

Dear ISI and UCSC community,

With shock and great sadness I first heard about the death of Chancellor Denice Denton 2 weeks ago.

Her apparent suicide has stunned our whole community, even our nation, and I'm sure many in academia around the world.

I feel compelled by the deep sadness that many of us are feeling to offer you my best understanding of God's message of comfort and truth in response. I respect that many of you have different beliefs than I so I risk offending some by my writing this. But I take that risk in hopes that God can use this to be of some comfort to you, or just that you can understand better our Christian beliefs. And I can't put this off longer, so, imperfect as it is, here goes...

I did not know Chancellor Denton personally, but was honored to meet with her twice this past year with our UCSC University Religious Council.

I felt an extra empathy for her, since my work with ISI international students includes many students and scholars in her field of Engineering, with whom it is my job as ISI staff to offer Christian and American friendship.

Tragically, I also have known, or known relatives of, 2 of people in the past 6 months, and 2 others in recent years, who have also committed suicide. I have even gone through moments in my life when I've felt low enough to consider that, as I'm sure many people have.

So this weighs very heavy in my heart.

My meetings with Denton

In our URC's first meeting with Chancellor Denton, I was impressed by her intelligence and desire to tackle the complex issues we discussed, and her honesty and openness in asking for our help in solving some campus problems.

It is a small comfort to me that, as a group of representatives from a range of religious faiths, we offered our services as spiritual advisors, jointly and individually, to all students, staff and faculty on campus. Our jobs as religious leaders in our various beliefs is to offer spiritual answers, even though we each may give different answers!

We even specifically offered to the Chancellor our URC help in times of crisis. I personally handed Chancellor Denton my ISI business card, as did others, and told her "call me anytime." Of course I didn't really expect her to do so, since she didn't know me personally, and I had no idea that it would be herself who would be in such need.

Still, I only wish she had taken me up on the offer, or any of my URC colleagues, or, indeed, anyone else who could have helped her.

In our second meeting Denton thanked our URC group for our help, saying she thought we had a positive influence in solving the problems for which she asked our help. We ended our meeting with a very positive view of working more with her in the future.

Gods Answers to Suicide

Suicide is a tragic expression of despair for those who have chosen that horrible path as a way to end their own sufferings. Of course there are many factors: depression, chronic pain, social rejection, medications. I don't attempt to analyze those now. But I

think probably the worst is to feel cut off from love and a sense of purpose, both from people and ultimately from God.

I can remember my own times in life when I felt completely alone and in pain (both were not physical but emotional and spiritual pain and aloneness). My life at the time didn't seem worth continuing, even though most people would probably have looked at me and thought I should be very happy. My guess is many people have had such a time in their life.

What strikes me in most, in what I've known of these people who committed, or considered, suicide, is that, by most human standards, they seemed to have just about everything they would need to be happy: Friends, family, intelligence, career achievement, money, living in a beautiful place (like Santa Cruz!)

But no matter what they had on the OUTSIDE, somehow it WASN'T ENOUGH to be happy on the INSIDE!!!

It seems to me like a bottle immersed in water --but with a cap screwed on --is still dry inside.

GOD's ANSWER

From the core of my heart, I believe God longs to give us answers. God has created each one of us in love, to experience His great purpose and love for each of us, which partly is the same for all people, and partly which is unique and individual for each of us, discovered only through His personal guidance.

Every human life is precious and dearly loved by God!

The Bible says God has poured His love out on all of us, even immersed us in the universe filled like a (freshwater) ocean with His love. But when we are unable to receive it (temporarily or permanently) into our hearts and souls, we are dry of God's love, dying of thirst while floating in a lake of delicious drink.

The problem is not the lack of love around us, the problem is our choice (or ability) to not take it in. And I believe that all of us, whatever kind of life we have, each have a choice to accept or reject God's love for us.

But somehow, something in our hearts and souls stops us from experiencing God's love inside us.

Here are some answers to how our thirst can be quenched by God's love, found in the Bible, which I believe is God's most solid truth in history. The following is just a partial list. Actually the whole Bible tells the message of God's love for us!

1. We all go through some kinds of suffering and we can **express our needs, sorrow, complaints to God, He is always listening**

I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy. I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble.

When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who know my way. ...Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life.

I cry to you, O LORD; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living."

Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those [evil forces? feelings?] who pursue me, for they are too strong for me
Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. The the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me. *Psalm 142*

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**2. No matter how low you are, or what you have done wrong, God can reach you, forgive you, restore you**

"Out of the depth I cry to you, O LORD; O LORD, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O LORD, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; ...I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the LORD more than watchmen wait for the morning...for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption." *Psalm 130:1-7*

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3. His love for us

This is how we know what love is; Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. *1John 3:16*

4. No matter how alone you feel, God himself, through Christ, has gone before you and wants to be with you --Jesus Christ identified with our suffering,

"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds...But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation." *Colossians 1:21-22*

"For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. *2Corinthians 1:5*

4. He bore our sins

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. *1Peter 2:24*

"You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live...all of us also lives among them at one time,...But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead...it is by grace you have been saved" *Ephesians 2:1,4-5*

5. Christ suffered for us even to the point of complete separation from God, His loving Father from whom he had never been separated from the beginning of eternity.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" *Matthew 27:46*

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**6. God wants us to internally experience his presence and love**

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying "Take and eat, this is my body, broken for you" *Matthew 26:26*

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7. God Himself loves you and will meet your need, first through Himself personally and also through other people

I love the LORD, for he heard my voice, he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.

The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow. The I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, save me!"

The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. The LORD protects the simplehearted; **when I was in great need, he saved me.**

Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the LORD has been good to you.

For you, O LORD, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the LORD in the land of the living.."

Psalm 116: 1-13

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Well, I hope this makes some sense and gives you HOPE and encouragement to discover more of God's love and truth for you.

***For those (few?) of you who actually read this far:*** I'd be glad to hear any response you have, or even meet in person to discuss this. If there are things I've written that you don't believe or agree with, that's ok, I still hope it has helped in some way, even to understand my beliefs.

May God bless us all.

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