

What to Do When Pastors Fail

Frustrated when a high-profile pastor's sins find the light? So is Russell Moore, the head of the Religion and Ethics Committee of the Southern Baptist Association.

"Sometimes I find myself fuming after a leader has fallen at the stupidity of it. Why would he risk his family for this? Why would he jeopardize the witness of Christ?" Moore writes.

From leaders like Darrin Patrick to Mark Driscoll to Tullian Tchividjian, Moore finds the problem not within the pastors, but within himself.

"The sins of others are always more shocking to us than our own sins. We are always able to 'contextualize' our sins, to find justifications for them, to weigh them against alternative sins we aren't committing. That's part of the power of deception. This sort of public scandal can expose how much we are unaware of what it takes to fight against sin," Moore writes.

But Moore isn't the only leader grasping at how to move on when pastors sin.

Shane Idleman offers these five tips for when men fail us:

1. No matter what the endeavor, God must be central. In the case of church planting, men do not call themselves, they become aware of God's calling. Demographic studies and marketing strategies may have their place, and it's good to have a core team with a missional focus, but all of this pales in comparison to the call of God. Only God is able to build, sustain, and edify His church. And He often uses confrontation and exposure to draw us back to Him. This new church plant in Arizona could be powerfully used of God.

2. Humility cannot be overlooked. C.S. Lewis said that "pride

is the last sin to die.” Pride works against us and is the No. 1 liability for Christians, churches and church pastors. After all, we’re going to do things “the right way.” Jealousy, envy and bitterness will keep us from fulfilling God’s call. Humility is fundamental. He guides the humble and teaches them His way (cf. Ps. 25:9). On the flip side, an attitude of constant criticism toward Christian leaders often reveals an inner drive to exalt oneself.

3. The fully surrendered life is crucial. Why do many endeavors fail? Why do many church plants fail? The reasons are many, but I believe that much depends on the spiritual life of the person and/or the pastor in regard to humility and brokenness. Prayer is the first sign of a healthy church. I’m not referring to a five-minute devotional, I’m referring to a deep devotional life focused on seeking God. Churches don’t need more marketing plans, demographic studies, or giving campaigns; we need men filled with the Spirit of God. Sermons should not come from pop-psychology or the latest fad; they must come from the prayer closet where God prepares the messengers before we prepare the message.

4. Ask, “Do I have a critical spirit?” This could also translate into a cynical or negative attitude. This is one aspect of Jesus’ words, “Judge not, that you be not judged” (Matt. 7:1). If you have a judgmental attitude, you’ve already turned a deaf ear to God’s leading. Ironically, I’ve noticed that those highly educated in biblical doctrine can often be the most critical, cynical and negative. We do not practice what we preach. Of all the books I’ve read, the sermons I’ve heard, the people I’ve talked with, and the devastation I’ve seen firsthand, one common denominator was present: critical, divisive people who do not forgive or release bitterness, anger and hurt never experience freedom, happiness or true restoration.

5. Love is a “choice,” not a “feeling.” If love is the greatest commandment, it should be our first priority. Love

hopes for and believes the best in others ... it is demonstrated through our actions and our words. Strive to develop the type of love that protects and defends others. For instance, why not believe that God is going to use Mark's past to help others?

As for SBC's Moore, dealing with pastoral failure falls into similar guidelines.

"One of the issues most difficult after a pastoral fall is a temptation to a loss of faith. That's especially true if the fallen leader was your minister. There's a spectrum of these (kinds) of falls. Some of them are temporary stumbles. Like Peter, they are restored after discipline and care. Some of them are, by the nature of the sin, disqualifying permanently for ministry. Like Moses, they enter God's kingdom but don't carry on their vocation. Others reveal predatory false teachers, like those Paul warns about in 2 Timothy 3. The church must be wise and brave to know the difference between these scenarios and respond accordingly," Moore writes.

"In all of those cases, though, the faith delivered to the saints can withstand the falls delivered by sinners. The church is not dependent on you or me or any pastor or leader but on the promises of Jesus, which He will keep with or without us," he concludes.