Lessons in Leadership from the Life of King Saul

Gregg T. Johnson

How the mighty have fallen,
And the weapons of war perished!
2 Samuel 1:27
How The Mighty Have Fallen

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The wise profit from fools more than fools from the wise; for wise men shun the mistakes of fools, but fools copy not the wisdom of the wise.

Cato the Elder
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FOREWORD

Because of the twenty-five years I have spent in national leadership and more recently as president of a Bible college dealing with ministries and those in training for ministry, I have read many books on the subject of the rise, fall, and restoration of ministers. *How The Mighty Have Fallen*, by Gregg T. Johnson, is the best I have read on the subject.

In using the life of King Saul as an example of all the pitfalls facing a charismatic leader, Gregg Johnson identifies the inevitable temptations facing all leaders connect to the Kingdom God.

The reader of *How The Mighty Have Fallen* will not only see the path to ultimate disgrace but most importantly, the road to ultimate restoration and victory. The book is a great read about Saul, but it holds up a mission to the reader.

Dr. Charles T. Crabtree

President, Zion Bible College (Northpoint College)
Former Assistant General Superintendent, Assemblies of God, USA
How The Mighty Have Fallen

A NOTE FROM
REV. DR. PAUL FRIMPONG MANSO

“How the Mighty Have Fallen,” is very crucial and relevant in our day and time; a must read for all, especially practicing leaders at every level of leadership.

In this book, Gregg Johnson addresses character flaws in leaders and how, if they are left unattended to at the very early stages of one’s life, can lead to a great down fall when one attains higher heights in leadership.

Furthermore, this book raises issues like the dangers in seeking early or premature promotion, the abuse of authority and the insecurity many leaders exhibit which leads to leadership crises. Saul is a very good character study on this subject matter and Pastor Gregg has done an excellent exposition on him. The issues raised in this book are a check list for all leaders to help us avoid wrecking our lives and the destinies of the people we lead.

I have read many books on leadership whiles serving the Lord in many leadership positions. This book is excellent and will equip the reader to walk in integrity. I also recommend it as a text book for Bible Schools and all institutions that train leaders.

- Rev. Dr. Paul Frimpong Manso
General Superintendent, Ghana Assemblies of God
Then David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son, and he told them to teach the children of Judah the Song of the Bow; indeed it is written in the Book of Jasher: "The beauty of Israel is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen! Tell it not in Gath, Proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon—Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. "O mountains of Gilboa, Let there be no dew nor rain upon you, Nor fields of offerings. For the shield of the mighty is cast away there! The shield of Saul, not anointed with oil. From the blood of the slain, From the fat of the mighty, The bow of Jonathan did not turn back, And the sword of Saul did not return empty. "Saul and Jonathan were beloved and pleasant in their lives, And in their death they were not divided; They were swifter than eagles, They were stronger than lions. "O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, Who clothed you in scarlet, with luxury; Who put ornaments of gold on your apparel. "How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan was slain in your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; You have been very pleasant to me; Your love to me was wonderful, Surpassing the love of women. "How the mighty have fallen, And the weapons of war perished!"

2 Samuel 1:17-27
INTRODUCTION

It was concerning King Saul that David said, "How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished" (2 Samuel 1:27). His was a life that began with great promise and celebration, but ended in miserable failure and humiliation. His life is an example of how the mightiest of leaders fail.

Why do great men and women fall? How do leaders, quick to ascend with such promise of unparalleled success, find themselves awash in disastrous failure and disgrace? More importantly, can the path toward one’s downfall be discerned before it’s too late and be avoided?

It is the premise of this book that such a decline can be detected and reversed. In fact, God’s Word is replete with examples of great men with incredible potential who fell in ruin—for our instruction. Case study after case study is provided for our learning; it’s a treasury of lessons in “what not to do.” If we will apply our hearts toward understanding and recognize the patterns in their lives, we can see the dangers in our own and prevent our own demise.

Failure is a great teacher, but only if we’re willing to learn from it. Mistakes are precious mentors, but only for the humble who seek to be taught rather than shifting the blame. Some of the greatest lessons we learn in life come from our past failures and mistakes. Even more, much of the wisdom we gain can be learned by watching the mistakes of others and learning “what not to do.”

I still remember some of the most important lessons I learned by observing the serious blunders of leaders which led to their downfall. Two out of three pastors I served under fell into sexual sin with women in the church and destroyed their families and ministries. Painful to witness, but invaluable
learning. I learned the value of maintaining sexual purity in ministry and staying close to my wife. I remember another pastor whose preaching was dry and ununctionless and forced the church into decline. Difficult to sit under, but priceless lessons learned. It forced me to realize how vital it is to bring a fresh word from God, to maintain a vibrant prayer life and seek God for His anointing. I recall another who failed to provide vision to the church which invoked a culture of apathy and lukewarmness upon a people who once were on fire for God. Still, this experience provokes me to impart vision to my people and challenge them to achieve great things for Christ.

Indeed failure and mistakes, if we will learn from them, can teach us lessons to last a lifetime. So it is with King Saul. From a hopeful beginning to a miserable end, his life serves as a classroom for the studious leader. The topic of study: “Lessons in What ‘Not’ to Do!” By chronicling Saul’s leadership career, we find contained in his mistakes valuable principles of leadership and examples of why men and women should lead with integrity. By his demise, he gives us a valuable example of what happens when leaders cast off restraint and live only for themselves. He shows us why we must be men and women of character, virtue, and humility.

This is the essence of Saul’s failures. His mistakes were not methodical, organizational, or managerial. They were failures of character. His incompetence as a leader was not due to lapses in strategic planning or poor administrative skills, he failed because he was toxic. When it came to matters of integrity, and personal qualities of credible leadership, Saul was deficient and his lack of character contaminated his entire organization. Sure, he had the looks and the charisma, he had certain skills and could throw a spear, but the essential qualities of credible leadership, selflessness, courage, contrition and more—the core values that drive, motivate, and
sustain a leader—had yet to be seen. In fact, when the pressures of leadership presented, Saul’s lack of character would crumble and turn him into a corrupt tyrant abusing his position for personal gain.

As we approach the story of Saul, let us not do so with a critical or condescending heart. Saul was only human, just as we are human. He was thrust into a role by the will of man before God had adequately prepared him and, because of that, could not cope with the extreme pressures he faced. And let us remember that Saul is also the story of us. There is a Saul in each of us. This is why God has given us this example—so we could look into ourselves, see him, and be warned. For if we do not seek to be taught, to learn the proper way of leadership, we will come to an end not much different than the mighty man who had fallen so hard.
“Then he stood and cried out to the armies of Israel, and said to them, ‘Why have you come out to line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and you the servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us.’ And the Philistine said, ‘I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together.’ When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.”

1 Samuel 17:8-11
LESSON SIX

SAUL SURRENDERED TO A SPIRIT OF FEAR

“A leader once convinced that a particular course of action is the right one, must remain firm and undaunted when the going gets tough.”

Ronald Reagan

The true quality of a leader is revealed when he is confronted by a Goliath.

Almost any leader can develop a vision and lay out a strategy for achieving it. Almost any leader can recruit people, motivate workers and supervise a team. The real test of leadership comes, however, when that leader faces obstacles. When resistance rises and adversity threatens success—when challenges loom as insurmountable—what does the leader do? Does he hesitate? Is he intimidated? Does he second guess and back peddle or does he remain firm and undaunted when the going gets tough?

The duty of leadership is to confront status quo and pull the people to a better place. Rosalynn Carter, wife of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, said, “A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don’t necessarily want to go but where they ought to be.” In the
course of such an act, a leader will undoubtedly face resistance. "Goliath-sized" obstacles will rise to challenge both the leader's vision and his resolve. How a person responds to Goliath reveals if he or she is a true leader, or just a custodian sporting a fancy title.

Saul had a title, but that didn't make him a leader. Men may have called him king, but that didn't give him command. Sure, he could organize the infantry for a march and arrange the chariots for a parade, but when it came to the business of battle—the hard work of overcoming obstacles to success—he fell apart. Rather than meeting the antagonist on the battlefield and inspiring his followers forward, he brought the people to a halt and the ranks became stagnant.

Leadership is ten percent vision and ninety percent overcoming the obstacles that hinder the vision. There will always be obstacles. People will always see some giant standing in the way of their progress. It could be a lack of resources, conflict within the organization, or resistance from outsiders. Whatever the obstacle, the leader's job is to stand with confidence against it, plot a course to overcome it, and cheer his followers on to victory.

To the contrary, nothing will destroy the credibility of a leader like a spirit of fear. It wasn't Goliath that paralyzed the Israelite army. They were paralyzed by their own leader who surrendered to fear. King Saul, frightened by Goliath's challenge, retreated from his post and Israel's advance was halted. If he had faith, if he had met the challenge with confidence and courage, his army would have followed him like they followed David. When David entered the scene and demonstrated his faith, the Israelites arose and defeated the Philistines. All they needed was a leader who believed God for success no matter how dire the circumstance.

People need leaders who have faith—even those who are
critical and defiant. They may say, “It can’t be done; it's impossible; we don't have the means or resources.” But, in reality, they are hoping for a leader who will stand with confidence and say “God is able.” They will respond to a leader like young David who declares, “If God is for us who can be against us. Don’t give up; we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.”

Therefore, if there was one thing I could pray into the leaders of my church it would not be a new vision, smart ideas, fancy programs, or even great resources. The one thing I would pray into our leaders would be a good attitude—an attitude of faith.

FAITH IS AN ATTRACTIVE ATTITUDE

John Maxwell wrote, “Many people who approach the area of vision in leadership have it all backward. They believe that if the cause is good enough, people will automatically buy into it and follow. But that's not how leadership really works. People don’t at first follow worthy causes. They follow worthy leaders who promote worthwhile causes. People buy into the leader first, then the leader's vision.”

In the early 1900s, the London Times reportedly carried an advertisement that read, “Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger. Safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success.”¹ The man alleged to have run the article was the famed explorer Ernest Shackleton and his vision was to make the first crossing of the perilous Antarctic continent by foot. He was hoping, by use of the controversial article, to recruit twenty six men to make the dangerous journey with him.²

Of course, it wasn’t a very inspiring vision statement and one might think that no person in his right mind would
respond to such an uninspiring help wanted ad. However, historian Julian Watkins reported that over five thousand people applied for the job. Why such a positive response? Because in London at that time, Ernest Shackleton was a man greatly respected. He was well-reputed as a trustworthy leader and a capable explorer. And, as a man expected to achieve greatness in his lifetime, people wanted to be a part of whatever he was doing. Those five-thousand men were not signing up for a great vision—they signed up for a great leader.

Ernest Shackleton exemplifies an important principle of leadership: people are not attracted to smart programs or good ideas—people are attracted to people. In other words, people don't follow us because they like our vision or are impressed with our plan. They sign up for our vision because they believe in us; they have confidence in the quality and content of our character. This is why powerful advertising firms hire popular personalities and successful athletes to promote their products. When people feel good about the presenting individual, they buy into their product—or vision. For example, people buy Nike sneakers, not because they necessarily like the shoes, but because they've bought into Michael Jordan. Once people buy into someone, they will give his or her vision a chance. Therefore, before you ask people to buy into your vision, you need to ask, “Do people buy into you?”

King David attracted many followers. In 1 Samuel 22, we see him living in the cave of Adullam. He’s been branded a fugitive by Saul, considered a traitor to the nation and is being hunted like an animal. One would think that no one would want to be associated with him, let alone follow him as a leader. Yet Verse 2 says, “...everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented
gathering to him. So he became captain over them. And there
were about four hundred men with him.”

What was it that drew so many people to this outcast
leader? Did people follow David because he had a great vision?
Did people flock to him because he gave them such promise for
their future? Of course not—he was living in a cave, being
hunted by the king, acting insane to avoid punishment from
the Philistines. Yet hundreds came to him. Why? Because there
was something about the man—something about his spirit, his
disposition, his attitude.

In Psalm 57 this attitude is revealed. While running from
Saul and living in caves, at the lowest point of his life, David
writes songs of praise in which he declares his confidence in
God’s deliverance. His spirit never wavered. He never grew
discouraged. He never complained or succumbed to fear.
That’s what those four-hundred despots saw. They saw the
way he kept singing praise songs and the way he rejoiced in
the Lord. They saw his confidence and optimism despite the
gloom of the cave and sentence of death upon him. They came
to him because of his spirit—not his vision. They came to him
because he inspired them; he encouraged them and made
them feel better about themselves.

Faith, optimism, confidence: these are the attitudes people
are attracted to. If a leader is going to build a following, then he
needs to demonstrate these qualities.

Former president of the United States, Ronald Reagan—
one America’s greatest leaders and foremost optimists—often
told a joke about twin boys about five or six years old. Their
parents were worried that the boys had developed extreme
personali:ies: one was a total pessimist and the other a total
optimist. To allay their concerns, the parents took their sons to
a psychiatrist. First the psychiatrist treated the pessimist.
Trying to brighten his outlook, the doctor took him to a room
piled to the ceiling with brand new toys. But instead of yelping with delight, the little boy burst into tears. “What’s the matter?” the doctor asked, baffled. “Don’t you want to play with any of the toys?” “Of course,” the little boy bawled, “but if I did I’d only break them and get into trouble.” Next the psychiatrist treated the optimist. Trying to dampen his ridiculously positive outlook, the psychiatrist took him to a room piled to the ceiling with horse manure. But instead of wrinkling his nose in disgust, the optimist shouted in delight, clambered to the top of the pile, dropped to his knees, and began gleefully digging out scoop after scoop with his bare hands. “What do you think you’re doing?” the psychiatrist asked, just as baffled by the optimist as he had been by the pessimist. “With all this manure,” the little boy replied, beaming, “there must be a pony in here somewhere!”

Presidential Advisor Edwin Meese recalled that “Ronald Reagan told this joke so often that it got to be kind of a joke with the rest of the staff. Whenever something would go wrong, somebody on the staff would be sure to say, “There must be a pony in here somewhere.”

This is the kind of spirit people are attracted to. The spirit that says, no matter what kind of difficulties life throws at us, there are sure to be benefits buried in there somewhere. It is the kind of attitude that refuses fear, refuses to believe that something bad will happen, refuses to say, “We can’t do it. Goliath is too big, the giants are too many, we don’t have enough resources or money or people; if we try, we will fail.”

For this reason, when God calls a leader, the first thing He commands him is “fear not!” At Joshua’s coronation, the Lord said, “...be strong and very courageous...do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:5-9). One of the most important qualities that God looks for in people who lead is the ability to
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demonstrate faith over fear—to believe God for success in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

FEAR IS A CONTAGIOUS POISON

Attitudes are contagious and bad attitudes are more contagious than good ones. It is easy to be infected by someone’s sickness but nearly impossible to catch their good health. The same is true of attitude. Fear spreads quickly. Unabated, it spreads like wildfire gaining more momentum with each person it infects.

Saul’s reaction to Goliath shows us the worst thing a leader can do. He hid himself away, afraid to confront the issue, unable to rally the troops with faith, optimism and a “can-do” attitude. As a result, fear spread throughout the camp like a virus devouring its victim.

The same dynamic occurred in Numbers 13 when the spies returned from the land of Canaan with a bad report. Although God promised them victory, they complained, “The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants...and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.’ So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night” (Numbers 13:32-14:1). Despite the fiery words of encouragement delivered by Joshua and Caleb, the dire prediction of the spies spread like an infectious disease throughout the camp. Such is the effect that fear has on a group of people.

Faith and fear are opposite twins. Faith is the expectation that something good will happen. Fear is also expectation, but it expects that something bad will happen. It is an attitude of discouragement that says, “We can’t. Goliath is too big, the giants are too many, we don’t have enough resources or
money or people; if we try, we will fail." This is the attitude that most people will take. When the twelve spies surveyed the land in Numbers 10, it was the majority who feared the giants and said, “It can’t be done; we’ll be defeated.” Anytime a vision is pursued, there will be those whose natural expectation is the worst. There will always be those pessimists who focus on the negative, who see the potential for failure and retreat because of it. But God is looking for leaders. People who can see the possibilities, expect the best and challenge the attitudes of fear.

Bruce Wilkinson wrote, “As God’s chosen, blessed sons and daughters we are expected to attempt something (so large) that failure is guaranteed—unless God steps in.” Have you ever been in a place where you felt that the task before you was too far beyond your ability to meet it? Have you ever felt that unless God shows up, unless God intervenes or provides, I’m going to fail, miserably? It is called “dependence” and it is exactly where we are supposed to be living. It is a difficult place, a challenging place, an uncomfortable place, but it is where God expects us, as leaders, to be. In fact, He has a label for it; it’s called “Walking by Faith!”

Noah called it building an ark, even though it had never even rained. Moses called it crossing the wilderness, without food, water, and adequate preparation. Abraham called it sacrificing Isaac when Isaac was his only hope for an inheritance. Joshua called it marching around Jericho. David called it confronting Goliath. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego called it refusing to bow down. And Peter called it walking on the water.

What do you call it? What ark are you building, what wilderness are you crossing, what Isaac are you sacrificing, what Jericho are you facing, what Goliath are you challenging, what water are you thinking about walking on? Or, are you
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Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. Then the Philistines followed hard after Saul and his sons. And the Philistines killed Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul’s sons. The battle became fierce against Saul. The archers hit him, and he was severely wounded by the archers. Then Saul said to his armorbearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and thrust me through and abuse me." But his armorbearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it. And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword, and died with him. So Saul, his three sons, his armorbearer, and all his men died together that same day.

1 Samuel 31:1-6
Saul killed himself. Overrun by the enemy, his army crushed, and mortally wounded by arrows, Saul took a sword and fell on it. Indeed, the enemy had overpowered him, but in the end his death was his own doing.

It was a tragic end that serves as a metaphor for all leaders. We must take heed lest our success be our undoing. The saying is true: "With higher levels come higher devils." Leadership will destroy the man (or woman) whose character has not been prepared for it. With advancement, promotion and enlargement in the Kingdom of God comes fiercer attacks, harsher resistance, and more intense warfare. The battle gets tougher the higher you go; and leaders must be aware that in the midst of such intense warfare there is a danger to fall on their own swords.

Proverbs 5:22-23 reinforces this concern by warning: "His own iniquities entrap the wicked man, and he is caught in the
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cords of his sin. He shall die for lack of instruction, and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.” The warning is clear: men are often ensnared by their own iniquities and the greatness of their own folly. In other words, our concern should not just be for the traps the devil is setting for us and the arrows he is shooting; we should be equally concerned about the traps we are setting for ourselves. We leaders need to be careful lest we fall on our swords in battle.

The context of Proverbs 5 gives us great insight into the number one cause of so many fallen leaders: sexual sin. Proverbs 5:20 plainly says, “Why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, and be embraced in the arms of a seductress?” It is an issue as old as leadership itself: the most common way that leaders self-destruct is sexual sin. More and more we hear about good men who have committed adultery or partake in pornography and are falling on their swords. It’s not only the arrows of the Philistines killing them, they’re killing themselves. Good men fall into sexual immorality, not because of the devil’s traps but because of the traps they have set for themselves. The paths they travel, the practices and policies they have, instead of keeping them safe, expose them to dangers, snares, and falling on swords.

A survey by Leadership Magazine showed 40 percent of pastors regularly struggle with pornography.1 Other research reveals that 37 percent of pastors have been involved in inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in their church.2 Even more alarming is a 15-year study that revealed approximately 10 to 12 percent of ministers have engaged in sexual intercourse with members of their congregations.3 Sadly, these statistics indicate a growing promiscuity in ministry that is reflective of our culture. Wayne Goodall, in his book, Why Great Men Fall, revealed that 25 percent of wives and 44 percent of husbands have had extramarital intercourse.
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As is true with church leaders, many of their affairs began at “work.” Fifty percent of unfaithful wives were involved with someone from work and 62 percent of unfaithful men likewise met their affair partners at work. Indeed sexual promiscuity is occurring in epidemic proportions in our day.

So as we see Saul slumped over on the battlefield, a sword sticking into his chest, we should be concerned, not only about the arrows the enemy shoots at us, but about the traps we set for ourselves. It is not Satan who is causing pastors to fall into adulterous affairs; pastors fall because of their own folly. They fall because of careless professional ethics and negligent standards of personal purity.

Throughout scripture we see examples of leaders who battled the arrows of sexual temptation. Some overcame victoriously, others self-destructed. The following is a survey of some of these men and women and lessons they teach us.

**JOSEPH AND POTIPHAR’S WIFE**

**RUN FROM DANGER**

“And it came to pass after these things that his master’s wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, ‘Lie with me.’ But he refused ...So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her. But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside, that she caught him by his garment, saying, ‘Lie with me.’ But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside” (Genesis 39:7-12).

Scripture describes Joseph as a handsome man to whom Potiphar’s wife was attracted. It is a reminder that leadership is attractive. There will always be those, especially of the opposite sex, who admire the one who leads. Leadership makes a person more appealing. It provides an image of
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charisma, confidence, and decisiveness. Often the more ignoble aspects of a person, their lesser qualities are obscured by the spotlight and people are easily enamored by the image they see in the pulpit.

Wise leaders, however, will realize the snare of the spotlight, and will employ measures to deliver them from sexual sin. Like Joseph, they will run; they will avoid those situations that will ensnare and cause them to fall on their sword.

**Avoid being alone with the opposite sex.** Joseph got into trouble because he was alone with another man’s wife, even though his intentions were innocent. Romans 13:14 instructs us to “Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.” 1 Thessalonians 5:22 further warns us to “Avoid every appearance of evil.” This means that leaders must demonstrate due diligence in avoiding situations that present temptation or have the appearance of impropriety, even if intentions are innocent.

Foremost is the danger of being alone with the opposite sex. In a car, having a meeting, sharing a lunch, holding a counseling session—it may seem innocent to you but it has the potential of sending the wrong signal. It says, “I’m interested in you, I don’t mind being alone with you,” or even worse, “I enjoy being alone with you.”

Furthermore, having “alone time” with the opposite sex causes others to question your integrity. If someone sees you alone with that person in a restaurant, in a car, or behind closed doors, more than likely, they will be suspicious and inherently sense something inappropriate. This means men who are spiritual leaders should not have private prayer meetings with women. They shouldn’t have one-on-one counseling sessions with women or drive in the car alone with them and never, never, never have lunch or dinner alone with
the opposite sex—even in a crowded restaurant.

If I must meet with the opposite sex—I will not meet in a place where we are alone. I always try to meet with others present in the room. If that is not possible or practical, then I will always leave the door open or at least ajar. This sends the message, “We are not really alone” or “I am uncomfortable being alone with you” or more importantly, “I don’t want to be alone with you.”

In fact, I have instructed my staff on several occasions, “Never leave me alone in the building when there is a woman in my office.” And “If you see me in my office with a woman, never pull the door shut, always leave it ajar.” As a result, on more than one occasion, someone on my staff has remained late in the office so as to avoid leaving me in a compromising situation.

Another solution may be to install a window in your office or to replace your door with one that has a widow in it. Of course, be sure that curtains or blinds are not covering these windows when counseling someone.

Some may feel these measures are too extreme or somewhat paranoid. However, I don’t believe one can be too careful in the area of sexual purity. I have served three pastors in my over twenty-four years of ministry. Of those three men, two of them have fallen prey to adultery, have divorced their wives and been removed from pastoral ministry. I have personally witnessed how a casual, relaxed attitude toward the opposite sex can expose good men to subtle and destructive snares.

Avoid excessive physical contact with opposite-sex parishioners. In the book, Does Touching Patients Lead to Sexual Intercourse?, published research reveals that physical exchanges such as hugs, touches, pats, and putting one’s arms around the shoulders correlates to a high risk for later sexual
How The Mighty Have Fallen

encounters. The studies also reveal that such contact is not as innocent or indiscriminate as one may insist, but is often directed toward those that one is physically attracted to.

Some pastors say, “I just love everybody and want to give everyone a big hug.” That may sound fatherly and pastoral—but it is also naive and foolish. These leaders are ignoring the fact that many people have been impaired by a sexually obsessed culture and could be confused by our good intentions. In fact, those who have suffered sexual mistreatment often cannot distinguish between erotic and non-erotic hugs and any touch at all might cause them fear, pain, sexual arousal, and flashbacks.

Add to this the reality that such physical contact often awakens the leader to temptation, especially when physical attraction exists. A recent Leadership survey of nearly a thousand pastors revealed that 12 percent admitted to extramarital intercourse. Among those with whom pastors were involved sexually, 69 percent came from within their own congregations, including 17 percent who were in a counseling relationship with the pastor. The primary reason for the sexual encounter was physical and emotional attraction as noted by 78 percent of the pastors, while marital dissatisfaction was reasoned by 41 percent. Clearly, ministers and church leaders who are physically attracted to the opposite sex are vulnerable to sexual temptation and it would be wise not to exacerbate it with unnecessary physical contact.

This is not to say that any physical contact is always wrong. There may be times when one is reunited with old friends or when special events engender a congratulatory hug. However, these kinds of exchanges should be the exception, not the norm. Leaders who wish to express affection through frequent use of hugs, kisses, and tight embraces should reserve them for his or her own spouse. Giving regular physical
affection to others of the opposite sex is simply inappropriate.

**Avoid discussing inappropriate issues with the opposite sex.** Spiritual leaders must use extreme caution when discussing sexual issues, especially with a person of the opposite sex. Dr. Wayne Goodall makes this point when he writes, “Do you share about your own sex life? Do you initiate conversation about sexual problems, preferences, or fantasies for the purposes of sexual gratification? Do you make comments on sexual or physical characteristics or imagined sexual performance? Counselor licensing boards consider this sexual exploitation, and it may be punishable as a felony criminal offense.”

Such discussions are dangerous because they cross thresholds that should be reserved for counselors of the same sex—or husbands and their wives. When church leaders broach these subjects with the opposite sex, it connects them on an emotionally intimate level. Even worse, sensual ties will develop that leave both parties open to temptation. Sometimes, that temptation is too great when one or both of those parties are in an emotionally weakened condition, lonely, in need of affirmation, or physically attracted to one another.

**Never take advantage of the power differential you hold over a parishioner.** People often put their pastors on pedestals. They give spiritual leaders a great deal of trust while affording them unusual access to and influence over their lives. Sadly, some leaders have leveraged this authority to gratify their own needs.

I received a phone call from one unfortunate woman who was disturbed about a pastor who told her she needed “deliverance.” He used his “spiritual expertise” to diagnose her condition, invite himself into her home—alone—and conduct numerous exorcisms. The woman was troubled, not only by
this pastor’s diagnosis of her spiritual condition, but the “techniques” used to deliver her. They involved placing his hands on her and pressing his body against hers in a very intimate way. This pastor was taking advantage of his spiritual clout and the trust this woman had placed in him to gratify his own urges.

“How terrible!” one might exclaim. Indeed. Yet how often are these scenarios replayed in churches today—but with less extreme methods? What about church leaders who offer friendly hugs and kisses to the young, attractive ladies in the church? Or the deacon who meets privately to console the distressed divorcee? And then there is the elder who takes advantage of those he knows are needy and emotionally weakened, to flirt with them or gratify himself in some way emotionally or physically. Unfortunately, it happens all too often.

Dr. Gary Collins, in his book, *Excellence and Ethics in Counseling*, indicates that so many people have been emotionally damaged by the sexual advances of counselors, ministers, and those in authority over them that Masters and Johnson asserted such behavior should be labeled and prosecuted as a form of rape. The presence of so many men holding positions of authority over women—especially in the church—obligates these men to be especially cautious and discreet when dealing with women. Even if some of these leaders are unpaid volunteers, they are in authority and leverage a certain amount of power. They must apply the same standards of professionalism and restraint as do the pastors who are being paid to act professionally.

**SAMSON AND DELILAH**

**AVOID EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENTS**
A FINAL WORD

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.

Galatians 6:1

Perhaps the greatest tragedy of Saul’s story is that he never found a place of repentance and, consequently, never experienced healing and restoration. It’s a sad indication of what happens to leaders who continue unabated in willful rebellion: eventually their sin will disqualify them from leadership and bring ruin to themselves, their families, their ministries and disgrace the Kingdom of God. To find a lesson on the healing and restoration of the leader, one most look beyond the life of Saul to that of his successor, David.

But can a church leader who has fallen and brought reproach on himself even be restored? It is a fair question and one many have asked based on the demands of Paul’s letters to both Titus and Timothy. A leader must be “blameless.”

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach… (1Timothy 3:2)
But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. (1 Timothy 3:10)

For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money... (Titus 1:7)

Obviously, the word “blameless” does not mean sinlessness or perfection. If that were the case no mortal would be qualified for Christian leadership. More accurately, the word implies being free from accusations of immorality with regard to reputation in the church and community. The question therefore is this: “Can a minister who has fallen in sin ever have his reputation restored to a position of integrity and moral trustworthiness?

In the opinion of this author, yes!

Paul makes this clear in Galatians 6:1: “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.” The gospel is a message of forgiveness, redemption and restoration for the sinner. This was clearly demonstrated by Jesus after Peter publicly betrayed Him on three occasions (Mark 14:68-72). After the resurrection, Jesus did not reject Peter and disqualify him for leadership. On the contrary, Jesus tested the depth of his repentance and restored him to his apostleship (John 21:15-17).

Another example is found in Acts 15:37-40 concerning Mark. Paul refused him a place on his leadership team because of his failure. Later however, in 2 Timothy 4:11, Paul instructed Mark to be brought to him “for he is useful to me for ministry.” Granted, Mark’s failure was more an issue of cowardice than immorality, but the principle remains: leaders who fail can be restored once they prove their worthiness and regain trust.

This is good news, especially for the reader who sees himself in the example of Saul. Perhaps this book has caused you to recognize certain shortcomings and provided you with
practical insight on correcting unhealthy behavior. In the event, however, you find yourself in that place of severe moral failure and public reproach and have been disqualified from leadership, the road back to restoration may be long and difficult, but not impossible.

Having served as a facilitator for the restoration of leaders who fell in sin, were removed from ministry and underwent a restoration process, I believe there are certain key factors that must be present in the restoration process:

**The Need for Repentance:** We are saved by grace, but not without repentance. God forgives our sin, but only after we turn from it. Acts 3:19 says “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord…” Repentance is both inward and outward. It is inward in the sense that there is genuine grief over the sin and remorse for what has been done. It is also external in that one’s conduct, lifestyle and environment indicate a change of direction. Essentially, repentance demonstrates that one deeply regrets what was done and has made every indication to prevent doing it again.

**The Need for Discipline:** Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 8:11: “Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” When a leader breaks the trust given to him by his followers and the organization that endorsed him, there must be punitive action. Yes, there should be a place for grace, but that comes after repentance has been shown and justice has been satisfied. We are moral beings, created in the image of God who gave us a sense of morality and righteousness. For an offender to be forgiven and restored without any tangible consequence violates our natural sense of justice. We cannot trust that the offender has “learned his lesson” unless we know he has been disciplined—even punished for his offense.

**The Need for Time:** Most people are not against