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# When a Leader Falls



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## Confronted with the Shameful

*How you should respond—legally and responsibly—when a staff member is accused of child molestation.*

by Mike Woodruff and Dennis Kasper

News stories of child molestation in the church cross our desk with alarming regularity. Recently prominent churches in the Midwest and South have been tragically shaken by allegations of criminal sexual conduct. Because of pending litigation and privacy issues, churches are reluctant to share the details of their experiences.

But LEADERSHIP came across a story that has run the circuit of accusation, investigation, and resolution. Mike Woodruff obtained permission to write the story of a church on the West Coast that lived through this crisis. As Mike relays the pastor's story, we've interspersed the counsel of Dennis Kasper, an attorney specializing in church crisis management, who comments on the steps necessary in responding to charges of sexual misconduct with a minor.

### **The pastor's story: Mike Woodruff**

Our youth intern is in jail, two boys are in therapy, and one family has left the church. What started out as the renewal of our middle school ministry ended in shameful tragedy.

I had no indication anything was wrong until the day our 25-year-old youth intern, Roy, asked for a meeting with the pastoral staff. As we gathered on that Wednesday afternoon nearly five years ago, our jaws dropped open and our mouths went dry as Roy began confessing inappropriate, make that horrific actions, including smoking marijuana with a 15-year-old student and renting a hotel room so the two of them could drink beer and watch R-rated movies.

But the worst was yet to come.

Later that week, Roy was arrested on five felony counts of child molestation. Because the youth in question was a member of our church, and because Roy claimed that the molestation charges were false, we were faced with a complicated crisis. The watchful eye of the press ensured the crisis would be public.

### **The attorney's analysis: Dennis Kasper**

In such a situation, several concerns must be kept in mind: the initial crisis response, communication, the ensuing investigation, and resolution, including ministry to the involved parties and their families. Each concern is loaded with legal and spiritual ramifications.



Numerous people are involved: the victim, the victim's family, the accused, the accused's family, witnesses, other students and parents involved in the youth group, the church, the authorities, the media, and the community. Prepared leadership, coupled with wise legal counsel, can manage these concerns.

**Woodruff:** Roy came to us on an unpaid internship from our denominational seminary. We welcomed him onto our staff after we had contacted previous employers and run a criminal background check, which he passed.

Roy jumped into the job with great vigor, quickly forming friendships with a number of the kids. He was especially determined to win his way into the lives of those on the fringes. Roy spent the most time with a boy named Jessie, a 15-year-old from a single-parent home, whose mother attended our church.

What happened next depends on whose account you believe. According to Roy, trying to fit into the lives of the youth mushroomed into an unhealthy desire for acceptance. Jessie took advantage of that weakness, manipulating Roy into purchasing cigarettes for him, then providing alcohol, and eventually smoking pot with him. Roy claims he was motivated solely by a desire to befriend Jessie and see him turn his life around. He described a desperate attempt to shake Jessie loose from the grip of drug use.

“Jessie, I'd do anything to get you off of drugs.”

“Okay, I'll quit. Just smoke pot with me one time, and I'll quit.”

Roy did.

When Jessie didn't keep the promise to stop doing drugs, Roy confronted him. “Look, Jessie, I can't keep quiet about this. You're hurting yourself. I'm going to have to bring your mom and the other pastors into this.”

“If you do,” Roy claimed Jessie said, “I'll tell them you smoked pot.” Right then Roy realized his mistakes were going to mean trouble.

Roy claims he was blackmailed by Jessie and duped into a downward spiral of poor decisions until the gravity of the situation forced him to confess. “I didn't feel like I had a choice,” says Roy. “Things were out of control. I was so sick of what was going on, but I didn't see a way out.”

The events culminated when Roy—who was boarding with someone from the church—rented a hotel room as a “safe” place to drink with the youth. During their second drinking party they also watched movies with graphic sex scenes. Roy claims Jessie was drunk and began to masturbate. When he couldn't talk Jessie out of it, Roy locked himself in the bathroom for an hour.

“I was shaking and sweating and throwing up,” claims Roy. “I knew things were over, one way or the other.”

Two days later, Roy asked for the meeting that shocked our staff.



Jessie's account is considerably more sordid, and involves charges of molestation. It suggests Roy was a crafty manipulator who was grooming Jessie for a homosexual encounter from the beginning.

**Kasper:** What do you do in this situation? Given the conflicting accounts, how do you juggle lawyers, reporters, counselors, gossips, victims, an accused staff member, and a church on the side?

The fact is, no one is completely capable of dealing with situations this complicated, this significant, and this demanding of time and resources. For that reason, I urge churches to form a Crisis Response Team. The response team's job is to move quickly to address all the previously stated concerns in a unified way, while minimizing disruption and damage.

A crisis necessitating a response team doesn't have to involve sexual misconduct. A crisis is any unplanned event that presents either a significant risk or a significant distraction to the church. By that definition, crises may include natural disasters, accidents, misconduct, strife, and a host of other possibilities.

The Crisis Response Team should be appointed by the pastor and/or board and consist of several key people:

- a member of the pastoral staff (if possible)
- a member of the church governing board
- someone with excellent writing and verbal communications skills
- someone with pastoral care or mental health care skills
- someone with legal or investigative training
- someone with a heart for intercessory prayer

Experience has taught me that this group should not include the entire staff because the pastors' energy and focus will be demanded elsewhere.

These members need not meet regularly, but must be available to drop everything and meet immediately in time of crisis. Meeting the same day of a crisis, or at the latest the next day, can be crucial. Particularly in misconduct cases, word of the crisis spreads quickly (often through the victim's family), and the law may dictate the church take immediate action.

When activated, the Crisis Response Team should have the authority to make quick and ongoing decisions. They should report regularly during the crisis to the pastor and board.

In the case involving Roy, an impromptu response team was formed out of the available pastoral staff. While this can work, I would recommend pre-selecting, and possibly even pre-training, a group of respected, mature, and level-headed people to fill out the team.



## **Crisis response**

**Woodruff:** After a quick huddle with the pastoral staff, we called Jessie's mother and accompanied Roy while he shared the "facts" as we now had them. That evening she confronted her son, who offered his completely different account. They immediately asked to meet with us to explain his side of the story.

With the surfacing of molestation allegations, we had no choice but to phone the police.

At the advice of our denominational leaders, we also prepared a statement for the press, notified our insurance company of a possible lawsuit, and prepared a letter to the entire church explaining as much as we could be certain of.

**Kasper:** The church was wise to respond swiftly. With the possible exception of trying to conduct their own investigation, they handled the situation reasonably well and took steps to protect themselves legally.

Several actions are key to handling a crisis well. Having a several-member response team will enable you do these things quickly.

**1. Meet immediately with legal counsel.** It is unlikely someone within the church will be sufficiently trained to handle this kind of situation—consult someone specializing in church crisis management. You will want to specifically discuss issues of how to protect the work of the team under the attorney/client privilege.

**2. Determine if any criminal report is required.** Many states mandate reporting incidents involving minors immediately. Attorney Stephen Chawaga warns, "Failure to take action after hearing of a complaint, or turning a blind eye to misconduct a later investigation reveals, practically guarantees that your church will be sued" ("The Ten Deadly Lawsuits," *Your Church*, May/June 2001).

**3. Advise the accused to seek an attorney.** Especially in the case of criminal allegation, the church can have no part in offering the accused what may be construed as legal counsel.

**4. Contact your church's insurance company.** Most church insurance providers protect against certain lawsuits. Just as you would contact your auto insurer in case of accident, contact the church's insurer to guide you through the necessary steps to ensure coverage.

**5. Assign liaisons.** A point person should maintain regular contact and provide pastoral support to the victim and the victim's family. A different person should do the same for the accused.

**6. Develop a plan of communication.** Select a point person to handle communication specifically with the church, the media, the authorities, and the lawyers. Agree upon what, to whom, and how communication will be offered. Generally, the closer a person is to the situation the more detail they need to know.

**7. Develop a plan for further investigation.** A church should not try to investigate the guilt or innocence of the accused. Criminal investigation must be left to the authorities. But it is important for a church to determine if there are any other victims.



**8. Make counseling available.** Prepare, practically and financially, to provide professional counseling for the victims, victims' families, and other affected youths in the program.

### **Communication strategy**

**Woodruff:** As soon as charges were filed, we began to receive phone calls from local radio stations and newspapers. We had anticipated this. Our staff agreed that only one person would act as the spokesman for the church, and all requests for information would be channeled to him. This helped us avoid issuing contradictory statements and put our best communicator in the spotlight.

We took the stance that the media was a neutral party and that certain questions needed to be answered publicly. Nonetheless, we guarded our words to protect privacy and to avoid issuing opinions or speculation.

On the Sunday following Roy's arrest we spent the entire Sunday school hour in a forum with the church body answering questions about the charges. We needed to squelch rumors and provide as many facts as we could. We held a similar session during youth group later that week.

At each forum I read the prepared statement, which included a summary of the accusations. I informed the congregation of the likelihood of a police investigation and upcoming legal action. I asked them to pray for both parties. Then we opened the forum for questions.

The silence was thick.

After a long, torturous pause of shuffling bulletins and echoed coughs, the first question came. "Are we vulnerable to a lawsuit?"

"Yes."

"What are our obligations to the accused?"

That was a harder question. Our primary responsibility had to be to Jessie and his family. It hurt to say it, but we had no obligation to Roy. Our attorney advised us that it's considered an improper use of charitable funds to defend criminal activity. We recommended to Roy that he get his own legal counsel. So our contact with Roy would be limited.

"What did we do wrong?" someone asked. "How could this happen?"

That was the hardest question of all. We didn't have any answers. Yet.

**Kasper:** The church handled this situation well. Observe each of their choices: they prepared formal statements, limiting such revelations to fact; public communication was directed to one designated spokesperson; they remembered that both the victim and the accused have certain rights to privacy (for instance, a minor cannot have his identity shared); they sought to stay ahead of the gossip curve by providing facts on a "need to



know” basis and quelling speculation; and finally, a method was developed for the church and concerned people to question the response team.

Two further points need addressing. First, do not assume either party is telling the whole truth. Often, a victim isn’t entirely forthcoming. In the effort to protect themselves and avoid blame for certain events, both the victim and the accused may tell only part of the story. A church cannot get caught up in the “he said, she said” game and should avoid all temptations to determine guilt or innocence.

Second, realize those closest to the situation need the most information, while those furthest removed need the least. It is unwise (and sometimes unlawful) to share details with the public. More information needs to be shared with the church, then more with the youth group, and more still with the families involved.

For instance, a media statement may include the fact that there’s been an allegation, that a crisis response team is evaluating appropriate actions, and that the church is offering professional counseling to potential victims—nothing more. The church may be informed additionally of the response team’s names and dates for communication forums. The youth group’s parents will need assurance that actions are being taken to protect their children. The victim’s parents need to know what care and counseling is available to them and their child.

## **Investigation**

**Woodruff:** Roy’s prosecuting attorney later spoke of how we handled the allegation:

“The one mistake the church made was in starting to conduct the investigation themselves. Church staff are not prepared for this type of work, and instead of trying to find out what actually happened, they should have immediately called the police. You are free to tell the person that you are going to report them, but you cannot fail to report them just because they claim innocence or state that a false accusation will ruin them.”

**Kasper:** A church must never attempt to determine if the accused is guilty of a crime. That’s the job of the police. Any attempt to determine guilt puts the church in the precarious position of becoming a witness in a criminal case. When there are criminal allegations, your church’s first steps are clearly defined: call your lawyer, call the authorities, and advise the accused to seek his or her own attorney.

There is, however, an important place for investigation in these matters. The investigation’s purpose is not to determine guilt. Instead, an investigation should be conducted to determine if other victims are involved, to determine if disciplinary action needs to be taken, and to determine if church procedures need to be changed.

To determine if there are any other victims, I recommend publicizing the provision of mental health care, as victims may be more likely to come forward to get help. It is important to discover who has been affected by the actions in question.

Often, even without being found guilty of a crime, the accused merits discipline (i.e. firing) for violating clear church policy. Occasionally, action needs to be taken against other staff members or volunteers as well. Even as an unpaid intern, Roy could have been



fired for committing a crime (providing cigarettes and alcohol to a minor), since that was admitted by all parties. In other cases, even without determining guilt, grounds for firing can be met on the basis of inappropriate advances, unsupervised contact, or wrongful counsel. Formal action should only be taken after consulting your lawyer to avoid violating employment law.

Obviously, an investigation may reveal that the church needs to change its supervision or accountability policies. Perhaps an investigation will reveal the need to redefine or clarify church policy regarding sexual boundaries and misconduct.

Lastly, make sure to coordinate the investigation with your lawyer. You may want to discuss the specific questions being asked of interviewees, how to take and legally protect the notes from those conversations, how to protect the investigators via attorney/client privilege, and how to protect the accused's Fifth Amendment rights.

## **Resolution**

**Woodruff:** The three months leading up to the trial were tense, to say the least. People constantly wanted updates. A few criticized us for not publicly backing Jessie, but as church leaders we needed to maintain a legal neutrality. I did, however, spend considerable time privately counseling and supporting Jessie's family.

Most of our criticism came from those who thought we weren't doing enough. Jessie's family was angry for not receiving more support from church members. Though we couldn't publicly name Jessie, still his family argued, "Everyone knows by now. Why aren't people reaching out to us?" Roy's family was also angered that we didn't provide financial help with legal fees.

And we faced the lingering question, "How could this happen?"

Our staff eventually determined there were several changes in policy that needed to be made to infuse our youth ministry with more accountability, rules, and supervision.

The church also offered to pay for all of Jessie's family's counseling, but we did not pay for Roy's. Some church members attempted to stay in touch with him, and I prayed with him on several occasions, but knowing I might be subpoenaed, I found it difficult to offer any meaningful care.

At the eleventh hour the prosecution offered to drop all of the child molestation charges if Roy would plead guilty to lesser offenses. The family was not out for vengeance, and they did not want to drag Jessie through a trial that would likely turn nasty. Roy accepted the plea bargain and was sentenced to one year in the local jail.

Remarkably, the entire crisis was weathered without a lawsuit and without any noticeable exodus from the church or the youth program.

**Kasper:** Crises do not simply go away when the storm blows over. Communication and ministry needs continue. The Crisis Response Team should continue to meet and report regularly during the aftermath. The point people assigned to the victim and the accused should continue to meet with their assigned person to keep communication





flowing. The families and congregation should receive regular updates. Providing counseling for the victims, witnesses, and their families is essential.

Furthermore, as the situation draws to a close, the team should meet with their attorney to determine what was handled well, and what things need to be done differently, both now and in the future.

Finally, the results of the investigation should prompt decisions and policy changes as necessary. It may be considered by many a healing balm to know that the church is taking steps to prevent this kind of tragedy from happening again.

**Woodruff:** Like any group that has weathered a storm like this, we examined both the events leading up to the crisis and our response to it. Our staff met to discuss these issues. There were a few things we did right with Roy, actions that prevented the situation from being much worse. But we also made some grievous mistakes that needed to be corrected.

Our largest mistake was allowing Roy to operate with too much autonomy. We had accountability meetings with Roy, thinking that was sufficient supervision, but we were wrong. Roy was still working as an island. We have since realized that he needed active partnership and mentoring that we didn't provide. Roy later confessed, "I can't watch a kid fail. I had a savior complex, and no one ever warned me of the problems that might cause."

We also encountered a faulty assumption with our church insurance policy. We discovered too late that our policy did not cover any of our staff if we faced criminal charges, only civil ones. Roy was forced to pay for his own legal representation, and we were left vulnerable to a lawsuit. We have since committed to reviewing our policies annually.

Finally, our staff affirmed the necessity of conducting background checks, especially on those who work with children. It's likely that our thoroughness with Roy's background check saved us from a lawsuit. Roy's prosecuting attorney later attested, "The church conducted a decent background check on Roy. They reviewed his employment history, and they phoned the police in those states where he had been previously employed to check on any criminal convictions."

It has been nearly five years since Roy first confessed to buying Jessie alcohol. Jessie has been greatly helped by counseling, and though he no longer attends our church, his mother told me, "If he stays with God through all of this, it will be because of your care."

As for Roy, he served his sentence in jail, where he was active in Bible studies and found refuge with God.

He was released after a one year jail term and no longer works in youth ministry.

*—Mike Woodruff is associate pastor of Christ Church, Lake Forest in Lake Forest, Illinois.*

*—Dennis Kasper is an attorney specializing in church law in Los Angeles, California.*

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## Drafting a Crisis Team

*Put this task force in place today—before the crisis comes.*

Here's what you need to do to create a response team.

**1. Choose your players.** Members need to be mature, well-respected, and able to drop everything to dedicate themselves to the process.

Your team should include:

- a pastor
- a member of the board
- several excellent communicators
- a prayer leader who can direct an intercessory prayer team.

**2. Assign key positions** (one person per position, and only one position per person):

- a chairperson (not the senior pastor)
- a communications spokesperson who is made accessible to the entire congregation for questions and concerns
- liaisons to each involved person or party.

**3. Give the team authority**, and allow them to act quickly:

- to coordinate legal response
- to communicate to the church, the general public, and media
- to design a plan for further investigation
- to set up counseling for those in need.

—Dennis Kasper



## **Hooked: One Pastor's Struggle with Internet Pornography**

*First he turned on the computer, then the computer turned on him.*

by Eric Reed

***This is a true story. Only the names and locations have been changed.***

The high-pitched roof of the sanctuary blocked the morning sun from the office windows, but by two in the afternoon, the light was streaming in and the office was growing warm. Russ pulled on the cord to adjust the blinds. He turned the slats upward to cut the glare on his computer screen.

His morning had been productive. Russ usually outlined his sermon on Tuesday. He researched the text and read commentaries on Wednesday. On Thursday he located the right illustrations and wrote the manuscript—if everything worked on schedule.

This week it had.

The fire of this message burned in his bones. He would review his notes several times over the next two days, then step up to the pulpit Sunday and deliver the word of the Lord with skill and passion. This would be a good one. He could feel it.

Russ hadn't thought of lunch; he wrote while the words flowed. Eileen's clatterings in the outer office hadn't bothered him this day. She had deflected a couple of phone calls. Thursdays were important to Russ, and Eileen was protective of them. Only once had she interrupted him with a question about the order of service. And he heard her muttering when the folding machine started wrinkling the bulletins. After a jam and some loud banging, she had decided to fold the bulletins by hand—again. "Get a better crease that way," she said.

Now, the only noise was the occasional turning of pages as she read a novel. Russ glanced at the clock.

"Is the bulletin done?" he called through the door partly open between their offices.

"Yes." Eileen was efficient.

"What time do your kids get home?" He knew the answer.

"'Bout three-fifteen." It was almost three.

"If everything's ready for Sunday, why don't you go on home," he told her. "There's no need for you to sit here."

Within two minutes he heard the snap of the deadbolt, the slam of a car door, the scratch of tires. He waited. Silence. Then the fan motor on his computer purred, the mouse clicked, and in an instant Russ was oblivious to everything else.



He had no idea how much time passed. It didn't matter. Russ looked until he could wait no longer. Then he hurried down the hall. Knowing he was the only one in the building, Russ slipped into the men's room, and masturbated.

## **The church of a lifetime**

Woodland Church was a plum. In the dozen or so years since he graduated from seminary, Russ had pastored three churches in mostly rural settings, each a little larger than the one before it. "This is a good move for you," the denominational executive in charge of the region said.

Russ knew it was.

Woodland was a thriving suburban church. Dayton, only 45 minutes away, was growing in the church's direction. The church had a reputation for treating ministers well. Every pastor within a 300-mile radius wanted this church. So Russ was surprised when the committee requested him. He was experienced and was considered a good preacher. And Russ was at the right age, in his early forties, where most everyone in the congregation could relate to him. This was indeed a good move. Once at Woodland, he couldn't imagine aspiring to any other church. "I'll probably retire there," he surmised.

Russ thought this move would be good for his family also. His wife, Angie, wanted to be nearer her aging parents. She wanted their children to get close to their grandparents. Grandpa and Gram lived in Dayton.

Their oldest daughter, Cassie, was a sophomore in high school. She made friends quickly and would find her niche right away. Russell Jr. was turning six and would enter first grade there. Only Rebecca, their middle child, worried Angie. Becca spoke often about the friends she'd left behind. She would face junior high without them. Angie's mother said Becca looked thin. Russ attributed the awkward transition to adolescence.

Angie loved Woodland Church—the people—right away. She also liked the parsonage. "Oh, it's beautiful," she exclaimed, as the committee walked them through the house.

"We're thinking about adding a large family room," the chairman said. Angie knew it would be perfect for entertaining.

As a pastor's wife, Angie had suffered the usual slings—too little money, too heavy expectations, too many dinners turned cold while Russ attended some member's need. But she developed a tenderness for the people and ministry. Angie liked being a pastor's wife.

The family settled in. The church was running smoothly. Their marriage was stable. In nearly twenty years, neither had strayed. Like every man, Russ was accustomed to asking more than receiving; but after two decades of married life, he really didn't expect much more from their sexual relationship.

That's when the e-mail came.



## Mail instincts

"Pastor, I want you to hold me accountable. I really need your help." Matt was the youth pastor. A part-timer, he was not in the building much on weekdays. He had made a point to come to the pastor's office that day. Russ, at the big desk, looked at Matt sitting across from him.

"I found the first pornographic site accidentally," Matt said. He hesitated. "I was looking for something else, and it was just—there. I was stunned by it and I turned the computer off right away, but—later," he confessed, "I went back."

"More than once?"

"Yes. Several times. But I felt really guilty about it. I've prayed about it. I told my wife. I asked her forgiveness. But I need someone who will help me control this urge to—to look."

Russ fidgeted with the keyboard. "What do you want me to do?"

"I need someone who'll look me in the eye sometimes and ask if I've kept myself pure."

The two men prayed and Matt left. Russ knew he would never initiate the subject with Matt again. How could he?

Like Matt's experience, his had started innocently. Russ turned on the computer, then the computer turned on him. "Click here for a beautiful scene from nature," the e-mail read. Russ clicked. It was a naked woman smiling at him. He quickly clicked again and closed the e-mail. *I should have erased it*, he thought later. *If only I had erased it.*

Several days passed, but the image stayed fresh in his mind. When he closed his eyes, he could see her. Working on a sermon for the next Sunday, Russ felt the tug to reopen the e-mail. After Eileen left for the day, he clicked on the icon. "You've got mail!" the computer chirped. Two clicks later, there she was—still smiling, still naked.

He revisited the photo several times the next week. The image sparked memories Russ thought he had forgotten, memories he had tried hard to forget. As a teenager, Russ had been frequently exposed to pornographic magazines, but when an abusive older brother left the house, so did the pornography. This smiling, available, inviting woman, so suddenly in his life, awakened in him something he hadn't felt in many, many years.

He felt accepted, appreciated, virile, horny. He wanted more.

And his search engine took him there.

## Obsession

Typing the word "sex" into his office computer, Russ found thousands of Web sites. He discovered a world he'd only heard existed. His visits were at first infrequent. He told himself, "I can stop anytime I want." But he didn't. In a

### A Stronger Temptation

What makes sex online far more compelling than any shrink-wrapped smut is instant gratification in endless variety. ... With old porn, once you view it, you've consumed it. You've chewed the flavor out of the gum. This can't be done on the Net. The gum never runs out of flavor. A new piece of flesh waits behind every old one, and expectation bids you to go further. Much further.

—Greg Gutfield  
"The Sex Drive," *Men's Health* (Oct. 1999)



couple of months, Russ was spending hours at a time, several days each week, staring at images on the computer screen.

More and more often he sent his secretary home early. His compulsion to look grew, and his excursions became more risky. Sometimes he didn't bother to send Eileen home. With the screen turned so only he could see it, Russ toggled adroitly between Bible study software and hardcore photographs of naked people having sex.

A few times Russ logged on at home and visited sex sites, usually late at night after Angie and the children were asleep. Sometimes the urge he felt was almost unbearable.

"Russ, someone has been looking at Internet porn on our computer," Angie announced one day. "Do you know anything about it?"

"It was probably one of the kids."

He didn't want to lie to Angie. On some level Russ felt guilty, but more about blaming the children than his voyeurism. Angie would never understand what he felt—no woman would. If she found out, she would surely hate him for it. *Matt told his wife*, Russ recalled, *but Matt also felt guilty, very guilty*. Russ could live with his low-grade guilt a while longer, but he decided to save his surfing—and his trips down the hall—for the office.

Angie found no more suspect communication on their computer. Since the children also denied any knowledge of the pornography, she dropped it. They would discuss it again in about six months.

Russ made one attempt to start an accountability relationship. He invited a member of the board who had become a good friend to lunch. "Jack, I need somebody I can spill my guts to."

"You can count on me," Jack replied. He stood by his pastor through a couple of tough situations. They candidly discussed church business and the personalities involved. "Just call on me, Pastor."

Russ never did. He couldn't get past Jack's invocation of "Pastor." Jack wouldn't want to hear what his pastor did with his long afternoons, that his temptations were as real as any man's, and that he succumbed. No one would imagine that this straight-arrow pastor was leading a secret life, much less discuss it with him.

If his town had had a red light district, Russ wouldn't know where it was. He never visited a nightclub, a strip joint, or a porn shop. In twenty years, he never peeked at the rack behind the clerk at the convenience store. Now, he was doing all that—electronically—in the church office.

And his virtual infidelity was about to become reality.

## **In the flesh**

Julia was an average-looking woman, about Russ's age. What made Julia appealing was the look in her eyes, that same accepting, appreciative, inviting look Russ found online.



Russ had known Julia almost as long as he'd known Angie. The move to Woodland brought their paths close again.

Russ wasn't surprised when Julia asked to see him. Her marriage wasn't strong, and she wanted to talk. His attempts to comfort her became an embrace, eventually a clutch, then a kiss that stirred him quickly and deeply.

*Stupid, stupid, stupid*, he thought two days later, reaching for the phone.

"I'm very sorry about what happened," he told her. "My defenses were down. It would be best if we didn't see each other again."

She agreed.

In the months that passed, Russ contented himself with Internet pornography. He didn't admit that his habit had become addiction, but he spent hours every week staring at the screen.

Nothing else satisfied him. Phone calls went unanswered. His sermons were anemic. Ministry, like his marriage, had lost its flavor.

Then he saw Julia again.

Their encounter was brief. No clothes were removed, but for Russ their clutching and fumbling had all the markings of an affair. And deep down, in that moment, he wanted it to be so much more. He wanted it to be everything he had watched others do for more than a year. He wanted it to be risky, raunchy, full-color, airbrushed. He wanted to be conqueror and her to be willing, nubile, and vanquished.

And then he thought of Rob.

Rob, his friend and colleague who divorced his wife of thirty years, was now married to the other woman, estranged from his children, 55 and unemployable, and out of ministry forever.

Later, alone in his study, Russ fell to his knees and cried out to God.

### **Augustinian confessions**

"Eileen, I won't be in the office the rest of the week. Ask Matt to cover prayer meeting for me tomorrow night. I'll see you Sunday." He hung up the phone and turned to Angie.

She was seated on the long sofa in the new family room. Already her eyes were red. "What's wrong, Russ?"

The story spilled out of him. He told her everything. At times the room seemed very large and Angie very far away. "I don't know how it went so far so fast. And the only reason it didn't go further was Rob. I thought of Rob. I don't want to be Rob. I don't want to lose you." Russ covered his face. "Have I lost you?" He expected Angie to start packing suitcases, to gather the children and disappear.

Angie was quiet for a long time.



She had many questions. Was she unattractive to him? Had she said no too often? What was it he wanted but didn't get from their marriage? Had he harbored a desire for Julia all these years? Why had he lied to her? And what about the church: how could he preach when he was swimming in such filth? Didn't he feel guilty?

She decided to save most of her questions for therapy. What she told him was "I'm not giving up on this marriage."

"But I'll have to resign," he countered. "We'll have to move. We may never have another church."

"I know. But I'm not leaving you."

Russ wanted to believe that, but for months afterward, every time he unlocked the door, he expected to find the house empty and the suitcases missing from the closet.

The kids came in later that afternoon, Becca and Rusty. Cassie was away at camp. It was the last week of August, and she was due home on Saturday. Angie prepared dinner. Conversation at the table was polite, but sparse. They would decide later how to tell the kids, and how much.

The conference with Russ's regional supervisor the next day lasted about three hours. Yes, he affirmed, resignation was the right thing. "I'll meet with you and your board Sunday morning at 8:30. I'll preach in your place, and after the service, we'll have a brief congregational meeting. Tell them you are resigning because of moral failure. Nothing else."

"He's our pastor. Why can't we discipline him?" Jack the board chairman asked on Sunday.

The supervisor looked at Russ. Russ scanned the board. A few looked him in the eyes. A few looked at their hands. Russ spoke up. "That's not the way it works, Jack. I'm sorry." Russ knew the procedure. He once served on the discipline committee for a pastor who'd had an affair. "I'm willing to submit to the discipline of the denomination."

"Besides," his supervisor said, "it's best if you make a clean break. You need to call a new pastor and Russ needs to get on with his life."

The explanation was almost as brief in the later meeting with the membership. After the visitors were dismissed, Russ stood before the congregation. Angie came in. She sat next to the supervisor's wife, sobbing softly. She buried her face in the woman's shoulder when he said the words "moral failure."

The phone calls began as soon as they returned to the parsonage. Church members were distressed and shocked. They wanted to know more, but there was no more that could be told. Always loving, Woodland Church wanted to be supportive now, but there wasn't much they could do.

Then pastors started calling—and confessing. The men wanted to know Russ's story. When he told them about his Internet addiction, twenty admitted their own involvement,





ten of them who pastored in his area. "You need to tell your wife and get help," he said to each one.

Then the calls stopped. He heard nothing more from the pastors, except one. Angie's friends stopped calling, too, all but two. Their life grew quiet and uncertain.

## **Deeper and darker**

Angie's father died six weeks later.

Telling her parents had been as difficult for Russ as telling Angie. Russ loved his in-laws. Early in his ministry, his own family expressed little confidence in Russ or his calling, but Angie's parents encouraged him.

"I don't understand this," the old man replied when Russ confessed. "But, we still love you, and we'll do whatever we can to help you." His death so soon after was stunning.

At the funeral Russ watched another pastor conduct the service. *That was my responsibility*, he thought. *I owed him that*. Russ couldn't sing. The words stuck in his throat. He couldn't pray. Public prayer was all he had done for months. He couldn't console the grieving woman standing beside him. He could only weep. *It's a good thing I don't own a gun*, he thought. He would think that a number of times.

The letter from the discipline committee outlined the next two years of their life, but the details were up to him. They must move 25 miles from Woodland. They must engage a therapist. They must join a church of their denomination and Russ must meet monthly with its pastor. He must perform no ministry for one year. After that, the committee would consider some limited service. After two years, possible reinstatement, but who knows for sure?

The immediate questions went unanswered: Where would they live? How would they earn a living? How would they survive?

Russ started job hunting right after his resignation. He found little market for suspended pastors. In the meantime, Woodland Church was generous, providing some salary and benefits for four months. The new pastor wouldn't move in until after the first of the year, so they could stay in the parsonage temporarily. But by Thanksgiving, they were getting desperate.

"We ought to skip Christmas altogether," Russ said.

"We would, except for the kids," Angie responded. "I'll have to put up a tree."

"There won't be much under it."

Russ found a job selling cars in Dayton. They decided to move there. He started looking for a house on his lunch breaks. She started packing.

Russ rented a truck to move them just after Christmas, the only day it was available. Then his new boss scheduled Russ to work that day. The men of Woodland came through for their former pastor.



“They were so good and it hurt so much,” Angie said to Russ when he came home to their rental that night. “They were laughing and joking and talking about how nice their Christmas was. And all the while they were hauling my life out to the van.” She melted into tears as they stood in the disarray of furniture and boxes.

The next week Angie registered the kids for school in Dayton and began looking for a job.

## **Aftershock**

Becca stayed behind when the family moved. She wanted to finish junior high with her close friends. Angie and Russ agreed for her to live with a family from Woodland, the parents of one of those friends who had been warm and gracious to them after Russ's confession.

Rusty seemed to adjust quickly. A new school and new friends were exciting for him. The reason for their move was not much of an issue. He knew it was Dad's fault and Dad was sorry. Rusty was not yet at an age where the term “Internet pornography” was appalling or alluring. Their oldest daughter, now 19, understood everything.

The day before he resigned, Russ drove to the camp where Cassie had worked for the summer. The account unfolded on their five-hour drive home. Russ stammered over the first few sentences. Cassie interrupted. “Dad, are we moving, again?”

“Yes, but we're not going to another church.” Russ told her the whole story, including his clenches with Julia.

There were tears and long silences—Cassie is a lot like her mother—but before they returned home, the young woman hugged her father and kissed him on the cheek.

“You're my daddy, and whatever happens, I will always love you,” she said. It was the kind of thing a parent says to a child.

The reaction from Becca was delayed. “If it weren't for Dad and his stupid pornography, we wouldn't be here,” she shouted at Angie months after they moved. Russ and Angie were called to Becca's school. She had fainted in class several times. The counselor suspected a cause.

“Becca is thin, but she appears to have lost weight since your move,” the counselor said. “I'm afraid she may be bulimic.” Their doctor confirmed the counselor's suspicions: Becca was eating very little and forcing herself to vomit that up. He recommended a treatment program for people with eating disorders. Angie added Becca's emotional condition to the list of matters to discuss with the therapist.

And to her prayer list.

## **Enter the bulldog**

Through it all Angie was praying—for Russ, for her children, for herself. But with Russ's confession, most of the people who were her prayer support were gone.



Angie's mother, though dealing with her own grief, tried to help her daughter. A few members of Woodland kept in touch, but she understood that with a new pastor and his wife in place, it wasn't easy for them to maintain a relationship with her.

"I passed a church yesterday, and a parsonage sat next to it," she said. "I was envious. Why should they have a church and I be deprived of mine? Every other time we've moved, there was a new congregation, new people to love and to love us," she said. "Where are the people this time, Russ?"

Tears came to her eyes with the thought.

The ministers in the area had frequent contact, and some of their wives grew close. Angie felt their loss deeply, but in her despair, she wouldn't call them. "We can't go to the conferences. Are we lepers? I feel like we've been shunned."

That summed up Russ's feelings. He'd had almost no contact with the pastors he had considered friends. When he met one on the street, the man would say "call me sometime," both knowing Russ wouldn't.

He did begin praying for an accountability partner. Since the confession, Russ had not looked at pornography in any form. (He and Angie changed Internet providers on their home computer and installed filters on the search engine. He showed her how to check the history of Web site visits, and only she had the passwords.) But the images were still in his mind and he wrestled not to act on them.

"Lord, if I'm going to withstand this temptation, I need help," he prayed. For the first time in a long time, he felt his prayers were heard.

James is not someone Russ would have chosen for a friend. He's younger. He has very different interests. They pastored in the same region, but that's about it. But when they met and James said, "I'm going to call you regularly," Russ knew he meant it.

"I need someone to hold me accountable," Russ said, "a man who will ask me the tough questions. And I need someone who will pray with me and for me, if I'm going to survive the next two years."

Russ outlined his plan: some prayer, some Bible study, and every time they met, the tough questions. James balked. "I never asked another man *that* before—'have you looked at pornography since our last meeting, have you fantasized, have you masturbated?'"

"That's only part of it," Russ said. "I also want to be accountable for my prayer life, my devotional life, and my spiritual leadership of my family. I need to know that every week, I'll have to answer these questions. And I won't want to tell you that I've failed in *any* of these areas."

James took the case. "He's like a bulldog," Russ told Angie. "And if we make it through this, it'll be because you stood by me and James came alongside."



## The waiting game

The alarm goes off at five. Angie gets up a half-hour earlier than she has to. She sits in the old chair in the living room and reads Scripture. She spends a lot of time in the Psalms.

Soon she'll get the children ready for school. Cassie is away attending a community college now. Rusty is beginning his second year at his school, and Becca is just enrolling in high school in Dayton.

Becca decided to move home after she completed the treatment program. She's still very thin, but she's doing better now. Becca hugged Russ when they came home. "You're my dad. I want to be wherever you and Mom are."

Russ is awake, though he worked late the night before. He won't sleep in. Temptation is strongest when he's home alone, so Russ will get up and get ready to meet James for coffee. Today is the day James drives into the city for their weekly conference.

He will tell James about his brother-in-law's funeral two days earlier. The death was unexpected, another shock for the family. But Russ found pastoral feelings stirring again, the desire to comfort and to pray that he had not felt in almost two years. He read Scripture at the funeral and sang. "It was so good to hear you sing again," Angie told him afterward as she squeezed his hand.

*It was good, he thinks. I wonder when I'll hear from the discipline committee. It's been more than a year.*

Then his thoughts turn to cars and trying to sell them with integrity. *Lord, please send me a sale before the end of the month. You know the rent's due.*

In an hour Angie will give him a kiss and head off to the shop where she works. Standing on her feet all day is hard, but she says the work is therapeutic—it keeps her mind occupied—and she enjoys meeting the customers.

Besides, they need the money.

*—Eric Reed is managing editor of LEADERSHIP.*

"Hooked: One Pastor's Struggle with Internet Pornography," LEADERSHIP, Winter 2001, Vol. XXII, No. 1, Page 86



## Three Minutes to Victory

*Prayer that defeats temptation and brings comfort.*

When I discovered that my emotions right before every temptation were distressed to some level and I was actually seeking comfort, I asked God to show me another way to find it. That's when I remembered Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit to be our ever-present, personal source of comfort. I wondered what would happen if I specifically asked for this comfort in a time of temptation.

My simple request went like this: "Dear Holy Spirit, You've been sent to me to be my personal Comforter. I am in desperate need of comfort. I don't want to sin. Please comfort me. In Jesus name, Amen."

That was it. I took off my watch to see what would happen. Slowly I became aware of something—I was comforted. My soul felt soothed and no longer in pain.

When I turned back toward that temptation, I discovered it had miraculously slithered into the darkness, far away from my senses. I was free.

I've prayed to my Comforter many times since. The Holy Spirit always—and I mean always—completes His responsibility in my heart; and He always gives me his comfort within three minutes.

Now I call this prayer the "Three-Minute Temptation Buster."

—Bruce Wilkinson  
from *Experiencing Spiritual Breakthroughs (Multnomah, 1999)*

## Watching What You're Watching

*Simple, but effective safeguards for home and office.*

- 1. Keep the computer in a room with a door that can't be locked.** Anyone in the family should have access to the computer room.
- 2. Have the computer screen face the door.** Many men are proficient at changing screens in an instant. Knowing someone could see what they have on the computer may serve as a deterrent.
- 3. Don't work on the computer after your family has gone to bed.** Most men struggle late at night when chat rooms and porn sites are packed. The risk is too great. Turn in when your wife goes to bed.

—Henry J. Rogers  
from *The Silent War (New Leaf Press, 1999)*



## Restoring a Fallen Colleague

*How one leader's personal failure was handled—and redeemed.*

by Edward G. Dobson

The sanctuary of Temple Baptist Church near Detroit is an imposing and intimidating structure. Built in the late 1960s, it seats 4,000 people. The church has a rich tradition in the independent Baptist movement, at the forefront of the evangelism, Sunday school, and church growth movements of the twentieth century.

I had spoken there many times before on happier occasions. But on this Sunday as I sat on the platform, it was different. I tried to sing the hymns, but I cried. I tried to concentrate on the special music, but my attention was riveted on the family in the first row. They were clinging to each other as if afraid to let go. They looked out of place, even though they had been in the church for years.

I tried to smile at them, and they tried to smile back. But it was obvious to both of us that there was little to smile about.

Many in the choir had tears in their eyes. It was like a funeral service: everyone putting on the best front possible, yet feeling that at any moment the emotions could come unglued.

It might have been easier had I not been so close to the family in the front row. Truman Dollar was a mentor and a friend. When I was considering leaving Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia, it was Truman who counseled me nearly every day. When I moved to Grand Rapids and needed advice in making decisions as a pastor, I turned to him.

Looking at him now from the pulpit, I could not believe he was about to resign as pastor. It all seemed so unreal.

The events of the last week flooded my mind.

### The unwelcome news

On the previous Monday, the phone rang. I answered, and in his resonant voice, Jerry Falwell, the man I'd worked with for almost fifteen years, said, "What are you doing?"

"Nothing," I replied. "I had to answer the phone." We laughed.

Jerry quickly got serious.

"Have you heard about Truman's situation?" Without waiting for an answer, he continued, "I just talked to Curt Wilson, the chairman of the Temple Baptist deacon board. Truman has had some problems and is going to resign. They wanted me to come and help, but my visibility would only hurt the situation. Since you've helped in these kinds of



situations before, I suggested that he call you.” He briefly described some of the problems and assured me of his prayer and support.

“Call me if you need any help,” he said.

Shortly after I hung up the phone, it rang again.

“Dr. Dobson,” the voice said, “Dr. Jerry Falwell suggested I call you to see if you could help us.” Curt Wilson and I spent almost an hour on the phone.

He explained that two years ago, Truman’s 15-year-old son had overheard him talking to a woman from their former church. The conversation contained inappropriate sexual content. The son, not knowing what to do, told the youth pastor what he had heard, who in turn confronted Truman.

Truman admitted he had spoken inappropriately, asked forgiveness, and the matter seemed settled.

Now, two years later, that episode resurfaced, and the entire deacon board had been informed. After a lengthy and stormy meeting, the deacons concluded they should ask for Truman’s resignation.

“The announcement will be made this coming Sunday,” Curt said. “Would you be willing to preach on Sunday morning and evening, and meet with our deacons to begin sorting through the specific steps that need to be taken?”

“First of all, I would need to consult our board for their advice and wisdom,” I said. “I haven’t been here that long, and I made an agreement to submit to their authority; I would not want to do something so dramatic without their complete support.” I made arrangements for an emergency board meeting the next day at noon.

I didn’t sleep much that night. I was shocked, disappointed, and hurt. I knew this would be a long and difficult week. I wasn’t sure what our board would think. I wasn’t even sure I was capable of giving advice or leadership in this complex situation. I did decide, however, that I would not walk away from Truman. He had been my friend, was still my friend, and would always be my friend. Whether or not I got officially involved in the situation, I would still stand by his side.

The next day at the emergency board meeting, almost everyone was there. While a few kidded and laughed before the meeting, everyone could tell something serious was about to happen. I’m sure some of them thought perhaps I was in trouble.

After recounting my conversation with Curt Wilson and Jerry Falwell, the board unanimously encouraged me to go to Temple, work with their deacon board, and preach for them on Sunday.

But they also felt that the pressure of this situation should not be faced alone. They promised to pray for my ministry at Temple, and they appointed three men to go with me as a source of encouragement, strength, wisdom, and support.



In retrospect, I am deeply grateful that these men went with me. Ken Ellis, the youngest member, is a licensed psychologist and has keen insight into human behavior. Adrian VanWyk, the elder statesman of the group, is one of the pastors at our church and had been through similar church situations before. Philip Nymeyer is a no-nonsense, get-to-the-bottom-line businessman. I knew that in a tense situation, these men could get to the fundamental issues quickly.

On Wednesday, I traveled alone to Detroit to meet with Curt Wilson, some of the staff, and the Dollar family. It was a long drive. I had several hours for reflection. I thought about the many times that Truman and I had talked together on the telephone. I thought about the time we were together in California when he was struggling with whether to leave his former church in Kansas City and move to Detroit. I remember his pain as he sought to do what God wanted.

I thought about the time we were together at a conference with sixty other fundamentalist preachers. I delivered a lecture on the differences between liberals, evangelicals, and fundamentalists. I remember his willingness to be used as my illustration of a not-quite-true fundamentalist because he wore a gold chain around his neck. People laughed and clapped. I also remembered jogging with Truman the next day.

I recalled the times he had come to Lynchburg. As columnists for *Fundamentalist Journal*, we would often read our material to one another over the phone and suggest changes to each other. We had developed a kinship over the years, and I was afraid our relationship was about to change forever.

## **Talking with Truman**

When I pulled into his driveway, I noticed a FOR SALE sign in front of the house. When I walked in the house, Truman and Donna embraced me, and we stood together and cried. As we talked, Donna made it clear she was completely supportive of her husband.

“I’m determined to stand with him—whatever happens,” she said.

The rest of the family was there, and it was a house filled with activity. Truman and I excused ourselves and went to the basement, a large room, carpeted and paneled, empty except for a desk and a couple of folding chairs in one corner. The family had often hosted large groups of church members there. And there we sat, and through the tears he poured out his story to me.

He talked about how hard the move from Kansas City to Detroit had been on his family—how they had to leave home and friends.

He told about the increasing pressure of the ministry, about coming from a church he’d built for over twenty years into a church that had a lot of problems and was in decline, a church that wasn’t overly receptive to him.

He mentioned how the decision to admit blacks into membership had cost the church several families. The recent discussion about relocating the church was even more volatile. And Truman was the target of most of the anger.





During this period, he had been talking to a couple who were lifelong friends. Sometimes when the husband wasn't home, Truman would talk to the wife. During those conversations, Truman began sharing the pressures and discouragement he was feeling.

Later Truman said, "Looking back, that was a fatal mistake. There were other people who could have listened. I said things that were inappropriate and wrong. I'm embarrassed and ashamed of what I said. I was neither unfaithful physically nor were we ever together. But with my suggestive language, I was clearly in sin. I still find it hard to talk about what I said to her."

It was during one of those conversations that his teenage son picked up another extension and listened in. He was shocked by what he heard.

Shortly thereafter, his son went on a youth retreat. He talked privately to the youth pastor about what he had heard his dad say. When they came back from the retreat, the son and the youth pastor confronted Truman. He reluctantly admitted he had said those things.

"This kind of language and conversation is completely out of character for me," said Truman. "I asked their forgiveness and promised to stop any further conversations with this woman."

They agreed that no one else needed to know about this.

But the secret between Truman and the youth pastor created intense pressure. Their relationship began to deteriorate.

"When the youth pastor would do something poorly and I would talk to him about it, he would say, 'Well, I guess I'm not the only person who has messed up.' As his performance slipped, I thought about firing him, but it was clear, at least to me, that he was holding our secret over my head. He repeatedly threatened me, and I knew he could go public.

"In retrospect," said Truman, "I should have gone to the deacon board right then, told them what was happening to me, and asked for their help. They probably would have put me on a leave of absence, gotten me some help, and nursed me back to health."

In time, however, the youth pastor confided in some other staff members. The church had been incurring excessive long-distance telephone charges, so Truman installed a device to log the numbers of all calls placed. Reviewing the log one month, the church staff member noted that woman's number had been called from Truman's line. Assuming the conversations had resumed, he told the whole story to some others.

One Sunday, right after the morning service, the staff members confronted Truman in his office with their accusations and documentation.

"What in fact had happened," said Truman, "is that the woman's husband had called when I was out. I returned the call and talked to him. I didn't consider that a recurrence. I tried to present my side of things, but the staff members insisted the incident had not been handled properly two years before, and now they wanted my immediate resignation.



“It didn’t take me long to discover that this confrontation involved more than a discussion of purity. It was a well-planned revolution, a palace coup. If I didn’t resign, they said, they would make the matter public.

“I didn’t bother to defend myself. I was humiliated and helpless. All of a sudden, something I thought had been taken care of was exposed.”

Truman later admitted to me that he was traumatized that afternoon, not thinking or acting logically after the painful confrontation by several staff members: “I was left alone in my office for a few minutes. My mind played tricks on me. I thought that perhaps the damage done to my family and the church would be minimized if I were not alive.

“My youngest son’s .30-.30 deer rifle was in my office; a staff member had recently cleaned it for me. I took a soft-nosed shell from a case and nervously shoved it into the chamber. For a fleeting moment I thought the easiest thing would be to end it all.

Fortunately Truman’s wife and secretary arrived about that time, and he was not left alone again. He didn’t tell his wife.

“I realize how self-centered this would have been,” he later told me. “I was thinking only of myself. It was also a denial of everything I had ever preached about accountability, about God caring and being in control.” (He was so embarrassed that only after three years was he able to admit publicly the incident.)

That night, Truman and Donna walked slowly out of the church study toward the two flights of stairs that would lead them to the parking lot. It had been a long afternoon. From the nearby auditorium of historic Temple Baptist Church in Detroit, they could hear the congregation singing hymns we had known all of their lives. The Sunday evening service had begun.

“It was the first time in thirty years that for a reason other than illness we had missed a Sunday evening service,” he said. “It seemed strange not to be there. I was officially still the pastor, but in my heart I knew that would change quickly—everything would change quickly. We were in great pain.”

They thought about the congregation, which was also in pain that night. The church was not told why Truman was not in the pulpit. The congregation knew nothing of the events that transpired that afternoon. They would not learn until the next Sunday.

That night Truman and Donna just wanted to disappear—so they spent that night alone: “We did not want to meet or talk to anyone. Donna and I were both numb, silent, overwhelmed with the events of the afternoon. Our whole world had just caved in. We felt abandoned by both God and man. We were both stunned. Thirty years of ministry gone—no job, no security, no future.”

Still, in a curious way, Truman was relieved that he would now be forced to deal with his sin: “My repentance had been private but incomplete. Now I can deal with it thoroughly and publicly.”

He recognized that he needed to make restitution to people whom he had injured with his actions, and although restoration was not going to be easy, he was determined to begin



the process: “There’s never a convenient time to interrupt life and deal with burdensome personal problems,” he later said, “but that day’s events forced me to deal with them. It’s clear that a sovereign God determined the time of my restoration in his own wisdom, but it was not all that obvious then. Still, I resolved then and there to begin to rebuild my broken life.”

About that night he also told me: “I know that I was not thinking clearly, but that night I developed a strange sense of peace, and there was almost no anxiety.”

I realized other factors were at work in all this. It suddenly occurred to me that every time I’d talked to Truman in the last year or so, he’d mentioned how tired he was, how hard he was working, how difficult the situation was, how spiritually drained he felt. I suspected that he saw resignation as at least some ray of hope that *I can get off this tread mill and out of this rat race.*

After our conversation that afternoon, Truman wanted to get out of the house and away from the telephone. So Truman, his two sons, and I played an afternoon of golf. The sun was shining; the course was beautiful. For a few temporary moments, everything was normal again. Tim talked about his law practice. Devon talked about his girlfriends. I talked about Calvary Church. Truman talked about golf.

All too quickly the game ended, and we rode back to Truman’s house. We walked past the FOR SALE sign and back into the harsh reality of an uncertain future.

I returned to Grand Rapids.

## **The week for the Dollar family**

Two days before I had my talk with Truman, he had begun the task of informing people whom he needed to tell personally. It was much like informing the members of the family when a death has occurred, he said.

At 2 P.M. that day, he called his daughter Sonya and his son Tim, both of whom live in Kansas City with their spouses. By 5:30 that afternoon, both of them were on a plane to Detroit to join Truman and Donna. They stayed the entire week and all the family members were by his side, on the platform the next Sunday when he publicly resigned.

Truman later told me that during that week, he became increasingly aware of the historical significance of what was occurring: “I knew each word would be recorded and every scratch of paper saved in the archives of the church. I remembered the hours I spent reading some of those decades-old records of bitter conflict. Now, my own name was to appear, and the record would not be good. I could not voice how regretful I was at how future generations would likely judge me.”

Life for Truman and Donna that week was incredibly hectic. People were in his house from early morning until the late hours of the evening. And the phone rang continuously. They received over five hundred long distance phone calls.



Some life-long friends did not call, while people he had known only casually—who had heard him speak at conferences or heard his tapes, read his books and articles—called several times. And there were the intimate friends who called often to comfort.

Knowing that his life was changing forever, Truman began to keep a daily diary. He wrote his feelings and observations. He recorded his reaction to Scriptures where he found comfort and instruction: “I believed it would be therapeutic for me. It was a very personal and private way to express myself. At times, it was as if I was writing about someone else, but I knew I was describing the collapse of my own life.”

He wrote a series of observations in his diary, which he couched in what he called “Laws of Human Nature.”

First law of human nature: The speed at which news spreads is directly related to its degree of badness.

Second law of human nature: When admitting something bad about oneself, the capacity to focus blame on others is infinite.

Third law of human nature: Nothing is totally appreciated until it is irretrievably lost.

Fourth law of human nature: Nothing you do in the future can erase the past; but with your life, you can give significance to the past.

He also bought an IBM-PC and began to write, but he says, “Most of the material I have never let anyone read.”

### **Identifying my goals in the process**

I met my traveling companions at 2 P.M. in the parking lot of Calvary Church the next Saturday. We packed our stuff in the back of a Jeep Cherokee and made the trip from Grand Rapids to Detroit. I updated the men on my conversations with Truman, Curt, and others.

Pastor VanWyk recounted in detail his experience with a similar situation many years ago. He told us about the long-term consequences of that incident in the people’s lives and how the church had become divided over the issue. Some people wanted to forgive the pastor and accept him as if nothing had happened. Others wanted to defrock him forever. Others didn’t know what to do. Pastor VanWyk had served as a moderator, and as a result, much of the anger in the church had been directed toward him.

I was beginning to sense that there was no simple, predictable strategy with which to respond to this situation. The damage had been done, and the best that we could do was exercise some sort of damage control.

But as we drove, the role I would need to play began coming into focus. I identified four goals. I vowed to try:

1. To ensure that they treated Truman with dignity. Even if he had done wrong, it wasn’t right to stomp on him.



2. To help the church work through the shock and the swirling emotions, and to help them see that there was hope beyond this, that this was not the end of effective ministry at Temple.
3. To communicate a biblical perspective. The key in all of this was to respond not according to what they felt but according to the principles of Scripture. I knew that some people in the church were delighted Truman messed up; they didn't like him to begin with. The whole church, and especially these people, needed to accept the biblical command to forgive.
4. To discourage the church from making hasty decisions. While some people would want Truman's head on a platter, others would insist he hadn't done anything seriously wrong. Some would want him skinned alive; others would want to vote him back in as pastor. My goal was to help prevent the church from splitting.

### **The divisive decision**

We checked into the Holiday Inn and went to dinner. Curt Wilson joined us, and we talked about the deacons meeting to be held that evening. We then rode together to the church. Everyone was there, including the staff member who had confronted Truman several years before and the staff members and deacon who had confronted him the previous week, bringing the issue to the full deacon board.

I looked around the room. I felt sorry for the staff and deacons. They had lost their leader. They seemed unsure of what to do.

The first couple hours of the meeting were spent recounting the details of the situation and the steps that had so far been taken in dealing with it. It quickly became clear that the group was significantly divided. Everyone felt that Truman had done wrong. However, some felt that the actions of those who accused Truman were just as wrong as what Truman had done.

Some tense charges and countercharges were exchanged:

"It's obvious that some leaders in this church are willing to sweep sin under the rug, to forsake their integrity to prevent embarrassment."

"It looks to me as though some people on staff here are trying to use this unfortunate episode to further their own careers. If anyone should come under church discipline, it's the staff!"

"This thing is two years old, and there hasn't been a recurrence of the questionable behavior. Truman should stay on as pastor."

"When such a serious sin is committed, spiritual leadership is forfeited!"

We reached an impasse. The three men from our church were sitting in the back, and I could see them bowed in prayer. I knew God was our only hope for bringing harmony to the group.



“Listen,” I said. “The real issue here is not whether we like the way things were handled. The issue is that we have a pastor who’s resigned, and we need to address that issue.”

I suggested that we pray, and I insisted that we all get on our knees.

I began, not knowing what I would say. It was one of the longest prayers I have ever uttered in a public meeting. I prayed for those in leadership, for the Dollar family, and for the church. Then I broke down and began sobbing. I asked God to protect each of us from making these same kind of mistakes. I told God I didn’t want ever to embarrass his name. I didn’t want to let down the church that called me as its pastor. I didn’t want to hurt my family. By the time I was through praying almost everyone in the room was weeping.

Then we took a break. When we came back, we began dealing with how we were going to face tomorrow. I sensed a different spirit at that point. Instead of *Where should we attach the blame?* the question became *How do we proceed from here?* Amid the tension, we all seemed to realize that if we were to sit in a position of authority and decision making, we needed to be humble before the Lord.

We also realized that regardless of how serious we each thought Truman’s blunder or how meaningful we judged his repentance, we knew he couldn’t stay on as pastor—the anger and confusion of so many members made continuing untenable. So we discussed Truman’s resignation and what needed to happen.

After some disagreement, we finally concluded that Truman should personally read the statement to the church. Some, especially on the staff, felt it should be read for him, that Truman shouldn’t even be there. They wanted him just to disappear.

I responded, “If you handle it that way, it will appear to the congregation that he got railroaded. And if that’s the perception, they’ll railroad every staff member out of here. Unless people can see that Truman is convinced this is the right thing to do, the church will split. Our only chance to minimize the damage is for him to be there and allow people to see him, to see his family, to hear him confess his wrong. And they need opportunity afterward to say good-bye.”

The group also agreed that Curt and I should meet with Truman to discuss the resignation and the events of the next day. We concluded that the statement should be honest about the reason for his resignation, although not explicit. We decided he should simply say he’d had “inappropriate conversations” with a woman.

We knew that what he read and how he read it would have a profound impact on how the congregation would respond. Indeed, the statement would serve as a document people would repeatedly refer to. In fact, one of the later sources of conflict was over the fact that the word sin was not used. In retrospect, perhaps it should have been, although those angry at Truman would probably have found other things to criticize.

We discussed how the resignation should be handled publicly, who would moderate the meetings, and who would speak to the press. We wanted a coherent and consistent position. We eventually came to consensus on each of these issues.



Then Curt and I drove to Truman's house. We sat in the basement with Truman, discussing his resignation statement. We talked through the events of the next morning. Where would Truman sit during church? Would he come in prior to the service or shortly after it started? Would he be there for Sunday school? In one respect, these seemed like insignificant points, but in light of what was about to happen, we all knew we had to pay attention to every detail.

Curt dropped me off at the Holiday Inn about 1:30 A.M. I still didn't know what I would preach. Normally I spend twenty hours in study for a Sunday sermon. I am not the kind who can stand up with minimal preparation and say something significant. That night, however, I read some Scriptures, prayed, and went to bed without knowing what I was going to say. I trusted that God would give me special wisdom for this important day.

### **The announcement**

As I sat on the platform, the past week seemed like an eternity. I had cried more in the last week than I had in years. And now the whirlwind was approaching the moment of resignation.

"I've preached in this pulpit many times," I began. "And I always look forward to being here, with the exception of today. I wouldn't have chosen to preach here today. But I'm going to anyway. And I have decided, for the sake of safety, to preach the sermon I preached last Sunday at Calvary Church. It's about David—and anyone else who ever made a mistake."

After my sermon, on David and Bathsheba, a staff member gave a public invitation for people to join the church. It seemed so odd to be concerned about church members when the pastor was about to resign. Nevertheless, several came forward with the desire to unite with the church.

At the end of the service, Curt stepped to the microphone and announced a special meeting of the church and graciously dismissed everyone who was not a member of the congregation. Since I had been asked by the deacons to be part of this unusual day, I stayed.

Truman, surrounded by his entire family, came to the microphone and read the statement of resignation.

When he finished, someone yelled from the audience, "Mr. Chairman, I move we refuse to accept this resignation."

A cheer erupted from the audience. Another man shouted support for Truman. It was immediately clear that the position of the deacons was dramatically different than the emotional response of the congregation. I knew in an instant that the situation could turn into a major conflict.

Before Curt could respond, Truman stepped to the microphone with a brief display of his strong leadership.



“That is not the issue,” he said. “What I did was wrong, and whether you want me to pastor or not, I don’t feel qualified to be your pastor. I am stepping down, and there is nothing you can do to change that. The deacons have done nothing that is improper.”

Afterward, Truman stood in front of the altar, and people came by to hug him and say good-bye. For two and a half hours, I watched an incredible outpouring of love and feeling.

One of the staff members said, “This is awful!”

“No,” I said. “This is important. This feeling has to be vented. Most people out there have messed up, many of them a whole lot worse than Truman. Anyone who has ever made a bad decision in life will throw arms around him and say, ‘Thank God you’re one of us.’”

Another person came up to me and said, “You whitewashed the whole situation. You even compromised the Scripture. You said in your sermon that David ‘made a mistake.’ King David didn’t make a mistake; he sinned.”

My emotions churned. How could anyone consider this whitewashing? The pastor admitted his action, confessed it publicly, asked the people to forgive him, and was now suffering the consequences of resignation. He was leaving the only thing he had done for thirty years. He was suffering public humiliation and embarrassment. He might never again return to pastoral ministry. And this guy thought we were whitewashing it? What more did he want? I felt hurt.

In the weeks that followed, I would learn that everyone had different reactions to the situation. In most such cases, I’ve learned, rarely is there unanimous support for any action.

I returned to the hotel exhausted. I opened my Bible to Galatians 6:18, the text I had decided would be the focus of my sermon for the evening.

Almost everyone came back to church that night. I preached ninety minutes. It was one of the most difficult sermons I have ever preached. I pledged publicly that I would stand with Truman through this crisis, to help “bear one another’s burden.” But I also preached that he was suffering the consequences of his behavior, that he had responsibility to “bear his own burden.”

On the way home that evening, I was totally drained. I knew people had misunderstood my sermons during the day, but I was glad for the encouragement and support of the men from Calvary. I was so filled with insecurities, I talked the whole way home. I didn’t want to be alone with my feelings and my thoughts; I wanted to sense from them that I had done and said the right things.

I lay down that night and wondered where Truman and Donna were. What were they thinking? What were they talking about? How were they feeling? It was a Father’s Day I will never forget.





## **Donna's new role**

I found out later some of the things that were happening to the Dollars. Among other things, an unlikely hero had emerged. Donna had always been a faithful and loving pastor's wife. She was also admired and loved by each congregation Truman served. She was, however, very quiet and lived in the background of Truman's more dominant pastoral and family role.

"As I led the church," Truman says, "she was always by my side, often in the shadows. In the home, I disciplined the children, handled the finances, and made almost all the decisions. This seemed to be in accord with her desire. It appeared to me she had chosen this quiet supporting role and that it best fitted her personality."

On the day Truman's life fell apart, though, she emerged as a strong figure by his side: "Her response was quick, decisive, and natural. She was supportive both in private and in public. She defended me, loved me, and comforted me. She became my great strength and constant partner.

"It was like she was transformed in a single day; and she has remained a strong help ever since. All four children were amazed at her sudden strength and admired her transformation."

Truman has since wondered how to explain this dramatic change. "I suppose it is like trying to explain how the pliable vice-president Harry Truman became the strong-willed president at Roosevelt's death. Some believe he was always strong and the new role gave him opportunity to display it. Others believe the pressure of the job made him strong.

"I am not sure what happened with Donna except I know it was a spiritual process, and without her sacrifice and support, restoration would not have been possible."

## **Short-term strategies**

The initial crisis was over; however, the long process of putting the pieces back together was only beginning.

In a crisis situation, there are no timeouts. There is no quiet withdrawal from the whitewater to meditate and sort through what you are going to do. You must respond with haste and decision. The next week was a blur of events.

Looking back, I've identified several key tasks we had to handle immediately.

- **Help the congregation process the emotion.** When an event of this magnitude hits a congregation, people have to deal with questions, fears, and disillusionment. I encouraged the leaders at Temple to go overboard to give people opportunity to talk about this—to let it out, to express their feelings.

So for several weeks, they let people know that half a dozen deacons and staff would be at Temple Baptist each night between 7 and 9 P.M. to talk about the issues. But mostly they listened to, reassured, and prayed with people.



- **Control the flow of information to the media.** We didn't want a disjointed, inconsistent picture presented to the media, so we appointed one person to be the church spokesman. Whenever anyone needed information about Truman or the church's response, this person spoke officially on behalf of the church. Unfortunately, information was given to the media beyond the written statement. The failure to stick to the written statement resulted in front-page headlines that damaged the church and the people involved.

The papers hounded Truman for a response. Fortunately, he declined any comment because further comment from him would have given reporters more to talk about.

- **Control the curious.** Since the story was carried on the front page of the Detroit newspaper, it was not long before people called me from all over the country. The barrage of calls was more than I could possibly return.

"Preachers are probably the worst gossipers in the country," I said in disgust and despair one day. The worse the news, the more people who wanted the inside details. All is done under the pretext of trying to help, of course, but in reality, I knew few of these people could offer any substantive help. Many people were angry at Truman, and I simply absorbed their wrath. I didn't pass any of those messages on to Truman.

Perhaps I was too cynical, but after a while, I returned only those calls from people I felt (1) genuinely cared about helping (not those who simply wanted the latest nuance of the story) and (2) had the resources necessary. In other words, I gave the details only to those who'd had a prior friendship with Truman, or people he respected, who I knew would call him to offer prayerful support.

With them, I'd tell the story and then say, "Why don't you call Truman directly? Here's the number where he can be reached."

## **The long-term strategy**

Restoration, to me, has two levels. The basic need is restoration to spiritual wholeness. Only after that issue is dealt with could we begin to even talk about the possibility of restoration to position.

We had no manual for managing such a crisis, nothing that outlined appropriate steps for healing and restoration. But I was increasingly convinced of two facts: (1) Truman merited a legitimate process of restoration, to aid his own personal and spiritual healing and the healing of his important relationships, and (2) the process should occur within the authority and care of a local church.

I began discussing these ideas over the telephone with Truman. We decided to convene a small group of pastors to establish some guidelines and suggest a blueprint for this process.



## **The pastors' group**

We agreed on four other pastors, and I called each of them: Jerry Falwell, Walt Handford, Jerry Thorpe, and Harold Heninger. They gladly agreed to meet in Atlanta, Georgia, to consider the implications of Galatians 6:1 for this situation—"If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."

For the first hour and a half, Truman told his story. I noted a high level of skepticism by all the pastors. They didn't think he was telling the whole truth. Everybody assumed the worst—that he'd been physically involved. Several times Truman was interrupted by someone asking tough questions.

After lengthy discussion with Truman and then without him, the committee concluded there had been no physical involvement, only an indiscreet conversation by phone.

"Truman," said one of the group, "you've told us this is the honest truth. Now we need to be honest with you. Hear us well—if at any point in the future we receive information that proves your statements not to be totally truthful, we are out of the process. This whole thing is based on your being honest. And if at any point we find out you've been dishonest, we're out."

The committee independently confirmed Truman's story with all the people involved.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the pastors' group recommended the following steps:

1. Truman stop all public speaking and writing and resign from all leadership positions.
2. Truman write a letter to the deacon board of Temple Baptist informing them that he would be submitting to the discipline of another church and that he would, under no circumstances, consider returning as pastor of Temple Baptist Church.
3. Truman and his wife should request a local church (preferably Calvary Church) to bring them under the discipline and care of that congregation. The following general guidelines were suggested:
  - The board of that church should develop a specific strategy for their healing and restoration.
  - This process should emphasize personal, spiritual growth for both Truman and Donna.
  - The process of restoration should not have time limits.
  - This process would not guarantee the type or place of future ministry.
  - The possibility of future ministry would be recommended corporately by the church and the pastors to whom Truman has submitted.
  - The leadership of Temple Baptist would provide input and advice during the restoration period.



4. A letter would be sent to Christian leaders around the country informing them of the steps that were taken in regard to Truman.

At first, Truman resisted the open-ended time frame. He suggested a six-month limit. He wanted an end in sight. But we insisted that the process would not guarantee any type or place of future ministry. We made clear that we were not going to guarantee Truman would ever be a pastor or leader again.

“We are committed,” we said, “to restoring your relationship to God, your relationship to your family, your relationship to a community of believers, and your restoration to some type of meaningful service. But the question of leadership is not up to us. The possibility of future ministry will be recommended corporately by the church and by this committee.”

This committee had no official ecclesiastical authority. Truman was not required to submit to our recommendations. The process of restoration rested totally with his voluntary compliance. He did so readily and completely. In my opinion, this was the single most significant factor in bringing about complete restoration.

Then I sent a letter to our church explaining the situation and the recommendations of the pastors' group. I also wrote:

On Sunday, July 24, Mr. and Mrs. Dollar met with the board of our church to discuss the possibility of coming under the care and discipline of our church. After a thorough meeting, the board unanimously and enthusiastically invited them to come under our care for a time of spiritual healing and restoration. A committee was formed to work with them during this process. The committee includes Mr. and Mrs. Jim DeVries (chairpersons), Mr. and Mrs. Dennis DeHaan, Mr. and Mrs. Ade VanWyk, Mr. and Mrs. Ken Ellis, and two couples from the board of Temple Baptist Church: Mr. and Mrs. Jay Hatfield and Mr. and Mrs. Curt Wilson.

We recognize that we have not walked this way before. We believe that we are following the spirit of Christ in this matter. We understand the process of restoration to involve three steps.

First, restoration to fellowship with God and others (2 Cor. 2:5-11, 1 John 1:9-10).

Second, restoration to service (the story of Peter's denial of Christ and his subsequent sermon at Pentecost).

Third, restoration to leadership. We are leaving this step up to God. We have made no commitment as to what Mr. Dollar can or cannot do after the restoration process.

I ask several things of our congregation. First, pray that God will lead us every step of the way. Second, pray for the Dollar family. We are committed to restoring them to spiritual health. We are leaving the issue of what they will do after that up to God. Third, pray that God will get the glory through this process. Fourth, please pray for me. As I have wept and prayed with the leaders of Temple Baptist Church and with each member of the Dollar family, I am reminded that I'm made of the same flesh. Pray that I will be true to



God, my family, and the wonderful people of this congregation. I don't want to fail!

When you see Mr. and Mrs. Dollar in church, please make them feel at home. This will be a very difficult time for them. The words of Paul to the Corinthian church in regard to their response to a repentant brother have practical application for us: "The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him."

### **The restoration committee**

We felt that one of the real tests of Truman's repentance would be his willingness to submit to a group of lay people. This group, in the long run, was a crucial ingredient in the restoration process. (See the reflections in Article 4, "A Restorer's Reflections," by group chairman Jim DeVries.)

This group was appointed by the board of Calvary Church. Truman was not involved in picking the members. The fact that he was not in control of this process was important. He was not to tell us how to restore him; this group was going to tell him.

I knew the lay committee needed to be made up of people committed to restoration, but some of them needed to be skeptics. Just because they believed in restoration didn't mean they all thought Truman was going to get there. So we had a combination of assurers and doubters.

The group met with Truman and Donna Dollar once a month for about nine months, with no fixed agenda. Jim DeVries met with Truman about once a week.

The group was not a jury. Its primary purpose was to care, to love, to support the personal healing process, and to guide in vocational decisions.

Immediately, that meant helping Truman find work. The board at Temple Baptist had agreed to pay severance for a limited time. But Truman still needed something to do.

"The greatest pressure when you step out of ministry," Truman said to me one day, "is figuring out how to earn a living. You discover very quickly that the world out there is very unimpressed that you've been a pastor. You're essentially qualified to do nothing. The skills of ministry don't necessarily transfer into business."

I arranged with some business people in the church to get him an office. Even before he had a position, I felt he needed somewhere to go every day.

Eventually Truman linked up with business people, became a partner in some of their ventures, and ended up with a business of his own.

The lay committee also made sure the healing process continued.

After about three months, when life began to stabilize, the group recommended that Truman and Donna go to Marble Retreat, a facility in Colorado that offers pastors intensive therapy.



Again, the Dollars initially resisted, feeling that they were just beginning to regain emotional equilibrium—why stir up the pain all over again?

But the lay committee insisted: “You need to see if there are some root causes that brought this situation about. As a committee, we’re not equipped to do that. We want you to probe the underlying drives, motivations, and fears that might cause this situation to recur in the future.”

Those two weeks of focused help with psychiatrist Louis McBurney became a key turning point in the recovery process. Not only did their cooperation show that Truman and Donna were committed to the restoration process, but they both came back able to point to specific things they gained from the experience.

Truman, for instance, had to sense deeply that his significance and value to God is not determined by whether he’s in ministry or by the size of his church. He had to accept both emotionally and intellectually that there’s more to life than work.

He also learned more clearly the importance of a personal relationship with God, not just a professional relationship with God.

“For the last three years,” Truman told me recently, “I have read the Bible and prayed because I needed to read the Bible and pray. For thirty years before that, I read the Bible and prayed, allegedly because I needed to, but I was really doing it for everybody else.”

In short, he learned balance. He’s now convinced that it’s okay to take time off to relax, to exercise, to spend time with his family—to be something besides a pastor of a big church.

Yet another role of the committee was to resist the temptation to short-circuit the process and announce complete restoration too soon. One of the tests of Truman’s repentance was his willingness to bring to this group things he needed their counsel on, and to submit to their wisdom. He clearly demonstrated that.

## **The pastoral connection**

Some people feel that if a pastor messes up, restoration means giving that person a broom and taking him to rock bottom, stripping him of dignity and worth, forcing him to rebuild.

I felt otherwise. In Truman’s case, the process of resigning and being on the front page of the Detroit newspaper was humiliation enough. I didn’t want to deliberately add to the humiliation he’d already brought on himself. To do so would likely bring about bitterness and loss of hope.

So, while not part of the committee, I called Truman several times a week to keep in touch. I must confess that, amid this flurry of activity, it was difficult to concentrate on the responsibilities I had as pastor of Calvary Church. In the early stages of the process, I welcomed the challenge of this additional pressure. But the longer the process went, the more effort it required. Yet I felt compelled to do it.



I was committed to preserving Truman's dignity. I was calling him to let him know that our relationship was the same. He wasn't a pastor anymore, but he was still my friend. If I was struggling with decisions in the church, I'd run my concerns by him. I didn't care if he'd messed up. He still had wisdom.

But we usually ended up talking about what he was going through, which was an overwhelming sense of loss and worthlessness. These visits took a lot of my time; nevertheless I felt they were important.

In the days since, Truman has indicated that these informal conversations, and his conversations with Jim DeVries, during which they would read Scripture and pray, were some of the most important in the restoration process.

Truman now says that Jim DeVries is "the first real friend I've ever had." Everybody else has been "a friend with conditions, a friend because of ministry." But Jim, according to Truman, is the first guy he's met in his entire life who accepts and loves him as a person, not as a preacher or church leader.

Jim's continuing contact was key in gauging Truman's progress.

### **When is restoration complete?**

Ultimately, in the restoration process, you've got to make a judgment call. Because discernment is so difficult, that's why a group needs to be involved— no individual is capable of seeing the whole picture.

After eighteen months, we reviewed the steps we had seen:

1. Truman's willingness to accept the authority of the lay committee and to be accountable, demonstrated when the committee rejected his desire to re-enter ministry prematurely.
2. Truman's willingness to accept professional counseling and embrace an examination of his spiritual and emotional foundation.
3. Truman's willingness to accept fully secular employment as a long-term option. The longer the process went, the less insistent he became of returning to pulpit ministry.
4. Truman's evidence of contrition. Truman had always been one to dominate a group by the force of his personality. Now, he didn't have to be center stage; he no longer tried to run the meetings. Instead of directing the conversation, he was hesitant to speak, and when he did, it was often with deep emotion.

He confessed, "There are times when I am sitting in my office in the middle of conducting business, and I close the door and just break down and weep uncontrollably. This is now almost three years later. I am still overwhelmed with the awfulness, not just of what I did, but what my actions brought about in my family and the church and the cause of Christ."



After reviewing these developments, the lay committee recommended to Calvary Church that the Dollars be accepted as members without any restrictions on service, which meant that they could teach, lead, serve, and perform any of the normal functions within the local church.

This cleared the way for the pastors' committee to clear Truman to accept a leadership position. Shortly thereafter, the ministerial group met and removed its previous recommendations of restraint. We knelt together and laid hands on Truman and prayed over him. We encouraged him to get involved in ministry again.

The pastoral committee unanimously agrees that Truman is now free to accept a leadership position, but our understanding is that any decision will be made with the advice and consent of the committee.

I don't think the process of restoration is ever finished. Our formal involvement, which has seen him back to health, to stability, to restoration, has ended. But in my opinion, Truman will wrestle with these issues for the rest of his life. But now more than ever he knows personally the grace and healing power of God.

*—Edward G. Dobson is pastor of Calvary Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

***Editor's Epilogue:*** *Tragically, a few years after this article was written, Truman Dollar committed suicide.*

"Restoring a Fallen Colleague," LEADERSHIP, Winter 1992, Vol. XIII, No. 1, p.106.





## **A Restorer's Reflections**

*What I learned from helping a pastor return to health.*

by Jim DeVries

Companion to Article 3, "Restoring a Fallen Colleague":  
Businessman Jim DeVries was asked to chair the lay committee overseeing Truman Dollar in the aftermath of his resignation. Here are Jim's reflections on the process.

### **When the committee formed**

How could a committee be expected to evaluate the genuineness of someone's repentance and relationship to the Lord? A skilled actor could fake it. Would we be duped?

Yet we also realized that unlike the court system, where the accused is innocent until proven guilty, a fallen pastor is assumed guilty of greater sins than those publicly confessed. This was certainly true in Truman's situation.

As a committee, we were overwhelmed at the responsibility, the size of the task, and the lack of a clear agenda and time frame. Our goals were broad and general—finding forgiveness and spiritual wholeness, healing the marriage, reconciling damaged relationships, restoring to productive service. Only after those things were addressed would we even begin talking about restoration to leadership or church office.

As chairman, I knew Truman and the committee first had to develop a deep, trusting relationship that would allow honest revelation of feelings on both sides. So our first conversations dealt not only with Truman's situation but also with struggles that each committee member faced.

### **The process**

For some pastors, like Truman, submitting to the authority of a lay committee is not easy. Truman's willingness to work with such a group was not only a sign of his sincerity, but it also showed Truman how a healthy body of lay people can contribute to ministry. Some pastors may never fully appreciate this while in the leadership role.

During the process, one vocational door after another was opened for Truman but then slammed in his face. As we worked through that difficult period, the trust level between the committee and Truman built exponentially. I saw the truth of the adage that you best get to know a man through watching him cope with either success or failure.

Still, it was vital for Truman to find meaningful work, and it was of immeasurable help when a church member provided an office for him, a place to go each day.

Truman and Donna were both skeptical about seeking professional counseling, particularly at a time when they were struggling to regain some equilibrium. However,



they showed their commitment to the process by accepting the committee's suggestion to spend two weeks at Marble Retreat in Colorado. It turned out to be one of the key elements in the process.

Another crucial element was Ed Dobson's daily communication and support. Without at least one other pastor exhibiting ongoing interest, I think the process would have taken much longer.

As relationships were developed between the Dollars and the committee, the strongest skeptics turned into the greatest supporters.

I was overwhelmed, however, by the lack of care coming from some others in ministry. The shuns, the personal attacks based on misinformation, and the vicious public attacks—in the business world, it would be called kicking a man while he is down.

Although the lay committee was composed of both husbands and wives, I don't think we addressed the unique needs of Donna, especially for support and guidance. Perhaps a separate group of women, called specifically to minister to the spouse, would have been more effective.

*—Jim DeVries is chairman of DLP Inc., a medical supplies company in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

***Editor's Epilogue:*** *Tragically, a few years after this article was written, Truman Dollar committed suicide.*

"A Restorer's Reflections," LEADERSHIP, Winter 1992, Vol. XIII, No. 1, p.118.



## Creating a Restoration Process

*Hard-won wisdom from four people who have worked with fallen pastors.*

A LEADERSHIP Forum

Most of the time, churches can live with the knowledge that their pastors are sinners. But sometimes pastors cross a line, and they sin in a way that's unacceptable, and the church feels obligated either to dismiss them from or restore them to ministry.

But which sins require such strong action? And if you decide to restore, how do you go about it? And how do you know when the person is ready to take up pastoral ministry again?

To probe such questions, LEADERSHIP brought together four men who have dealt with the complexities of the restoration process. At the time of this forum, their positions were as follows:

Jim DeVries is chairman of DLP Inc., a medical supplies company in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He chaired the lay committee that oversaw the restoration of the pastor whose story is told in Article 3, "Restoring a Fallen Colleague."

Richard Exley is pastor of Christian Chapel (Assemblies of God) in Tulsa, Oklahoma. In 1988, he authored *The Perils of Power: Immorality in the Ministry* (Honor Books).

William Frey is an Episcopal bishop, currently president of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania. Previously he served as bishop of the diocese of Colorado.

Louis McBurney is a psychiatrist who works at Marble Retreat in Marble, Colorado, specializing in helping clergy in crisis.

We began our conversation by asking each participant to tell us about a recent involvement with restoration. The stories, except for Jim DeVries's (told in its entirety in Article 4, "A Restorer's Reflections") are included in Article 6, "Pictures of Restoration."

Throughout this forum the pronouns "he" and "him" are used when referring to those needing restoration, simply because none of our participants has had experience restoring women in ministry.

**LEADERSHIP:** What pastoral sins require restoration?

**William Frey:** Two high-profile sins these days are (1) misuse of church funds (I don't just mean stealing but also misdirection of funds intended for other purposes) and (2) sexual misconduct.

**Louis McBurney:** I do think sexual sin has a more painful personal impact than others, because it touches something deep inside each of us. It threatens us and stirs in us a great deal of anxiety.



But there are a lot of sins that can create as much havoc: judgmentalism, hypocrisy, gossip—even speeding, which can kill people. But we generally don't think about having to restore pastors to ministry for such sins. Maybe all of those things ought to be dealt with in some way.

**Richard Exley:** To me, any behavior that seriously violates trust, especially in the relationship between pastor and congregation or between the pastor and his family, requires restoration. Brokenness has entered the relationship, and that brokenness must be dealt with before effective ministry can continue.

Inadvertent failure produces disappointment and hurt. But a deliberate disobedience of Scripture is a betrayal of our value system. Such a betrayal causes not only regret but also a brokenness inside us and in our most important relationships—both personal and pastoral.

**Frey:** In a similar vein, I would say anything that harms a pastor's relationships probably requires restoration at some level. Some of my private sins—if I trip and then curse—don't actually harm a lot of people. If I have an affair, it would harm me, the other person, and everybody who puts trust in me.

Even some "victimless" sins require restoration, because some are not as victimless as we at first imagine. I'm part of an anti-pornography group, and we keep reminding people that pornography is not a victimless crime—it changes your behavior, and that affects your congregation, your family relationships, and the trust other people have placed in you.

**Jim DeVries:** To me, anything that invalidates the pastor's ongoing ability to provide spiritual leadership requires some sort of restoration process. That throws a lot of things in the pot, although it certainly would include sexual misconduct.

A church is only healthy to the extent its pastor is healthy. We can each come up with examples in which a pastor, either through a style of leadership or an abuse of power, has damaged more lives than the fellow who has had one sexual slip, confessed it, and quickly restored the situation.

**LEADERSHIP:** When can situations remain private—restoration taken care of by a small group with only the pastor and a few key others involved—and when should the matter be public—the entire church hearing about the incident and action being taken by congregation and, perhaps, denomination?

**McBurney:** Ideally in the Christian world, it ought all to be public. We ought to be mature enough as believers to be redemptive with each other, to hear each other's sins and do what's necessary to restore one another. But we don't live in the ideal world.

Early in our ministry with pastors, a fellow came to us who had committed adultery. Just he and his wife were working through it; nobody else knew.

They were wondering if they should tell the congregation what had happened, and I said, "The obvious thing to do is confess it to the leaders of your church and ask their forgiveness and get their help in working through this."



I wish I'd never said those words! He told the church and was immediately crucified. He was sent packing right away—no help, no forgiveness, nothing.

**Frey:** That's where we run up against the public expectation of perfectionism. We don't want to be seen as condoning anything less than perfect behavior, which puts a pastor in a terrible situation. He knows he's not perfect, but it's the image people want him to live up to. That tension, unfortunately, discourages pastors from getting help, and that just leaves them in their problems.

**LEADERSHIP:** So how public should things be?

**McBurney:** I've concluded that something should be as public as it needs to be for the amount of damage done and as public as it can be considering the people involved.

It needs to be an individualized process. It's very difficult to form a rigid guideline because not every situation fits.

I've had pastors at the retreat center who came because they'd had brief adulterous relationships, have been devastated that they have so sinned, and have confessed it to their wives. They have received the forgiveness of the other woman involved, and an elder or denominational official has been included in the process. No one else has ever found out. Under some circumstances, that seems to work.

But if the degree of fracture is greater, if the news has become public or the involvement was ongoing or subtly damaging to a number of people, then I think the larger system has to be involved.

**Exley:** I think two or three criteria should be considered.

First, I want to know if the immorality was a lifestyle or a one-time failure. Did he deal with it immediately or try to cover it up? Second, did he voluntarily confess his failure and seek help, or did he acknowledge his sin only after he had been caught?

Third, has he already submitted to a restoration process?

A one-time sin, voluntarily confessed, and already submitted to restoration are strong grounds for keeping the matter private. It's vital that we distinguish individual differences and apply restoration on a case-by-case basis.

**DeVries:** If the situation remains private, though, I see a lot of hazards, especially if the restoration is not structured well.

In my most recent experience, the pastor first tried to deal with the matter privately. But it was completely unstructured, and as a result, it was not fully resolved and eventually required public intervention. In that case, private restoration was not ultimately helpful. In retrospect, his ministry and the church probably wouldn't have been damaged to the same extent if there had been the proper structure to begin with.

**LEADERSHIP:** What are the legal considerations when it comes to restoring pastors?

**Frey:** Legal considerations may become more and more important. I wouldn't be surprised if in the next ten to fifteen years the church will experience increasing legal action.



A Minnesota law, for example, says that even if the other party gives full consent, the pastor is still legally liable for sexual misconduct, because the pastor is the powerful person in the relationship. These cases are treated legally and psychologically as though they were cases of rape or even incest, since a male pastor is a father figure in a congregation, and many of the same dynamics exist as in a family.

Furthermore, in a few states, the clock of the statute of limitations starts ticking when you become aware of the fact that you have been abused. So something thirty or forty years old, seemingly ancient history, could come back to haunt you today.

**LEADERSHIP:** Before we started this conversation, Bill, you said, “I shouldn’t be talking about the restoration process, because I’m a failure.” In what way did you fail?

**Frey:** Morally, I don’t think I did. I made the best judgment call I could: we had prayed, counseled, and thought we had done everything right. In fact, this was one of those cases where I thought, *The Lord won one this time*. We got two families back together and salvaged a good priest’s ministry. And suddenly from out of the blue came a lawsuit. (See Article 6, “Pictures of Restoration”.)

In terms of legal issues, obviously we failed someplace. During the trial, the fact that I kept the restoration process as private as possible was held against me. I was charged with trying to deceive, trying to cover it up at the expense of the woman.

Furthermore, it was assumed, and perhaps properly, that by not telling the priest’s new church what had happened, I was guilty of negligence, failing to disclose that he might do such a thing again.

**LEADERSHIP:** So what lessons have you learned?

**Frey:** Certainly that a church must be told ahead of time whether a potential pastor has committed such an offense, because the church can be sued for the pastor’s failures. (Although revealing such information may make it virtually impossible for congregations to hire a restored person—if a church has a choice between two pastors, one of whom has and one of whom hasn’t committed such crimes, which is it going to hire? The one who presents less of a legal liability.)

I also think the church is going to have to show concern for the restoration of the parishioner who has been involved, not just hope that they “be warm and be filled.” Otherwise churches open themselves to a lawsuit because of the “damage” they’ve done to the offended person for not offering genuine help.

I also think that churches, to protect themselves, should have a mechanism in place to deal with such incidents—a written set of policies, standards, and procedures with a committee composed of people with various gifts, using strict disciplinary procedures.

For instance, the public confession of sin in a Christian arena is a marvelously healthy thing. In the hands of an unscrupulous lawyer, it can cost you: “I have it in black and white. You said here that you are fully responsible for the damage you have caused.” Then the damages get assessed in millions of dollars! So you need somebody who can at least tell you how to couch any public confession.



**Exley:** It's disquieting to think that the church would shape its response based on a fear of litigation.

**Frey:** No! I don't think we should let legalities determine our actions. In court one day, my legal adviser told me, "Your problem, Bishop, is that the Christian thing to do and the judicially prudent thing to do are not always the same thing. As a bishop you have only one choice: you have to do the Christian thing. But that's going to get you in trouble with the law from time to time."

All I'm suggesting is that there may be ways of doing the Christian thing that won't necessarily exacerbate the legal dynamics. It's a messy business. There's only one priority, though, and that's the gospel. You can't get away from that. I'm simply saying we need to be aware that there are legal risks to being a Christian church.

**LEADERSHIP:** Once a situation—let's say a sexual relationship between a male pastor and a female parishioner—has been made public, how do you proceed?

**DeVries:** At the beginning especially, I think there needs to be what I call a "damage control individual" on the scene. In one case, it was another pastor. When he arrived, it became nearly a twenty-four-hour-a-day job to get the family and the church stabilized.

For example, you have to decide about resignation: when and how you resign, what you say, who you say it to. What sort of publications do you make the resignation known to? In this case, a press release went to the local media because he was well-known.

You also have to decide which liabilities you want to risk. You have one set of legal liabilities if you make an announcement to church members only. You are liable for different things if you make an announcement to the Sunday morning congregation, composed of members and non-members.

And there are so many details to take care of: someone has to be found to fill the pulpit the very next Sunday. So crisis management is necessary for a few days to a week.

**LEADERSHIP:** After the crisis, then what?

**Exley:** You begin by dividing up the tasks. You definitely have to divide responsibilities. In the Assemblies of God, the district officials assign to the fallen pastor an individual who is responsible to oversee the counseling and restoration process.

The body that initiates discipline can seldom be the primary instrument for healing; it just doesn't work. The fallen pastor, more often than not, views the disciplinary body as adversaries, even though on another level he may realize they are trying to help him.

To my knowledge, the district officials seldom, if ever, participate in restoration of the other person involved in the adultery; the local congregation needs to assume that responsibility.

**DeVries:** The church should not attempt to handle all this by itself—it's just too much, and the church is just too close to it all. Most denominations have structures that can help, but independent churches can call on another church to step in and help.



In addition, there needs to be a SWAT team in place: someone who understands staff dynamics, another who can work with the family, another still who will work with the other party's family.

**McBurney:** I think different people are needed to counsel the pastor and his family, the church, and the offended party and her family. In most cases the pastor and his family are going to move, and it's likely to be physically impossible to minister over distance.

**DeVries:** Even if the pastor and family stay in the area, the time demands of overseeing more than one party are overwhelming. It's not fair to any of the parties if one person is personally responsible for all aspects of the process.

**LEADERSHIP:** Specifically, what did your committee do?

**DeVries:** As a committee, we met with the pastor once a month for about nine months. But there was no fixed schedule; we met as we were needed. Between committee meetings, I met with him about once a week over lunch or dinner. And when something crucial came up, I'd call a meeting.

Mostly we were there to encourage him. When we first started working together, he was nearly nonfunctional—he would spend long periods weeping or expressing his anger at the whole situation.

We also helped him adjust to the new realities of his situation, helping him make job choices. We also helped him deal with his new social situation—all of a sudden he was a layman rather than a pastor.

**McBurney:** Do you feel there were advantages to having laymen involved?

**DeVries:** Definitely. The pastor told me recently, "Lay people are a lot more realistic than clergy tend to be."

But he also liked having an open agenda, with no specified time frame. When he started, he was anxious to get through the process and get back to "real life." But in retrospect, he's glad the committee didn't allow him to do that.

He is also glad we didn't lecture him, that it was more of a discussion among friends, that he was an active participant in the restoration process.

**Frey:** I think lay people are essential. Otherwise you run the risk of pastors' trying to protect one of their own.

**DeVries:** This pastor feels that lay people were able to confront him with reality in ways fellow clergy might not. Early in the process, he came in with lots of schemes. Once he got an idea he could ghostwrite a book for somebody. Another time, someone started talking to him about becoming the director of development of his organization. But when the plans were obviously desperate, we were brutal with him: "You're just not with it. That idea is foolish; it's never going to work."

**LEADERSHIP:** What do you say after session one? After the pastor has told his story, what's next on the agenda?





**McBurney:** The early sessions are partly trust-building sessions. It's important to bring up issues that need to be discussed, but it's especially important to build relationships.

**DeVries:** When we started out, we each shared some of the struggles that we individually had been through, including some crises we had faced in our marriages. We peeled off a few layers before we asked him to start opening up, and that, I think, allowed trust to build between us more quickly.

**Exley:** When I meet with such a person, I try to meet him where he's at that particular day. Although I have a long-range goal and some clear ideas about the kind of things we need to discuss, it's important to remain flexible. Some of the most helpful breakthroughs have come when I have followed my intuitions.

The larger agenda, though, follows a pretty set progression. First, I want to help him own the problem—that is, accept responsibility for his actions.

Then I want to help him process his feelings. Confession happens on two levels—facts and feelings. Some people can never confess what actually happened; they just start crying. Others can confess what they did, but there is no remorse, no emotion. Both are a means of avoidance. True, biblical confession must include both facts and feelings.

**LEADERSHIP:** How exactly do you “process feelings”?

**Exley:** I hope this doesn't sound cruel, but I look and listen for sensitive spots, and then I poke them. If I see in the person's eyes or in nervous mannerisms that we've touched on something sensitive, I'll keep probing, much in the same way a doctor probes a tender area in order to make an accurate diagnosis.

Then I try to determine the root cause, the reason for that pain. If we can find out why something hurts or makes him angry, maybe we'll understand more about what caused his moral failure.

I also work with him to implement disciplines to aid in his recovery: spiritual disciplines and new ways of responding to stress or temptation.

Of course, all along we're working to rebuild trust in his key relationships. I especially try to help him rebuild trust in himself. That's the heart of the matter. He has shattered everything he thought about himself. His life has now been exposed as a lie. This fundamental trust in himself can be rebuilt only by the grace of God and with the help of those who are willing to go on believing in him.

Finally, there is the process of helping him integrate back into the mainstream of ministry.

**LEADERSHIP:** How does the restoration committee know if progress toward restoration is being made?

**Exley:** You can look for lifestyle changes. For instance, I think the way a minister schedules his time can often be indicative of progress. Many ministers are workaholics, who overinvest in ministry at the expense of their marriage and family, leaving themselves



vulnerable to temptation. When such a person begins to take control of his schedule, he is making progress.

I also watch for changes in the way he talks about himself. I want to see him move from telling me about the success of his projects and ministry—achievements around which his self-image is centered—to talking about relationships and the things he is discovering about himself.

**Frey:** Another key area is whether the person owns responsibility for the sin or problem. And one way to determine that is to see if he's moved from remorse and shame to repentance. It's one thing to feel ashamed—"I'm horrified that I have to be in this group with you people who know who I am"—and another to repent.

**Exley:** Taking responsibility for his actions is a key sign for me, too. I know of a situation where a highly visible churchman used his leadership position to influence people to invest money in some highly speculative business ventures. As a result a lot of money was lost.

Finally the leadership of that church initiated a disciplinary process for restoration. They removed that man from all leadership positions in the church and required him to receive professional counseling and to become involved in a Christian Twelve-Step group.

With the help of a professional counselor, they developed some criteria for measuring his progress, and one of the things they are looking for is his willingness to take responsibility for the money his investors have lost.

Maybe he will never be able to repay all of the money lost, but he should make some effort. From their perspective the issue isn't so much the repayment of money, though that's important, but his willingness to take responsibility for his actions and to make restitution.

**DeVries:** I would agree—the pastor has to accept responsibility for what he's done. In our case, it took a couple of meetings before he was able to trust us enough to level with us.

Over a few weeks, he became increasingly aware that he had lost his ministry because of what he did, that he was responsible for his actions.

**Frey:** I had an alcoholic priest in my diocese with whom I thought we were making progress. He was even in a Twelve-Step program. But I happened to hear that whenever he went to an AA meeting, he would introduce himself as Father Tommy—not "I am Tom, and I'm an alcoholic," but "I am Father Tommy."

I realized he hadn't yet taken responsibility for his alcoholism. He was still conning himself and everybody else: "I'm here, but I'm really a counselor." What he should have been saying was "I'm really a drunk."

And sure enough, he was back on the sauce within a few months and had to go through the whole process again.



**Exley:** I also look to see if the fallen pastor has gotten past his anger: especially anger at his congregation or the people who caught him or even at the people who are involved in his restoration.

**DeVries:** The pastor I worked with was angry when we asked him and his wife to go to Marble Retreat. They are very private people, and the husband in particular didn't care for the idea of getting "therapy" for two weeks, particularly in a group setting. Up to an hour before they boarded the plane, we weren't sure they would go. And when they did go, they went with the idea that they weren't going to say anything once there.

When they came back, the man said, "I went there resenting this committee for asking me to do something as embarrassing as getting therapy. But it was extremely beneficial."

**Frey:** Another thing I always look for is how much control the person is trying to exercise over his or her own therapy. In other words, is he self-diagnosing and self-prescribing, or is he willing to trust the therapist or the group? I don't trust somebody who says, "Here's my disease, and here's the treatment that you ought to give me."

I think the most a patient can do is tell you where it hurts, and that's a good place to begin.

**McBurney:** Another way to assess a person's progress is to get feedback from the spouse. That's one reason we have spouses come to the retreat. The man may be able to put the mask on or say the right things in public, but the spouse is going to tell us, "Well, I'm still worried about him," and identify unresolved issues.

**Exley:** Just watching a spouse when you are counseling a husband and wife together can sometimes tell you a lot. I've seen a wife literally close up—cross her legs, fold her arms, bend forward—when the husband was saying something that she knew, and I later discovered, wasn't true. Things like that often indicate that she is still afraid to confront him.

That brings up another sign of progress: the healing of the marriage. Without that, especially in the case of sexual failure, there can never be full restoration.

**McBurney:** Trust between husband and wife is certainly one of the main things that needs to be restored. But trust is not something that can be restored instantly. That's why I'm nervous when a wife immediately says, "Oh, I've forgiven him. That's not a problem—not at all." Trust just doesn't come back that quickly.

Another marital issue is anger. Sometimes the husband's long-standing anger with his wife is one cause of his adultery. But also, the wife is usually and justifiably angry with her husband. All that has to be worked through.

**Exley:** And that means forgiveness. There can be no restoration of the marriage without genuine forgiveness. Unfortunately forgiveness doesn't usually occur until the anger has been dealt with first.

That's often difficult because many Christians have been taught to repress their anger. Sometimes when I counsel a betrayed spouse, I ask her to write a letter to God telling him



how she feels about what her husband has done to her. I encourage her to tell God exactly what she would like to do to her unfaithful husband, and how she feels about the “other woman.”

Frequently I get l-o-n-g letters, and for the first time the betrayed wife has truly expressed her anger.

Following that release, she is often able to tell her husband, face to face, how she’s been hurt. Until she comes to that point, she’s not likely to move to genuine forgiveness.

Sometimes we have to go through that process several times, because there are layers of anger she has to work through.

**McBurney:** Actually, many of the same dynamics in a troubled marriage occur in a case of restoration. Good marital counseling skills go a long way here.

**LEADERSHIP:** Besides anger and distrust, what other family pressures make this type of restoration difficult?

**DeVries:** Economics. The loss of income is a major disruption for the family. It puts tremendous pressure on the wives, many of whom have depended totally on their husbands’ income.

**Exley:** If we are serious about restoring a fallen minister, we must find ways to assist him financially during the process.

In the Assemblies of God, a minister guilty of a moral failure is required to leave active ministry for two years. During that time he enters the job market, often with no transferable skills. The resulting financial pressures can be enormous.

Still, in spite of all of the pressures the couple experiences, I remain hopeful. In my limited personal experience, most of the ministerial marriages that have been torn by adultery survive. A significant number of ministers have been restored, are now experiencing a meaningful ministry, and have not repeated their offense.

**McBurney:** We’ve had that same feedback from lots of couples who come to our retreat. Five years later we’ll hear from them, and they often say, “That was a turning point in our marriage relationship. We really began to grow at that point.”

**Frey:** In my limited experience, marriages have survived about two-thirds to three-quarters of the time. And the cases where they haven’t, it looks as if the marriage was in deep trouble before the affair, and the affair was simply a symptom of terminal disease in that marriage.

**LEADERSHIP:** How do fallen pastors, intentionally or not, try to thwart the healing process?

**Frey:** One of the first things the fallen pastor will do is pluck your guilt strings: “Don’t you believe in forgiveness? Why should the church shoot its wounded?” Such a person is, in fact, avoiding facing his situation, and he’s forgetting the difference between love, forgiveness, and accountability.



**Exley:** I respond to such questions by saying, “Although it feels punitive, removing you from ministry for a period of time is redemptive. The pressures, unique circumstances, and dynamics of ministry are usually part of the problem. Unless you are removed from ministry, you won’t be able to address the core issues of your life.”

**Frey:** Another justification fallen pastors try to use is: “We’re all wounded healers.” It’s a truism that can sometimes be used as a smokescreen to deny culpability.

**Exley:** Sometimes they will say, “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.” That one has been difficult for me to handle. Who among us is not painfully aware of his own shortcomings?

Once when I was wrestling with this, I suddenly realized that those words were not addressed to persons involved in redemptive discipline but to a mob bent on stoning a woman taken in adultery.

Actions of restoration are totally different. We are implementing spiritual discipline in order to restore a fallen brother.

**LEADERSHIP:** Are there cases in which a person would display many of these signs of progress and yet you would not recommend full restoration to the ministry?

**Frey:** Yes—in the case of a person who has practiced pedophilia. Since there’s such a high degree of recidivism, I’d be biased against restoration to ministry. The risk involved outweighs the benefits.

**McBurney:** It also depends on the type of ministry the person wants to return to. I wouldn’t want a man with a history of pedophilia running my summercamp ministry for kids, or a man who has had a compulsive problem with lust doing campus ministry with women—just as you don’t want the alcoholic working in a bar. I would think, though, that a person who really wants to recover from his problems would not want to be in compromising situations.

**Exley:** I would not be comfortable restoring a repeat offender, a person who has already been through the process once. If a person has been restored once and then falls again, we are probably looking at someone with a serious addiction. He is not beyond the grace of God, but he has probably disqualified himself from ministry.

**Frey:** In some ways, the law enters into the decision, especially for denominational officials. There is a legal risk if it happens once. But it’s multiplied if it happens twice. It’s the one-bite rule—if my dog bites someone once, there’s nothing to be done. But if my dog bites again, I’m liable for that.

And so anytime we decide to restore someone, we run a legal risk. That doesn’t mean we shouldn’t run such risks—I do occasionally—but we should be fully aware of what we’re doing.

**LEADERSHIP:** Is there a temptation to restore a pastor prematurely?

**Frey:** The temptation I’ve felt to restore somebody prematurely has largely been due to economics. When I find that the priest is not able to hold any other kind of job for any



length of time, and his family is in financial trouble, and I don't have funds available—that puts great pressure on me to get him back in a parish situation before adequate healing has occurred.

**Exley:** That's one of the strengths of the Assemblies of God system: even if the fallen minister walks on water or raises the dead, he is still going to be required to undergo two full years of restoration, and during that time he cannot participate in ministry.

I need that requirement because I am always tempted to let my pastor's heart overrule my better judgment. I want to ease his pain. I want to make everything right. I want to fix it. Left to my own judgment, I would probably allow my sympathy for the fallen pastor to cause me to rush the process. That two-year requirement helps me do what's best for him.

**LEADERSHIP:** When does the process end?

**DeVries:** Our committee stopped meeting with the pastor when we saw his marriage was healthy and his relationship with the Lord restored, and when he asked to join our church, not as a staff person, but just as a layman. At that point, we felt he had made significant progress and was fully capable of moving ahead on his own initiative.

The pastors' committee has since given him the go-ahead to enter ministry but with one qualification: if and when he feels led to accept a call, the calling church needs to talk with somebody from the ministerial committee so the church can be assured that the necessary restoration has taken place.

However, I think it would be good for the pastor to be accountable to a new committee in his next church. He's basically a workaholic, and that's something he'll struggle with the rest of his life. A small group of lay people could help him not fall into an eighty- to ninety-hour work week again.

In the meantime, we still see each other regularly. We have become good friends, and we hold each other accountable in this area.

**McBurney:** In one sense restoration is something that goes on for a lifetime. We can never say we are fully healed. In fact, I would say the kind of accountability and support that the restored pastor receives ought to be a part of every pastor's life.

**Exley:** Most pastors are loners, even those who are part of a denomination. Although I have been a pastor in the Assemblies of God for twenty-five years, I've had very little pastoral care from my district officials. Most of their time is spent troubleshooting.

In order to meet my needs for nurture and accountability, I meet with my elders every Friday morning. One week we pray together, and the next week we meet for breakfast. We talk about our jobs and about our families. We pray for each other. We hold each other accountable. I participate because I don't trust myself. I'm prone to work too much; I'm prone to unhealthy ambition; I have all kinds of reasons not to trust myself. Those guys help me keep my priorities straight.

**LEADERSHIP:** Can a pastor be restored to the church in which he committed an offense?



**Frey:** I've seen that happen many times when the offense was alcoholism. I've seen a number of clergy restored to their original congregation after undergoing alcohol rehabilitation. I'm not aware of any situation where after a public restoration for a sexual offense a pastor has gone back to the same church.

**McBurney:** Not to the same congregation. I'm aware of a number of restoration programs that have been successful, and the person has returned to pastoral ministry. And apparently there were no further problems, even though the new church was aware.

**LEADERSHIP:** What gives you hope about working with fallen pastors?

**Frey:** I think of a good friend who twenty years ago went through a rehabilitation process for a sexual offense. And he has been a superb pastor ever since, with no repetition. Restoration works.

**Exley:** I know of a number of pastors who have been restored and who are now enjoying significant ministry, but the one person who stands out in my mind is Gordon MacDonald.

After he experienced a moral failure, he voluntarily confessed it privately to a small group of his peers and made himself accountable to them. They assumed the responsibility for his restoration. For a time it seemed this would be sufficient, but then rumors began circulating, and it looked like the issue was going to be made public. At that point, MacDonald publicly acknowledged his failure and resigned from all public ministry.

For the next several months he focused on his relationship with God and his relationship with his wife, under the supervision of the group who was responsible for overseeing his restoration.

This is the beautiful part: He was re-ordained and restored to ministry in Grace Chapel, in Lexington, Massachusetts, where he had previously pastored. He is now pastoring in New York City.

I look at that and say, "Good job, God!"

"Creating a Restoration Process," *Leadership*, Winter 1992, Volume XIII, No. 1, pp. 122—134



## **Pictures of Restoration**

*Three snapshots of a complicated process.*

Recollections by William Frey, Richard Exley, and Louis McBurney

### **A legal affair**

Six years ago, while I was serving as bishop of the Diocese of Colorado, an assistant priest in one of our parishes became sexually involved with a parishioner. The relationship between Paul (the priest) and Mary (the parishioner) lasted several months and was then terminated at Paul's insistence.

Seven months later, Mary's husband, Jeff, found out about it and confronted Paul. The two of them then came to inform me.

Paul confessed his sin and appeared to be both aware of his responsibility and stunned that he could have done such a thing. I asked Jeff if he wanted to press charges that could have led to Paul's dismissal from ordained ministry.

Though he was angry, Jeff insisted that he did not and simply wanted to be sure it would never happen again. He appeared to accept Paul's repentance, offered forgiveness, and said that among Christians such matters should be dealt with through healing and reconciliation.

I wanted to hear Mary's side. I asked if she would be willing to talk about it. She was, and she told me she felt responsible for the whole thing. I assured her that from my point of view the priest was the responsible party since he was the pastor.

When I asked how she wanted the matter dealt with, she insisted that she wanted no scandal and no harm to come to Paul, his family, or his ministry.

I suggested that one way to avoid unnecessary publicity, and the pain that such publicity would cause to both families, would be to refrain from talking about the incident publicly. That remark, offered almost as a truism, later became grounds for a charge that I had "silenced" Mary as part of a "cover-up."

In an attempt to salvage both marriages and find healing for all concerned, I put the priest under several disciplines, including psychotherapy. I recommended marriage counseling for Jeff and Mary (apparently Mary was already in therapy) and offered financial assistance for the expenses. Jeff and Mary had transferred to another parish, and Mary was receiving some counsel from several other clergy.

Complicating the case was the fact that prior to my learning about the incident, Paul had been called to pastor another parish. All the data in his file, as well as my personal knowledge of him, led me to believe that the affair had been an isolated episode and not part of a chronic pattern. So I did not interfere with the call, hoping that the spiritual discipline and therapy would be adequate.





For three and a half years, everything seemed to go well. None of the people involved expressed any unhappiness with the way things were handled.

Then several things happened. In the course of her therapy, Mary discovered that she had been sexually abused as a child, and she was diagnosed as having Multiple Personality Disorder. This helped explain the fact that she had had a number of sexual encounters with other men throughout the course of her marriage.

Jeff sued for divorce. Mary, concerned about her future, was apparently advised that she had been victimized by Paul and the church, that making the abuse public would hasten her recovery, and that she should sue for damages.

A civil suit was filed against Paul and against the bishop and diocese, claiming the incident had aggravated her illness and made it impossible for her to work. (Ironically, a year earlier, Mary had won a custody case, claiming that she was capable of supporting her children, and that her multiple personality disorder gave her a “useful mechanism for coping with stress.”)

The case against the priest had to be dropped when Paul filed for bankruptcy, so the case proceeded not against the person directly involved but against the denominational agency. The charges were “negligent hiring and supervision,” “vicarious liability,” and “breach of fiduciary duty.” After a trial, the jury awarded Mary \$1.2 million dollars.

An editorial in a Denver newspaper called the verdict “bewildering,” pointing out that “(1) she had a history of psychiatric problems, (2) her ex-husband testified that she had numerous affairs during their 16-year marriage, (3) the priest ... claimed ... that she’d been the aggressor, (4) she herself testified that one of her 60 or so personalities likes to break men’s hearts, and (5) her latest breakdown occurred three years after the affair ended” (*Rocky Mountain News*).

The verdict is being appealed.

—*William Frey is an Episcopal bishop. At the time of this article, he was president of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania. Previously he served as bishop of the diocese of Colorado.*

“A Legal Affair,” *LEADERSHIP*, Winter 1992, Vol. XIII, No. 1, p. 124.

## **Getting to the deeper issues**

My district superintendent assigned me to work with one pastor who’d had an adulterous affair. As is usually the case, that affair turned out to be merely a symptom of deeper problems.

This young man was reared in a strict fundamentalist church that never spoke of sex except in the most negative terms. He grew up feeling that sex, even in marriage, was somehow inherently sinful. He never learned to appreciate it as a gift of God.



As a teenager he experienced the normal sexual temptations, and he once made secret arrangements to spend the night with his girlfriend. They managed to get use of a house and planned to have intercourse. But he couldn't bring himself to violate his moral standards. Just before they were to have sex, he got up and left the house.

But instead of feeling he had been faithful to his convictions, he was haunted with regret. From that day on, he lived with a secret resolve—if ever in that situation again, he wouldn't miss his chance.

Eventually, he got another chance. After he was married and while serving as a member of a pastoral staff, he became involved in a passionate adulterous relationship.

On the inside he was tormented, racked with guilt. Possibly due to his subconscious yearning to be caught and punished, he became increasingly careless. He allowed himself to be seen with her in public and frequently let his car be seen in front of her house.

This relationship was soon discovered, and he was forced to resign following a public confession.

He moved out of the city and was eventually assigned to me for restoration.

While counseling him and his wife, I discovered a number of other contributing factors, including their unhappy marriage. Before they were married, his wife had been vivacious and assertive, qualities that attracted him. After they married, however, he dominated her, and she became increasingly submissive. Although he had remade her into his idea of the "ideal wife," he became increasingly dissatisfied. He resented the fact that she was no longer the outgoing and assertive woman he had married.

That, coupled with his failed teenage tryst, set him up for a moral failure. When an assertive, vivacious, young woman made herself available, he had plunged headlong into an affair.

Over the weeks of counseling, other issues also surfaced. He was a workaholic who repeatedly sacrificed his marriage and family for the ministry. He struggled with doubts about his value as a person and needed constant success to assure him of his worth. He hungered for his wife's approval, but his self-assured facade kept her from meeting that need. His spiritual disciplines focused on power rather than intimacy, and as a result he had only a "working relationship" with God.

With God's help we worked through these issues, and he is being fully restored. His marriage is richer than it has ever been; he is at peace with himself and preparing to return to active ministry.

*—At the time of this article, Richard Exley was pastor of Christian Chapel (Assemblies of God) in Tulsa, Oklahoma.  
He authored The Perils of Power: Immorality in the Ministry (Honor Books).*

"Getting To The Deeper Issues," LEADERSHIP, Winter 1992, Vol. XIII, No. 1, p. 127.



## **A pornographic habit**

One pastor I worked with years ago had had, since his teenage years, a problem with pornography, mostly limited to *Penthouse* and *Playboy*. Particularly when he was under stress, he would look at the pictures and masturbate, and he continued this habit after he married.

When he reached his second pastorate, he started renting X-rated videos. Although his wife knew about the magazines, when she discovered the videos, she was furious.

“This has got to stop!” she demanded. “It’s going to get you in trouble, and I resent living with it.”

So he sought counseling, and for nine months he seemed to be making progress. He was dealing with his identity formation, his sexuality, and his self-image. He began to learn some new behaviors to stop the habitual, compulsive use of pornography.

Then his ministry entered a period of severe conflict. Amid that stress, he bought a pornographic magazine.

But when he sat down to look at it, he was amazed and somewhat gratified to discover that it didn’t interest him as it had before. So he tossed the magazine in his desk drawer, intending to dispose of it discreetly, and forgot about it.

Sometime later, his secretary, in looking for some information in his desk, discovered the magazine.

She contacted a church leader and called in the denominational superintendent, who asked the pastor to explain.

The pastor told about the counseling he’d been getting and the progress he had made. The superintendent found this credible because he knew the pastor had been in counseling (about what, though, he hadn’t known). He was going to let the matter rest.

But a few days later, word leaked out, and rumors spread through the church. Within a week, the superintendent told the pastor, “You probably better resign.”

He did and entered the denomination’s restoration process. That’s when he and his wife came to our retreat center.

He had a lot of mixed feelings about the restoration process. He acknowledged his sin as sin, but he felt that he had been making significant progress. The process was very painful.

His wife still felt protective toward him, but she also was angry with him. In addition to her resentment about the pornography, now she was forced to pack up and move their family away from their community and friends, all because of her husband’s being caught.

Fortunately they were able to work through the pain and anger. He conquered his addiction and was ultimately restored to ministry.

*—Louis McBurney is a psychiatrist who founded Marble Retreat in Marble, Colorado, specializing in helping clergy in crisis.*

“A Pornographic Habit,” *LEADERSHIP*, Winter 1992, Vol. XIII, No. 1, p. 129.