

Pastor Commits Suicide in Church-Owned Home After Admitting Adultery

I never enjoy writing about pastors falling into sexual immorality—and when pastors take their own lives it reminds me of the suicide in my own family just a few years ago. But this column is among the most tragic I've ever penned.

Please understand, I am writing this with sorrow upon sorrow for the sole purpose of laying an axe to the root of the devil's plans to steal, kill and destroy more lives.

Yesterday I learned that Seth Oiler died in the prime of his life. The 42-year-old pastor of First United Methodist Church (UMC) in Newark, Ohio, committed suicide in his church-owned home a week ago. His untimely death followed an adulterous affair with a church staff member to which he admitted. I can only imagine the guilt, shame and condemnation that was flooding his soul.

We reported on a similar story in December 2013, when Isaac Hunter, former pastor of Summit Church in Orlando, took his own life. His death came about a year after he admitted to an affair with a former staffer. Unlike Oiler's story, with Hunter there were apparent warning signs, including reports of a downward spiral of violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and suicidal thoughts. A suicide note was even discovered far in advance of his death.

Stopping This Deadly Cycle

Sexual immorality is tragic, but there is a way back from this sinful path. Indeed, we know that many pastors have been fully restored to ministry even after falling into immorality and idolatry. What's especially tragic is that the devil that

tempts people into sex immorality—or any manner of sin—is the same devil that later brings accusations, guilt, shame, condemnation and the like. It's a set up. The question is, how do we stop the deadly cycle?

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When we hear stories about pastors like Oiler and Hunter, our first reaction should be to make intercession for the families these men of God left behind. Next, we should also look for the root of pastor suicides so we can prevent more tragedies in the future. Keep in mind that suicide is not a new problem among clergy—and it's not relegated to pastors who committed some grave sin, either.

There is no lack of statistics about pastors and depression, burnout, health, low pay, spirituality, relationships and longevity—and none of them are good. According to the Schaeffer Institute, 70 percent of pastors constantly fight depression, and 71 percent are burned out. Meanwhile, 72 percent of pastors say they only study the Bible when they are preparing for sermons; 80 percent believe pastoral ministry has negatively affected their families; and 70 percent say they don't have a close friend.

The Schaeffer Institute also reports that 80 percent of seminary and **Bible** school graduates will leave the ministry within five years. It's not clear how many commit suicide, but it is clear that pastors are not immune to it. Psychologists point to several reasons why people commit suicide, from depression to psychosis to stressful life situations. But one thing is certain: Whatever drives someone to take their own life ultimately begins in the mind. Suicidal thoughts precede **suicide**.

Suicide Starts With a Thought

Indeed, every action we take starts with a thought. As one who

struggled with depression for years, I am not trying to oversimplify the solution, but rather merely point out one contributing factor. Many of the harmful actions we take originate from the seed of a thought Satan whispers to our souls. That seed grows as our minds reason out the benefits of acting on the thought. For those contemplating **suicide**, I believe the seed grows in their minds as they reason themselves out of living because life's circumstances are too overwhelming.

When the enemy plants a vain imagination in our minds, we have two choices: cast it down or meditate on it. When we meditate on vain imaginations, we tend to connect demonic dots that create skewed pictures of reality. Believing what we see in our thought life is real, we talk ourselves into taking action based on a wrong perception. Although there are issues of chemical imbalances, I believe this is what happens with many **suicides**. The enemy plants a seed in the form of a thought that an already distraught soul doesn't discern as a demonic attack on their life.

If we want to win the battle against suicide in the pulpit and the pew, we need to, among many other things, take hold of Scriptures that instruct us about the battle in our mind. Paul told us, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled" (2 Cor. 10:4-6). No one can take your thoughts captive for you, but you can take your own thoughts captive, and it starts with girding up the loins of your mind (1 Pet. 1:13).

Think On These Things

Of course, I am not suggesting chemical imbalances don't cause depression. I have close friends who have tried everything to

overcome depression and other mental health issues without medication but only found relief with either natural supplements or prescription anti-depression drugs. Even still, there is power in our thoughts. One can take the best anti-depressant on the market but if we think depressing thoughts we'll remain depressed. If we think suicidal thoughts, we'll move toward suicide. If we think about Jesus, we'll find greater peace in any circumstance.

Paul also offered this advice: "Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you" (Phil. 4:8-9). If we do what the Word says—if we meditate on what the Word tells us to meditate on—the enemy's seeds won't take root in our souls.

If you see your pastor or anyone else struggling with depression or hear them speak disturbing thoughts that aren't in line with the Word of God, pray and ask God what He would have you do. Then do it. Suicide is a leading cause of death in the United States, and the enemy is targeting our spiritual leaders in this hour. Let's rise up and battle against this disturbing trend in the name of Jesus.

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