different. We discovered and totally agree with Jackson in this regard, **"that the qualities of empathy and compassion are born out of our own painful encounters with loss, and those who look at others through tears of grief have a perspective the dry-eyed cannot see**

and they are uniquely qualified to minister to others in pain”.(Jackson 1992:26)

One thing we never did in our Survivors Of Suicide group was to trample on each others pain by saying things to each other that were unhelpful like “don’t worry time will heal”. We allowed each other to journey and discover for ourselves where we were. We always had one goal in mind – to get busy living. Some of the things we found helpful in our journey of recovery were the following. Eat wisely and exercise regularly. There are many positive aspects to eating and exercising regularly. Joel Robertson in her book: Natural Prozac indicates through current research that regular exercise reduces the symptoms of depression. (Robertson 1997:148)

It raises and maintains our energy levels and increases our capacity to concentrate. Researchers are also starting to discover how much diet affects how we think and feel. Diet and exercise are two very important ways we can get busy living if we observe them carefully.

Another way we found to be extremely helpful was to keep journals. To record exactly what was going on each day, recording our feelings, struggles, pains, hurts, joys, dreams and other daily experiences that we were having. We had a joke that we shared between us, that if we die before we wake we were to throw our journal in the lake. It was extremely personal stuff where in our Survivors of Suicide group it could be shared if we wanted to. It is amazing how one can see maturity in our own lives when they keep a daily record of thoughts, feelings, emotions and experiences. It is sad to think that so many people don’t record their daily experiences and thus cannot reflect accurately on issues like growth, healing and forgiveness. Perhaps that is why so few of us can see God working in our lives. It was when we reflected on our lives that we saw incredible growth and healing and realized that we were not alone on our journey. We had each

other and we had a God who cared about us intimately and desired a relationship with each of us. So the above was some of the things that we discovered as a group trying to invest into the pain of our fellow brothers and sisters. Depression is a very common human experience. To get busy living after having survived such emotional trauma like suicide, we had to get some practical ways to help us move on with our lives. Our group still meet every two weeks and we depend on this group as our life line. That we have each other to journey alongside is a wonderful gift. God seems to have made us that way.

Human beings need other human beings. We need each other to help us laugh, to cry and to share. It really is the only way to get busy living. We cannot do it alone and the great news is that we don't have to. Here we motivate and encourage one another not expecting to always have the answers. We laugh about what is going on in the world and we share how we are going to kick our loved ones butts when we see them. Sometimes our laughter turns to tears but it is always healing. We share how a song can bring back memories and how we miss our loved ones. We share how we have come to accept the harsh realities of our experiences

Our Survivors of Suicide group has taught us some valuable lessons. If you want to get busy living you cannot do it alone. We will explore in Chapter 4.5 where to get further help and conclude this traumatic topic in Chapter 4.6 with a summary.

4.4 Small group therapy.

The question to ask is what can be done therapeutically in a small group?

One model the author is interested in, is the model of the good shepherd shared

by Gerkin. He says **“Pastoral care is a way to bring about hope in a persons life when severe trauma like the loss of the loved one to suicide occurs. When a sheep knows it is protected by the shepherd, it has somewhere to go for help, someone to talk to, share with and cry out to.”** (Gerkin 1997:37)

Let's have a biblical analysis of what a shepherd does. He guides his flock to good pastures and safe resting places (Psalm 23). He feeds the sheep and provides for all their needs (Isaiah 40:11). He guards his flock and protects them from wild animals (Psalm 23) . He searches for those who get lost (Matt 18:12). He knows each sheep (John 10:1-4). He tends to those that are sick and weakly (Gen 33:13). Being a shepherd means taking a deep personal interest in the welfare of the flock (Taylor 1998:9)

The work of the leaders in the early church was modeled on this pattern. They fed them with Christian truths, protecting them from wrong teachings, they cared for the needy and distressed, they encouraged those who had lost hope, (Acts 20:28-31) the church can learn from this model we see in Acts chapter 2. The model the author has developed is totally based on the model of the church in Acts 2 church. Small wounded groups helping one another.

The author thinks that one of the most important things in helping other to attain hope in their lives is to show them acceptance. “I accept you.” “I am a sinner like you struggling to understand my situation.” Using a Christ like model of respect, honesty and hopeful expectation (Taylor 1998:99) when one sees how Jesus accepted people in scripture it always leads to hope. He saves a woman from being stoned. He challenges her to a new style of living and by so doing he gives her hope. Jesus approaches Zaccheus, but wants to help him straighten out his life. Zaccheus was a selfish, bitter and lonely man. Jesus offers him acceptance and friendship. Jesus didn't support Zaccheus's selfish lifestyle or his unjust business methods but through his acceptance hope is offered (Taylor

1998:100) Acceptance to those who have lost loved ones through suicide is so important. Kubler-Ross touches on acceptance as being the final stage that we go through when experiencing trauma. This is an important part of dealing with life, especially when faced with trauma.

We don't agree with what the deceased has done, but we offer hope to those who have to carry on without their loved ones. We tend those who are hurting – we listen to them, we cry with them showing them that we care and we journey with them. After acceptance comes awareness and understanding our next step in moving towards hope. Kubler-Ross's methodology was very helpful as we therapeutically strived to nurture one another to recovery. In 4.4.2 we explore Kubler-Ross and the various stages of recovery as experienced by a small group.

4.4.1 Exploring Small Groups using the methodology of Kubler-Ross

The author started a self help group modeled on Alcoholic Anonymous. We called it Survivors of Suicide group. Each person in the group has experienced suicide first hand through a husband, a father or a brother or a son etc. It is interesting to note that all the folk the author worked with lost either a husband, a father or a brother and all the deaths were violent. More men succeed in committing suicide and one of the reasons is that males tend to use more violent methods when killing themselves by means of gun, hanging or suffocation. Women tend to overdose themselves with pills. The average rate of suicide in South Africa is 19 per 100 000 as per the global average of 16 per 100 000.

Professor Schlebusch says that in South Africa today there is one fatal suicide and twenty attempted suicides every hour. It is quite interesting that there is an increase in attempted suicides among black teenagers especially between the

ages of 10 – 19, a huge factor being academic difficulties and problems with conflict resolution. (The Citizen 14th September 2005: “Teenage suicide is on the increase in South Africa”) The author also had a woman who was suicidal yet managed to pull herself out of her depression and lives a very fulfilling life now, heavily involved with the community at many different levels. She was extremely helpful to other members of the Survivors of Suicide group including myself as to what goes through a suicidal persons mind.

Being someone who experienced suicide myself the author focused on questions that he was asking himself at the discovering of this trauma. How did I move on with my life? What questions do I still find myself asking? When does humour help me journey on with my life? How long do we grieve for? Why do our emotions go on such a roller coaster ride? As we look back on our journey, what helped us? For the sake of confidentiality the author has called my team subject 1, subject 2 etc.

The author spoke earlier of the shepherd model but feels that the A.A. model is very similar. We share together our struggles, pains, hurts and fears and through this we remain a part of the flock journeying together through our stories and experiences.

Survivors of Suicide are a group that meets regularly and we have established safety amongst one another. Something Herman says is crucial in chapter 8 of her book – Trauma and Recovery. Establishing safety is essential in journeying from trauma to recovery. Herman says that “**recovery unfolds in three stages – first stage – safety – 2nd stage – remembrance and mourning – 3rd stage – reconnection with ordinary life**”. (Herman 1992:155)

How did we establish safety in our Survivors of suicide group? Herman says there is no single course of recovery and that therapists and patients found

themselves becoming discouraged when issues they thought were put to rest reappeared. Herman says **“that recovery is like a spiral in which earlier issues are continually revisited. In the course of a successful recovery, it should be possible to recognize a gradual shift from unpredictable danger to reliable safety from dissociated trauma to acknowledged memory and from stigmatized isolation to restores social connection”** (Herman 1992:155)

4.5 Summary.

Important information about human beings is this. Once we have suffered the scars of trauma we need once again to feel good about ourselves. We need to get our self esteem back. We all struggled with emptiness when we experienced the trauma of losing a loved one due to suicide. All of us experience inner difficulties and as suicide survivors we have also experienced the immeasurable pain of grief and loss.

We knew as we came together that we were not just going to snap out of it but we were going to be on a journey that was going to lead us to hope and wholeness once again. The community of our Survivors of Suicide group was a life saver, in that it gave us opportunity to ask the questions we would normally have asked and this lead us to hope.

In the following chapter the author wants to explore the healing power of humour and how it can be used to move us from a place of hopelessness to a place of healing. One thing we did discover was that our Christian faith helped us hang on. We were challenged as Trevor Hudson said **“to never ever give up on life. When we do or if we do, we go against God’s will.”** (Hudson 2000:164)

Larry Crabb in his book “Connecting” says that **“helping our fellow travelers**

over the rough spots on our way is one of the God ordained tasks and joys. There is a power within the life of every Christian waiting to be released-a power that can lead to deeper and further change.” (Crabb 1997:36) In small groups we connect with the hearts and souls of other people. Crabb asks **“Why are we afraid to connect with others.”** (Crabb 1997:1) The author agrees with this statement in that we need to be free to be ourselves and we need to know others as we want to be known. When we can be transparent with one another not fearing judgement, we can experience true healing.

The author found a prayer that seems to be very close to many who suffer with suicidal thoughts but realized too that this prayer is for all people. This part of a prayer by Trevor Hudson shares deeply about the pain and suffering we experience.

Lord, sometimes it gets very dark in my life
When this happens everything seems to be an effort,
Everything is difficult and I often want to give up.
Please give me strength to hang on in these moments.
Help me not give in to the difficulties I face.
Rather may I do something creative, reach out
To others and stay close to you.
Amen (Hudson 2000:167)

This work that the author is doing is to help suicide survivors and the church minister to those who want to move on with their lives just like I did. If the author never experienced this trauma, perhaps no good could have come out of this process. The author thinks when we always strive to make a difference to others around us, then we experience the community that God wants us to be a part of. When there is community, there is connection, when there is a connection, there is healing, and where there is healing there is recovery.

Chapter 5 – Humour, a gift for healing.

5.1 The achievement of this study.

With any study that one participates in there is purpose and a realistic goal. The goal of this study is to help S.O.S (Survivors of Suicide) move on with their lives. We don't move on by procrastinating and putting things off, but we move on by confronting our fears, hurts and misunderstandings head on.

The aim of this study is to help those who are left behind in order to deal with the harsh reality that our loved ones, who committed suicide, are not coming back. This is a hard pill to swallow. A part of us does not want to accept that our loved ones are not coming back. There is a child like hope that refuses to believe that they are gone for good. The poem that follows helped our group, especially when we read it together as we struggled through our trauma.

As I grow old

You lost your loved one to suicide one day
Now your friends seem to look the other way
They don't understand what you now feel
You just wish that this wasn't real
The trauma and heartbreak that tears you apart
Down to the soul and your now broken heart
There are things we took for granted suddenly don't matter
Not even the gossip or peoples idle chatter
The questions abound deep in your head
What did I miss and why are they dead
Nothing makes sense as you wrack your mind
You weren't prepared for what you would find
Now that it has happened your mind is confused
Your heart now broken and severely bruised

You wonder how you will ever survive, each day
You awake you are still alive keep them alive
With the memories in your heart.
For that is where they will always be a part
Time will heal your wounds this I am told,
You will remain in my heart as I grow old
Then one day when my time is through,
We will meet again just me and you

(Anonymous) (Source unknown: the poem was given to the author by a friend from overseas)

We chose this poem as a group because it clearly was written by someone who had experienced the pain and trauma of suicide. The words connected to the group in a powerful way and brought healing to our shattered worlds. When one sings an old hymn like Amazing Grace at a funeral, it has a mysterious way of bringing comfort. The above poem had the same mysterious effect on our group.

When analysing issues of suicide those who have done research in this field will want to have some contribution to society through sharing their own personal experiences. The aim of the research through what I have discovered and written is to help other people who have lost loved ones due to suicide. One will always have questions as to why our loved ones did what they did and we will always feel guilt as to why we didn't stop to take notice of their cries for help. Looking back at our family I can say that we were too busy to stop and say 'Hey Dad, do you want to chat, Are you okay?' We were too busy with our own issues and neglected to take notice of him and his pain.

My dad was not the kind of person who would share easily but the author must say that when we heard what he had done, we were shocked and stunned. We couldn't believe it, not our dad. Kubler-Ross calls this denial, one of the five stages we go through when trauma knocks on our door. He seemed to be such a happy person who was always making other people laugh. Lots of people who met him could not believe it either.

The aim of this research is to help others deal with suicide and deal with their lives. Johnson suggests a way of dealing with suicide. She says "**They have to learn to laugh in the face of adversity, not as a form of denial but as a proven tool for managing stress, coping with pain and maintaining hope.**" (Johnson 1994:181) It is the authors hope that this study will achieve a process of healing to those who are experiencing pain. Herman goes on to say that "**Humour is a saving grace and it helps us down the road to positive**

living.” (Herman 1992:153)

As human beings move from pain to hope, from trauma to recovery, from victim to survivor, there is healing and hope. (Herman 1992:98). We were not created to be unhappy creatures. We have been given one another to help with the struggles that life throws at us. This study aims at answering “the how to move on with our lives when trauma strikes”.

My model the S.O.S. (Survivors of Suicide) model had the sole aim of working towards possible solutions to the pain left behind through the trauma of suicide. Spiritual resources like prayer and biblical promises and fellowship with one another helped in relieving the anxiety but not the deep pain and stress that accompanied us after the burial. We also received help and encouragement from each other and this helped us put possible solutions into action, like phoning anytime, knowing there is always someone to talk to. Our mending process was long and difficult but the S.O.S (Survivors of Suicide) group got each of us on our feet again and helped us to walk by ourselves. Sometimes members of our group fall into any of the five stages Kubler-Ross describes in her book “On Death and Dying” (Kubler-Ross 1969:10), but we are there to carry each other. It certainly depends from member to member in the Survivors of Suicide group into what stage they can fall again. Some struggled with denial, while others struggled with anger upon hearing of someone else who had committed suicide. People react differently to trauma and the same can certainly be said of what stages they fall into if they do again. All of us went through the five stages described by Kubler-Ross but not all of us went through each stage again. Some struggled with anger again and some others with depression again but the most common stage we all struggled with was depression. However we are moving on with our lives and so the author’s main aim was achieved - healing.

5.2 Some of the challenges the author has encountered

The biggest challenge the author has encountered without doubt through my Survivors of Suicide group was trying to answer the ‘why’ question. No matter how much we grew and healed as a survivor of suicide group member, we all struggled to answer this question. Problems arise in peoples lives because of various issues like money and illnesses (especially AIDS) and stress or depression caused by unemployment, violence in society, crime, socio-economic problems and rape or molestation. These above statements “problems arising in peoples lives because of various conditions of living” help us try and understand the ‘why’ question a little better but as humans we will always struggle with the problem of death.

Professor Schlebusch from the Nelson Mandela School of Medicine says that someone in South Africa commits suicide almost every hour and this is a serious problem as quoted earlier in chapter 4 from a different source. He says that “people are crying out for help and the biggest causes of suicide are loneliness and relationship problems”. Professor Schlebusch has been researching suicide for the last thirty years. (You Magazine 21st of July 2005:10-11). Jorgan Harris, a clinical psychologist says that all human beings at some stage in their lives feel too hopeless and unable to carry on with their lives. (Department of Health – South African National Risk Behaviour Survey 2003). Berent says **“As a cause of death, suicide ranks high - inordinately so among the young for whom life would seem to hold so much”** (Berent 1981:11)

The average age in which people commit suicide is 35 and South Africa as a country has an average suicide rate of 19 per 100 000 compared to the global

average of 16 per 100 000. (The Citizen 14 September 2005:9) We are the highest suicide country.

We see from this section that suicide is a desperate cry for help and in our next section we will look at practical solutions to this problem

5.3 Solutions to the despair

Despair seems to have a way of forcing humanity to cry out to a creator. We groan with the struggles of our trauma and cry out for a saviour. As a Survivors of Suicide group we turned to the bible in our despair as a search for answers that will guide us through our trauma. The first passage we dealt with was the following:

“And these three remain, faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13)

Losing a loved one through suicide is traumatic; a solution is to once again be able to move along with your life. There has to be acceptance before we can work on solutions. The Survivors of Suicide Group had all reached the stage of acceptance and now were ready to work on solutions. The living cannot simply stop living because of the trauma caused by someone we love. This takes a lot of faith, hope and love which we will deal with in 5.3.1, 5.3.3 and 5.3.4 respectively.

We need to keep going on with life and a ‘how’ to keep going is the solution we want. Acceptance is extremely important for those who are left behind. A Mrs G who was coming to terms with her husband’s chronic illness says. **“I have learned to depend and live one day at a time. We have today but we may not have tomorrow.”**(Kubler-Ross 1969:143) This process connects us to faith issues.

5.3.1 Faith

The first solution to this despair that I would like to explore is faith. A Danish proverb describes faith in the following way. **"Faith is like a little bird that sings before sunrise. It sings while it is still dark but it knows that the sun will rise.** (Hewlett (ed) 1988:45) The author agrees with this description of faith, as it is hard to describe something we cannot see. Devoted nurses who see death daily, regardless of the fact that hope was dim said "faith in God has a lot to do with the fact that the dying fight and don't just give up."(Kubler-Ross 1969:143)

One of the greatest tragedy's ever faced by humanity was the Holocaust. How did people cope and develop faith when God seemed to have forsaken them? At an abandoned house, almost a heap of rubble, searchers with flashlights found their way to a basement and there on a crumbling wall, a victim of the holocaust had scratched a Star of David. The message read:

I believe in the sun even when it does not shine

I believe in love even when it is not shown

I believe in God even when he does not speak.

(Hewett (ed) 1988:186)

As the above poem explores issues of faith we can not see, it is not seeing to believe but, believing to see. (Hewett (ed) 1988:186). Martin Luther said of faith" **The righteousness of God is revealed through the Gospel and a righteous person lives by a gift of God, which is by faith.**"(Blankman 2002:15)

We agreed as a group that faith in God had helped us to deal with our pain. Trauma has a way of forcing us to look beyond our everyday experiences. Death's painful sting forces one to question the meaning of life and wrestle with painful realities, but we keep going. Life goes on but it sure seems easier with faith. The ultimate solution to the despair of losing a loved one through suicide is that we learn to once again after grieving, take time to play, relax, have fun

and laugh.

Once again being able to laugh connects us with Kubler-Ross's 5th stage namely acceptance. When we can laugh again it is as if we have accepted finally, the reality of the trauma we have experienced and let it go. If we could summarise this whole chapter in one word it would be 'healing'. Our Survivors of Suicide Group had journeyed through the suffering of pain and guilt and in our next section 5.3.2 we will look at laughter and humour as therapeutic issues.

“A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.”(Proverbs 17:22 NIV)

5.3.2 Laughter

Healthy laughter is good for the soul as well as for the body. Laughter is not good when it is used to cover up problems, inner turmoil or insecurities, it should not be used as a scapegoat. Laughter brings healing and it makes us feel good and helps us for a brief moment to forget all our pains and hurts. (Herman 1992:120) Dick Innes says that **“Our suffering should never be wasted and we should use what you have learned as you reach out from your heart and pull others along.”** (Johnson 1994:95)

A poem by Dick Innes describes accurately the dangers of wasting your pain.

**Please grant that I shall never waste my pain, for to fail without learning
To fall without getting up, to sin without overcoming,
To be hurt without forgiving, to be discontent without improving
To be crushed without becoming more caring, to suffer without growing
more sensitive, makes of suffering a senseless futile exercise, a tragic loss
and of pain the greatest waste of all. (Johnson 1994:95)**

The group as it met explored and discussed different issues affecting the families who had experienced suicide. At times we explored pain and shared openly and honestly about our feelings. At other times we read poems and literature relating to suicide. As a group we decided that the above poem was extremely accurate in what it said. We could see the pointlessness in being hurt without forgiving. We forgave our loved ones and as we shared our experiences it was like a healing balm to one another. Scripture reminds us that as we refresh one another we too are refreshed. (Proverbs 11:25 NIV) Our Survivors Of Suicide Group was a support group and it brought to each of her members a journey and experience of healing. This is what group therapy does according to Judith Herman in her book 'Trauma and Recovery' (Herman1992:186-187, 224)

Time helped us laugh again and friendships were doubled and sorrows were divided. We didn't deny reality, the first stage of Kubler-Ross in her grieving process, but once we grieved, and the grief was faced we started looking for the humorous side of things. Barbara Johnson says that "**Tears begin the healing process, and laughter propels it along.**" (Johnson 1994:3)

Pain without doubt is diluted when we see the humour in life. The author remembers sharing a story to our group about my dad. It was a humorous story and our group burst out laughing. This was one example of how we gained hope and encouragement through the power of humour.

So what is humour and laughter? Humour according to Lefcourt and Martin is a human beings antidote to adversity and helps us cope with life's stress

(Lefcourt, Martin (eds) 1986:32) Laughter according to Latta is a basic human survival mechanism and really is the best medicine for trauma (Latta 1998:22) Doctors are agreeing that people need to laugh more. Those who laugh more live longer. (Johnson 1994:9).

Physically laughter increases your breathing rate, which automatically increases the amount of oxygen in your blood. (Johnson 1994:11) and it is good for your mental health too. We should learn to laugh at our embarrassing moments in life. When we share embarrassing moments in life, yes, even shocking things like suicide, it achieves two things according to Johnson, imperfections and ways to find things to laugh about.

Imperfections are admitted which helps others draw closer to us, and it is a great way to find things to laugh about (Johnson 1994:12)

Laughter and humour have a way of unglueing us. Human beings are way too uptight and on edge. This thesis came about because the author wanted to explore the awesomeness of humour. He had experienced how humour had set him free and wanted others to discover this God given gift. Through Humour we will now explore our next important solution to our despair of surviving suicide trauma and that is hope.

5.3.3 Hope

The author thinks that one type of hope Survivors of Suicide often struggle with is the hope that those who have died are coming back. We look for them in places such as psychics and spiritualists, John Edwards and his television show: Crossing Over.

One of my members Mrs R said “every time the gate opened at home I kept

thinking it might be him coming home. Dealing with memories I kept hoping and praying that there had been some big mistake and he was home.” ’A big reality check for me was having to go and identify his body at the morgue. When I saw him I knew it was real and he wasn’t coming back, not in this life anyway. I hope to see him in the next. I will kick his arse when I see him again.” (The group breaks out into fits of laughter)

Hope is what keeps human beings going when we don’t want to anymore. Kubler-Ross says this about hope when people deal with diseases like cancer, **“You have to be lucky’, meaning they maintain the hope that there will be another remission, they hope that some cure may be found, they maintain this hope to the very last day.** (Kubler-Ross 1969:164)

Paul also has a great teaching on hope. He says, **“Not all of us will die, we will be transformed from earthly bodies into heavenly bodies.”** (I Corinthians 15:51,52 NLT)

“When Christ returns we will all be given new bodies and they will be without disability, never to die or become sick. This can give us hope in our suffering In our next section we will deal with love and here Paul once again combines the three ‘faith, hope and love’. He says that **“love never loses faith and is always hopeful”**. (1 Corinthians 13:7)

5.3.4 Love

“Love never gives up and its faith, hope and patience never fail.” (1Corinthians 13:7 TEV) The author wonders if someone were to try and give a scientific explanation of love what they would say. How does one try and analyse a feeling that is so powerful, a feeling that can literally change the world. Human beings write and dream and speak about love in ways that move nations but the above translation of love is a good description of what love is. Paul wanted the church to be a loving organisation and wanted her members to be loving. The church has failed in many ways.

Love involves unselfish service to others. To show love, gives evidence that you care. Faith is the foundation and content of God's message, hope is the attitude and focus and love is the action. Love is the greatest of all human qualities and is an attribute of God himself (Life Application Study Bible 1988:1823) 1 John 4:8 says **"Anyone that does not love does not know God –for God is love."** Our world with its shallow and selfish view of love has contaminated our understanding of love. Hollywood has a lot to do with that- It portrays love as something that makes a person feel good. Love is a feeling but in reality it is actually a choice and an action. There is a lovely saying that says "you can give without loving but you cannot love without giving.

John Ortberg in his book titled "Love beyond reason" says that **"as human beings we may be unlovely but we are not unloved"**. (Ortberg 1998:15) Jesus mentioned two commandments one from Deuteronomy 6:5 and the other from Leviticus 19:18. Both the commandments had to do with love and so the author is found asking himself this question "why is love so important?" Jesus said all of the commandments were given for two simple reasons, to help us love God and love others as we should. (Life Application Study Bible NLT 1988:1513)

The author truly agrees from his experience of the Survivor of Suicide Group that love for one another and a belief in a higher power is what keeps human beings moving on with their lives with purpose and meaning. We were created out of love and it is what we were created to do.

Summary

The aim of this chapter was once again to help those who are left behind face their fears, hurts and misunderstandings head on. By facing our hurts we begin the process of healing which means that we are at the acceptance stage. The

Survivors of Suicide Group had a sole aim and that was to find a solution to the pain that is left behind when we lose a loved one to suicide. The author looked at the various challenges that was encountered by the group like answering the “Why?” question and as a group came to realise that we couldn’t. Death is a problem for the living; it always has been and always will be.

We looked at some of the biblical solutions to our despair like faith, hope and love and asked the question of how it could be applied into our lives. Faith as Kubler-Ross noted, “ **helped the dying fight and not just give up**”. (Kubler-Ross 1969:143) We also looked at hope and how without it, human beings give up, but, when they have it they fight to the very last. “**They hope some cure may be found, they maintain this hope to the very last day.**” (Kubler-Ross 1969:164)

We also explored how Paul linked the three aspects of faith, hope and love in 1 Corinthians 13. Love according to John, is God and “**God is love**”. (1 John 4:8) The whole message of the bible is one of a love that a living God has for the creatures that he has created. We realise that love is important to God and to each other. It involves unselfish service to others. The author noted from his small group experience that love for one another and belief in a higher power is what keeps us moving on with our lives with purpose and meaning.

Laughter was also explored and it was discovered that it was hugely beneficial in the healing of each other.

In chapter 6 the author will design a liturgy for the burial of people who committed suicide as a way of ministering and caring for those who are left behind. The issue of suicide is a challenge to churches and pastoral care givers. In many cases the church still refuses to bury people who have committed suicide.

Pastors are free to use this liturgy in a funeral service. The author feels that many pastors have a very uncompassionate response to suicide and even experienced fellow pastors at a contact week in Alexandra in 2005 saying very

hurtful things like “Those who commit suicide are cowards.”

Through this thesis it has been a goal of the author to help the church start loving and stop judging those lost, and those who are left behind. The church needs to start practising what we preach and stop the grudges and divisions that we have among ourselves. We are The Body of Christ and that means we should start being Christlike.

Conclusion

Chapter 6

6.1 The Church and her role regarding liturgies and pro-active work towards suicide survivors

As we summarise the findings of this thesis we started with the hope that the author's experience of suicide and his personal journey could be used as a tool by others. We noted in chapter 1 that life has to go on regardless of how difficult a situation we had been through. The hope was, that, a practical model could be developed and used by the church in any context, like the Alcoholics Anonymous model but instead of using the twelve step programme our group used the Kubler-Ross stages. The church should be a place of healing and renewal that cares for people who have been through traumatic experiences. The local church has to once again get her hands dirty and stop pretending that everything is okay.

A shepherd has to be practical to those in need (Campbell 1986:37) The challenge from chapter 1 was that the church had to once again become a place of healing, restoration and renewal to those who have lost loved ones to suicide. In chapter two the church and her members had to wrestle with the age old question of, "Where is God when it is painful"? The Good News of The Gospel and of Jesus Christ is that we are never alone in our journey. There are always others going through the same pain and struggles as the author.

We discovered that, what, is frightening is how many people hide their pain through their laughter. Qualitative research tries to understand the meaning of the experience being observed or studied. We discovered that alcohol and substance abuse were big contributing factors to depression which was a major struggle for suicide victims.

The church had a major role to play in helping those who suffer from depression and if the church couldn't help like in extreme cases for example, Bipolar, ensure that professional help was made available. In Chapter three we explored small group therapy. We used the Kubler-Ross Methodology and found it extremely accurate in our contexts. The Survivors of Suicide Group found the various stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance extremely helpful. We wanted to apply Kubler-Ross's stages in a meaningful way that would lead the group to full recovery. As noted the author on page 56 says **"We have dealt with difficult issues in this chapter."**

A great way to deal with trauma is through the relationships we develop in our small support groups. **Interactions with people influences our moods and attitudes and making contact with people can make us feel better and more energized. (Ortberg 2003:117)** As a small group we struggled to forgive our loved ones but there can be no healing without the crucial element of forgiveness. Chapter three showed as individuals that we have worth and as human beings when we wrestle with our pain and from that experience try and help others, we receive incredible healing.

What to do now? is something the church has to be prepared for. Philip Yancey in his book titled, Church: Why Bother, quotes a saying by J F Powers, **'The Church is a big old ship, she creaks, she rocks, she rolls and at times she makes you want to throw up. But she gets where she's going. Always has, always will, until the end of time. With or without you (Yancey 1998:17)**

The Church is an imperfect place run by imperfect people that exists for the hurting. Paul Tournier says **"The church has a vital, necessary role to play. We are God's new community on earth. (Yancey 1998:37)**

That is why the Church has to be equipped to deal with the issues of the day. Suicide is not a new issue. We read of Jesus' disciple, Judas committing suicide

after he betrayed Jesus (Matthew 27:5).

Yet the church has certainly been slow in showing compassion to those who are left behind. Perhaps this research can aid in changing that. In chapter four we looked at how the church could now move people from traumatic experiences to hope through having a reason to live. How does the church help those who carry the scars of traumatic experiences like suicide, once again feel good about themselves and realise that God can work through what they have been through. The Church has to once again connect with others. Larry Crabb asks the question, **“Why are we afraid to connect with others?” (Crabb 1997:1)** It must be that people after being hurt a number of times are not quick to trust others with their personal stories of pain. In groups however trust is once again restored and people regain their sense of being pilgrims on a journey together.

Chapter four looked at the way the church and the author could help others move on with their lives. Community, which is what the church should be about, leads to connection which leads to healing which leads to recovery. Chapter five looked at what this study achieved as far as hope, love and faith was concerned.

As we conclude this study and move on as the beginning of a new era in terms of church liturgies regarding untouchable issues like suicide we see that the church can well become a place of healing and can touch the loves of those experiencing this trauma. Here are some of the concerns this research highlighted.

1. The church and her members need to stop avoiding the harsh realities of issues like suicide. It is time to be compassionate, committed and ready and equipped to deal with this trauma.

2. The church is called to wrestle with tough issues of the day like abortion, suicide, rape, AIDS, alcoholism, poverty and any other traumatic experience that face humanity on a daily basis.

3. Small Group Therapy is not new. Jesus modelled small groups over two thousand years ago and they literally changed the world. We see in a simple group like Alcoholics Anonymous how effective they can be. They rebuild lives and help people deal with their problems head on.

4. In a society of incredible technology we find ourselves having more and more problems. The church has failed to keep up to date with many of the issues of the day. We are uncomfortable with squatter camps, illegal immigrants, AIDS, crime and one of the most destructive forces of our day, depression.

5. Many issues that the church has avoided over the years have to be dealt with. It is through the dealing of issues that we find solutions and they take time. There is no quick fix.

6. The Christian faith has a truth that is not found in other religions. We have the Holy Spirit who guides, leads, heals and assures us of the truth. As the church we are not called to always be successful and always have the answers. We are called to be faithful. We are never alone.

We will now design liturgy for those who need the church to be a place of healing.

Liturgy

In this closing chapter it was the author's intention to design a liturgy that could be used by those who have lost loved ones to suicide in a therapeutic way. It was made clear from the start of the Survivors of Suicide Group that it was a Christian Recovery Group. This does not mean that other groups cannot apply this liturgy to their context but that the author makes no apology for having Christ at the centre of this particular group.

Clearly by the time this liturgy had been drawn up the members of the Survivors of Suicide Group had worked through the Kubler-Ross stages of Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and finally acceptance. As healing is a process, the liturgy could only be written after each member had worked through the above named stages. This whole thesis was based on the Kubler-Ross methodology and as a contribution to her final stage of acceptance the author wrote this liturgy.

Liturgy

"I am the resurrection and the life," says the Lord. "Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted

God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in times of trouble

Let us pray:

Lord through Jesus we see your love and commitment to us your creation. We see that you are involved in the affairs of your people. You repeatedly reveal, renew, restore. God you are our refuge and our strength, a helper close at hand in times of trouble. Enable us to hear your word of death overcome and life renewed that as we face the mystery of death we may see your eternal light Through our risen saviour Jesus Christ.

We meet in this solemn moment to worship God and give thanks for the life of our brother/sister.

We commend them to God's care and pray for those who mourn.

Christ offers us sure ground for hope, confidence and even joy.

He overcame death, and was raised again triumphant

He lives forevermore

In him his people find eternal life

Let us then hear the words of Holy Scripture that from them we may draw comfort and strength.

Psalm 23 –The Message

God, my shepherd

I don't need a thing.

You have bedded me down in lush meadows,

You find me quiet pools to drink from.

True to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction.

Even when the way goes through Death Valley,

I'm not afraid when you walk at my side.

Your Trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure
You serve me a six course dinner right in front of my enemies.
You revive my drooping head, my cup brims with blessing
Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life
I'm back home in the house of God
For the rest of my life. (Peterson 2003: 924)

John 14:1-6, 27

Jesus said: Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God and believe also in me. In my fathers house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and I will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going?

Thomas said to him, "Lord we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way? Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, do not let them be afraid.' (New Revised Standard version of the Bible – Anglicized edition 1989)

Romans 8:28, 31b-35, 37-39

We know that all things work together for good those who love God, who are called accordingly to his purpose.

If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who

will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation (**including suicide**), will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(New Revised Standard version of the Bible – Anglicized edition 1989)

You heal the broken hearted including Survivors of Suicide. You remember us your creatures who feel angry, depressed, alone, unloved, neglected, abused, in denial.

Help us Oh Lord to acknowledge your presence

Let us pray:

Glory and thanks be given to You Almighty God our Father.

You gave your Son to be our Saviour.

He lived our life, bore our griefs, and died our death.

He has conquered sin and death, and He has opened the kingdom to all believers.

We thank you for your full, perfect and sufficient gift of life in Christ,

All praise and thanks be given to You. Amen.

Eternal God, in your wisdom and grace, You have given us joy.

Through the lives of your departed servants.

We thank You for our brother/sister
And for our memories of her/him

We praise You for your goodness and mercy that followed them all the days of
their lives.

We thank You for that brother/sister
The tribulations of this world are over, and death is past.

We pray that You will bring us with them
To the joy of your perfect Kingdom through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty God
Father of all mercies and giver of all comfort,
Deal graciously with those who mourn,
That they may cast every care on You,
And know the consolation of your love,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord

We remember the ones we love yet see no more. Remind us when we fear for
them.

- You are a fair God
- You are a loving God
- You are with us always
- You walk with us through the darkest valley
- Even when you see us contemplating self destruction – you never stop
loving us.

Amen

Hymn

Committal

All stand. The Minister says:
Since the earthly life of brother/sister has come to an end
We commit their body
Earth to earth
Ashes to ashes

Dust to dust

In sure and certain hope
Of the resurrection to eternal life
Through our Lord Jesus Christ,
To whom be the glory
For ever and ever
Amen

Closing prayer:

Help us Oh Lord to depend on your guidance

Give us strength to go on with our lives.
Give us Guidance.
Give us healing.
We pray for those whom we love, but see no longer.
Grant them your peace
Let your light shine on them
In Your loving wisdom and almighty power
Work in them the good purpose of your perfect will
You have made nothing in vain,
And you love all that you have made
Help them to find in You, their refuge and their strength
Help those of us left behind
To carry on
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The Minister says:

God grant to the living, grace
To the departed, rest

To the world, peace

You know how we long to see our husbands, wives, fathers, mother, sisters and brothers again. We long to hold on to them and pray we could turn back the clock. We long to see them and tell them of our love. We wrestle with the silence. We experience a Labyrinth of emotions. We hide our pain. Be strong – says the world and get on with your life – we don't care. Be weak says the Lord – in your weakness I am strong.

For some your silence is too much, they seek answers elsewhere. Can you be human and not be curious about where the dead Go? Does anyone know?

Very few have come back. Only one we can really trust. Still our world wants proof, too many discrepancies she cries. Science shouts – give me proof! Love divine – all loves excelling. Joy of Heaven to earth come down. Nkosi Yam, Ubundithanda ekulahlekeni, kwam

Closing prayer

Thank you Jesus that nothing can separate us from you love, not even suicide

Thank you Holy Spirit that you fight for us your sinful children, you never let us go

Teach us to be your hands to those who have also lost loved ones to suicide

With all of life's pains and hurts and struggles we rejoice, we are never alone

You will never forsake us or neglect us, you hear our cries

Oh God you hear our cries –Our Lord Come-Maranatha-Our Lord come soon.

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