

Know and be known

Strip secrets of their power, and live



Thomas Froese
ChristianWeek Columnist

There was an old man with a secret.

And there was a police cruiser and fire truck and ambulance, large with red lights in the darkness in front of the man's house. And my children held my hand and looked up and asked me questions. What could I say?

The old man lived in a small house near us, a man who could have already left this world from a heart attack or cancer or some other run-of-the mill calamity.

He was being wheeled out on a stretcher when he looked up from under his blanket to his next-door-neighbour, a woman who had apparently noticed earlier that something was eerily amiss. Then, with tired and angry eyes, he asked her, "Why did you call them?"

This, from Hamilton, Ontario. It comes to mind because more people are killing themselves these days. Globally, about a million a year now; one every 40 seconds and believed to go to one every 20 seconds by 2020. And what can we tell the children?

In the poorer world, you're

an indebted farmer destroyed by rising costs and falling prices. Or you live in a private hell with your husband and abusive family. Or you can't carry the weight of your studies and all those expectations any longer.

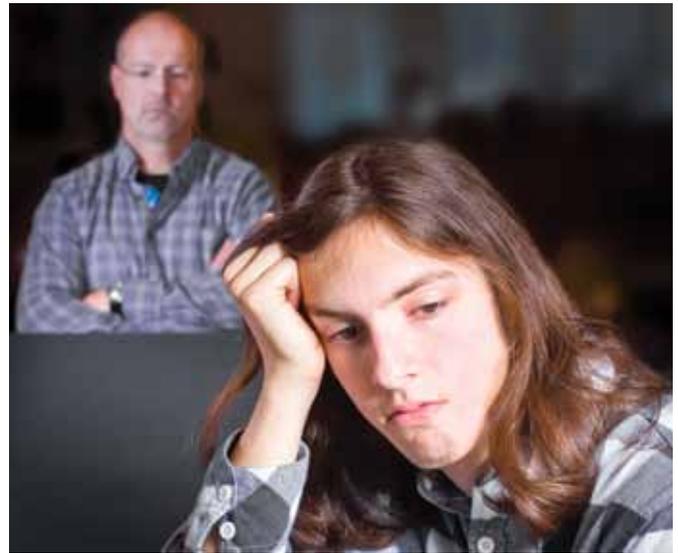
In the richer world, you've suffered one broken relationship after another. It's the loneliness. It gnaws at you. If you're a European, especially from the northwest, or from the U.S., where suicides are at their highest in 15 years, you've lost both your job and identity.

It's not just depression, it's hopelessness. It's not just too little money, it's comparing yourself to your neighbours or cousins or whoever and drowning in a sea of inadequacy.

We'll never know all the secrets. Half the world is too underserved to even monitor these things.

In Africa, people are born into hard days and seem more accepting. But my observation in Uganda is that it's easy to walk with a smile while suffering quietly.

Researchers confirm what we intuitively sense: worldwide belief in God has eroded steadily in recent decades. And without Him, just who do we tell our secrets to?



Then there's the false teaching. Jesus did warn about a certain unforgiveable sin. But never did He insinuate it was suicide or that certain hell awaits its victims.

It was a black and blue day in her Berlin apartment when my own mother did herself in. Life and severe illness had left her beaten too many times. This is my loved ones' own secret, one that, with a writer in the family, has surfaced from time to time.

So what do we tell the children? What do I, at the right moment, tell my own children?

That old man in Hamilton was a tired man. Tired of living. Tired of carrying so many secrets. And he was afraid. Get ready to hear more of these sorts of stories as

westerners grow older.

How will we do it? How will we stick around longer and longer with less and less? How will we stay clear-headed? Not only for the rest of this young year, but next year? And the year after?

Somehow, let's believe, by telling our secrets. By being known and knowing others. By telling who we are, not just what we'd like the world to think of us.

The first is flesh and blood, like Jesus. The other is a caricature, something less than what we're made to become.

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