

What to Do When a Leader Falls

Many believers are shocked when they hear of a leader's moral failure. Godly safeguards can protect against a fall.

I was on an airplane between Louisville, Ky., and Dallas, trying to relax between speaking engagements, in the first week of October 2006. As I looked at the Arkansas countryside below, an inward voice suddenly spoke to me: "I am about to shake this nation."

Within weeks the shaking began. My phone rang on a Thursday morning in November. A serious media firestorm was erupting at a church in Colorado, and one of my dear pastor friends was at the center of the controversy.

The church I have pastored for 25 years (Bethany World Prayer Center in Baton Rouge, La.) had helped plant that church 21 years earlier, and I had served as an overseer from the beginning. I knew I had to respond immediately. Within hours I found myself in an office in Colorado, surrounded by media and confused church members.

Our group of four overseers saw fit to lovingly remove the leader and help him seek restoration in his life. Fortunately, he had established good government and clear guidelines for discipline.

Today God is working both in the church and in the family of that leader, but the pain and hurt that both the pastor and his congregation endured is hard to describe. That incident shook America, and the rapid exposures in the spiritual, political, athletic and business worlds have continued to rock our nation.

How did the church get so dysfunctional? And how do we turn

the situation around?

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team by Patrick Lencioni outlines the reasons teams fail in the corporate arena. I believe we can identify five dysfunctions in the church that are perpetuating the cycle of failure in the American church. These dysfunctions stem from the loss of the fivefold ministry in its full expression (see Eph. 4:11).

The fivefold offices are intended to keep the church healthy and mature, but when they are neglected or abused, the church spins into chaos. Let's re-examine them in light of the current environment.

Lack of Apostolic Oversight

The first dysfunction of the American church is that it is unfathered. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church: "In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:15-17, NKJV). But we live in a fatherless society where dads are often anonymous, absent or abusive.

In his book *Wild at Heart*, John Eldredge discusses the concept of a "father wound," which he says is caused by rejection and lack of affirmation from one's father, which leaves deep scars in adults. His premise is that this father wound causes adults to become posers, people who are untrue to themselves in one of two ways. Either they become aggressive and live recklessly in order to prove themselves and receive affirmation, or they become passive and fear all new challenges because of a lack of it.

I have met many pastors and leaders suffering from this dysfunction. They mistake a natural gift for a God-given anointing and use their gift to impress, for affirmation's sake. But there is a big difference between a gift and an anointing. A gift can operate through connections, finances,

entrepreneurship, education and even manipulation, but the anointing flows from brokenness and transparency.

If they have no “fathers” in their lives, gifted leaders often turn to others to meet their crying need for affirmation. Despite their obvious gifts, inwardly they feel insecure. Their gifts bring them far, but their character cannot preserve their accomplishments.

Jacob in the Old Testament is the perfect example of the type of leader I’m describing. His father loved Jacob’s brother, Esau, while Jacob’s mother favored Jacob. In an effort to gain his father’s validation and blessing, Jacob posed as his brother in his father’s tent, putting skins on his arms and pretending to be Esau.

How many pastors and leaders are walking around with “skins on their arms” in order to impress someone? I thank the Lord for my father, whose 63 years of ministry and marriage to my mother have provided not only an example but also a constant source of affirmation for me during my almost 40 years of ministry.

The New Testament is full of examples of spiritual fathering. Paul took Timothy, son of a gentile father and Jewish mother, and mentored him into a faithful man. Jesus Himself received His Father’s validation in the waters of baptism. If the Son of God needed His Father’s affirmation, how desperately must we also need it?

Our traditional structures of oversight must shift from bureaucracy to fathering. American pastors and leaders must identify the persons functioning as fathers in their lives and receive the affirmation they need. If every pastor and leader in America were fathered and mentored, this core dysfunction would disappear, and a new generation of leaders full of boldness, confidence and transparency would emerge.

Lack of the Prophetic Word

Throughout the Old Testament and New Testament, the ministry of the prophet was to bring God's word of alignment without fear of reprisal. Jeremiah, Nathan and Elijah all shared an uncompromised accountability for kings and leaders.

The church today, however, has become a "non-prophet" organization. Our idea of a weird, bearded, wild-eyed prophet pronouncing doom has kept us from this vital connection to God's opinion of our ministries, motives, marriages and money. Just as we need the affirmation and governmental structure of the apostle, we need the correction and confrontation of the prophet.

David was a great king but not a very good father. He never asked his rebellious son Adonijah why he behaved as he did. Eli, also, never confronted or restrained his sons as they misappropriated offerings and cavorted with temple women. In similar ways, the lack of discipline in many pastors' families has bred an entitlement mentality and a feeling of being above the law in their ministries.

When pastors make themselves accountable to others in authority, they must agree to abide by the predetermined consequences if they default morally, doctrinally, financially or ethically. They must be willing to abide by the decisions of their spiritual oversight. They must initiate the process and remain in the process, not excusing themselves by judging the motives of those in authority over them.

Like David, their attitude must be: "Let the righteous strike me; it shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; it shall be as excellent oil" (Ps. 141:5). Traveling ministries, parachurch ministries, pastors, television ministries, Bible teachers, youth pastors and worship leaders—all must seek prophetic accountability and discipline.

Lack of Evangelistic Thrust

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you

that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain'" (John 15:16). These immortal words from Jesus address the third dysfunction of the American church. We think that the goal of ministry is growth—"nickels and noses," as someone aptly described it. However, filling a church, packing a pew or even recording decisions is not necessarily what Jesus had in mind. His final words to His church were to "'go therefore and make disciples of all the nations'" (Matt. 28:19).

Currently, much of the "growth" in churches is not real growth but transfer growth from church to individuals change churches, the net growth for the kingdom of God is zero. True growth occurs only when you make a disciple who can make a disciple.

Evangelism must not stop with the prayer of commitment; it must disciple every new convert into a faithful man or woman who can convert others. "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).

Disciple-making moves you from addition to multiplication. You no longer seek attendees or members because you have multipliers, people who have matured and can reproduce themselves. That is true evangelism, and Paul practiced a four-step method of it in his apostolic ministry.

He outlines this method in Colossians 1:28: "Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (emphasis added). Preaching is the first phase, but Paul continues with "warning," "teaching" and "presenting." To win a soul brings addition; to train that soul to win a soul brings multiplication.

Lack of Pastoral Care

The healing and deliverance of believers is the work of the pastor, the fourth of the fivefold ministry callings. A pastor

sees his members not as numbers but as gifted, talented leaders whose potential must be released. David prayed, “‘Heal my soul’” (Ps. 41:4) and then took 300 men who were in debt, distress and discontent (see 1 Sam. 22:2) and formed them into mighty warriors.

An unhealed church has deep inner wounds that only the cross can heal. But in many of our churches, the cross is considered excess baggage, an awkward holdover from the last century that does not relate to the iPhone generation. We hide it, disguise it and move past it, seeking instead to entertain and impress—while our members continue to divorce, look at pornography and raise rebellious, wild children.

In the story of the Good Samaritan, the Samaritan not only resuscitated the stranger but also “bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he ... brought him to an inn, and took care of him” (Luke 10:34). The Good Samaritan represents a paradigm shift in our number-crunching, parking-lot-counting mentality. It moves beyond the weak idea of follow-up that implies a person’s praying a prayer and signing a card effectively deals with all the emotional scars that took a lifetime to create.

Week after week as I stand in the lobby of my church shaking hands with our members, I look into the faces of the thousands walking by and think: Are they conquering temptation? Are their children warriors of faith? Are their extended families saved? What inner battles are they fighting behind the smile? What habits are they trapped in?

Let’s heal them, pastors, through the cross, and then let’s do the final thing needed to restore the dysfunctional church: Let’s go back to the Bible.

Lack of Biblical Teaching

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for

instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). This passage gives insight into why we are in the mess we are in: a lack of teaching. We are awash in tapes, books, conferences and clinics, but how much of the actual Scriptures does the average American believer know, understand and commit to memory?

My conclusion as a pastor is that we have so abandoned expositional preaching that we have an entire generation that is a "mile wide and an inch deep." Our sermonettes have produced "Christianettes."

In May 2006 the Lord spoke to me about restoring the teaching of the Scriptures. In response, I began teaching the entire Old Testament on weekends and the entire New Testament on Wednesday evenings. Additionally, I took a hard look at every program and department in our church and asked myself one question: Is this program teaching the Scriptures? If it wasn't, we modified it or removed it.

The Scriptures must become preeminent in our children's churches, youth groups and services. Only then can the church mature.

It is not too late for pastors and leaders to stem the tide of moral, financial and ethical decline in the church. We can take our nation back. A fresh commitment to fathering, correcting, multiplying, healing and teaching can restore the New Testament foundations that made us strong.

Restoring the fivefold ministry will require radical shifts in thought and action. But it will also prevent the judgment of God from sweeping this land and destroying the greatest missions base of all time.

In the midst of all that is wrong, there is a remnant of fivefold ministry leaders committed to authentic, relevant, biblical, accountable leadership. They are those who have

stayed true to God and not forsaken their covenant with Him. This mighty remnant must arise and come to the forefront in restoring integrity to American ministry. Are you part of that remnant?

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