

n. Dear Teachers,

New research has found that suicides among young adults have dropped most sharply in states that have embraced the 988 crisis line, which is an encouraging development in the area of mental health. In response, this installment of The Wired Word will focus on helping people in times of despair, and exploring what the church can do to help prevent self-harm and suicide.

As an option, our second lesson uses a story idea sent in by a subscriber about hurry as the enemy of spiritual formation. We'll consider how intentionally slowing down and seeking a simpler lifestyle can bring us closer to God and to others, and build Christlike character.

Teachers, you are welcome to email the student version of either lesson to your class members, depending on which lesson you prefer to use for your class time. To do so, [click here](#).

May God bless you as you experience the Scriptures this week.

The Editorial Team of The Wired Word

Youth Suicides Drop After Debut of National Hotline

The Wired Word for the Week of May 10, 2026

In the News

The news surrounding teen mental health is often disheartening. The suicide rate among people aged 10 to 24 jumped 62% from 2007 through 2021, reports Greater Good Magazine, after remaining stable for the previous five years. But recent data is offering a glimmer of hope, revealing that the youth suicide rate in the United States has dropped in recent years.

FOX 13 News spoke with the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, Florida, in an effort to better understand the trend. President and CEO Clara Reynolds attributed this positive decline largely to the implementation of 988, the national Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Although 988 is a national phone number, the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay answers Florida callers. The hotline is a gateway to professional help and mental health support.

The 988 national suicide prevention hotline was introduced in 2022, and in the following 2.5 years the rate of suicides among young people across the country dropped 11% below projections. The greatest decreases were in states with a higher volume of answered 988 calls.

The findings, reported by The New York Times, compared suicide deaths from July 2022 to December 2024 with mathematical projections that were based on historical trends. According to this analysis, there were 4,372 fewer suicides of adolescents and young adults, ages 15 to 34, than had been projected.

But why was this good news connected to the use of the hotline? Researchers at Harvard Medical School looked at trends in states with high and low usage of the hotline. They found that the 10 states with the largest increases in 988 calls experienced an 18.2% reduction in observed suicides compared with expected suicides. The 10 states with the lowest number of answered 988 calls saw a reduction of only 10.6 percent.

The government's investment in 988 has resulted in "a measurable reduction of deaths," said Dr. Vishal Patel, a resident physician at Brigham and Women's Hospital. Among young people "at least," he said, "suicide mortality is lower than it would have been without the program."

The United States created the 988 hotline with bipartisan support in July 2022, replacing a less memorable 10-digit hotline number. The government also supported the hotline with a \$1.5 billion investment in crisis center capacity. Since its debut, the service has been used more than 25 million times, according to the Department of Health and Human Services. The agency has requested \$534.6 million to fund the program for 2027.

In 2025, the Trump administration terminated one aspect of the hotline, the Press 3 option for LGBTQ+ callers. Advocacy groups and policymakers protested the decision, and health secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. recently said that his agency was planning to restore the Press 3 option.

In an effort to show a link between the decline in deaths and the hotline, researchers looked at suicides among Americans over age 65, who are less likely to call 988. In that group, the reduction in suicides exceeded expectations, but it was smaller -- just 4.5%. They also looked at the rate of suicides among young people in England, where no comparable change had been made to the national crisis line. They found no reduction in youth suicides in England.

So, what happens on a 988 call? According to WebMD, you will first hear a message that will give you options to connect to the Veterans Crisis Line, access help in Spanish, or be routed to your local Lifeline network crisis center (based on your area code). If your local crisis center is unable to answer, your call will go to another Lifeline center. Once the call is routed, a trained counselor will answer the phone. They will listen, provide support, and share resources if needed -- their goal is to support you in your moment of distress. If the counselor feels you are in danger, they may discuss connecting you to local emergency services like 911. But first they will do everything they can to help you with a less invasive plan to keep you safe.

Emily Hilliard, a senior press secretary at the Department of Health and Human Services, said that government agencies are "committed to ensuring that all Americans have access" to the 988 line, which she said "clearly provides lifesaving support, helping millions of people every year."

More on this story can be found at these links:

[We're Missing the Good News About Youth Mental Health. Greater Good Magazine](#)

[Youth Suicide Rates Drop 11% Nationwide: How the 988 Lifeline Is Saving Lives. FOX 13 Tampa Bay](#)

[Youth Suicides Declined After Creation of National Hotline. The New York Times](#)

[What Happens When You Contact 988 About Suicide? WebMD](#)

Applying the News Story

Jesus had compassion, which literally means that he "suffered with" people. Discuss how you, as a follower of Christ, can help a neighbor in a time of despair, loneliness, futility or emptiness. Explore how your congregation can do a better job of helping to prevent self-harm and suicide, through its messages and its programs.

The Big Questions

1. When, if ever, have you felt moments of despair, emptiness, futility or loneliness? Who or what was helpful to you?
2. What is your experience with youth suicide, in your family, congregation or community? What assistance has been available to struggling young people and families in your area?
3. When and how are matters of mental health discussed in your family, if at all? What prevents these issues from being raised? How could such conversations be encouraged?
4. How do leaders and members of your church listen, provide support, and share resources? In what ways do they provide support in moments of distress? How could they do better?
5. What, if anything, can your congregation do to help prevent self-harm and suicide among its members and neighbors?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

1 Samuel 16:23 And whenever the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him. (For context, read 1 Samuel 16:14-23.)

Although the Bible does not say much about being depressed, it does speak of people suffering mental and emotional torment. In 1 Samuel, God rejects King Saul and an "evil spirit" begins to torment him (v. 14). From the biblical description of the situation, it appears that Saul is suffering from depression.

The servants of Saul are concerned, and they search for a person who is "skillful in playing the lyre" to bring the king some relief (v. 16). David is recommended, and he is brought to Saul. Whenever the evil spirit comes upon Saul, David plays the lyre. Then, "Saul would be relieved and feel better." Music may have been one of the very first therapies used to relieve people suffering from mental torment.

The Bible takes mental health seriously, and so should we. We need to seek guidance, counseling, therapy and sometimes medication. The church should not avoid this topic, but instead talk about it openly, for the good of its members and friends.

Questions: What helped King Saul in his time of despair? Why is mental health a concern to God? What kinds of counseling, therapy and medication can be helpful in achieving and maintaining good mental health? What are the consequences of ignoring mental illness?

Mark 6:34 As [Jesus] went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them many things. (For context, read Mark 6:30-34.)

The word "passion" comes from the Latin word *passio*, which means "suffering." We sometimes forget this when we speak of romantic passion, or the passion that someone has for a hobby or sports activity. The root of the word passion is suffering, which was made very clear in the Mel Gibson movie about the crucifixion of Jesus in Jerusalem: *The Passion of the Christ*.

Mark 6 comes from a time much earlier, when Jesus was performing his ministry in the region called Galilee. If a movie were made about this time period, it would be called *The Compassion of the Christ*. Not *Passion*, but *Com-compassion*. Compassion is such an important word in this passage of Scripture, and it comes from the combination of *passio* (suffering) and *com* (with). Put the two together and you get "with suffering" or "suffering with." Jesus shows compassion toward the people around him, which means that he "suffers with" them.

Jesus has a sympathetic awareness of the distress of the people around him, combined with a strong desire to alleviate it. Mark tells us that he has compassion because they are "like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them many things." The challenge for us is to feel the compassion of the Christ and to help people learn more about God and his love for them. To suffer with people, as Jesus does -- people who are young and old, male and female, black and white. Jesus helps everyone, without discrimination, and without asking how they managed to get in trouble in the first place.

Questions: How can you show the compassion of the Christ, in your family, church and community? Why is this important? What help could you offer a person feeling despair, loneliness, futility or emptiness? Be specific.

Luke 6:18-19 They had come to hear [Jesus] and to be healed of their diseases, and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And everyone in the crowd was trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them. (For context, read Luke 6:1-19.)

In the sixth chapter of Luke, Jesus and his disciples are walking through fields on the Sabbath, and the hungry disciples begin to pluck heads of grain. A group of Jewish leaders, the Pharisees, criticize them by saying, "Why are you doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" (v. 2). Jesus replies, "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath" (v. 5). He is saying that his identity as the Son of Man gives him authority to use the Sabbath for his work of feeding, helping and healing.

Then, on another Sabbath, Jesus enters a synagogue and sees a man with a withered hand. He knows that the scribes and the Pharisees are watching him closely, wondering if he will cure on the Sabbath. Using the man as a focal point for his teaching, Jesus says to the scribes and the Pharisees, "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or destroy it?" (v. 9). No one answers. Then Jesus says to the man, "Stretch out your hand" (v. 10). The man does this, and his hand is restored. The coming of the kingdom of God is seen in doing good, saving lives, and healing people -- even on the Sabbath.

Jesus goes on to call his twelve disciples and then to take them into the middle of a large crowd. Luke tells us that the people "had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases ... those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured ... power came out from him and healed all of them." Jesus makes clear that his mission is to heal the sick and cast out demons by the power of God, helping people to be restored to physical, mental and spiritual health. He cures people with "unclean spirits," which we might describe today as mental illness. Concerns about details such as healing on the Sabbath are insignificant, says Jesus, since he -- the Son of Man -- "is lord of the Sabbath." Jesus is committed to human restoration, in every time and place, and he sees healing as a sign that the kingdom of God has entered human life.

Questions: What is it about issues of mental health that make many people uncomfortable? Why would Jesus want us to tackle problems such as depression, anxiety and other crippling mental difficulties -- even on the Sabbath? How is healing a sign of the coming of the kingdom of God? What can your Christian community do to be involved in this work?

2 Corinthians 12:8-9 Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. (For context, read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10.)

In the 12th chapter of his second letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul speaks of visions and revelations. When he says, "I know a person in Christ" (v. 2), he is probably speaking about himself, but he does not want to boast about his ecstatic experiences. This person entered heaven, says Paul, and was "caught up into paradise and heard things that are not to be told" (v. 4).

He goes on to say that "on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses" (v. 5). By refusing to boast about his revelations, Paul is criticizing those who gather followers by taking pride in their visions. Although he has been given revelations of "exceptional character" (v. 7), he has been prevented from becoming too elated by a thorn in the flesh -- a physical or mental ailment. He has appealed to the Lord about this on three separate occasions, but the Lord Jesus said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." Weakness shows that any greatness shown by Paul is not his own characteristic, but is a sign of divine grace and Christ's power. Whenever "I am weak," concludes Paul, "then I am strong."

Questions: When have you experienced a weakness that revealed Christ's power, if ever? How are people united to God and to each other through vulnerability instead of strength? When do you try to remove a thorn in the flesh, and when do you accept it?

For Further Discussion

1. UCLA's Daniel Eisenberg says that there has been a recent uptick in young people using apps and telehealth to support their well-being. According to Greater Good Magazine, the academic distress of students peaked right after the beginning of Covid-19, then declined each of the three years that followed, eventually returning to pre-pandemic levels. Students' frustration levels also gradually declined from 2010 to 2024. Where do you see improvements in the mental health of young people, if anywhere? What has contributed to this positive trend? What more can be done to help young people with anxiety, loneliness, distress, depression and frustration?

2. For more than two decades, basketball star Elena Delle Donne lived under the spotlight. She was a star at age 12, and much later led the Washington Mystics to the WNBA Championship. When she retired at age 35, she was a two-time MVP, seven-time all-star and Olympic gold medalist. But she also experienced depression, illness and injury. According to The Washington Post, she moved to college in a fog of depression. Feeling that she did not want the basketball life but had no way out of it, she contemplated suicide. She retreated to her family home but did not discuss her feelings. "I didn't want to talk about depression and suicide," Delle Donne says. "That wasn't a thing you talked about back then." How should depression and suicide be discussed in your family and congregation? What are the barriers to doing so? What are the consequences of not discussing the topics?

3. Christian communities are challenged to overcome the taboo of mental illness. Edward Jones II, an assistant athletic director for Baylor Football, says to Christianity Today, "As a Black man, I understand the taboo that mental health is and has been in our community." He tries to "be an example of handling your mental health so all of our student-athletes can see its benefit." How can you do a better job of "handling" your mental health? What approaches would you be willing and able to share with others?

4. Mark 6 tells us that wherever Jesus went, "into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it

were healed" (v. 56). Yes, all who touched it were healed. Jesus healed everyone, without discrimination. What does this passage tell you about access to healing? In our current health care environment, what would Jesus do? What does Jesus want us to do?

Responding to the News

Look for opportunities in your family, church and community to start conversations about mental health. Show compassion to people in distress or despair. Try to listen, provide support, and share resources with people in need. And challenge your congregation to develop messages and programs that will help to prevent self-harm and suicide. Perhaps you can develop Stephen Ministers, members trained to provide one-on-one care to people going through difficulties.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for being such a powerful healer. Work in our lives, and in the lives of people around us, to ease distress and lift despair. May we trust your power and your grace to be at work within us, as we seek to be involved in your ministry of healing and restoration. Amen.