

# BUCKINGHAM REPORT

AN IN-DEPTH CRITIQUE BY AMERICA'S FOREMOST  
CHRISTIAN ANALYZER OF THE ISSUES, PEOPLE, &  
EVENTS AFFECTING TODAY'S SPIRIT-LED LEADERS

## ANALYSIS #1

### HANDLING SEXUAL IMMORALITY IN A STAFF MEMBER

#### Two Failures

Twice, over the last five years, members of our pastoral staff have become involved in sexual immorality. The first one was a man who had been an elder/pastor with me for a number of years. His children called me "Dad" and I looked upon him as a dear friend. But something was wrong. I talked to his wife and finally sat down with him. Through many tears he confessed a long-standing relationship with a much younger married woman in the church.

After much counseling he asked to come before the Body at a closed "believer's meeting," confess his sin and ask forgiveness. He also agreed to go off with his wife for a time of healing. However, on returning, it was obvious there were still deep problems. When I asked him to refrain from all public ministry for a season--although we would continue to pay his salary--and submit himself to the church leadership for rigid direction of his life, he grew angry and refused. I had no choice but to release him from the staff. He immediately withdrew from the church. Shortly afterwards he left town and divorced his wife. He is now living in another state and to my knowledge is totally lost to the ministry.

The other case involved an associate pastor who had come to us after having been forced out of a large church as senior pastor in the wake of discovery of a number of sexual affairs. In this case my compassion outweighed my good sense. Several trusted and respected ministers around the nation warned me I was moving too fast in re-establishing him into ministry. I should have listened. Instead, after two years of what seemed to be solid ministry in our church he announced he was going to divorce his wife and marry a twice-divorced woman he had been seeing in a marriage counseling situation. It was a nasty situation, for the woman's husband, when he discovered what was going on behind his back, threatened to sue the church.

This time I did not beat around the bush. After agonizing prayer (I stayed up nearly all night one night with him) I demanded he call off his divorce, break the illicit relationship and take a six-month leave of absence (with pay) for the purpose of healing. When he refused, I fired him on the spot, called a meeting of the church and spelled out what had transpired, and evoked 1 Corinthians 5, declaring the man anathema and asking the people to shun him for the purpose of redemption. He quickly divorced his wife, married the other woman and took a secular job in a nearby city. His former wife remains a



trusted and faithful member of the church.

As you can see, my success rate is not very good. However, in this Analysis I critique one instance which seems to be evolving into real healing. It deals with an associate pastor (identified here by the pseudo name of Pete Greene) of The Church on the Way in Vay Nuys, California. When Greene confessed he had been living a double life, fraught with numerous extramarital episodes, Pastor Jack Hayford transformed the potentially explosive situation into a learning experience whereby everyone benefited.

### Dragons in Camelot

The Church on the Way has 85 staff members, 20 of whom are pastors. These had covenanted together that anytime one of them was tempted sexually, he would confess it to another pastor. Hayford said that nearly all the pastors (including himself) had, at one time or another, needed this assistance in warding off temptation.

On a Tuesday night in June 1982, Hayford called the pastors together to deal with breaks in relationships. Pete Greene, in a phone conversation with another pastor, had slammed down the receiver. Hayford saw this as a serious offense. He dealt with it brutally, harshly rebuking Greene for his ungraciousness. The men prayed, asking God to return the true spirit of servanthood to the flock.

The next morning the pastoral staff met. Again there was extensive prayer. As Hayford exhorted them "a holy fear and sense of accountability to God began to fill all hearts." During the session Hayford said that "God has brought to my knowledge" that one of the men in the room was guilty of sexual immorality. He then asked the pastors to pair off and pray together.

Hayford, unobtrusively, asked Greene to join him in his office for prayer. After praying together Hayford asked: "Pete, is there anything else you need to say to me?" Greene hung his head and replied, "Pastor, I'm unclean."

Greene then confessed that over a 13-year period there had been sporadic trysts with various prostitutes, as well as a few instances within the Body of Christ. Even though, at the time, Greene showed no emotion or any sign of sorrow--much less repentance--Hayford was convinced Greene had made full confession.

Greene said his wife, Michele (also a pseudo name), a gifted musician who also worked on the church staff, knew nothing of his involvements. Nor did he try to blame her.

Hayford then called in the executive staff and Greene repeated his confession. Greene showed no emotion until Hayford, deeply burdened by the breach of trust and the fact a man of God had sold himself so cheaply to prostitutes, began to weep. When that happened Greene broke and for the first time seemed to realize the gravity of his sin. There was genuine repentance.

Following that, Hayford and Pastor Darrell Roberts met with Pete and Michele Greene and broke the news of the situation to her.

That night Hayford convened a group of 12 leaders called "The Church Council." Along with Greene they came to his house to hear the facts and pray. They stayed until 2:00 a.m. devising a plan of action.

### Steps to be Taken

This is the result of that meeting:



1. The leaders realized they were not only dealing with the sin of sexual immorality, but with the equal sin of the violation of a sacred trust between Pete Greene and the pastoral staff.

2. Action taken would not be punitive, for the leadership affirmed on the basis of Greene's confession that he had repented and was forgiven. Any action, therefore, would be (in Jack Hayford's words), "for the purpose of helping him establish a pathway in holiness and purity and proving again his preparedness for the entrustment of the flock of God under his leadership." In short, the leadership wanted to see him healed and restored to public ministry.

3. To do this would take years--not weeks or months.

4. Greene was to be removed from the pastoral staff and forbidden to minister publicly in any way for a long period of time.

5. Because Michele would need to give priority time to helping rebuild their lives, she, too, was removed from the church staff. However, she was not forbidden to minister publicly with her music. (NOTE: After about a year Michele was allowed to return to the staff on a part-time basis.)

6. It was arranged for Pete and Michele to go away for three months to a sister church in another state where they would be under extensive guidance and counseling. Their salaries would be continued during this time but the trip would be at their own expense.

7. Men of the Council would assist Pete in finding employment in the area when he returned.

8. Pete and Michele requested, and it was heartily agreed, that they continue in the life of The Church on the Way. During that time they would continue to receive professional counseling and would be under the local church pastoral oversight.

9. Hayford would call an open meeting of the church and make full disclosure. Greene would also make a statement before the church. Hayford would prepare a full written statement called "A General Epistle Concerning a Tragedy in the Church Family" which would go to the church leadership and to any others with a need to know.

(NOTE: The tape of the service is SoundWord Tape #2015. "A Case of New Testament Discipline." It is available for \$4.00 plus \$1.00 postage by writing SoundWord, 14480 Sherman Way, Van Nuys, CA 91405.)

### The Sunday Meeting

The next Sunday morning, at the close of the service, Hayford announced that the evening service would be given to dealing with a staff member who had fallen into sexual immorality. That night more than 2,000 church members packed the building.

All the pastoral staff sat on the platform. Hayford opened the meeting stating, "This is one of the most difficult and demanding presentations in the history of my ministry."

He then took 50 minutes for a Bible teaching, reciting the different kinds of moral failure, differentiating between impurity and immorality, saying that purity of heart is the way to avoid immorality. He spoke of the influence of the spirit of our times. He said impurity is not a matter of public exposure and correction, but immorality is. He showed the differences in dealing with immorality among Christians and among church leaders.

### Now the Case at Hand

Following his teaching Hayford detailed all that had happened



since the Tuesday before. He pointed out specifically that "the thing that hurt me most--and this may seem peculiar to you--was Pete's dishonesty, first with the flock but more directly with the pastoral staff and with me. For while God will not hold him in private judgment for having violated my trust or that of the pastoral staff, he betrayed a way we have chosen to live in the pastoral staff...I was at least as wounded by the violation of that trust as I was by the actual acts themselves."

He then evaluated Greene's situation for the congregation saying Pete was a "man terribly beset by the most hideous sense of self--worthlessness that I have ever come to discover."

He pointed out, however, that Greene was "full of the conviction that God will restore his ministry in years to come."

"I want to make clear that it will be years," Hayford told the church. "Because when a spiritual leader has violated a trust in this fashion, it is common for people in the church to say, 'We will forgive them. Just let them go on.' But the Lord doesn't allow that--in His Word or by His Spirit. We are not dealing with whether or not he is forgiven. He is. We are talking about leadership in the Body. And leadership in the Body, contrary to much that goes on in the Church at large, is supposed to be proven first."

He concluded his remarks saying, "While it could seem wrong to insist on a lengthy period of restoration, it would also be unrealistic and spiritually irresponsible to require anything else...but I do unhesitatingly declare that I believe restoration and redemption shall come about."

Hayford then called the men who were to serve the Holy Communion. After the bread was served he asked the congregation to hold the portion in their hands while Pete Greene came to make a statement.

#### Greene's Statement Before the Church

"After feeling small for so long, and lying for so long, I now know there is hope. I ask that the Lord will forgive me. I ask that my wife will forgive me. And I ask that you would."

Hayford then turned to him saying, "May I break bread with you, my brother?"

He then spoke absolution. "In the name of Jesus, I speak His forgiveness. And all in this Body who extend forgiveness, extend your hand to this man and speak as you will these words: 'In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, I forgive you.'"

There followed a time of praying in the Spirit. Then one of the elders brought a prophecy which said, in part, "Allow this exposure of sin to reach you and uncover the sin in you. Then you will mourn...."

According to Hayford "a phenomenal spirit of mourning and forgiveness poured forth through the entire Body." The church then, with widespread audible weeping took the bread. This was followed by the cup. As the congregation held their individual cups Hayford told them that Michele had called him that afternoon and said she wanted to sing. Michele then came and sang powerfully:

I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever,  
For His faithfulness fails not...  
It is of the Lord's mercies  
That we are not consumed.  
Because His compassions fail not.  
They are new every morning,



New every morning--  
It is Thy faithfulness.

Following that the church received the cup. There was additional prophecy and a strong word of the Lord's restoring power by Hayford. The service concluded with Jack saying:

"If anyone knows of any individual who has been hurt in any way by words or actions of the one with whom we dealt this evening, I ask that you please urge them to come to an elder or pastoral staff member of this church, that we may personally and privately offer whatever is needed to assuage their pain or relieve their circumstance.

"Second: If anyone hears of anyone in our assembly who, through absence on this occasion, would be bewildered, problemed, or critical of what has been done; or if there is a general misunderstanding on their part of what has been done, challenge them to inquire directly of us who lead.

"Then, in every practical and prayerful way possible, let all rise in loving support of the fallen one and believe for a full restoration of his life and his home and his ministry. Any encouragement or help of love in other ways will be welcomed. They ministered well for years and God will bring beauty from these ashes."

In a final step Hayford sent out a letter to his church leaders answering questions which came up as a result of the Sunday night service, such as: "Since Pete has made confession and received forgiveness from God and the assembly, why does he have to leave the pastoral staff?" and "How are we to act toward Pete and Michele when they return?"

### Evaluation

I agree with Hayford's basic approach. He concludes that "very few Christians have ever seen such a circumstance handled in a scriptural way--where love and authority, judgment and mercy, are manifest in balance; where confession and forgiveness at a public level are exercised unto the potential of realizing maximum restoration over the long run."

Some time ago Ray Stedman of Palo Alto, California, went through a similar situation with one of his staff members. When the man was finally returned to ministry the church had a great feast, killed a fatted calf, and Stedman presented the former prodigal with a ring for his finger. That's restoration.

I also agree with Hayford's reasons for removing Greene from public ministry. This was not done for punitive reasons, rather: (1) To allow time for him to restore his relationship with God and with his wife. (2) Greene's double life had become a life style. Only by the passage of time will his spiritual director be able to determine if the old way of life has been put to death. (3) During the trauma of healing he should be receiving ministry--not ministering. (4) The church needed the lesson of the seriousness of sin among leaders. Hayford points out: "Many do not know the Bible well, and therefore, are quite ignorant of the requirement of spiritual leadership in terms of qualifications, standards of life and disciplines of preparation for ministry. This ignorance is compounded by the ofttimes cheap pathway to leadership allowed in some circles of the Church at large."

On the other hand, Hayford exhibited an almost childish naivete by expressing his hurt that Greene had not only been involved in sexual immorality--but had lied, too. Those of us who have been involved in sexual immorality know that lying is merely the other side



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of the coin. An adulterer is always a liar. There is no way a leader can expect a confirmed fornicator to be honest.

Hayford exhibited profound wisdom in waiting for Greene to confess. This opened the door for the church to administer forgiveness. Most adulterers wait until they are caught before confessing--and then confess only that which is already known.

Hayford deeply esteems ordination. He told his church: "The ministry of a leader in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ must 'first be proved' (1 Tim. 3:10). The requirements of full integrity and purity in the discharge of pastoral duty is so great in its consequence upon people's lives, that haste should never be present in ordaining one to ministry. Thus, when the vows of Biblical fidelity to the responsibilities of pastoral leadership have been broken, the person is not forever banned from ministry (as a lawyer disbarred, for example), but the individual does need to return to the role of one who must again have time to demonstrate over a number of years the character qualifications essential to them functioning again as a recognized spiritual leader."

The plea of the Greenses to maintain their relationship with the Church on the Way as active members is both biblical and therapeutic. How unlike those situations where trouble is not handled biblically in public confessions and forgiveness and where the leader is usually banished with dispatch and the matter swept under a rug of silent hypocrisy. If the church is not a healing family, it is not a church. The shooting of wounded leaders is no longer funny. Hats off to The Church on the Way for giving us a viable alternative.

**Important:** Hayford's handling of the Pete Greene situation should not be looked upon as a model. Merely an example. Each situation is different. Hayford found his answers only through long periods of prayer and fasting. There are no easy formulas. The solution must be carved out through agonizing prayer. There are other situations I know about where the wounded leader continued to lead his flock after his confession and forgiveness--and lead effectively and powerfully. I also know of situations--such as those mentioned earlier--where it was right for the church to banish their unrepentant leader. Only in the wilderness do some men find God.

**Most Important:** Paramount should be the salvaging and restoration of the fallen leader and the protection of the flock from any spirits which may enter to destroy. Then, if possible, use the situation as a learning experience.

**Remember:** We do not "forgive and forget." We "forgive and remember." The reason for remembering? "There, for the grace of God, go I."

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