



Faith.Hope.Life

One Sabbath celebrating life, hope, and reasons to live

Every life matters in God's kingdom, from the youngest to the oldest, the weakest to the strongest, the infirmed to the healthy. This week, we celebrate reasons to live, every day, regardless of how you feel at the moment. Let's be honest: life can sometimes feel overwhelming. The loss of a job or a relationship, trouble in school, a serious mental or physical illness, a divorce, or the death of a loved one can happen to anyone. Life events like these can leave us feeling worthless, abandoned, or isolated.

[Insert the name of your faith community] seeks to be a caring community focusing on the hope that in God's time, the travails of this life will subside. Through connections within our own community, we find strength for each day. Each of us is here for a reason and has a God-given role in life, regardless of the circumstances. Moment by moment, it is important to remember there is help and hope.

Faith.Hope.Life. is a reminder that God loves you and knows your struggles and failures, as well as your joys and triumphs. Even when you walk through the valleys of the shadows, God is with you. In the times when it feels like God is far away or doesn't hear our prayers, God gives us people who can help—friends, loved ones, co-workers, others in your faith community, your [insert the term you use for faith leaders: rabbis, pastors, imams, priests], and clinical professionals such as counselors, therapists, and doctors. They can be God's heart and God's listening ear when we feel most troubled or alone.

If you, or someone you know has lost hope, is feeling completely alone, or that life doesn't matter, reach out for help. Let others help. This is especially important if there are thoughts of suicide or wanting to die.

Resources for Help

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (24 hours): 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Pathways2Promise: Ministry and Mental Illness: pathways@mimh.edu

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Your Faith Community Can Make a Difference

Deborah [substitute a name common to your community's ethnicity] had struggled with depression for much of her life, although she had managed to stay active and involved. However, after the birth of her first child, Deborah went into a depression so severe that she couldn't leave the house. Her husband called their minister and said he was worried that Deborah's depression was getting worse. Based on what David shared, the minister told him she was concerned that Deborah might be suicidal and urged him to take her to the emergency department. Then the minister asked to speak to Deborah. After talking with the minister for a while, Deborah finally agreed to go to the hospital, where the minister joined them.

Deborah then entered into a program of intensive psychiatric care that was appropriate for a mother of a newborn. The doctors and nurses worked to regulate her medication and help her talk about her feelings and her fears. She was then able to resume her life with the help of outpatient treatment.

What happened with the church was also very important. With Deborah's permission, the minister shared with the congregation that she was in treatment and encouraged church members to help as they would have had if she was dealing with a physical illness. They helped Deborah care for her baby, brought meals for the family, and wrote notes. They included Deborah and her family in prayers and when she regained her health, she was given a warm welcome back into the community.

That was 12 years ago. While Deborah still has occasional "blue" times, she has never gone back to the severity of that time. Nor has the church gone back to its previous silence about mental and emotional illness. One could say that new life came in all kinds of ways.*

(*From the experiences of a faith community leader)

How Can Faith Communities Help in Suicide Prevention?

Studies show that persons experiencing mental health problems or emotional distress frequently turn to faith communities and their leaders for help. You and your faith community can help in many ways:

- **Know the facts.** Suicide does not discriminate; it can touch people of all ages and classes; all racial, ethnic, and religious groups. However, suicide is also preventable and your faith community can play a role.
- **Talk about mental illness.** Help your faith members understand mental health problems as being real and treatable in the same way that physical health problems are. Speak and pray about mental illness just as you would about physical illnesses, such as cancer, heart disease, or diabetes.
- **Promote connectedness.** Fellowship groups, choirs, service work, worship—all are ways people connect in faith communities. Such connections let people know they are not alone and that they are cared for.
- **“Narratives of hope.”** Faith communities share stories—from the Bible, the Koran, or other sacred texts--of how people have overcome adversity and experienced God's presence in times of struggle and hardship. They also share the stories of their own lives--their faith and courage—that can give hope and strength to others.