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Ministry After a Leadership Failure: Principles for Transitional Worship Leader

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by

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Abstract

Despite much information and attention given to senior leadership transitions after a moral failure in leadership, there is little information regarding supporting pastoral staff moral failures and how to lead a ministry department to a place of healing and restoration. This thesis examined the distinct challenges of transitional leaders assuming the role of guiding a worship ministry department through a previous leader's moral failure. This study analyzes commonalities and themes to demonstrate the unique challenges the worship ministry faces apart from the church. Literature and research on leadership transitions due to moral failures tend to focus on senior pastoral leadership. While this information proves relevant, it does not provide insight into the role and methods needed to support pastoral staff in difficult transitions. Exploring the cause of the moral failure is not pertinent to this exploration of transitional leadership; rather, it is the incoming leader's journey to restoring trust, righteousness, and health. This analysis captures the assumptions, actions, and reactions of leaders who have effectively led a worship ministry in the context of a transition due to a previous leader's moral failure. This qualitative study is essential for developing a methodology and plan of action to assist leadership in navigating these troubled times of transition.

Keywords: moral failure, worship pastor, worship leader, transitional leader

Dedication/Acknowledgments

This project is dedicated to my wife Jessica, children Makenzie and Tanner, and the ministry call. I am humbled and honored to be called husband, father, and pastor. Thank you for sharing this work with me. May the information within these pages strengthen ministers and give glory to God.

I want to acknowledge the River Oak Church of God, Danville, VA, where I serve as the Lead Pastor. Their prayers, support, and encouragement have been incredible throughout the Doctoral process.

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Abbreviations

IRB: Institutional Review Board

SBC: Southern Baptist Convention

COG: Church of God, Cleveland, TN

AOG: Assembly of God, Springfield, Missouri

Chapter One: Introduction

Background

Leadership transitions are complex; however, moral failure is even more strenuous for those navigating the challenges of a new leadership role. Leaders in the specific role of the worship pastor are in a support leadership position that is subject to a higher authority and have tasks that may prove difficult in the supportive pastoral role.[1] The modern Christian church has been ravaged by moral scandal. From the mid-nineteen-eighties through now, names like Swaggart, Baker, Haggard, Driscoll, and Lentz have been associated with scandal and hypocrisy.[2] These are just a few examples of high-profile Christian leaders who fell into the traps of sin. However, there are examples of unknown ministers throughout the church that are less known and significantly impact the church. In light of these moral crises that occur, churches are left with feelings of anger, rejection, disappointment, and a sense of loss.[3] Those who serve in vocational ministry support roles are an integral part of the church and how it operates.[4] Individuals serving in the support roles of ministry have great influence and connection to those they serve within the church body as a whole and in the respective department assigned to their care.[5]

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[1] Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson, *Leading from the Second Chair*, (San Francisco, CA: Wiley + ORM, 2012), 20.

[2] Benjamin Rossi, "Hypocrisy is Vicious, Value-Expressing Inconsistency," *The Journal of Ethics* 25, no. 1 (03, 2021), 57-80.

[3] Robert R. Harrell, Jr., "Case Studies of Congregations Recovering from Pastoral Moral Failure," (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1996), 25.

[4] Bonem and Patterson, Leading from the Second Chair, 6-7.

[5] Ibid., Bonem, 14-16.

The entire church suffers from moral failure from leadership.[6] When a moral failure happens with a secondary leader, there is a more profound impact on those who are involved in that department.[7] Existing literature surrounds the moral failures of senior leadership and the church's response and incoming replacement. While clearly usable for informational and strategic purposes, there is a lack of literature needed to facilitate a successful transition and healing in the instance of moral failure among secondary leaders. Secondary leaders need information that will lead them to success with their leaders and their departments when facing the challenges of transitional leadership after a moral failure. Writers have published many informative works that lead the charge for the senior leader and how to navigate bringing stability, healing, and lasting trust.[8] This study seeks to enhance the ability of those leading a worship ministry as subordinate leaders to successfully bring a worship department back from the brink of disaster.

Statement of the Problem

While much information and attention are given to senior leadership transitions after a moral failure, there needs to be more direction for supporting pastoral staff moral failures and how ministry departments are to be led. Those who assume these positions are often left to their own in discovering a path forward, leaving them feeling inferior, irrelevant, and defeated.[9] The problem is not the lack of information for transitional leaders who follow a leader with a moral

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[6] Matthew Wolf, "Following Failure: How to Lead when Succeeding a Fallen Pastor" Order No. 28417519, Biola University, 2021.

[7] Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson, *Leading from the Second Chair*, (San Francisco, CA: Wiley + ORM, 2012), 44.

[8] Ken Sande, *The Peace Maker*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 235.

[9] Bonem, *Leading from the Second Chair*, 71-73.

failure; instead, the problem lacks published relevant information in assisting those in subordinate roles who are leading through these types of transitions. The existing literature provides a lot of information for senior leaders who are confronted with transitions due to moral failure. The literature, however, does not provide guidance for the worship pastor or worship ministry leader. This topic needs to be explored for those leading in a secondary leadership role and how they can partner with senior leadership in uniting the entire organization with a team effort. Taking direction and using the abilities and strategies that secondary leaders possess should align with the mission and vision of the church's senior leadership.[10] There is also a lack of supporting information that addresses the mental, emotional, and spiritual health of leaders who follow a leader who has had a moral failure in a subordinate role. This study's mission is to bring attention to each of these elements to produce actionable information to assist leaders in their path forward.

Statement of the Purpose

This thesis focused on the unique transitional issues within the worship department of the local church after the moral failure of a previous leader. This study examined the results of a moral failure and the challenges of leadership transitions within a worship ministry department. Qualitative research was used to develop a clear path of leadership principles to fill the gaps in information related to this topic. Interviews, questionnaires, and historical data comprise the methods to give valid and usable information.[11] Although much literature exists on leadership and moral failure, this study focuses on the worship pastor and department to produce

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[10] Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson, *Leading from the Second Chair*, (San Francisco, CA: Wiley + ORM, 2012), 27-42.

[11] John W. Creswell, Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches. 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc, 2018).

meaningful and viable applications for leadership success. Many areas within the role of leading

in secondary positions that lack the information to assist a leader in being successful through

these types of transition. Moral failures occur in different circumstances, cultural and community

context, and senior leadership responses. The historical experiences and background of the

problem are central to the reason and need for the examination and attempt to supply deeper

insight and offer a plan for the strategic planning of the worship pastor and the path to success.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for transitional leaders facing the challenges of following a

colleague after a moral failure. Moral failures, unfortunately, are a factor in the leadership

landscape.[12] These failures create unique challenges that are not easily overcome and require

information that is not always available within the pages of text. The existing literature provides

a lot of information for senior leaders who are confronted with transitions due to moral failure.

The literature, however, does not guide the worship pastor or worship ministry leader. The

findings of this study should provide direction to any reader facing the challenge of leading

through a transition after a moral failure with the direct knowledge and experiences of those who

have led in these circumstances. In addition to the potential information gained through this

study, there could be an element of information that assists in bringing healing to those who read

and utilize this study who have or are experiencing the moral failure of a leader.

This study offers a potential trajectory to facilitate additional studies and curriculums for

the transitional leader who is following the moral failure of a previous leader. The development

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[12] Robert R. Harrell Jr., "Case Studies of Congregations Recovering from Pastoral Moral Failure," Order No. 9627847, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1996.

of the path forward for many leaders is often clouded with irrelevant information intended for others. This study could lift the burden of those with a genuine passion for shepherding those they are responsible for into a place of rest and healing.

Research Question and Sub Questions

This study focused on the need for methods, education, and inspiration for the transitional leader of a worship ministry after a moral failure. There are two key questions this study seeks to answer. RQ 1: In what ways can a transitional leader facilitate a worship ministry department's recovery from the moral failure of a previous leadership? There must be a plan of action to bring about emotional, spiritual, and physical healing during an unexpected leadership change.[13] This question has many elements that must be explored to determine the best course of action, the place to start, and how others' experiences can impact successful transitional leadership.

RQ 2: How can a worship department leader partner with senior leadership to bring healing to the entire body during recovery from a moral failure of previous leadership? Leading from the second chair position can be challenging; however, some are called to lead effectively in the support role.[14] This thesis will provide insights for those leaders searching to bring health, trust, and spiritual revival into a transitional situation.

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[13] Jeremy Bedenbaugh, "Developing an Approach for Unanticipated Leadership Transition in the Church," Order No. 10812498, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018.

[14] Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson, *Leading from the Second Chair*, (San Francisco, CA: Wiley + ORM, 2012), 6.

Hypotheses

This thesis seeks to inform the reader of the causes and effects of a moral failure of a ministry leader in the worship department and how the transitional leader can effectively lead. The hypotheses of this thesis based on the research questions are as follows:

HP1: A transitional leader can facilitate a worship ministry department's recovery from the moral failure of a previous leadership by developing a plan of action, knowing the condition (mental, emotional, and spiritual) of those within the department, and leaning on the wisdom of others who have faced the challenges of this leadership challenge.

HP2: A worship department leader can partner with senior leadership to bring healing to the entire body during recovery from a moral failure of previous leadership by aligning their plan of action with that of senior leadership, leaning on the experience and spiritual covering of the senior leadership, and knowing the role as subordinate leadership.

Core Concepts

This study focused on considering the initial circumstances surrounding the need for a transition to take place and beyond within a worship ministry. Leaders must accurately grasp the facts to develop a plan of action; there must be a discovery of a cause to create an opportunity for sound leadership.[15] Establishing the issues is essential to defining the role and actions of a leader.[16] There are opportunities for leadership in various capacities as leaders find the path through difficult situations. According to John Maxwell, a need for the reality of a problem

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[15] John C. Maxwell, "*Leading in Tough Times*, (New York, NY: Hatchett Book Group, 2021), 1.

[16] Ken Sande, *The Peace Maker*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 102.

should be established.[17] Within this concept, there must be constructs of action that speak to the brevity and viability of a specific plan of action to move people forward.

Before working through a moral failure, there must be an understanding of what moral failure looks like scripturally and in the eyes of humanity.[18] Not every moral failure is created equally. While sin is sin, the impact of a moral failure is not always as significant or damaging according to the severity or actions that have taken place. There are also additional variables that impact the gravity of the situation resulting from the moral failure. One of those variables is the intensity of the relationship between the former leader and those being led.[19] The length of time of service, the interconnectivity of fellowship, and the foundation of friendship are all areas that come into play in determining the impact upon those in a worship department who have lost the leadership of someone who was trusted and befriended.

Once an understanding of the reality of the situation surrounding the moral failure of the previous leaders has been established, there must be a moment of spiritual leadership that comes to the forefront of the leader's plan. There are elements of natural leadership that come to those who are in positions; however, there are spiritual principles of leadership that are gifts.[20] These gifts are given to us by Christ as Paul states, "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-12, New King James

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[17] John C. Maxwell, "*Leading in Tough Times*, (New York, NY: Hatchett Book Group, 2021), 26.

[18] Robert R. Harrell Jr., "Case Studies of Congregations Recovering from Pastoral Moral Failure," Order No. 9627847, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1996.

[19] Harrell, "Case Studies of Congregations Recovering from Pastoral Moral Failure," 1996.

[20] J Oswald Sanders. *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer*, (Chicago,IL: Moody Publishers, 2007), 29.

Version). Spiritual leadership during a time of moral failure is paramount to seeing a return to a healthy community of believers.[21] Leading with dependency on God is the solid foundation for ensuring a leader can carry out the in-depth responsibilities of facilitating a department back into a place of peace and trust.[22]

This study describes the pain of the people left in the aftermath of the transition. A leader must know the condition of each person mentally, spiritually, and emotionally to lead people.[23] Scripture instructs leaders to "Be diligent to know the state of your flocks and attend to your herds…" (Proverbs 27:23, New King James Version). Many negative emotions must be identified. The condition of the flock, or department, will assist leaders with the assignment to bring trust and peace to a horrible situation.[24]

Another quest of this study was to find routes to peace in all elements of the worship ministry. The peace of God will assist in bringing healing when allowed to have providence, as scripture instructs, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful" (Colossians 3:15, New King James Version). Within this concept, the study will establish the need for the heart of the individuals and the leader to turn from conflict to peace. "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matthew 15:19, New King James Version). To unite people, the "I" must become a "we"; simply, one bad apple spoils the bunch.[25]

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[21] Robert R. Harrell Jr., "Case Studies of Congregations Recovering from Pastoral Moral Failure," Order No. 9627847, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1996.

[22] Ken Sande, *The Peace Maker*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 102.

[23] Harrell, Case Studies of Congregations Recovering from Pastoral Moral Failure," 19.

[24] William Pentak, and Kevin Leman, *The Way of the Shepherd: 7 Ancient Secrets to Managing Productive People*, Zondervan, 2004.

Another concept of this study is the place of repentance and reconciliation in the department and with the previous leadership.[26] Until there is genuine forgiveness and reconciliation, there cannot be peace to move forward.[27] The leader facing a disastrous transition because of moral failure will need to lean on the power of forgiveness to move forward. Colossians gives great insight and instruction regarding forgiveness. This study will draw from the interviews conducted to form a genuine significance in the role of forgiveness in the transitional leadership process:

> Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do.* But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him (Colossians 3:12-17, New King James Version).

An additional concept explored in this study is conquering the frustrations of the leader facing the challenge of following a fallen leader. There is a dark side to leadership that can creep in to distract and stop forward progress.[28] "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me (Psalm 51:10, New King James Version). Within this specific context of leadership transition, there is a possibility of offense, frustration, and resentment forming in

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[25] Ken Sande, *The Peace Maker*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 111.

[26] Robert R. Harrell Jr., "Case Studies of Congregations Recovering from Pastoral Moral Failure," Order No. 9627847, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1996.

[27] Sande, *The Peace Maker*, 102.

[28] Gary McIntosh and Samuel D Rima, *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership: How to Become an Effective Leader by Confronting Potential Failures*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2007), 28.

the heart and mind of the transitional leader.[29] This can make the situation worse for everyone involved in a crisis transition. This study aims to provide transitional leaders with the tools to stop this from becoming an issue before it starts. There are three focuses to prevent falling into a pitfall during a time of transitional leadership: 1.) "*Confidence-transitioning without destroying,*" 2.) "*Morale – Motivating with care and toughness,*" 3.) *Change – Progress without chaos.*"[30]

Many of this study's core concepts will focus on others' experiences and available research to assist transitional leaders following a moral failure in a worship department in formulating a plan of action to move forward. The health of an organization relies on the mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being of the leader.[31] It is developing a winning strategy that includes positive change, team building, creating motivation, and forming open, trustworthy communication plans to lead a department forward in recovery.[32] This component will also explore the spiritual actions that are available in research and from the experiences of those interviewed for this project.

Mentally, it can be a challenge for those seeking to lead to connect with those whom the actions of a previous leader have harmed.[33] Likewise, it can be equally challenging for those looking to have the mental capacity to accept a new leader with trust. The core concepts of this study endeavor to focus the reader on critical aspects of mental adjustment and health to bring a

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[29] Mike Cosper, Review of *Don't Make the Church Leadership Crisis Worse. Christianity Today*, April 2022.

[30] "Avoiding the strategy execution pitfalls: Confronting dilemmas when turning plans into action", *Strategic Direction*, Vol. 32 No. 5, 2016: 17.

[31] John C. Maxwell, "*Leading in Tough Times,*' (New York, NY: Hatchett Book Group, 2021), 88.

[32] Maxwell, *Leading in Tough Times*, 16.

[33] Mike Cosper, Review of *Don't Make the Church Leadership Crisis Worse*, April 2022.

positive reaction to leadership that is moving forward. Equally, the emotions of those involved in the moral failure crisis are often highly charged.[34] At the core of this study is the aim to identify and prevent the emotional fallout that happens after a moral failure to be minimal. Spiritual confusion is also a significant part of moral failure for those who are left in its wake.[35] Those who are left on the path of moral failure often question the faith, trust, and authenticity of leadership and God.[36] This study will identify ways through scripture, research, and experience to give foundation al spiritual principles to restore confidence in leadership and God.

Definition of Terms

The term *transitional leader* refers to a leader who has assumed a role following a departing leader.[37] This study will use this term to describe the leader of a worship ministry department and senior pastor. The phrase will serve to illustrate transitional leaders who are looking for paths to successfully guide a department into a place of healing, trust, and forward progress.

Moral failure is defined as actions contrary to scripture and moral rules that would disqualify a person from a leadership position.[38] For this study, a moral failure will be defined as any sinful action that would lead to termination of employment in the context of vocational

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[34] Erica J. Dollhopf and Christopher P. Scheitle, "Decline and Conflict: Causes and Consequences of Leadership Transitions in Religious Congregations." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52, no. 4 (December 2013), 675–97.

[35] Matthew Wolf, "Following Failure: How to Lead when Succeeding a Fallen Pastor" Order No. 28417519, Biola University, 2021.

[36] Wolf, "Following Failure: How to Lead when Succeeding a Fallen Pastor", 2021.

[37] Tim J. Pratt , Roy K. Smollan, and Edwina Pio. 2019. "Transitional Leadership to Resolve Conflict, Facilitate Change and Restore Wellbeing." *International Journal of Organizational Analysis* 27, no. 4 (April).

[38] Robert R. Harrell, Jr., "Case Studies of Congregations Recovering from Pastoral Moral Failure," (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1996), 25.

church ministry. Moral failures can include sexual sins, financial improprieties, and other morally and biblically sinful activities. Each moral failure that is a factor in the ministry's function and life significantly impacts individuals and congregations in different ways.[39]

Senior leadership is a leader who can present, carry out, and instill vision within an organization and lead from a position of authority.[40] Senior leadership for this study will be referenced and interchangeable with the lead or senior pastor in the survey and data collection.

Secondary leadership is defined as one who is in a subordinate role.[41] For this study, this term will describe and assign the position and responsibility of the worship minister, director, or pastor. Leading from the second chair is challenging and must be taken seriously to move forward in unity and benefit a church or ministry.[42]

Research Plan

This qualitative study aimed to offer viable information that will assist research, methodology, and guidance for those who face similar challenges in transitional leadership in a worship pastor capacity after the moral failure of a previous leader. This thesis utilized a thematic analysis to better understand the commonalities and processes through interviews and scriptural foundations.[43] The development of the methodology of this study will rely on the

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[39] Mike Cosper, Review of *Don't Make the Church Leadership Crisis Worse. Christianity Today*, April 2022.

[40] Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson, *Leading from the Second Chair*, (San Francisco, CA: Wiley + ORM, 2012), 27-28.

[41] Bonem and Patterson, Leading from the Second Chair, 4.

[42] Bonem and Patterson, Leading from the Second Chair, 2-3.

[43] John W. Creswell, Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches. 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc, 2018).

approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Liberty University approval. Once the IRB approved the interview process for this study, the research plan methods were executed.

The initial research of this thesis focused on the experiences of others. The participants were selected through personal ministerial relationships, recommendations of the Administrative Leadership, and the Department of Care of the Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee, to the researcher. The questions utilized for this study focus on critical parts of the leaders beginning and ending through the transitional period. It is necessary to establish the why and how of the role of the transitional leader, and it is central to the success of the leader who is leading during a crisis transition.[44] The research focused on the complexities surrounding the change and how they were addressed by others to benefit the reader of the study.

Summary

Chapter one of this qualitative research study formally introduces the reader to the two research questions: 1). In what ways can a transitional leader facilitate a worship ministry department's recovery from the moral failure of previous leadership, and 2.) How can a worship department leader partner with senior leadership to bring healing to the entire body during recovery from a moral failure of previous leadership? These two questions form the problem and purpose of the research for this study. The literature that is available to leaders in secondary leadership roles, specifically worship pastors, who follow a leader who has had a moral failure, is derived from leadership materials for senior leadership. This study seeks to fill this gap and deliver actionable information and accurate foundations for strategy and cooperation.

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[44] John C. Maxwell, "*Leading in Tough Times*,' (New York, NY: Hatchett Book Group, 2021), 88.

This chapter brings attention to the problems that arise from the need for more information related to this topic. In addition, a brief overview of the purpose of this study is included in the chapter to develop a further interest in the topic. The core concepts of this study are also highlighted to give direction for the reader to focus on the subjects of moral failure, leadership, and mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects that are directly impacted by this subject matter. In conclusion this chapter takes into account the complexities of this topic. It presents general information for the reader to look forward to the intensely focused information regarding leading a worship ministry after the moral failure of a previous leader.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the definition, general information, and repercussions concerning moral failure in the church, religious organizations, and the secular world by leadership. Understanding how moral failure impacts an organization at every level is imperative to bring healing and potential prevention in the future.[1] To do so, there must be a fundamental understanding of moral failure and its impacts. This chapter will identify essential information concerning moral failure's rudimentary causes and effects. To find the common threads of moral failures and their impact on leadership and groups, this chapter will discuss the differing aspects of this issue within the religious and secular context. This chapter will also discuss the moral failures of church senior leadership and its effects on the congregation and secondary leadership. This literature review includes the polity and discipline guidelines from mainstream American denominations that assist the local church in determining and correcting the appropriate paths for leaders who have committed moral improprieties.

The chapter will appraise the secular corporate marketplace practices in handling moral failures that are fireable offenses. The literature reviewed will also demonstrate the need for more information and study for secondary leadership transitions within the confines of church and religious organizations. Finally, this chapter will assess how the church copes with moral failures and how healing and stability are restored. Moreover, a Biblical framework is established to help the believer, leader, and church move forward after a moral failure has occurred.

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[1] Hanno Sauer. "Moral Failure." Journal of Moral Philosophy. 16. (London: Continuum, 2019), 647-648.

Moral Failure

According to Hanno Sauer, morality is often perceived as a solution to a problem. Sauer asks the question, "What is Morality?" To understand what a moral failure is, one must understand what morality is. Sauer, in his review of *What's Wrong with Morality? A Social-Psychological Perspective,* a book by Daniel Batson, provides these clear parameters as to how morality can be defined. Morality is actions that can be definitive, common, or fundamental, and it promotes wellness beyond a person's interest and is about normality, rules, and virtuous actions.[2] These all, coupled with the influence of culture and religion, help define morality and how it should be applied. Moral failure takes shape when an individual's character and integrity become sullied. Failure of character, judgment, environmental pressures, lack of honest authenticity, weakness of desire, and hypocrisy lead ethical behavior to failure.[3]

According to Robert Harrell, moral failure is an action contrary to scripture or moral rules that would disqualify a person.[4] For this study, a moral failure is defined as any sinful action that would lead to termination of employment in the context of vocational church ministry. Moral failures include sexual, financial, and other morally or biblically sinful activities. Each moral failure that is a factor in the ministry's function and life significantly impacts individuals and congregations differently.[5] Moral failure cannot be predicted; it is considered an

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[2] Hanno Sauer. "Moral Failure." Journal of Moral Philosophy. 16. (London: Continuum, 2019), 647-648.

[3] Hanno Sauer, "Moral Failure", 657.

[4] Robert R. Harrell, Jr., "Case Studies of Congregations Recovering from Pastoral Moral Failure," (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1996), 25.

[5] Mike Cosper, Review of *Don't Make the Church Leadership Crisis Worse. Christianity Today*, April 2022.

unanticipated variable.[6] Defining moral failure as a term is the easiest part of the journey. Defining the causes and products of moral failure adds another level of intricacy to the study.

Morality and sin are often aligned into the same category, yet they can be separated according to the beliefs, culture, and religious practices of those in judgment.[7] Two mainstream Pentecostal denominations define moral failure in their respective governing documents. The Church of God, Cleveland, TN, uses the terms "Disorderly Conduct" and "Conduct Unbecoming of a Minister" and is broad in interpretation.[8] The Book of Minutes for the Church of God only explicitly lists "explicit heterosexual misconduct, other heterosexual conduct, and homosexual offense." The Assembly of God, Springfield, MO, does not leave as much room for interpretation by providing a very detailed description of moral failures, including as main headings sexual misconduct, financial misconduct, relational/ethical misconduct, and substance use and abuse.[9] Likewise, the Global Methodist Church extensively describes what constitutes a moral failure in their churches.[10] Churches that are autonomous have self-governing rules and definitions of moral failure.

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[6] Jeremy Bedenbaugh, "Developing an Approach for Unanticipated Leadership Transition in the Church," (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018).

[7] David Lyle Jeffrey and Jeff Levin, "Are the Wages of Sin Really Death?: Moral and Epidemiologic Observations," (Christian Scholar's Review 49, 49, no. 3, 2020.)

[8] James Cossey, "*Minutes 2022: Church of God Book of Discipline, Church Order, and Governance*," (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2022), 114-128.

[9] "Constitution & Bylaws." n.d. Ag.org. https://ag.org/About/About-the-AG/Constitution-and-Bylaws, 66-70.

[10] "The Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline the Global Methodist Church." n.d. Accessed December 13, 2023.

Moral Failure in the Church

As stated above, when evaluating moral failure, there must be a clear understanding and definition of moral failure for those who are affected by others' offenses. First, what is the offense?[11] Clear, concise, and factual information about the offense must be established to set the course of action.[12] Moral failure in the church happens in different forms and different leadership offices.

Every church has a different method of approaching the topic of moral failure within their governance. The Southern Baptist Convention provides a series of resolutions that give scriptural evidence of position concerning immoral and sinful actions that are in scripture.[13] The SBC has many resolutions about moral failure; however, it is the autonomous local church that develops its polity concerning offending ministers.[14] For example, the denomination the Church of God, with headquarters in Cleveland, TN, provides a basic description of moral failures by offending ministers and the process of removal, repentance, and restoration when possible.[15] Likewise, the evangelical Pentecostal denomination the Assembly of God, with headquarters in Springfield, MO, also includes in their constitution and bylaws defined offenses and the process of dealing with these indiscretions.[16] These three denominations serve as examples of the different

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[11] Sam Rainer, "How to Handle a Church Staff Person's Moral Failure," Church Answers. April 27, 2022.

[12] Sam Rainer, "How to Handle a Church Staff Person's Moral Failure," 2022.

[13] "Bylaws - SBC.net." n.d. Https://Www.sbc.net/. Accessed December 13, 2023. https://www.sbc.net/about/what-we-do/legal-documentation/bylaws/.

[14] "Bylaws - SBC.net." n.d. Https://Www.sbc.net/. Accessed December 13, 2023.

[15] Cossey, James, ed. 2022. *Minutes 2022: Church of God Book of Discipline, Church Order, and Governance.* Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press.

[16] "Constitution & Bylaws." n.d. Ag.org. https://ag.org/About/About-the-AG/Constitution-and-Bylaws, 66-70.

approaches to hierarchal governance approaches to moral failures within the local church. While the governance of the church has a significant impact on the actions taken by the church in dealing with an offending minister, it does not lend much help to the church in bringing healing and restoration of trust and acceptance of a transitional leader.

It should also be noted that there is a difference between an accusation of a moral failure and an actual moral failure.[17] Accusations should be investigated, and truth must prevail.[18] Within the denominational references within this study, there are specific instructions for investigation, appeals, and trial procedures. However, there is a guiding source for all of these: scripture.

> Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector (Matthew 18:15-17, New King James Version).

Discipline for moral improprieties within the church should always begin with scripture. Beginning the corrective process with scripture is well rooted in love.[19] Feelings sometimes seem to become facts and cause reconciliation and forgiveness to take a backseat to retribution.[20] It is imperative that the church and fellow ministers operate in love to restore the fallen and heal moral injury within the leadership, congregation, and community.[21] Ultimately, there must be a

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[17] Sam Rainer, "How to Handle a Church Staff Person's Moral Failure," Church Answers. April 27, 2022.

[18] Sam Rainer, "How to Handle a Church Staff Person's Moral Failure," 2022.

[19] Brian Edgar, "The Ministry of Friendship," (Pacifica 29, 29, no. 2, 2016), 127–40.

[20] Willis M. Watt, "*Relational Principles for Effective Church Leadership,*" (Journal of Leadership Education 13, no. 2, 2014), 125–139.

[21] Timothy J. Hodgson, Lindsay B. Carey, and Harold G. Koenig, "Moral Injury, Betrayal and Retribution: Australian Veterans and the Role of Chaplains," (Journal of Religion and Health 61, 61, no. 2, 2022), 993–1021.

response that is based on the spiritual restoration of the offending leader.[22] It is not about the justice of the earthly realm; it is about the eternal justification of the soul.[23] 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. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:1-2).

Repercussions for the Church

The local church has many hurdles that it must cross to move past the offenses of a fallen leader. There is a sense of betrayal that now looms over those left in the path of destruction left by the offending minister.[24] The pedestal that ministers are often placed on is now reduced to a valley of pain that seems uncrossable. The moral crisis' that occurs in the church is a stain on the reputation and viability of the church.[25] Every action taken by the church and leadership after the revelation of a moral failure is scrutinized by those inside and outside of the church.[26] The fallout over a moral failure in the church, depending on the size and scope of influence, is first evaluated by the initial response.[27] The response to a moral failure can make a difference in the healing

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[22] J Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer*, (Chicago, Il.: Moody Publishers, 2007), 127.

[23] Joshua Wilson, "The Haunting of Ministry Failure." (The Gospel Coalition. June 16, 2017).

[24] Joe McKeever, "The Aftermath of a Moral Failure," (Outreachmagazine.com. October 31, 2023).

[25] Jordan Morehouse and Laura L. Lemon, "Beyond Reputational and Financial Damage: Examining Emotional and Religious Harm in a Post-Crisis Case Study of Hillsong Church," (*Public Relations Review* 49, no. 1, 2023), 5.

[26] Morehouse and Lemon, "Beyond Reputational and Financial Damage: Examining Emotional and Religious Harm in a Post-Crisis Case Study of Hillsong Church," 2023, 6.

[27] Sam Rainer, "How to Handle a Church Staff Person's Moral Failure," Church Answers. April 27, 2022.

process for the church.[28] The healing process must be beneficial to all who are involved in the aftermath of a leadership moral failure.

The church will suffer from many different issues that are byproducts of moral failures in leadership. The emotional trauma of losing a trusted leader is one of the most significant results of the moral failure of a leader.[29] Emotional trauma must be met with leadership qualities such as anger, patience, tact, diplomacy, listening, inspiration, and love; it must also be bathed in prayer.[30] The reputation of the church will also suffer from the actions of the fallen leader.[31] For example after the fall of Pastor Carl Lentz, the reputation was sullied and ability of Hillsong Church Australia and New York to continue in the same manner that they were accustomed to operating in came to a screeching halt.[32] Later revelation of scandal in the Hillsong organization increased the hardship and painful impacts surrounding the moral failures of Carl Lentz.[33]

Moral failure does not only affect the operations, future, and direction of the church; it can cause a church to cease to exist. The decline in attendance at a church after a moral failure is one of the most visible results of a moral failure.[34] Along with the departure of church

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[28] "Moral Failures and Pastoral Ministry - Association of Certified Biblical Counselors." n.d. Https://Biblicalcounseling.com/. Accessed December 13, 2023.

[29] John G. Cullen, "Moral Recovery and Ethical Leadership: JBE," (Journal of Business Ethics 175, 175, no. 3, 2022), 485–97.

[30] J Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer*, (Chicago, Il.: Moody Publishers, 2007), 65-75.

[31] Ibid., Morehouse and Lemon, 1-9.

[32] Jordan Morehouse and Laura L. Lemon, "Beyond Reputational and Financial Damage: Examining Emotional and Religious Harm in a Post-Crisis Case Study of Hillsong Church," (*Public Relations Review* 49, no. 1, 2023), 5.

[33] Morehouse and Lemon, "Beyond Reputational and Financial Damage: Examining Emotional and Religious Harm in a Post-Crisis Case Study of Hillsong Church," 2023, 6.

membership, there is also the depletion of financial contributors.[35] There must also be an awareness that civil and criminal legal actions may be a part of the fallout of a moral failure in the church.[36] The litigation of such actions can be carried out over years, making the healing process very difficult for all involved in the moral failure of a leader.[37] The church will most certainly discover what they are made of and if they really believe what they preach and practice in the aftermath of a moral failure.[38]

Healing for the Church

While there are many repercussions for the church after the moral failure of a leader, there must come a time of healing. Healing for the church is dependent on many variables. However, some basic steps must be taken. First, there must be an audible and visible presence of truth; there is no need to share intimate details, but a clear picture of the situation should be disseminated.[39] Truth brings healing according to James 5:16, "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed…" Do not hide from the questions; be as open and accessible as possible.[40]

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[34] Erica J. Dollhopf, and Christopher P. Scheitle, "Decline and Conflict: Causes and Consequences of Leadership Transitions in Religious Congregations," (*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52, no. 4, December, 2013), 675–97.

[35] Jordan Morehouse and Laura L. Lemon, "Beyond Reputational and Financial Damage: Examining Emotional and Religious Harm in a Post-Crisis Case Study of Hillsong Church," (*Public Relations Review* 49, no. 1, 2023), 5.

[36] John G. Cullen, "Moral Recovery and Ethical Leadership: JBE," (Journal of Business Ethics 175, 175, no. 3, 2022), 485–97.

[37] Lipsky, Avgar, and Lamare, "Organizational Conflict Resolution and Strategic Choice: Evidence from a Survey of Fortune 1000 Firms," 431–55.

[38] Joe McKeever, "The Aftermath of a Moral Failure," (Outreachmagazine.com. October 31, 2023).

[39] Sam Rainer, "How to Handle a Church Staff Person's Moral Failure," Church Answers. April 27, 2022.

Once truth has been proclaimed, then the time to act as the shepherd has arrived.[41] There must be

a connection between the transitional leadership and those who have been impacted by the moral

failure.[42] Ultimately, healing will only come built on a foundation of love.[43] Transitional

leadership should not implement any new programs and should only concentrate on bringing

healing to the congregation or organization.[44] Bringing healing will encompass forgiveness and

love working hand in hand to repair the physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, and

financial impacts of moral failure.[45] "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk

in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God

for a sweet-smelling aroma (Ephesians 5:1-2, New King James Version). When individuals

imitate God, there is a quality to their effort in bringing about healing in any relationship.

Christ-like behavior brings honor to God and is an act of worship.

Turn to the Godhead in prayer, worship, and solace for the comfort of the Holy Spirit.[46]

When the pain of a moral failure manifests itself, it can only be overcome by the dependency on

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[40] Ed Stetzer, "A Letter to the Church on Moral Failure and Misconduct," (Outreachmagazine.com.September 17, 2018).

[41] Sam Rainer, "How to Handle a Church Staff Person's Moral Failure," 2022.

[42] Kenneth H. Blanchard, Phil Hodges, and Phyllis Hennecy Hendry. *Lead like Jesus Revisited: Lessons from the Greatest Leadership Role Model of All Time*. (Nashville, Tennessee: W Publishing Group, An Imprint Of Thomas Nelson, 2016), 212.

[43] Blanchard, Hodges, Hendry, Lead Like Jesus, 211-213.

[44] Sam Rainer, "How to Handle a Church Staff Person's Moral Failure," Church Answers. April 27, 2022.

[45] Moral Failures and Pastoral Ministry - Association of Certified Biblical Counselors." n.d. Https://Biblicalcounseling.com/. Accessed December 13, 2023.

[46] Ed Stetzer, "A Letter to the Church on Moral Failure and Misconduct," (Outreachmagazine.com. September 17, 2018).

the word of God and healing that comes from God alone.[47] Lean on the strength and

understanding of Christ for wisdom, patience, and answers. "Trust in the Lord with all your

heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him,

and He shall direct your paths (Proverbs 3:5-6, New King James Version). In the effort to satisfy

the human desire for accomplishment and peace leaders must employee the full power of Godly

wisdom to enable their efforts. Ultimately, the church is the Lord's, and He will build His

church. Though there may be tests and trials, the church will be victorious, whole, and healed by

the grace and mercy of God and not through the actions of human wisdom, intervention, or

action.[48]

Moral Failure in the Senior Pastor

Moral failure among pastoral leadership is more common than it should be.[49] A 2015

study by Howard Hendricks revealed some of the causes and effects of moral failures among

senior pastors. Two hundred forty-six men, all full-time clergy, participated in his study after

having an adulterous affair within a twenty-four-month period.[50] According to Hendricks, these

men demonstrated four similar themes at the root of their moral failure. None of the men had

personal accountability, a personal devotional, prayer, and worship life ceased, eighty percent of

the men had a sexual encounter with a woman after spending time with them often in a

counseling setting, and finally, they all denied that they would ever fail morally.[51] Garret Kell

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[47] Stetzer, "A Letter to the Church on Moral Failure and Misconduct," 2018.

[48] Ed Stetzer, "A Letter to the Church on Moral Failure and Misconduct," (Outreachmagazine.com. September 17, 2018).

[49] McKeever, The Aftermath of a Moral Failure, 2023.

[50] Garrett Kell, "The Pattern among Fallen Pastors," The Gospel Coalition. June 16, 2017.

offers four observations that lead to moral failure in senior pastors: 1) Sin thrives in isolation, 2) If you flirt with sin, you will fall to sin., 3) Pride blinds individuals to weakness., 4) Purity is cultivated by loving Jesus. When these four principles are ignored, it is very easy for ministers to fall into the temptations of the world that induce failure and injury.[52]

Senior pastors who have fallen morally experience great personal tragedy and cause moral injury to those that they lead.[53] The moral failure of the pastor ensures the following, according to Joe McKeever's article "The Aftermath of Moral Failure" for the senior pastor. First, his ministry is over.[54] The ministry of those who have committed moral improprieties loses everything and must enter a period of restoration.[55] Second, the humiliation is severe, and the shame is a heavy burden for the pastor and his family.[56] McKeever also highlights that those he led are now disillusioned, and those he may have been trying to disciple are more likely to fall away from the Christian faith. The future ministry of the fallen pastor is potentially limited; what could have been has now been diminished.[57]

Lifeway Research conducted a survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors in 2019, asking the question, "If a pastor commits adultery, how long, if at all, should a pastor withdraw from public

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[51] Garrett Kell, "The Pattern among Fallen Pastors," The Gospel Coalition , 2017.

[52] Garrett Kell, "The Pattern among Fallen Pastors," June 16, 2017.

[53] Hazel R. Atuel, Nicholas Barr, Edgar Jones, Neil Greenberg, Victoria Williamson, Matthew R. Schumacher, Eric Vermetten, Rakesh Jetly, and Carl A. Castro, "Understanding Moral Injury from a Character Domain Perspective," (Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology 41, 41, no. 3, 2021), 155–73.

[54] Joe McKeever, "The Aftermath of a Moral Failure," (Outreachmagazine.com. October 31, 2023).

[55] Ibid., McKeever, 2023.

[56] Ibid., McKeever, 2023.

[57] Ibid., 2023.

ministry?"[58] Among the pastors surveyed, the results are vast. The results of the survey convey

that there is a broad feeling among those who hold the position as to the way a moral failure

should impact a senior pastor in the moment and the future. Two percent of those pastors

surveyed thought that those who had committed adultery did not need to withdraw from ministry

at all. Sixteen percent thought the pastor should withdraw from ministry for a period of one year.

There were many different percentages represented in the study. There were two additional

statistics of merit, twenty-seven percent thought the offending pastor should withdraw

permanently. The most staggering result of the survey is that thirty-one percent were not sure

what the ramifications of the adulterous action should be.

 While the opinions of the survey are varied, there are two avenues of thought concerning

the eligibility of those who fail morally to return to ministry that are prevalent.[59] There are those

who feel that once someone has committed an egregious offence, they disqualify themselves

permanently from ministry. Dr. Jerry Johnston cites the following reference to the writings of Dr.

John MacArthur:

> Some kinds of sin irreparably shatter a man's reputation and disqualify him forever –
> because he can no longer be above reproach … Where did we get the idea that a year's
> leave of absence can restore integrity to a man who has squandered his reputation and
> destroyed people's trust? Certainly not from the Bible. Trust forfeited is not so easily
> regained. Once purity is sacrificed, the ability to lead by example is gone forever.[60]

Johnston also cites evangelical author Tim LaHaye's position on the subject of Pastoral

restoration:

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[58] "Pastors' Views on Moral Failure." n.d. Accessed December 13, 2023. https://research.lifeway.com/wp content/uploads/2020/08/Pastors-Moral-Failure.pdf.

[59] Jerome Richard Johnston, "Review of *An Exploration of Rates and Causes of Attrition among Protestant Evangelical Clergy in the United States*," (Thesis, Acadia Divinity College, 2012), 109-111.

[60] John MacArthur, "Should fallen leaders be restored?" Masterpiece, 1988, 304.

No single Scripture passage either clearly forbids or clearly approves of restoring a fallen minister to public ministry. For that reason, a divergence of opinion on the subject has arisen among Bible-believing Christian leaders, even some who are in basic agreement on most other scriptural issues. … Those who lean toward legalism tend to conclude that a pastor's ministry is forever terminated if he is publicly exposed for adultery. Those whose tradition stresses mercy and grace tend to approve restoration after genuine repentance and an appropriate period of discipline.[61]

Moral failure among those who hold the senior pastor's office is a serious matter and causes much debate and soul-searching for the offender and the offended. It is a disaster and also a harsh reality that no one is exempt from sin.[62] Senior pastoral leaders, unfortunately, have the reality of the pedestal that places them on display for all to see.[63] The expectations that are placed on leaders cause stress that can often lead to burnout, stress, and moral failure.[64] It only takes a moment of isolation, stress, and burnout for the enemy of the soul to take a seat at the table of an individual's heart and infiltrate their mind.[65] There are many levels of discipline for the offending minister within the church. The most severe of those is the permanent loss of ministry.[66]

The passion for ministry is one of the greatest on earth; losing the opportunity to be in a ministry adds another element of punishment to the offending minister.[67] The denominational examples of polity and discipline used in this chapter each give a process, result, and restorative

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[61] Tim F. LaHaye, If Ministers Fall, Can They Be Restored (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 97.

[62] Gary McIntosh, and Samuel D Rima, *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership: How to Become an Effective Leader by Confronting Potential Failures*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2007), 27.

[63] McIntosh and Rima, *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership*, 2007, 181-97.

[64] Garrett Kell, "The Pattern among Fallen Pastors," The Gospel Coalition. June 16, 2017.

[65] Louie Giglio, *DON'T GIVE the ENEMY a SEAT at YOUR TABLE: Taking Control of Your Thoughts and Fears in The Middle of the Battle, (*S.L.: Thomas Nelson Pub, 2021), 42-45.

[66] Joe McKeever, "The Aftermath of a Moral Failure," (Outreachmagazine.com. October 31, 2023).

[67] Joshua Wilson, "The Haunting of Ministry Failure." (The Gospel Coalition. June 16, 2017).

plan for those who have admitted their moral failure or been found guilty by investigative

boards. For example, the denomination of the Church of God in Cleveland, TN, utilizes

guidelines in their Book of Minutes, which is produced biannually by the General Assembly.

These guidelines apply to what the Book of Minutes calls "Disorderly Ministers" and how they

should be treated locally, regionally, and denominationally.[68] The polity of the church covers

unbecoming conduct, which is defined as "violations of personal integrity, of doctrinal fidelity,

as accepted by the Church of God, and leadership accountability." [69] The Church of God takes

great steps to ensure that restoration is a part of the disciplinary process. However, there is no

path for ministerial restoration for homosexual activity.[70]

Senior pastors who commit moral improprieties face personal, spiritual, and ecclesiastical

chastening. While God will forgive and forget the sins committed (Hebrews 10:17), it is not that

easy for human beings to do the same.[71] Likewise, it will be very difficult for a minister to

forget his or her transgressions.[72]

After a senior pastor's moral failure, a group of people are left to pick up the pieces.[73]

This includes but is not limited to the congregation, elders/deacons or church council, and

secondary executive leadership. Senior pastors leave a group of people who trusted, sacrificed,

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[68] James Cossey, "*Minutes 2022: Church of God Book of Discipline, Church Order, and Governance*," (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2022), 114-128.

[69] Cossey, "*Minutes 2022: Church of God Book of Discipline, Church Order, and Governance*,", 114-128.

[70] Ibid., Cossey, 114-128.

[71] Joe McKeever, "The Aftermath of a Moral Failure," (Outreachmagazine.com. October 31, 2023).

[72] Joshua Wilson, "The Haunting of Ministry Failure." (The Gospel Coalition. June 16, 2017).

[73] McKeever, The Aftermath of a Moral Failure, 2023.

and worked alongside and subordinately to proclaim the gospel. Now they are lost and trying to facilitate a reconciliation without a shepherd.[74] This is one of the most significant impacts of moral failures involving the senior pastor.

The Bible is a fountain of sources to demonstrate moral failure to those who are seeking examples. It should be stated that moral failure is formed in the basic principles of the Ten Commandments given to Moses and the people of Israel. In these ten basic tenets, morals are the basis for human moral behavior and righteous living. God is very specific in His desire for righteous living and clear with His expectations.

Throughout scripture, there are examples of those who did not meet the standard of God's desire for human behavior. In one story found in 2 Samuel 11-12, King David commits egregious moral failures. David lusts, has an adulterous affair, fornicates, bears falsehood, and murders Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba. David is one of the greatest stories of failure and redemption in scripture. Likewise, Paul in New Testament literature is a great example of moral failure that can only be defined as reprehensible. His persecution of the church and his actions against believers are morally and spiritually condemning. Much like these two examples we see the same effects of moral bankruptcy impacting the local church even in those we revere the most.

Moral Failure and Secondary Leadership

Despite the large amount of literature on moral failure in the church and senior leadership roles, there is sparse information about the secondary leader in moral failure and those following the leader in transition. While existing literature provides insight into the causes and effects of

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[74] McKeever, The Aftermath of a Moral Failure, 2023.

moral failure in senior leadership, and it can be applicable in some cases to secondary leadership roles, the intricacies and impacts of secondary leadership failures still need to be explored fully.

Secondary leaders have unique positions within the church. These leaders are individuals serving in subordinate roles that have valuable influence on those within an organization.[75] These leaders build relationships that enhance the ministry of a church or religious organization.[76] Leaders who occupy these roles often have titles that give broad authority and directional oversight over specific groups within a church ministry setting.[77] Moral failures among these leaders have great impacts on those that they serve intimately with. This adds a layer of transitional stress that is a part of the bigger picture of healing that should receive attention. Without understanding the level of effects on a congregation when a secondary leader has fallen, there is a possibility of leaving unknown wounds uncared for.[78]

There are three distinct biblical examples of secondary leaders. First, there is Joseph. Joseph, the youngest son of Jacob, is one of the greatest examples of a secondary leader who gets the job right in scripture. The story of Joseph is found in Genesis 37-50. Joseph had to pass the test that made him the leader that he read about and studied for his leadership examples.[79] Each event that unfolds in the story of Joseph forms a leader that one day answers only to Pharaoh. The result of Joseph's successful resistance to temptation is the survival of his entire family.

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[75] Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson, *Leading from the Second Chair*, (San Francisco, CA: Wiley + ORM, 2012), 2.

[76] Bonem and Patterson, *Leading from the Second Chair*, 2012, 6-8.

[77] Bonem and Patterson, *Leading from the Second Chair*, 2012, 17-18.

[78] Tim J. Pratt, Roy K. Smollan, and Edwina Pio, "Transitional Leadership to Resolve Conflict, Facilitate Change and Restore Wellbeing," (*International Journal of Organizational Analysis* 27, no. 4, April, 2019).

[79] Robert Morris, *Dream to Destiny: A Proven Guide to Navigating Life's Biggest Tests and Unlocking Your God-given Purpose*, (Southlake, Texas: Gateway Press, 2023), ix-x.

Even those who had persecuted him and made his journey hard benefited from the success of his ability to maintain his integrity.[80] Secondly, Aaron the bother of Moses in Exodus 32 in his haste to lead the people led them into a time of idolatry while waiting on Moses to return from the mountain of God. This single act of taking authority where it was not given brought the wrath of God upon the people. It cost lives, favor, and honor not only in the moment but in the future of the people of Israel.

Lastly, there is another scriptural reference to a secondary leader and his inability to resist temptation. Judas, a handpicked disciple of Christ, is a great example of failure in a secondary leadership position that resulted in betrayal, conflict, disillusionment, and heartbreak among Jesus' followers and those who led alongside him.

> Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?" And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him (Matthew 26:14-16, New King James Version).

Judas' presence and influence in scripture is minimal until the betrayal. However, after Judas betrayed Jesus, Peter denied him, and the other disciples forsook and fled (Matthew 26:47-75). These two examples of secondary leaders are very different but demonstrate the necessity of understanding the role and influence of secondary leaders within the congregation.

Secular and Governmental Organizations

Moral failure is a prevalent issue both in the church and outside of the four walls of the religious focus of this study. There is much to be learned from the impacts of moral failure in outside organizations. Historically the world has seen the results of moral failure and the decline

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[80] Robert Morris, *Dream to Destiny: A Proven Guide to Navigating Life's Biggest Tests and Unlocking Your God-given Purpose*, (Southlake, Texas: Gateway Press, 2023), ix-x.

of civilizations because of the actions of those in leadership.[81] The American government has encountered its fair share of moral failure in the leadership representing the three branches of Government. Presidents, members of Congress, and even judiciary appointments have demonstrated the results of moral failure on the American people and the nation. These moral shortcomings have significant results on many fronts, resulting in mistrust, offense, and anger.[82] The betrayal of those in leadership and service that is felt by those who look to those over them results in moral injuries that are often insurmountable and lead to further issues within an organization.[83] Betrayal is a strong word that defines the severity of moral failure in the eyes of those who are left in the aftermath. According to Hodgson, betrayal is the failure to honor trust, confidence, or standards that result in psychological, social, and spiritual conflicts in relationships, individually or corporately.

Like in the Church, moral failure is not simply an issue that happens and has no reactions or repercussions. Actions have severe consequences for those looking for leaders who are in power to lead change, success, and security.[84] Fortune five-hundred companies and small businesses all look to ethical leadership to be a stalwart in the success of their respective organizations.[85] Entire brands suffer at the hands of moral failure among the rank and file of

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[81] "Moral Failings of Leaders Collapsed Even the Best Societies, Study Finds." n.d. Big Think, October 18, 2020.

[82] John G. Cullen, "Moral Recovery and Ethical Leadership: JBE," (Journal of Business Ethics 175, 175, no. 3, 2022), 485–97.

[83] Timothy J. Hodgson, Lindsay B. Carey, and Harold G. Koenig, "Moral Injury, Betrayal and Retribution: Australian Veterans and the Role of Chaplains," (Journal of Religion and Health 61, 61, no. 2, 2022), 993–1021.

[84] Tannenbaum, Julie. 2015. "Mere Moral Failure," Canadian Journal of Philosophy 45, 45, no. 1: 58–84. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26444363.

[85] John G. Cullen, "Moral Recovery and Ethical Leadership: JBE," 485–97.

those who serve corporations and organizations.[86] The question then becomes, how do

companies respond to moral failures that assist them in weathering the aftermath?

Recovering from a moral failure in the secular world is not much different from the

church or religious organization sector. In the research for this thesis, a term emerged in the

secular aspect of the study: moral injury. This term best focuses on moral failure and its effects

on individuals, groups, and organizations.[87] Moral injury affects the mind, emotions, and

physical aspects of those who are left in the wake of moral failures by leadership.[88] Moral injury

also impacts the spiritual, financial, and social functions as well.

The secular model of dealing with offending employees is variant. The corporate world

looks at moral failure through the lens of their market.[89] Essentially, the moral failure of a leader

in a secular position is an event that matters more in the arena that the organization serves.[90] The

secular world looks at its image, financial impacts, and structure to determine how to bring about

moral recovery.[91] A survey of Fortune 1000 firms found that there are plans in place to handle

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[86] A.A. Maher and Singhapakdi, "The Effect of the Moral Failure of a Foreign Brand on Competing Brands," (European Journal of Marketing 51, 51, no. 5/6, 2017), 903–22.

[87] Hazel R. Atuel, Nicholas Barr, Edgar Jones, Neil Greenberg, Victoria Williamson, Matthew R. Schumacher, Eric Vermetten, Rakesh Jetly, and Carl A. Castro, "UnderstandingMoral Injury from a Character Domain Perspective," (Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology 41, 41, no. 3, 2021), 155–73.

[88] John G. Cullen, "Moral Recovery and Ethical Leadership: JBE," (Journal of Business Ethics 175, 175, no. 3, 2022), 485–97.

[89] William L. Benoit, "Image Repair Discourse and Crisis Communication," (*Public Relations Review* 23, no. 2, 1997), 177-86.

[90] A.A. Maher and Singhapakdi, "'The Effect of the Moral Failure of a Foreign Brand on Competing Brands," 903–22.

[91] John G. Cullen, "Moral Recovery and Ethical Leadership: JBE," 485–97.

conflict, moral failure, and issues within corporations.[92] The processes used by the companies are meant to bring finality to the issues, restore productivity, and avoid litigation when possible.[93]

Conclusion

Moral failure is a topic of great importance that must be understood fully to come to an accurate resolution. The sinful nature of humanity does not rest only on the laity of the church; the shepherd is human, too. The driving theme of moral failure is that it all rests on the fact that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23, New King James Version). Moral failure seems to be viewed as an ordinary sin when looking through the lens of the ordinary; however, when looking at the leader of the church, there is a microscope focusing on the actions of those in ministry leadership.[94] Literature has shown that the senior pastor role of ministers has many avenues of discussion, education, and prescriptions for the moral failures of those in senior leadership. Literature has also demonstrated the need for more research for those who are serving in secondary leadership roles. There are many questions for the church and transitional leaders during the aftermath of a moral failure that needs answers and direction for those facing these uncertain and dire times.

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[92] David B. Lipsky, Ariel C. Avgar, and J. Ryan Lamare, "Organizational Conflict Resolution and Strategic Choice: Evidence from a Survey of Fortune 1000 Firms," (ILR Review 73, 73, no. 2, 2020), 431–55.

[93] Lipsky, Avgar, and Lamare, "Organizational Conflict Resolution and Strategic Choice: Evidence from a Survey of Fortune 1000 Firms," 431–55.

[94] Julie Tannenbaum, "Mere Moral Failure," (Canadian Journal of Philosophy 45, no. 1, 2015), 58–84.

Chapter Three: Methods

Introduction

This chapter will explain the research process for this study. In this chapter the reader will be able to find information concerning the processes in which the researcher gathered the information and analyzed it for the purposes of answering the research questions and support for the hypothesis for this thesis. The design, process, participants, setting, and data utilized in this study were essential in producing a resource that will help those facing the moral failure of a leader or are transitional leaders after the moral failure of a previous leader. In order to have a complete understanding of this topic, the researcher deployed a focused strategy to find the answers necessary for this study.

Design

The researcher utilized a qualitative thematic design to research transitional leadership after a moral failure from the point of view of the senior and secondary leadership. A qualitative study produces diverse possibilities for data collection and analysis.[1] Therefore, the researcher was able to use the rich experience of the participants to complete the study. The thematic interview process allowed the researcher to ask sixteen questions to the senior pastors and fifteen questions to the worship pastors who participated in the study. The questions enabled the researcher to examine the past experiences of senior pastors who led through moral failures and worship pastors who were the transitional leader after the moral failure of a previous leader.

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[1] John W. Creswell, "Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches," (5th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc, 2018), 179.

Questions and Hypotheses

This study focuses on the need for methods, education, and inspiration for the transitional leader of a worship ministry after a moral failure. There are two key questions this study seeks to answer. RQ 1: In what ways can a transitional leader facilitate a worship ministry department's recovery from the moral failure of a previous leadership? There must be a plan of action to bring about emotional, spiritual, and physical healing during an unexpected leadership change.[2] This question has many elements that must be explored to determine the best course of action, the place to start, and how others' experiences can impact successful transitional leadership.

RQ 2: How can a worship department leader partner with senior leadership to bring healing to the entire body during recovery from a moral failure of previous leadership? Leading from the second chair position can be challenging; however, some are called to lead effectively in the support role.[3] This thesis will provide insights for those leaders searching to bring health, trust, and spiritual revival into a transitional situation.

HP1: A transitional leader can facilitate a worship ministry department's recovery from the moral failure of a previous leadership by developing a plan of action, knowing the condition (mental, emotional, and spiritual) of those within the department, and leaning on the wisdom of others who have faced the challenges of this leadership challenge.

HP2: A worship department leader can partner with senior leadership to bring healing to the entire body during recovery from a moral failure of previous leadership by aligning their plan

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[2] Jeremy Bedenbaugh, "Developing an Approach for Unanticipated Leadership Transition in the Church," Order No. 10812498, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018.

[3] Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson, *Leading from the Second Chair*, (San Francisco, CA: Wiley + ORM, 2012), 6.

of action with that of senior leadership, leaning on the experience and spiritual covering of the senior leadership, and knowing the role as subordinate leadership.

Participants

For this study, a panel of three Worship Pastors and three Senior Pastors were interviewed. Their ages ranged from twenty-nine to sixty-four. Of the six candidates, five were male, and one was female. Their ethnicities were Caucasian and African American. The Worship Pastor participants had a combined fifty years of experience, and the senior pastors had a combined ninety-three years. Three participants were from the Church of God, Cleveland, TN, denomination; one was non-denominational, and two were ministers in the Southern Baptist Convention. This study's participants are credentialed ministers in their respective denominations or churches. The participants were sent an email with the parameters of the study asking if they would like to participate. Each participant signed a consent form and was given a ten-dollar gift card for their participation in this study.

Position	Gender	Age	Race	Credentialed	Denomination	Experience
Senior Pastor A	Male	40	Caucasian	Ordained Bishop	Church of God Cleveland, TN	23 Years
Senior Pastor B	Male	52	Caucasian	Ordained	Southern Baptist	31 Years
Senior Pastor C	Male	64	Caucasian	Ordained Bishop	Church of God Cleveland, TN	39 Years
Worship Pastor A	Male	29	Caucasian	Ordained Minister	Church of God Cleveland, TN	8 Years
Worship Pastor B	Female	51	African American	Ordained Minister	Non-Denomination	27 Years
Worship Pastor B	Male	46	Caucasian	Ordained	Southern Baptist	15 Years

Setting

The participants were invited to participate in person, face to face, or via video conferencing with the researcher. Four of the participants were interviewed in person, face to face, and two were interviewed through video conferencing. Three of the four in-person face-to-face interviews took place in the office of the researcher in Virginia. The fourth in-person, face-to-face interview occurred in the participant's office in Virginia. The two live interviews via video conferencing methods took place in the researchers' and research participants' respective offices in Alabama and Florida. The interviews were private, with no interruptions or observers. The environment for each interview was casual and included soft music playing and, for those in person, a beverage.

Data Collection Method and Procedures

The researcher conducted interviews that were scheduled in advance to collect the data necessary for the study. The data was collected in face-to-face interviews, both in person and through a video-conferencing application. The researcher recorded the data using an audio device with the permission of each participant. Post-interview, the researcher transcribed the recordings. Both the recordings and transcriptions were locked in secure electronic files on a computer and cloud storage.

The researcher emailed a recruitment inquiry to potential participants, inviting them to participate in the research for this study. Each one who received the email was offered a ten-dollar gift card for their participation. Thirteen emails were sent to potential participants, and seven responded. Six of the respondents were able to participate in the time frame needed for this study. The seventh was unable to commit to a time that would be conducive to the timeline of this thesis.

The participants were scheduled for interviews over a two-week period. The researcher presented each participant with a consent form before the start of the interview and had them sign it. The interview was started and flowed according to the researcher's questions, which the IRB approved. The interviews were cold; the participants had no prior access to the questions that would be asked in the interview process. The data was secured and stored in the researcher's office and cloud storage until it was time for analysis.

Researcher Positionality

The researcher for this study serves as the Senior Pastor of a congregation with over seven hundred members. Before becoming a senior pastor, the researcher served as a Worship Pastor for seventeen years. This study was conducted because of the researcher's experiences in ministry and desire to help others. The researcher had the misfortune of following a minister with a moral failure. Some bias should be noted as the researcher desires to formulate the research to answer questions that will enhance his ability to lead successfully, both personally and as a mentor.

Data Analysis

Using a qualitative thematic approach to the research, the researcher found themes of commonality in the answers provided by the participants. These themes were synthesized by the researcher by hand and by digital analysis using Nvivo to provide common themes to answer the research questions and support or not support the researcher's hypothesis. The themes found within the research provided a complete analysis of the experiences of Senior Pastors and Worship Pastors who have led during or after a moral failure.

This analysis will show the reader distinct themes found in each case presented by the participants for analysis. The following common themes were found in the Senior and Worship Pastor Participants data:

1. Timing of Discovery

2. Inexperience

3. Overwhelming Moral Failure: Sexual in Nature

4. Connections

5. Loyalty

6. Spiritual Discipline and Dependence

7. Leadership Support

8. Lack of Resources

Summary

Chapter three is a concise description of the methods, participants, and data collected for the purpose of this study. As mentioned above, the study is a qualitative thematic study revolving around the interviews of Senior Pastors and Worship Pastors who have been in leadership positions during and after the moral failure of a worship pastor. The purpose of this study is to enable people to answer the ways a transitional leader can facilitate a worship ministry department's recovery from the moral failure of previous leadership and how a worship department leader can partner with senior leadership to bring healing to the entire body during the recovery from the moral failure of the previous leader. These two questions, coupled with the two hypotheses above, are answered and supported by the results of the data collected for this study.

The researcher has a vested interest in the outcome of this study as it is the researcher's goal to assist those who may face this challenge and mentor those who are. The most common themes in the research will enable the researcher and the readers of this study to find ways to navigate the difficulties of a moral failure in the church and in a transitional time of leadership. Using the narratives of the study's interviews, the qualitative results will reflect supportive and descriptive solutions to the problem found for the purpose of this study.[4]

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[4] John W. Creswell, "Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches," (5th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc, 2018), 200.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

The research for this thesis left no imaginative room for interpreting the results discovered. Within this chapter, the researcher will inform the reader of the results of six interviews conducted with three Senior Pastors and three Worship Pastors who experienced the challenges of leading during the moral failure of a staff member and as a transitional leader after a moral failure. The interviews conducted provided first-hand accounts of experiences that rendered invaluable contributions to the study and preparation of this thesis. This chapter will cover eight main themes found within the answers provided by the interviews. Each participant contributed a different story, action, and result, giving a broad view of the topic in question. For the purposes of this study, each candidate's story will be included in the discussion of the themes in concise summaries. The varied themes identified helped to answer this thesis's research questions and hypotheses.

Timing of Discovery

Moral failure is not a scheduled or predictable event.[1] According to this particular Senior Pastor interviewed for this study, they were completely caught off guard by the shortcomings of their subordinate staff members. Of the three Senior Pastors who participated in this study, their tenures were three months, eight months, and eleven years. They all were completely taken by surprise. The timing of a moral failure, as stated, is never predictable, and for two of these senior pastors, they came at a crucial time as they were very early in their tenure.[2]

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[1] Sam Rainer, "How to Handle a Church Staff Person's Moral Failure," Church Answers. April 27, 2022

[2] Sam Rainer, "How to Handle a Church Staff Person's Moral Failure," 2022.

The Worship Pastors who participated were all the transitional leaders of a worship department after the moral failure of their predecessors. Two of them were contacted by a Senior Pastor, or someone who knew them, to come and lead the worship department after the moral failure of the department leader/pastor. One of them was serving in the church where the moral failure took place and assumed the role of worship pastor along with their other duties within the church. Each of them had a basic knowledge of the church and situational history surrounding the need for a transition.

The individuals who committed the moral failures had different lengths of tenure before the moral failure occurred, ranging from one to eight years, with only one lasting longer than four years. The length of tenure varied, but it was early in the tenure for many of the leaders who fell into moral impropriety.

Inexperience

Each leader who participated in this study had experience in leading a congregation or a department in normal times and times of dysfunction. However, only one of the three Senior Pastor participants had no experience in leading in or after a moral failure. Their inexperience caused them to rely on the experience of others to assist them in leading through the transitions that impacted the ministry in such a negative way. The two participants who had experience leading during or after a moral failure early in their ministry career eluded that even though they had been through this before, they still felt slightly unprepared because of the suddenness and shock of the revelation. Senior Pastor – B, when asked if you had any experience in leading a congregation or ministry through the moral failure of a minister/leader, replied, "No, it was a whole new ball game for me. It was something like one of the soap operas my grandmother watched. It was chaos at its finest." The leaders interviewed for this study indicated that they felt

"totally unprepared" to lead a congregation, staff, or department through the difficulties of a moral failure that an offending minister had committed. The Worship Pastors that were interviewed were asked about the support from the senior leadership in leading the worship ministry forward. Each one gave a different account. Worship Pastor – A had the unique opportunity to serve with a Senior Pastor who had been a Worship Pastor in his ministry career and had assumed the position after the moral failure of his predecessor. Worship Pastor – B had a much different experience. She felt that her Senior Pastor trusted her with the situation; she responded this was the approach of her Senior Pastor, "Hey, you handle it. Part of me enjoyed that trust, but it also made me feel like it handicapped the healing process from going forward. You need to hear from your senior pastor, and I really did not." Worship Pastor – C had the full support of a Senior Pastor who had no experience and was just as lost as he was in the situation. Senior and Worship Pastors in this study felt that their inexperience was one of their greatest challenges in transitioning their respective groups forward in healing and continuing to fulfill Christ's great commission.

Moral Failures

Moral failure comes in many different forms. Each of the cases presented by the participants had unique circumstances and causes. However, the prevailing moral failure identified in this study was sexual in nature. Senior Pastor – A had a Worship Pastor who was having an adulterous affair with a single woman in the church. Senior Pastor – B had the most extreme moral failure account of all of those interviewed for this study. "The worship pastor was caught in a homosexual affair with another minister across town. It was something that had happened for an extended time and with others in the community and our church." Senior Pastor

– C had a Worship Pastor who had a very sudden affair with an individual who had only been a part of the church for around three months.

The Worship Pastors interviewed for this study also revealed the circumstances surrounding assuming their respective roles. Worship Pastor – A followed a Worship Pastor who had an affair with a single member of the church. Worship Pastor – B followed a Worship Pastor who had an inappropriate sexual relationship with a minor. Worship Pastor – C followed an individual who embezzled large amounts of finances from the church.

As stated above, the overwhelming moral failure found in this study was sexual in nature. However, the circumstances surrounding each example are varied and carry unique perspectives to be viewed when looking at each case. The churches, people, and issues that arose from each example provided are equally sad and revealing about the harms of sin on the body of Christ.

Connections

Being connected to others is a common human occurrence. The connection of humanity perpetuates the gospel message into a tangible experience and changes the world one soul at a time. Connections played a very important role in the relationships between the Senior Pastor, the morally fallen, the transitional leader, and the congregation, according to the participants of this study. This section will reveal the commonalities and distinctions in each situation. It is vital to see the relationships between leaders and those in their care to see the positive and negative results of leading through the difficulties of a moral failure.

For perspective, this section will evaluate the relationship connection between the Senior Pastor and the offending minister. Senior Pastor – A reported, "The minister and I bonded pretty quickly over our shared interests. I thought that I had a deep enough connection to correct the behavior even in the short amount of time that we spent together. The staff member respected

me, I thought." Upon discovering the moral impropriety, Senior Pastor- A thought their relationship was strong enough to bring correction before the offending minister's total demise. Unfortunately, he discovered their relationship was only surface-deep, and the offending minister would not receive correction or guidance, leading to their dismissal. Senior Pastor – B knew the offending minister on more of an acquaintance level. He responded to the researcher's question, "What was your relationship like with the offending leader/pastor? Was there a deep connection?" by saying: "I knew the offending minister. We had served in our denomination in the same state for most of our careers. We had not worked together in the same church but had a few times in other areas." Senior Pastor – C had a much deeper connection with the offending minister; his response to the same question above was as follows:

> We had grown very close. He came to us as a young man and stayed in our home for three months when he first arrived until he could find an apartment. We golfed once a week together and traveled often. We had an almost father-son relationship. He was one of the greatest hires that I have made in my thirty years of pastoring. Honestly, we are still very close.

The Worship Pastors who participated in the study for this thesis likewise reported their relationship with their predecessor. The participants were asked, "Did you at any time have any interactions with the former leader?" Worship Pastor – A responded that they had a friendship before the occurrence of moral failure and that they became their replacement; they did not have a ministerial relationship. Worship Pastor – B had a prior friendship and continued the friendship with the offending minister. After the individual's dismissal, Worship Pastor – B had several in-person interactions with the offending minister. Worship Pastor – C worked with the offending minister before becoming the replacement. They had served on boards within their denomination together. They had a friendship.

The next connection that will be highlighted in this section is that of the connection between the worship department and the offending minister. While there was a wide variety of levels of connection, all participants reported a deep social and emotional connection with the department members and the offending minister. The element of a deep spiritual connection was missing from the participants' accounts. The study participants also reported that the offending ministers had little to no connection with the entirety of the congregation. One Worship Pastor reported that the congregation was connected to the offending minister because he was from the area and was known before becoming a church staff member.

An additional element to this section that must be examined is the severing of a connection. After the moral failure of a previous leader, especially one that has been long-term, there will be connections that are still present within the ministry and congregation. Senior Pastor – B had the most profound moral failure of a Worship Pastor among the participants for this study. The Worship Pastor had an extramarital homosexual affair with a Worship Pastor from a different church. The Worship Pastor had been on the church staff for eight years. Many relationships had been formed over that period of time. This Senior Pastor, leadership team, and new Worship Pastor took a drastic approach to severing their connection to the former leader. This is the Senior Pastor's account:

> We erased every physical trace of the former worship pastor. We even moved the worship pastor's office to another part of the church and made the old office a storage room. It is still a storage room… I don't think anyone actually goes in there. Even the music and arrangements that had his name on them were replaced. We steered every conversation, action, and plan for the church away from the past. It helped immensely!

The connection was severed for many reasons. Senior Pastor B and the church leadership felt that it was such a deep wound that all reminders and sources of connection to the former leader would be a block to moving forward in the congregation and worship department. Even

with the removal of all sources of connection, the participant stated that it took three years to move toward healing completely.

The common connections in all the participants' interviews centered on social and emotional connections on a human basis. It should be noted that only one participant reported a spiritual connection or leadership element between the offending minister and the worship department and church.

Loyalty

Loyalty is a wonderful companion between those who serve together in ministry. This study discovered that loyalty is both a help and a hindrance. The Senior Pastor participants of this study were asked, "Were there loyalties to the previous leader that presented challenged your new worship leader/pastor in connecting and leading?" The Worship Pastor participants were asked, "Were there loyalties to the previous leader that presented challenges for you in connecting and leading?" The common answer given by those in both positions was yes and no. The majority of those who were interviewed had a unified answer that there was only a minority of those who remained loyal to the offending minister. Most of the participants interviewed stated that those who continued to be loyal to the offending minister did so because they did not understand or believe the offensive behavior.

Two participants of the six gave differing experiences with loyalty. One found that the nature of the moral failure profoundly affected the relationship of those left in the path of the offense. This offending minister had a homosexual affair and was totally abandoned by all those in the church. Senior Pastor – B, "All loyalties were gone. I believe if it had been a heterosexual affair with a chance at reconciliation, there could have presented this issue. But, with the disgust of the people, there was no loyalty at all that presented a challenge." This participant also stated

that while the people were not loyal to the former Worship Pastor, they were "fiercely loyal" to the worship department. The people who made up this department did all that they could to keep the department together and function at its high level of success. Another account demonstrated the love of the people toward the offending minister but found no loyalty was to be found by those in the worship department or congregation. Loyalty played a significant part in the transitions in all six interviews, both positively and negatively. As stated above, the key negative component of transitions in this study was due to a lack of understanding of the specific moral failure.

Spiritual Discipline and Dependence

Further examination of the participants in this study asked them to explain the recovery process for their departments and congregations spiritually, emotionally, and physically after the moral failure of the Worship Pastor in each situation. Each participant had unique attributes to their answer; however, three overwhelming similarities were a part of each ministry moving forward. First, prayer was the initial step taken by all who faced this distinct challenge in their ministry. Prayer was the stalwart defense against further division and fracture. Secondly, the participants brought attention to the development or re-development of unity and community. This all began with transparency. Within each account of the participants, the need for unity was paramount to moving forward. Worship Pastor – A said, "We focused on rebuilding the community of the worship department. The department was fragmented and had to be rebuilt and become a healthy body." One of the most significant examples of this came from Worship Pastor – B:

> Let's get to know each other… I think that after this trauma, getting them to know one another and trust one another helped build a team quicker than if the moral failure had not happened… they almost trauma bonded… like okay, we're going through this together…

it was interesting to watch. I am not sure that group of people would have bonded together with one another or me if the moral failure had not happened, it is sad to say.

The third similarity found among the participant's answers revealed the need to remove the reminders of the offending minister physically. In one account, the office of the Worship Pastor was completely moved to another part of the building, and the former office was made into a storage closet. While this was an extreme revelation within the study, each participant gave an example of moving forward by removing the past. One revelation in this aspect of the study should be noted. Senior Pastor – C and the church took the time to find a replacement, which further assisted in the positive outcome of the transition.

> We waited about six months before we hired the new worship pastor. We chose to give ourselves time to heal and really find the right fit for the church. We made our hire, and it was almost an instant connection between the people of the church. I hate to use this terminology but we "made a match." I think because we waited so long to replace the worship pastor, we had removed many of the barriers for the new worship pastor.

Additionally, the participants of this study were asked if they relied on anyone outside of the church for guidance. Senior and Worship Pastors alike all emphatically responded with a resounding yes. While only one of the Senior Pastors had ever faced the challenge of leading through a moral failure, he, too, revealed his dependence on outside support and guidance. "While I had been through this once before, there is no wisdom in going at things alone. I called several of my colleagues and leaders over me. There were aspects of our situation that they had faced, and they were able to offer sound advice that helped me avoid making huge mistakes." All the participants of this study realized their inability to lead through a moral failure without leaning on the experience of those who had faced this distinct challenge. Spiritually, emotionally, and physically, the challenge of leading through a moral failure has incredible challenges that can only be understood by those who have faced them. While depending on the disciplines of

prayer, worship, scripture, and fasting were all aspects discussed by those who participated in this study, they all revealed their need for those with wisdom and experience to help them navigate the difficulties of leading through a moral failure.

Leadership Support

There is nothing harder than leading through difficult situations without the support of leadership, both above and from the support leaders of an organization. Senior Pastors who participated in this study were asked if their church leaders supported them and the new Worship Pastor through the difficulties of the transitions following the moral failure in each situation. They all responded differently but with one central answer: yes. Worship Pastor – B provided the following answer:

> Our leaders were broken. I remember the night that everything was exposed, and it was like a funeral. We met at the church and wept. We sat in silence for many moments of our initial meeting… I mean, what do you say? As time passed, we prayed, fasted, and prayed and fasted some more. We began to see the help of the Lord. We worked so closely together during this time… now that I think about it… I miss that healing time… it was great. I know that may sound weird, but those were great leaders and spiritual people who helped me, and the entire staff pick up the pieces for three years.

The substance of this answer was found in the answers of the Senior Pastors who participated in this study. Brokenness turned to unity, leading the congregation and the worship ministry forward to greater places than before the moral failure.

The Worship Pastors participating in this study were asked if the Senior Pastor and the church leadership helped them move the worship department forward after the moral failure of the previous leader. This is where the study found a variety of answers. Worship Pastor – A answered the question, stating that the Senior Pastor that he worked for helped in every way possible, as well as the church leadership. Worship Pastor – A worked for a leader who had served as a Worship Pastor for many years before becoming a Senior Pastor and was able to

assist him in leading the department forward. The church leadership also fully supported him to the best of their ability to help the department and church move forward.

Worship Pastor – B did not have the same experience. The answer provided in the interview to the two questions was a stern no. Worship Pastor – B stated there was no support from the Senior Pastor or the church leadership and felt abandoned. The outside guidance assisted in leading the worship department forward and on the road to recovering from the moral failure of the previous leader. Worship Pastor – C stated that he had no help from his Senior Pastor because he did not know what to do. However, the leadership of the church stepped up to the plate, and along with outside guidance, he was able to lead effectively and move the department and congregation forward as far as the worship aspect of the church.

An additional element of leadership support was found in the cases of the Worship Pastors. Their internal leaders proved to be an amazing asset in assisting the success of moving the department forward. However, some personnel casualties occurred due to small loyalties to the former leader and malice toward the Senior Pastor. These exits from the ministry and congregation did not hurt the process but helped move the process forward. The three Worship Pastors who participated in the study all greatly appreciated those in their respective departments and their assistance in leading well alongside them to see a whole team and ministry.

The common theme among all those interviewed is the necessity to seek help from outside sources to assist them in leading through such a challenging time. Their dependence on the experience of others was invaluable and, in all cases, should be accredited with the success of the participant's ability to move forward after the moral failure of a leader.

Lack of Resources

As with any topic, information is always needed to address the complexities associated with the topic in question. This study sought to find resources that would assist in developing answers to the research questions and supporting the researcher's hypothesis. There is always a reason or purpose for a researcher to initiate the study of a topic, and most of the time, it is due to the need for more information available. This study is no different. This study sought to find the common aspects shared across the experiences of those who have faced the challenge of leading in and after the moral failure of a leader. The study also pursued the ability to answer the researcher's question and the need to explore the topic further. After interviewing the participants of this study, an answer to the following question posed to all was unanimously consistent: "Did you find any literature or leadership guide that was specific to leading a worship ministry forward after a moral failure?"

Each Senior Pastor and Worship Pastor answered that they found no literature specific to leading a worship ministry through the moral failure of a leader specific to this ministry department. Each of them also stated that there was no literature accessible for the secondary leader to rely on for direction and information concerning leading during or after a moral failure. All participants found literature and resources specific to Senior Leaders facing the temptations of moral failure or having committed a moral failure. Senior Pastor – A, "The only sources that exist are for those in a senior pastoral role. There are also some resources for those who have committed an immoral act for their recovery." When resources are unavailable it can lead to the mishandling of information, processes of action, and reliance on other avenues that can be defeating to the desired outcome. The only consistent resource that was located for each of the

leaders was the experience of others. Fortunately, this proved to be a reliable resource for the participants of this study.

The need for previous literature is also reflected in the interviewees' answers concerning their reliance on the help of others. Each participant expressed that a direct impact of their leadership plane was a lack of documented support, which was an element of hindrance in facilitating healing after the moral failure of the previous leader. Worship Pastor – B responded to the question, did you find any literature or leadership guide that was specific to leading a worship ministry forward after a moral failure? "No, not at all, not at all. Plenty of literature to help you if you had a moral failure or how to prevent a moral failure… but nothing for help when you follow someone." A benefit to having a written, reliable resource is the ability to share it with those you are trying to lead. Depending on the word of mouth or experiences of others without documentation leads to loose interpretation and contextual fallacies that can potentially lead to undesirable outcomes.

Answering the Research Questions

After all the research and interviews conducted for this thesis, valuable information has been produced to answer the following two research questions. These two questions are concise and center the focus of the research. The first question posed by the researcher was, in what ways can a transitional leader facilitate a worship ministry department's recovery from the moral failure of a previous leadership? The three worship pastors answered with many commonalities that point to specific answers to this question. The initial starting place for answering this question comes from communication. For a ministry to recover, there must be honest and candid communication. The causes of the fractured ministries are poor integrity and dishonesty. For

transitional leaders/ministers to successfully facilitate a positive recovery, their communication must be rooted in righteousness and humility.[3]

An additional approach to leading recovery after a moral failure was found to be building community. Community starts with trust, according to Worship Pastor – B. This was the appraisal of trust and community provided in the interview. She stated that the members of the department had been through a trauma and did not know one another well enough to get through it together. Trust was also another starting point for all the researcher's study participants. In all cases, trust in one another and trust in their new leader and senior leadership led to a successful transition and recovery for the worship ministry departments. Another approach that was revealed in the interviews was the clear need for spiritual renewal. Prayer, worship, fasting, and fellowship were all key elements in leading to the recovery of the worship ministries represented in this study.

These three specific approaches to leading a ministry's recovery after the moral failure of its former leader involve the most important factor: time. Time was the all-encompassing ingredient that assisted all those who led through the transitions during and after a leader's moral failure. The famous quote attributed to many authors, including the Greek poet Meander and Geoffrey Chaucer, "Time heals all wounds," has relevance for those who find themselves leading in transition after the moral failure of a leader. However, in the cases used for this study, time was not the healer; rather, the allowance of time for the methods and Godly wisdom to produce results was essential.

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[3] McKeever, The Aftermath of a Moral Failure, 2023.

Leading from the second chair is not always the easiest, and with the added stress of following a fallen leader, it can be challenging. The second question posed by the researcher asks, how can a worship department leader partner with senior leadership to bring healing to the entire body during recovery from a moral failure of previous leadership? This question requires a specific look at the answers provided in the interviews. One of the worship pastors interviewed for the study found no assistance or connection from their senior leadership. This, unfortunately, had a profound effect on how this Worship Pastor moved forward with their leadership plan and the amount of time and energy that was needed to facilitate the healing process. However, the other two Worship Pastors and the Senior Pastors were very candid about their approach and connection to those whom they walked through this journey with. In each of these cases, there was a smoother recovery process compared to the Worship Pastor who had no assistance or connection.

In almost every case for this study, there was a need for dependency on one another to move the church and ministry forward. Only one Senior Pastor and one Worship Pastor had ever experienced these circumstances before. Their experience assisted them in making the process easy from the start and gave them an inside track to leading effectively through the moral failure of the leader they were facing. Dependency on one another's prayers, leadership, and desire is essential to a team approach to moving forward in recovery. Just as in the first research question, trust and communication also play a very significant role in helping lead a worship ministry department and church forward after a leader's moral failure.

Summary

The research for this study was heartbreaking and revealing to examine. However, it was necessary for the purpose of this study. The common themes found within the interviews proved

to be consistent and followed a similar pattern of pain, shock, loss, and recovery. These themes helped this study form an accurate picture of the complexities of leadership following the moral failure of a minister within the context of the worship department. It should be noted that each participant in the study shared intimate feelings and accounts of each situation with the researcher that were found to be pure, honest, and raw. The effects of a moral failure, whether recent or twenty years in the past, produce deep emotions and reactions from those who are left in the wake of destruction. The participants and information found in this study have the potential to spark greater interest in the topic and demonstrate the need for more information and instruction concerning leadership and leadership transitions after a moral failure.

Chapter Five: Summary of Study

This study provides an in-depth look into the circumstances surrounding the case studies of six participants that led through and after the moral failure of a Worship Pastor in a local church. The study focused on the Senior Pastor and transitional Worship Pastor. Each case presented different and unique circumstances; however, many common themes drew attention to the need for further study.

The researcher examined the literature applicable to the transitional leader following a moral failure, specifically to those who serve in a secondary leadership role in a worship department. In the quest for information, the researcher found that there are ample resources for those who are in Senior Pastor or Executive leadership positions. The literature available while usable for the topic did not cover the specific responsibilities, actions, and leadership requirements of the Worship Pastor after the moral failure of a predecessor.

The study then focused on those who had actual experience. The study began with a selection process facilitated by a recruitment email to individuals known to and recommended to the researcher. After the participants' commitment, the researcher scheduled times for one-on-one interviews, both in person and through video conferencing technologies. Each participant provided an answer to the questions developed by the researcher. Senior Pastor participants were asked sixteen questions, and Worship Pastor participants were asked fifteen. This series of questions provided a sampling from different perspectives and experiences to supply the researcher with the information necessary for the study.

The researcher asked each of the participants to explain the worship pastor's moral failure for the record. After the cause of the transition was established, each participant described the aftereffects of the moral failure and how they inhibited or assisted the path of transition and

healing for the specific worship department and congregation. The study provided clear and concise information for the researcher to answer the research questions and hypothesis.

Prior Research and Summary of Findings

The researcher for this study located many different resources covering moral failure and those in ministry. However, those resources were vague to the transitional leader, specifically those in the secondary leadership role in a congregation's worship ministry. Most of the prior research located for this study is geared toward the Senior Pastor who has faced moral failure or is facing moral failure. The prior research did provide the basis for questions that were used in interviewing the study participants and display the effects of moral failure on the church and the minister for the reader of this thesis.

The findings of this study are informative, illuminating, and foundational. First, the findings are informative because they provide information both for research and revelation. From the research perspective, they equipped the researcher with the necessary answers and applications for the purpose of this thesis. The information provided by the study participants demonstrates the harsh effects of moral failure on those left in the aftereffects and those who must clean up the path of destruction.

The common themes study revealed in this study offer confirmation that the lack of resources is very prevalent regarding the topic of transitional leadership after the moral failure of a leader in a secondary leadership role. The research participants offered, in detail, the lack of resources that were available to help them in their pursuit of leading well through the difficult transition after the moral failure of a previous leader. Likewise, the literature accessed for research for this thesis left the researcher needing more resources to answer the research questions; rather, it needed more proof of the hypotheses. The literature that was discovered for

this study was detailed for those in senior leadership to provide remedies for avoiding moral failure or having committed a moral infraction. To understand moral failure, the research literature for the study provided a baseline for defining morality. Hanno Sauer stated that morality is often interpreted as a solution to a problem. He asks the question, "What is Morality?" Sauer, in his review of *What's Wrong with Morality? A Social-Psychological Perspective,* by Daniel Batson, provides these clear parameters for defining morality. Morality is actions that can be definitive, common, or fundamental, and it promotes wellness beyond a person's interest and is about normality, rules, and virtuous actions.[1] These all, coupled with the influence of culture and religion, help define morality and how it should be applied. Moral failure takes shape when an individual's character and integrity become tainted. Failure of character, judgment, environmental pressures, lack of honest authenticity, weakness of desire, and hypocrisy lead ethical behavior to failure.[2] These secular views lend assistance in defining moral failure for the religious or church community. The researcher applied these definitions along with the position of Robert Harrell that moral failure is an action contrary to scripture or moral rules that would disqualify a person for the purposes of this thesis.[3]

The literature and interviews for research also provided a glimpse into the effects of a moral failure on the church. There are accusations, and then there are actual moral failures.[4] The interviews gave specific verified moral failures that gave the researcher first-hand knowledge of

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[1] Hanno Sauer. "Moral Failure." Journal of Moral Philosophy. 16. (London: Continuum, 2019), 647-648.

[2] Hanno Sauer, "Moral Failure", 657.

[3] Robert R. Harrell, Jr., "Case Studies of Congregations Recovering from Pastoral Moral Failure," (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1996), 25.

[4] Sam Rainer, "How to Handle a Church Staff Person's Moral Failure," Church Answers. April 27, 2022.

how the church functioned and moved forward after the moral failure of the previous leader. The

research interviews revealed that no matter the moral infraction, destruction, pain, and heartbreak

were left in the path.[5] The literature research did support the actions of the churches that were

examined in the interview's approach to being truthful and honest as an initial priority in moving

toward healing.[6]

The literature, while limited, does give significant information that can be drawn from to

lead a ministry through the moral failure of a leader. The literature that was accessed for this

thesis is geared toward the moral failure of a Senior Pastor. Howard Hendricks found four

characteristics that could be used in evaluating the causes of a secondary leader's moral failure in

his study. He four characteristics state that none of the men had personal accountability, a

personal devotional, prayer, and worship life ceased, eighty percent of the men had a sexual

encounter with a woman after spending time with them often in a counseling setting, and finally,

they all denied that they would ever fail morally.[7] The causes of the moral failures in this study

were not a factor in the study; however, the results of the moral failure examples are indicative of

these factors.

This study found that moral failure and the secondary leader, while a significant issue

within an organization, have yet to be something that has been studied in an in-depth manner.

Leaders in the secondary role often play a valuable role and greatly influence the operations and

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[5] Jordan Morehouse and Laura L. Lemon, "Beyond Reputational and Financial Damage: Examining Emotional and Religious Harm in a Post-Crisis Case Study of Hillsong Church," (*Public Relations Review* 49, no. 1, 2023), 5.

[6] Sam Rainer, "How to Handle a Church Staff Person's Moral Failure," Church Answers. April 27, 2022.

[7] Garrett Kell, "The Pattern among Fallen Pastors," The Gospel Coalition. June 16, 2017.

members of an organization.[8] In the interview portion of the research for this thesis, the influence of those who had the moral failure was found to be very influential in some cases and not so much in others, dependent on their tenure with the ministry or church.

The research for this study was designed with a thematic interview process at the heart of the research to gather information from the experiences of those who had led through the moral failure of a previous secondary leader. The study focused on the need for methods, instruction, and inspiration for the transitional leader after the moral failure of a previous leader. Participants were those who had experience and could offer a clear image of what it looks like when facing the many challenges of leading after the moral failure of a previous leader.

Finally, the research findings provide foundational information for the furtherance of research on transitional leadership in a secondary leadership role, specifically in the role of the worship pastor. The research demonstrated the lack of information for those facing the challenges of moral failures of previous leadership. The research found that most of those who faced a leader's moral failure relied more on others' experiences rather than research or leadership. Therefore, the research contained in this study provides the foundations for further research.

Significance

This study is significant for transitional leaders facing the challenges of following a colleague after a moral failure. Moral failures, unfortunately, are a factor in the leadership landscape.[9] These failures create unique challenges that are not easily overcome and require

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[8] Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson, *Leading from the Second Chair*, (San Francisco, CA: Wiley + ORM, 2012), 2.

[9] Robert R. Harrell Jr., "Case Studies of Congregations Recovering from Pastoral Moral Failure," Order No. 9627847, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1996.

information that is only sometimes available within the pages of text. The existing literature provides a lot of information for senior leaders who are confronted with transitions due to moral failure. The literature, however, does not guide the worship pastor or worship ministry leader. The finding should provide direction to any reader facing the challenge of leading through a transition after a moral failure with the direct knowledge and experiences of those who have led in these circumstances. In addition to the potential information gained through this study, there could be an element of information that assists in bringing healing to those who read and utilize this study. This study offers a potential trajectory to facilitate additional studies and curriculums for the transitional leader who is following a moral failure. Many leaders' development of the path forward is often clouded with irrelevant information intended for others. This study could lift the burden of those with a genuine passion for shepherding those they are responsible for into a place of rest and healing.

This study also focused on considering the circumstances surrounding the need for a transition to take place. Transitional leaders should accurately understand the circumstances they are facing to develop an informed plan of action; discovering a cause to create an opportunity for sound leadership should be an initial starting place for those leading in the aftermath of a moral failure.[10] Understanding moral failure and its results is essential to defining the role and actions of a leader.[11] There must be constructs of action that ensure the viability of a specific plan of action to move people forward. Another crucial factor that this study examined was developing a sound scriptural foundation that clearly defines what moral failure looks like to God.[12] Not every

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[10] John C. Maxwell, "*Leading in Tough Times*, (New York, NY: Hatchett Book Group, 2021), 1.

[11] Ken Sande, *The Peace Maker*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 102.

moral failure is equal in value to human comprehension. Sin is horrible and has no measure of severity with God; a moral failure is not always as significant or damaging according to the severity or actions that have taken place. The circumstances of a situation impact the outcomes after the moral failure of a leader.

One of the questions in the interview process for this study examined the relationship between the transitional leader and the members of the worship department and congregation. Within the participants' answers, they each described the people's conditions in the aftermath of the moral failure. Leading people requires a leader to examine the mental, spiritual, and emotional condition of those in their charge.[13] As stated in a previous chapter, scripture instructs leaders to "Be diligent to know the state of your flocks and attend to your herds…" (Proverbs 27:23, New King James Version). The condition of those left after a previous leader's moral failure will help establish a plan that will restore trust and healing after such a horrible situation.[14]

This study also seeks to provide healing and peace routes for those facing this leadership challenge and those being led. Trusting and resting in the peace of God is the greatest asset that this study found in those who participated. In the earlier portions of this thesis, the peace of God was a core concept, and this study found that those facing this must heed the instructions to the believer "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful" (Colossians 3:15, New King James Version).

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[12] Robert R. Harrell Jr., "Case Studies of Congregations Recovering from Pastoral Moral Failure," Order No. 9627847, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1996.

[13] Harrell, Case Studies of Congregations Recovering from Pastoral Moral Failure," 19.

[14] William Pentak, and Kevin Leman, *The Way of the Shepherd: 7 Ancient Secrets to Managing Productive People*, Zondervan, 2004.

Limitations

This study has limitations that prohibit the sampling of research. In this section, the researcher will provide examples of the limitations encountered in this study. The first limitation that must be examined is the need for more resources available to those who are in the secondary leadership role following the moral failure of a previous leader. The literature available to the researcher was limited to applications specific to the Senior Pastor who has fallen or is leading after a previously fallen Senior Leader. This limitation is also very apparent, as stated in the previous chapter, concerning the ability of the participants of this study to locate and use relevant resources for the individual moral failures that they faced. It is also a direct link to their need for advice and reliance on the experiences of others to assist them in transitioning a church or worship ministry forward after the moral failure of a previous leader.

The researcher's positionality also provides a limitation to this study. As noted in chapter three of the thesis, the researcher has a vested interest in this topic. The researcher serves as a Senior Pastor. Before this role, he served as a Worship Pastor for seventeen years. During his tenure in that position, he had the misfortune of following a previous leader who had committed a moral failure. Bias should be noted; however, the researcher intends to provide answers for himself and others who face the aftereffects of the moral failure of another leader.

An additional limitation of this study stems from the need for more desire to participate in the interviews used. The researcher invited thirty-two individuals to participate in this study, with only seven replies and six commitments. The one reply that was received that did not participate expressed their concern about remaining anonymous due to the public knowledge of the moral failure they were associated with. The desire to talk about those who have committed a moral failure and the willingness to speak about the moral failure is necessary to move forward

in the healing process.[15] This study did not seek to bring a healing process to a specific situation; however, the study intends to provide a clear picture of the ingredients necessary to succeed in the process of transitional leadership after a moral failure. Luke 12:2 says, "For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known." While there was a lack of committed participants, those who provided the necessary information helped the researcher produce the results of this thesis. It should be noted that the researcher found after the interview process that several potential candidates who did not respond to the initial request for participation did reach out to express their reluctance to be included in the case studies. Most of these individuals feared the possibility of their anonymity being breached, or they felt that enough time had passed for them to speak freely about the circumstances of their situation.

The limitations of this study press for the need for further research beyond what is found in this study. Unfortunately, moral failure is not something that is disappearing from the human landscape. There are many issues that the church faces; however, the greatest threat to the unity of the church is sin and sinful actions. The limitations of this study demonstrate the profound need for literature for those who serve in primary and secondary roles of leadership to find actionable applications to bring healing, continuity, and future success within the context of their ministries. Future researchers can endlessly capitalize on the limited resources that are available to those serving in a transitional secondary leadership position after the moral failure of a previous leader.

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[15] Joe McKeever, "The Aftermath of a Moral Failure," (Outreachmagazine.com. October 31, 2023).

Recommendations for Future Study

The future for this topic is rich with potential. Considering the limitations of materials relevant to the specificity of leadership transitions after a moral failure in a secondary leadership position, the field is wide for research and study. The study findings are illuminating in that the research showed the need for further research and instruction for transitional leaders after a secondary leader's moral failure. The findings also illuminate how little attention is given to one of the most challenging aspects of ministry that can be found. The culmination of all the information found in the study provides the researcher and reader with the desire for more information and instruction concerning the paths necessary to lead after the moral failure of a minister. As for the recommendations from this study, consider the following:

There is a great need for a defined approach to leading as a secondary leader after a moral failure. Specifically, for those who become the transitional leader. This study demonstrates the need for an initial understanding of the role of the secondary leader. Secondary leaders must clearly understand how and where their authority and leadership empowerment originate.[16] It was clear from the participants that they needed a clear understanding and support from senior leadership to make the transition smooth. There was an ease toward deep healing where roles and parameters were clear.

This study has the potential to spawn many different studies, curriculums, or literary works that can assist secondary leaders in their leadership efforts after the moral failure of a precious leader. This study focuses on the role of the Worship Pastor in this situation yet could inspire focuses on other secondary ministry leadership roles. Leading in a secondary leadership

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[16] Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson, *Leading from the Second Chair*, (San Francisco, CA: Wiley + ORM, 2012), 17-18.

role is always a challenge. As stated above, the role of a secondary leader can be interpreted in many ways. This study not only indicates this necessity but also stresses the need for a guide for this situation. The Worship Pastor participants in this study all had to rely on the help of others to guide them through this process. A future study could include a step-by-step process for Worship Pastors faced with leading through or after the moral failure of a previous leader.

Additionally, there could be deeper research into the demographics of those who have committed a moral infraction leading to their dismissal as a Worship Pastor. There are many questions, emotionally, physically, and spiritually, that could give a better understanding of why individuals succumb to the temptations that ruin their ministry and, often, their lives. Moral failure is not always confined to a certain gender, race, or theological position. This study was able to use just three theological perspectives: the only two genders and only two ethnicities. Looking at a broader section of ministry leaders could unlock more information relevant to creating a clear path of transitional leadership practice after a moral failure.

Research into the transitional leader's mental, emotional, and spiritual health is another area of research that could and should be pursued. There are many issues that these leaders face that cause anxiety, stress, and defeatism. The possibilities are plentiful for researchers to establish symptoms, signals, and remedies that could assist leaders who find themselves in the position of a transitional leader after the moral failure of a previous leader. The frustrations that are encountered with the transition process in normal leadership changes are stressful, and adding the element of following a leader who has abused their position, lost the trust of their followers, and left a path of destruction because of their actions gives another level of stress that is unforeseen until it is encountered.

Another avenue of research that should be pursued is the development of Senior Pastor and Worship Pastor collaboration to develop a guide for those facing this situation. The researcher of this thesis presented in his second hypothesis, "A worship department leader can partner with senior leadership to bring healing to the entire body during recovery from a moral failure of previous leadership by aligning their plan of action with that of senior leadership, leaning on the experience and spiritual covering of the senior leadership, and knowing the role as subordinate leadership." The research for this study demonstrates the dire need for this to come into a tangible application for the church and ministers to utilize in the future.

Summary

This thesis was born out of the desire to assist the author and those who are under his mentorship in achieving success in leadership in all possible situations that they may encounter. In the opening of this thesis, there is a clear background for the purpose of this thesis and study. Leaders, specifically in the Worship Pastor or secondary role, are at a loss when it comes to many topics of leadership that they may face. Moral scandal is one of the most difficult challenges that the church faces. The scandalous behaviors of high-profile ministers such as Swaggart, Baker, Haggard, Driscoll, and Lentz are examples of moral failure that have stained the trust and reputation of the church.[17] This study does not focus on these high-profile offenders but rather on those lesser-known who have done as much damage in the local church through their moral failures.

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[17] Benjamin Rossi, "Hypocrisy is Vicious, Value-Expressing Inconsistency," *The Journal of Ethics* 25, no. 1 (03, 2021), 57-80.

Senior leadership has a fountain of information that helps those in secondary leadership roles. This study only seeks to enhance that ability with new information and revelations of existing limitations. This study found that there are times when secondary leaders can be left to their own to find a path forward that leaves them feeling isolated and defeated, as Bonem and Patterson, in their book Leading from the Second Chair, describe. It is essential for those who are in this leadership position to find their way to the leadership of a senior leader who can help or partner with them in leading their ministry forward. This study focused on locating the existing resources and leaning on the experience of those who have encountered leadership roles after the moral failure of a previous leader.

The research questions and hypotheses that formed the basis of this study narrowed the topic into a distinct focus. This focus centered on the transitional leadership of a Worship Pastor after the moral failure of their predecessor. The study centered on several key concepts that examine the causes and remedies of transitional leadership after a moral failure. They include discovering the circumstances of the moral failure, the necessary elements of leadership that are needed to move a worship ministry forward, how are the people left in the aftermath affected, what the route to peace and healing, how forgiveness takes its necessary place in the healing process, and how do transitional leaders move forward with all of the many challenges that arise after the moral failure of a leader.

This study focuses on key elements of leadership and moral failure by asking what the definitions of the following terms mean to and in the study. First, what is a transitional leader? Second, what is a moral failure for the purposes of this thesis? Finally, what is the difference between a Senior and a Secondary Leader? These key terms are essential to understanding this thesis's who, what, and why.

Chapter two of this thesis centered on the literature available and its contribution to the study. The impact of a moral failure is imperative to bringing initial and lasting healing to an affected organization.[18] The appraisal of the literature located for this study lends great credence to the finding of this study that there needs to be more study or literature that is available to the secondary leader who is a transitional leader after the moral failure of their predecessor. The review of resources centers on discovering literature that defines moral failure in both the religious and secular world. It centers the religious definition of moral failure as an action that is contrary to scripture or moral rules that would disqualify a person.[19] Another topic of review is the accounts of moral failure in the church and how mainstream denominations and non-denominational churches handle the moral failures of ministers within the church. From here, the study focuses on the repercussions that the church may encounter after the moral failure of a leader. Every aspect of the process, from the initial discovery to the outcome, is examined as the literature allows.

The church and those that lead it must present a clear grasp and ability to lead in all circumstances that may arise. Using scripture, literature, research, and experience, this study provides a clear understanding of the power of moral failure. For the church to heal, there must be a process adopted and followed by the transitional leaders and the members of the department and congregation. Though there are many tests and trials that the church faces, the church is

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[18] Hanno Sauer. "Moral Failure." Journal of Moral Philosophy. 16. (London: Continuum, 2019), 647-648.

[19] Robert R. Harrell, Jr., "Case Studies of Congregations Recovering from Pastoral Moral Failure," (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1996), 25.

victorious and healed by the grace and mercy of God when human dependency is on Him alone.[20]

    The next two sections of chapter two cover the moral failures of a Senior Pastor and of a secondary leader or Worship Pastor. The moral failure of a Senior Pastor is always very public and prevalent in the minds of the outsiders and the least involved in the inner workings of the church. A Senior Pastor's moral failure greatly affects those who are led broadly in the congregation and the community.[21] The secondary leader has more of an impact on those who work in the details of the church, the inner circle of leadership.[22] While both the senior and secondary leaders have great influence, it can be different in how they affect the organization that they are a part of. The final section of chapter two explores how the secular and religious world handles moral failure. Just as in the church, the moral failure of a leader in the secular world has severe ramifications. The secular world must develop a plan to bring stability and peace to the organization to move forward and be productive, just like the church. Betrayal in the secular world is defined as moral injury, and it affects the mind, emotions, and physical aspects of those who are left in the aftermath of the moral failure of a leader.[23]

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[20] Ed Stetzer, "A Letter to the Church on Moral Failure and Misconduct," (Outreachmagazine.com. September 17, 2018).

[21] Hazel R. Atuel, Nicholas Barr, Edgar Jones, Neil Greenberg, Victoria Williamson, Matthew R. Schumacher, Eric Vermetten, Rakesh Jetly, and Carl A. Castro, "Understanding Moral Injury from a Character Domain Perspective," (Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology 41, 41, no. 3, 2021), 155–73.

[22] Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson, *Leading from the Second Chair*, (San Francisco, CA: Wiley + ORM, 2012), 2.

[23] John G. Cullen, "Moral Recovery and Ethical Leadership: JBE," (Journal of Business Ethics 175, 175, no. 3, 2022), 485–97.

The next chapter of this thesis, chapter three, centers on the research study, its participants, and its components. The qualitative thematic design of the study focused on the transitional leader and their experience after the moral failure of a former leader. Six participants, three Senior Pastors, and three Worship Pastors were interviewed using a questionnaire to provide valuable experiential data application and analysis. The participants ranged in age from 29-64 years and had a combined 143 years of experience. The participants all had experiences that involved transitional leadership during or after the moral failure of a secondary leader. The interviews produced common themes that assisted the researcher in developing research findings that provide a clear and evidentiary case for the need for further research, practicum, and applicable information in assisting those who face the challenges of leading as a Worship Pastor after the moral failure of a previous leader. The distinct issues that are evident due to this study include the lack of literature, willingness to talk about the moral failures of others, the need for senior leaders to be better equipped to equip those under their authority, and the need for tangible applications for the church and minister to implement in their pursuit of bringing restoration and healing to those they are leading.

The research findings in chapter four begin with the timing of the discovery of the moral failure by the Senior leadership and congregation of the church. The amount of tenure of the fallen leader played a significant role in the length and journey of the healing process of each ministry and congregation. Additionally, the experience and inexperience of the transitional leaders were examined to see their effect on the course of action and process toward recovery. The types of moral failures that the participants encountered are also examined to see how each ministry and congregation was affected. One of the most significant elements of the interview research was found in the connections between the offending minister and the church, the

offending minister and the Senior Pastor, and between the congregation, the worship department, and the transitional leader. The connections were different in every situation; however, they had many common elements among them. Also, there was an examination of the loyalty between the former leader and the church/ministry department and whether there was an impediment to the success of the transitional leader. The spiritual discipline and leadership support are also key elements that were examined to see how they were leaned on to assist the transitional leader in moving the church and worship ministry forward after the moral failure of the previous leader. Finally, the lack of resources and ability to answer the research questions enabled the researcher to develop a sincere and accurate picture that gives credence to the need for literature and further study to be conducted on this topic to assist leaders in navigating the choppy and uncertain waters after the moral failure of a secondary leader.

In conclusion, this study has illuminated the despair and folly of sin. Let this study be a warning to those who may read it to trust in the Lord, surrender to His ways and his will, and follow the words of Christ in Luke 7:13-14, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." The results of sin take a toll on the sinner and those who are associated with them. Those who lead must do so in a way that brings glory to God and assists others in knowing Him in the fullness of His love, power, and majesty.

Appendix A: IRB Approval

December 8, 2023

Eric Medford
Hanna Byrd

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-655 Ministry After a Leadership Failure: Principles for Transitional Worship Leader

Dear Eric Medford, Hanna Byrd,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d): Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.
If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B: Recruitment Email

Dear _____:

As a graduate student in the School of Music at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to examine the results of a moral failure and the challenges of leadership transitions within a worship ministry department. I am performing a qualitative research study that will be used to fill the gaps in information related to this topic, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must meet the following requirements:

1. All participants must be 18 years or older.
2. All participants must have served in a Pastoral or Supportive Pastoral role.
3. All participants will be current or former Ministers of Music or Worship Pastors and Senior Pastors.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an in-person or online interview, which will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Participation will be confidential. It should take approximately one hour to complete the interview. Participation will be confidential.

To participate, please contact me at ███████████████████████████, for more

information and to schedule an interview. A consent document will be given to you before the

interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research.

Participants will receive a $10 Gift Card for their participation in this research study.

Sincerely,

Eric R. Medford
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University, School of Music
███████████████████████

Appendix C: Consent Form

Study Participation Consent

Title of the Project:
Ministry After a Leadership Failure: Principles for Transitional Worship Leader
Principal Investigator:

Eric R. Medford, Doctoral Candidate, School of Music, Liberty University

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate:

1. All participants must be 18 years or older.
2. All participants must have served in a Pastoral or Supportive Pastoral role.
3. All participants will be current or former Ministers of Music or Worship Pastors and Senior Pastors.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research.

What is the study about, and why is it being done?

This thesis focuses on the unique transitional issues within the worship department of the local church after a moral failure. This study examines the results of a moral failure and the challenges of leadership transitions within a worship ministry department. Qualitative research will be used to fill the gaps in information related to this topic. Interviews will comprise the method used to give valid and usable information for this research study.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. You will participate in a one-hour interview conducted face to-face or through video conference.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer in a locked office. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. At the conclusion of the interview, participants will receive a $10 gift card.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Eric R. Medford. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at ██████████ ███████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Hanna Byrd, at ███████████.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix D: Interview Questionnaire – Senior Pastor

1. Were you the senior pastor at the time of the moral failure of your support staff pastor?

2. Did you have any experience in leading a congregation or ministry through the moral failure of a minister/leader?

3. What was the moral offense committed by the previous leader and how was it discovered? (Please do not disclose any names or graphic details.)

4. What was the length of the offending leader/pastor's tenure before the moral failure?

5. What was your relationship like with the offending leader/pastor? Was there a deep connection?

6. What was the emotional, spiritual, and social relationship between the department and the leader/pastor? Was there a deep connection?

7. How was the new worship leader/ pastor initially received by the department and congregation? Were there barriers in connecting them?

8. Was there division between the people in the department and in the congregation on the moral failure and the circumstances surrounding?

9. Were there loyalties to the previous leader that presented challenged your new worship leader/pastor in connecting and leading?

10. What was the relationship between the department and congregation and you the senior/lead pastor? Was there animosity or bitterness toward you for the dismissal of the offending minister?

11. How did you assist the new worship leader/pastor in leading the worship department/ministry forward?

12. Did you seek out help from others to help lead the ministry and the new worship leader/pastor navigate through such a difficult experience?

13. Did you find any literature or leadership guide that was specific to leading a worship ministry forward after a moral failure?

14. Did the leadership of the church assist you in bringing renewal and trust to the position of the worship leader/pastor?

15. How did you focus spiritually, emotionally, and physically in overcoming the challenges created by the moral failure of a subordinate leader?

16. What was the most difficult part in leading after the moral failure of a subordinate leader and how did you connect to the replacement?

Appendix E: Interview Questionnaire – Worship Pastor

1. A. Please describe how you became the leader/pastor of the worship ministry department after the moral failure of the previous leader:

2. What was the moral offense committed by the previous leader? (Please do not disclose any names or graphic details.)

3. What was the length of the offending leader/pastor's tenure before the moral failure?

4. Did you at any time have any interactions with the former leader?

5. What was the emotional, spiritual, and social relationship between the department and the leader/pastor? Was there a deep connection?

6. How were you initially received well by the department and congregation? Were there barriers to connecting with them?

7. Was there division between the people in the department and in the congregation on the moral failure and the circumstances surrounding?

8. Were there loyalties to the previous leader that presented challenges for you in connecting and leading?

9. What was the relationship between the department and congregation and the senior/lead pastor? Was there animosity or bitterness toward him/her for the dismissal of the offending minister?

10. How did the senior pastor assist you in leading your department/ministry forward?

11. Did you seek out help from other ministers or pastors in trying to lead the ministry through such a difficult experience?

12. Did you find any literature or leadership guide that was specific to leading a worship ministry forward after a moral failure?

13. Did the leadership of the church (outside of the senior pastor) assist you in bringing renewal and trust to the position?

14. How did you focus spiritually, emotionally, and physically in overcoming the challenges created by the mistrust and violation of the people you were empowered to lead?

15. What was the most difficult part in leading after the moral failure of a previous leader?

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