

An Overseer's Response to Sam Hinn's Re-Ordination: (and the Restoration of Other Fallen Leaders

Whether you recognize Sam Hinn's name or know nothing about the ministry of Benny Hinn's younger brother, there's an important issue in the body of Christ that needs to be addressed in light of Sam's "re-ordination" on Sunday night in Orlando, Fla., only eight months after he stepped down from the pulpit due to a serious moral indiscretion.

This and other recent instances—both in Orlando and around the nation—prove that we, as the church, still struggle with how to restore fallen leaders.

When Sam's four-year affair came to light, the board of his church, the Gathering Place (TGP), reached out to me because TGP wasn't part of a ministerial association and because they knew I'd dealt with this numerous times in my 35 years of ministry. They also recognized that I'd known Sam for more than 30 years, having been pastor of a church nearby, and that I'd do anything I could to help them and him.

During that very difficult time, Sam submitted to my leadership. I outlined a two-year plan of restoration and walked through the initial stages with him. But after three months, Sam wanted to renegotiate the terms. When I wouldn't agree to that, he withdrew from my covering and has since found a group of men willing to endorse his leadership in a more expeditious manner.

On Sunday, Bishop Mark Chironna, Archbishop Lonnie Langston and a handful of other leaders laid hands on Sam in a ceremony at Church on the Living Edge, also near where I pastor in

Longwood, Fla. During the service, attended by fewer than 100 people, Chironna mentioned that Joseph Garlington, bishop of Covenant Church in Pittsburgh, was en route to the service and also among those fully backing Sam's re-ordination.

I have to confess that when I heard about the plans to re-ordain Sam, I was upset. I told one of my ministry colleagues, "This is a joke and makes a mockery out of everything I hold dear and have spent my life proclaiming and upholding."

I feel now that I must speak up after personally reaching out to several of the leaders involved in this re-ordination—including Sam—but getting no real response from my voicemails and text messages.

Obviously, these men believe Sam is ready for ministry. Though I love Sam dearly and want him to be restored, I strongly disagree with this. In fact, it's *because* I love him that I cry out now.

I sat with Sam for hours immediately after the four-year affair was disclosed and counseled him. He was indeed a broken man. I also sat with his precious wife, Erika, and their children in perhaps the darkest hours of their life. I sought to do all I could to bring them through this tragic ordeal. So I believe in restoration.

But this is *not* what it looks like!

I have dealt multiple times in myriad places with leaders who have fallen. I have seen the pain and devastation their sinful actions cause. On the flip side, I have also seen fallen leaders find healing and be fully restored to not only productive lives but, yes, fruitful ministry.

Because of this, I feel I must speak out on what is happening. The truth is, this is not as much about Sam Hinn as it is a bigger issue in the church.

Restoration is not a quick fix but a systematic process of transformation that deals with a person's deep-seated sinful and narcissistic tendencies. These are the issues at the core of these problems and the cause of these failures in the first place.

The restoration process begins with deep sorrow and brokenness over failure and sin. (And I must add here that I sincerely believe Sam is sorry for his sinful failure.) However, a person must then move past that remorse to concrete action. The Bible teaches that we must bring forth the fruit of repentance (Matt. 3:8; Luke 3:8). The only way I know if a person has truly repented is not by what he says but by what he does. It is through demonstrating a tested, proven lifestyle of change that I can know. Then and only then can I know it's real. That is fruit!

This does not happen in seven to eight months when there have been four years of constant sinful behavior.

I know many who will say, "Aren't we supposed to forgive and move on? Isn't what you are suggesting ignoring God's grace?" Absolutely not! Restoration is not only about forgiveness, but also about trust. We are all called to forgive just as Christ has forgiven us. Sam asked for and received my total forgiveness—as he's done with numerous people in his life.

However, trust must be earned. Only when a person is serious enough to take the time to fix what he has broken and systematically walk out a process of transformation should we trust again.

At the risk of being called a legalist, I am standing up and letting my voice be heard. I, for one, am tired of picking up the pieces from this kind moral collapse. During my involvement with Sam's restoration, I drove a stake in the ground, and I wasn't going to move it. It was my opinion that in many places, what he had done would permanently disqualify

him, so he should be thankful for a two-year time out. Furthermore, I think two years is a minimum to deal with the issues resulting from a four-year affair. But evidently you can shop bishops until you get the answer you like.

I also believe that professional clinical counseling is a necessary part of any restoration. If I stand on a public platform and influence the lives of others, there needs to be public disclosure in some form regarding my psychological fitness to serve in that capacity before I return. If I am teaching God's Word and caring for the eternal souls of men and women, I must be a well-balanced person myself. In Sam's case, I question the wisdom of installing him as a teacher at a Bible school guiding young students—which is what he and the leaders announced on Sunday that he'll be doing as a part of an Orlando extension of Langston's Tabernacle Bible College and Seminary.

It takes time to test and prove a healthy, sound mind and heart. I realize this may seem costly and exact a lot, but another failure is even more costly and exacts an even higher price.

For the sake of the name of Jesus and His church as well as the people affected by this kind of behavior, let's demand a higher standard and not bless quick fixes to long-term problems!

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