

Responding to Israel Houghton and Other Fallen Leaders

Transparency doesn't exude from the mouths of men easily. Unless a man is caught with his hand in the cookie jar, transparency is as rare as a 23-year-old bottle of Pappy Van Winkle.

It's why I feel it necessary to share a smidgen of my story to set the stage before responding to the public marital failure of Israel Houghton.

I'll never forget the phone call I received from my wife on Friday, January 16, 2004. While driving with a friend, I answered the phone and heard a low, stern voice say, *"You need to get home right now."* My first thought was that something had happened to one of my three children. When I asked, she assured me the kids were fine but we weren't.

As I topped the steps to enter the kitchen, she was standing with my computer on the granite counter beside her. "What is this?" As she revealed the image on the screen, my first thought was to blame a pop-up and guilt her for not trusting me like I had so many times before. Little did she know, the image on the screen was just the first ripple of a tsunami that would destroy the very foundation of our marriage and change our lives forever.

As I fumbled trying to remember which story line to use, it became obvious she wasn't interested. She was utterly devastated and heartbroken. This would be the second time in our 12-year marriage I would admit to multiple marital failures.

Just this week, the devastating news that Israel Houghton, the multi Dove and Grammy award-winning worship leader and his wife have called it quits after 20 years of marriage due to a

past marital failure. You can read his full statement [HERE](#).

I'm sure the mud will start slinging and well meaning adolescent "Christians" will start rolling up their sleeves and picking up stones. There will be no shortage soapbox preaching filled with useless speculation and a plethora of self-righteous opinions "as if they will change anything."

How we respond will reveal our arrogance and pride or our understanding God's grace, mercy, and judgment.

What if it was your brother, sister, or a close friend? Would your response be different?

Well Israel is a son, a father, and friend. The guilt and shame he's carried has surely been unbearable. The betrayal she's felt, unfathomable. The Houghton family in some form has changed forever.

How should we respond? Should we join the crowd of stone throwers? How we respond will reveal our arrogance and pride or our understanding God's grace, mercy, and judgment.

Let me suggest, through my own experience, we start with the following:

1. Pray first. Take a vested interest in their family by praying for them instead of being just interested in talking about them. Luke 18:1 tells us we "*ought to always pray and not to lose heart.*" We should pray that the Houghton family not lose heart. Pray they would continue to surround themselves with pastors, friends, and family that would love them unconditionally yet firmly. Even though the depth of pain is great, pray they would forgive themselves and each other. Pray for reconciliation, wisdom, peace, healing, and for their children. Pray.

2. Show grace. To be gracious toward someone doesn't make you an accessory to the offense. While the court of public opinion

will attempt to be the judge and jury, they will never have the appropriate information to hand down a legitimate verdict. Only God and those in their inner circle have the right vantage point. As indicated in his post, Israel has accepted full responsibility and realizes the sobering reality of consequences. *"Be not deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows, that will he also reap" (Gal. 6:7, MEV).*

Sow grace; reap grace. You'll need it one day.

3. Trust God. From the beginning, God's people have sinned against Him. Israel's admitted failure is not a sin against humanity but against the creator of the universe. Although we may feel hurt and angry, ultimately we have to trust that God who has the unambiguous right to pass judgment, waits to be gracious to us (Isaiah 30:18). God still exists and continues to be a father that cares deeply for His children, even those that go astray. He has always proven to be trustworthy. Let's trust the Lord with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding.

Thirteen years has passed since that terrible yet amazing night when my life changed forever. Somehow through the unbearable pain and unfathomable betrayal, my wife chose to stay and be a part of an amazing story of reconciliation.

It took true repentance, unbelievable forgiveness, prayer, grace and trusting that God and His word were true. I hope against hope that the Houghtons can experience what my wife and I have. I hope you can too.

Fear not; fight well.

JT McCraw is the men's pastor at Bethel World Outreach in Brentwood, Tennessee and the founder of the BE MEN Movement, where he provides oversight for this multi-ethnic, multi-site men's ministry, focusing on engaging and equipping men to serve Christ. Presently they have locations in Tennessee, Texas, Florida, Ohio, Louisiana, Alabama and Arizona. JT lives

in Franklin, Tennessee, with his wife of 24 years and their five children. You can follow JT on Twitter @jtmccraw.