

Do We Bury Suicides From The Church?

A PRACTICAL PAPER

by Rev. John R. Hildebrant

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Introduction

The formal question which has been assigned to me, to address in this paper, is: "Do we bury suicides from the church?"

The importance of this question and topic can not be overstated. In a twelve month period of my relatively brief pastorate, there have been three suicides in my rural area. One was a former member and confirmand of my congregation - the son and brother of current members. Another was a close relative of another family in my congregation. The third was a member of a neighboring WELS congregation. The questions that arose from that situation served as the impetus for this paper. Each one of those suicides sent shock waves throughout the community - the last one reaching beyond, to the circuit level.

An interview with almost any one of my members will result in a list of half a dozen to a dozen local suicides that can be remembered off the top of the head - and that in a community of hundreds, not thousands or millions. My county, Clark, in which three of our WELS congregations are located, is said to have one of the highest rates of suicide in the state of South Dakota. I was not able to find documentation of local statistics to support that claim. But nationwide statistics show that South Dakota and the Rocky Mountain states are well above the national average when it comes to suicide rates.

According to *The Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1994*, South Dakota ranks sixteenth out of fifty states and the District of Columbia in incidents of suicide. In 1991, the national average was 12.2 deaths per 100,000. South Dakota's ratio was 13.5 compared to North Dakota's 11.7 and Minnesota's 11.5. As one travels westward, the numbers only get worse. Our district faces greater ratios in Wyoming and Montana with 18.9 and 19.9 respectively.¹ (Canada's national average of suicide was slightly higher than the U.S. in 1990 with a ratio of 12.4 per 100,000 deaths.)²

In 1991, there were 30,810 suicides in the United States. Suicide is the eighth leading cause of death in our country.³ That means that there have been more suicides than homicides and deaths by legal intervention combined. More lives are lost to suicide in our country than by the HIV infection.

¹Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1994, Table No. 129

²Ibid., Table No. 1359

³Ibid., Table No. 127

To say that the matter is serious is an understatement. Many more people attempt suicide than are actually successful. Time magazine reported that "only 30,000 of 300,000 annual suicide attempts are successful."⁴

But that isn't because there's a lack of information or legitimizing encouragement. In 1991, Derek Humphry, the former president of the Hemlock Society, published his book *Final Exit - The Practicalities of Self-Deliverance and Assisted Suicide for the Dying*. Since 1990, the infamous Dr. Kevorkian has assisted at least twenty people in ending their own lives.⁵ In the state of Oregon, physician assisted suicide was legalized in the 1994 fall election. And the recent and highly publicized suicides of White House aid Vincent Foster and rock star Kurt Cobain have also done their part to familiarize and legitimize the act of suicide throughout the nation and across generations.

When dealing with the question of suicide in our own circles, it is possible to envision many situations. Along with them come various approaches and arguments - some based on Scriptural principle, others based on mere emotion.

For my part, I have seen this question from many of its sides. I feel that it is only fair for you to be aware of the fact that almost twenty years ago my uncle committed suicide. In that particular case, he was not buried from the church. A private service was held at his home.

As a WELS pastor, I understand the reasons that led to my uncle's pastor, also a WELS member, denying a church funeral. As a relative, I saw the result of that action as well. Another family member, a DMLC graduate, removed himself from the church and the Means of Grace for a period of almost ten years - partially, but not wholly, because of the decision to deny the request for a church funeral. It is impossible for that situation not to temper my view on this topic. However, in all things, *Scripture and the principles pronounced there must be held superior to mere emotion or sentiment.*

In the course of this paper, we will look at what Scripture has to say about suicide and about Christian burial. At the same time, it is important to remember that this paper is a *practical* paper not a dogmatic one. Beyond the Scriptural principles, which do not change, the *applications* will vary from situation to situation. Within this topic, there are vast areas of gray. The purpose of this paper is to solidify the Scriptural principles while giving 'food for thought' and addressing various practical applications.

⁴Time, *A Swift Route to Suicide*, Nov. 15, 1993, p. 89

⁵Issues in Law and Medicine, vol. 10, iss. 2, Fall 1994

Part 1 - What is Suicide?

Suicide is the killing of one's self. As such, it is murder. Moses records, "You shall not murder." in Exodus 20:13. Matthew 5:21 points back to the fifth commandment when it states, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'" In 1 John 3:15 we clearly see what that judgment is, "Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him." Simply stated, suicide is sin.

The Bible clearly teaches that it is the Lord who gives life, and it is that same Lord who takes life again. Job confessed in the first chapter of his book, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." With these words recorded in Job 1:21, this man of God is making a statement about every blessing from the Lord. The fact that these blessings include life itself is brought out later in this same book when Elihu says, "The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life." Job 33:4. Job, himself, also states, "For what hope has the godless when he is cut off, when God takes away his life?" Job 27:8

One of the clearest passages about the times of life and death is Psalm 31:15, "My times are in your hands." None of us decided when we were to be born. That decision was God's alone. Likewise, the times of our deaths are to be determined by none other than the Lord. It is he who gives each one of us this time of grace. The person who commits suicide is in fact saying that he or she does not want the Lord to be God. By ending one's own life, the individual takes upon himself the decision which is God's alone. In the selfish and prideful act of suicide, the individual denies the true God and attempts to become a 'god' unto himself.

Examples Of Suicide In Scripture

Throughout Scripture we see several examples of suicide. By my count, there are five suicides mentioned in God's Word. They are 1) King Saul, 2) Saul's armor-bearer, 3) Ahithophel, 4) King Zimri, and 5) Judas - the betrayer of Christ. Let us take a moment to look at each one of these instances of suicide.

The deaths of King Saul and his armor-bearer are recorded in 1 Samuel 31 and 1 Chronicles 10 - both with similar wording. During Saul's final battle with the Philistines, the following took place:

1 Samuel 31:3-6 "The fighting grew fierce around Saul, and when the archers overtook him, they wounded him critically. Saul said to

his armor-bearer, 'Draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and run me through and abuse me.' But his armor-bearer was terrified and would not do it; so Saul took his own sword and fell on it. When the armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and died with him. So Saul and his three sons and his armor-bearer and all his men died together that same day."

The third instance of suicide recorded in Scripture is that of Ahithophel the advisor first to King David and then later to David's rebellious son, Absalom.

2 Samuel 17:23 "When Ahithophel saw that his advice had not been followed, he saddled his donkey and set out for his house in his hometown. He put his house in order and then hanged himself. So he died and was buried in his father's tomb."

The fourth, and perhaps the most obscure suicide in Scripture is that of King Zimri, the fifth king of the northern kingdom of Israel. After killing King Elah and murdering the whole family of Baasha, King Zimri reigned in Tirzah for a mere seven days. After Zimri took over the kingdom, Omri laid siege to the capital city.

1 Kings 16:18,19 "When Zimri saw that the city was taken, he went into the citadel of the royal palace and set the palace on fire around him. So he died, because of the sins he had committed, doing evil in the eyes of the LORD and walking in the ways of Jeroboam and in the sin he had committed and had caused Israel to commit."

The final and most familiar suicide recorded in the Bible is that of Judas. The first of two accounts is found in the gospel according to St. Matthew:

Matthew 27:3-5 "When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. 'I have sinned,' he said, 'for I have betrayed innocent blood.' 'What is that to us?' they replied. 'That's your responsibility.' So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself."

The second account is located in the book of Acts:

Acts 1:18,19 "(With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so

they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)”

[Some have questioned the two accounts of Judas’ death, pointing to an apparent discrepancy in the mode or method Judas used to kill himself. The best explanation of this apparent contradiction is that Judas did, in fact, hang himself as clearly stated in Matthew’s gospel. However, if the body of the former apostle was not discovered immediately, it is possible that either Judas’ body or the rope or other material he used to hang himself became loosened - resulting in the horrible fall recorded in the book of Acts.]

In several of the suicide cases we have investigated so far, we note that the persons involved had the opportunity to hear the message of the gospel. Saul certainly had the council and instruction of Samuel until he rejected the Word of the Lord and the Lord in turn rejected him as king. Since the Lord says of Saul, “he has turned away from me” in 1 Samuel 15:11, we know that at one time Saul was a believer. Ahithophel, as a member of David’s court, also had the opportunity to hear the truth and may have been a believer at one time. Finally, Judas was called by Jesus as a disciple. He had followed him for three years, hearing him preach, teach, and perform miracles. About Judas, Peter said in Acts 1:17, “he was one of our number and shared in this ministry.” There is no doubt that Judas was, at one time, numbered among the believers.

However, in all five of the suicide cases recorded in Scripture, we have no reason to believe that any of these individuals died in the faith. In fact, these acts of suicide display a denial of faith and trust in the Lord. In each case, the men who took their own lives separated themselves from the grace of God.

Applying Law And Gospel To Cases Of Suicide

Since none of the five suicides recorded in Scripture shows them as a believer at the time of their death, we might well ask - can anyone who commits suicide be saved? Here we get to an important question in our study of this topic. As we look at this particular question, it will hopefully shed more light on the over-arching question of burial and the applications that follow.

We have already established that suicide is sin. We can not deny that fact or lessen the severity of that statement. Sin is sin. And Romans 6:23 tells us, “the wages of sin is death.”

We have also looked at 1 John 3:15 which says, “Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.” Yet we see an

apparent contradiction when it is noted that Simeon, Levi, Moses, David, and Saul - later known as the apostle Paul - were all murderers who *do* have eternal life. The answer to this paradox is found in the gospel. As we look to the gospel, we see a message of 'good news' for sinners.

In Isaiah 53:4-6, the prophet in eloquent and compelling words spells out what the Messiah was coming to do for all people.

"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him *the iniquity of us all.*"

The New Testament makes the same point when it records, "For Christ died for sins once *for all*, the righteous for the unrighteous" 1 Peter 3:18a. In these and many more passages, we see that Christ died for *all* sins. That includes the sins of murder and suicide. On the cross of Calvary, Jesus paid the price owed to God by *every* person for *every* sin.

Mark 16:16 states, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." Here we get to the heart of the matter. When a person denies Christ, they bring condemnation on themselves. On the other hand, the believer is given salvation as a free gift of God's grace.

1 John 1:8,9 puts it this way, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." The impenitent separate themselves from God's grace. The penitent receive God's mercy and pardon.

The question, then, focuses on suicide itself. Is suicide inherently a denial of Christ? Many times suicide is, in fact, a denial of Christ. An interview with Dr. Kevorkian almost two years ago clearly showed that denial. The following question and answer was given:

"Q: What's the mood when patients are in the process of ending their suffering?

A: It's a strange phenomenon. Not one of them fears death, not one. I've had all kinds of religions, and not one wanted a religious

consultation. Religion is totally irrelevant to what they want.”⁶

Yes, for most who commit suicide, religion is totally irrelevant to what they want. I would have been surprised if any of Dr. Kevorkian's patients requested a religious consultation. If their trust were in the Lord, they would not be pursuing the “ending of their suffering” in that way.

However, we can not say that *all* suicides are a denial of Christ. Some cases may be the result of a mental or chemical imbalance. Some recent studies in biochemistry point to a neurotransmitter called serotonin which affects some violent and impulsive behaviors.⁷ Antidepressant medications, like Prozac, are aimed at boosting serotonin levels to eliminate or reduce the affects of that imbalance. If such an imbalance of that kind exists in an individual who commits suicide, he may not be denying Christ by his action.

In another instance, an individual may commit suicide - at that moment denying the Savior - yet, by God's grace, may be called to repentance just before death. In such a situation, salvation would be the glorious outcome. Even so, we would not want to emphasize this type of scenario. To do so might encourage someone to tempt God. But at the same time, we must also leave room for that possibility.

The application of law and gospel to suicides also overlaps with questionable situations where individuals die engaged in gross sins. The focal point of such a circumstance is not that the person died in a sin. It isn't even the 'size' of that sin that matters. Every person, other than Christ himself, has died or will die in the state of sin unless the end of the world comes first. Psalm 51:5 reminds us, “Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” Our struggle with sin remains to the last moment of our earthly lives. Romans 6:7 says, “Anyone who has died has been freed from sin.” Even though the believer tries to strangle the Old Adam daily, it continues to come back day after day. Only when we have died, will we be *completely* free from sin. The question in cases where an individual died while engaging in a gross sin, again, focuses on whether or not that person was impenitent, thus denying Christ by his action, or simply experiencing a weakness of faith.

Some weak Christians may wonder why we bother at all trying to determine the spiritual state of individuals. They may quote the Sermon on the Mount by saying, “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the same measure you use, it will be measured to

⁶Newsweek, *A Conversation with 'Dr. Death'*, March 8, 1993, p. 48

⁷Newsweek, *The Mystery of Suicide*, April 18, 1994, p. 48

you." Matthew 7:1,2 To them, we must give the gentle reminder that Christ instructed his church and his disciples to judge when he gave us the Ministry of the Keys. Jesus said in Matthew 16:19, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." In order to bind and loose, we must judge. [The warning in the Sermon on the Mount is against self-righteousness. The measure we use, which we welcome others to use on us as well, is God's law and gospel.]

In any case, whether a suicide or a questionable situation, we must confess that "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." 1 Samuel 16:7. We can only judge by external words and actions. As such, it is possible for us to be mistaken. We can be fooled by hypocrites and we can be misled by circumstances. In many of these situations, we may find nothing but grey area. Yet, we make our best judgment and leave the rest in the Lord's hands - trusting that he will in every case determine and do what is best.

I believe that it is significant that even in the case of Judas, a case which is the darkest of grays - if not black, the disciples used a euphemism when talking about his eternal judgment. In Acts 1:24,25 they prayed, "Lord you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left *to go where he belongs*." We have every reason to believe that the place where Judas belongs is hell, but that term itself was not used.

Suicides will often raise questions and doubts. In most cases we will not be able to say one way or the other where the victim of suicide will spend eternity. But for all people, whether believers or unbelievers, penitent or impenitent, whether they died of natural causes, by an accident, were murdered, or took their own life, the Lord will judge appropriately. He does not make mistakes. He is perfect and completely just in his judgments. He knows everyone's heart and all will go where they belong.

Part 2 - What Is A Christian Funeral?

Having looked at suicide, we now turn our attention to Christian funerals. The main question before us implies not only a death by suicide, but a request for a Christian burial as well. As a result, we need to be familiar with and clear about what such a request entails.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, there are many examples of death and burial. However, there are no examples of a worship service or ceremony connected with those rites, with which we are so accustomed. A Christian funeral

is by no means required for a proper burial. However, it is fitting that the death of a Christian should be marked by a Service of the Word.

The funeral service is not for the deceased. Hebrews 9:27 says, "man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." Because this is the case, we do not attempt to pray for the dead, baptize them, or say masses on their behalf. The Lord gives a time of grace for the conversion of the individual before death. After a person has died, that opportunity no longer exists.

The funeral service is ultimately intended for the survivors. At the funeral of a Christian, the family and friends of the deceased gather around the Word of God. There they receive comfort for their sorrow, The message of Christ crucified and risen assures them that their loved one, who died in the Lord, will also rise on the last day and live forever with Christ. There is the promise of a joyful reunion in heaven. Often there are many unbelieving survivors gathered at Christian funerals as well. That serves as an excellent opportunity for the pastor and other Christians to witness their faith and share the message of sin and grace that might not otherwise be heard.

However, that does not mean that pastors and churches ought to bury just anyone. The custom of Christian funerals also makes a statement to the world. It says, that to the best of our knowledge, the individual who has died - died in the Lord. To bury an unbeliever would be lying to anyone who heard about it or was involved in the service.

The temptation for some may be to accept any and all requests. A justification for such a practice could be that an opportunity should not be missed to share the message of Jesus Christ with others. That, however, is nothing more than a straw man. The act of officiating at or denying a funeral service speaks a sermon in and of itself.

Speaking The Truth In Love

Ephesians 4:15 says, "Instead, *speaking the truth in love*, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ." And again in 1 Corinthians 13:6 the apostle Paul states, "Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth." In both of these verses we see a dual emphasis - love and truth. As we apply this Scriptural principle to the question "Do we bury suicides from the church?" we will not want to act in an unloving way *or* in a way that denies the truth.

It is impossible to make a hard and fast rule that no funerals for suicides should ever be conducted by an individual pastor or congregation. It is equally impossible

to say that every request for a funeral of a suicide will be honored. The former could easily trample over love. The latter could easily trample over the truth.

In some cases, the most loving thing a pastor can do is to deny a Christian burial. If all factors in a suicide or questionable death point to impenitence and a denial of Christ, members of the family, the congregation, or the community could be led astray if the pastor officiated at a service. If conducting a service would mean muddling the clear message of the Word, a God-fearing pastor would rather deny the service than deny the truth. Even if precautions and subdued treatment are used, often times the only thing that may be remembered is that the pastor had the funeral. Out of love for souls, a pastor will not want to offend the weak. He will not want his actions to be interpreted as condoning sin. The difficult but necessary action in such a case would be to refuse the request for a church funeral.

When a funeral service is denied, some may protest, "You can't bury a man like a dog."⁸ [My experience in the ministry is limited to the extent that I have never heard this particular argument, but from all I have read and know of human nature I have no reason to believe that it is not used!] To such a statement, we answer with the words of Christ himself, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead." Matthew 8:22.

Certainly the refusal to officiate at a service is not the same as withholding a proper interment. Of our five Biblical examples, King Saul is a case in point. 1 Samuel 31 describes the shameful treatment Saul's body and the bodies of his sons faced at the hands of the Philistines. Yet, in verses 11-13 of that same chapter we read,

"When the people of Jabesh Gilead heard of what the Philistines had done to Saul, all their valiant men journeyed through the night to Beth Shan. They took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth Shan and went to Jabesh, where they burned them. Then they took their bones and buried them under a tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they fasted seven days."

In so doing, the people of Jabesh Gilead showed respect for Saul's office and the people of God over whom he had been ruler. They certainly gave Saul a proper burial. We also note, however, that no prophet of the Lord was called upon for this task. Pastors are public ministers of the gospel, not funeral directors.

Yet, some people don't consider a funeral complete or proper without a token clergyman to preside over the affair. Superstition can play a part in this as well.

⁸The Shepherd Under Christ, p. 299

Somehow the feeling may be that if only a pastor is there, he will usher the deceased into heaven. The fact remains that it is Christ alone who saves. The hypocrite will not be in heaven merely because a pastor officiated at his funeral. In the same way, the believer will not be damned for the lack of a Christian burial.

In some cases, a God-fearing pastor may be able to conduct a service for a suicide. [*The Lutheran Liturgy* alludes to that possibility when it includes a prayer to be said "At The Burial Of A Suicide" - with the caveat, "When the circumstances are such as to make it possible for a Christian minister to officiate."⁹] Those circumstances exist when the pastor is able to give the benefit of the doubt. Such a service may be held in a private home, a funeral home, or the church itself.

When the service is held in the church, the time honored custom is to conduct the service "ohne Sang und Klang" - without singing or the tolling of the bell.¹⁰ These things are avoided so as not to offend or cause the weak to stumble. No one should have the idea that suicide is being condoned. If the pastor is being pressured by the family to include soloists and/or hymns in the service and he is not able to dissuade them, a viable alternative may be the oral recitation of the lyrics. In that way, the benefit of the words is not lost. No matter what, the pastor is ultimately responsible for the service and will, again, use his best judgment.

Other than the decision whether or not to officiate, perhaps the greatest struggle for the pastor will be in the writing of his sermon. What can he or should he say? E. H. Wendland's *Sermon Texts* lists about eight different readings for use in "doubtful cases." Other texts may also come to the mind of a pastor for his consideration. But no matter what the text, the pastor will want to be especially careful in the wording of his sermon. He will not be able to point to the eternal state of the deceased with any certainty. In fact, the less said about the individual the better it would be.

Often even the sermons delivered at the funerals of stalwart Christians can border on eulogy. Certainly Scripture uses Christians as examples. Hebrews chapter 11 lists the heroes of faith and Hebrews 13:7 also says, "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith." Yet, even there, we confess that it was the working of the Holy Spirit in the heart and life of the believer that brought that stalwart Christian to faith. Even there, our emphasis is on the saving work of *Christ*.

In preparing a funeral sermon for a suicide (or any sermon for that matter), we will

⁹The Lutheran Liturgy, p. 297

¹⁰The Shepherd Under Christ, p. 294

take our cue from 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.

“When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.”

Our preaching will focus, as always, on what Christ has done. He was faithful in spite of our unfaithfulness. Whether or not people in general or an individual in particular believed or trusted in him, Jesus died for the sins of all. That is certain - even in the midst of uncertainty. A sermon at the funeral of a suicide is unique, and yet it is the same. The law still serves as a warning to all. The gospel still invites us to put our trust in Jesus Christ alone.

The Ever Present Need For Ministering

One of the most important facts in this entire matter is that the families of suicide will have a need for special care. No matter what the decision in regard to service arrangements, the survivors of suicide will always be in need of ministering. For them, the feelings of guilt, anger, and helplessness can be more intense than usual.

Even in the event of a normal burial, the caring pastor recognizes that, “If there are close survivors who are under his spiritual care, the pastor will not consider his ministrations finished on the day of the funeral.”¹¹ As shepherds who care for each one of their sheep, ministering is often one on one. The caring words and council of a pastor will go a long way, even if that same pastor is the one who had to deny a Christian funeral. Perhaps it is most vital in such an instance where the funeral service has been denied. Just because a worship service has been withheld, does not mean that the pastor's service as a caretaker of souls should be withheld as well. The message that would have been contained in a sermon, can be shared through private devotions and discussions with the mourner(s) without giving the appearance of impropriety or offending the weak. [From my personal experience, this may have been the one thing that would have helped my family the most. It is easy to understand how individuals can slip through the cracks from time to time, but we will always want to do our best so as to avoid that.]

¹¹Ibid., p. 297

Conclusion

It would be impossible to site every case or solve every dilemma involved with the question we have explored today - "Do we bury suicides from the church?" The simple, yet paradoxical, answer is "Yes" *and* "No."

I hope and pray that none of you ever have to wrestle with this question either on a personal or professional level. However, that is only for God to decide. As with all of the gray areas of suicide itself, we leave that in our Lord's most capable and loving hands.

My parting encouragement to all of you is to take this, or any other type of concern you may have, to your brothers in the ministry. They may have more or different experiences than your own. Lean on them for advise and support. Most importantly, take the matter to God in prayer. Ask for his guidance and turn to his Word for the answers. Then, follow your conscience as you determine your response and course of action in regard to such a request - always trusting that his strength is made perfect in our weakness.