

Hope Always: How to Be a Force for Life in a Culture of Suicide

DVD Study Guide

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Introduction

In the year ahead, it is estimated that over one hundred thousand Americans will die by suicide. Some will classify as accidental overdoses, others as intentional suicides. One thing is clear: For all of these people created in God's image, America was not a place of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It was a place of depression, addiction, loneliness, and premature death.

*“Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all”*

-Emily Dickinson

What should we do? Mental health experts say we need more counselors, doctors say we need more medicines, and teachers suggest providing more education. These are good recommendations. But what if the men and women suffering have something else to tell us? What if we've built a world that is unlivable?

Hope Always is a study for people who are asking these questions. It is for people who currently deal with, have dealt with, or will deal with suicide. It is for men and women struggling with suicidal ideation and the family members, friends, colleagues, pastors, and church congregations who love them.

As an ER doctor and chief of hospital medical staff, I have experience attending to patients dealing with depression, addiction, and suicide. As a Christian, my beliefs are the theological bedrock upon which my medical beliefs about preventing suicide stand. With these in mind, I will make a faith-based argument for life and share tools for preventing suicide you can use right away.

The first session of this study takes a look at the problem of suicide. The second session presents a biblical worldview of suicide. The third session will help you learn how to talk to loved ones that are struggling. The fourth session focuses on how to offer hope. And, the fifth session takes a look at a biblical perspective on drugs, suicide, and alcohol and offers practical tools.

Not everything in this study will be easy to hear, but the seriousness of the topic demands that we give our full attention to the unvarnished truth. I hope this study is a meaningful journey toward understanding how you will become part of the solution to our current suicide epidemic. At the end of the day: what matters most is life. *“I came that they might have life and have it more abundantly.” John 10:10*

Matthew Sleeth, MD

How to Use This Guide

Welcome! This study guide accompanies the *Hope Always* video curriculum. We hope that you will use this guide in a group setting such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or small group gathering.

Each session takes about an hour to complete, and your group should work through the sessions in order, meeting weekly, bi-weekly, or whatever works best for your schedules.

We recommend choosing someone in your group to act as the group facilitator. This person will be responsible for starting each session, keeping track of time, and guiding the group discussions. The group facilitator should also be prepared to read aloud questions, prompt group members to respond, and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate.

For your study, each person should have a copy of the study guide. Group members are also encouraged to have the book *Hope Always* by Matthew Sleeth, M.D., although they can complete the study with this guide and the video sessions.

The following is an overview of what each group session will look like:

- GETTING STARTED - Read a brief overview of the session theme.
- GROUP CONNECTION - Respond to a question on the session theme.
- GIVE YOUR HEART AND MIND TO GOD - Invite God to guide the group time.
- LEARN TOGETHER - View the *Hope Always* video session.
- DISCUSSION TIME - Answer questions and talk through the video content.
- APPLICATION POINTS - Identify steps to take based upon the session theme.
- CLOSING PRAYER - Finish your group time with prayer.

You may find that you are not always able to get through all of the material. That is okay. Invite God to guide your group time as you walk through the session and trust that God will lead you where you need to go.

Be sure to invite group members to work through the personal time section between group meetings and look at the uplifting resources provided after each session for additional support.

Are you ready to begin? All you need is your group, a screen, a Bible, a pen or pencil, and this guide. To learn more about *Hope Always* and Matthew Sleeth, visit blessedearth.com or matthewsleethmd.com. There you will find more resources and information, including the free, downloadable *Hope Always Toolkit*.

Participating in this study is taking the next step in helping your loved ones struggling with depression, anxiety, or suicidal thoughts. May God bless you richly on your journey.

Session One: The Problem of Suicide

“Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human.”

- Henri Nouwen

GROUP TIME

Getting Started (2 minutes)

Invite someone in the group to read aloud this brief description of the session theme.

Welcome! As you begin your *Hope Always* study together, be prepared to see God at work in your group. With this in mind, each person should commit fully to participating in each session.

In this first session, you will consider the relationship between the historic commitment doctors make to easing suffering and preserving human life and the compassion that followers of Jesus are asked to show to people thinking about ending their lives. You will consider the question *“How bad is the suicide situation in America today?”* and take a look at statistics that offer a stark answer. Finally, you will look at current responses to the question *“What should we do about it?”* and consider whether or not these responses effectively answer the question.

Group Connection (5 minutes)

Share your response to the following question about the session theme:

What are you most hoping to learn or take away from this group study?

Give Your Heart and Mind to God (2 minutes)

Deciding to participate in this group study requires taking a step of courage. As you begin, you may be feeling a sense of fear or anxiety or a bit of hesitation to dive into such an important topic. This is normal and most likely reveals your care and concern.

“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.”

Lamentations 3:22-23

As you prepare your heart and mind for session one, open up with prayer, inviting God to guide your group time and direct your conversation. It might be helpful to begin with a few moments of silent prayer.

Learn Together (10-15 minutes)

Use the space below to take notes as you watch the session one video segment.

Discussion Time: “The Problem of Suicide” (30-45 minutes)

You may not have time to discuss all of the questions in this section - that's okay! Cover as much as you can and encourage everyone to participate.

Take a moment to review the statistics about suicide in America that Matthew Sleeth shared during the video.

- Next year, ten million people will consider suicide, 1.5 million will attempt suicide, 50 thousand will die by suicide, and nearly 100 thousand more will die by overdose.
- One person attempts suicide every 22 seconds.
- One person dies from suicide every 11 minutes.
- For every murder you hear about, there will be 2 ½ times more deaths by suicide.
- Suicide is currently the leading cause of death among thirteen-year-olds.
- The current suicide rate is 14.5 suicides per 100,000 people per year.

Dr. Sleeth then shared that the current suicide rate is the same as during the Great Depression of the 1930s, and several thoughts explaining why modern medicine skews the comparison of these two time periods.

- Unlike in the 1930s, we can save most people who attempt suicide from dying.
- If we find someone in trouble today, we can activate a universal 911 response system.
- A single ambulance has more equipment on it to save lives than found in an entire 1930s hospital.
- Through various means, we can reverse and treat all kinds of overdoses.

In the video, Dr. Sleeth drew several conclusions that help us understand more clearly the suicide situation in America today:

- If all that was available today is the technology that existed in the 1930s, there would be somewhere between half a million and a million deaths by suicide in the next year.
- Without modern medicine, our suicide rate would be between 100 and 200 times higher than in the 1930s.
- When it comes to suicide, we are at a place where no society in history has ever been

Considering all of this important information, answer the following questions:

1. If someone asked you, “*How bad is the suicide situation in America today?*” how would you respond?
2. How do you respond to Dr. Sleeth’s suggestion that maybe we should start looking at suicide differently?
3. Do you know someone who died by suicide?

Application Points (10 minutes)

This part of the session is important. It is the time for you and your group to decide how you will be a force for life in a culture of suicide.

As Matthew Sleeth encouraged in the video session, you mustn’t get overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problem of suicide. You are not powerless. As Christians, you are empowered with the Holy Spirit to show the compassion of Jesus, and there are ways you can act to help save another person’s life.

1. When your heart aches for people you have known who are hurting, what are some of the ways you have found to show them compassion?
2. How might God invite you to use those ways to help people struggling with depression, addiction, and suicide?

Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

Take a moment to close with a prayer, offering gratitude to God for what you have learned and a commitment to act upon the next steps you and your group have identified.

PERSONAL TIME

Being a force for life in a culture of suicide involves more than just participating in the group study. The Personal Time section is your guide as you go forward.

To reconnect with the session's topic, answer the following questions.

1. When you reflect upon the information Dr. Sleeth shared about the suicide situation in America, what pieces of information stand out in your heart and mind?
2. What is one way God may be inviting you to help people struggling with depression, addiction, and suicide this week?

Ways You Can Help Save a Life

In order to help you begin the work of being a force for hope in a culture of suicide, the following are practical ways you can encourage someone who is feeling depressed or suicidal.

1. *Visit.* People need to know that someone cares, and nothing does that more than spending time together. Visit at their home or yours, at a restaurant or a coffee shop. Sit in a park or take a walk. There is no replacement for human touch, the human voice, and the presence of another person.
2. *Write a letter and send it via snail mail.* In the age of electronic communication, receiving a card or letter in the mail is a special treat. The bonus is that the person can hold onto the letter and reread it when they are struggling and feeling hopeless.

UPLIFTING RESOURCES

Hymns and Songs to Uplift

Music can be a meaningful source of comfort in times of trouble, offering a heartfelt connection to God. Below are several uplifting songs to listen to and share with others when feeling down.

- *"All Creatures of Our God and King"*
- *"Amazing Day"* - Coldplay
- *"As the Deer"* - Martin Nystrom (written by)
- *"Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing"*
- *"God is Love"* - Marvin Gaye
- Handel's "Messiah" (complete oratorio)
- *"Heaven Is Around Us"* - Stu Garrard feat. John Mark McMillan
- *"His Eye Is on the Sparrow"* - Lauryn Hill, Tanya Blount

Movies to Uplift

Below are movie recommendations to watch with a loved one. They are uplifting and inspirational and include a character who learns an important lesson or overcomes a challenging problem. Included are age recommendations so that you can decide if it's okay to

watch a film with younger family members and friends. Please, prayerfully use your best judgment when discerning whether or not to watch a film with someone that is hurting.

- The Adventures of Milo and Otis (1986, 5+)
- Ratatouille (2007, 6+)
- Fly Away Home (1996, 8+)
- Spirited Away (2001, 9+)
- October Sky (1999, 10+)
- Little Women (1994, 11+)
- The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind (2019, 12+)

Books to Uplift

Of course, the Bible should be a staple in anyone's reading. Yet, the books below are known to have also been helpful to people walking through difficult seasons in life, providing inspiration and hope when all seemed dark and lost. We suggest that you read a book before recommending it to someone or giving a copy as a gift.

Fiction

- All Creatures Great and Small - James Herriot
- The Country of the Pointed Firs - Sarah Orne Jewett
- A Girl of the Limberlost - Gene Stratton-Porter

Nonfiction

- And There Was Light: The Extraordinary Memoir of a Blind Hero of the French Resistance in World War II - Jacques Lusseyran
- Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World - Henri Nouwen
- Spurgeon's Sorrows: Realistic Hope for Those Who Suffer from Depression - Zack Eswine

Session Two: A Biblical Worldview of Suicide

“The iron bolt which so mysteriously fastens the door of hope and holds our spirits in gloomy prison, needs a heavenly hand to push it back.”

Charles Spurgeon

GROUP TIME

Getting Started (2 minutes)

Invite someone in the group to read aloud this brief description of the session theme.

Welcome back! In this session of *Hope Always*, you'll gain a clear understanding of a biblical worldview of suicide, looking at suicide through a spiritual lens and seeing how the Bible offers the best explanation of where suicide originated.

You will learn how throughout the Bible and time, Satan has always shown up with a desire to bring death into the world and how Jesus is the one whose sacrifice has brought us life everlasting. You will also consider the question of whether or not suicide is an unforgivable sin and hear the good news that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Group Question (5 minutes)

Briefly answer the following question about the session theme.

If someone asked you, *“What does the Bible have to say about suicide?”* how might you respond?

Give Your Heart and Mind to God (2 minutes)

Psalm 119 declares that the word of the Lord is a *“lamp for my feet, a light on my path.”* As you prepare your heart and mind for session two, open in prayer, inviting God to light your path and direct your conversation as you discover a biblical worldview of suicide. It might be helpful to begin with a few moments of silent prayer.

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 8:38-39

Learn Together (10-15 minutes)

Use the space below to take notes as you watch the session one video segment.

Discussion Time: "A Biblical Worldview of Suicide" (30-45 minutes)

If you are not able to discuss all of the questions in this section, trust that the Lord is guiding your time together, cover as much as you can and encourage everyone to participate.

Matthew Sleeth shared that trying to understand the origins of suicide through a secular and scientific lens is a problem because suicide is a purely human phenomenon. Humans are hardwired to protect and defend themselves just like other animals, but there is no model for studying suicide in animals because no other animals commit suicide.

1. How would you describe the distinction Dr. Sleeth makes between animals and humans?

The question is: Why are we killing ourselves?

Dr. Sleeth suggests that despite all of the advances of modern medicine, only when we read the Bible can we find an explanation of where suicide came from in the first place and why it persists.

1. Have you ever considered the Bible as the place to look for an explanation of suicide and why it persists? Why or why not?

Take a few minutes to read Genesis 2:16-17, 3:1-6 and answer the following question:

1. What lies did Satan use to convince Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil? What lies does Satan use today to convince someone to kill themselves?

Dr. Sleeth shared that whenever Satan shows up in the Bible and throughout human history, he tries to destroy life. God is always the giver of life, and Satan is the one who tries to take it away.

If someone you know ever hears a voice telling them to kill themselves or that the world would be better off without them - including you - it is the voice of Satan. God loves them and wants them to live.

1. Have you ever had someone voice that they have felt the world would be better off without them?
2. What would you say to that person if they were a part of your group study right now?

In this session, Matthew Sleeth also addressed the important question: *“Is suicide an unforgiveable sin?”*

He shared that the Bible clearly states that killing someone is a sin (see Exodus 20:13). However, Dr. Sleeth went on to explain that mental illness can result in people getting to a place where they don't know right from wrong and up from down. He believes that if they have placed their trust in Christ in life, nothing separates them from God's love and the work of Jesus on the cross.

1. What Bible verses would you point to if someone asks you, “Is suicide an unforgiveable sin?”

Application Points (10 minutes)

This part of the session is important. It is the time for you and your group to decide how you will be a force for life in a culture of suicide.

When Dr. Sleeth wrote *Hope Always*, he did not just want to study why people killed themselves but to discover why Christians who struggled with depression and thoughts of suicide did not act on those thoughts. The question he asked himself was, *“If we're trying to prevent suicide doesn't it make sense to study those who have overcome it?”*

The two reasons for not acting he found most often given were:

1. Fear of Consequences - What will happen to my soul if I kill myself?
2. Concern for Others - What will happen to those I leave behind?

Fear of consequences and concern for others are key elements in preventing suicide. The fear of consequences is a mechanism God can use to protect us, and concern for others is a hallmark of followers of Jesus.

1. Can you think of a time that the fear of consequences prevented you from doing something that could be harmful to yourself or others? Fear of consequences affects your understanding of how God is your protector?
2. Who is one person struggling with depression, addiction, or suicide for whom you are concerned? How might you show your concern for them in the week ahead?

Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

Take a moment to close with a prayer, offering gratitude to God for what you have learned and a commitment to act upon the next steps you and your group have identified.

PERSONAL TIME

Being a force for life in a culture of suicide involves more than just participating in the group study. The Personal Time section is your guide as you go forward.

To reconnect with the session's topic, answer the following questions.

1. When you reflect upon a biblical worldview of suicide, what aspect stands out in your heart and mind?
2. Has this session addressed some of your own struggles with depression, addiction, and suicide?

Take a moment to prayerfully reflect on the following verses, asking God to speak through them and draw your heart closer to his.

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:38-39

Ways You Can Help Save a Life

In order to help you begin the work of being a force for hope in a world of suicide, the following are practical ways you can encourage someone who is feeling depressed or suicidal.

1. *Call.* A timely phone call and a listening ear can be lifesaving. If you don't know what to say, start with something like "I was thinking about you this morning and just wanted to check in and see how you are doing." No matter how you start, the important thing is to pay attention and listen.

2. *Share a prayer.* When you receive an email or text asking for prayer, send a prayer right then and there. If you don't feel comfortable with unscripted prayer, you can send a few personalized lines followed by the Aaronic blessing:

The Lord bless you, and keep you:

The Lord make his face shine on you, and be gracious to you:

The Lord turn his face toward you, and give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26

UPLIFTING RESOURCES

Hymns and Songs to Uplift

Music can be a meaningful source of comfort in times of trouble, offering a heartfelt connection to God. Below are several uplifting songs to listen to and share with others when feeling down.

- *"Amazing Grace"*
- *"Blessed Be Your Name"* - Matt Redman
- *"For the Beauty of the Earth"*
- *"Heavy"* - Birdtalker
- *"How Deep the Father's Love for Us"* - Stuart Townend
- *"Love is the Key"* - Tuck & Patti
- Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons"
- *"What a Wonderful World"* - Louis Armstrong

Movies to Uplift

Below are movie recommendations to watch with a loved one. They are uplifting and inspirational and include a character who learns an important lesson or overcomes a challenging problem. Included are age recommendations so that you can decide if it's okay to watch a film with younger family members and friends. Please, prayerfully use your best judgment when discerning whether or not to watch a film with someone that is hurting.

- Kiki's Delivery Service (1989, 5+)
- Up (2009, 6+)
- Galaxy Quest (1999, 8+)
- Back to the Future (1985, 10+)
- Queen of Katwe (2016, 10+)
- Pride and Prejudice (1995, 11+)
- Cranford (2007, 12+)

Books to Uplift

Of course, the Bible should be a staple in anyone's reading. Yet, the books below are known to have also been helpful to people walking through difficult seasons in life, providing inspiration

and hope when all seemed dark and lost. We suggest that you read a book before recommending it to someone or giving a copy as a gift.

Fiction

- Anne of Green Gables - L.M. Montgomery
- The Chronicles of Narnia (series) - C.S. Lewis
- A Wrinkle in Time - Madeleine L'Engle

Nonfiction

- For the Glory: The Untold and Inspiring Story of Eric Liddell, Hero of Chariots of Fire - Duncan Hamilton
- One Man's Meat - E.B. White
- The Strength You Need: The Twelve Great Strength Passages of the Bible - Robert Morgan

Session Three: Talking to a Loved One

“Bring love into your home for this is where our love for each other must start.”

- Mother Teresa

GROUP TIME

Getting Started (2 minutes)

Invite someone in the group to read aloud this brief description of the session theme.

In this session of *Hope Always*, Dr. Matthew Sleeth focuses on explaining how to have a life-saving conversation with someone who is depressed or possibly suicidal. You will learn how and how not to talk to someone who is struggling - both are important!

Dr. Sleeth shares a script for starting a conversation about suicide, and offers suggestions for how the Church can help those who are struggling.

Jesus told his followers that he came that they might have life and have it more abundantly, and it is time to share this message of life with those who need to hear it most!

Group Connection (5 minutes)

Share your response to the following question about the session theme:

How might you begin talking to a loved one about suicide?

Give Your Heart and Mind to God (2 minutes)

In this important session, you will learn practical ways to be a force for life and help loved ones struggling with depression, addiction, and suicide.

As you prepare your heart and mind for what you will learn, open up with prayer, inviting God to guide your group time and direct your conversation, beginning with a few moments of silent prayer.

“He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.”

2 Corinthians 1:4

Learn Together (10-15 minutes)

Use the space below to take notes as you watch the session one video segment.

Discussion Time: "Talking to a Loved One" (30-45 minutes)

If you are not able to discuss all of the questions in this section, trust that the Lord is guiding your time together, cover as much as you can and encourage everyone to participate.

If a loved one says things like "I wish I were dead" or "I can't go on with life," it is critical to begin a conversation with them. It has been proven time and again that starting a conversation about suicide will NOT make suicide more likely to happen.

To help you get ready for these conversations, take a few minutes to review the following examples of what not to say, why it is important, and what to say or do and then answer the questions that follow:

What NOT to say...	WHY this is important...	What TO say or do...
<i>"You don't mean it."</i>	Don't downplay or discount their words.	Pause and tune in to listen closely.
<i>"Don't talk that way." "You shouldn't say that."</i>	Your goal is to learn how they're really doing.	Be quiet in order to listen and have a handkerchief
<i>"Everything is going to be okay."</i>	At the moment, everything is not okay.	Let them cry and resist the temptation to "hush" them.
<i>"I'll keep this a secret."</i>	Getting help is a priority.	Don't agree to keep secrets.
<i>"You need to pray." "You should read the Bible."</i>	This may be very difficult for them.	Ask to pray or read Scripture together.

1. Which of the "What NOT to say..." statements is most difficult for you to avoid? How do you understand this statement differently after watching the video session?
2. What are the Bible verses and values that come to mind about having hard conversations?

Matthew Sleeth recommended preparing a memorized script as a way to demonstrate that you care enough to be prepared before having conversations about depression and suicide. If someone has a suicide plan and a means to do it, you must know how to get help immediately.

Review the basics of the recommended script and answer the questions below.

- Ask, *"Have you thought about hurting yourself?"*
 - If the person shares that they have thought about hurting themselves, ask, *"Do you have a plan?"*
 - If they have a plan, call 911 and say, *"I am sitting with someone that is suicidal, and they have a plan."*
 - If appropriate, and you know you and the person will be safe, consider being the one to take them to the emergency room.
 - Ask the person what means they have to commit suicide and remove the means to do so as soon as possible.
 - If the person is not suicidal and does not have a plan but is depressed, share information about what they should do if the situation changes.
 - Ensure the person has a way to get ahold of you or has 911 and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1.800.273.TALK (8255) programmed onto their phones.
1. How do you think and feel in response to learning this script?
 2. What aspects of the script do you anticipate will be the most difficult for you to follow? Take a moment to share the reasons for your answer.

Dr. Sleeth recommends using H.A.L.T. as a systems-check tool for whenever you or someone you love is going through a challenging moment. The tool helps people pause and identify the root of their problems and look toward healthy responses. Sometimes what keeps us from falling into despair is meeting our basic needs.

Use the next few minutes to review the H.A.L.T. method, including healthy responses, and answer the questions below.

H.A.L.T. Method

Healthy Response

Are you HUNGRY?

Get something to eat.

Are you ANGRY?

Take deep breaths. Go for a walk. Listen to music.

Are you LONELY?

Call a friend. Visit a family member.

Are you TIRED?

Take a nap. Go to bed early.

1. When might the H.A.L.T. method be helpful to you?
2. How might sharing the H.A.L.T. method with others be helpful?

Application Points (10 minutes)

This part of the session is important. It is the time for you and your group to decide how you will respond to the session as a force for life in a culture of suicide.

Dr. Sleeth mentioned in the session that he has noticed a reluctance to talk about suicide and other mental health issues in the church. This reluctance is not present in the Bible nor the life of Jesus Christ.

Specifically, he noted expressions of heartache in the book of Psalms and that when Jesus healed people, he did not make distinctions between mental and physical illness, including an instance with the demoniac of Gedarnes, whom Jesus went out of his way to heal.

1. Do you think there is a reluctance to talk about suicide and mental health issues in the church? Why?
2. Based on what you have learned in this study of *Hope Always*, what are some ways your church could help people struggling with depression and suicide?

Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

Take a moment to close with a prayer, offering gratitude to God for what you have learned and a commitment to act upon the next steps you and your group have identified.

PERSONAL TIME

Being a force for life in a culture of suicide involves more than just participating in a group study. The Personal Time section is your guide as you go forward.

To reconnect with the session's topic, answer the following questions.

1. In the video session, Dr. Sleeth said: *"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Suicide is the one disease for which prevention is the only cure."* How does this impact the way you will work to prevent suicide in your home, church, and community?
2. What opportunities is God giving you to talk with others who are struggling?
3. Is there anyone in your life with whom you need to initiate a caring conversation about suicide?

Ways You Can Help Save a Life

In order to help you begin the work of being a force for hope in a world of suicide, the following are practical ways you can encourage someone who is feeling depressed or suicidal.

1. *Ask questions.* Whether it's in person or over the phone, ask open-ended, nonjudgmental questions. Here are some examples:

"What are you doing for fun lately?"

"Are you getting outside?"

"What music are you listening to?"

"What does your routine look like these days?"

"Are you having trouble sleeping?"

"What was the high point and low point of the past week?"

"On a scale of 1 to 10, how are you feeling today?"

2. *Share a meal.* There is something about the relaxed environment of eating around a table that helps people let down their guard and share what is on their hearts. Your relationship is never the same once someone has been welcomed into your home. Note that the root of the word "hospitality" and "hospital" are the same; hospitality heals!

UPLIFTING RESOURCES

Hymns and Songs to Uplift

Music can be a meaningful source of comfort in times of trouble, offering a heartfelt connection to God. Below are several uplifting songs to listen to and share with others when feeling down.

- Bach's "Brandenburg Concertos"

- *"Be Thou My Vision"*
- *"Come As You Are"* - David Crowder
- *"Great Is Thy Faithfulness"*
- *"I Can See Clearly Now"* - Jimmy Cliff
- *"I Hope You Dance"* - Lee Ann Womack
- *"The Valley Song (Sing of Your Mercy)"* - Jars Of Clay
- *"Your Great Name"* - Natalie Grant

Movies to Uplift

Below are movie recommendations to watch with a loved one. They are uplifting and inspirational and include a character who learns an important lesson or overcomes a challenging problem. Included are age recommendations so that you can decide if it's okay to watch a film with younger family members and friends. Please, prayerfully use your best judgment when discerning whether or not to watch a film with someone that is hurting.

- My Neighbor Totoro (1988, 5+)
- Batkid Begins (2015, 7+)
- The Princess Bride (1987, 8+)
- A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood (2019, 10+)
- Chariots of Fire (1981, 11+)
- The Robe (1953, 11+)
- The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society (2018, 12+)

Books to Uplift

Of course, the Bible should be a staple in anyone's reading. Yet, the books below are known to have also been helpful to people walking through difficult seasons in life, providing inspiration and hope when all seemed dark and lost. We suggest that you read a book before recommending it to someone or giving a copy as a gift.

Fiction

- *At the Back of the North Wind* - George MacDonald
- *Heidi* - Johanna Spyri
- *Silas Marner* - George Eliot

Nonfiction

- *God in You: A Conversation* - John Stumbo
- *The Problem of Pain* - C.S. Lewis
- *Then Sings My Soul: 150 of the World's Greatest Hymn Stories* - Robert Morgan

Session Four: Offering Hope

“Everything that is done in the world is done by hope.”

Martin Luther

GROUP TIME

Getting Started (2 minutes)

Invite someone in the group to read aloud this brief description of the session theme.

Welcome back! In this session, Dr. Matthew Sleeth shares nine keys for maintaining mental health. These keys come from his personal experiences and observations, the more than 30,000 patients he saw in the emergency room, and from the many people he has interviewed that have overcome suicidal impulses.

Group Connection (5 minutes)

Share your response to the following question about the session theme:

What are some of the keys you believe are necessary for maintaining mental health?

Give Your Heart and Mind to God (2 minutes)

In session four, you will learn how God wants to use you to offer hope to people who are struggling to maintain their mental health. As you prepare your heart and mind for what you will learn, open up with prayer, inviting God to guide your group time and direct your conversation. It might be helpful to begin with a few moments of silent prayer.

“I will turn their mourning into joy. I will comfort them and exchange their sorrow for rejoicing.”

Jeremiah 31:13

Learn Together (10-15 minutes)

Use the space below to take notes as you watch the session one video segment.

Discussion Time: “Offering Hope” (30-45 minutes)

If you are not able to discuss all of the questions in this section, trust that the Lord is guiding your time together, cover as much as you can and encourage everyone to participate.

For this session’s discussion time, please take three to five minutes to review and discuss each of the Nine Keys for Maintaining Mental Health described below. Share how each key is currently a part of your life and what opportunities you have to grow.

Key One: Don’t Be Your Own “god”

Creating your own belief system, or not thinking about life's meaning at all, is to live as if you are your own god. This approach to life will never lead to true happiness or contentment. When you follow Jesus, your world grows because you are no longer the center of the universe and turn your attention toward caring for other people.

Key Two: Find Out Why God Put You Here and What His Plan is For You

God made you in His image to love and care for others. Nothing brings about deep joy and contentment in life as knowing and doing his will. Don’t let the world’s standards tell you it’s all about you and your success. Follow the path of Jesus and die to yourself so that you can live to serve others. .

Key Three: Remember the Sabbath and Keep It Holy

Sabbath keeping is not a condition of getting into heaven; it’s just the condition of heaven when you get there. God created you to live in a rhythm of six days of work and one day of rest. To maintain mental health, you must remember that t God’s rest is more powerful than your work.

Key Four: Be Grateful

We don’t need to create more wonders. We need a greater sense of wonderment. If you haven’t done so yet, start keeping a gratitude journal and review it regularly. You will discover that gratitude is what gives you the eyes to see God at work in your lives.

Key Five: Seek Beauty

Jesus often escaped the crowds that followed him to sit alone among the wildflowers and beauty of the Judean Hills. You should follow his pattern and regularly plan for time to admire all that God has created to declare his glory. Doing so will cause your pulse to slow and your spirit to soar.

Key Six: Be Careful What You Put In Your Mind

You are a result of what you put into your minds: All of what you hear, read, and see. Jesus said that if your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be. If your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be in darkness. To maintain your mental health, do not fill your mind with trash but whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable - excellent and praiseworthy things.

Key Seven: Choose Your Friends and Your Heroes Wisely

To maintain mental health, reflect on the people you spend time with and who you want to emulate. A place to start is by considering whether or not your friends and heroes display the fruit of God's Spirit in their lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These are the kinds of friends you should seek and the friend you should become.

Key Eight: Listen to Your Father in Heaven

If you want to hear how God is speaking into your lives during times of struggle, you should develop the habit of reading and studying Scripture. When you look to Scripture as a light guiding the pathway of your life, you can trust that God will lead you and guide you through the most difficult moments you face.

Key Nine: Pray

Nurturing a deep relationship with God includes talking to God through prayer. It is a conversation with the emotions life brings your way: lament for heartache, and praise for blessings. When we pray, God hears us, sees us, and responds. Pray without ceasing and enjoy the riches of a deep connection with the Creator of the universe.

Application Points (10 minutes)

This part of the session is important. It is the time for you and your group to decide how you will respond to the session as a force for life in a culture of suicide.

Followers of Jesus are to be keepers of their brothers and sisters. Caring for others is part of what gives our lives a sense of meaning and purpose. And, the good news is that when you reach out to help another struggling with life and death, God will help you.

As a point of application to end this session, read the following poem aloud together:

*To you who struggle and struggled and endure
Bearing a cross upon your shoulders,
The weight known only to God;*

*We who love and have loved you,
Salute you,
And cry tears of thanks that God
Has given you the strength and courage to see
Another day.
Our prayer:
That you walk with God's face upon you,
Stepping out of cast shadows,
Into his light,
And that you hope,
Always and forever.
Amen and amen.*

Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

Take a moment to close with a prayer, offering gratitude to God for what you have learned and a commitment to act upon the next steps you and your group have identified.

PERSONAL TIME

As you have discovered, being a force for life in a culture of suicide involves more than just participating in a group study. Use this Personal Time section as your guide as you go forward.

To reconnect with the session's topic, answer the following questions.

1. Review the Nine Keys for Maintaining Mental Health. Which of these keys do you feel a nudge to explore more fully? What is your plan to get started this week?
2. Take a moment to slowly read as a prayer the poem Dr. Sleeth wrote, found in the Application Points section of this session. Before you begin, ask God to reveal someone in your life who needs to hear this poem and think of them as you are praying.

Ways You Can Help Save a Life

The following are practical ways you can encourage someone who is feeling depressed or suicidal.

1. *Send a passage from Scripture or an uplifting quote.* This can take many forms: emails, texts, handwritten notes on index cards, calligraphy posters, or even needlepoint. It can be quick and simple or framed and beautiful. A list of Scriptures can be found in the *Hope Always Tool Kit*. Download your copy at blessedearth.org.
2. *Take a Walk.* The lack of interruptions, the release of endorphins, the connection with God's creation, and the rhythm of walking side by side all help to build deeper connections with other people. Finish your walk with prayer, reflecting what you have learned together and offering up any concerns to the Lord.

UPLIFTING RESOURCES

Hymns and Songs to Uplift

Music can be a meaningful source of comfort in times of trouble, offering a heartfelt connection to God. Below are several uplifting songs to listen to and share with others when feeling down.

- *"Because He Lives"*
- *"Cornerstone"* - Hillsong
- *"Eye of the Storm"* - Ryan Stevenson
- *"Fireflies"* - Owl City
- *"The Hills of Home"* - Kevin Braheny, Tim Clark
- *"Holy, Holy, Holy"*
- *"In Christ Alone"* - Stuart Townend
- *"Meant to Live"* - Switchfoot

Movies to Uplift

Below are movie recommendations to watch with a loved one. They are uplifting and inspirational and include a character who learns an important lesson or overcomes a challenging problem. Included are age recommendations so that you can decide if it's okay to watch a film with younger family members and friends. Please, prayerfully use your best judgment when discerning whether or not to watch a film with someone that is hurting.

- Homeward Bound (1993, 6+)
- Akeelah and the Bee (2006, 8+)
- The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe (2005, 9+)
- I Can Only Imagine (2018, 10+)
- Won't You Be My Neighbor? (2018, 10+)
- Sense and Sensibility (1995, 11+)
- North and South (2004, 12+)

Books to Uplift

Of course, the Bible should be a staple in anyone's reading. Yet, the books below are known to have also been helpful to people walking through difficult seasons in life, providing inspiration and hope when all seemed dark and lost. We suggest that you read a book before recommending it to someone or giving a copy as a gift.

Fiction

- *A Chameleon, a Boy, and a Quest* - J.A. Myhre
- *The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings* trilogy - J.R.R. Tolkien
- *Les Miserables* - Victor Hugo

Nonfiction

- *Hinds' Feet on High Places* - Hannah Hurnard
- *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption* - Laura Hillenbrand
- *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* - Timothy Keller

Bonus Session: Drugs, Alcohol, and Suicide - A Biblical Perspective and Practical Tools

“In my deepest wound I saw your glory, and it astounded me.”

Augustine

GROUP TIME

Getting Started (2 minutes)

Invite someone in the group to read aloud this brief description of the session theme.

Welcome to the bonus session of *Hope Always*! Thank you for dedicating your time to discovering how you can be a force for hope in a world of suicide.

In this bonus session, Dr. Matthew Sleeth discusses the important topics of drugs and alcohol. He will share what the Bible has to say about these and how they relate to depression and suicide. He will also explain why drug overdose deaths have increased exponentially over the last several decades.

Group Connection (5 minutes)

Share your response to the following question about the session theme:

How would you describe the relationship between drugs and alcohol, and depression and suicide?

Give Your Heart and Mind to God (2 minutes)

As you prepare your heart and mind for what you will learn in this final session, open up with prayer, express gratitude to God for your *Hope Always* group study, and invite God to guide your group time and direct your conversation. Consider starting with a moment of silent prayer.

“Happy is the land whose king is a noble leader and whose leaders feast at the proper time to gain strength for their work, not to get drunk.”

Ecclesiastes 10:17

Learn Together (10-15 minutes)

Use the space below to take notes as you watch the session one video segment.

Discussion Time: “Drugs, Alcohol, and Suicide - A Biblical Perspective and Practical Tools” (30-45 minutes)

If you are not able to discuss all of the questions in this section, trust that the Lord is guiding your time together, cover as much as you can and encourage everyone to participate.

Biblical scholars of old have speculated that the fruit ingested by Adam and Eve was alcohol, the fruit of the vine.

Dr. Sleeth offered two reasons why this may not be a far-fetched idea. First, alcohol presents a temptation that is hard to ignore: it looks good, tastes good, and it makes people think they are wise. Second, the actions of Adam and Eve after ingesting the fruit are similar to how people feel the morning after getting drunk. They are ashamed, remorseful, hiding, lying, and making excuses.

1. Can you recount someone’s impulsive or foolish actions while under the influence of alcohol?
2. After getting drunk, have you seen someone acting like Adam and Eve: ashamed, remorseful, hiding, lying, and making excuses?

Scripture clearly warns about the perils of drunkenness and offers many examples of people suffering from the consequences. It also gives some positive examples of alcohol, including when Jesus used it at his Last Supper as a powerful symbol of his blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins. As a result, Christianity does not require abstinence from alcohol but warns about drinking alcohol in excess.

The Bible also includes examples of how drugs can have a powerful hold over those who crave them. A story in Genesis about Leah and Rachel reveals the desperate lengths people will go to get drugs. In Revelation, we see that drugs have the power to bewitch us and cut us off from God.

1. Were you aware of what the Bible has to say about alcohol and drugs? What surprised you?
2. How can excessive use of alcohol or drugs cut us off from God?
3. Can you share an example of someone who turned their life around after giving up alcohol or drugs?

Application Points (10 minutes)

This part of the session is important. It is the time for you and your group to decide how you will respond to the session as a force for life in a culture of suicide.

As Dr. Sleeth indicated, unless you take prescribed drugs from the pharmacy, there's no way to tell what's in them or how powerful they are. Taking drugs purchased off the street is *"like playing Russian roulette with all cylinders loaded but one."*

Mixing alcohol or drugs with depression is a fatal combination. Your job is to help them get into a recovery program and receive your support.

1. Does your church sponsor a recovery program for drugs or alcohol?
2. Do you know how to help someone connect with such a resource?

Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

Take a moment to close with a prayer, offering gratitude to God for what you have learned throughout the study and a commitment to act upon the next steps you and your group have identified.

PERSONAL TIME

Being a force for life in a culture of suicide involves more than just participating in a group study. The Personal Time section is your guide as you go forward.

To reconnect with the session's topic, answer the following questions.

1. How have your thoughts about the relationship between the Bible, alcohol, drugs, and depression grown as a result of this session?
2. What is one action step you can take to raise awareness about this topic with your friends and family?

Ways You Can Help Save a Life

In order to help you begin the work of being a force for hope in a world of suicide, the following are practical ways you can encourage someone who is feeling depressed or suicidal.

1. *Sabbath together.* The Hebrew word for holy is *kadosh*, which means “set apart.” Think of Sabbath as a time set apart from worldly concerns, commerce, and work. If your friend has been withdrawing, ask them to join you for church or for a walk and a meal after worship. Or try practicing screenless Sundays together, a holy time set apart for family, friends, and God. It’s been shown repeatedly that time spent in nature can be both uplifting and healing.
2. *Do something fun.* Sometimes just being together is more important than what you say. Play a board game, watch a movie, or listen to some favorite music together. Push back the furniture and dance. Read an uplifting fictional work or a book from the Bible aloud. Find a south-facing hill and soak up the sun. Go outside on a clear night and look at the stars. People who are depressed tend to isolate and turn inward. Jesus sought joy in community and so should we.

UPLIFTING RESOURCES

Hymns and Songs to Uplift

Music can be a meaningful source of comfort in times of trouble, offering a heartfelt connection to God. Below are several uplifting songs to listen to and share with others when feeling down.

- *“Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine”*
- *“The Father’s House”* - Cory Asbury
- *“Hold It Up to the Light”* - David Wilcox
- *“How Great Thou Art”*
- *“I Will Move on Up a Little Higher”* - Mahalia Jackson
- *“Join the Triumph”* - Citizens & Saints
- *“Lay It Down”* - Matt Maher
- *“Where the Streets Have No Name”* - U2

Movies to Uplift

Below are movie recommendations to watch with a loved one. They are uplifting and inspirational and include a character who learns an important lesson or overcomes a challenging problem. Included are age recommendations so that you can decide if it’s okay to

watch a film with younger family members and friends. Please, prayerfully use your best judgment when discerning whether or not to watch a film with someone that is hurting.

- Inside Out (2015, 6+)
- Anne of Green Gables (1985, 8+)
- It's a Wonderful Life (1946, 9+)
- Newsies (1992, 9+)
- Groundhog Day (1993, 11+)
- The Wind Rises (2013, 11+)
- We Bought a Zoo (2011, 12+)

Books to Uplift

Of course, the Bible should be a staple in anyone's reading. Yet, the books below are known to have also been helpful to people walking through difficult seasons in life, providing inspiration and hope when all seemed dark and lost. We recommend reading a book before recommending it to someone or giving a copy as a gift.

Fiction

- A Christmas Carol - Charles Dickens
- Frog and Toad are Friends - Arnold Lobel
- Mansfield Park - Jane Austen

Nonfiction

- I Bought a House on Gratitude Street: And Other Insights on the Good Life - J. Ellsworth Kalas
- The Red Sea Rules: The Same God Who Led You in Will Lead You Out - Robert Morgan
- When the Bottom Drops Out: Finding Grace in the Depths of Disappointment - Robert Bugh