DEAN SIKES

CHOOSE LIFE

Where there is LIFE there is HOPE

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Worldwide Distribution Available Through:
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Post Office Box 8915
Chattanooga, Tennessee 37414
United States of America
www.deansikes.net

ALL SCRIPTURE REFERENCES IN THIS BOOK ARE FROM THE NEW KING JAMES VERSION OF THE HOLY BIBLE.

CHOOSE LIFE

An hour ago I made the decision that today is the day I'm ending my life. I just can't take it anymore. Too much has gone wrong for too long; too much time has forever vanished. I'm not too popular; I don't date a lot; nobody really knows the real me; and besides, once I'm dead, nobody's going to miss me anyway. I have no purpose; don't have a clue as to why I'm even alive. I can't seem to find any direction for my future. I'm tired of always feeling so alone and depressed. The pain on the inside is just getting worse. I feel like I'm being drawn further down into a bottomless, dark pit and as I am, the desire to end my life seems to be intensifying every day. I don't want to live like this; actually, this isn't even living, at best, it's existing.

I mean, for all I know, maybe I was never even supposed to be born.

Just as soon as chapel was over, my plan was to call my mom and ask her to bring my medicine to school. I knew she'd bring me the whole bottle of pills. When she did, I was going to the girl's bathroom where I was going to swallow the entire bottle of medicine, sit down on the floor, close my eyes, and never have to wake up again. Soon it was all going to be over. No more pain. No more darkness. No more feeling empty. For the first time that I can remember, I'm in control of what's happening to me and I'm choosing death.

Besides, I don't see any other way out of this deep, dark hole that seems to consume my every thought; no way out from a spiritual emptiness that drives me from anger to hopelessness, and to every conceivable emotion in between.

And then there's the whole God question. Is He real? Does He exist? Does He know how miserable I am? Does He care?

People at this school and at my church talk about God but does anyone really KNOW Him? I sure don't.

Even if He is real and if He really does love me, why has He caused my life to be so miserable and painful that in a few minutes, I won't be here anymore.

The only two things I wonder about are my family and as silly as this sounds, I do kind of wonder if is there life after death, and if so, where will I be later today?

What will my family think when they discover what I've done? Will they blame themselves? Will they cry and if they do, how long will they cry? Will they be embarrassed? Will they forget about me? Will they close off my room or will they give all of my stuff away?

Life after death; I do wonder about it. When I take my last breath on earth, is that all there is or will I take my first breath into eternity? If there is a heaven, will I be allowed in or by my taking my life, I wonder if I'm shutting heaven's front door? Could hell be real? If it is and if there is a God who does love me, there's no way He'll send me to hell, is there?

You know what? I can't consume myself with all of these WHAT IF's – I'm in control now and I say it's time to die.

But before I die, I have to go to chapel. Can't skip. My teachers would know that I'm not sitting with my class. Besides, mom can't get here with my meds for another hour anyway. So, one more boring chapel to sit thru and then, I'm out. I'm so ready for all of this to just be over; just sixty more minutes.

With that, the sixteen year old young lady named Jane who was telling me all of what you have just read, took a breath, wiped away her tears from her face, and then continued sharing with me more of what happened next:

An hour ago, suicide was the only answer I saw to the pain and emptiness that has continually filled my heart. But something happened as I was in chapel today. Something totally unexpected. Something changed on the inside of me.

You said to us that irrespective of what we were going through and despite the pain we might have in our heart today, with God, there's always hope. You said that He loves me; that He's not mad at me; and that He has a plan for my life. I know you were talking to everyone at the chapel, but honestly, it felt like you were talking directly to me. I suddenly was very much aware of what I was only minutes away from doing and as I became more aware, I found myself crying. I couldn't hold back the tears. I didn't want to sit there crying in front of my school but I couldn't help it. The tears just kept coming and as they did, I realized that maybe, just maybe, I needed to give God a chance

in my life. And so, when you asked those three (3) questions at the end of chapel, I raised my hand for two of them: I'm not a Christian and I think suicide is my answer. Could you please help me?

What you've just read really happened and it happened to a young lady named Jane at a Christian High School in Texas where we recently shared our ***YOU MATTER*** message of hope. As soon as our chapel service came to a close that day, students stood in line at her school for almost an hour to share their individual stories with our ministry.

Hearing all that Jane shared with me, I immediately found myself wandering through a maze of deeply seeded thoughts. I wondered what had brought her to this point in life. What had happened for her to buy the lie that death would be a better choice than life? How would her life look different when she embraces the love God freely has for her? And what will she do when she discovers, *not decides*, the vision He has for her individual life?

When I met Jane and she began to tell me her story, I could not help but consider what might have happened had the Lord not touched her in such a way that caused the power of hope to come alive in her heart. By her own words, Jane was sixty minutes from death. But God.

This is just one testimony from the road where we've seen the Lord touch hearts and lives have been changed right before our eyes. Through the years, we've met literally

thousands of teenagers who have courageously shared with us that at one or more points in their life, they too wrongly believed that their death would be better than their life. Maybe today, right here, right now, you too know these feelings of despair and hopelessness all too well.

If so, ***YOU*** are why I was led to write this book. By design, this book is short and to the point. It is written from the heart of someone who truly cares about **YOU**. Perhaps you're wondering how, or, maybe you even doubt if I really do care about you. After all, we don't know one another. That's fair. But here's the truth: I care about you because according to Job 33:4, *the Spirit of God made you and the breath of God gave you life*. I care because God cares so much for you that He gave you life.

And remember, ***where there is life, there is hope***.

HOPE

Hope and vision are forever connected. It's part of God's plan for humanity. Hope gives life to vision and when you have God's vision for your life, yep, you guessed it, you have hope.

Here's how serious God takes you getting His vision for your life: the Bible teaches us in Proverbs 29:18 that *where there is no **vision**, the people perish*. Ever wondered or studied what the word ***perish*** actually means? I have and it might surprise you to learn that one of the definitions for ***perish*** is, ***to suffer spiritual death***.

Spiritual death. That's a pretty heavy definition, but how many people in your world and in mine are walking around spiritually dead because they have not yet discovered God's vision for their very existence? Without this vision, hopelessness creeps in and if not dealt with, oftentimes before a person even realizes what has happened, a spirit from the devil attaches itself to their life and that spirit is death. *The fastest death in the earth today is suicide*.

Every single person with whom I have talked who has shared with me that suicide was a real, viable option in his or her life, has told me that at their lowest point, when death was knocking on the door of their heart and mind, *they felt consumed with hopelessness*. This hopelessness seemed to be ***driving*** them to hurry up and end their life. If you or someone you know can relate to these feelings, here's a truth to be mindful of: ***God never drives; He always leads***.

If hopelessness has shown up in your life, where did it come from? Get this: **hopelessness never, ever comes from God**. So, since He didn't send it to you, who did? In your life and in mine, what comes our way either originates from the Lord or from the devil. Here's a simple acid test for you to consider: ***GOOD GOD / BAD DEVIL***.

Maybe you're wondering how I can be so sure that God's plans for your life are full of hope and vision? Simple answer. I can read the Bible and ***I choose to believe*** what it says.

Take a look at what the Word of God says about this over in Jeremiah 29:11: "*For I know the thoughts I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a* ***hope***."

God's plans are to give YOU a future (vision) and hope.

So, why then do you think the enemy fights this vision and why does he desperately try to sow seeds of hopelessness in your life? In other words, ever considered what the devil knows about your future that he's petrified of you and the potential (vision) that the Holy Spirit has deposited into your life?

Think of it like this: if you're sitting wherever you are right now and I'm sitting wherever I am and the devil is seated between us; if you and the potential/vision that God has deposited into your life are a threat to the devil and I am not, who is the devil targeting? You, of course. And so, if you happen to get only one nugget out of this book, this is the revelation I pray that most penetrates your heart:

While God is the Giver of life, the devil comes to steal, and to kill and to destroy, and he comes after those who are a viable threat to his kingdom of darkness. I know this to be true because of what the Bible teaches us on this subject:

Genesis 2:7 - "*And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the BREATH OF LIFE; and man became a LIVING BEING.*"

John 10:10 - "*The thief (the devil) does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy…*"

If you sense that the enemy is chasing you, stop, take a deep breath, and be mindful that you are a threat to him. Otherwise, he wouldn't waste his time on you.

Remember: Good God; Bad devil.

And so, with this truth being established in our hearts, let's go back to some of the statements shared and questions asked from Jane at the Christian school in Texas. As we do, might be worth your time to see how you'd respond to and answer what she shared with me. After all, how you live your life will in large part be directed by what YOU BELIEVE.

BELIEF

When Jane came up and began talking with me, her first words were, *I just can't take it anymore. Too much has gone wrong for too long; too much time has forever vanished. I'm not too popular; I don't date a lot; nobody really knows the real me; and besides, once I'm dead, nobody's going to miss me anyway.*

As you read what she said, do you notice anything in particular about her words? Specifically, do you hear what she's believing? Do you pick up on the ***defeat*** in her voice? Everything she is saying at this point shouts agony, despair, and what she sees as *wrong* in her life. At the end of her first sentences to me, she takes this already defeated attitude and crosses a line when she matter of factly declares that, *once I'm dead, nobody's going to miss me anyway*. Did you catch that? Not only has she bought the lie from the enemy about her own life; at this point in our conversation, she's been convinced by the devil *what others are supposedly going to feel after she's gone*.

In short, Jane was believing lies. Why is this so important to recognize? First, a lie never, ever comes from God. Here's why. According to Titus 1:2, it's plainly revealed that ***GOD CANNOT LIE***. It's not even that He won't lie; no, it's that He ***can't*** lie. So again, since God cannot lie, where is Jane getting her information? The short answer is the devil. Let's back this answer up with truth from the Word of God; specifically, check out how Jesus describes the devil at the end

of John 8:44 – ***for he is a liar and the father of it.*** Jesus plainly tells us in this verse that the devil is a liar and beyond this, the enemy is the father of all lies.

Okay. Ready for something really basic and simple? The opposite of a lie is truth. And according to the Word of God over in John 8:32, ***you shall know the truth, and the truth (you know) shall make you free.***

Understanding this, the assignment the Lord gave me with Jane was to help her better know *the truth* about her life and as she believes and receives and acts on this truth, the lies from the enemy cannot legally stay in her heart and mind.

Could be that today, you too need to be reminded of some truth from the Word. Truth that assures you that God loves you, that He's got purpose for your life, and that no matter what the devil tries to get you to believe, because of what Jesus has done for you, ***YOU MATTER***.

As Jane continued sharing her experience on the day that we were at her school, she quickly moved to the core of the hopelessness that had set up residency in her heart and in her mind. Check out her words:

I have no purpose; don't have a clue as to why I'm even alive. I can't seem to find any direction for my future. I'm tired of always feeling so alone and depressed.

In these three sentences, we are offered a *behind the scenes* look at Phase One of the demonic strategy from the devil that he'd unleashed on Jane's mind:

1. He convinced Jane that there was no purpose for her life. Without a reason to live, why live?

2. He next led Jane down a path of her seemingly having no roadmap to follow that would lead her to any direction for her life. And finally,

3. The devil consistently hit her mind with so many lies that she was worn out from the feelings of being alone, and subsequently, she was depressed.

The devil's strategy for Jane is clear to see: convince her she has no future; no direction; and so wear her out with the lie that she's all alone that eventually, she becomes depressed.

Very quickly, let's see how the Bible answers the lies the devil unleashed on Jane in Phase One of his attack:

1. The devil said that Jane's life had no purpose. In Exodus 9:16 we see the truth: ***But indeed for this PURPOSE I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth***.

2. The devil had so confused Jane with his lies that she wrongly believed that there was no direction for her life. In Proverbs 3:5-6 we see the truth: ***Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall DIRECT your steps***.

3. The devil consistently lied to Jane in such a way that the fear that came with those lies led to her feeling depressed. (Spiritually speaking, depression is a *spirit of*

heaviness that takes up residence in the heart and mind of someone who has bought the lie of the devil.) In Isaiah 61:3 we see the truth: … ***The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.***

As Jane continued to share with me what she was thinking and how she was feeling that day, we begin to better understand Phase Two of the devil's strategy to cause Jane to move closer to a decision to end her life.

The pain on the inside is just getting worse. I feel like I'm being drawn further down into a bottomless, dark pit and as I am, the desire to end my life seems to be intensifying every day. I don't want to live like this; actually, this isn't even living, at best, it's existing.

Do you see the strategy? The pain on the inside is getting worse. Jane senses that she's being drawn into a dark pit. The desire to end her life is intensifying. She is now saying that she doesn't want to live like this.

Again, very quickly, let's see how the Bible answers these lies the devil had unleashed on Jane as part of Phase Two of his strategy to see her end her life:

1. Because at this point Jane believed the lies, the emotional pain she was experiencing as a result of these lies was getting worse. Let's again go over to John 8:32 where we see the truth: ***You shall know the truth, and the truth (you know) shall make you free.*** Free from what, you might be asking. Free from the results of lies, free from the grip of the devil, and yes, free from the

emotional pain that he oftentimes unleashes on people who have bought his lies.

2. As the devil is *patiently waiting* for the moment when Jane can no longer take the spiritual battle that she's in, a battle for her very life, Jane senses that she is being *drawn* into a dark pit and that the desire to end her life was intensifying. The phrase she used in describing what she was feeling was a very purposeful phrase. Jane sensed that she was being *drawn*. In Proverbs 24:11 we see the truth of why she was feeling this drawing: ***Deliver those who are DRAWN toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter.*** She was feeling drawn because in reality, she was being drawn.

3. Because the devil knows all too well the power of the words you and I speak, his attack has now put so much pressure on Jane that she is saying that she doesn't want to live like this. In Job 22:28 we see the truth relating to the power of the words we speak: ***You will also declare a thing, and it will be established for you; so light will shine on your ways.*** (In other words, your words create your world.)

In Phase Three of the enemy's plan for Jane, we see **the centerpiece of his lies** when Jane says, *I mean, for all I know, maybe I was never even supposed to be born.*

Let me be clear about this: God has never made a mistake and He certainly did not make one when He gave you life.

Phase Three of the strategy against Jane can be wholly answered with the truth we find in Job 33:4 which tells us, ***The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.***

In Phase Four of this attack, we can see how the devil is turning up the heat and Jane is reeling on the inside: *I don't see any other way out of this deep, dark hole that seems to consume my every thought; no way out from a spiritual emptiness that drives me from anger to hopelessness, and to every conceivable emotion in between.*

In this portion of the strategy, the lie is clear: there's no way out; Jane's thoughts are consumed with death and hopelessness; and she's so spiritually empty that her emotions are driving her to anger.

Very quickly, let's see how the Bible answers the lies from Phase Four of the attack:

1. Jane is now focusing on a wrong belief that there's no way out, no escape from the attack of the enemy and as such, the temptation to end her life is all she can see. In 1 Corinthians 10:13 we see the truth: ***No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.***

2. With her thoughts now consumed with death and hopelessness, it is imperative that Jane renews her mind

with truth. In Romans 12:2 we see this truth: ***And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.***

3. Because Jane is running on spiritual emptiness (her faith tank is low), her emotions are driving her to anger. In Romans 10:17 we see the truth on how to get more faith which, in turn, will help in our ruling over our emotions as opposed to our emotions ruling over us: ***So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.***

As we now move into exposing Phase Five of the attack on Jane, we see where the enemy turns his strategy toward God: *And then there's the whole God question. Is He real? Does He exist? Does He know how miserable I am? Does He care? People at this school and at my church talk about God but does anyone really KNOW Him? I sure don't.*

Even if He is real and if He really does love me, why has He caused my life to be so miserable and painful that in a few minutes, I won't be here anymore.

In identifying Phase Five of this assignment on Jane's life, we must insure that we do not overcomplicate the truth.

1. When the enemy gets Jane to ask if God is real, we need go no further than the first four words of the Bible (Genesis 1:1) where we come face to face with the truth: ***In the beginning God …*** You see, God has always been; He is today; and He will remain the same tomorrow.

2. When Jane begins to wonder if God cares for her, we see the craftiness of the enemy at work in her mind. In 1 Peter 5:7 we see the truth: ***Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.***

3. And to cap off the *God question*, the enemy works hard at putting the blame for Jane's misery, fear and spiritual heaviness in life at the feet of God. But in 2 Timothy 1:7 we see the truth: ***For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.***

As the attack on Jane is being fully identified, we move into Phase Six. It is during this phase that we see Jane beginning to consider if there is a hereafter and if so, where will she be. Take a look at what she said to me:

Life after death; I do wonder about it. When I take my last breath on earth, is that all there is or will I take my first breath into eternity? If there is a heaven, will I be allowed in or by my taking my life, I wonder if I'm shutting heaven's front door? Could hell be real? If it is and if there is a God who does love me, there's no way He'll send me to hell, is there?

1. When Jane questions if there is a heaven we find the truth in John 14:1-3: ***Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.***

2. As Jane considers if hell is real, the truth that describes hell is found in Revelation 21:8: ***But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.***

3. The question Jane asks next is the single most asked question I get on the road when students ask us about suicide. Jane said, "I wonder if I'm shutting heaven's front door?" In other words, Jane was asking, *If I commit suicide, will I go to heaven?* After reading the Bible from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22, I have not seen any scripture that says if a Believer (a Christian) commits suicide, he or she will go to hell. What I have seen however are two very, very important scriptures that relate to this question. In Hebrews 9:27 we see this truth: ***And as it is appointed for men to die once*** … In this scripture we see that there is an APPOINTED time for you and for me to die. God does not need our help in getting either you or me to that appointed time. Remember, God is the Giver of life and the devil is the destroyer. The second very important verse He has shown me relating to this question is truth found in Romans 10:13: ***For <u>whoever</u> calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved***.

I realize that the questions asked in Phase Six of the attack on Jane are some of the toughest questions any of us will ever be asked to answer. Understanding the difficulty of these thoughts and subsequent questions gives birth to

another truth that I pray you receive deep into your heart; it's a truth I was taught many years ago: ***You and I will never beat thoughts with thoughts. We beat thoughts with words and words in red always win.*** In other words, we need to search out and then speak the Word of God to combat and beat the thoughts the enemy throws toward our minds.

As Jane and I talked about what we believe happens to a Christian who commits suicide, these questions were posed: Does a Christian who dies of cancer go to hell? The answer is obviously NO. Does a Christian who dies in jail go to hell? The answer is obviously NO. How about this; does a Christian who willfully and purposefully abuses their body by eating unhealthy foods and who refuses to exercise for years of his or her life and subsequently dies of a heart attack, does that person go to hell? Obviously the answer is NO. ***There's no difference is mental illness***. When a person ends his life, they are not mentally healthy. It is at this point where I believe the mercy and grace of God is fully at work in and on that persons life.

Please do not misunderstand what I am saying. ***Suicide is never, ever the answer***. God has an assignment for you to fulfill on this earth. Anyone who takes their life automatically misses out on the fulfillment of this assignment and all of the goodness He has scheduled for your life.

As Jane began to bring her testimony to a close, she did so by sharing what happened next during our chapel service at her school – she chose to give *God a chance*.

GIVE GOD A CHANCE

Near the end of our chapel, I was led to ask the students a series of three questions:

1. If today were the last day of your life and this journey we know as life came to an abrupt end, where would you spend your eternity? In other words, are you a Christian; have you made Jesus Lord of your life? If you haven't made this choice and you'd like to invite Jesus into your heart, would you please raise your hand.

2. If there is someone in your life who has caused you pain and you have a gentle prompting in your heart to forgive that person, would you let me know by raising your hand? Remember, if you do not forgive, the Bible teaches us that we will not be forgiven.

3. If today you are dealing with suicide and you have the guts to acknowledge that you wrongly believe that your death is better than your life, would you also simply raise your hand?

Jane then shared with me that at the end of our chapel, as I was asking the above questions and she responded to two of them, *something totally unexpected happened. Something changed on the inside of me,* she said.

What was changing was Jane was coming out of the darkness from the lies of the enemy and was coming straight into the glorious light that is produced by the truth found in the Word of God.

In short, on that morning at that Christian school in Texas, after hearing the truth that we were led to share, ***Jane chose life***. She chose to not only give God a chance; she chose to make Jesus the Lord of her life. Doing so was not the end; much to the contrary, it was the beginning.

So, what about you. Ready for a new beginning? Ready for some change? Ready to receive the free gift of eternal life that is yours the instant you make Jesus Lord of your life? Ready to get some help? Ready to get plugged into a faith system that can produce lasting change in your life? If so, then are some next steps you can pray about taking as you move forward from here:

SPIRITUALLY

1. Receive Jesus as Lord of your life.
2. Get plugged into a local Bible-teaching church.
3. Get and read the Bible in a translation that speaks to your heart – everyday.
4. Talk with other Christians about your journey of faith.
5. Have spiritual accountability in your life: a Pastor or Youth Pastor.

EMOTIONALLY

1. Pray about meeting with a Christian Counselor on a consistent basis.
2. Journal on paper (or via technology) what's happening on the inside of you.
3. Connect with other Christians who are on a similar journey as you and share your story.
4. If you need help and can't find anyone at that particular moment, call 800.273.TALK (8255) – this is a free, national 24/7 suicide prevention lifeline.

PHYSICALLY

1. Incorporate exercise into your schedule – everyday.
2. Eat healthy meals.
3. Plan consistent times during the year to let your mind get quiet and simply rest.

As we begin to close our time together within the pages of this book, I was led to share with you the ***personal*** reason I believe I was led to write on the topic of ***Choosing Life.*** Years ago, when I was in my early twenties, my mom attempted suicide and I was used by the Lord to get to her and to then get her to a hospital where God saved her life. Shortly thereafter, we had another member of our family who actually took their life. In more recent years, my wife had a member of her mom's family end his life. You see, this is a subject that has hit really close to home but as it has, as a family, we have drawn closer to the Lord and have become more purposeful in our commitment to choose to live the life we each were created to live.

Now, it's your turn to make a choice. My prayer for you is that as we have invested some time together through the pages of this book and as you have more deeply understood the attack that was on Jane's life, your heart has been touched and you're drawing even closer to Jesus and to the truth that God created you on purpose, with purpose and for purpose. Within this purpose (vision), there is hope.

Irrespective of how dark any situation may become along this journey we know as life, because you are connected with Jesus by His Spirit, today more than ever, you are committed to ***CHOOSE LIFE*** because ***WHERE THERE IS LIFE, THERE IS HOPE***.

God bless you.