

The IHOP Scandal Has Exposed a Deep Need for Repentance

When I first heard about the sexual scandal involving Mike Bickle and the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, Missouri, in December, my initial reaction was defensive. I didn't want to believe the charges. But I cringed on Dec. 12, 2023, when Bickle released his own confession. And my heart sank when details surfaced about another woman who had been involved with Bickle in his earlier years as a youth pastor. It became obvious that there had been a disturbing pattern of sexual abuse at IHOPKC, and with it, a pattern of hiding that abuse.

The IHOP scandal is a harsh reminder that we have a much bigger problem. The worst thing we can do is go back to business as usual when the investigation ends. We need to stop, mourn for the victims, grieve for our own hardness of heart and publicly repent for the sin of sexual abuse.

For more than two decades I've been confronting the abuse of women and girls in developing countries where gender-based violence is common. I work in communities where rape is widespread, sexual violence is normal, polygamy is legal and the forced marriage of underage girls is considered a man's right.

When I start working in a country where men consider women inferior, I always begin with the pastors. I teach them how Jesus elevated women—how He healed bleeding women, defended women who were falsely accused, brought ignored women into the spotlight and empowered women to be vocal witnesses of His Resurrection. Then, I always challenge the men to repent for having hard hearts.

It's a beautiful thing to watch when men from countries such

as Congo, Tanzania, Bolivia, El Salvador or India kneel in front of women and repent for cruelty, domestic abuse, polygamy, abandonment, harassment and other forms of misguided male dominance.

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In one case in 2019, the men from a village in Uganda wept as they renounced a saying their forefathers had passed down to their sons for hundreds of years. That saying was: “Our cows are more valuable than our wives.” The men repented of promoting that idea, and they broke free from centuries of male domination.

The women listening to the public confession wept for joy. They never expected to hear those words in their lifetime.

I believe it’s time for American men to make a similar public confession. I believe these words will be healing for women who have been hurt by men in the church. You don’t have to use the words I’ve written below, but this would be a good place to start:

As men who are supposed to reflect the character of Christ, we acknowledge that, too often, women have been exploited sexually by men in Christian congregations. This predatory behavior has been at times ignored, minimized or even covered up. We repent on behalf of all abusers, and we ask for forgiveness from our sisters.

In some cases, men in the church—including pastors and other ministers—raped women, lured women into sexual relationships, touched women inappropriately, made sexual comments to women or requested sexual favors. Yet God calls men in the church to treat Christian women as our sisters and mothers “in all purity,” according to 1 Timothy 5:2 (NASB). We repent for viewing women as sexual objects instead of valuing them for their character traits, personalities, intellect and

spiritual gifts. We ask for forgiveness.

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We recognize that in some cases, women who came to church seeking help after being sexually abused or violated did not receive the compassion and care they deserved. In some cases we minimized their pain, trivialized their trauma and blamed them rather than praying for their complete healing. We repent for not listening to women's pain or feeling compassion for their loss. We ask for forgiveness.

We also recognize that in some cases, church leaders created an atmosphere of secrecy to enable abusers to continue in their sin. Some pastors or leaders even knowingly allowed abuse to continue, because they didn't have the courage to confront the abusers. Jesus was a defender of women when they were falsely accused—but we have not always been bold enough to defend the women who came to us for help. We repent for our unwillingness to speak out for women when they felt voiceless. We ask for forgiveness.

We also acknowledge that in some churches, abusers used prophetic words or other spiritual gifts to manipulate women into sexual relationships. This is spiritual exploitation of the highest order. We believe any servant of Jesus Christ who uses Scripture or a prophetic message to lure a person into sexual sin should not be in ordained ministry. We repent for any instance of spiritual exploitation or deception to manipulate and control. We ask for forgiveness.

We acknowledge that God created male and female in His image (Gen. 1:27), and that men and women are equal in His sight. Yet because of male pride, many men view women as inferior—and as a result they believe they can coerce, dominate, demean and abuse women physically, emotionally and

spiritually. We affirm that husbands are commanded to show wives honor, and treat them as “fellow heir(s) of the grace of life,” according to 1 Peter 3:7. We repent for all cruelty and abuse associated with male domination, and we repent for any pain we have caused.

God wants men to be strong, but our strength should be in our character, meekness, courage, fatherly care and protective love—not in cruel domination, abusive words, immature bravado or lustful exploitation. May God break our hard hearts and make us more like Jesus.{eoa}

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