

# How Do We Respond When Church Leaders Fail?

It was sad when leaders of the International House of Prayer cut ties with founder Mike Bickle last December because of a sexual scandal involving Bickle and at least two women. Then on June 9 of this year, veteran pastor Tony Evans of 10,000-member Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, Texas, stepped down from his pulpit, citing an unnamed past sin as the reason for his abrupt departure..

And just a few days later, allegations surfaced about Robert Morris, senior pastor of 25,000-member Gateway Church, also in the Dallas area. An Oklahoma woman, Cindy Clemishire, went public with allegations that Morris abused her sexually over a four-year span in the 1980s. She says she was only 12 when the assaults began.

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Morris released a statement admitting that he was “involved in inappropriate sexual behavior with a young lady,” but he didn’t address the fact that Clemishire was a minor when the actions occurred. “It was kissing and petting and not intercourse, but it was wrong,” Morris said, noting that the behavior “happened on several occasions over the next few years.”

Morris said that in 1987, he confessed and repented of his sin and went through a two-year rehabilitation process. He also noted that “no other moral failures” have occurred in his life since then. The incidents involving Clemishire occurred before Morris founded Gateway Church in 2000. He did not address the scandal from his pulpit last weekend.

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Over the years I've known a number of pastors and leaders who found themselves in spiritual disasters—from sexual scandals to financial scams to spiritual abuse. In many cases my trust in these people was shattered—and my trust in all leaders was tested.

A church scandal isn't just traumatic for the leader at the center of the storm. It also destabilizes everyone around them, especially any victims. Whole churches or ministries are often shaken to their foundations when a leader makes sinful choices.

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