

6 Ways to Deal With Ashley Madison Scandals in Your Church

It was just yesterday that I began to hear the stories. As the list of names on the Ashley Madison list began to unfold, pastors and other church leaders received word that some of their own members were on the list. Some of the names included elders, deacons, pastors, church staff and laypersons in the church.

The pastors with whom I spoke weren't on the list, but they had church members who were. These pastors were struggling with how they were going to respond to the families impacted, other church leaders and the congregation as a whole.

Adultery is not new in the Christian world. The Bible itself is filled with accounts of believers who committed such sexual sin. No church has been immune from this issue. But this time it seemed to be more problematic. Those who committed adultery had their names on the Internet for the world to see.

Though we are only at the early stages of names being revealed, it is not too early to suggest some ways church leaders and members can deal with the Ashley Madison scandal if it comes to your church.

1. We must lead. We can't act like this event never took place. We can't wish it away. Now is the time for church leaders to truly lead. This occasion is one where our leadership will likely be tested. We must seek God and His wisdom and strength to be the type of leaders for such a time as this.

2. We must exhibit grace. To be grace-filled does not mean we minimize the sins of adultery, lying, and betrayal. But it is

incredibly sad and tragic when Christians on the list have more to fear and less hope than non-believers on the list. I fear that some Christians will retreat into a mode of legalism and judgment when grace should be pervasive.

3. We must remember the goal is to restore sinners. Truly repentant believers on this list should not only receive grace; they should be given the opportunity to be restored to the church. The ultimate goal of church discipline is restoration to the body.

4. We must respond pastorally and with great compassion. We are already hearing stories of families torn apart, of children terrified about what is happening to their dad, and of the tragedy of suicide. Church leaders cannot respond in their own power. God, however, can provide them all they need to respond in such a time of tragedy and hurt.

5. We must understand the extensive nature of this issue. It is highly public involving countless Christians. While immediate families are the most directly impacted, entire congregations will likely go through stages of grief as they hear the news.

6. We must understand that this issue will have a long-term effect. It will take months, even years, for healing to take place fully. Pastors and other church leaders must be prepared to deal with this matter for the long haul. Such leadership will require exceptional endurance and God-given stamina to minister to many people for a long time.

I am no less a sinner than anyone on the Ashley Madison list. It is only by the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ that I have been forgiven and given new hope and life. May we remember the Christ-given grace given to us as we deal with the sins and tragedy of adultery and betrayal that will continue to become even more evident in the days ahead. And may we be bearers of hope and love to the families reeling from these discoveries.

You church leaders who are dealing with this tragedy have my prayers. You families impacted by this tragedy have my prayers. And you who are on the list have my prayers as well. Now is the time for the body of Christ to be one of grace, healing, and restoration.

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