



WHEN
LIVING
FEELS
HOPELESS

*A Pastoral and Clinical Response
for Those Struggling with Suicide*

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 **PETRA** Media

Foreward

Following are some helpful thoughts from three people who have counseled and walked with those who have struggled with suicidal thoughts and attempts. You will find help and encouragement in what they have to say.

At the end of the booklet is contact information for counseling that is available to help you. You don't have to go through this struggle alone. There is also a section in the addendum of encouraging things God says in the Bible for those who are struggling.

About the Writers

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Candace Gudgeon – M.S. – Candace graduated with her undergraduate degree in Psychology from the University of Valley Forge in 2017. She has earned her master's degree and is working towards her LPC at Cairn University. She dreams of opening her own counseling practice with a focus on women and marriages.

Lester Zimmerman

I am so glad this booklet found its way into your hands. Either you picked this up or it was given to you because you have contemplated suicide or have tried to end your life. You might be surprised to know that many people have struggled with thoughts of suicide at one time or another. You are not alone in this struggle.

Life sometimes feels overwhelming, and we think there is no way out. We just want the pain to stop and the depression, anguish, despair, and torment to go away. Maybe we think no one really cares or understands. We feel trapped and hopeless.

There are many reasons people think of suicide, such as bullying in school, difficult relationships, abuse, confused sexuality, financial issues, health issues, addictions, and PTSD.

Sometimes there is no rational reason we can identify. We just feel depressed and overwhelmed with life. Our mind seems stuck, and we can't get out of the cycle of dark thoughts and hopeless feelings.

Sometimes the suicide of a close friend, family member, or relative feeds these thoughts of suicide to where it becomes an obsessive thought we can't seem to get out of our head. Suicide begins to look like a good option the more we dwell on it.

Sometimes we come to the point of desperation and feel like a person who is drowning. It's hard to keep breathing and to keep struggling to live another day. The thoughts of suicide keep pulling us. We can't seem to stop the thoughts, and we feel we can't take it anymore.

If any of this describes you, there is hope! Many people have walked this deep valley of despair and come out to a healthy place where the thoughts of suicide are gone, and life becomes easier to manage. The darkness gives way to new light and hope. Just like a new day comes after every night. The sun will shine again in your life if you don't give up.

There is hope for your tomorrow. Suicide might seem like an attractive alternative at the moment, but it really is not the answer. There is a better way to deal with the pain and find the freedom you long for.

When we find ourselves in a place of dark depression, the feeling of hopelessness begins to warp our thinking process. We are unable to see other options, and we begin to believe that the thoughts in our head are true when in fact they are the voice of our depression and not the voice of reality. We need other people to help us decipher these voices and messages in our head that we have come to believe. Here are some common lies our depression tries to make us believe.

Lie: *“No one understands”* – **Truth:** There are people who want to understand and will, if you allow them to get close and help you.

Lie: *“Everyone is against me”* – **Truth:** Is it really everyone? Maybe it's time to find a new set of friends who accept you for who you are. The most important person is standing with you, and is for you – God. He says he is for you and has a hope and future planned for you.

Lie: *“There is no hope”* – **Truth:** You may honestly feel this way, but it is not true. You may feel totally hopeless, but the truth is that there is always hope. There are always more options and alternatives. There are other ways to find

freedom from the pain and overwhelming feeling of hopelessness as you find a purpose to live for.

Lie: *“People will be better off without me”* – **Truth:** This is not true. A thousand times no. You will be increasing their pain and hardship. People would much rather walk with you in your struggle than walk through the heartbreak and aftermath of your suicide.

Lie: *“No one really loves me”* – **Truth:** I don’t know your situation, but usually there is a parent or loved one who loves you dearly. You may have been betrayed or hurt deeply by people close to you, but that doesn’t mean you are not loved or valued. There are people around you who truly love you, even if they don’t express it very well at times.

No matter what you have done or struggle with, every single person is of great worth and value because they are created by God and loved by God. I don’t know if you are a person of faith, but there is one person who loves you unconditionally. His name is Jesus. He loves you so much that he overcame death so you can find the freedom you long for. You are loved! You are valuable! More than you will ever know. If you would like to know more about Jesus, and how to find the freedom he brings, you can contact us at the address at the end of this booklet.

For some, the thought of heaven seems like an escape from the present pain and trouble. But God does not give us the choice of taking our own life. Instead, he has promised to help us become overcomers. The pain in your life right now may seem overwhelming, but even in our pain, God is working out his purposes. God is with you and will help you.

There is support available for those who are feeling overwhelmed with life. You are not alone, even though you

feel desperately alone at times. Allow people to come around you and help you. Please find a counselor as soon as possible.

I know people battling depression often deal with shame but there should be no shame for having bodies or minds where the chemicals get out of balance, which is completely out of your control, but can be treated. Depression is very real, and many people battle it to varying degrees.

I strongly encourage you to consider taking medication as part of the battle against depression and your suicidal thoughts. Medication is a gift from God. Whether it is insulin to balance your blood sugar from diabetes or a medication to balance a chemical imbalance in your brain, it helps life feel more manageable.

Please consider this if you are struggling, even if it is temporary. It is not a lack of faith or unspiritual. It is a gift. There is no shame or weakness in using medication. It is wisdom and strength to do so. It will help you get through this crisis in your life.

In the addendum of this booklet I added an *“Agreement with Life”* paper for you to read and sign with a family member or friend, for accountability. Some people have found this helpful, and it gives them the added strength and resolve to deal with their suicidal urges.

Ben Dodd

If you are struggling with suicidal thoughts or have attempted suicide, we want to help you get started down a path toward healing. This could include things like a plan for better self-care, and connecting with a counselor.

We encourage you to see your doctor to discern if your depression is more biological in nature, and if you would therefore benefit from medication. There could be physical reasons you are feeling so depressed and hopeless, such as an underactive thyroid or low vitamin D levels. Medication can help you function and do life more the way you want to. If someone in your family, like a parent, grandparent, aunt, or uncle has suffered with depression, you might be pre-disposed to similar symptoms biologically.

If you have tried medication and it did not work, don't give up! You might benefit from a different kind of medication that works better for you. Sometimes you have to try a couple until you find the best fit.

It is also important to take into account your environment. Do you live where it is often dreary and rainy? Is your job stressful and thankless? Are your relationships with family and friends strained? Are you eating an unhealthy diet of fast food? Are you always tired because you never get enough sleep? Are you spending a lot of time on social media? These are all important contributors to how you feel about life, and may ultimately warrant a change, such as moving or changing jobs, diet, or going to bed earlier.

In winter time or on long, dreary days, when we don't get as much sunlight, it can affect our mood. Some people have found it helpful to invest in a "Happy Light," or something similar, which is a bright light that mimics natural outdoor

light. (Bed Bath and Beyond offers one for about \$40.)

Other helpful intervention strategies include learning relaxation techniques that calm down your body and help your mind to focus on other things.

People with depression often feel better with regular exercise and spending time out in nature. Exercise is helpful when you get your heart rate up by doing 20 minutes of cardio, because it releases endorphins in your brain that help you feel better.

But the three things that I have found to be the most effective are taking back authority over your thoughts; seeking out one or two safe people you can talk to, (faith-based professional counselors are an excellent choice); and finding a purpose that allows you to get involved and help others in your community.

Discovering purpose often comes from learning about your gifts and abilities and your identity as far as your true source of value and worth.

As far as safe people to talk to, accountability partners can help motivate you to persevere through the tough times and even motivate you to do things like exercise – when you really don't feel like it – by going on a walk with you. The key is to tell others what you need and to be specific. For example, "I am feeling particularly down today and need you to call me tonight around 8:00 and ask me if I am tempted to act on any suicidal thoughts."

Please know that you are not alone. I am writing this to you not only as a licensed professional counselor, but also as someone who's been through it. Earlier in this booklet, Pastor Lester stated that, "Many people have walked this

deep valley of despair and come out to a healthy place where the thoughts of suicide are gone.” That’s my story. These suggestions are both clinically proven, as well as things that I have done and continue to do myself and with the help of others.

Those who are able to grasp onto the concept of a loving God – something bigger than yourself – who cares about you, can have an easier time holding on to hope, because it is not based solely on their own strength to make it through.

Another clinically proven way to feel better is to develop a habit of listing what you are thankful for as soon as you wake up. It literally releases chemicals in your brain that help increase a positive mood or state of mind.

Everyone I have ever met that has contemplated suicide has had to wrestle with the question of how it will affect those around you if you die. The reality is, that in those moments, we are simply not thinking rationally or clearly. We tend to rationalize and minimize our choice in order to justify in our minds that it is right, okay, and maybe even the best thing for everyone. But consider these rationalizations and then the actual truths.

Justification/ Rationalization/ Minimization	Truth
Others will actually be better off without me.	They will suffer immensely for years after.
It won't hurt anybody else.	It tempts others to commit suicide because it makes it seem like a valid choice.
I'm sick and there is no hope.	Embrace the time you have left and pray for healing.
I'm financially broke and can't see a way out.	Life is always worth more than money. A local church or agency might be able to set you up with a financial advisor. Maybe file bankruptcy and start over.
I feel trapped in an abusive relationship and don't know how to get out.	Tell a counselor who can help get you to a safe place.
At least then my family will receive money from my life insurance policy.	Suicide negates life insurance, and your family might actually be more financially burdened.
At least the pain will stop.	We don't actually know what awaits us in the afterlife if we commit suicide.

The truth is, there is always a better way out. You just might need some outside help to see it.

Candace Gudgeon

You're probably reading this booklet because you just wanted the pain to stop. But you're still here, so now what? This booklet gives you some next steps to take as you face a world that you didn't expect to see again. There is no right way that you should feel as you face each day. You may feel afraid of the uncertainty of your future. You may feel angry that your attempt was unsuccessful, and your pain continues. Or you may feel ashamed and like a failure that you were unable to live the life you "should have" lived and now you have found yourself here.

Even now you may be questioning why you are here. After attempting to take your life, it may be confusing to consider what your purpose is now. The answer to this is that you still have a legacy to leave. You were put on this earth for a reason. The impact that you have on your world is greater than you know. In fact, if your suicide had been successful, the people in your life, from family to co-workers, are 50 percent more susceptible to making the same choice. I say this to show you that the choices you make matter.

You have been given a second chance at life. With this second chance you get to harness the impact that you have, and can change your world for the better.

The first thing that you should know is that you will get through this. With support and time, healing is possible. As impossible as it may feel right now, you can feel joy and hope in the future. Your journey is 100 percent your own. As you consider your next steps, be sure to take the time and space that you need as you re-enter life. You do not owe anyone answers that you are not yet comfortable sharing.

Furthermore, feel free to take the time you need to develop self-care habits, a daily schedule, and set in place a strong support system. All of these will be further discussed. As you begin your healing journey, you will be encountering the most damaged parts of your heart and wrestling with them. As you do this, you could benefit from the support of an experienced counselor to guide you through this and lead you to healing. The names of a few counseling resources are included at the end of this booklet.

Support System

In addition to professional support, you will need to have personal support as well. This personal support can be friends, family, or a support group (of people who share your experience with suicidal ideation). Receiving support from people around you will be vital in your healing journey. Having people who can regularly check in on how you are doing will offer you valuable encouragement to keep up with healthy habits. Now you may be thinking, *“I don’t want to be a burden by asking someone to check in on me.”* Let me tell you that you are worth it! Asking someone to support you may feel uncomfortable, but when you partner with someone in your healing journey, you are giving them the opportunity to help carry your burdens.

Take a step of faith and reach out to a friend, family member, or pastor. There are people who love and care about you, so give them a chance to help you through this difficult time.

Daily Schedule

Research shows that people who have a daily schedule that they stick to are less likely to be overwhelmed by stress and are more likely to have a positive outlook on life. Schedules allow you to have a plan in place for what you will do next for each part of your day. This way you always have something to

look forward to, and can defend against feelings of lack of direction on a daily basis. An activity that you may add to your daily schedule is naming the lies that suicide has told you. This habit of identifying lies that you have believed about yourself, such as “I am a burden,” and replacing it with truths such as “I am loved by my family.” You can also replace it with scripture, which reminds us of how much God loves and values us. *1 John 4:16 “We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.” (NLT)*

By starting your day naming the lies that suicide tells you and replacing those lies with truths, you will be equipped with a valuable tool to face your healing journey on a solid foundation each day.

Self-Care

One thing that your life may have lacked before your suicide attempt was opportunities to relax and be joyful. Without activities which offer joy and relaxation, we can develop feelings of hopelessness and a lack of enjoyment in life. So, find an activity you like. Taking care of yourself is an important part of your recovery. Your “self-care” activities can be positive things that make you feel good about life and yourself.

As you face the next steps in your healing journey, self-care activities will be key in giving you an outlet when wrestling with the burdens of life. Self-care can be activities that you enjoy, that relieve stress, and promote a healthy lifestyle. Limit your time of listening to news and being on social media and instead engage in things like reading, listening to positive music, exercising, crafting, puzzles, playing an instrument, walking, hiking, biking, sports, joining a club, volunteering in the community, and serving at church.

Self-care can be an effective alternative to any temptation you may have to self-harm. Before your suicide attempt you may have struggled with self-harm in the form of something such as cutting. Although your previous triggers to self-harm may not have gone away, your reaction to those triggers can change. By identifying your triggers and having self-care habits in place, you can better traverse the ups and downs of life.

What about Everyone Else?

When you come home after your suicide attempt, you will be asked questions from well-meaning friends and family. They may be concerned, curious, and unsure of how to best support you. Before you head back into your society, be sure to think of what you are comfortable sharing with others. It may be best for you to think of a statement to say if they ask you questions you are not comfortable answering. This statement can be something such as *“I appreciate your concern, but I am not ready to talk about that part of my story right now.”* This is a respectful way to let others know your boundaries and what information you are willing to share.

As mentioned previously, do not be afraid to ask people in your life for help. If you feel yourself tempted to practice self-harm or suicidal ideation, reach out to a safe person. As people, we are meant to work together to heal from our wounds and support each other’s journeys. You might have a long road ahead in your recovery, but you will recover. You will have victories and failures, but you are strong enough to do this. As scripture says in 2 Timothy 1:7 *“God has given you a spirit of power, love, and self-control.”*

You have the power to take hold of your life and to change. You have the strength to practice self-control and seek help when you feel weak. You have a spirit of love that allows you

to love yourself and the future that God has given you a second chance to see.

Summary

In all that we have said in this booklet, the most important thing we want you to hear is that you are of great value. Your life has purpose. Things will get better. There is another way. There is a God who created you and loves you.

Please, if you are struggling with suicidal thoughts, tell someone you trust. Talk to someone. Silence isn't strength. Don't keep suicidal feelings to yourself. There are people who can and want to help you. You don't have to fight this battle alone.

Booklet Contact Information

Petra Church
565 Airport Road
New Holland, Pa. 17557
717-354-5394

www.petra.church

Contacts in Lancaster County, PA

Lancaster Crisis Intervention 717-394-2631

Clinical and Community Counseling Services/Petra Church
717-354-5394

Upward Call Counseling Services 717-656-4834

Lifepoint Counseling Services 717-563-0111

Elanco Celebrate Recovery 717-354-5394

Providence Behavioral Health 717-397-1400

Other Contacts

1-800-273-8255 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

[Suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

TTY 1-800-799-4889 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline for
deaf or hard of hearing

1-800-273-8255 Veterans Crisis Line or text 838255

1-800-985-5990 Disaster Distress Helpline

[SpeakingOfSuicide.com/resources](https://www.SpeakingOfSuicide.com/resources)

Addendum

Agreement with Life

I, _____, make a commitment to living. I will not harm myself or anyone else in any way. I will not attempt suicide, or any self-injury.

If I begin to have thoughts of harming myself:

I will try to identify specifically what is upsetting me.

I will review alternatives to self-harm, such as thinking about my friends, family, or those who would be adversely affected by my actions.

I will do at least one of the following things to try to make myself feel better:

I will seek out a responsible, caring, and supportive person if thoughts of self-harm continue. (1-800-SUICIDE is also an option)

I will relinquish or dispose of items which may be used for self-harm.

If at the time I do not feel I can control my behavior, I will contact 911 or the nearest emergency room.

I recognize that I am responsible for my own actions. It is not guaranteed that someone will be able to respond at the time of such crisis, nor is it incumbent on another person to prevent me from harming myself.

I will therefore use any means necessary to prevent my own death.

Signature

Date

Help From Above

Sometimes we try to manage our lives on our own strength, but God has so much more for us. He promises to give us his strength when we surrender our lives to his control.

John 1:12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Rom 10:9,13 If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved . . . for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

I Jn 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

If you would like to surrender your life to Jesus and have him forgive you of your sins and give you eternal life, you can pray this prayer. He will honor your prayer of a repentant heart and give you new life and renewed strength to face life.

"Lord Jesus, I admit that I am a sinner. Please forgive my sins and give me your gift of eternal life. I believe you died on the cross and rose from the dead for my sins. Come into my life and be my Savior and Lord. I surrender my whole life to your control. Give me your strength to overcome my struggles and suicidal thoughts. I want to live for you. Thank you for loving me and accepting me as your child. In Jesus' Name, Amen"

Promises From God to Hold On To For Strength and Hope

Ps 42:5 — Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God.

Ps 69:1 — Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck.

Ps 31:24 — Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD.

Ps 31:2 — Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me.

Ps 119:116 — Sustain me according to your promise, and I will live; do not let my hopes be dashed.

Jer 30:11 — I am with you and will save you, declares the LORD.

Dt 31:8 — The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

Ps 46:1 — God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

Ps 33:18-22 — . . . the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine. We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you.

Ps 62:5-6 — Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.

Ps 119:49-50 — Remember your word to your servant, for you have given me hope. My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.

Isa 40:31 — . . . Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

La 3:21-26 — Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD'S great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.

Ps 16:1 — Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge.

Ps 31:16 — Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love.

Ps 71:3-4 — Be my rock of refuge, to which I can always go; give the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.

Ps 91:4 — He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

Ps 116:6-7 —The LORD protects the simple hearted; when I was in great need, he saved me. Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the LORD has been good to you.

Ps 138:7 —Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes, with your right hand you save me.

Ps 27:5 —For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock.

Isa 41:10 —So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Ps 23:1-6 —The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup over-flows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Ps 46:1-3 —God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

2Th 3:16 —Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way.

1Pe 5:7 — Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Ps 120:1 — I call on the LORD in my distress, and he answers me.

Ps 121:1-8 — I lift up my eyes to the hills— where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip— he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD watches over you—the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forever-more.

Ps 9:9-10 — The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.

Ps 28:7 — The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped.

Ps 62:8 — Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.

Ro 15:13 — May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Isa 26:3 — You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

Ex 14:14 — “The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.”

Ps 77:14 — You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples.

2Th 3:3 — But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.

Dt 31:8 — “The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”

Ps 73:23 — Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand.

1Ch 28:20 — Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD God, my God, is with you.

Isa 41:10 — So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Isa 43:2 — When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

Ps 145:17-20 — The LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made. The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them. The LORD watches over all who love him . . .

Jer 29:11-12 — “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.”



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