

Why Leaders Fall Into Sin

There is an epidemic of moral failure in leadership today. Why is this happening, and what can we do to turn it around?

The church today is facing an alarming trend of moral failure among its leaders. For years my wife, Trisha, and I have walked many ministers who have experienced a moral failure through a restoration process. It seems that with each couple, the pattern in their relationship that preceded the fall was similar. In earlier years, they had a call of God upon their lives, a passion in their marriage and zeal for the ministry. But somewhere along the way, misplaced priorities led to a gradual decline in intimacy, and ministry began to take precedence over relationship.

This was my and Trisha's story. After only a short season of pastoring, it appeared to her that I loved the ministry more than her. Ministry became my passion. It met my need for significance, self-worth, affirmation and acceptance. I was very good at helping others, but I felt inadequate in convincing my family I loved them more than ministry. So I gave myself to doing what I did best—ministry—and I walked down the path that easily could have led to moral failure.

No one makes plans to serve faithfully in ministry, grow distant from his spouse and end up in moral failure. Before a minister falls, he has usually tripped over a series of four stumbling blocks. It may be wise to examine these pitfalls and see if there are any needed course corrections.

CAUSES OF FAILURE

Most leaders who have fallen followed a similar pattern on the way down. Let's take a closer look at the four common stumbling blocks that often precede a fall.

1. Ministering out of an unhealed need for love and acceptance. Ministry is meant to be an overflow of the love we have experienced in God and with family. The lives and ministries of the fallen ministers I have worked with were not primarily characterized by being comfortable with love and intimacy in their homes. There were unconscious strongholds (ungodly beliefs) in their minds, wills and emotions that exalted themselves above the experience of God's love (see 2 Cor. 10:4-6).

I was raised in a home in which love and acceptance were expressed often based on my performance in sports, at school and in daily life. My response to this negative motivation was to build a habit structure of thinking that said, "I must perform well enough to earn love and acceptance." When I didn't, I did not feel I had a safe and secure place in my parents' hearts, and I closed my spirit to love.

Because I was created for love and intimacy but rarely opened my heart to receive it, in my teens and 20s I sought intimacy in pornography, masturbation and immorality. I was not comfortable with intimacy with my wife. After I came to the Lord, I laid the pornography down as an act of religious fervor and discipline. But the need for love and intimacy was still there, so my unhealed need surfaced in other areas—hyper-religious activity and the need to be needed.

Ministry became the source by which I sought to get my need met. One church crisis after another continued to interrupt family times of intimacy and fun. I became addicted to helping people and to hype and crisis in order to find the adrenaline rushes I fed upon. But it left me with an angry edge at home and with anyone who did not agree with me. Ministering from my unhealed need set me up for stumbling block No. 2.

2. Living in independence and isolation. Outwardly, in the eyes of the church and the community, I was anointed and upright. But I was not real, open and transparent. Inwardly, I

lived for the praise of man and easily took offense at the slightest rejection or challenge to my authority.

I was jealous of others' success in ministry. Thus, I wore a religious mask, pretending to be more spiritual than I really was, and excusing my faults and weaknesses by blaming my family and others for anything that went wrong. No one knew the real me. To admit I had a problem meant I must be broken and deserving of punishment.

I thought if people really knew who I was, they would reject me, so I could not let anybody get too close. I found security and comfort by controlling my emotions and relationships in order to protect myself from a sense of rejection and failure.

There was no accountability in my life. I could not receive admonition or correction without seeing it as rejection. Therefore, I was not open to receive anyone to minister to my deep personal needs. I ended up in denial: "I'm OK. I have no need because I am spending so much time in prayer, study and doing so many good religious things." There is nothing easier than self-deception!

Once I chose darkness over light, intimacy with God was greatly hindered (see Rom. 13:12-14; 1 John 1:5-7). Because I was so motivated by works, discipline and duty instead of by love, I was out of touch with the needs of the average person in my church. I began to drive them, trying to get them to meet up to my rigid standards and expectations.

What I had to do to feel good about myself was what I required others to do for them to have any sense that I valued and approved of them. I worked hard to please everyone and to build the church in order to prove to others that I had value and worth. This only served to unconsciously lead me more deeply into the third stumbling block.

3. Being more committed to ministry than to family. As the stress and demands of ministry increased, I found myself

coming home each day with no energy left to love. Often it seemed that life would have been better if I did not have to go home at night. The community loved the work I was doing. But about my wife I would ask myself: Why can't she appreciate the hours I spend daily in the Word and prayer? Doesn't she see the sacrifices I make, the souls I am winning and all I am doing for God?

Communication at home began to break down and often was no more than faultfinding and criticism. We became very dysfunctional. Rarely did we trust each other enough to talk about our true feelings; we centered our conversations around ministry and children. But at church we made sure the family wore their plastic smiles.

Being more committed to ministry than to love, I spent many hours giving away to others what rightly belonged to my wife and children. Many promises were broken as I prioritized others' needs over those of my family. This left my wife and children with unconscious resentment and anger toward me. With that awaiting me at home, it was so much easier to just spend more time ministering to others. After all, they always affirmed me for it.

Tripping over the first three stumbling blocks had finally set me up to fall face first into the fourth—and I never saw it coming.

4. Finding comfort in someone other than one's spouse. With a breakdown in communication and intimacy at home, there always seemed to be women who appreciated the anointing on my life. I found delight in being with them and in their affirmations of my ministry. They were so easy to talk with about my dreams and fears, and I thought they understood me better than my wife did. When Trisha asked why I seemed to light up around certain people but seemed so down when I got home, I became defensive, and it only added to the tension at home and my self-deception.

God designed my wife to be a physical and emotional haven of rest, and a place where I receive His love and comfort through the intimacy we share (see Prov. 5:18-19; Eph. 5:25-33). When I share my private and intimate concerns with someone other than my wife or find more delight in being with another woman than my wife, then I am giving to someone else the position of comforting me in the natural realm. That is spiritual adultery.

Before a full moral failure could ensnare me, Trisha began experiencing depression, partially from stuffing her anger for so many years. I ended up in spiritual burn-out, and we resigned the ministry. I finally began to hurt enough that I opened up to a friend and pastor, Phillip Miles. Trisha opened up to his wife, Lynn. If not for their patience, unconditional love and grace toward us, we may have gone the path of so many other ministers who ended up falling.

STEPS TO RESTORATION

How should the church respond when someone falls? “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1, NKJV). Restoration is God’s plan. But God is more concerned with the restoration of intimacy and the overall well-being of the leader and his family than He is with the restoration of a leader’s ministry.

God forgives the fallen leader immediately when he demonstrates genuine repentance. But forgiveness and healing are two different things. The leader and his family are usually overwhelmed with shame, embarrassment, loneliness, depression and personal torment. They may try to compensate for their feelings through hyper-religious activity, which will increase their insecurities and fears.

Our experience in ministering to these situations through the

years has shown that when there is a quick restoration to ministry without a timely season away so the leader can work through issues and become free from his value and acceptance being wrapped up in his ministry, the marital crisis is often repeated a few years down the line.

For lasting healing of the minister's life and family, Trisha and I feel a leader must willingly step aside for at least one year from all ministry and positions so the minister's focus can be placed on healing, finding his identity in God's love and restoring intimacy with his family. This is usually only effective if there is genuine repentance: Deeply convicted, the fallen minister chooses to walk in the light, and willingly comes forward and exposes his sin, willing to do whatever it takes to bring healing to those he has hurt; he doesn't make excuses or seek to put the blame on others.

It is not possible to have the same guidelines of restoration for each situation. Personalities are different. Their depth of repentance is different. The depth of their unhealed needs is different. But here are some practical steps (not all inclusive) to consider when seeking to bring restoration:

****The fallen minister should express an uninhibited confession of the moral failure to the ministry board.**

****He should turn in a written resignation, citing moral decay in his life (no details necessary).**

****He should make a public resignation and confession of moral decay (no details necessary).**

****The ministry board should: emphasize forgiveness, compassion and restoration; give a generous severance package to help the minister's family get resettled; help establish a restoration committee of respected Christian leaders; and help establish the family in a new church, with one of the restoration committee members giving oversight.**

****The restoration committee should:** help the fallen minister find work in the secular field; provide counseling and ministry to the marriage and family; provide weekly accountability and prayer partners; and determine the goals, boundaries, qualifications and length of time for the restoration process. When the fallen leader has re-qualified himself and his marriage shows the fruit of restoration, then a public restoration service should be held in which he is pronounced restored. The committee should then help the couple locate a new avenue for service and ministry.

Things are different, however, when a minister is caught in sin and unwillingly exposed or made to confess. When this happens, there is often little repentance, only remorse.

Remorse rarely changes the problem. The person is grieved over the loss of his reputation and identity. He may seek to salvage his name, position and salary through blame-shifting, justifying or diminishing the depth of his involvement and seriousness of his moral condition. In this case, the restoration process to ministry should take much longer, or there is a risk of the problem being repeated.

Our hearts should be for the forgiveness and restoration of our fallen leaders. But it should also be for the healing of the church. We need a restoration process that will release greater integrity, intimacy and love in our families and the church, overflowing into a hurting world that is searching for truth manifested in forgiveness, compassion and genuine, self-sacrificial love.

PARADIGM SHIFT

There is a need for a paradigm shift in some of our values in ministry in order to abate moral decay.

****We must value intimacy more than ministry.** The Word makes it clear that our primary qualification for ministry and our relationship with God is evidenced by our relationships with

our families and the degree to which we abide in love and intimacy (see Matt. 22:37-40; 1 John 4:7-18; Eph. 5:25-33; 1 Pet. 3:1-7; 1 Tim. 3:4-8).

****We must value being seekers more than being speakers.** Our study and prayer times need to be motivated by a heart seeking for love and intimacy, not by a desire to receive information or anointing for ministry (see 1 Tim. 1:5-7; 1 John 4:19-20; John 13:34-35).

****We must value a life of humility more than a life of visibility.** “He must increase, but I must decrease” (see John 3:30; Phil. 2:3-9; Matt. 18:4).

****We must value a life of integrity more than charismatic personality.** Integrity is an issue of the heart that makes daily decisions to integrate God’s core values into life’s daily actions. God values integrity above personality because it is foundational to building security, trust and intimacy in relationships (see Ps. 15:1-2; Prov. 10:9; 1 Chr. 29:17).

****We must value interdependence more than independence.** To whom are you accountable? Have we become like the Corinthian church, which had many teachers but few fathers? And as a result, have we focused our lives on gifts and power but are left walking in lustful passions of the flesh? (see 1 Cor. 4:14-21; Eccl. 4:9-12).

****We must value impartation more than information.** We must focus on being the message more than preaching the message. We impart what we are long before people put to practice what we preach. Paul’s ministry was not focused on persuasive speech but on the power of impartation (see 1 Cor. 2:4-5; 1 Thess. 2:7-8, 11-12).

When God wanted to bring revival to Nineveh, the most sinful city in the world, who did He have more trouble with—the man of God sent to the city or the city itself? When Jonah began to see things from God’s point of view, he repented of his

fear of failure and rejection, and the city of Nineveh experienced revival.

Revival is needed in our land today. Could it be held back by the love deficit within Christian leaders that has opened the door for many to pursue their need for unconditional love and acceptance in counterfeit affections of the flesh: passions, position, possessions and power? Is it possible that when our motivations and values as leaders come in line with God's, the church will move from purity, to presence, to power—and the revival will come that we so desperately need?

Jack Frost and his wife, Trisha, founded Shiloh Place Ministries () with a vision to provide a place of healing and restoration for those in ministry.

Tips for Standing Strong

Jack Frost shares eight steps you can take to prevent a moral failure from occurring in your own life.

Here are some daily practical choices I make to help protect my marriage and ministry from moral failure:

1. I choose to embrace the conviction that ministry should be an overflow of relationship and what God is doing within my home and family. I seek to make family needs priority over ministry needs. Several times a week my wife, Trisha, and I share in conversational prayer and intimate discussion.
2. I choose to make time each week to play and have fun with my family. We go to the beach, the lake, or play cards and games.
3. I choose to seek seasons of rest and renewal in the Lord

separate from ministry. Several times a year, I take several days for solitude, fasting and contemplative prayer. Remember, Jesus ministered out of relationship and was motivated by His Father's voice, not by the needs of others. (see John 5:19).

4. I choose to have an open heart and to be transparent in relationships. I encourage my friends and prayer partners to ask the hard questions about my personal life. I no longer hide my faults, fears and insecurities from my wife, prayer partners and mentors but choose to walk in the light (see 1 John 1:7).

5. I choose to share the deep desires and needs of my heart with my wife first, before I share them with anyone else (except mentors) or in a group setting. In the 1980s, when I struggled so much with intimacy, this was difficult for me to do. So I began with my prayer partners and counselors (of the same sex), and it began to slowly develop with my wife. What helped me enter into this was reading a marriage book with her and discussing how it was speaking to me.

6. I choose to share with my wife the times I feel weak, have defiling or tempting thoughts, or if I suspect someone is seeking to attach themselves to me in an impure way. We agree together in prayer that no defilement take place. We pray that the cross be between me and the one whom I feel pulling on me. Trisha also daily prays a hedge of protection around me.

7. I choose to avoid ministering to the opposite sex without someone else in the room with me. If at any time I see a name on my calendar or someone during a ministry time who gives me "warm fuzzies," I refer that person to someone else for ministry. I set a personal boundary not to be alone with a member of the opposite sex.

8. I choose to be honest with myself. When I sense that self-love is resurfacing, my motivations are impure, when I cannot find rest in my family, or when I seem to be putting blame on

everyone else, I acknowledge I am in need.

I initiate a meeting with my mentors and/or prayer partners several times a month. Then, at least every year or two, I seek mature and qualified Christian counselors or ministers of healing prayer and receive personal ministry.

I believe the future of my marriage, family and ministry depends on my honesty with myself and my openness to receive ministry and admonition.