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Clarion Review ★★☆☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

Suicide, No Way Out

Donald J. West
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In *Suicide, No Way Out*, author Donald J. West draws upon the Bible's Old and New Testaments to illustrate his thesis that the "spiritual reasons for suicide can include pride, guilt, fear, power, and greed." Beginning with Saul, the rebellious and disobedient Old Testament king who, faced with defeat in battle, threw himself upon his own sword rather than risk capture by his enemies, West traces how characters in the Bible chose to commit suicide rather than make life changes. Asking readers to examine their own lives for some of Saul's negative traits, he assures them that, "Everyone who is reading this and has contemplated or is contemplating suicide has the ability to change. Allow the Lord to enter your heart to help you change. Speaking from experience, I can tell you this truly does work."

Other stories in West's book include one about Saul's armor bearer, who, after refusing to run his sword through his king watched Saul commit suicide, and then killed himself. West likens this young man to today's spiritually and mentally immature young soldiers who might consider suicide in the aftermath of battle. The remaining stories are those of Ahithophel, who committed suicide when caught in a lie; Zimri, who led Israel to engage in idol worship and then killed himself out of guilt; and Judas Iscariot, who felt such remorse after he had betrayed Jesus that he hanged himself. The final chapter offers an exercise in forgiveness of self and others, which West suggests may help forestall suicide.

West's book would perhaps best be used as a guide for bible study groups seeking to open a discussion of suicide; in this case, identifying the biblical books and verses from which the stories were taken would be helpful. Like-minded believers will appreciate the manner in which scriptural references are brought to bear upon the causes of suicide; those of different persuasions may find West's approach somewhat harsh and limited, and, while he affirms that the "the key to survival is a strong spirit," little guidance is given as to how such a trait is to be acquired.

The cover design is powerful and effective, however the book would benefit greatly from careful editing (an example is the use of the word "forage" on the back cover, rather than "forge"). Insufficient attention has been paid to verb tense agreement, singular/plural relationships, and spelling("Tirzah," not "Tizrah," and "functional magnetic resonance imaging," not "imagining").

While it is true, as the author states, that suicide is "a permanent solution to a temporary problem," there are many more causes for suicide and much greater reason to live than he presents in his small volume.

West attended the Bethel World Outreach Training Center through the Buffalo Bible College, studied Spirit-Filled Living and Missions, and worked as a crisis and suicide counselor at the National Counseling Center. A naval veteran, he served as a counselor at the first Vietnam Veterans Conference in 1989, helped shape current policies in suicide prevention through his communications with the special advisor to the U.S. Surgeon General, and continues to help fellow veterans deal with war trauma.

KRISTINE MORRIS (June 6, 2011)

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