

## CHAPTER 3 THE CAUSES AND CURE OF THE MORAL FAILURE OF PASTORS

### **Pastor's Marital Relationship**

One of the most significant reasons behind pastoral attrition is the increasing number of clergy who violate their marital vows and commit adultery. This has become so commonplace in the United States that an alarm about this grave danger must be sounded to young pastors entering the ministry. Here we will examine how prevalent the problem is quantitatively, and then look for causes and cures.

All of my research and interviews with pastors who have failed morally indicate an interesting common denominator—almost every pastor admitted to me that his marriage was not vibrant, romantic, sexually passionate, or spiritually intimate when he began the affair. The fallen pastors remarked that their marital relationship(s) had corroded to that of a “roommate” coexistence instead of that of two lovers achieving new levels of spiritual, emotional, and sexual intimacy. Sexual activity and intimacy was stale, unplanned, and infrequent. These marriages resembled more of a brother/sister relationship than that of lovers—they were simply two people coexisting. Similarly, the couples’ spiritual bond was disconnected, as evidenced by infrequent prayer time together and less sharing of spiritual needs. I interviewed a number of successful, young, cutting-edge pastors who built large churches and who each committed adultery at around their five-year church anniversaries, just as their congregations showed signs of permanent influence and establishment, several with 1,000 or more people attending.

Why the five-year mark of moral decline? Why in the midst of becoming established and showing outward signs of success?

According to a report published by the Francis Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership, 77 percent of pastors responding to a survey indicated that they did not have a good marriage.<sup>83</sup> Several of the pastors I interviewed indicated their poor marriages were a reality for years prior to the start of their churches and their illicit affairs. Several pastors confessed that the longer they stayed in ministry, the worse their marriage had become. Other pastors expressed the notion that what drove their sexual dalliance was the pressure of pastoring and trying to please all the people: it was an escape from the complaining or, as one pastor termed it, “the bitching of the people.” The affair was not just intended for sexual satisfaction but also a mental escape from a life of pressure, performance, and expectation. Still other fallen pastors, overcome by ego and success, traced their affairs to an attitude of entitlement similar to that of the successful corporate executive who replaces his aged wife with a younger, attractive mistress as yet another trophy of his hard-work and accomplishments.

### **Case Study 1: Gary Lamb**

A new form of church polity defined by having a “board of outside overseers” to the pastor, comprised only of other pastors outside the church, demands too little accountability and has indirectly contributed to the moral collapse of some pastors, including Pastor Gary Lamb. He was a very successful pastor who realized that he should

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<sup>83</sup> Richard J. Krejcir “Statistics on Pastors: What is Going on with the Pastors in America?” Francis Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership, 2006, [www.intothyword.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=36562](http://www.intothyword.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=36562) (accessed March 2, 2012).

have had Elders within his church body to keep him accountable. Gary revealed that his “board of overseers” (outside pastors) simply discussed church growth strategy with him when they met and never mentioned personal, moral issues. After he had an affair with his administrative assistant, he claimed that his board of overseers did not have a clear restoration plan for him, a lacunae that added further confusion and complications. Pastor Lamb commented: “The American church does a horrible job at restoration. I did my own restoration.” Gary explained to me that he became open and honest about his affair and did not try to hide anything or leave his city. His board of overseers dismissed him. “Lost people were more forgiving than Christians.” Deanna, Gary’s wife, divorced him. He married the woman with whom he had an affair and together they started a second church, Action Church, in a ghetto area of the city.<sup>84</sup> Pastor Gary, who originally founded Revolution Church in Canton, Georgia, now reaches out to other pastors on his website by sharing his mistakes:

In May 2009, I made decisions that cost me everything. My actions cost me my marriage, my family, the church I pastored, and my name. The consequences for my sin are something I’ll be paying for the rest of my life, but it was during this time that God showed me His love in ways I never imagined possible. Since that time I have been in the process of God getting me ready to do again what He has called me to do ... This blog is simply me sharing my thoughts on the next steps in my journey and hopefully a testimony of how God uses screwed up people to fulfill His purpose.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with Pastor Gary Lambert, February 29, 2012.

<sup>85</sup> Gary Lamb, comment on “Thankful For God’s Second Chances,” [www.garylambonline.com/?page\\_id=357](http://www.garylambonline.com/?page_id=357) (accessed February 23, 2012).

## **Case Study 2: Jamey Ragle**

The mentors of some of the pastors I interviewed were poor role models. The wife of Jamey Ragle, a nationally known, highly popular pastor and evangelist, had a number of affairs over a number of years and, one night, Pastor Ragle himself morally failed when a female waitress in a restaurant showed him kind attention. Jamey reflected to me that his mentor taught him through fear and intimidation. The word “sabbatical” was unknown, unpracticed, and unmentioned by his mentor. The underlying theme of the mentor’s teaching was this: You are supposed to work seven days a week in ministry, 16 hours a day, and let God take care of your family. Jamey progressed from youth pastor to senior pastor, to non-stop traveling, celebrated evangelist. He remembered that eventually his overweight physical body revealed an outward sign of his undisciplined life. Yet, simultaneously, Jamey became addicted to the accolades of people as the largest churches in the country invited him to speak. As a comedian he was unequalled, and he skillfully interjected penetrating spiritual truth at just the right moments into the hearts of audience after audience. He accumulated all the trappings of success—four beautiful homes, custom-designed suits, luxury accommodations—while his marriage eventually crumbled. For ten years there was no sexual contact between him and his wife as she engaged in serial adultery. In that first decade of marriage there were fights, excessive anger that eventually led to no communication and resulted in two strangers living under the same roof, strangers who began to pursue career interests apart from one another. After his fall, Jamey said that he was deafened by the silence of his many pastor friends, who seemed to write him off. The Ragles’ special-needs child presented a mountain of ongoing medical bills, and the ultimate heart-breaking institutionalization of their daughter bred a marriage

that was cancerous and on its way to a certain death. Jamey said, sadly: “It didn’t quit raining in my life.”<sup>86</sup>

### **Case Study 3: Ray Carroll**

Former pastor Ray Carroll, who divorced his wife after 14 years of marriage and later wrote a book, *Fallen Pastor: Finding Restoration in a Broken World*, admits:

A few weeks before, I had resigned my pastorate and given a month’s notice. My wife and I were seeking a separation because of our marriage problems that had been going on for years. We had been able to control them, but due to recent crises, they were now spiraling out of control. The church thought my resignation was because I was stressed out. I knew the truth. It was because I had committed adultery and wanted to be with Allison.<sup>87</sup>

A pastor’s first ministry is to his family. The vitality and intimacy of a pastor’s marriage to his wife cannot be overstated. Ray told me there had not been enjoyable, anticipated sexual intimacy in his marriage for at least seven years. The complication of raising children, home schooling, and self-image problems for his wife after the birth by Cesarean section of two children compounded the turmoil.<sup>88</sup> As I have observed through years of ministry experience, often the wife has forgotten she is also a lover in addition to a mother. Couples start taking each other for granted. Both spouses slowly relax in marriage, become overweight, less sexually appealing, with little or no creative plans to change the situation. A marriage cannot be put on hold until the kids are raised. And when a marriage takes a rain check, it expires prematurely.

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<sup>86</sup> Interview with author, February 24, 2012. (For more information, [www.jameyragle.com](http://www.jameyragle.com)).

<sup>87</sup> Ray Carroll, *Fallen Pastor: Finding Restoration in a Broken World* (Folsom, CA: Civitas Press, 2011), 31-32.

<sup>88</sup> Interview, February 22, 2012. (For more information go to [www.fallenpastor.com](http://www.fallenpastor.com)).

Nothing curses character more quickly than success. A growing ministry with significant public profile often inadvertently attracts women who view the pastor as a power figure. Depending on his spiritual maturity and demeanor, some women will be enticed by the pastor's influence and success. Pastor Ray revealed:

I had been dying on the inside for a long time, even before I had met Allison. I had been chasing after an unrealistic view of myself that I could never achieve. I knew others had expectations for me and believed in me and I was tired of pretending to be the 'man in the pulpit' on Sunday, only to realize that I was a wretch every other day of the week. I had kept the charade up for a long time.<sup>89</sup>

#### **Case Study 4: Floyd Belt, Jr.**

Floyd Belt, Jr., an associate pastor of youth and families, developed a fascination with a woman in his church. Raised in a legalistic Baptist environment, he indicated that his Christian life was "rules oriented." By his own admission, Floyd was not in love with his wife. Floyd began flirting with a young lady in the church and became emotionally attached and close to her. Simultaneously, he was sleeping on the couch at home. His wife became concerned and asked what was wrong. When she intercepted a letter of admiring affection from Tiffany, she was alarmed and impulsively went directly to the senior pastor, who abruptly sent her back to her parents with their two sons in another state. The pastor came down hard on Floyd and fired him. At that time, there had been no sexual intercourse between Floyd and Tiffany. The pastor quarantined Floyd in a motel. Frustrated, at a critical, pivotal moment in his life and ministry, Floyd secretly contacted Tiffany, and they had sex in that motel. The rigid senior pastor could have played a key

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 32.

role in preventing Floyd's copulating with Tiffany and in the potential restoration of his marriage but, as Floyd said to me, "We kill our own wounded."<sup>90</sup> Now remarried, Floyd manages a website to minister to people and warns of the dangers of adultery.

### **Case Study 5: David Trotter**

After 10 years as a successful, innovative pastor in California, David Trotter was burned out and stuck in a life and marriage that lacked passion. His desire for an intimate partnership led him to leave his mistress, the ministry, and to run into the arms of a real-life mistress—his wife's best friend (and one of his congregants). After moving into an apartment and spending 40 days together, Samantha abruptly left to go back to her husband and four kids, and David's life hit rock bottom. He went from the pulpit of a thriving church into a psychiatric ward for three days. "I took the pills they put in my hand, and I just wanted to close my eyes and make the world go away. I was scared to death to sleep in a place with a bunch of crazies ... and then I realized that I might be one as well."<sup>91</sup> Professing Christians were merciless in their condemnation of Pastor David:

Although I hate to paint a broad brushstroke, the Christian community is rather known for jettisoning people along the way. There isn't much of a willingness to walk alongside someone when they are taking a path that isn't within the normal boundaries of Christianity, as they happen to define it. We were no different. No one contacted me to seek to understand. No one offered to listen to what I was wrestling with. No one was open to offering assistance.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Interview with author, February 27, 2012. (For more information, [www.fallenbeyondgrace.com](http://www.fallenbeyondgrace.com).)

<sup>91</sup> David Trotter, *Lost & Found: Finding Myself By Getting Lost in an Affair* (Lexington, KY: Nural, 2010), 178."

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 132.

God finally melted and molded David Trotter's heart, and he returned to a forgiving wife, Laura. God is rebuilding him and his marriage. He has started a marketing company and has volunteered to lead the building campaign of an evangelical church his family is attending. I asked him if his talent eclipsed the gifting of the senior pastor of the church he is attending. Rather slowly and humbly he said, "Yes." But Pastor David Trotter's story reminds us that it is not talent alone God blesses as much as likeness to Jesus Christ. Trotter is on the slow road to recovery. I also asked him if he would still be tempted by an affair. He responded, "My wife asked that question to me the other day and the answer is yes. But my focus and the most important thing to me now is my wife and children."<sup>93</sup>

David and Laura Trotter made the gutsy move to share their story of adultery and restoration on Oprah Winfrey's television show, *Unfaithful: Stories of Betrayal*, which aired on her television network nationally in late February 2012. Why would they publicly revisit the days of betrayal that so upended their marriage and ministry? When I asked David why, he responded:

It was brutal to re-hash the pain of my bad decisions for eight hours straight as a producer asked me question after question. It was brutal to know what Laura was reliving through the entire process. However,

1. We want to challenge other couples to get help before an affair.
2. We want to inspire others who are fighting for their marriages.
3. We want to motivate other couples to get outside help (through faith and therapy).
4. I want my story to be a warning to other guys who are disconnected from their families.

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with David Waters, Tuesday, February 29, 2012.



5. I want my story to cause followers of Jesus to think about how we treat those who stumble, fall, and screw up in huge ways.<sup>94</sup>

### **Case Study 6: Devin Hudson**

In my opinion, Devin Hudson is one of the most talented, educated, innovative young American pastors I have ever met. He is gutsy, and his every remark is thought-provoking. After earning a Ph.D. at Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and two Master of Divinity degrees, Devin went to “sin city,” Las Vegas, Nevada, to plant a church, Grace Point. Within a few years, his church was running 1,200 in attendance and things, it seemed, could not have been going better from an external point of view. Then, the economic recession that hit the U.S. jolted Las Vegas, and unemployment shot to over 14 percent in what had been a boomtown. Quickly, people moved out of town. Within months, Devin watched his church attendance plummet to 600. Who would have ever thought this brilliant, gifted young preacher, in the midst of stress and unexpected disappointment, would have an affair with his female assistant and months later have it discovered, three days before his church’s fifth anniversary celebration? She was younger and prettier than his wife, and there was a sexual attraction about her that aggravated the situation. When Ashley opened up to Pastor Devin about problems in her marriage, he responded, and one thing led to another. Devin and Ashley began discussing personal issues. He made an overture to her and she responded. As he reflected to me, Devin said, “I should have protected her as her pastor.”<sup>95</sup> Why did he do it? Devin told me he was raised in a legalistic Baptist church background. He indicated that he was not closely

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<sup>94</sup> David Trotter, “Affairs, Oprah Winfrey Network, Unfaithful: Why We Told Our Story to Oprah Winfrey,” [www.davidtrotter.tv/affairs/why-we-told-our-story-to-oprah-winfrey](http://www.davidtrotter.tv/affairs/why-we-told-our-story-to-oprah-winfrey) posted February 22, 2012 (accessed February 27, 2012).

<sup>95</sup> Interview with the author, March 8, 2012.

aligned with anyone, even though he spoke at numerous church growth conferences. “I did not have close friends.”<sup>96</sup> Devin also told me that his marriage was suffering in the love quotient. Three children in seven years and all the extensive study to complete his Ph.D. degree combined with a hectic work schedule to produce staleness in his marriage. Devin maintains a blog, [www.devinhudson.com](http://www.devinhudson.com): “*The random thoughts of a jacked-up Jesus follower in constant need of radical grace.*” After our interview I noticed he blogged about it:

This past week a pastor that I respect interviewed me regarding my recent life experiences. The conversation was candid, eye opening, and healing. This pastor is developing a work on young ‘successful’ pastors who have taken a fall of some sort (moral, emotional, etc.). He is studying both the commonalities among these pastors and the restorative process (or lack thereof) that most groups employ after young pastors have fallen. During the course of our lengthy conversation, he reminded me that God has gifted me in a unique way. My sin does not annul my gifts. Sin may redefine the role you perform within God's work but it does not revoke who you are as a person uniquely gifted by God. During the course of this conversation, this older and wiser pastor reminded me that God called me into the ‘life change business’ and that no matter what ‘job’ I work or for how long I perform it that God's call on my life doesn't change. God used what he said to speak into my life in a deep way. Later that night, I had to drive a couple of hours to Nashville for an event and I was talking to God, reflecting on my earlier conversation, and listening to Hillsong's *God is Able*. The lyrics of that song remind me of God's ability to use us beyond our own beliefs and doubts. There is a simple yet profound phrase in that song that has stuck with me the last few days: “*God is with us - God is on our side.*”<sup>97</sup>

My own heart was deeply moved by Devin Hudson. I could tell that he is that rare exceptional minister for Jesus Christ—with head and heart perfectly blended by the Lord. And before we hung up on our call, he told me how strange it seems on Sundays to not be preaching or having to prepare a sermon. Now Devin conducts seminars on how to buy

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<sup>96</sup> Interview with the author, March 8, 2012.

<sup>97</sup> Devin Hudson, “God is on Our Side,” [www.devinhudson.com](http://www.devinhudson.com), posted March 13, 2012 (accessed March 13, 2012).

and sell homes at a profit and it, obviously, falls woefully short of producing fulfillment in life. “I hate to not use my gifts,” he said regretfully. Baptists are famous for either shooting or prematurely burying their wounded. Devin married Ashley and told me that after an Andy Stanley sermon, he and Ashley stopped, prayed, and sincerely asked each other’s forgiveness for the damage they had caused to one another’s marriage and to many other people.

What about restoration for Devin Hudson? The church he founded fired him. He moved from Las Vegas to Huntsville, Alabama, where his former wife relocated, so he could be close to his kids whom he faithfully sees each week. He did preach that fifth-anniversary sermon knowing he had failed morally, carefully watched by the Elders who had intervened and confronted him, and the Mayor of the city listened, very impressed with how Grace Point church had helped the Las Vegas. Only a handful of people that morning knew that it was all over. The enthusiastic, expectant congregation had no idea that this was the last sermon they would ever hear from Pastor Devin. “I won 75 percent of my church to Christ,” he said. Then he added, “I never had a chance to say good bye.”<sup>98</sup>

### **Restoration: Pastor Brian Bloye, Westridge Church**

The Launch Church Planting Network<sup>99</sup> initially began through the passion, experience, and the resources of Westridge Church in the greater Atlanta area. Led by their founding pastor, Brian Bloye, Westridge Church was planted on the northwest side of metro

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<sup>98</sup> Interview with the author, March 8, 2012.

<sup>99</sup> For more information go to [www.launchstrong.com/about/aboutlaunch](http://www.launchstrong.com/about/aboutlaunch) (accessed March 13, 2012).

Atlanta in 1997. In less than 15 years, the church had grown to over 4,000 in regular attendance but, more significantly, Westridge planted over 50 churches in the last six years. Brian is a terrific pastor who shares my burden of seeking a restorative procedure to help fallen pastors. Through his Launch Network, they assess potential church planters and lead them to complete 12 core competencies through six months of training. Pastor Bloye told me that he does believe in pastoral restoration. “I grew up in a world where you could not be restored,” he said.<sup>100</sup> When I quizzed him about a biblical premise for restoration, he said he did not know if he had one, but reflected on 1 Timothy 3 and Titus chapter 1. Since we have both known of one another for over 30 years it was easy to share name after name of pastors we both knew who, to our regret, experienced the tragedy of moral collapse. What impressed me most about Brian are the steps he has taken to protect his ministry: two pastors who are close accountability friends, a counselor for him and his wife whom they regularly see, avoidance of being a “workaholic,” and his openness and honesty with his congregation. By 2010, the commitment to church planting was taken to the next level, as Launch was formed with the help of several other like-minded churches, breaking the mold of traditional church-planting strategies. God bless their efforts.

### **Overcoming Pastoral Misconduct**

Pastors have a fiduciary obligation to the people to whom they minister. Scripture outlines specific spiritual requirements of the pastor in charge of God’s flock (see 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1). Paul codified the standard for a pastor with the simple statement,

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with the author, March 8, 2012.

“A bishop then must be blameless” (1 Timothy 3:2). Nothing can destroy that trust more brazenly than sexual misconduct. Trust is removed when a pastor succumbs to sexual temptation. Perhaps there is no greater stumbling block for believers than when they observe the moral failure of spiritual leaders. Stories are widespread in churches in the United States of the proliferation of pastoral affairs. Prevention and protection for clergy from moral failure is essential for the longevity of a fruitful pastoral career. Yet most Elder or church boards have no written procedures or support mechanisms in place. Most wait until a pastor is in crisis to draw up plans. Intervention regarding clergy involved in sexual misconduct can create a host of problems, i.e., congregational splits, criminal indictments, and civil lawsuits.

Considering how explosive the issue is regarding the moral fidelity of pastors, it is surprising that few churches have proper screening and support monitors or procedures for their pastors. Graciously helping a pastor to take time for his own marriage is crucial. Marital conflict and lack of marital intimacy are highly correlated with sexual misconduct among pastors. In one survey, 41 percent of pastors involved in sexual misconduct acknowledged marital dissatisfaction, and 75 percent of pastors who had marital difficulties of five to 20 years’ duration were at risk of sexual misconduct.<sup>101</sup> Beyond that, most pastoral careers never survive sexual indiscretion. Rehabilitation and restoration procedures are foreign to most churches and evangelical denominations. To repeat the sad comment of one former pastor: “We like to shoot our wounded.”

Church boards often go to great lengths to hold a pastor financially accountable. Most of the larger church ministries adopt the practice of commissioning an annual,

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<sup>101</sup> J. E. Johnston, “Predictive factors regarding extra-marital relationships in ministers” (Doctoral dissertation, Kansas State University, 1996).

independent, certified audit to ensure proper accounting of all monies. As the budget grows, elaborate plans and projections are made to ensure that the church does not go “in the red” financially. Regretfully, many of the same churches have no plan to lovingly assist in holding a pastor to the highest standards of moral fidelity. Many of the entrepreneurial pastors I know, who are busy growing their own churches, do not take the time to initiate the creation of a mature team of respected leaders who will devise a protection/education/prevention plans for moral failure. A pastor can pass the point of burnout and spiritual depletion and set himself up for sexual compromise. Only wise, mature pastors can anticipate this potentiality and carefully seek to avoid it. But the responsibility should not be entirely the pastor’s. Nor should prevention measures designed to monitor a pastor’s moral behavior be such that they will further overburden a pastor already overloaded with pastoral responsibilities by adding more mental distractions. If someone is appointed to assist, that person must be qualified to do so, lest this person’s intervention create a whole new set of problems for the pastor. This whole process needs to be set up as a team effort with non-agenda driven, godly laymen.

In one of his sermons at Willow Creek Community Church, one of the largest churches in the United States, Pastor Bill Hybels noted that a staff member held him accountable for parking in a no-parking zone at the church:

These have been difficult days for me. I’ve made a special plea to the Elders of our church, to the staff, and to the board of directors to turn up the ‘watch care’ on my life. I’m a sinner. I’m tempted every day. I’m carrying a heavy load. And I want to finish well. But you people will fail me if you don’t join in providing ‘watch care’ for my life, and other leaders’ lives in this place. If you hear any of us say things that cause you concern, if we do things that cause you concern and you don’t bring them to our attention in love, if you don’t speak up, then you are paving the way for the kinds of abuses and scandals that have embarrassed the whole

kingdom of God worldwide. Oh, we'd all like to put our heads in the sand and say, 'It could never happen here.' You make sure it never happens here. Read the financial statements that we keep trying to pass out to the people in this church. Not enough of you take them. Question things that you don't understand. Call us on matters – in love.<sup>102</sup>

Only a spiritually sensitive pastor who desires to honor the Lord with his ministry would make such a plea to his parishioners. Bill Hybels is strikingly different in this regard from Jack Hyles. A fellow Chicago-land cleric with a longstanding ministry, Hyles is the former pastor of what was the twentieth-largest church in the U.S. in 2007. Pastor Hyles was questioned by scores of people about his relationship with a female employee of the First Baptist Church of Hammond, Indiana. Hyles' motto was: "If you have not seen it, you can't prove it." His ministry of eccentric legalism was shrouded in allegations of an improper sexual relationship with this woman (effectively his mistress), who had an office next to his. Hyles' son, David, tragically, also fell victim to moral failure that cost him his ministry and family: a small suitcase was found in a dumpster near the church he pastored at the time. The suitcase contained lewd photos of him with a number of women.<sup>103</sup>

For 17 years, I preached as a full-time itinerate evangelist in over 1,000 churches throughout North America and the world (1979–1996). I have lost count of the number of pastors I spoke for who were later ousted for sexual impropriety. One pastor friend in Texas was accused by his church leaders of having affairs with seven women in the congregation, including one divorced woman. Even though the pastor was arrested by the

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<sup>102</sup> Bill Hybels, (May 24, 1987) Willow Creek Community Church, Seeds Tape Ministry, Tape no. M8721.

<sup>103</sup> Robert Sumner, "The saddest story we ever published" *The Biblical Evangelist*, [www.biblicalevangelist.org/jack\\_hyles\\_chapter3.php](http://www.biblicalevangelist.org/jack_hyles_chapter3.php) vol. 42, mo. 5, posted November, 2011 (accessed February 9, 2012).

police for stealing condoms from a store, was under investigation by the IRS, and was accused of embezzlement, he continued to preach in his church for another eight months before resigning in disgrace.<sup>104</sup> Another extremely talented pastor, who built a mega-church, and for whom I held an evangelistic crusade in north Dallas, was exposed by *D* magazine<sup>105</sup> for his repeated sexual affairs. Several years later, as he lay dying of a brain tumor in the hospital, he cried to a trusted former associate, “I did not live well.” His father’s ministry was also tarnished because of moral failure. Most of the pastors who have been involved in sexual sin never thought it would happen to them. Sexual sin is always the result of progressive steps, any one of which should have signaled a warning to the pastor. At crucial points of vulnerability in the pastor’s life, he has the potential to incrementally make small compromises, and then larger and larger ones, until the sin is unavoidable. Why is moral failure so high among ministers? Are there other reasons for pastor’s moral catastrophe?

### **Statistics on Moral Failure**

Among those in professional vocations, pastors rank first in committing sexual indiscretions with the people they are supposed to serve. It has been estimated that of the 600,000 ministers in the United States, ministering to the spiritual needs of over 300,000 Protestant congregations, between 10 percent and 14 percent have had sexual contact with someone other than a spouse. This statistic, in my opinion, is vastly understated, as responses from anonymous pastor surveys have verified. Compared to other helping professions, sexual contact between the professional and those he/she is helping, clergy

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<sup>104</sup> Phillip Chalk, “A Jim and Tammy tale in Dallas” *Dallas Magazine*, September, 1988, 39-84.

<sup>105</sup> [www.dmagazine.com](http://www.dmagazine.com)



(10 to 14 percent) outrank male psychiatrists (7 to 10 percent); psychologists who acknowledge having sex with their clients/patients (5 to 7 percent), and physicians who copulate with their patients (10 percent). It has been estimated that fewer than one percent of female therapists and physicians had sex with their patients.<sup>106</sup> Steinke reported that nearly 15 percent of ministers have admitted to experiencing sexual attraction on a daily basis toward those to whom they minister and 21 percent admit to a weekly attraction.<sup>107</sup>

Extrapolating from these statistics, an estimated 120,000 pastors are fighting sexual attraction toward church congregants whom they counsel or to whom they minister, people who generally have their guard down and probably have affectionate, trustful feelings for their minister. The pastor can become confused between spiritual passion and sexual passion, and that passion, as has been proved in case after case, can lead to the next step in sexual temptation and fulfillment with a church member whom the pastor is counseling. Annually, between 60,000 and 75,000 clergy in the United States are acting out those sexual temptations—that is an astounding 165–205 pastors falling to moral failure per day, and six—nine pastors committing sexual indiscretions per hour.<sup>108</sup> Every six–ten minutes a pastor is failing morally in the United States. The real numbers are probably much higher and are literally epidemic across this nation. There are many examples of great, spiritual leaders in the Bible who surrendered to sexual passion: Abraham and David were adulterers; Samson was seduced; and the Corinthian church was cited for sexual deviancy (see I Corinthians 5).

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<sup>106</sup> J. C. Bouhoutsos, J. Holroyd, H. Lerman, B. R. Forer, and M. Greenberg, “Sexual intimacy between psychotherapists and patients” *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 14/2 (1983): 185-196.

<sup>107</sup> P. L. Steinke, “Clergy affairs” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 8/4 (1989): 56-62.

<sup>108</sup> J. W. Thoburn and J. O. Balswick, “Demographic data on extra-marital sexual behavior in ministry” *Journal of Pastoral Psychology*, (1998) 42, 447-457.

## High-Profile Moral Failings

Moeller's study indicated that 44 percent of churchgoers want to hear more scriptural teaching from their pastors on the subject of sex, and 22 percent of pastors feel they should spend more time on the topic.<sup>109</sup> Jimmy Swaggart was preaching on "America's Dark Stain," the proliferation of pornography in America, while at the same time he solicited a prostitute to strip for him and perform various sex acts in a sleazy motel in Metairie, Louisiana. Seen by viewers of 3,000 television stations every week, how did Swaggart think he and his pink Lincoln Continental would go undetected? Donnie Swaggart, son of the famous evangelist, invited me to their ministry headquartered in Baton Rouge, not long before the fall, when they were bringing in \$140 million each year and had 2,300 employees. His father's sexual indiscretion devastated the ministry. Even though Jimmy Swaggart's ministry had contributed \$12,000,000 annually to the mission program of his denomination, the Assemblies of God, they refused to make an exception for him. Denominational leaders removed his credentials, as they would have done to any other minister for committing similar sexual indiscretions. The Assemblies of God then voted to remove Swaggart from the ministry for one year and required that he submit to counseling for two years. Sadly, Swaggart chose to reject their authority and withdrew from the denomination after only three months out of ministry, discrediting himself even further when another sexual incident occurred.<sup>110</sup> The sexual falls of Jim Bakker, Gordon MacDonald, and Jimmy Swaggart launched scores of

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<sup>109</sup> B. Moeller, "Christians and Sex" *Leadership Journal*.

<sup>110</sup> Dr. G. Raymond Carlson was the general superintendent (1986-1993) of the Assemblies of God denomination at the time of Swaggart's fall.

research studies regarding clergy and moral failure. Over 30 scholarly articles have been published since 1991 on pastoral sexual misconduct.

In 1982, *Leadership* magazine carried the heart-wrenching story of one pastor who finally became honest about the sexual misdemeanors that he had successfully kept hidden:

Exactly three days later I spent the night with a very dear friend, a pastor of one of the largest churches in the South. I had never shared intimate details of my lust life with anyone before, but the schizophrenia was building to such a point I felt I must. He listened quietly, with compassion and great sensitivity as I recounted a few incidents, skipping over those that showed me in the worst light, and described some of my fears to him. He sat for a long time with sad eyes after I had finished speaking. We both watched our freshly refilled cups of coffee steam, then stop steaming, and then grow cold. I waited for his words of advice or comfort or healing or something. I needed a priest at the moment, someone to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ But my friend was no priest. He did something I never expected. His lips quivered at first, the skin on his face began twitching, and finally he started sobbing – great, huge, wretched sobs such as I had seen only at funerals. In a few moments, when he had recovered some semblance of self-control, I learned the truth. My friend was not sobbing for me; he was sobbing for himself. He began to tell me of his own expedition into lust. He had been where I was – five years before. Since that time, he had taken lust to its logical consequences. I will not dwell on sordid details, but my friend had tried it all: bondage, prostitution, bisexuality, and orgies. He reached inside his pocket and pulled out a pad of paper showing the prescriptions he took to fight the venereal disease and anal infections he had picked up along the way. He carried the pad with him on trips, he explained, to buy the drugs in cities where he is anonymous.”<sup>111</sup>

### **Circumstances Leading to Moral Failure**

Patrick Carnes, Ph.D., executive director of the Gentle Path program at Pine Grove Behavioral Center in Hattiesburg, Miss., and the primary architect of the Gentle

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<sup>111</sup> Richard Exley, *Perils of Power: Immorality in the Ministry* (Tulsa, KS: Honor Books, 1988), 20-21.

Path treatment programs for the treatment of sexual and multiple addictive disorders, is the author of *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction*,<sup>112</sup> the first work designed to help addicts deal with their sexual compulsions, and to examine the tangled web of trauma, love, addictive sex, hate, and fear often found in family relationships. According to Carnes, more than 30 percent of pastors engage in sexual behavior that they consider inappropriate, and more than 15 percent of pastors qualify as being addicted to Internet pornography. Even more troubling, when clergy sexual misconduct is discovered in a church, on average seven women have been victimized.

What physiological and psychological circumstances predispose a pastor to commit adultery? Are there certain times in pastors' lives when they are more susceptible to moral failure? If so, when? And why? Rob Baker and John Thoburn in *Clergy Sexual Misconduct: A Systems Approach to Prevention, Intervention, and Oversight*, elucidate the interplay of several factors that determine the potential risk for pastoral sexual misconduct:

1. Assessment and evaluation of a seminarian's call to ministry.
2. Practical ministry education and training in recognizing signs of burnout.
3. The personality factors of the pastor.
4. The pastor's foundation (or lack thereof) in spiritual formation.
5. The quality of his marital relationship.
6. The needs and expectations of the congregation.
7. The kind of direction and support supplied the pastor's conference, synod, or presbytery.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Patrick Carnes, *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction* (Center City, MN: Hazelden Information & Edu, 2001).

<sup>113</sup> John Thoburn, Rob Baker, and Maria Dal Maso, "Clergy sexual misconduct overview: A model for prevention, education, treatment, and oversight," *Clergy Sexual Misconduct* (Carefree, AZ: Gentle Path Press, 2011), 23.

Serving as a senior pastor, I had to publicly address our church regarding our youth pastor, my son-in-law, who had become sexually involved with a student in our youth ministry. He is a young man we still love and for whom we pray. His situation illustrated all seven points stated above:

1. His path to ministry was made too easy when he married my daughter and I gave him a position he had not spiritually earned (my error).
2. He did not have an undergraduate degree, let alone a seminary education (he was attending a Bible college, reluctantly, at the time of his fall, but with an arrogant attitude, questioning why he needed to attend).
3. Although we were unaware of this at the time, he was a textbook narcissist (a certified Christian counselor later confirmed that diagnosis).
4. Although a Christian, his shallow preaching (a repeated complaint of parents) was reflective of a shallow Christian life.
5. Repeatedly, each of our family members noticed trouble in his marriage. My other daughter, fretfully, was predicting its demise.
6. Solid families, in a slow stream, were leaving our church because there was “no spiritual depth in the youth ministry.”
7. Because my wife and I were handling multiple other ministry challenges, I was unsupportive and inattentive and did not provide the help he needed.

In retrospect, we can now see the indicators of his eventual moral collapse. I have great regret now that I did not provide the strong intervention and help he needed before he fell. One of our Elders had to fire him, and I told the church exactly what had happened. As parents, my wife and I learned firsthand how painful sexual misconduct could be as our daughter, in her mid-twenties, moved back home for a number of months, and we ministered to her through many tearful nights and earnest prayers. Jenilee is now happily remarried to a fine Christian husband and businessman who only magnifies, by his courteous, respectful behavior, just how dire the situation was with our previous son-in-law.

## Social and Psychological Factors Contributing to Moral Failure

Mark Laaser, M.Div., Ph.D., suffered sexual abuse at the hands of a pastor and was himself a sex addict. When he was a pastoral counselor, he sexually abused female counselees. In a 2003 study, he and his colleague revealed that there are four aspects of sexual addiction:

1. The behavior has become unmanageable. There have been attempts to stop the behavior but the person is unable to do so.
2. The addiction creates a neurochemical tolerance. The person's brain has adapted to the pleasure-creating chemical interaction.
3. Tolerance leads to escalation. More of the neurochemical is needed to create the same effect, prompting more of the behavior to create the desired effects.
4. The neurochemical pleasure from the behavior pattern ultimately medicates mood, either high or low depending on the person's perceived need or desire.<sup>114</sup>

Dr. Patrick Carnes's study of more than 1,000 sex addicts revealed a high percentage of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse factors in their lives. Most of the study's subjects grew up in emotionally rigid or detached family relationships that stunted their healthy personal development and bonding capabilities. His research further revealed a history of addictions in their family systems. The study's subjects themselves had multiple addiction issues and, in some cases, other conditions such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and attention deficit disorder.<sup>115</sup> The attributes and factors identified in Carnes' work are similar to those described by Laaser and Gregoire in pastors at risk for sexual addiction and misconduct.

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<sup>114</sup> M. Laaser, and L. J. Gregoire, "Pastors and cybersex addiction," *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 18/3 (2003): 395-404.

<sup>115</sup> P. Carnes, "Don't call it love: Recovery from sexual addiction" New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 64.

## **Moral Failures and Same-Sex Attraction**

It is clear that it is sometimes the strongest and most effective pastors who fall the hardest. In 2003, I was invited to a special pastors' gathering called "Beyond All Limits 2: Church Leaders Join Forces to Halt Pastor Attrition," held in Orlando, Florida. The conference advertised this statistic:

Every month some 1,600 pastors in U.S. churches quit or resign from their jobs and nearly 20 percent of clergy suffer stress or burnout. Beyond All Limits 2, a three-day conference for pastors worldwide, is designed to equip, instruct, teach and encourage church leaders for the everyday trials they face in their work.<sup>116</sup>

Two of the featured headliner speakers for the event were Ted Haggard, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, founding pastor of the 14,000-member New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO, and Eddie Long, pastor of the 25,000-member New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in DeKalb County, Georgia.

Originally, Haggard was an associate minister at Bethany World Outreach Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, pastored by Larry Stockstill. We served together on Dr. Paul Yonggi Cho's Church Growth International Board in Seoul, Korea. After Haggard's sex scandal was made public, with an escort and male masseur alleging that Haggard paid him for sexual activity and the purchase of crystal methamphetamine, he admitted being sexually abused as a child. Ironically, Haggard was one of the chief opponents of same-sex marriage and an outspoken advocate of the 2006 Colorado Amendment 43 aiming to ban it. Since his fall, he has appeared on one television show after another, including *Celebrity Wife Swap*, and an HBO television special, "The Trials of Ted Haggard," where

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<sup>116</sup> [crosswalk.com/church/pastors-or-leadership/church-leaders-join-forces-to-halt-pastor-attrition-1225625.htm](http://crosswalk.com/church/pastors-or-leadership/church-leaders-join-forces-to-halt-pastor-attrition-1225625.htm) posted October 16, 2003 (accessed January 28, 2012).

he told ABC News *Nightline* that he “... owes an apology to gay people.”<sup>117</sup> Confronted by yet another male accuser, Haggard was surprised in the interview by a recording ABC produced of him captured on tape, attempting to silence yet another young man from going public or litigating by promising hush money. He also said that he “... never dreamed the family [i.e., evangelicals] would throw me out.”

Influential Atlanta bishop Eddie Long conducted the funeral for Martin Luther King’s wife, Coretta, at his church. Pastor Long was well known as being outspoken against homosexual behavior. His ministry persona fit the bill of a charismatic, affluent (\$1 million annual salary), ostentatious Afro-American pastor. Four young men, claiming that the bishop had sexual relations with them, created seismic shock waves through the church and faith community.<sup>118</sup> The bishop denied the allegations. His wife, Vanessa, later filed a petition for divorce. Long’s attorneys reached a “cash and confidentiality” settlement with the young men, who nevertheless brought court cases accusing the bishop of sexual coercion. His attorneys sought arbitration and repayment of the settlement money as a result of the legal action. Interestingly, a restoration demonstration Sunday, January 29, 2012, at New Birth Missionary Baptist Church had people talking nationwide. Colorado Rabbi Ralph Messer wrapped bishop Eddie Long in a sacred Torah scroll and had four men carry the pastor around on a supposed throne.

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<sup>117</sup> [youtube/GbvVPzIsJWw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPzIsJWw) (accessed January 30, 2012).

<sup>118</sup> [youtube/hm7fR2wLTig](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hm7fR2wLTig) (accessed January 30, 2012).



## Recent Studies on Pastoral Attrition

Reports like these have become commonplace in relation to pastors in the United States. The Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development conducted a survey of pastors to assess their emotional and spiritual health in 1989 and then again in 1998. Dr. Richard J. Krejcir, director of the study, reported:

- From our recent research done to retest our data from the 1989 study—1050 pastors were surveyed from two pastors' conferences held in Orange County and Pasadena, Cal—416 in 2005, and 634 in 2006 (I conducted a similar study for the *Fuller Institute* in the late 80s with a much greater sampling). Of the one thousand fifty (1,050 or 100 percent) pastors we surveyed, every one of them had a close associate or seminary buddy who had left the ministry because of burnout, conflict in their church, or from a moral failure.
- Nine hundred forty-eight (948 or 90 percent) of pastors stated they are frequently fatigued, and worn out on a weekly and even daily basis (did not say *burned out*).
- Nine hundred thirty-five, (935 or 89 percent) of the pastors we surveyed also considered leaving the ministry at one time. Five hundred ninety, (590 or 57 percent) said they would leave if they had a better place to go—including secular work.
- Eight hundred eight (808 or 77 percent) of the pastors we surveyed felt they did not have a good marriage.
- Seven hundred ninety (790 or 75 percent) of the pastors we surveyed felt they were unqualified and/or poorly trained by their seminaries to lead and manage the church or to counsel others. This left them disheartened in their ability to pastor.
- Seven hundred fifty-six (756 or 72 percent) of the pastors we surveyed stated that they only studied the Bible when they were preparing for sermons or lessons.
- Eight hundred two (802 or 71 percent) of pastors stated they were burned out, and they battle depression beyond fatigue on a weekly and even a daily basis.
- Three hundred ninety-nine (399 or 38 percent) of pastors said they were divorced or currently in a divorce process.
- Three hundred fifteen (315 or 30 percent) said they had either been in an ongoing affair or a one-time sexual encounter with a parishioner.
- Two hundred seventy (270 or 26 percent) of pastors said they regularly had personal devotions and felt they were adequately fed spirituality.

- Two hundred forty-one (241 or 23 percent) of the pastors we surveyed said they felt happy and content on a regular basis with who they are in Christ, in their church, and in their home.

Following is a digest of research results from the Barna Research Group, Focus on the Family, and Fuller Seminary (1991), all of which backed up the findings of the Schaeffer and other studies and added information from reviewing others' research:

- Fifteen hundred pastors leave the ministry each month due to moral failure, spiritual burnout, or contention in their churches.
- Fifty percent of pastors' marriages will end in divorce.
- Eighty percent of pastors feel unqualified and discouraged in their role as pastor.
- Fifty percent of pastors are so discouraged that they would leave the ministry if they could, but they have no other way of making a living.
- Eighty percent of seminary and Bible school graduates who enter the ministry will leave the ministry within the first five years.
- Seventy percent of pastors constantly fight depression.
- Almost forty percent polled said they have had an extramarital affair since beginning their ministry.<sup>119</sup>

When I first began speaking in full-time evangelistic ministry in 1979, one heard about a pastor falling morally from time to time, but the numbers were nothing like those reported today. No effective safeguard should be ignored in an effort to prevent this tragedy. Of the hundreds of evangelical denominations in the United States, very few have written procedures regarding intervention with, ministry to, or possible restoration of adulterous pastors. *Christianity Today's* article, "Before the Next Scandal,"<sup>120</sup> refers to a Tulsa pastor who was arrested for seeking sex from an undercover police officer. The article also points to another mega-church pastor in Atlanta, who arranged sexual liaisons

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<sup>119</sup> Richard J. Krejcir, "Statistics on Pastors." *Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development*, [www.intotheyword.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=36562](http://www.intotheyword.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=36562) posted research from 1989 to 2006, 2007 (accessed January 14, 2012).

<sup>120</sup> "Before the Next Sex Scandal," (Apr 2006), [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/april/12.28.html?start=1](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/april/12.28.html?start=1). Accessed February 3, 2012.

for visiting pastors with his female staff worker. She finally broke down and sued. America's largest Protestant denomination, with nearly 50,000 churches, has no written procedures for pastors who fail morally. Scott McConnell, Director of LifeWay research, writes: "I do not believe there is a standard procedure for pastors who fail morally. Because of the autonomy of local SBC churches it is their choice whether restorative help is offered."<sup>121</sup> As *Christianity Today* reported:

Churches that need a model may look to the Assemblies of God (AG). Every few years, AG leaders revisit their policies dealing with moral failure. Most recently, an advisory group considered how to handle pastors with chronic financial debt and problems telling the truth. AG churches turn cases of moral failure over to district or state bodies, and their national policy manual has codified five separate levels of response for pastors caught in varying degrees of pornography use. Adulterous affairs typically correspond with the most serious level for addictive pornography, when the denomination suspends the pastor's credentials and requires two years of professional counseling. Knowing the challenge of overcoming sexual sin, the AG never guarantees it will restore credentials. But if a pastor successfully completes the restoration process, the denomination reissues his credentials.<sup>122</sup>

### **Current Proactive Denominational Policies**

Dr. Jim Bradford is General Secretary of the Assemblies of God (AG), the largest Pentecostal denomination, based in Springfield, Missouri, with some 64,100,671 members and adherents worldwide. Dr. Bradford writes:

We do have a restorative process. ...[this] excerpt from our bylaws describe[es] the charges that can be brought against a minister and the process for determining whether dismissal or rehabilitation is warranted. A rehabilitation process generally involves ongoing counseling, mentoring by a local church pastor, reading materials and related assignments,

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<sup>121</sup> Scott McConnell, e-mail to author, February 1, 2012

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

accountability structures and monthly written reports submitted by the minister under rehabilitation.<sup>123</sup>

The AG, as of 2010, had 12,457 churches in the United States with 3,030,944 adherents. When you add in the AG's growing mission program, they have an additional 338,472 churches and an additional 55,699,506 adherents. Worldwide churches and adherents, including countries/territories not considered mission fields, with AG adherents add 1,010,420 churches for a total of 64,100,671 adherents.<sup>124</sup> The Assemblies of God lead all evangelical denominations in having a prescribed plan to respond to ministers who are having trouble due to moral problems, and the numbers certainly prove that it is working:

	Ministers Restored	Total Number of Ministers	Percent Female Ministers	Median Age
2007	834	33,871	19.2percent	52
2008	712	34,178	19.7percent	52
2009	777	34,504	20.1percent	54
2010	673	35,023	20.6percent	54

Although rather lengthy, the substantial and well-designed restorative procedures incorporated into the bylaws of the Assemblies of God denomination are vitally important and are included in this thesis (See Appendix A, below.).

The Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA), another reputable evangelical denomination, distinguishes itself with its innovative Recovery Church Ministry, launched in 1992 under the leadership of the executive director of pastoral care ministries.

<sup>123</sup> Jim Bradford, e-mail to the author, February 10, 2012.

<sup>124</sup> Sherri L. Doty, Statistics Department Supervisor, Office of the General Secretary, The General Council of the Assemblies of God, 2011 Reports, Springfield, MO (published in 2012). [www.ag.org/top/about/statistics/index.cfm](http://www.ag.org/top/about/statistics/index.cfm) posted 2012 (accessed February 14, 2012).

It has assisted nearly 150 EFCA pastoral families to date. John Herman, the head of the EFCA Pastoral Care Ministries, writes thereof:

Of the 150 families assisted in the past 18 years, approximately 60 percent result from non-disciplinary issues [such] as burnout, job performance, church conflict or family crisis. The other 40 percent resulted from behavior that resulted in some level of ministerial discipline that included dismissal from employment in the church. Many of these involved moral misbehavior but not all. There are an unknown number of other forced pastoral transitions with which we have had no involvement at the National Office level. ... An EFCA pastor who fails morally and has responded positively to ministerial discipline can potentially return to ministry if approved by the BOMS. [The Evangelical Free Church of America operates within a congregational form of church government. The local congregation calls and cares for its pastoral staff. However, ECFA policy calls for the ECFA Board of Ministerial Standing (BOMS) to administer the process of granting ministerial credentials. The Board of Ministerial Standing is also responsible to administer the discipline process of those serving with ECFA ministerial credentials.] When a pastor is released from discipline the BOMS states if there are any restrictions in regard to future ministry. However, in our Congregational form of church government a local church calls whom they wish to serve as pastoral staff so the final outcome belongs to the local church. On a regular basis there are pastors who have been placed under discipline and given the opportunity to return to ministry, been granted that request by the ECFA BOMS and have been called to serve in a local church pastoral position so their ministerial credential was returned to them. As we have refined the process and the ministry has become more well known the number has grown.<sup>125</sup>

The Evangelical Free Church of America has initiated a program, Recovery Church Ministry, which trains and prepares certain churches to be a ministry hospital to weary pastors and missionaries. The goal is to return these servants of Christ to productivity in the cause of Christ. This program moves far beyond rhetoric of Christian concern for a burned-out or morally failing pastor. The Recovery Church is asked to

willingly love others (pastors) unconditionally, and provide “radical hospitality” which includes affordable quality housing in a restful setting

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<sup>125</sup> John Herman, e-mail to the author, February 12, 2012.

along with practical and supportive love, especially at the beginning of the process. In the interim rebuilding phase for the wounded minister, the Recovery Church assists him to identify marketable vocational skills, contacts enabling employment as soon as possible, and wisdom in identifying future employment and career options. [*sic*] Further, these special churches assess the impact of the recent crisis on the marriage and family, provide counseling sessions to address appropriate issues, and report significant insights and progress to the recovery team.<sup>126</sup>

The EFCA provides two ingenious documents, “The Discipline, Recovery, and Restoration of Pastors with EFCA Ministerial Credentials,” and “Pastor Under EFCA Discipline: A Handbook of Information,” both of which outline the detailed steps of different levels of discipline, and include information on recovery and restoration, personal recovery, repentance, and attempts to reconcile, release from discipline, return to ministry, and restoration of the credential—literally nothing left to chance or to a hurried, *ad hoc* strategy devised when the moral collapse of a pastor has occurred. The EFCA has experienced a tremendous growth in the United States since its formation in 1950, at which time there were 20,000 members and under 300 congregations. By the 1980s, there were over 800 congregations and over 100,000 members. In 2003, the Association reported 300,000 members in over 1,400 congregations. In 2010, the EFCA reported a weekly attendance of 357,709 in 1,480 congregations. As of 2000, California had the largest number of congregations with 175. However, membership is primarily concentrated in the Midwest.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> “Recovery Church Ministry,” [www.efca.org/church-health/pastoral-care-staff-benefits/recovery-church-ministry](http://www.efca.org/church-health/pastoral-care-staff-benefits/recovery-church-ministry) posted 2002-2012 (accessed February 10, 2012).

<sup>127</sup> [www.efca.org](http://www.efca.org) (accessed February 11, 2012).

## Differing Opinions on Moral Failings

The Assemblies of God and the Evangelical Free Church of America are frontrunners in the United States in the care and restoration of failing pastors. It is a mystery that the Southern Baptist Convention, with its vast financial and personnel resources, has not created such a program. The programs of these two churches certainly trump the procedures recommended by noted evangelical author Tim LaHaye, himself a veteran pastor for many decades, to be given to a church whose pastor fails morally:

1. Discover the facts.
2. Ask for the minister's immediate resignation.
3. Make a financial settlement with the minister.
4. Urge the minister to leave town immediately.
5. Prepare for the media.
6. Hire an interim minister.
7. Establish guidelines for leadership.
8. Establish a restoration committee.
9. Cut the fat.
10. Elect a search or pulpit committee.
11. Emphasize forgiveness, love, loyalty, and prayer.
12. Practice patience.
13. Keep on with ministry.

LaHaye notes that:

No single Scripture passage either clearly forbids or clearly approves of restoring a fallen minister to public ministry. For that reason a divergence of opinion on the subject has arisen among Bible-believing Christian leaders, even some who are in basic agreement on most other scriptural issues. . . . Those who lean toward legalism tend to conclude that a pastor's ministry is forever terminated if he is publicly exposed for adultery. Those whose tradition stresses mercy and grace tend to approve restoration after genuine repentance and an appropriate period of discipline.<sup>128</sup>

LaHaye documents the fact that Dr. W. A. Criswell, the famous 50-year pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, believed that if a man violated his marriage vow he

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<sup>128</sup> Tim F. LaHaye, *If Ministers Fall, Can They Be Restored* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 97.

is no longer entitled to be senior pastor. Jimmy Draper, former pastor of First Baptist Church, Euless, Texas, and former president of LifeWay, the publishing arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, reminds us that there is no example of a New Testament pastor or minister who engaged in sexual sin. Dr. Jerry Falwell believed that any pastor who failed morally should not be allowed to re-enter the ministry. Dr. Richard Halverson, once chaplain of the United States Senate, anchors his belief that a minister who admits to moral failure can be restored in the following passages: 1 John 1:9, Hebrews 10:11-14, and Ephesians 2:8-10. Jack Hayford, charismatic, founding and long-serving pastor of Church on the Way in Van Nuys, California, aligns with the Assemblies of God notion that if a pastor who has failed is repentant and subordinate to spiritual authority over a period of time, he should be allowed to re-enter the ministry.<sup>129</sup> Interestingly, Dr. David Hocking, once senior pastor of the Calvary Church of Santa Ana, California and persuasive speaker for the *Biola (Bible Institute of Los Angeles) Hour*, and who was discovered to be engaged in extramarital sex, had previously stated his belief that a fallen minister could be restored if an adequate time of repentance and restoration had occurred. And that was Hocking's personal experience. The iconic founder of the Calvary Chapel movement based in Costa Mesa, CA, Chuck Smith, with over 1,400 church plants, believes there is a biblical basis to the restoration of pastors after sexual sin if they repent and enter counseling. Smith says they should not be forced to leave the pulpit permanently. Pastor Chuck reveals that Calvary Chapel has helped a number of pastors in restoration where the problems never became public and people were not even aware of them.

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<sup>129</sup> Jack W. Hayford, *Restoring Fallen Leaders* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1988), 18-21.



John MacArthur, noted pastor of Grace Community Church of Sun Valley, California, takes a much more rigid stance:

Some kinds of sin irreparably shatter a man's reputation and disqualify him forever – because he can no longer be above reproach ... Where did we get the idea that a year's leave of absence can restore integrity to a man who has squandered his reputation and destroyed people's trust? Certainly not from the Bible. Trust forfeited is not so easily regained. Once purity is sacrificed, the ability to lead by example is gone forever.<sup>130</sup>

Chuck Swindoll, former pastor of the First Evangelical Free Church of Fullerton, California, said, "I have given this considerable thought of late and cannot think of one person, either in the Bible or in life, who survived the exposure of a repeated sexual sin and was restored to the same level of ministry he had previously."<sup>131</sup>

### **Steps To Insure the Health of the Pastor and his Family**

After 32 years in ministry, and after reviewing the data for this thesis, I would recommend that the following steps to help prevent moral failure in a pastor or spiritual leader's life be officially adopted by the church board (to whom I refer as "Elders," with the approval and awareness of the entire church congregation). In addition, these written protocols designed to protect and make pastors and their families accountable should be posted on the church's website. In other words, this information should be common knowledge within the congregation and the community-at-large. The credibility of the pastor and church and their ability to maintain an authentic ministry and prevent any

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<sup>130</sup> John MacArthur, "Should fallen leaders be restored?" *Masterpiece*, 1988, 304.

<sup>131</sup> Tim LaHaye, *If Ministers Fall, Can They Be Restored* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 123-155.

known or unknown skeletons in the closet from developing would be greatly enhanced. My research and ministry experience over the last three decades has led me to believe that there are specific steps that can be taken to protect the church, the pastor, and his spouse from the painful harm of moral indiscretion.

### *1: In-Church Accountability*

A compassionate Board of Elders should designate at least one board member who has rapport with the pastor, his wife, and his family, and who is lovingly committed to regularly interacting with the clergy's family and, in particular, the pastor. This Elder must fulfill the role of a trusted confidant. He should meet regularly with the pastor, asking questions about his marriage's vitality, sexual temptations, physical health regime, and spiritual calisthenics maintenance. This Elder should ensure that the pastor's family has at least one family vacation per year, one romantic vacation per year (the pastor and his wife alone without children), and that he and his wife attend at least two spiritually enriching conferences annually. The compensation package offered to the pastor should designate additional monies for these two vacations, with the church bearing the expenses so that the pastor and his wife can participate in the conferences. If the church budget cannot underwrite this expense, the Elder board should creatively raise the money and dispense it to the pastor, earmarked specifically for these purposes. (Some pastors won't take a vacation unless they are forced to or have the funds to do so.) The Elder who closely monitors the pastor and his family's physical and spiritual health must be a model of the same. He should be a mature, godly man, showing good physical, marital, family

and spiritual stewardship himself. Briefly, his own life and family should challenge the pastor to strive to meet these attainable goals.

## *2: Peer Accountability—A Pastor for the Pastor*

The Elder board, working closely with the pastor, should select a wise, proven senior pastor from another church who is a model in all areas described above in point 1. This outside senior pastor (preferably, but not necessarily, older than the pastor) could also mentor the pastor, become a second confidant, and be a needed sounding board in times of ministry challenge and opportunity. Furthermore, the outside pastor could provide at least an annual update to the church board, if not serving on it himself, of the pastor and family's overall health and well-being. I would recommend that this same report, perhaps in the form of a sermon, recognizing the biblical admonition, "Let the Elders (pastors) who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine" (1 Timothy 5:17), be presented each year to the church congregation. This outside pastor can remind the church congregation of their responsibility to "minister to the minister." Paul's admonition adds, "For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,' and 'the laborer is worthy of his wages'" (1 Timothy 5:18). Annually, creative appreciation should be shown to the pastor, his wife, and family who serve the church diligently and are faithful to the admonition to "[p]reach the word!" (2 Timothy 4:2a). This outside, mature pastor should also serve as a liaison between the pastor, the Elder board, and the church congregation.

The health of a pastor is mirrored in his congregation. The goal of this caring, consulting cleric is to promote the spiritual and physical health and well-being of the pastor. Again, this is a pastor for the pastor.

### *3: Professional Counseling*

The Elders and the pastor should mutually select and engage a certified, board-licensed Christian counselor, therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist. At least twice each year that individual should privately counsel the pastor, his wife, and their children and provide coaching and expertise to help the entire family endure the ups and downs of pastoral and church ministry—including living life in a fishbowl. A qualified counselor or therapist will know if the pastor or any of his family members need special attention, medication, or have issues unresolved from the past that might be predictors of poor future behavior that might discredit himself, his family, the ministry of the church and, ultimately, the Lord Himself. I am convinced that I preached for a number of pastors through the years who had significant psychological problems themselves, problems which had never been properly addressed by a professional—someone who, along with the guidance of Scripture and the indwelling Holy Spirit, could have prescribed healing suggestions. There is one guarantee in pastoral ministry: every cleric is dealing with challenges and temptations—and every minister has his own unique set of weaknesses and alluring enticements. Unaddressed, and bottled-up in guarded silence, they can and will manifest themselves in the tragic, poor behavior of the pastor. The result could be sexual fantasies, sexual overtures to a person of the opposite sex, adultery, homosexuality, bisexuality, usually all accompanied by a reliance on or addiction to pornography. Nearly 30 years

ago, a number of my early mentors would have dismissed counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists with one word—“Freudian.” There was a belief that no godly, Spirit-filled Christians, let alone pastors, needed board-certified professionals or therapists. Think of how many pastors who shared this view, particularly true of very conservative Christian believers, have crashed in the last few decades because they had a problem or need, and it never was properly diagnosed and addressed. I am grateful for the younger crop of creative pastors who are building great churches and are openly talking about the essential importance of a counselor in their lives. This is healthy and good.

#### *4: Points of Accountability and Concern*

As the Elder team, outside pastor/support friend and coach, and counselor (or therapist) monitor the pastor and his family’s spiritual, physical, and marital health, they should be particularly attentive to the following warning signs:

- The pastor becoming emotionally drained. Nothing will drain a pastor like a disloyal board, staff, or church member. Eliminate the antagonist on the board—do not ignore him.
- The pastor becoming physically drained. It is essential that a pastor be on an exercise/health program. Ministry vitality along with sexual vitality is linked, as evidence has proved, to maintaining the proper weight, diet, and to having periodic blood tests to monitor health. An increasingly overweight pastor should be confronted and motivated and held accountable to get this area of stewardship under control.
- The pastor becoming spiritually drained. The clearest evidence of this, at times, can be the sermons that are presented to the church. Are the sermons fresh, not plagiarized, anchored in the authority of Scripture, connecting with the people in discipleship and reaching the lost for Christ? Do creativity, vitality, vision, and spiritual zeal characterize the pastor?
- The pastor getting lost in legalism. Legalism is a poison that creates rules and false spiritual standards where the real behavior and temptations of the pastor are disguised. In over three decades of ministry, I have watched spiritual legalists destroy their marriages, abuse staff members, and erode their children’s heart for God. Whenever we take a stand where Scripture does not, we are always going to be inconsistent and inauthentic.

- The pastor getting lost in liberalism. When a pastor's morals change, most often his theology does as well. A pastor gets soft on sin when sin is in his life. Conversely, it is evident to an Elder board, a pastoral confidant friend, a counselor, and the entire congregation when the pastor is growing in his love and zeal for Jesus Christ.
- The pastor who rarely talks about his wife and children. Healthy marriages and families are as clear to see as sick ones. All marriages, like life itself, go through different times and seasons. The best of parents can have children who misbehave. The goal here is simply for pastoral transparency and for the church members to be gracious and compassionate, considering their own personal successes and failures in marriage and parenting.
- The pastor who rarely laughs and has little joy in his life. When everything in ministry is always serious and a drain, joy evaporates when things are headed the wrong way. Every pastor needs a hobby other than church. A good Elder board will encourage their pastor to find some hobby to help balance the minister and contribute wholesome pleasure to his life.
- The pastor who is constantly hassled by a troublesome board member, staff or church member. I have watched Elders stand dumbfounded, like a calf staring at a new gate, watching a fellow church or board member behave inappropriately or disloyally to the pastor. This is wrong. A divisive board member causes a pastor heartache, and this anguish often becomes pillow talk every night and contributes to stress in his marriage and family. Good Elders confront errant church, staff, and board members for the good of the church and pastor. Cut the cancer out: do not play at détente with a faction or person who is poisonous.
- The pastor who will take no correction. Scripture abundantly reinforces the importance of godly counsel and receiving correction from someone spiritually qualified. A pastor who will not listen to reproof is signaling an imminent fall in his life.
- The pastor who has no common-sense safeguards in his life and ministry. Much in the Pandora's box of pastoral failures grows out of counseling others. I am convinced that, as far as it is possible, counseling should be outsourced. The pastor should be focused, primarily, on the vision of the ministry, leading the leaders, and studying the word of God to present laser-sharp sermons. In my ministry, I never counseled a female in an office without another female staff member present. A minister should never be alone with a person of the opposite sex in any situation whatsoever, no exceptions. Practical, common-sense precaution can prevent sexual compromise and accusation. I never write an email to a woman unless I can imagine it being printed in a newspaper with a reporter trying to distort the facts, and I am always careful to include my wife in the expression of our mutual concern and love for the person to whom I am writing. The "Modesto Manifesto" created by the young Billy Graham team in the late 1940s, identified women, money, and pride as the three major downfalls of a minister. He led the team to establish high barriers of prevention, and these should be practiced by every pastor concerned about the reputation of Christianity and the church.
- The pastor who has experienced a large measure of success. Oscar Wilde once wrote, "In this world, there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants, and the other

is getting it.”<sup>132</sup> The crescendo of success after success in ministry can cause self-reliance. Self-reliance can cause a spiritual fall given the right circumstances.

- The Elders should encourage ongoing theological training from a reputable seminary. The call that began a pastor’s ministry must be encouraged by continued theological and methodological educational training that will undergird his service.

## **Conclusion**

As we have observed, pastors who fail morally seldom saw themselves as candidates for it. Studies reveal that certain behaviors predispose pastors to moral failure. Wisdom suggests that we should become intimately familiar with these predictors and realize that pastors, and their families, are not above the benefit of qualified counselors and peer mentors. In our next chapter we will find that the growing trend of diminishing church attendance also impacts pastoral longevity. Indeed, the statistics and moral trends are alarming. In response, pastors and church leaders must design churches that not only model biblical fidelity but also target the spiritual, social, and relationship needs of an increasingly fractured society.

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<sup>132</sup> Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1893), third act.