

ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL..... Join us for a great discussion based on the article down below about the tragic death of Tony Hsieh. How can we be a source of encouragement for those struggling around? How can we be a light to someone who is feeling like Mr. Hsieh? We begin the discussion at 9:30 am.

[Welcome](#)

[Opening Prayer](#)

[Mental Health](#)

Friends Say Tony Hsieh, Former Zappos CEO, Showed Self-Destructive Trend Before His Recent Death

The Wired Word for the Week of December 13, 2020

[In the News](#)

He titled the book he wrote in 2010 about the lessons he'd learned from business and life *Delivering Happiness*. But in the months preceding his death in late November, Tony Hsieh (pronounced shay) appeared to be anything but happy. Hsieh, the visionary entrepreneur behind Zappos, was 46 when he died from injuries sustained in a house fire.

In August, the singer Jewel Kilcher, who performs under the name Jewel and was one of Hsieh's longtime friends, warned him bluntly in a note: "I need to tell you that I don't think you are well and in your right mind. I think you are taking too many drugs that cause you to disassociate."

She added: "The people you are surrounding yourself with are either ignorant or willing to be complicit in you killing yourself."

Up until this last year, Hsieh's life was marked by success, fostering human connections and profitability, and making others feel comfortable, secure and even happy shopping on the internet.

He sold his first company, LinkExchange, an online advertising network, to Microsoft in 1998 for \$265 million. He then invested in a San Francisco-based retail shoe start-up called ShoeSite, soon becoming its CEO and building it into an Internet giant, renamed Zappos (an adaptation of *zapatitos*, the Spanish word for shoes, according to the company website.)

At Zappos, Hsieh taught employees in the call center to engage customers as if speaking to an old friend, with authentic-sounding welcoming banter. He also realized that buyers needed to try on shoes, so Zappos offered free overnight shipping and free return shipping, often sending customers multiple pairs at a time.

The ethos at Zappos was even more remarkable. Hsieh built it around the idea that happy employees were the conduit to satisfied customers who would return again and again, and he did a lot to make sure his employees loved their jobs. Many who knew him said his life was marked by generosity, humanity and vision.

When Hsieh stepped down as chief executive in August of this year after 21 years with Zappos, he was estimated by *Forbes* to be worth at least \$700 million.

But according to friends and family, within the past year, Hsieh's life began to go off the rails, especially as the Covid-19 restrictions on society stifled the nonstop action he seemed to need. Hsieh began to struggle with depression and addiction, those around him said.

He also appeared to have issues with loneliness, though he was seldom actually alone. In fact, after he recently moved to Park City, Utah, he paid friends and acquaintances to move there as well, where he filled his 17,350-square-foot mansion with social gatherings and performances by well-known musicians.

The trouble, according to *Forbes*, was that the people he surrounded himself with in this last year were "yes-people," individuals who wouldn't challenge him on his self-destructive behavior as he began drinking more heavily and sank deeper into addiction, notably to nitrous oxide.

Hsieh died the day after Thanksgiving, succumbing to injuries sustained in a November 18 house fire in Connecticut, where he was visiting. While the investigation of the fire is not yet complete, there are some indications that Hsieh may have barricaded himself inside, which delayed his rescue. When he died five days later, the cause was listed as smoke inhalation.

In preparing an article about his death, *Forbes* interviewed more than 20 of Hsieh's close friends and colleagues "each trying to come to grips with how this brightest of lights had met such a dark and sudden end."

In reconciling their comments, said the *Forbes* article, "one word rises up: *tragedy*."

Jewel, for one, refused to be one of the yes-people in Hsieh's life. In her note to him, she told him directly, "If the world could see how you are living, they would not see you as a tech visionary, they would see you as a drug addicted man who is a cliché. And that's not how you should go down or be known. Your body cannot take not sleeping. And the amount of N2O you are doing is not natural. You will not hack sleep and you will not outsmart nature."

Sadly, it appears that Hsieh was no longer listening.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[The Self-Destructive Last Months of the Zappos Visionary. *Forbes*](#)

[Tony Hsieh, Longtime Chief of Zappos, Is Dead at 46. *The New York Times*](#)

[Tony Hsieh Was a Widely Admired, Wildly Successful Entrepreneur. But He Struggled to Find Real Happiness. *Inc.*](#)

Applying the News Story

It is not our place to judge Tony Hsieh, especially as it appears that mental illness was a factor in his personal decline over the last year. But his story may bring to mind people we have known whose end is marked by what seems to us looking from the outside as preventable tragedy.

So our thoughts turn to consideration of how God looks upon such individuals, and how important it is for all of us to have people who will tell us when we are engaging in self-destructive behavior.

The Big Questions

1. Who, if anyone, have you seen turn away (or drift away or fall away) from their successes and end in personal tragedy? How did it make you feel? What, if anything, did it make you resolve about yourself?

2. When has someone told you an uncomfortable truth about yourself that helped you make an important change of direction? When have you resisted making a change despite being confronted by an inconvenient truth about yourself? Why?

3. What helps you decide that *you* are the one who needs to intervene in the trajectory of another person's life? What are the distinguishing factors between an intervention and being a "busybody"?

4. When you have intervened, what was the outcome? If the person you confronted failed to heed your warning, was it still important that you gave it? Why or why not?

5. How do you think God looks upon people who "crash and burn" despite the advantages they started with?