

# Unintentional Suicide

As all of you know by now, Heath Ledger died last week at the young age of 28. In the aftermath of his death, much of the media attention has been directed at whether or not his death was suicidal. While no official cause of death has yet been determined, we do know that several prescription drugs were found in the apartment in which Ledger died. It has also been rumored that he had long-standing issues with drugs. While Ledger's death is a tragic one, we should remember that countless people whose names we'll never know die everyday under similarly tragic circumstances.

If Ledger died of a drug overdose, does it matter if it was intentional or accidental? Neither makes him any less dead, and I doubt if either would do much to compensate for his loss among his friends and family. I do not say these things to sound cold or inconsiderate – In fact, maybe the most compassionate thing we can do as humans is to quit emotionally differentiating between types of death. Young or old, expected or shocking, every death is a loss, and we should respect every death as such.

While I do not wish to defame Mr. Ledger or anyone who dies under such circumstances, I do believe that it is fair to call his death a suicide . . . an unintentional suicide. Merriam-Webster's definition for suicide includes the word "intentionally," so how can I say it's possible to commit *unintentional* suicide? People who die of drug overdoses, alcohol poisoning, sexually-transmitted diseases, reckless driving, and other dangerous behaviors may not have intended to die, but they were certainly taking their lives into their own hands. They made a willing choice to gamble with danger and death, expecting to win. They realized the risks they were taking and either dismissed those risks or believed they could beat the odds. No, they did not choose to die. They did, however, make decisions that could very well lead to death.

Allow me to illustrate it this way. If I play Russian Roulette with a six-shot revolver, I have a 1 in 6 chance of killing myself. If the bullet ends up in the firing chamber, I die. If not, I live. What difference in intent is there between me living and dying? The outcomes may be very different, but the outcomes do not change my decision to take a chance with my life. The same is true for people who make some very dangerous decisions with their lives. Some live, some die, but they all were taking the same chances. How many alcoholics or drug addicts decided to become addicted when they took their first drink, smoke, or pill? How many of them ever thought that "just one time" would lead to death?

On the Day of Judgment, how many will lose their eternal reward because they played Russian Roulette with sin? They had all the intent in this world to go to heaven, but then they took a chance on sin, even for "just one time." That "just one time" became many times, and those many times turned a once Christ-like life into something far from faith. They never meant to be lost; it just happened along the way. Such people will have committed spiritual suicide . . . unintentional suicide. Taking chances with your life and losing is a very tragic end. Taking chances with your soul and losing is the most tragic end of all. – Blaine