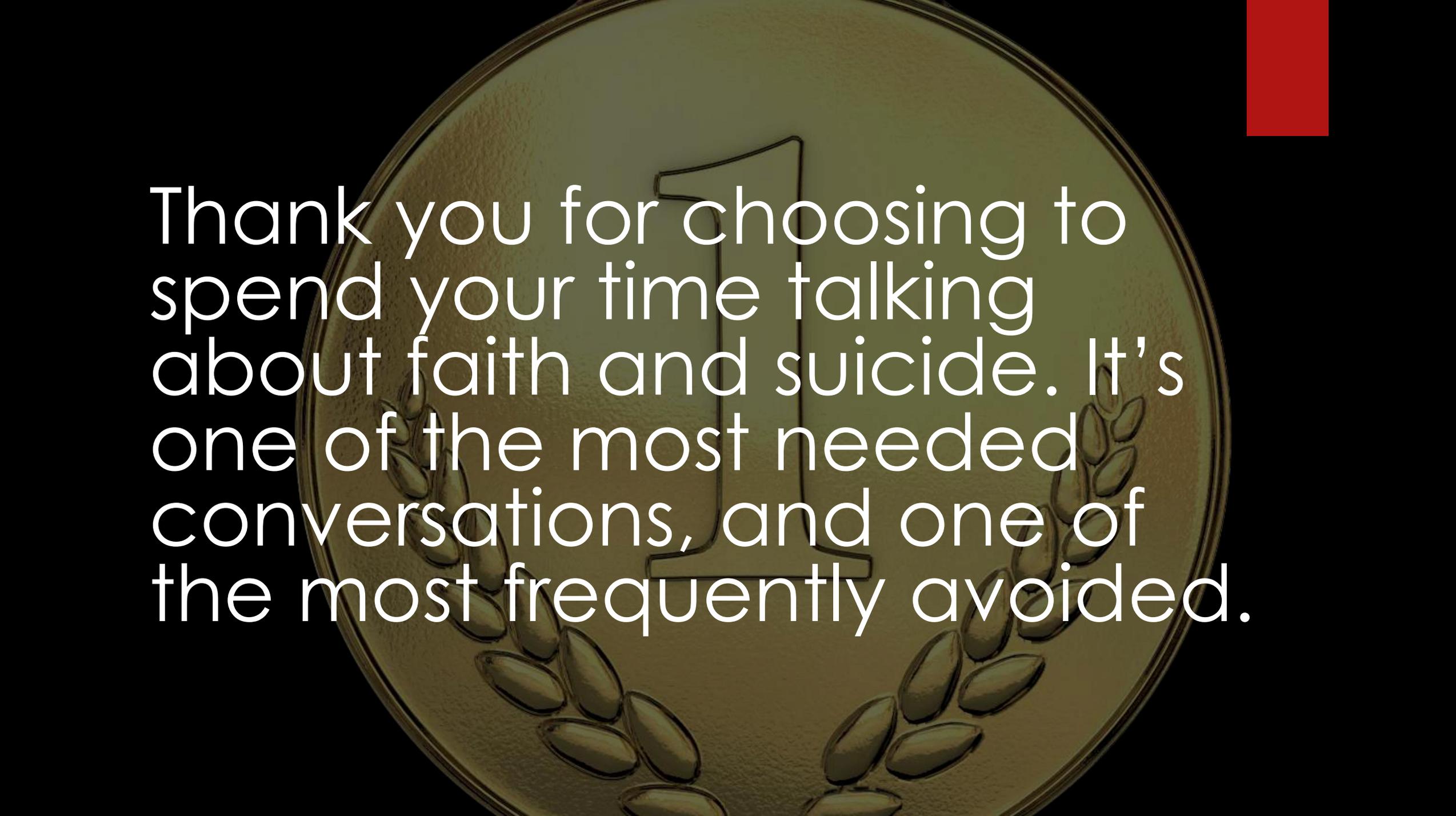




Intentional and Faith-Filled Suicide Prevention

*RESPONDING TO SUICIDE AND SUICIDALITY TO
SAVE LIVES*

Rev. Dr. Rachael A. Keefe
April 5, 2019



Thank you for choosing to spend your time talking about faith and suicide. It's one of the most needed conversations, and one of the most frequently avoided.

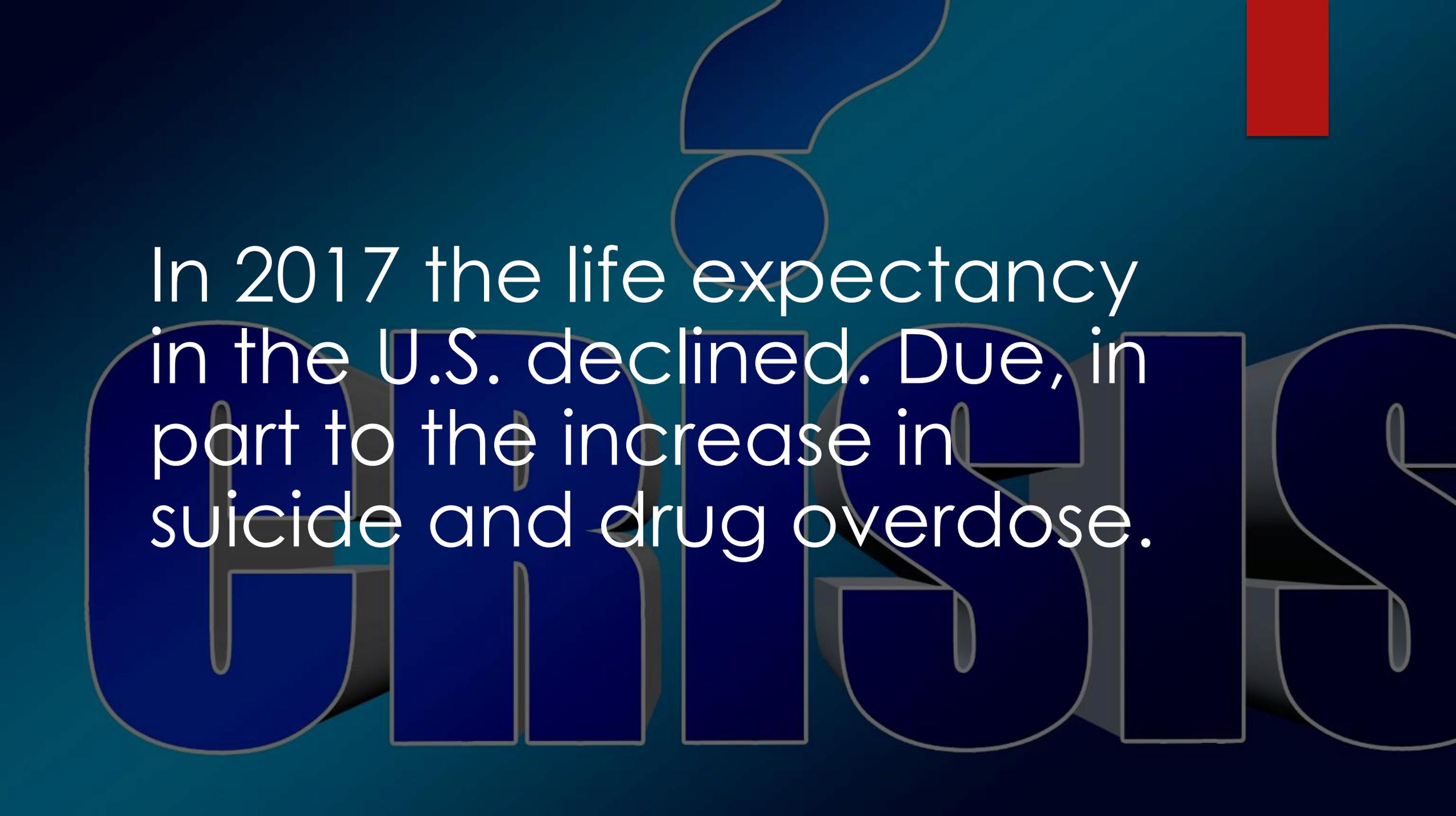
Why this conversation is important...

Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S.

- Second leading cause of death for ages 10-34
- Fourth leading cause of death for ages 35-54
- Eighth leading cause of death for ages 55-64

In 2017 47, 173 people died by suicide in the U.S.

- An average of 129 people die by suicide each day
- The suicide rate increased 33% between 1999 and 2017, and continues to increase
- In 2017 there were an estimated 1,400,000 episodes of suicidal behavior
- Suicide and self-injury cost the U.S. \$69 billion in 2015 alone



In 2017 the life expectancy in the U.S. declined. Due, in part to the increase in suicide and drug overdose.

A hand is shown holding a stack of white paper clips. In the background, a chain of white dominoes is falling in a line. The scene is set against a dark background. A red vertical bar is visible in the top right corner.

Hold that
thought...

Belief in God or higher power or spiritual force is alive and well in the U.S.



- Pew Research Center 2017 survey reports more than 80% of adults in the U.S. believe in God/higher power/spiritual force
 - Of those 56% believe in the God of the Bible, 23% belief in a higher power or spiritual force
 - Of the 19% who say they don't believe in God, 9% believe in a higher power or spiritual force and 10% report no belief at all

Religious Landscape Study 2015

Christian 70.6%

- ▶ Evangelical Protestant 25.4%
- ▶ Mainline Protestant 14.7%
- ▶ Historically Black Protestant 6.5%

Catholic 20.8%

- ▶ Mormon 1.6%
- ▶ Orthodox Christian 0.5%

Jehovah's Witness 0.8%

- ▶ Other Christian 0.4%

Non-Christian Faiths 5.9%

Jewish 1.9%

Muslim 0.9%

Buddhist 0.7%

Hindu 0.7%

Other World Religions 0.3%

- ▶ Other Faiths 1.5%

Unaffiliated (religious "nones") 22.8%

Atheist 3.1%

Agnostic 4.0%

- ▶ Nothing in particular 15.8%

Don't know 0.6%

What faith
traditions have to
say about suicide

25%
Evangelical
Protestant
7% Historically
Black
Churches

Suicide is a sin, it is “self-murder.”

Many view suicide as a rejection of salvation in Christ.

Some will say that suicide is a sin like any other and, therefore, not excluded from God’s forgiveness.

21% Catholic

- Traditional view - Suicide is a sin and the person who dies in this way is damned.
- Modern view – Suicide is contrary to the laws of God, however, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states the following:

Grave psychological disturbances, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering, or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide.

We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives.

(paragraphs 2282-2283)

15% Mainline Protestant

► Usually the response is one of compassion, with an understanding that the person was in a great deal of pain. However, for many people there is still a lingering question of grace.

2% Mormon

- Suicide is a moral issue. No one knows God's response and suicide should be approached with compassion
- A person who suicides may not be responsible for their actions. Only God can judge this for sure.
- If a person is otherwise in good standing, they may have a Mormon funeral.

2% Judaism

The understanding is that a person who suicides is mentally ill and, therefore, not responsible for their actions.

The question really is whether or not the body of someone who suicides can be buried in a Jewish cemetery.

The implication is that suicide is a sin that has ramifications after death.

1% Islam

- Suicide is forbidden.
- It is believed that those who suicide are condemned to repeat the act in the fires of hell without ever dying.

1% Hinduism

Generally, suicide is in violation of the code of non-violence and is as sinful as murdering another.

Summary of faith traditions

- Most faith traditions do not believe suicide to be a healthy or viable option for one who suffers.
- Some say it is possible for those who suicide to receive God's mercy.
- Others believe that the person is condemned.
- Most respond with compassion.



Neglecting to address faith in conversations about suicide and suicidality is irresponsible and may contribute to more people dying by suicide.



BREAK

My story...
February 13, 1983



The Lifesaving Church Faith Communities and Suicide Prevention

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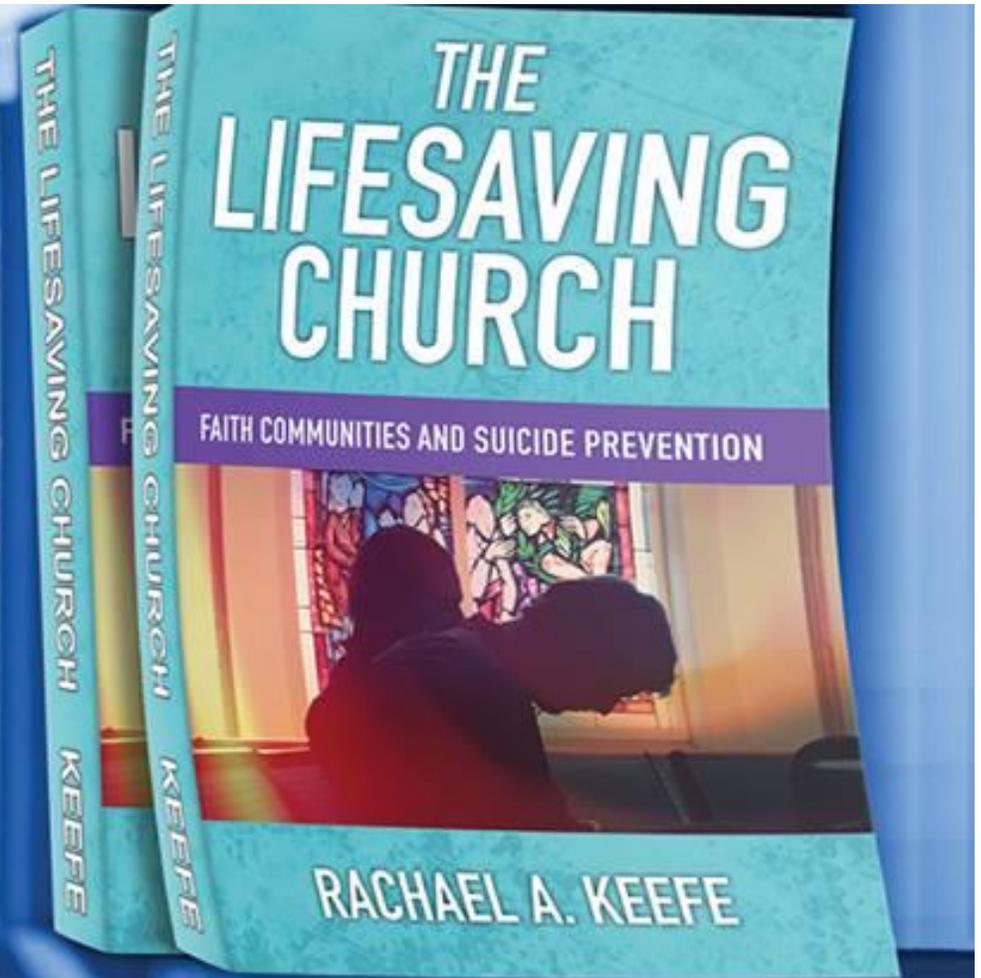
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We have a puritanical preset and it may be killing us.



The
“Puritanical
Preset”
evidenced in
commonly
held beliefs

Suicide is a sin.

Anyone who dies by suicide is
damned.

God’s grace does not extend
to those who die by suicide.

Suicide in the Bible

- In the Bible there are seven suicides recorded
 1. Abimalech – Judges 9:54
 2. Samson – Judges 16:30
 3. Saul – 1 Samuel 31:4
 4. Saul's Armour-Bearer - 1 Samuel 31:5
 5. Ahithophel – 2 Samuel 17:23
 6. Zimri – 1 Kings 16:18
 7. Judas – Matthew 27:5

- 
- The Bible does not directly address suicide, but most people believe it is covered under the sixth commandment – You shall not commit Murder – and other places that address the value of human life.
 - The Bible says nothing about God's response.

Popular Belief as a protective factor

- The popular belief that suicide is an unforgivable sin is a protective factor for those contemplating suicide, sometimes the only one.
- It would be unwise to remove this factor by explaining that in the Judeo-Christian tradition, God could very well offer forgiveness for suicide.

Popular Belief can contribute to contagion

- On the other hand, to let survivors hold this belief unchallenged could risk contagion.
- For those already suffering from psychache, hell may not hold much of a threat



On the other hand...

- Assuring a person who is suicidal that God is merciful and will welcome them into heaven, will likely lead to that person engaging in suicidal behavior or dying by suicide.
- Assuring a survivor of suicide loss that their loved one is “at peace with God” may lead to this person engaging in suicidal behavior or dying by suicide.





God is not
a fan of
suicide.

From a
Christian
perspective...

Jesus was always on the side of
love and abundant life

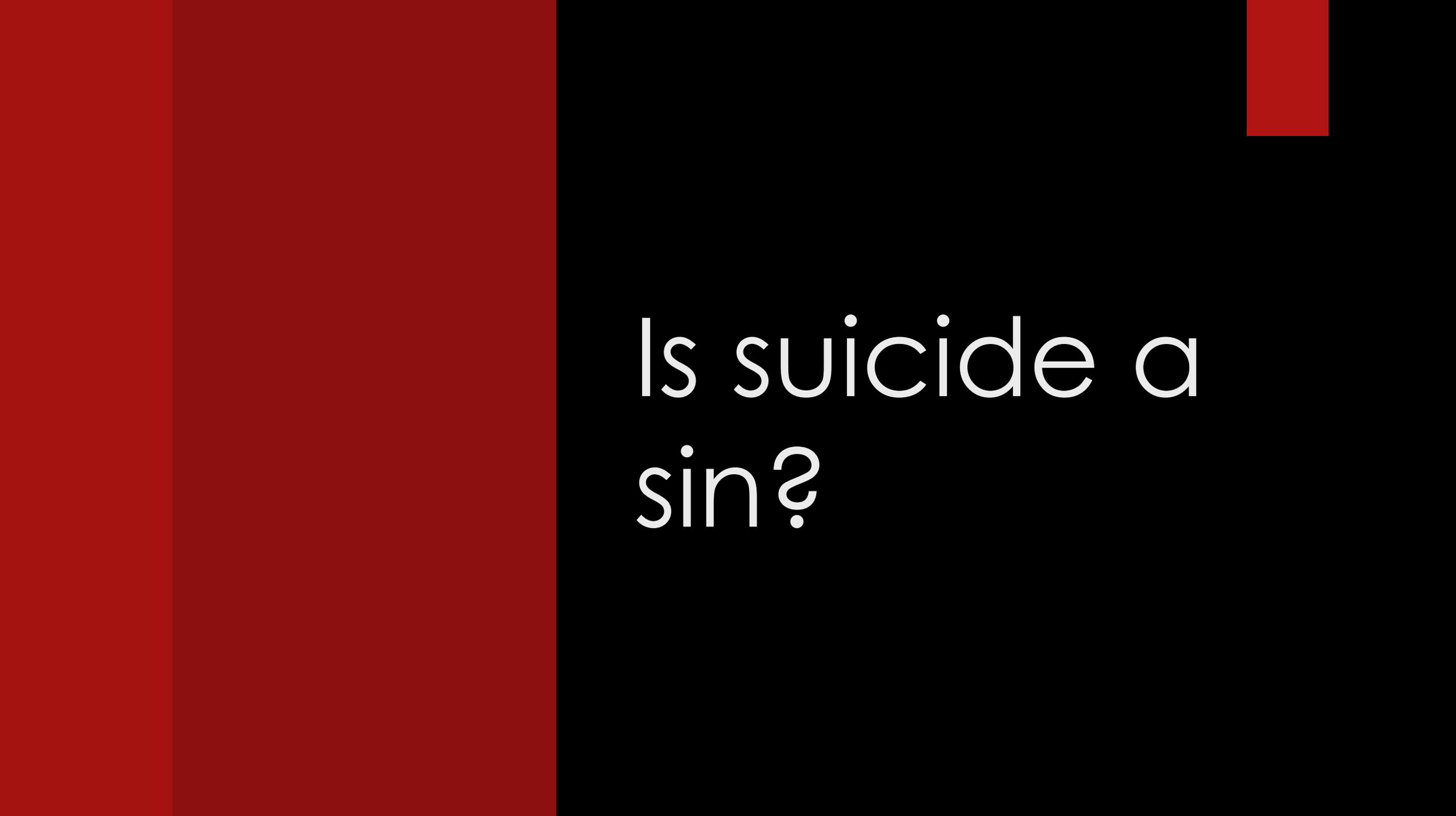
Jesus “re-remembered” people

God does not need our help
saving souls

God needs our help saving
lives



The big question



Is suicide a
sin?



Yes, but not the
way you think.

Suicide is the sin
of community,
not the individual

SUMMARY

- Unexamined beliefs around suicide may contribute to more suicides
- People of faith have a responsibility to save lives first and foremost.
- God is not a fan of suicide.
- Suicide is the sin of community and not the individual.
- The more faith communities engaging in the conversation around suicide, the more lives saved.



Resources used in this presentation:

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, afsp.org
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center, sprc.org
- Center for Disease Control, cdc.gov
- Pew Research Center, pewforum.org