



Catching the FALLEN

By Al Ells, M.C

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness..."

— Galatians 6:1

At some point during their career, most ministers will be forced to deal with the failure and removal of a key staff member, associate, elder or fellow religious leader. The accompanying responsibilities of dismissing and replacing the fallen leader, notifying the congregation, and doing damage control on all fronts are uncomfortable, controversial, and delicate to manage.

Sadly, sexual sin is the most common cause of a leader's failure. However, other problems such as theft, substance abuse, severe marital issues and rebellion may also warrant immediate removal of the person from the position.

What should be done when someone so respected has fallen to such a position of disgrace? Ministers as a group are redemption-minded. None of us likes the idea of having to remove someone from his or her position. And if we have to, we want to pursue restoration and healing of the fallen one, if possible.

Restoration is a worthwhile endeavor, which requires wisdom, or the results may be worse than the initial offense. Consider the following tips when undertaking a project to restore someone to fruitfulness and ministry:

Make sure the person is a good candidate for restoration.

While many are sorry they have sinned, only some are truly penitent and willing to be restored. A candidate for restoration must declare and exemplify a willingness to do whatever is necessary in order to be healed. He or she must be

broken in spirit. This means that the individual must surrender control of his or her life to God and those in authority, and recognize that he or she got into trouble by not doing so in the first place. Unwillingness on any part of these efforts is a signal that the person is not ready for restoration.

Strike a balance between public and private disclosure.

A too public or too negative declaration of transgression and the resulting shame makes restoration harder for offender and family, while serving no fruitful purpose for the church. A good rule of thumb is to share only generalities within the individual's circle of influence or audience of participation.

For example, if the youth minister of a large church has committed adultery, then deal with it within the sphere of the youth ministry and the families and youth who have been directly affected. On the other hand, if the Sunday morning worship leader has fallen, inform the entire congregation.

Involve the key people in the fallen individual's life.

No matter the cause of the downfall, restoration requires a coordinated effort of the key people in the individual's life. If a male leader has been unfaithful, his wife, possibly his adult children, his pastoral authority, a counselor, an assigned elder, and his best friends must be involved.

We are all members of a formal and informal community of believers. The deeper the process delves into the life of the transgressor, the better the chances of success. Again, if the person is unwilling to allow this type of cooperation, he is not ready for restoration.

Appoint a restoration team to oversee the process.

Gather a group of individuals willing to serve as a restoration team. Appoint a leader, provide the team with resources and charge them with the task of diligently seeking the restoration of the fallen one. A team of three or more will always work better than the pastor alone. Teamwork provides perspective, shares the workload, helps break through denial and defensiveness, and allows for better accountability.

Choose respected and qualified individuals for the team. For example, if the problem involves substance abuse, find people who know something about how

God heals drug or alcohol abuse. Including a minister or Christian leader from another church who has experience and is willing to serve may also prove helpful.

Have a written plan of restoration.

The team should work out a plan to follow. It is best to write it out and give a copy to the fallen leader. Bob Mumford, a known Christian leader, advises that a sound plan should be built around the following six goals:

1. Forgive the person before you do anything else.
2. Suspend the person from his or her duties – take him or her out of the front lines of battle.
3. Instruct the fallen person – counsel, teach, disciple etc.
4. Support the individual and his family. This means emotionally, spiritually and especially financially.
5. Test the person when you think he or she is ready. If he or she passes the test, great! If not, reassess.
6. Restore the individual to a place and position of ministry with your full support and announcement that he or she has been restored.

Have patience – restoration takes time.

The sin at hand did not develop overnight, but most likely built up over time. Therefore, it will take time—weeks, months, maybe years—to undo. The fallen leader will need ample amounts of prayer, humility and counsel to overcome the problem. Be patient, forthright with the individual and diligent. A restored leader has a life message that can touch countless other lives. This is what the gospel is all about.

Educate yourself and the team.

The following are good resources for fallen leaders.

- *Restoring Fallen Leaders* by Jack Hayford
- *After Shock: What to Do When Leader (and others) Fail You* by Ted Kitchens
- *Rebuilding Your Broken World* by Gordon MacDonald
- *Restoration Manual: A Workbook for Restoring Fallen Ministers and Religious Leaders* by Thomas L. Pedigo
- *Fallen Shepherd, Scattered Sheep* by F. LeGard Smith