

THE LIFESAVING CHURCH

FAITH COMMUNITIES AND SUICIDE PREVENTION



RACHAEL A. KEEFE

STUDY GUIDE

WELCOME

Is your church prepared to save lives?

This study guide is intended to deepen and extend your reading of *The Lifesaving Church: Faith Communities and Suicide Prevention* by Rachael A. Keefe. For more resources or to purchase the book, [click here](#).

Study guide for *The Lifesaving Church: Faith Communities and Suicide Prevention* by Rachael A. Keefe (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2018).

The Body of Christ Is Suicidal

CHAPTER 1

The first part of this chapter tells about the author's experiences with suicidal behavior and an eating disorder. Does any of her story resonate with you? If you knew her then, what might you have said or done to help? Does her story bring anyone you know to mind? If so, is there anything you can say or do to be helpful to that person?

Saving Church

In this section the author shares her memories of her childhood church's love for her. She makes a point of saying that she was unaware of their care for her until after she engaged in suicidal behavior. How can we, as individuals and as congregations, effectively communicate love for and value of each person? What might this say about how we engage in children's and youth ministry?

Psychache

Does the term *psychache* help you to understand some of what a person struggling with suicidality might be experiencing? The author provides a glimpse into how psychache grew in her life. In what ways can congregations provide hope and healing for those who live with psychache?

In response to reading this chapter, is there anything you would like your church to try or do differently?

Study guide for *The Lifesaving Church: Faith Communities and Suicide Prevention* by Rachael A. Keefe (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2018).

CHAPTER 2

The Body of Christ Holds Secrets and Shame

In the first section of this chapter, the author describes how much of her eating disorder and her feelings she kept hidden. Do you think your church supports this kind of false persona? If so, what can be done to change the culture to one that encourages and supports authenticity? If not, how is authenticity encouraged and supported?

The Word of Life

Do you think your church has “forgotten its power”? Why or why not? Are there psychological needs in your community going unmet because of theological beliefs? If so, what can be done to change this? If not, what does our community have to offer that could help other churches address more psychological needs?

The Word Living among Us

What part of this section resonates most with you? Why? What are your thoughts on “everything happens according to God’s will” or “everything happens for a reason”? Did you find the author’s response to this helpful? If so, in what way? Has your understanding of the need for a Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Pardon in each week’s worship changed? If so, how?

In response to reading this chapter, is there anything you would like your church to try or do differently?

Study guide for *The Lifesaving Church: Faith Communities and Suicide Prevention* by Rachael A. Keefe (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2018).

The Body of Christ Is Fearful

CHAPTER 3

In the first section of this chapter the author describes her fears of judgment if she were to share her thoughts and feelings. Ultimately the people she spoke with were supportive. However, they cautioned her not to share her experiences if she wished to be ordained. How, if at all, does your congregation contribute to the sense that such things as trauma, eating disorders, addictions, and suicidality can be discussed openly? What can be done to create a more supportive, open, nonjudgmental community?

For [Jesus] Came to Seek and to Save the Lost

The author shares the “secret underneath” her secrets – mainly that she feared that God did not love her, that God had not been with her in her worst moments. Do you think this is a common fear? Is it possible for congregations to create communities of love and acceptance, of forgiveness and grace, that do not foster a fear of judgment? If so, what might that look like? Where would you start?

Healing from Within

Everyone needs to be a part of a community, to have a sense of belonging somewhere. How is church uniquely positioned to be such a place? How well does your church “re-member” those who are vulnerable? How could your congregation be more intentional in its “re-membering”?

In response to reading this chapter, is there anything you would like your church to try or do differently?

Study guide for *The Lifesaving Church: Faith Communities and Suicide Prevention* by Rachael A. Keefe (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2018).

CHAPTER 4

The Body of Christ Is Resilient

This section touches on “safe messaging” and the need to prevent or minimize contagion after a suicide. Had you thought about your own theology around suicide before reading this section? Do you think differently now? If so, in what way?

Claiming a Place at the Table

What did you think or feel as you read the author’s account of being “dis-membered” by the church? Have you had or heard of similar experiences? What, if anything, can be changed to create congregations focused on “re-membering” rather than “dis-membering”?

Self-Worth is More than Pop Psychology

Do you agree with the idea that people mistake the church’s view as God’s view? The author describes how the church’s rejection felt like rejection from God. If this is true for many people, how can the church, or individual congregations, or individual Christians, do a better job of communicating God’s love and the innate value of every person?

In response to reading this chapter, is there anything you would like your church to try or do differently?

Study guide for *The Lifesaving Church: Faith Communities and Suicide Prevention* by Rachael A. Keefe (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2018).

The Body of Christ Is Beloved

CHAPTER 5

What is your response to the author's search to find love? What resonates with you? Have you had the experience of someone holding hope for you? If so, what was that like? Have you had the experience of holding hope for someone else? If so, what was that like? Is your congregation a community that holds hope for those who cannot hold it for themselves? If so, what does that look like? If not, what can change to make this possible?

The Power of Transformation

The author states that the church ought to be about saving lives, literally, more than anything else. What do you think about this idea? Does being the Body of Christ mean embodying unconditional love first and foremost? How might this idea transform church?

Self, Neighbor, Creation, and God

Do you believe you have "a unique place in God's heart" and/or that every person does? What gets in the way of believing this? What prevents the church from embracing and reflecting this concept? What can change?

In response to reading this chapter, is there anything you would like your church to try or do differently?

Study guide for *The Lifesaving Church: Faith Communities and Suicide Prevention* by Rachael A. Keefe (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2018).

CHAPTER 6

The Body of Christ Is Broken...and Whole

This chapter opens with an account of redemption – in a state psychiatric hospital. The author reframes “everything happens according to God’s will” as “eventually goodness comes out of even the worst human experiences.” Do you agree with this? Why or why not? If God can transform our worst experiences into goodness, how can the church more effectively share this message?

Putting Our Fingers in the Wounds

What would it feel like for church to be the place where no wounds have to be hidden? What would it be like to offer/receive the “peace of Christ” as a gentle, healing touch on our own wounds? Do you think it’s possible for a congregation to be made whole in Christ, not by denying wounds, but by embracing them? What would help facilitate this?

Emotional Freedom

Do you bring your full self to God or do you tend to bring only the “good” parts? Do you think it’s possible for congregations to extend this kind of welcome, a welcome of the whole self for all people? What would help make this possible?

In response to reading this chapter, is there anything you would like your church to try or do differently?

Study guide for *The Lifesaving Church: Faith Communities and Suicide Prevention* by Rachael A. Keefe (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2018).

The Body of Christ Is a Lifesaver

CHAPTER 7

Do you agree that the true work of the church is caring for those who are unable to care for themselves? Why or why not? What judgments (or fears) get in the way of loving as Christ loves? What can we do to address these fears or areas of judgment so that the church becomes an embodiment of Christ's love for all people?

The True Power of the Gospel

In spite of (or because of) our frailty and capacity for sin, Jesus offered himself so that we might become whole. The Last Supper was an act of love and forgiveness meant for all people. Is this a new way to think about communion for you? Does the idea of Jesus as the New Covenant that “binds us with forgiveness in communities of love” make a difference in how you think about church? If so, how?

Spirituality, Religion, and Healing the Psyche

Have you thought about the church being a faith-filled community supporting recovery and wellness before reading this section? Does this change the way you think about church? If so, how? What do you think about the church as a lifesaver? What changes can be made in your congregation to become a lifesaving church?

In response to reading this chapter, is there anything you would like your church to try or do differently?

Study guide for *The Lifesaving Church: Faith Communities and Suicide Prevention* by Rachael A. Keefe (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2018).

EPILOGUE

The Big Questions

Is Suicide Preventable?

Breaking the silence and removing stigma will bring us closer to suicide being 100% preventable. What can you do as an individual or a congregation to break the silence and reduce the stigma?

Is Suicide a Sin?

What do you think about suicide as a communal sin, a sin of the church rather than the individual? Is this a helpful way to view suicide? Why or why not?

Concluding Questions

- What is one thing you have learned from this book that you will share with others?
- What would you like to share with your congregation after reading this book?
- What is one thing you would like to change in your life or in the life of your congregation in the way you/they live out Christian faith?
- Do you have ideas on how your church can become a lifesaving church?

Click here for more resources
or to purchase
The Lifesaving Church

Study guide for *The Lifesaving Church: Faith Communities and Suicide Prevention* by Rachael A. Keefe (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2018).
