

# Self-Harm

Mark Shaw

## Introduction

Princess Diana: “You have so much pain inside yourself, you try and hurt yourself on the outside because you need help.” BBC tv interview in 1995 (cutting arms & legs)<sup>1</sup>

**Hebrews 7:26-27** *For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up Himself.*

## I. What is Self-injury?

- A. Injuring yourself on purpose by making scratches or cuts on your body with a sharp object – enough to break the skin and to make it bleed (self-harm, self-mutilation, self-abuse).
- B. There are numerous forms of Self-harm.
- C. Why self-injure?
- D. How do self-injurers see themselves?
- E. **GOD** \_\_\_\_\_ misunderstands the cutter! **Psalm 139**

## II. Self-injury and Addiction

- A. The \_\_\_\_\_ of a cutter is similar to the thinking of a drug addict
  1. A desire to remove unpleasant conditions from life
    - a. Escape from pain to pleasure
    - b. **Ps. 55:6** *And I say, “Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest;*
    - c. The action is often planned (meaning it is not impulsive or compulsive)
- B. The \_\_\_\_\_ of a cutter are similar to the actions of a drug addict
  1. Forms of \_\_\_\_\_
    - a. Lying (is a better description than manipulating)
    - b. Hidden from loved ones
  2. Euphoric \_\_\_\_\_ after the temporary physical pain
    - a. Medical explanation of pain (adrenaline and histamines)
    - b. The thinking of the self-injurer’s loved ones is similar to the thinking of the drug addict’s loved ones.
- C. Two \_\_\_\_\_ Descriptions of Self-injury
  1. Worldly view: \_\_\_\_\_ Illness
    - a. Not a diagnosis in the DSM-V but a “Conditions for Further Study” located in the back of the DSM-V
    - b. Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI)
    - c. Associated with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) and/or
    - d. Major Depressive Disorder

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<sup>1</sup> Some of this workshop has been excerpted from my *Hope and Help for Self-injurers and Cutters* booklet by Focus Publishing, 2007.

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2. The Word of God diagnosis:
  - a. Saint<sup>2</sup> - grieving like the pagans do; **Deut. 14:1-2**
  - b. Sufferer – grief, deep sadness (unbiblical response); **Lev. 21:5**
  - c. Sinner – wrong \_\_\_\_\_ to circumstances, feelings; **I Pet. 1:14-16**
3. God offers \_\_\_\_\_ to the cutter:
  - a. Confession and Repentance. **Prov. 28:13** *Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.*
  - b. New Identity and a New Heart. **II Cor. 5:17** *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.*
  - c. Blood shed once and for all by the Savior. **Heb. 7:26-27** (above) &  
**I John 1:7** *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.*

## III. Biblical Hope for Self-Injurers

- A. \_\_\_\_\_ by beginning with hope for the hurting.
  1. Not a new problem for God. **Ecclesiastes 1:9-10** *What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, "See, this is new?" It has been already in the ages before us.*
  2. God addressed this problem with His children thousands of years ago. **Leviticus 19:28** *You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourself; I am the Lord.* **Lev. 21:5** *They shall not make bald patches on their head, nor shave off the edges of their beards, nor make any cuts on their body.*
  3. God treasures His people and wants the best for them. **Deuteronomy 14:1-2** *You are the sons of the LORD your GOD. You shall not cut yourselves or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead. For you are a people holy to the LORD your GOD, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the people who are on the face of the earth.*
- B. Build a \_\_\_\_\_ relationship.
  1. Not condemnation, but reconciliation. **Romans 8:1** *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*
  2. Openness, confession, no shame. **I John 1:5-10**
  3. No judgment. **Rom. 3:23**
- C. Ask \_\_\_\_\_
  1. Data Gathering Questions first like: When did cutting start? How do you injure in public? In private? Etc.
  2. \_\_\_\_\_ Probing Questions second like: What is plaguing you? What grieves you? What does self-injure provide for you? What lies are you believing? What is true? Etc.
  3. David Powlison's 35 x-ray questions.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Three categories are excerpted from Dr. Mike Emlert's *Cross Talk* book, New Growth Press, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Powlison, David. "X-ray Questions: Drawing Out the Whys and Wherefores of Human Behavior." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol. 18, Number 1, Fall 1999.

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- D. \_\_\_\_\_ the truth using biblical passages that specifically address self-injury:
1. What it means to be a holy, set apart people. **Deut. 14:1-2** (above)  
**I Peter 1:14-16** ...do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as HE who called you is holy, you shall also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."
  2. Explain the love and holiness of God in the passages listed throughout this workshop.
  3. Teach the atonement and the importance of the blood of Christ. **Heb. 7:26-27**
- E. Give \_\_\_\_\_ homework.
1. Put-off self-harm and replace it with calling a TCF (Trusted Christian Friend); memorizing Scripture; honest, out loud prayer; singing praise songs out loud; Etc. **Eph. 4:20-24**
  2. Mind renewal homework is important. **Eph. 4:23**
    - a. Attack the self-reliant attitude and other lies they believe.
    - b. Address the victim mentality<sup>4</sup> and blame-shifting.
    - c. Teach where to turn when powerful emotions of disappointment, anger, or sadness arise.
  3. VOH Consequence Homework:
    - a. Please read the print out entitled "Which God is in Your Sufferings?"
      - 1) Identify ways you noticed Joni Eareckson Tada reacted to her suffering.
      - 2) Did she try to get out of her suffering before God was done making her uncomfortable?
      - 3) Was she willing to allow God to do what he wanted to do with her life even if it made her very uncomfortable and she really wanted relief, but He decided not to give it to her?
    - b. Please read Romans 8:18; Rom 8:28 and 29; II Cor 9:8; II Cor 12:9. God says that He the discomfort we are experiencing right now will not be comparable to the glory we gain from working through the suffering/discomfort, do you believe it? Why or why not? When you are experiencing discomfort/suffering, are you asking God to make His grace abound to you to give you what you need to **not** sin, or are you taking matters into your own hands and giving yourself the relief you think you need **when** you think you need it? Are you willing to wait for God to give you relief or do you say you're not willing to suffer and you take matters into your own hands? Are you willing to sin in order to get relief or to get out of suffering? Explain.
    - c. Please read II Cor 1:3-4 and Galatians 6:1,2. What do these passages say about what our role should be as Christians toward others who are suffering? Do you believe that your commitment to keeping your struggles private (not involving the help of interns and/or staff) is allowing other Christians to do their job as listed in these 2 verses? If God commands Christians to serve each other to help support other believers who are suffering or struggling are you (as the suffering /struggling Christian) putting yourself in a position to be served like God commands even when you doubt that they will be able to help you?
    - d. Please list every single way you sinned during the progression of events on the day before, during, and after you self-harmed. How have you taken care of your sin against God? How

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<sup>4</sup> For a thorough differentiation between true victims and the victim mentality, see my book *Relapse: Biblical Prevention Strategies*, Focus: Bemidji, MN.

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have you taken care of your sin against VOH and the staff on duty? How did you violate the policies that were set up to protect you?

## IV. Biblical Hope for the Non-Christian and Christian

- A. Seize an opportunity to present the Gospel to Non-Christians. **Romans 3:23** *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of GOD.*
  1. Because of our sins, we are alienated from GOD and headed for eternal destruction and we cannot save ourselves. We require a Savior.
  2. The blood of JESUS was shed for the forgiveness of all sins. JESUS suffered and died for all sinners who will trust in Him.
  3. The LORD calls for sinners to repent by turning from sin and to Him. **Prov. 28:13**
  4. JESUS alone saves us by grace through faith in Him, not a result of our own doing or a result of our good works. **Ephesians 2:8-9**
  5. God is faithful to both forgive and cleanse us from all our sins. **I John 1:9** *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
- B. Seize an opportunity to remind Christians of the Gospel.
  1. Trusting God continues even when you are a believer. **Proverbs 3:5-8** *Trust in the LORD and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.*
  2. Does a *Christian* need to punish themselves for their sins? No. Jesus is the propitiation for us and He experienced God's wrath for us. Only Jesus was qualified to satisfy the wrath of God. Our blood is insufficient, useless.
  3. Restore hope by:
    - a. Empowering the Christian with the truth that maladaptive thoughts, words, and behaviors can be replaced by God's grace. **Phil. 2:12-13**
    - b. Remembering there is a new way to be human – to live for Christ bringing forth abundant life!