

DIGITAL EVANGELISM: Can Hillsong Founder Brian Houston Make a Successful Comeback with New Online Church?

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After a string of legal problems, mysterious accusations and the stunning ouster from his own church in Sydney, Australia, Brian Houston, founder of global megachurch Hillsong, along with his wife Bobbie, is in the process of making a comeback. In July, Houston launched a new online church called .

Is Brian Houston simply misunderstood? Did he make a few errors in judgment while under immense stress over the serious allegations related to his father's tenure? Can he be trusted in ministry leadership again? Despite the exercise of his faith and best intentions, will Brian Houston's past define his future in ministry?

"Don't ever write off a comeback. God is good at those," Houston tweeted earlier this year on X, soon after announcing the plan to launch their new online ministry.

Season of Scandal and Cleansing

The return of Brian Houston to the ministry scene comes at an interesting time. Just within the past several months, several high-profile Christian ministers have fallen into scandals

that have led to their departures from their churches. The list includes Mike Bickle, followed by Tony Evans and Robert Morris, this latter few all located in Dallas, what used to be known as the “Bible Belt.” The age of the “celebrity pastor” may be over, especially as people—Christians and non-Christians alike—are skeptical of pastors who are more interested in their own celebrity, brand building and social media followers in the hundreds of thousands, than in ministering Jesus to people and living right before the Lord.

However, Houston may fit well in this blossoming post-celebrity pastor era because he has consistently focused his ministry on Jesus, and he has a track record of approaching challenges as a leader, not as an “influencer” seeking fame. He isn’t necessarily trying to build Hillsong 2.0. God is doing a new thing.

New Ministry On the Launch Pad

The launch of marks the return of this megachurch pioneer to active ministry-building, following his departure from Hillsong in 2022. Two years ago, it looked like Houston was done in ministry permanently. He was accused of not disclosing information about offenses committed by his father. It has been publicly reported that Frank Houston used his position in ministry allegedly to abuse youths in the 1970s. Unlike disgraced ex-Hillsong minister Carl Lentz, who turned his “celebrity pastor” status into extramarital affairs, Houston has not been accused in any similar manner. His wife Bobbie continues to stand by him—loyalty that the former Senior Pastor of Hillsong Church cannot take for granted.

“You learn a lot about people in your tough times,” Houston tweeted.

Multitudes of people turned against Houston and even people close to him in ministry turned their backs on him for failed leadership and were unwilling to see his side of the story.

But Houston has remained adamant in his faith in Christ. He has signaled publicly that he has every intention to re-establish himself as the leader of a ministry.

The people who wrote him off during “tough times” may owe him an apology. In August 2023, an Australian court acquitted Houston, validating that he had a “reasonable excuse” under the law not to disclose the accusations against his father Frank, who died in 2004.

Never known to make ministry about himself, Houston has publicly stated that the focus of his new ministry is “pointing to Jesus and seeing people become followers of Jesus.” He shared online about how he is “very excited about our online community... building community... connecting Jesus followers and building disciples.”

An online church makes a ton of sense for Brian and Bobbie Houston, who are in a rebuilding phase despite being at an age when most ministers are beginning to think of retiring; Brian is 70, Bobbie 67. It is a season in which the Houstons are starting over, partly by necessity to earn a living after having their financial coffers drained by legal expenses, but also and more importantly as a call from God.

On the ministry’s official website, , it states: “ is here to welcome and extend our table of life and experience to you. This online platform (and church) is here to love, encourage and be a trustworthy voice of hope and inspiration in the days ahead. Our heart is to serve the God-given potential within you and the body of Christ.” The website calls out a biblical reference to provide context: “As Ephesians 2:21-22 says, we are all being built into a holy habitation for the living God, brick by brick, stone by stone, with Jesus Christ as the Chief Cornerstone.”

as an online church initiative is envisioned to be a platform that provides a digital environment for worship, community and

spiritual growth. The online church features regular live-streamed services, including worship sessions, sermons and interactive components designed to engage viewers from around the world. includes:

Live Streaming Services: Regularly scheduled live services that include worship music and sermons;

On-Demand Content: Access to a library of past sermons, teachings and worship sessions;

Interactive Features: Opportunities for viewers to engage through chat, prayer requests and virtual small groups;

Global Community: Aimed at reaching a worldwide audience, fostering a sense of community among believers from different regions;

Focus on Accessibility: Designed to be accessible to people regardless of their location, allowing anyone with an internet connection to participate.

Brian Houston's vision for is to create a dynamic and inclusive online space where people can connect with their faith and with each other, regardless of geographic barriers. Nonetheless, with being an online church, Houston won't have to worry about any construction materials to build a brick-and-mortar church. He is using advanced digital technologies to reach the whole world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What's Next for Brian Houston?

One of the remarkable characteristics of Houston is that he is trying to pick up where he left off at his former church and avoid allowing shame to take over his life. If he feels that he was attacked by other people when he was down, he is not ashamed to say that faith in Jesus is the "greatest weapon." Houston tweeted in early July, "Stay strong in the face of trouble. Jesus said He has overcome the world."

While in the early days of a newly launched online ministry, Houston is hard at work on his other new project, a book about his life slated for release in early 2025. In it, Houston would have the chance to recount his side of the story, the accusations that have beset his life, and ultimately the shocking departure from Hillsong Church.

Ultimately, God knows Brian Houston's heart, but if he reveals his true character going forward, there is an opportunity for Houston's future to redefine the widespread perceptions of his past. Rather than "falling from grace" as so many high-profile pastors have in recent months and even weeks, Houston may be falling into grace. God's power is often magnified through brokenness.

Little do we know to what extent spiritual warfare has hammered away at him for the years before and during his building one of the most influential churches in the world. Having gone through adversity after adversity, Houston has been tested in the extreme. And the next test may just be how far he can take the new into a world starving for the living Word of God and the life-changing power of His Holy Spirit.

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This article has been updated to remove T.D. Jakes' name. A previous version incorrectly stated that he departed his church. T.D. Jakes remains the senior pastor of The Potter's House.