

Hope Always Discussion Guide

1. How has suicide touched you? What objects in your life are “haunted” the way the author describes (see page 1)?
2. In his tale of two patients, the author shows the difference that faith makes in the life of one person. How does faith play a protective role when it comes to suicide? How do other avenues to finding meaning in life fall short?
3. In chapter 2, the author examines the extent of the suicide crisis and why current statistics do not accurately represent the problem. Are the numbers or the extent of the problem surprising to you? Explain.
4. The author predicts that “if we continue on the current path, society will ultimately normalize suicide” (pages 31–32). How would you respond to someone who believes that suicide is not morally wrong but a “life choice”?
5. The right side of the Life Continuum Scale represents people who are focused on others in life-giving ways. The left side describes individuals who are self-focused and demonstrate attitudes and behaviors that are life taking. Is there someone you are concerned about who is traveling down the left side of the continuum? How far to the left side do you think that person is, and why? How might you help them move right on the continuum?
6. In chapter 4, the author gives an overview of various mental illnesses that are often associated with depression and suicidal ideation. In your view, what is the role of mental health professionals in caring for people who may have a mental disorder? If you are a pastor or church worker, when is it appropriate to refer someone in your care to a mental health professional?
7. “Unlike every other creature on earth, we are drawn toward things that we know will harm us. . . . God is light and truth. Satan represents death and lies” (page 72). What are some of the lies people believe that lead to self-harm? What are truths about God that combat these lies?
8. After a great victory against the prophets of Baal, the prophet Elijah feared for his life and fled into the wilderness. At his lowest point he told God he wanted to die (see 1 Kings 18–19). What does Elijah’s despair tell us about human vulnerability? What can we learn from the way God met Elijah’s physical needs? What restored Elijah’s hope and will to live?
9. How did Jesus show love and compassion to people with mental illness and those possessed by demons? Consider Luke 8:26-33 (page 97). We may be tempted to judge or give up on such people today. How does this story influence the way you view people who suffer in this way?
10. The author reports that “50 to 70 percent of those who commit suicide have drugs or alcohol

in their system” (page 103). He writes that 12-step programs are the most effective treatment for alcoholism. What help in your area can you recommend for someone struggling with drug or alcohol addiction? How can you become better prepared to support a recovering alcoholic or drug addict?

11. The author suggests memorizing three questions to ask to determine if a person is in imminent danger of suicide. Review these questions on pages 124–125 and the follow-up steps to take if necessary. With a partner, role play a conversation in which you practice asking these questions gently yet directly (or imagine or write down a practice conversation). How can you demonstrate that you care as you listen and invite honest responses?
12. The mnemonic SIG E CAPS is a tool professionals use to screen for depression. It stands for sleep, interest, guilt, energy, concentration, appetite, psychomotor, and suicidal ideation. In chapter 8, the author suggests using this tool to help a loved one by looking for causes of depression and offers practical suggestions of ways to help. Which of his suggestions can you implement with a friend or loved one now? What other ideas would you add to the list? What helps you the most when you are feeling down?
13. The author writes, “When it comes to suicide, we are all living on the coast. Every Christian needs to be prepared to help save a friend who is over their head in the sea of depression” (page 144). What are the three most important things you have learned in this book that you will implement to help a friend in this state?
14. Pastors are not immune to depression and suicide, and church history offers examples of preachers, such as Charles Spurgeon, who had dark seasons of depression. How can you support clergy who are prone to depression? If you are a pastor who struggles with depression, what help are you actively pursuing?
15. What training can your church provide to lay leaders to help them recognize when a person may be suicidal and take appropriate steps to support them?
16. What new ministries might your church consider starting to offer hope and help to people who are depressed or suicidal? How can your church support those who have family members with mental illness? How can you foster a church culture that shows compassion to hurting people and invites open conversations about depression and suicide?
17. The Hope Always Tool Kit on page 171 provides practical resources to use in helping people who are depressed or suicidal. What additional resources would you add to the lists in the tool kit?
18. Ask God to show you who in your life needs encouragement and comfort. How can you show them today that you care? In what ways can you bring the hope of Christ to them?