

What We Can Learn From Calvary Chapel Pastor Bob Coy's Moral Failure

I first met **Bob Coy** 25 years ago on my summer break from seminary. He was a guest on my dad's TV talk show, *FeedBack*, conversing on the subject of evangelism.

This young, fiery, hilarious transplant from Las Vegas made quite an impression and practically stole the show. He stood out on the panel of high-minded clergy, they wearing their Sunday best and he in his jeans and T-shirt. He was whimsical and passionate, and it was no surprise to me that in just a few short years, he would build Calvary Chapel into one of the largest congregations in Fort Lauderdale—a city infamous for church-plant failure.

I've lived in the Ft. Lauderdale community on and off for nearly three decades, and I've been witnessed to four times—every time by individuals who called **Calvary Chapel** home. Bob made being a Jesus-follower natural—no pretense, no weirdness, no ceremony. His folksy, long-winded, humor-laced, verse-by-verse Bible expositions broke most of the rules for modern-day homiletic relevancy. He didn't care, and it didn't matter. He could break the rules not only because he was an exceptionally gifted orator, but more importantly because he was just being Bob Coy.

Through the years our paths crossed often, as the **OneHope** offices are just a few short miles from Calvary Chapel's sprawling campus. A number of our staff call the church their home, with several of their children also attending the school.

On several occasions I invited Bob to share with visiting pastors from across America and around the world. Most wanted

to know what the secret was to building one of the largest churches in America. His answer was always consistent: "I can't tell you." He believed God would give every sincere, **praying** pastor a unique vision for their city.

You can't argue with Bob's formula and the good it has done for Broward County, Fla. I remember when national attention focused on the Boy Scouts losing their public park accessibility for taking a stand against homosexual Scout leaders. Most churches were gearing up to fight and picket. Instead, Bob took an offering and opened up Calvary's fields.

I've observed **Calvary Chapel** as an informed outsider, and although I haven't always agreed with all of Bob's theology, praxis or organizational leadership, I have always rejoiced that **Calvary Chapel** was in my city, shining as the brightest of lights and the most savory salt.

My heart sank last week when I was informed that Bob would be resigning from his pastoral position due to moral failure. I hurt for him, his wife and kids, the church and us—the community of Christ in South Florida and beyond. I've experienced this hurt with close friends, OneHope partner churches and even family members far too often in my lifetime, and I don't underestimate the anguish, pain and disrepute that this sin inflicts on us all. I also know that it sets in motion a cycle of response:

- *Denial or affirmation:* "I can't believe it" or "I kind of thought that/suspected."
- *Anger:* "How could he be so selfish?" or "I can't believe they won't let him stay."
- *Justifying:* "If only he or we or they would have ..."
- *Depression:* "I'm so hurt/sad" or "I just want to give up" as well as "I miss him/them/the way it was."
- *Acceptance:* "I'm coping" or "It's time to move on."

I'm already seeing the best and worst of these expressions in

our community. Most are understandable. But two types of responses are unacceptable for those of us who call ourselves believers: joy and self-righteousness.

I've encountered both of these unacceptable responses in the few short days since this somber announcement and am painfully reminded that we are all at some level disgruntled, disillusioned and abused people. We all have failures, hurts and disappointments that we carry with us like sores—some open, exposed and raw, others covered and hidden. So when someone like Bob—who seems to have exceeded the expectations of almost everyone around him—fails, a nasty, vile part of our fallen nature wants to revel in his failure in order to feel better about our own.

However justifying or soothing that feeling of condescension might be as it wells up within you, I urge you to identify it and dismiss it for what it is—a satanic ploy to destroy you and the body of Christ. Any joyful inclination that one might feel in the failure of another is in itself a moral failure. As a friend of mine pointed out to me, “Once you do that, you switch camps—maybe not permanently ... but a switch nonetheless. Satan is overwhelmed with joy when we fail—let's not rejoice with him but in the amazing God that we serve whose very name is Redemption.”

Galatians 6 clearly states what the Christian's response is and is not to be in this situation: “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load” (vv. 1-5, ESV).

This week, I have heard members of the body conjecture as to

all manner of reasons why they think Bob fell. Maybe it was governance, dispensationalism, salary, multisite strategy, lack of accountability, something in his past life, his friends, denomination, Satan, personality. I have even heard some of the most callous, judgmental and flat-out ludicrous “reasons” for why Bob fell.

You know what? He’s a sinner, just like me and just like you. Does this obfuscate him from discipline and judgment by those in authority over him? *Absolutely not*. He has a long, rocky, uphill road to walk to restore his life, marriage and relationship with his kids, family and friends. I don’t know if he will ever be restored to ministry. That loss may be a natural consequence of his sin. What I do know is that I **pray** for him to have a miraculous season of grace as he is first and foremost a brother in faith. The rest of his faith journey, just like yours and mine after any type of sin or failure, is yet to be written by God’s grace.

Many people have been asking those of us close to the leadership at **Calvary Chapel** for the exact details of Bob’s failure, claiming they need or deserve to know. I feel that since he has confessed and disqualified himself and since there is no disputing, fighting or defending his actions, more does not need to be revealed, confronted or publicly disciplined.

Less than two weeks ago, when my uncle, David Crabtree, died, I wrote for his obituary, “He was building mega-churches before people knew what they were.” My uncle was one of the single greatest communicators I’ve ever heard. His whimsical humor is legendary. He accomplished a lot. The memories I will hold most dear, however, won’t be of his younger years of ministerial :success,” but of his later life, as I saw a deep spirituality filled with overflowing love to everyone he encountered.

What I didn’t mention in his obituary was that decades before,

he had experienced a moral failure and nearly lost everything. Less than a week ago, I sat in his memorial service with hot tears flowing down my cheeks as former parishioners, friends, family and his faithful and adoring wife paid him honor—not because he was perfect but because he was forgiven, and out of a grateful heart to those who loved him, most of all his Savior, Jesus, his gratitude and grace ran like a river into all of our lives.

I pray that honor for the Coys, for Calvary Chapel, for the bride of Christ in South Florida and for all of us who live under the mercy and grace of our Lord. This is not primarily the story of the fall of a megapastor; it is primarily the story of megasinners, of which I also am one.

Rob Hoskins *is the president of OneHope. He was born to missionary parents, which is probably where his passion to spread the truth in God's Word began. He and his family—wife Kim and daughters Diandra and Natasha—live near OneHope's global headquarters in Pompano Beach, Fla., but their hearts beat on every continent around the world.*