



June 2019

Dear Friend:

I often use this correspondence to catch you up on happenings around here and this month is no different. Recently, your team here at Focus on the Family has poured their hearts into developing a resource to meet a dire need in our society—teen suicide prevention. I know it isn't a popular topic, but it is one that must be addressed.

Depression and suicide rates among kids are staggering. Everyone should be concerned. Right here in El Paso County, where Focus on the Family's headquarters is located, 49 youth under the age of 18 died by suicide between 2014 – 2017. During that time, the district where my sons go to school faced three student suicides in two weeks. It was devastating! Nationally, there are more than 3,000 suicide attempts *every day* in the United States among 9th to 12th graders. That number would be even higher if middle school kids were included in the statistics.

These students are paralyzed by pain that has spread across our nation. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, more than 3 million adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 report at least one major depressive episode in the past year, and more than 2 million report severe depression has impeded their daily functioning.

To help students, parents and all those involved with youth turn this tragedy around, we launched into action to create a resource that would help stop this heartbreaking trend in its tracks. Our *Alive to Thrive* teen suicide prevention program is a free resource that your support made possible. I'm praying and believing God will use it to save lives. However, before I tell you more about the *what* of *Alive to Thrive* . . . I'd like to introduce you to the *why*. Her name is Brianne. Maybe you have a Brianne in your life.

Brianne was already struggling with school and relationships before she entered high school, but high school magnified the loneliness she felt. She was desperate to find a group of friends. What she found was the wrong group.

"I started going out with them in order to feel included," Brianne admits. "We started going to parties and I got involved in drinking and other substances. As I opened that door, the devil just burst through and took hold."

Her choices impacted her relationship with her family. Little by little, Brianne listened to lies from the enemy that she was a disappointment and unworthy.

"It's not one big thing that causes you to question the value of your life and whether or not you are

(over, please)

even worthy of the air you breathe. It's one thing on top of the other. I hated looking at myself in the mirror. I was disgusted with what I had become. I convinced myself that I was too far gone for me to go back to Christ."

Brianne eventually thought that everyone would be better off without her and that her family didn't want her. "That was the worst lie I think I've ever believed."

This poor young lady grew up in a Christian home with a family who loved her. They had no idea about her doubts and fears, until it was too late but her mom found her before she took the pills.

"We saw no signs at all," Brianne's mom Erin says. "We were completely blindsided. Later, we would discover that several things happened all at once in Brianne's life. She was diagnosed with ADD and put on medication. Because of that, she felt that her brain was broken. At the same time, she had tried to fit in with a group of kids at school and had made choices with them. She walked away from them, but couldn't forgive herself for the choices."

Erin says Brianne didn't talk about any of it. "Because she wasn't talking to me about it, I didn't know the questions to ask. I wasn't taking the time to really sit with her and ask the tough questions."

Meanwhile, Brianne was quietly slipping deeper and deeper into desperation. "I just couldn't see a future. It was so dark," she remembers. "There was nothing. It was just pitch black."

As a parent, this absolutely breaks my heart. I know it does yours, too. Too often when the challenges of life hit our children full force, there are voices telling them lies.

"When I grew up, I always had this picture of the devil as some guy with horns, a pitchfork and you expect him to have a different voice," Brianne says. "What made it so hard was that it was my voice. It was me that was saying that I wasn't worthy, that I was a burden, and that I was unwanted."

Brianne said eventually she couldn't separate the lies from what God's Word said about her value. She decided the only way to end the pain was to kill herself.

"I felt like killing myself was going to be a favor to those around me, because they wouldn't have to deal with me. I wrote a note that said I'm sorry for being a burden. I remember sitting on my bathroom floor with my pills and the enemy was just screaming all of these lies in my head. I was about to take my pills when I heard this whisper. 'Wait.'"

Erin says she was in the house at the time, pre-occupied with a task. "God told me to find Brianne," she says. "I went looking for her."

God was at work to save Brianne. "In that moment of hesitation, my mom came bursting in," Brianne remembers. "She knocked the pills out of my hand and I just sat on the floor and cried."

(next page, please)

Brianne said that moment not only saved her life, but it also changed her life.

“I realized that God wasn’t done with me, that God has a purpose for me,” she says. “I also realized just how powerful God was because the enemy was screaming to get me to do it and all God had to do to stop me was whisper.”

Praise God for saving Brianne! She says she still struggles but is learning how to rely on God’s voice more and more. She learned to talk to her family and Erin says they learned, as parents, to ask the hard questions.

“Ask your children the hard questions,” Erin cautions. “Take the time to ask if they’ve ever considered harming themselves. Parents need to be the ones who exhibit and model what bravery and courage looks like. It’s having the hard conversations before the hard stuff happens. Fortunately, I’ve had the opportunity to fix all those lack of questions. Now, there’s nothing that Brianne won’t tell me.”

There are so many young people like Brianne who are at risk of suicide. Sadly, this is a serious and growing health crisis among today’s youth.

To respond to this alarming trend, Focus developed the *Alive to Thrive* program—a biblical guide to preventing teen suicide. Using this resource, parents and anyone who interacts with teens can learn how to help prevent suicidal thinking through sound practical and clinical advice, and more importantly, biblical principles that will provide a young person with hope in Christ.

The *Alive to Thrive* resources is not the type of suicide prevention resource that simply offers the warning signs or helps you deal with the aftermath of a teen’s death by suicide. While it certainly can help you in a crisis, it is primarily designed to help you and your teen avoid a crisis altogether. *Alive to Thrive* takes a preventative approach by equipping parents and others who interact with teens to address issues long before a child might ever entertain thoughts of ending his or her life.

Joannie DeBrito, Focus on the Family Director of Parenting and Youth and a licensed clinical social worker and therapist, says *Alive to Thrive* is different from other resources that address suicide.

“*Alive to Thrive* is biblically based. Yes, suicide is often related to mental illness, but there is also a spiritual component,” says DeBrito. “The other unique thing is that it is prevention-based. We want to prevent this from happening to the next generation.”

We believe this resource will quite literally save lives. And thanks to generous donors like you, all of the content is completely free.

Alive to Thrive includes articles, video testimonials from families and kids like Brianne, and messages featuring Phil Stacey (Christian recording artists and former *American Idol* contestant), Dr. Kathy Koch, David Smallbone (For King and Country), and Al and Lisa Robertson, and a comprehensive

(over, please)

e-book written by Christian clinicians.

I really believe *Alive to Thrive* can infuse hope into the teen suicide tragedy. That is why I'm asking you to help get the word out about *Alive to Thrive*. Download the free e-book for yourself and share AliveToThrive.com with anyone who interacts with teens—it will equip them to prevent suicidal thinking through biblically based clinical advice. Will you also consider giving a generous gift today to help us continue to make this resource FREE to those who need it the most? We are always updating the information and adding blogs, videos and other resources. Your support ensures we never have to charge for these life-saving efforts!

God will use your generosity to save lives. *Alive to Thrive* has only been released a short time and we are already seeing a response!

“The *Alive to Thrive* document came to my attention recently through my involvement with Focus on the Family as an avid listener and financial partner. It is by far the best material I've seen on the topic, and I've studied mental health for many years. My father died by suicide when I was 12, so the recovery journey has led to a lifelong search for quality resources. As a licensed professional counselor working with families and children, I am excited to have a document that is so well researched and put together. Many thanks to all who worked on this project. The Lord is indeed in it.” –Ginny Harrison, LPC

Please help us reach even further to save the lives of our children. Free resources like *Alive to Thrive* wouldn't be possible without your prayerful support. Your gift today could help save a life. And remember, if *you* are currently engaged in the grand adventure of parenting or grandparenting, we are here for you! Just call us or visit our website and let us know how we can help.

Until next month, may God bless and keep you and your loved ones. Thanks for your partnership!

Sincerely,



Jim Daly
President

P.S. Will you come alongside Focus on the Family to ensure our *Alive to Thrive* resources can help equip parents, teachers and pastors with tools for today's youth who struggle with depression? With 3,000 or more suicide attempts each day in this country alone, your response today is urgently needed. Please give today to ensure we can continue offering this life-saving resource for FREE when it's truly needed. Thank you.