

## A Tragedy

David Flatt

Two weeks ago, a former Miss USA winner, Cheslie Kryst, committed suicide. She jumped from her Mid-town Manhattan high-rise apartment. I had never heard of Cheslie, but I could not help but read the news report of her tragic death.

News stories described someone who was highly successful. Not only did she have fame, but she was highly accomplished academically. She had earned a law degree and MBA from Wake Forest. Most recently, she was an Emmy Award-nominated television correspondent for EXTRA.

When anyone commits suicide, we immediately ask, “Why?” This is especially true regarding those who appear successful and happy. Last year, Cheslie wrote a personal essay in Allure magazine entitled, “30 on 30: a Pageant Queen Reflects on Turning 30.” She struggled with aging and trying to find meaning in her life. The following quotation is lengthy but worth reading.

*Each time I say “I’m turning 30,” I cringe a little. Sometimes I can successfully mask this uncomfortable response with excitement; other times, my enthusiasm feels hollow, like bad acting. Society has never been kind to those growing old, especially women. (Occasional exceptions are made for some of the rich and a few of the famous.) When I was crowned Miss USA 2019 at 28 years old, I was the oldest woman in history to win the title, a designation even the sparkling \$200,000 pearl and diamond Mikimoto crown could barely brighten for some diehard pageant fans who immediately began to petition for the age limit to be lowered.*

*A grinning, crinkly-eyed glance at my achievements thus far makes me giddy about laying the groundwork for more, but turning 30 feels like a cold reminder that I’m running out of time to matter in society’s eyes — and it’s infuriating...*

*...I remember being enamored by “20 under 20” and “30 under 30” lists that tied achievement to youth and called it success — lists that are surely intended to recognize the rarity of accomplishing outstanding feats at a young age. But they had an unfortunate side effect on some young people, who felt encouraged to hoard accomplishments as fast as possible in order to measure up to our peer.*

*When I graduated from college and opted to continue my studies at Wake Forest University, I decided I’d earn a law degree and an MBA at the same time. (Why stop at two degrees when you can have three?) I joined a trial team at school and won a national championship. I competed in moot court; won essay competitions; and earned local, regional, and national executive board positions. I nearly worked myself to death, literally, until an eight-day stint in a local hospital sparked the development of a new perspective.*

*I discovered that the world's most important question, especially when asked repeatedly and answered frankly, is: why? Why earn more achievements just to collect another win? Why pursue another plaque or medal or line item on my resume if it's for vanity's sake, rather than out of passion? Why work so hard to capture the dreams I've been taught by society to want when I continue to only find emptiness?*

*Too often, I noticed that the only people impressed by an accomplishment were those who wanted it for themselves. Meanwhile, I was rewarded with a lonely craving for the next award. Some would see this hunger and label it "competitiveness"; others might call it the unquenchable thirst of insecurity.*

Kryst concluded her essay by writing, "Now, I now enter year 30 searching for joy and purpose on my own terms — and that feels like my own sweet victory." Ten months after the publication of this essay, Kryst took her life. She was thirty years old.

The story of Cheslie Kryst is tragic. I had never heard of her before reading of her suicide. Yet, I could not help but feel incredibly sad for her. Highly accomplished with a beaming future, but overwhelmed by pressure to measure up and an abyss of emptiness. How many people today feel just as pressured and empty?

Some of the descriptions in her essay were chilling. Did she view her "lonely craving for the next award" as "competitiveness" or "the unquenchable thirst of insecurity?" We may never know for sure; however, she seemed to be leaving clues.

Strangely, Allure magazine offered the following primer for Kryst's essay. The primer stated, "...In this essay, the former attorney and Emmy Award-nominated television correspondent, reflects on her journey to overcoming the relentless pressure to achieve — and how she found fulfillment and purpose in herself." Yet, nowhere in the essay did Kryst write about how she overcame the relentless pressure to achieve or how she found fulfillment and purpose in herself. If anything, her essay was a cry for help.

### **Fulfillment in God, Not Self**

We are not designed to find fulfillment or purpose in ourselves. We are designed to find wholeness through a relationship with our Creator. God provides fulfillment through His Son and our Savior, Jesus (Eph. 1:3-6).

Jesus often spoke to broken people about making them whole and filling them. The conversation Jesus had with a Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob is appropriate for this occasion. She was a wreck when Jesus found her. She was a social outcast. She had been seeking fulfillment in men, only finding pain in each passing relationship. She knew the "unquenchable thirst of insecurity." Yet, Jesus offered to quench her thirst (John 4:1-30). When this woman found Jesus, her life forever changed.

## **Conclusion**

Everyone struggles to find meaning in life. Young people living through a pandemic struggle to understand the point of life. People in mid-life can become disillusioned by the emptiness of their accomplishments. Older people can become bitter toward the vanity of it all.

Jesus offers us a new, meaningful purpose. Jesus offers us a new life. Jesus offers us a new identity. Jesus offers us a new family. Jesus offers us new hope. If we find Jesus like the Samaritan woman found Him, our lives can be forever changed. Through faith in His grace, we can experience the blessedness Jesus promised to those who seek Him.

If you are staring down the hopeless abyss of emptiness, please know that you are loved and valued beyond measure. The love and value given to everyone are not gained by academic achievement, fame, the man/woman of your dreams, or a successful career. The love and value offered to us come by the grace of a good God. We have a Savior who died to save us from hopelessness. He is looking for you. Are you looking for Him?