

PASTORAL RESTORATION

The Path to Recovery
in a Broken World

UPDATED & REVISED



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The evidence was there.

A church leader had asked me to look at the details of their minister's wrong choices. As I read through the notes, I thought of his wife and children, his ministry, the victims — and his soul.

What was he thinking? Why did he make these decisions? The writer of Proverbs makes it clear: He *wasn't* thinking. "The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; He who would destroy himself does it" (Proverbs 6:32, NASB).

The minister denied the affairs and sexual harassment accusations. He said that he was being set up. He said the accusers were "delusional."

But the church leader and I had proof. The details were accurate, and there were witnesses. For almost an hour we read the evidence to the pastor. Finally, he broke down and confessed, "It's true."

With tears flowing down his cheeks, he admitted his sin. He asked, "Now what?" What would he say to his wife? Should they tell their children? What about his ministry, his job? How would he provide for his family?

"What happened to me?" he asked.

INTRODUCTION

“Even if godly people fall down seven times, they always get up” (Proverbs 24:16, NIRV).

The person who does what is right may have many troubles. But the Lord saves him from all of them” (Psalm 34:19, NIRV).

Spiritual leaders pose a grave threat to the enemy’s kingdom. If Satan can tempt a leader to make a sinful decision, the fallout is exponential — not only for the leader and his family, but for the very cause of Christ. Even the community suffers from hearing that a spiritual leader has fallen.

Satan is patient; he will wait and watch for just the right moment — a moment that will do the greatest damage to the kingdom of God.¹

1. Tim Chaddick, *The Truth About Lies*, David C. Cook.

Scripture supports the reality of spiritual warfare:

- *Paul instructed Timothy that a leader needs to have a good reputation so he won't fall into disgrace and the devil's trap (1 Timothy 3:7).*
- *In his second letter to Timothy, Paul instructed him to correct people with gentleness because they had lost common sense and been trapped by the enemy (2 Timothy 2:26).*
- *David said that people (through the enemy) had set traps for him (Psalm 140:5).*
- *Jesus warned that the devil wants only to kill, deceive, and destroy — to ruin people (John 10:10).*
- *Jesus told Peter that the devil wanted to shake him and sift him to the point of breaking (Luke 22:31).*

On our own, none of us can withstand the onslaught of the enemy. Our greatest defense is deep intimacy with God and right relationships at home, at church, and with our colleagues. We also have to take precautions: “Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you” (James 4:7-8, ESV). And each day, we can put on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-20).

Even so, sin is a complicated issue; there are no simple answers for decisions made in moments of temptation. James wrote about the downward spiral of sin: “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (James 1:13-15, ESV).

The reasons ministers fall are complex. However, we've found that most moral or ethical failures stem from five issues:

- *No accountability and too much power.*
- *Unresolved conflict at home.*
- *Limited time spent alone with God.*
- *Isolation and loneliness.*
- *Burnout, stress, and lack of life balance.*

Ministry should be meaningful, and every servant of God must have a vigilant spirit. The apostle Paul wrote, “Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58, ESV). To do that, a busy pastor has to get adequate rest, nurture his relationship with the Lord, keep his marriage and family healthy, and be accountable to one or more of his fellow pastors. All good things, yes, but still a tall order — especially in today’s culture when ministry doesn’t always feel meaningful.

That’s why part of our calling here at Focus on the Family is to support clergy and their families. The body of Christ — the church — is a pillar of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). Healthy leaders are critical. Because of our love and esteem for clergy, their families, and the church, we wrote *Pastoral Restoration: The Path to Recovery in a Broken World*.

Most of you reading this are leaders or officials in your local church. Please give our words careful consideration. They aren’t comprehensive and won’t apply to every situation because of differences in church structure, bylaws, and personalities. But they *are* seasoned, borne from long hours spent counseling men and women who have failed God, themselves, and the souls they love and lead.

We also want to help clergy and church leaders stay vigilant and proactive when it comes to indications or revelations of indiscretion.

Failure in a leader's life — whether sexual, ethical, financial, or something else — affects the leader and everyone in his sphere of influence. Like a tsunami, waves of hurt, shame, and disbelief pummel the unsuspecting and can lead to lifelong devastation.

Thankfully, God is the Healer of broken lives. In spite of the gravity of the situation and the shock that comes from news of a fallen leader, the question is never, “Can they be restored?” but rather, “Will they submit to a process of restoration?” No one is beyond the divine reach of God. He is a God of mercy, forgiveness, and restoration.

Isaiah captures the essence of this healing (which Jesus quoted about himself in Luke 4:16-19):

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound ... to grant to those who mourn in Zion — to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified (Isaiah 61:1, 3, ESV).

Remember God's nature: “The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth” (Exodus 34:6, NASB). His compassion, grace, mercy, and love will convict, guide, and comfort during this season. Through the process of reconciliation and restoration, God will help a fallen leader — and the church body — realize that there is hope. The valley might feel dark and lonely, but we can trust God and lean on His understanding, wisdom, strength, and unfailing love.

Our prayer is that this booklet will help you accomplish the humble, critical task of restoration. ~Dr. Wayde Goodall

Different denominations hold varying views on the ordination of women. But as a non-denominational ministry, Focus on the Family's outreach to pastors supports the entire body of Christ, men and women — and we realize women are just as likely as men to fall into sin. From this point forward we use “he” and “him” only for the sake of reading ease.

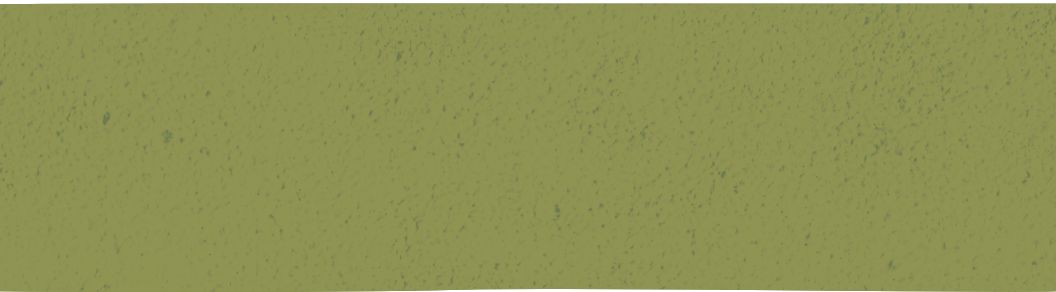
STANDARDS FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP

1

God's immutable standards for church leadership provide the framework for leadership qualifications — and set the stage for discussions about failure, discipline, and restoration:

“An overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil” (1 Timothy 3:2-7, ESV).

“Appoint elders ... [who are] above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:6-9, ESV).



Moral and spiritual failures have many root causes. They could stem from the leader's family of origin, or there may have been abuse in the leader's background.

Other problems can include a lack of depth in the leader's relationship with Christ. A man is often able to compartmentalize his life and justify sin. An inability to cope well with stress can lead to actions that are detrimental to his spiritual or physical health. There might be marriage problems, a flawed concept of success, no personal discipline, or pride and ego.

Whatever the cause, it's no excuse to sin. The church body and the leader's loved ones need to watch for warning signs. And the pastoral care team or someone appointed by the board must intervene immediately so destructive behaviors are identified, and the leader can be helped.

Warning Signs of Impending Failure

- *Signs of burnout and stress*
- *Behavioral changes, such as no longer reading the Bible or praying*
- *Personality changes, such as mood swings, lethargy, and anger*

MORAL FAILURE: CAUSES AND PREVENTION

2

- *Sermons becoming less about the Bible and more about the pastor*
- *Rude behavior, sarcasm, and defensiveness*
- *Unusual absences or unavailability*
- *Inability to stay within budget*
- *Inappropriate touching of the opposite sex*
- *Closed-door, one-on-one counseling sessions with the opposite sex*

Prevention is always preferable to waiting for a leader to fall. “The question is not whether we fail again and again — that is a given. The question is whether, over a period of time, we are developing a practiced habit of divine fellowship.”² When a life is driven by the responsibilities, desires, and expectations of others, leaders can get lost in time demands and complexities of ministry. They must establish and hold fast to biblical priorities and goals.

Our first responsibility is to love the Lord with all of our heart, soul, and mind.³ “Intimacy with Christ is the essential element

2. Richard J. Foster, *Prayer, Finding the Hearts True Home*, Harper/San Francisco, CA, 1992, p. 129.

3. *Matthew* 22:37-38

and necessary for useful ministry.”⁴ To build intimacy with the Lord requires that we spend time in His presence. The spiritual disciplines of prayer, worship, fasting, study, and sharing our faith, help each of us maintain that cutting-edge first love.⁵

Developing an intimate relationship with God and family also includes rest. Endless labor is not a sign of devotion or spirituality. Jesus rested and encouraged His followers to do the same (Mark 6:31).

To help your pastor guard against moral and spiritual failure, encourage him to:

- *Take a day or two each week to unplug and rest.*
- *Spend quality time with his family each day.*
- *Date his spouse weekly.*
- *Get away with his spouse for at least two days every three months.*
- *Attend at least one seminar every six months for mental stimulation and spiritual renewal.*
- *Take a family vacation at least once every year.*
- *Build lasting memories with his family by prioritizing birthdays, anniversaries, and other important family events.*

Unfortunately, good intentions and preventive measures don't guarantee a sinless life; there's no such thing.

4. H.B. London, H.B., Neal B. Wiseman, *The Shepherd's Covenant for Pastors, Section 1, Develop a Great Soul, Regal 2005*

5. Revelation 2:2-4

COMMON PITFALLS

3

A leader faces many pitfalls. The most common failures lie in three areas:

Financial Mismanagement: Restoration involves repayment and restitution (and criminal actions could involve judicial punishment). A leader whose finances have defaulted should forfeit his leadership position. He must also submit to a ministry representative monitoring all income and disbursements until outstanding debts are paid in full.

Alcoholism and Substance Abuse: Drunkenness is clearly sin (Ephesians 5:18), but Focus on the Family takes a neutral stance about *casual* alcohol consumption. However, if all use is prohibited by your church leadership, then even casual use should involve discipline (removing responsibilities).

But casual use of recreational drugs should never be tolerated. And addiction — whether to alcohol, prescription medication, or recreational drugs — requires disqualification and several years of restorative therapy.

Sexual Temptation: Sexual sin isn't an isolated issue; it's a cluster of character flaws culminating in corrupt sexual expression, most commonly pornography and adultery.

More than half of pastors and youth pastors admit to struggling

with pornography either currently or in the past. Pastors fear they will be caught, and they feel ashamed. Most eventually seek help, but say their involvement with pornography has been a significant injury to their work as a minister.⁶

Use this five-stage scale when assessing a leader's involvement with pornography:

- 1 **Curiosity:** *Someone has a desire to know or to learn something, or accidentally looks at pornography.*
- 2 **Experimental:** *A person becomes superficially involved in pornography to see if it's stimulating or compelling.*
- 3 **Habitual Use:** *The person looks at or listens to pornography on a regular basis. The person really needs to seek help right now.*
- 4 **Chronic Use:** *The person has a compulsion to find more ways and/or opportunities to view or to read pornography over time.*
- 5 **Addiction:** *The person no longer has the ability to discontinue involvement in pornography despite repeated attempts, or negative consequences.⁷*

Habitual Use, Chronic Use, and Addiction stages necessitate intensive professional assistance. Restoration from pornography use can take 6 to 24 months depending on the level of involvement and the cooperation of the participant.

If a leader has been sexually involved with anyone other than his spouse, or he's been frequently involved with pornography, he's biblically disqualified to serve:

6. *The Porn Phenomenon* was commissioned by Josh McDowell Ministry.

7. Dr. Wayne Goodall

- **He's guilty of infidelity.** *He has sinned against God, sinned against his spouse, and broken faith/trust with his leadership team and with the congregation who put their confidence in him (Matthew 5:27-28, 2 Peter 2:14, Hebrews 13:4).*
- **He's no longer blameless (Greek: unrebukable).** *His conduct has led to questions about his integrity. He's been found guilty (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6).*
- **He no longer has a good reputation.** *There is no longer an excellent testimony and reputation with the non-Christian community. A church leader must be respected in the community as well as in the church (1 Timothy 3:7).*
- **He's not a man of good behavior.** *He does not have a modest, disciplined, respectable lifestyle. He's no longer honorable or dignified. He has become boastful, arrogant, presumptuous, and not well-behaved (1 Timothy 3:2).*
- **He's not temperate (Greek: self-controlled).** *He hasn't shown self-restraint over appetites and affections (Titus 1:8).*
- **His behavior isn't holy.** *He is no longer devout, pious, pleasing to God, and set apart for God's service (Titus 1:8).*
- **He has been self-willed.** *He's stubborn, arrogant, and dominated by self-interest. He hasn't submitted to proper authority, seeking to please God and others. He's set in his own ways (Titus 1:7).*
- **He hasn't been sober in his thinking.** *He hasn't been sensible or discreet. He's been given to fanciful thinking or emotional irrationality instead of sound judgment (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8).⁸*

8. "Dealing with Church Leadership and Infidelity," © 2005, George Stahnke

Separation and Divorce

As Bible-believing Christians, Focus on the Family takes the view that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) and desires to bring healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation to broken marital relationships.

Nevertheless, we believe there are three situations where Scripture makes allowance for divorce and remarriage:

- ***When the first marriage and divorce occurred prior to salvation.*** *Although a person can't undo all the sins he's committed, he is forgiven for the wrongs he did before accepting Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).*
- ***When one's mate is guilty of sexual immorality and is unwilling to repent and live faithfully with the marriage partner.*** *Jesus states specifically that divorce and remarriage are acceptable when due to this kind of hardness of heart (Matthew 19:9).*
- ***When one of the mates is an unbeliever and willfully and permanently deserts the believing partner.*** *This does not refer to a temporary departure, but a permanent abandonment (1 Corinthians 7:12-15).*

A leader who divorces for another reason, or whose spouse divorces him, should step down from ministry in hopes of restoring his marriage.

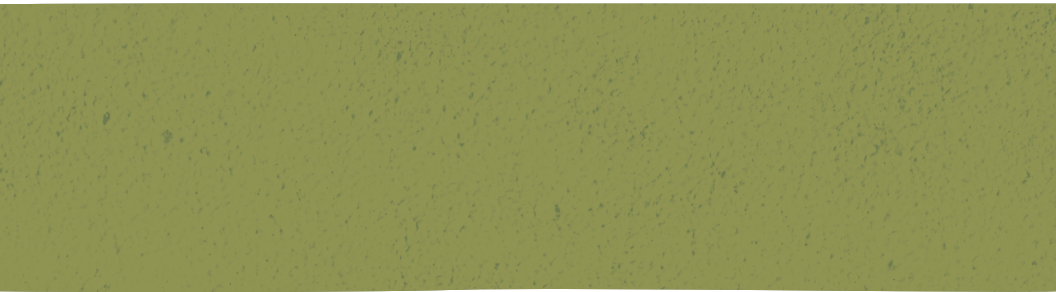
If a couple is close to divorce or has divorced and wants to reconcile, they should pursue weekly marriage counseling. For those still married, ministry activity should be limited to events both partners can participate in. The couple can be placed back in full-time ministry only when counselors and church leadership agree that they're ready.

*As a help to couples in crisis, Focus on the Family offers **Hope Restored: A Marriage Intensive Experience**. This innovative and effective program is overseen by a team of highly trained therapists who specialize in helping couples facing serious marital distress. Visit HopeRestored.com to learn more, or call 1-866-875-2915. (We realize that some husbands and wives are concerned about financial costs — and so we do make scholarships available. Ask for details when you call.)*

“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted” (Galatians 6:1, ESV).

“Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet?”
(Amos 3:3, ESV).

“If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand” (Mark 3:25, ESV).



When people hear that their pastor has fallen, the news can be devastating. It might start with a rumor, causing people to begin to act aloof or whisper in small groups. Details are sketchy, and the first response might be to dismiss and deny the news: *Not him!* Or perhaps media coverage smothers the congregation. Regardless, the damage is tri-fold: The public perceives that the church covers up sin, the church senses that they can no longer trust their leader, and the fallen individual wonders whether he can be restored.

Establishing a Restoration Team: Roles and Responsibilities

To handle a spiritual crisis, it's helpful to get a response team in place. You can't afford to simply turn away and hope things will blow over. Depending on your church constitution, the church board or governing body should choose several trusted members to prayerfully come together, submitting to God and to each other. It will be helpful if one or more members of the team have the spiritual gift of discernment.

Agreement among team members is critical. Any division will weaken their ability to function and to care for the fallen pastor and the congregation. If the team is not united in its understanding of and approach to the crisis, another team skilled in conflict resolution should be brought in.

ADDRESSING MORAL FAILURE

4

Few aspects of church ministry are as difficult as pastoral restoration. Who can be restored? To what position? While these questions are important, restoring the leader to his original leadership position is not the team's primary concern.

The most important tasks are directing the leader to fellowship with God, caring for his spouse and family, and facilitating healing for those who've been wronged. If, on rare occasions, and after careful examination, it's possible for the leader to be restored to the pulpit or original position, God be praised. However, if that doesn't happen, it doesn't mean the team's efforts failed.

Leadership failure is a tragedy. No one should delight a leader's demise. A proud, high-minded, flippant attitude on the part of the restoration team is deadly to the entire process. We are to "bear one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:2, ESV). Those who are mature in the faith are called to take the initiative in restoring a fallen leader to wholeness — acting with meekness and discernment.

Part of being meek is having reverent fear of the Lord.

God's charge to rebuke sin is solemn and must be handled with impartiality (1 Timothy 5:19-21). When we discipline leaders, our love for them and our desire to see them restored should never

overshadow our love for and commitment to Christ, His church, and the living witness of faithful ministry.

Meekness also means enduring the process *without resentment and with hope*. The restoration team must be patient with a fallen leader's depression, anger, hurt, confusion, misunderstanding, and cycles of despair. The driving hope of their efforts is to one day stand publicly with the leader and declare him fully restored to fellowship, fully reconciled with his family, and fully released to pursue the call of God on his life.

Discernment is essential. The process of restoration requires a clear understanding of history, motives, temptations, sinful behavior, rationalization or compartmentalization, and current activity. You wouldn't remove a splinter with a hammer; in the same way, you shouldn't lump together indiscretions and moral failures.

Indiscretion (using poor judgment in matters of morality; e.g. viewing pornography, flirting with or making suggestive comments to people other than your spouse) needs *discipline*, whereas moral failure (for example, adultery) requires *disqualification* from ministry, at least for a time. Leaders assisting with restoration need to take evidence seriously and depend on the Holy Spirit for discernment. Finding answers to these questions can help:

- *How deeply rooted and long-standing is the sin?*
- *Has the individual covered his sin? Has he developed a lifestyle of deception?*
- *Has the individual been untruthful in the process, lying to those who had a premonition of his sin before it was discovered?*

- *Has he publicly denied his sin and lost credibility with his followers?*
- *Did he confess? Was he open about confession when confronted?*
- *Is he cynical about the seriousness of his sin? Does he belittle it as if it's normal behavior?*
- *Has he excused his sin by blaming others — or the discipline process — and making himself a victim?*
- *Is he using scriptural passages to condone immorality or leadership failure?*
- *Is he labeling everyone who opposes his leadership as pharisaical and legalistic?*
- *Is he willing to break off every wrong relationship?*
- *Has he repented? Is he willing to renounce and forsake his misdeeds, and submit to authority during the restoration process?*

To restore is to *mend* what's been broken — it's the idea of setting a broken bone back in place so it can heal correctly. We must pay attention to our family of believers. If we see that they've fallen, we *set their brokenness* so God can heal their hearts and restore them to usefulness.

Setting a broken bone requires a cast, a period of immobility, and physical therapy. In a similar way, a fallen leader needs *spiritual* therapy — beginning with his spiritual life, then his personal life, and extending to his ministry life.

***Special Circumstances:
When Failure Means Involving the Police***

Depending on the nature of the failure, you may need to contact the police or other authorities. Perhaps a youth pastor abused substances with the teens in his care — or worse, abused the teens. Or maybe a leader has been accused of sexual harassment.

As a team, identify the problem. Did the leader confess, or did someone accuse him? Take the charge seriously and investigate. Interview each person individually and pray for God's guidance. No matter how much you might trust an individual's reputation, you need to discover the truth.

After the team's initial interviews, the truth should become clearer. If the team can't discern the truth or division springs up, seek outside help; you aren't abandoning your duties by asking for assistance. Turn to denominational leaders for a referral or to another church body that has gone through a similar experience.

If the charge appears to be true, notify the denomination leadership or ruling body. (In some cases, they might already have been involved in the initial discovery phase.) Prompt notification is vital to keep communication lines open in all aspects of the process — but this can also be frightening for the pastor. When appropriate, accompany him to meet with church leadership. This can comfort your pastor *and* help answer governing authorities' questions about the sincerity of his confession and repentance. It can also guide their decisions about whether, when, and how to restore him to ministry.

Keep a written record of all discussions, decisions, and actions taken by the team as you work your way through these steps.

This protects the church if the matter escalates into a lawsuit. It also provides a framework of details for those who need answers.

1. **Immediately seek legal counsel.** Consult someone who specializes in crisis management. Discuss how to protect the work of the team under attorney/client privilege.
2. **Determine if a criminal report is required.** Many states require that incidents involving minors be reported. Failure to do so may lead to a lawsuit.
3. **Advise the accused to seek an attorney.** If the allegation is criminal in nature, the church cannot offer legal counsel to the accused.
4. **Contact the church's insurance company.** To ensure coverage, notify your insurer as soon as possible.
5. **Assign liaisons.** A group representative should provide pastoral support for the victim and victim's family. A separate person should provide support for the accused.
6. **Develop a communication plan.** Select a point person to communicate with the congregation, the media, the authorities, and the lawyers. Agree on what communication will be offered.
7. **Investigate further.** It's not the church's duty to investigate the legal guilt or innocence of the accused; criminal investigation should be left to the authorities. However, the church must determine if there are any other victims.
8. **Make counseling available.** Prepare to provide counseling to anyone who needs it.⁹

9. Adapted from "Confronted With the Shameful" by Mike Woodruff and Dennis Kasper, *BuildingChurchLeaders.com*, © Christianity Today Intl.

For smaller congregations, many of these recommendations are daunting; hiring lawyers and counselors and conducting investigations can be costly. Consider a lawyer or counselor in your church or a nearby congregation who's willing to assist for a reduced fee.

Confronting and Removing the Pastor

Regardless of the nature of the moral failure, if evidence proves that the leader is guilty, the response team or church board should confront the leader and remove him from his position.

There are four elemental steps in the removal process:

- *Begin immediate administrative leave, the length of time to be determined.*
- *Determine a severance package.*
- *Establish and follow through with a restoration plan (where possible).*
- *Identify a new leader to fill the void.*

We can't suggest standards for administrative leave and severance; they'll depend on denominational association and rules of order. However, we *can* offer details to consider when creating and carrying out a plan of restoration:

- ***Understand the discipline timeline:*** *Not every leader can be restored to every role; that's a bigger discussion than our purposes here. But one who commits adultery, for example, needs to be under church discipline for at least two years. The leader then sits under the ongoing authority, guidance, and restoration process of the restoration team. The process — with a pre-planned timeline — moves forward with counseling, accountability, help for those hurt by his actions, and any other steps required by the church.*

- **Find a new church home:** *It's usually best for someone caught in immorality to be placed under another church. The individual being disciplined can choose which church, but we recommend one that's several states away. The pull of sinful roots can blossom quickly with even a casual, coincidental rendezvous.*
- *Also, the leader's former congregation can face confusion if he's still present. He may be tempted to reassert his leadership — and if he remains in the same city, he'll more than likely try to start another church that will pull sympathetic members to his side.*

“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy” (Proverbs 28:13, ESV).

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working” (James 5:16, ESV).

- **Establish support from the disciplining church and the receiving church:** *A leader cannot demand anything from a church where he has disqualified himself. He must cast himself on the mercy and grace of the church leadership, realizing that the church owes him nothing.*

Nevertheless, if the leader is repentant and cooperative, the disciplining church should prepare to help him relocate and consider providing him with several months' salary while he finds work and gets settled. (The home he's leaving should be put up for sale or leased for an extended time.)

The receiving church who agrees to oversee the leader's restoration after he relocates will be in charge of assisting

him to find housing, employment, and spiritual accountability. They're not responsible for any of those things; they only agree to do their best to facilitate a smooth transition. (The leader should prepare to return to the workforce as soon as possible. He should be realistic about the fact that employment options might be few — but could include substitute teaching, insurance sales, or real estate.)

- **Submit to accountability:** *The leader should attend a weekly small group with the receiving church leaders, such as the pastor's cell group, the men's ministry leader's cell group, or a marriage ministry leader's cell group.*

He should bring his family to church weekly, sit toward the front, and participate in worship and fellowship. Any opportunities to serve or lead should be postponed until he's shown consistent, forward-moving progress in his marriage and in his relationship with the Lord.

And at all times, the receiving church's board must lovingly hold the leader being restored accountable when it comes to his schedule, his budget, and his personal purity. They should put in place checks and balances so he isn't isolated and doesn't have sole authority in any area where a problem might arise.

The response team must also decide who will care for the home congregation. Another pastor on staff may feel inadequate to carry the assignment. If so, seek an outside pastor. If an associate pastor feels confident, though — and the team agrees — the congregation might feel more at ease with a familiar face.

Identifying True Repentance

A leader must show genuine repentance and remorse, and not simply because he was caught (2 Corinthians 7:10). If a minister is *exposed* as opposed to *coming forward on his own*, discipline might need to be more stringent. And if he balks — if he chooses the role of victim, doesn't take responsibility, or doesn't see the need for discipline — it's a warning sign that he's not ready for the restoration process.

*Fear leads to hiding,
but faith leads to
confession and restoration.*

But if a minister voluntarily comes to his denominational or church leader — if he is broken before God and wants *His* will in the situation rather than grasping for “everything to be like it was” — it should be in his favor. If a leader acknowledges his sin and submits to the authority of the governing body, is willing to take any and all steps toward wholeness, and agrees that the congregation's health is the highest priority, a spirit of cooperation and humility paves the way for recovery and restoration.

In *The Heart of a Warrior*, Michael and Sharon Hill suggest a step-by-step process of identifying real repentance:

- **Confession** — *sincere regret and acknowledgment of the magnitude of the sin and why it was wrong.*
- **Change of attitude and behavior** — *shift from blaming others to willingness to bear the blame.*
- **Following a plan** — *willingness to follow a written contract detailing steps for restoration.*
- **Accountability** — *commitment to meet with a biblically mature believer each week who will prepare a report of the leader's progress; willingness to allow access to all email, internet, and social media accounts.¹⁰*

Ed Stetzer¹¹ also offers guidelines for the confession of a fallen leader:

- **Repentance must be public.** *Pastors are held to a higher standard – the biblical standard. As far as the sin is known the repentance should be known.*
- **Repentance must be honest and complete.** *Saying, “I’m sorry you were offended” is not repentance. Neither is giving a carefully worded statement without accepting full responsibility. And attempts to avoid blame reveal higher regard for reputation than for repentance. Those are patterns of the world — they speak more to having the right public relations firm than having a repentant heart. True repentance sounds like this:*
 - *“I didn’t tell the truth because I wanted to be liked and listened to. I’m sorry.”*
 - *“I committed adultery on more than one occasion, and it’s my sin.”*
 - *“I wasn’t honest with the finances. I stole, and it was wrong.”*

10. Adapted from, *The Heart of A Warrior*, Michael Thompson, Heart and Life Publishers, Grand Rapids, MI. 2015 © Christianity Today Intl.

11. Ed Stetzer, *The Billy Graham Chair of Church, Mission, and Evangelism at Wheaton College*. He also serves as the Dean of the School of Mission, Ministry and Leadership.

- *There is great freedom in confessing all sin early and moving toward restoration. The alternative is to stay trapped in a cycle of waiting until evidence mounts and then try to spin it to salvage reputation.*

When repentance is public and thorough, restoration can be public and complete.

- **Repentance should lead to restoration.** *Although a leader's influence will be limited by his past, there can be future opportunities for him to use his spiritual gifts, first as a layman and possibly even in a pastoral role. We have to give him that chance.*

Consider the story of a pastor who confessed adultery to his church leadership. He was told to resign and relocate, but he was prevented from confessing publicly — despite the sin being known publicly. By taking this approach, his church leadership failed him. Now he always wonders, “Will it come out again?” He would rather have confessed his sin and moved on. He was robbed of true pastoral repentance, and the church was robbed of an honest dealing with sin. When it comes to pastoral repentance, fear leads to hiding, but faith leads to confession and restoration.¹²

12. Ed Setzer, *When Pastors Fall, Leadership*, April 22, 2014
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/edsetzer/2014/april/why-full-and-public-repentance-matters.html>

Caring for the Leader and His Family

Early in the restoration process, the church should provide the fallen leader with professional Christian counseling. That individual can help objectively determine what led to the failure and what steps need to be taken for personal wholeness. This is invaluable in the healing process.

Don't just require this of the offending leader, though. His actions have seriously damaged the marriage relationship. Healing and rebuilding trust will take time and must be proven valid (Matthew 3:8). Insist that both husband and wife go together for counseling.

This process can take a minimum of 6 to 18 months. Under no circumstances should the person be placed back into any position of leadership until it's complete. The pastor and his marriage are the primary concerns, not his ministry.

Keep in mind, too, that this type of situation can be so painful that the fallen leader's spouse and children suffer silently — unnoticed and abandoned — not only by their family member but by the church body. Take special precautions so they feel loved and supported. Provide counseling and other care as needed.

God has chosen fallible humans to help build His kingdom. The fact that they fall grieves Him but doesn't take Him by surprise. Because He is all-powerful, He can use a church's devastating situation to bring glory to His name. Take heart in the Lord and in His might. God can lead you through difficult times — and He can draw His people closer to himself because of these deep waters.

For referrals to licensed therapists in your area, call Focus on the Family's Pastoral Care Line (1-877-233-4455).

Communicating Well

As a crucial part of the restoration process, you need to communicate well with the congregation — to mitigate the risk of gossip and a potential church split. When church leadership deals with things quickly, efficiently, and honestly, it restores a measure of faith to all who've been affected.

Communication must be as open as possible without jeopardizing legal principles.

- *This could take the form of a letter that lets members know appropriate information.*
- *Or you could hold a special meeting with members. (Prepare a written statement to read to the congregation. Don't shoot from the hip; your words are important and deserve detailed attention.)*
- *If there's possibility of a lawsuit, ask legal counsel to help you decide when and what you can share. The restoration team's point person should provide the congregation with ongoing, discreet updates.*

That said, prepare for two types of responses:

- *In many cases, the congregation will pressure church leaders to restore a fallen pastor fully and quickly. They'll point to his "anointing" or the increase in church attendance and membership under his leading, and they might push the committee by asking how long it will be before the leader returns.*
- *On the opposite side are those who want the fallen leader to be cut off. They'll seek immediate termination — no severance, no counseling, and no recourse for restoration.*

Both of these extremes are based on emotion and biblical misunderstanding. Moral failure by church leadership on any level must be dealt with in a scriptural manner if the ministry family and church body are to survive.

The restoration team can help, not by blaming a congregation, but by tenderly guiding them. They need to understand that the restoration process won't be hurried — but it *will* happen, out of love and care for their brother in Christ. They also need to brace for the truth that full restoration to the pulpit after a moral failure happens only on rare occasions — and even then only after much prayer and firm assurance that the fallen pastor has truly repented, found healing, and reconciled himself with God and his family.

Providing Care

A pastor's moral failure causes trauma to the congregation. They need care to return to spiritual wholeness. Church staff can model grief and recovery, and they can provide opportunities to work through the process:

- *Grief counseling for staff members as well as the congregation.*
- *Congregational meetings for communication and healing.*
- *Small group meetings to help work through issues.*
- *Sunday school classes on recovery and restoration.*
- *Outside help from a team of individuals committed to the health of the church.*

Becoming a Safe Place

The church plays a very real part in pastoral restoration. In *Restoring the Fallen*,¹³ the authors point out that there are three general responses to a fallen leader: “cheap grace” that’s quick and non-confronting, a legalistic approach that banishes the offending leader, or simply ignoring the problem.

But there’s a fourth alternative — one that’s comprehensive and involves accountability, commitment to all members of the body and, often, public disclosure. “In studying Scripture, we notice that teaching on discipline and restoration is always tied to a local fellowship and not simply to a group of well-intentioned friends.” So part of the healing process — for the fallen leader and the congregation as a whole — involves the church become a restoring church.

Too many times church is a place to hide our faults and failures. We need to foster a climate of openness and honesty about our weaknesses and sins. *Restoring the Fallen* lists eight traits of a restoring church — a church that’s a safe place for people to be real:

13. Adapted from “Restoring the Fallen.” Earl D. Wilson, Sandy Wilson, Paul Friesen, Virginia Friesen, Larry Paulson, and Nancy Paulson, *Restoring the Fallen, A Team Approach to Caring, Confronting Reconciling*. IVP, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 1997. (used with permission (original))

- ***A place where godly judgment is administered.*** *The church should be sensitive to sin and committed to dealing with it. A church that looks the other way and doesn't confront sin is not a restoring church. The goal is not to blast sinners, but to gently draw them into fellowship and forgiveness. The church understands that God's kindness leads to repentance (Romans 2:3-4).*
- ***A place where grace is extended.*** *Jesus extended grace to the woman caught in adultery, but he didn't ignore her sin (John 8:10-11). The church should model this type of love—committed to justice **and** to mercy.*
- ***A place for discipline.*** *A restoring church isn't afraid to enter into loving but firm church discipline.*
- ***A place for accountability.*** *Having someone committed enough to ask hard questions can be freeing. It helps us understand that we're not alone on this journey.*
- ***A place where truth-telling is practiced.*** *Telling the truth silences rumors. It also helps us open our lives to each other and curtail destructive sinful patterns (Ephesians 4:24).*
- ***A place where the restored leader is validated for return to ministry.*** *Restoration to full ministry is rare but not impossible. It might require an advocate who's walked through the process to speak on behalf of the leader's complete healing. Just as Barnabas spoke about Paul and assured believers he had met Jesus and had changed, so a church body can speak to the change in someone's life (Acts 9:27).*
- ***A place that's a haven for the fallen person's family.*** *The spouse and children are often treated as if the sin was their fault; people don't know **what** to say. A restoring church works through discomfort and walks alongside the family.*

CONCLUSION

6

Much is at stake when a leader falls. When repentance is public and thorough, restoration can be public and complete. But if not, 1 Timothy 5:20 should be a warning to us all: “Publicly rebuke those who sin, so that the rest will also be afraid” (HCSB).

Unless all of us who lead engage in public repentance, bold preaching about sin and grace will be little more than window dressing. What we believe about God, sin, and grace is proven true when we treat our own sin as seriously as we say others should. Too many leaders aren’t repenting according to Scripture, and too many churches don’t know how to work through repentance to restoration. Both matter — and God’s Word provides a path for both.

If there’s some way Focus on the Family can help or encourage you, contact us toll-free at 877-232-4455, by email at Pastors@fotf.org, or through our webpage: FocusOnTheFamily.com/Church

We pray that your congregation will never be forced to go through a pastoral restoration process. It’s never easy, and it always leaves scars. For this reason alone, it’s worth every effort by your church to be vigilant and preventive in long-term care of your pastors and

their families. It's also worthwhile because you might save one of God's called leaders from shame, failure, and disqualification for ministry — a situation that always gives the enemy a reason to discredit God's church in the eyes of the world.

Unfortunately, statistics suggest that your church will likely face such a bitter moment. If that day comes, we trust that this booklet will give you a sense of direction and hope as you serve the leader and church you love.

God is a God of forgiveness and healing. He will be there for you and give you wisdom. Lean on Him in every way, not on your own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6). May He bless and protect you, your co-leaders, and your pastoral staff and their families as you make decisions that have eternal ramifications.

Brady Boyd and Mike Ware pastor churches that have global impact for Christ. Larry Stockstill and Dr. Wayde Goodall serve as pastors to pastors. Together with the Pastoral team at Focus on the Family, they offer wisdom to help prevent moral failure and to restore a fallen leader and a broken church.

AFTERWORD

BY BRADY BOYD

In August 2007, I became the Senior Pastor of New Life Church in Colorado Springs. 10 months earlier, in November 2006, the church was rocked by scandal when the founding pastor admitted to a relationship with a male prostitute. It was a story that made international headlines and caused great hurt among the 12,000 members of the church. Four months after I became the leader, a gunman came on our campus and killed two teenage girls, wounded two others before taking his own life in the hallway of our main building. In 13 months, the church twice made international headlines and suffered more traumas than any I'm familiar with.

I am not an expert on helping people heal but I am experienced. What did I learn in the past 11 years that could help others heal? What should leaders and pastors do to help a church that has suffered?

1. Talk About What Happened

Christians can be notorious posers. We've even been taught erroneously that talking about bad stuff is bad confession and proof that we have no faith. What theological baloney! If you've been hurt, the worst thing you can do is ignore what happened. I had to lead by talking about it in Sunday talks, in staff meetings, and

in private conversations with members. I regularly discussed my own hurts and my own disappointments, which gave everyone else permission to talk about what they were experiencing. When people can be authentic and take off their “church masks”, their hearts are opened to the Holy Spirit and real healing can begin.

2. Deal With the Pain

I believe the Bible teaches us that it is ok not to be ok. It also teaches us that it's not ok to remain in the dark places of life. I believe in the power of the Gospel to repair and restore all broken humanity, but we must cooperate with the Holy Spirit to experience this healing. Hours after the shooting, hundreds of pastors and volunteer counselors began meeting with New Lifers who had been traumatized. In many cases, after talking about the shooting for a few minutes, many New Lifers admitted they had never dealt with the pain of the scandal.

It was a reminder to all of us that time does not heal all wounds, it only hides them. We were determined to deal with the pain, so we kept trained counselors on hand and offered several settings where people could receive nurture, prayer and inner healing. We did not get in a hurry with this process and allowed people to process their own pain at their own pace. Many leaders want instant healing when the human soul often takes time to heal, even under the best circumstances.

3. Move to the Next Exhibit

When I take my kids to the zoo, they often want to stay at the lion exhibit or the monkey exhibit for what seems like forever. I often must move a few steps away from them and act

like I am walking completely away to get them to look at another exhibit. Once they see me walking, they pry themselves away from the monkeys and join me at the giraffe exhibit. I have learned

that I could not ignore the pain of the church, but I also could not spend the rest of my life looking at the same exhibit. Scars are a reminder of a traumatic event, but we do not have to be defined by them. At some point in the journey we must move forward. Fresh wind of heaven must fill our sails and move us to new waters. God is not finished with any of us, and He certainly has not forgotten how to take the broken pieces of humanity, restore them and set them on new path to higher places.

Miraculously, New Life is thriving today and experiencing what can only be described as God's favor and blessing. No one at New Life would say we are completely healed, but most New Lifers would agree that a great deal of restoration has already happened because we talked about it, dealt with the pain and we moved to the next exhibit in our lives.

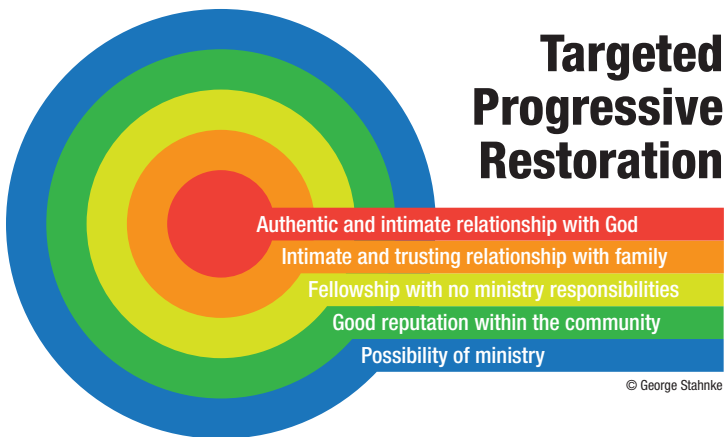
TARGETED PROGRESSIVE RESTORATION CHART

The purpose of this chart is to diagram a prioritized biblical progression of restoration.

Misplaced priorities in the process invite disaster. Too many times the focus is “How quickly can I get back into ministry?” rather than “How do I renew my relationship with God, family, congregation, and community?”

Impatience is the enemy of restoration. It takes time to restore those who have fallen. It takes time to prove the authenticity of repentance (Matthew 3:8; Acts 26:20). It takes time to rebuild broken relationships. It takes time to regain a lost reputation.

You can't rebuild in a day what years of neglect have produced (Nehemiah 4:10).



This brochure is informational and educational in nature. It is not offering professional or legal advice. For advice about your specific situation, please consult an attorney in your area.

Resources

Pastors.com, notable for Rick Warren's Ministry Tool Box.

"Ebbing the Flow of Moral, Marital or Ministry Burnout" by Jack & Trisha Frost, Shiloh Place Ministries. <https://shilohplace.org/product/ebbing-the-flow-of-moral-marital-or-ministry-burnout/>

"Public Perfection, Private Despair" by Lee Sparks, Rev! Magazine. Jan/Feb 2007.

Dr. David Whitaker, Care Clinic.

"Reducing the Risk of Sexual Misconduct: A Guide for Pastors and Staff Members Who Work With Adults" by James Cobble, by Christian Ministry Resources. <https://www.churchmutual.com/media/safetyResources/files/ReducingTheRisk.pdf>

"Assessment for Moral Purity," a warning sign checklist, by George Stahnke.

"Dealing With Church Leadership and Infidelity," George Stahnke.

"Restoration" by Earl and Sandra Wilson in the Soul Care Bible.

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The Path to Recovery
in a Broken World

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