COUNSELING WOMEN WHO ARE DESPAIRING AND SUICIDAL

1. Introduction

A. In this workshop, I want us to consider eight possible characteristics of a counselee who is what I would term “despairing and suicidal.” They are at a high risk for committing suicide thus desperately need the hope of the gospel and practical help for the sin in their life. So, as I really love to make charts, I made a chart comparing “Eight characteristics of a person who is despairing and suicidal with “practical biblical counseling tips.”

1. Definition: A despairing and suicidal woman sees no way out and has lost all hope. She likely will have a combination of sin patterns in her life and as a result, she is emotionally unstable. Romans 1 is one example (downward spiral, God gives people over to their sin.)

C. The sin patterns which I am about to describe are not something that should require years of biblical counseling to overcome. If the woman tells you she is a Christian and gives a biblical answer to questions about her salvation, assume she is but expect her to repent. Coming to counseling and doing her homework is not necessarily a sign of repentance. True repentance is a whole U-turn of heart (what she thinks about God, herself, and others) that leads to a U-turn in the behavior. True repentance is a grace gift from God. The Word of God is alive and powerful and if she truly knows God, His Word will have a supernatural effect on her. Hebs. 4:12

D. Sometimes women who are deeply emotionally disturbed experienced some sort of terrible trauma as a child or young adult. She may have been sexually molested or beaten unmercifully or her parents may have bitterly divorced or one of her parents may have died. It seems to have been especially difficult if both parents were mean, cruel people. The sin against her may have been exceedingly vile and your heart will go out to her. She may be struggling with great guilt over sins such as abortion, immorality, or deep seeded bitterness. She may have a “bent” towards self-pity and worry so it is easy for her to spiral down into depression. Patiently teach her, exhort her in a kind tone of voice, give her boatloads of hope, but call her to repentance. Pray that God will grant it to her.

1. Eight Possible Characteristics of a Person Despairing and Suicidal

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| CHARACTERISTIC | BIBLICAL COUNSELING TIPS |
| 1. Anger – there is an intense resentment. Often she has thoughts like, “I hate…” It is common for them to wish horrific things would happen to others.   This anger goes beyond the usual “I’m irritated.” It is malicious and cruel and vengeful.  When you try to exhort her to do right, she often become belligerent and even threatening. | 1. Self-Talk Log – have her write down her thoughts whenever she is experiencing emotional pain such as feeling frustrated, sad, overwhelmed, fearful 2. Teach the Put-Off and Put-On Concept. Relate it to her unbiblical thoughts or actions. Correct the thoughts one by one. Ephesians 4:31-32 3. Teach them the Biblical concept of loving others – her enemies, her neighbors, fellow believers.   I John 2:9-11 |
| 1. Fear. Her fear at times is extreme and seemingly unbearable. Often, she will have full-blown panic attacks. When she has a panic attack, adrenaline is secreted into her blood stream from the adrenal glands located on top of her kidneys. Her heart will pound, her hands shake, she will feel as if she cannot breathe and is going to die. Her greatest fear then becomes the fear itself. | 1. Self-Talk Log 2. Anxiety Journal. Phil. 4:6-9 3. Jay Adams’ pamphlet on fear. 4. Fulfill responsibility whether feels like it or not – accountability. |
| 1. Blasphemous view of God. This is a *very dangerous* sign. It is easy for her to spiral down into despair and attempt suicide. Often, her thoughts are that God is not good or that He has malice towards her and that He is unfair. She may even hate God because of things that may have happened to her in the past or are happening in the present. | 1. Keep giving her the hope of the gospel and exhort her to repent (change her mind about God). Ro. 2:5-8 2. Teach biblical concept of mind renewal. Her thoughts are wicked and God is greatly offended. She must change her mind and begin thinking right thoughts about God. – Romans 12:2, see Chapter nine in *Attitudes of a Transformed Heart*. 3. Teach the character of God. Ro. 2:4; Arthur Pink’s *Attributes of God*. Also, Martha Peace’s *Precious Truths in Practice*. |
| 1. Not grateful. She is so self-focused that she believes she deserves better. She is somehow getting a raw deal and she does not thank God. Even the good things that happen to her are not enough. | 1. Teach her the story of the children of Israel grumbling in the wilderness. Explain how God is especially grieved at ingratitude. Ex. 15:22- 17: 2. Scripture memory. Teach her to think scripturally. Col. 3:16 3. Thank God in all things. I Thes.5:18 |
| 1. Suspicious of others. Judging motives of others. Misperceives words or actions of others. Assumption that the other person is out to deliberately hurt them or make them look foolish. | 1. Teach her why wrong to judge motives and how to give the benefit of the doubt. I Cor. 4:5; Phil. 4:8 2. Example of King Saul: he loved David, then became jealous (instead of glad), then angry, suspicious, and attempted to murder David. 1 Samuel |
| 1. Idolatrous desire to have a hurt free/pain free life. Willing to do anything to escape from pain – run away, take pills to alter their mood, binge on alcohol, divorce their husband. | 1.She needs *great hope* – the gospel and Scriptures. Romans 15:13  2. Give her hope by *gathering data* and give her a brief overview of how you will help her with her depression. Gather data in the four following areas: Physical, Circumstances, Bitterness, and Sin. |
| 1. May be unable to sleep due to ungodly thoughts, guilt over sin, and panic attacks. | 1.Recommend that she read the Psalms out loud to help her concentrate. They are God’s tranquilizers.  2. Brain storm with her to come up with some true, God-honoring thoughts to think when she is struggling. Ps. 34:4; 1 John 1:9 |
| 1. She usually cannot sleep and her emotional pain has become so great that she cannot bear the pain. She may become suicidal (to escape from the emotional pain) or self-abasing (cuts herself, hits herself, hurts herself physically in some way – somehow the physical pain distracts her from the emotional pain) or homicidal (directing her rage at others with some sort of weapon or whatever object is at hand). It is also a way to express her extreme rage. | 1.Calmly, verbally confront and warn her.   1. Call in two or more witnesses, then the pastor and/or elders. Matt. 18;15-18 2. Do whatever is necessary to protect her and her children. Elders arrange for a church family to temporarily take the children. Hebs. 13:17 3. Find out if she has a specific plan. 4. Contact her family and warn them and ask them to take her to be evaluated at a psychiatric hospital. 5. Ask the family to remove all drugs and guns from the house. 6. She should not be alone during this time. 7. It is illegal to commit suicide. Either her family or you may need to call the police. They will take her to the E.R. where she will have a psych evaluation. Then she will be transported to a psychiatric hospital for mandatory admission for, at least, 72 hours.   Ro. 13:1   1. Don’t ever think “she is just trying to get attention.” You don’t know that. Take each suicide threat seriously. 2. Ask if she has ever attempted suicide in the past. 3. It is especially dangerous if she cannot sleep. Men are more likely to go through with it and be successful but plenty of women are too. 4. If she is *impulsive*, she is at much higher risk. 5. Be aware of a danger time if she recently started on an SSRI or SNRI medication (first 30 days) or is withdrawing from one. 6. Daily or almost daily be in contact with her. For example, have her call you every morning at 7 AM to report in. See her two or three times a week to begin with. 7. Never try to counsel a suicidal person by yourself. |

1. Conclusion

It is troubling and scary when a counselee has tried to commit suicide or is threatening to commit suicide. You can be a wonderful instrument of God’s grace in her life praying for her, exhorting her with God’s Word, and giving her the hope of the gospel and the hope that you are committed to walking through this difficult time with them. Pray earnestly for wisdom and trust God to give it to you. In my thirty years of counseling women, I have only thought that two of my counselees really might commit suicide. Thankfully no one has yet. But remember that God is sovereign and if a counselee attempts or does commit suicide, God will, at that time, give you grace to bear up under it. 1 Corinthians 10:13