

Devotional 18 October 2011
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Standing in the hospital room after a conversation I asked, "Do you want a prayer before you leave?" With those words, like a toddler wishing to be lifted up his arms reached out and wrapped around me. So, I hugged back and we prayed. He sobbed and I whispered. He did not see a future I saw the hope and potential that was still there. People walked in and stood awkwardly in the hospital room with his exit papers ready to sign. But it was a blessing to be there and we took the time to pray. It was now noon and yesterday in the afternoon this individual had attempted to take their life. Suicide was the unspoken creature in the room and we all were collateral damage.

My suicide patient had come close to dying. But a group of co-workers had found him. It had been like a war zone on this corner of a peaceful military base. Yet, in the "fog of war" five people worked as a team, fell back on their training, yelled and cursed, and through a high dose of adrenalin brought this man back to life. They had won the battle. And suicide is a battle the military now fights. This undeclared war with suicide has taken more military lives than those who have died in battle in Afghanistan or Iraq since 9/11. The old saying goes that, "God does not give us anything we can't handle" and that's true. But the devil corrupts things so much it takes a community to bring another back to life. My group of five heroes had saved a life. But they would live with these images of blood forever as the collateral emotional damage on a suicide battle field.

The five heroes who had won the battle against suicide looked at me with disbelief when I said they saved a life. Behind their eyes in the stare of disbelief, I saw them remembering the incident; remembering and rethinking every word the man had said before the suicide attempt, imagining they could have done more; and finally coming too how the man may have thrown away a promising military career. Like any battle warrior they really don't think of themselves as heroes; just people in uniform that had been at the right place and the right time doing what they had been trained for; defending life. If I asked, I'm sure all of them would say they wished things had been different. All of them said to some degree, "I'm angry" with our suicide patient.

People talk about how selfish suicide is; it is. If you have been around someone who has or tried to commit suicide you have an internal pain like no other. It's hard to describe this pain of memories, disgust, and fear all wrapped up and mingled with hurt and compassion. The person who went into the battle of suicide to loose and end their life just could not see the hope, love, and potential that was around them. Somehow the "devil" closes things down and narrows the view. But sometimes God reaches down into this despair and brings a renewal of life. God's hand that reaches into the despair is the community of family, friends, and co-workers who fight for the sake of living life.

The CNN reporter and anchor, Anderson Cooper, wrote "That's the thing about suicide. Try as you might to remember how a person lived his life, you always end up thinking about how he ended it." Mr. Cooper's older brother had died of suicide. Anderson Cooper cannot forget this act because he is part of the collateral damage caused by a suicide. His life is marked by it and it informs who he is now. This is true with all family members and others who lose a loved one to suicide. You carry a chunk of pain forever and it will become a scar that is your very being.

Being the collateral damage of suicide means you must learn to forgive and find hope. Thinking about letting suicide take you does not solve anything and only brings suffering to those you love.