

How Should We Process the Robert Morris Scandal?

Gateway Church in Dallas is the ninth-largest church in the U.S., with more than 25,000 members. But the church has been reeling since June 18, when Pastor Robert Morris, 62, resigned after admitting to sexually abusing a 12-year-old girl during his early years as a youth evangelist.

Some of Gateway's elders have now resigned as well. Leaders who are still there say the allegations blindsided them. They knew Morris had admitted to a moral failure 35 years ago while at a different church. But he had told people he had inappropriate contact with "a young lady," and that he had stepped down from ministry for two years to receive rehabilitation.

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But the "young lady," Cindy Clemishire, now a grandmother, says she was a young girl when Morris began a sexual relationship with her when he visited her parents' home in Oklahoma while preaching in youth revivals. When she reached out to Morris in 2005 to ask for restitution after years of abuse, he said in an email to her that she could face criminal charges for exposing him.

Morris went on to become one of America's most successful pastors. Now, no one knows who will fill his vacant pulpit. The entire dilemma leaves all of us sad, bewildered and angry at the same time—especially the people who think of Gateway as their spiritual home.

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There's so much to unpack when processing this tragedy. Fingers point in many directions. But as I have prayed, grieved and prayed some more, I've reached some conclusions that might help us all as we collectively mourn this loss.

– We must accept that Christian leaders sometimes fail. Sometimes we forget that on this side of heaven, life won't be perfect—and even pastors will sometimes disappoint us. Jesus had a Judas on his team; Paul had a Demas. Paul had to confront to a man in Corinth who was living immorally with his father's wife (see 1 Cor. 5:1). Sometimes we must grapple with unspeakably ugly problems in the church. But those don't discredit the gospel; they only prove how much we need a Savior.

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