



Worldview Transformation Series

Season Two ~ Disk 24
Death To Suicide ~ Sea of Trees



Video Summary

Aokigahara (青木ヶ原), also known as the **Sea of Trees** (樹海 Jukai), is a 35 km² forest that lies at the north west base of Mount Fuji in Japan. The forest contains a number of rocky, icy caverns, a few of which are popular tourist destinations. The forest, which has a historic association with demons in Japanese Mythology, is a popular place for suicides. In 2002, 78 bodies were found, despite numerous signs, in Japanese and English, urging people to reconsider their actions. Due to the wind-blocking density of the trees, and an absence of wildlife, the forest is known for being eerily quiet. This pristine environment is the number two place in the world where people go to take their lives; number one is the Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco, CA. It was here that Chad and his team explored this ever-growing problem and discovered that evidence of this issue can be found at every turn.



The Book that Promotes Death

The Complete Manual of Suicide (完全自殺マニュアル Kanzen Jisatsu Manyuaru, lit. Complete Suicide Manual) is a Japanese book written by Wataru Tsurumi. It was first published on July 4, 1993 and sold more than one million copies. This 198-page book provides explicit descriptions and analysis on a wide range of suicide methods such as overdosing, hanging, jumping, and carbon monoxide poisoning. It is not a suicide manual for the terminally ill. There is no preference shown for painless or dignified ways of ending one's life. The book provides matter-of-fact assessment of each method in terms of the pain it causes, effort of preparation required, the appearance of the body, and lethality.

Because the Japanese criminal code censors only graphical depictions of the sexual organs, this book was not censored by the government. Some officials

designated the book as yugaitosho (book harmful to youth), which restricts the sale of books to minors, while some, such as Tokyo, decided against doing so. There are many suicides where the book was found along with the body, including several cases of the suicides of junior high school students. The book neither encourages nor discourages suicide, and as well does not tell those considering suicide to seek help, though wordings such as "completely painless" and "marvelous experience" are used to indicate that certain methods are less painful and more fatal than others. Moreover, the book shows that certain popular methods of suicide have very low success rates. For this reason, some argue that the book has made suicide attempts since its publication more fatal. Some attribute Japan's high suicide rate not just to the number of people who attempt suicide but also to the fact that people utilize more fatal methods, though to what extent the book has contributed to this trend is unknown.



Primary Lesson

Choose life

This lesson looks into the uncomfortable truth concerning suicide. Although most people are aware of this growing trend among teens, few are willing to deal with it directly, and as a result it has stayed out of mainstream media and Christian conversation for too long. This poignant program cuts to the core motivation behind suicide and confronts the lies about life and death that are prevalent in our world.

The Bible makes it very clear that we must make a choice every day to embrace life, and that those choices will affect us and our families (Deuteronomy 30:19). As Chad and the production team travel around the country of Japan, they find evidence that this ancient culture has had a fascination with death, especially suicide, for hundreds of years. A lack of Judeo-Christian history and a spirit of fatalism are a potent mixture that poisons thousands of young and old alike every year. From the flashing lights of downtown Tokyo to the remote foot hills of Mt. Fuji, the nation is being ravaged by a spirit that desires not only to take the life of the young, but also to erase the memory of the past. Interacting with Japanese youth and locals alike, they find that suicide is not only accepted but also promoted on a very subtle level throughout the culture. Come on this very exciting, yet disturbing, journey into the past and present of Japanese culture as they uncover the reasons why the Japanese refer to the Sea of Trees as the "perfect place to die."



Facts, Figures & Illustrations

Suicide

- Worldwide there are more deaths due to suicide than to accidents, homicides and war combined.
- Over 34,000 people in the U.S.A. die by suicide every year.
- Currently, suicide is the 11th leading cause of death in the U.S.
- Every day, approximately 95 Americans take their own life, and 2,370 more attempt to do so.
- A person dies by suicide about every 15 minutes in the U.S. An attempt is estimated to be made once every 40 seconds.
- In the U.S. in 2007 (the latest year for which rates are available), the suicide rate among women was 4.8 per 100,000, while for men it was 18.3 per 100,000.
- There are four male suicides for every female suicide, but three female attempts for each male attempt.
- Firearms are the most frequent method of suicide among adults in the U.S.
- Over 90 percent of people who die by suicide had at least one psychiatric illness at the time of death. The most common diagnoses are depression and drug and/or alcohol abuse.
- Alcoholism is a factor in about 30 percent of all suicide deaths.
- Early recognition and treatment of depression and other psychiatric illnesses appears to be the best way to prevent suicide.
- Certain personality disorders, such as borderline and antisocial personality disorders, appear to carry high risk for suicide. Impulsivity also appears to be a risk factor for suicide.
- Between 20 and 50 percent of people who kill themselves had previously attempted suicide. Although the majority of people who die by suicide have not made a previous attempt, a serious suicide attempt is a clear risk factor for suicide death.
- Suicidal individuals often talk about suicide directly or indirectly using statements like, "My family would be better off without me." Sometimes they talk as if they are saying goodbye or going away, and may arrange to put their affairs in order. Other signs of contemplating suicide include giving away articles they value, paying off debts or changing a will.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students and the third leading cause of death among all youth 15–24 years old. In the U.S., only accidents and homicides claim more young lives.
- Over 4,000 people aged 15–24 die by suicide each year in the United States.
- Between the mid-1950s and the late 1970s, the suicide rate among U.S. males aged 15–24 more than tripled (from 6.3 per 100,000 in 1955 to 21.3 in 1977). Among females aged 15–24, the rate more than doubled during this period (from 2.0 to 5.2). The youth suicide rate generally leveled off during the 1980s and early 1990s and since the mid-1990s, it has been steadily decreasing.
- Among young people aged 15–24, males die by suicide almost six times more frequently than females. In 2007 (the latest year for which rates are available) the suicide rate among young men was 15.8 per 100,000, and the rate among young women was 3.2.
- Youth suicide rates vary widely among different racial and ethnic groups. In 2007, white youth had a suicide rate of 10.3 per 100,000, compared to rates of 6.0 for African Americans, 7.0 for Hispanics youth, 8.5 for Asian Americans and 20.0 for American Indians and Alaskan Natives.
- Twenty percent of American high school students report having seriously considered suicide during the previous 12 months. Eight percent of high school students make a suicide attempt.
- Seventy percent of youth who make a suicide attempt are frequent users of alcohol and/or other drugs. In states where the minimum drinking age was raised from 18 to 21, the suicide rate for 18-to-20 year olds decreased.
- Over 90 percent of youth who die by suicide had at least one psychiatric illness at the time of death; in about half such cases, the psychiatric illness was present, although often unrecognized, for two years or more. The most common diagnoses among youth are depression, substance abuse and conduct disorders.



Key Scriptures

(From NKJV, unless otherwise noted)

1 Corinthians 6: 19-20 ~ *Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body[a] and in your spirit, which are God's.*

Matthew 22:37-39 ~ *Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

1 John 4:7-13 ~ *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

John 10:10 ~ *The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*

John 11:25 ~ *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live."*

John 14:6 ~ *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*

1 Corinthians 3:17 ~ *If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.*

Jeremiah 29:11 ~ *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity;*



Complimentary Stories

Elijah had successfully encountered, defeated, and slain the prophets of Baal (1Kings 18:19-40), but then the wicked Queen Jezebel quickly threatened to kill Elijah.

Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" (1 Kings 19:2-4)

But, why would Elijah flee from this wicked woman, much less to seek the LORD to end his life, when he had already defeated 450 prophets of Baal? Because the spirit and courage he had before were of the Lord, and not of himself; and that those who have the greatest zeal and courage for religion, for God, and his worship, his truths and ordinances, if left to themselves, become weak and fearful.

He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. (Isaiah 40:29).

The secret of the strength and power in the life of the Saints, is that it comes from God — and, is willingly received by faith.

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)

The question of how Elijah dealt with his suicidal thoughts is more of a description of how God restored spiritual equilibrium to His fearful and despondent prophet.

1. The LORD mercifully sustained Elijah.
 - Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel[a] touched him, and said to him, "Arise and eat." Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. (1Kings 19:5-6)
 - Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. (Lamentations 3:22).

2. The LORD majestically demonstrated His power to Elijah.
 - Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. (1Kings 19:11-12)
 - We also recall that it is 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts. (Zechariah 4:6).
3. The LORD calmly spoke to Elijah with a small, comfortable voice.
 - And after the fire a Still Small Voice (1Kings 19:12b).
 - In like manner, the Father has comforted us with the gentleness of His powerful hands.
 - "I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will also lead him, and restore comforts to him and to his mourners. I create the fruit of the lips: Peace, peace to him who is far off and to him who is near," Says the Lord, "And I will heal him." (Isaiah 57:18-19).
4. Finally, the LORD humbled Elijah with the Truth that Elijah was not alone.
 - Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him. (1Kings 19:18)
 - Only when we have been humbled by the Almighty, are we truly turned back to Him.
 - Turn us back to You, O Lord, and we will be restored; renew our days as of old. (Lamentations 5:21).



Discussion Questions

1. Ask the questions: Why do people commit suicide? Do you personally know anyone who has taken his or her own life or attempted it?
2. Discuss the issues of shame and guilt as they relate to suicide and why these issues are difficult for people to talk about it.
3. Discuss the fact that the real victims of suicide are the survivors. How do those of us who are left behind feel, especially when we can't ask them why?
4. Discuss the scripture in Jeremiah 29, how God has great plans for all of our lives, yet people choose death. What are the external and internal factors that cause people to choose death?
5. What does the Bible say about eternal life and what are the qualifications for receiving it?
6. Discuss the influence of evil spirits and demonic influences and how they play a part in suicide and suicidal thoughts. (See Ephesians 6:12)
7. Discuss what teens can do when battling thoughts of suicide. (Hints: stay in communication with friends and family, do not allow yourself to be isolated, maintain a healthy relationship with Jesus, etc.)
8. Discuss the armor of God and how by faith we can access it to fight the spirits that come against us. (See Ephesians 6:13-17)