

## “Restoring the Fallen” Book Summary 01/2020

Summary by Mark R. Elliott\*

### **Page 195**

*What response should the offender have to the victim?*

I feel it is important for the offender to apologize in public to the victim. It is important to understand that when someone says “I’m asking for your forgiveness,” that is *not* an apology, but is simply more abuse and victimization. The victim does *not* have to forgive. The burden for the solution, since the problem was caused by the offender, lies with the offender.

Apologizing means saying, “I’m sorry I did \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. I was wrong to do that. I hurt you and had no right or excuse to hurt you. I will never do that again to you or anyone else. I realize I was wrong to do that because \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. I also understand that you are under no obligation to forgive me. I must make the corrective action. I am willing to pay for your treatment if you need treatment, and I am willing to do whatever you ask.

### **Pages 196-197**

*You have hinted that a person’s Christian faith may be a hindrance in recovery. Can you explain that further?*

Christians, by definition, are not reality-based. They may draw conclusions and make decisions by appeal to authority (Scripture; a religious leader), by revelation or by uncritical faith. Because the illogical is thus accepted, it is very easy for a sex offender to manipulate from within this system.

This is the primary reason most churches have allowed clergy-offenders to escape any legal consequences for so many years. There is a sort of unspoken taboo among Christians not to critically evaluate any other Christian’s faith. Thus, when an offender is caught and says, “I have fallen from grace, but thank God, in Jesus’ name, I am saved once again, and I will go and sin no more,” what on earth are the church authorities to say? Most have no idea what to say. I have conducted support groups for clergy on these issues, and they have told me that they have received no training and have no reference material on these issues.

I have watched a youth pastor who had molested fifteen children in his own church escape the legal justice system because he personally went to the parents of each of the fifteen identified victims (not the other four who never told until later), apologized and asked for their forgiveness. Of the fifteen sets of parents, fourteen forgave him and would not press charges. One set of parents filed charges, but the offense was reduced to a misdemeanor because the

minister was so “repentant.” I believe this minister is still molesting children today. He never received any treatment. His attorney’s secretary risked her job to call me and tell me in tears how wrong she felt her boss was to distort all parts of this pastor’s reality to get him a light legal outcome.

My experience has shown me a man who had sexual intercourse with all of his young children, had a jailhouse conversion, was given an extremely light sentence, joined a church, befriended a farming family in the church, got a job with them, got them to trust him and then sexually approached their high-school daughter. This family saw no problem in leaving their daughter alone with a convicted sex offender because he was “born again.”

Prison chapels are perfect places for passing and storing weapons, drugs and messages. The pattern seems to be that it is difficult to have spiritual faith and common sense! With an intelligent, verbally skilled offender, it is easy enough to present a convincing picture of remorse, repentance, spiritual renewal and a new direction. Such a pattern can fool anyone, but especially it seems to fool religious people. I do not feel good about these observations, as I am a minister’s son and tend to be pro-religious in broad terms. But I have seen too many offenders easily hide within the religious framework.

## **Pages 45-50**

### Choosing to Rebuild

When a person falls into sin, one of three things will happen.

1. The person will choose not to repent.
2. The person will feign repentance and receive a pseudo-restoration.
3. The person will repent and be restored.

What actually happens depends on the choice of the sinner. The Spiritual Care Team can encourage direct and exhort, but the sinner must choose whether he or she *really* wants to pursue restoration.

**Choosing not to repent.** Our hearts are saddened when we learn that a person we have loved and admired has chosen to follow sinful desires rather than to follow the Savior. It is even sadder when we learn that a person has been confronted with personal sin and has chosen not to turn from the chosen path to destruction. Jesus felt such sorrow; he looked at the city of Jerusalem and wept over its unrepentance: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Mt 23:37).

The key words in the verse are *not willing*. The restoration process does not fail because God is reluctant or unable; it fails because the potential restorer is unwilling. Those who care about the person can offer love and accountability, but the choice is up to the individual.

One of the members of our Spiritual Care Team was asked to consult with a church who wished to confront their pastor regarding what they saw as a potentially dangerous situation with a woman staff member. During the meeting with the church board, the consultant asked the board, "If your pastor is willing to receive your admonishment to holiness and to end this dangerous relationship in order to fulfill the requirement of Scripture of Leadership to be blameless [in Greek, "unaccused" or "irreproachable"; see 1 Tim 3:10], will you be willing to continue to follow his leadership?" Each person in the room responded without hesitation, "Yes!" There seemed to be an excitement that a healthy resolution could occur. The board made plans to talk to the pastor, and the consultant returned home, tired but satisfied.

Three days later he received a sad phone call. "We met with the pastor, but he was unwilling to follow our suggestion. He resigned on the spot and is packing to leave town." Later it was learned that the pastor had left his family and did not pursue either personal restoration or further ministry. He was *unwilling*—unwilling to return to a life of holiness, to his family, to fellowship with his church family or to his vocation. What a sad loss for all involved.

***Pseudo-restoration.*** A false repentance may seem desirable—the person caught in sin just wants to get the whole thing over with as quickly as possible. We are uncomfortable and don't know what to do, so we adopt an "out of sight, out of mind" policy or subscribe to the "let's just put this behind us" philosophy. These attitudes do little to promote restoration and instead create an atmosphere in which the exterior damage is covered over while the interior structural damage is ignored and unhealed.

When Jim was caught embezzling money from his company, he lost his job, and word filtered through the church. The rumor mill suggested that he was sorry and that his employer hadn't really treated him very fairly. (We are often quick to help people justify their sin. This is not a part of the restoration process.) Jim did not approach the elders or the pastor with his predicament. Repentance was assumed; no one cared enough to really check it out. After the initial shock waves subsided, people in the church didn't pay much attention to Jim. In fact, no one had much interaction with him. If asked, church members were quick to say they had heard he was doing okay. They were willing to assume that Jim was okay now, or that if he wasn't it was none of their business. His burdens were not being borne by anyone, and his personal growth and development were ignored. It was assumed that he was restored primarily because he did return to church and had found a new job. No one really knew about his current spiritual condition.

In pseudo-restoration the family is seldom helped. No one asks the children about their needs. No one helps them address their shame and disillusionment. The spouse often stands alone during those long hours, trying to decide whether or not the sinning partner can ever be trusted.

We often overlook the fact that sinful choices have a devastating impact not only on the life of the individual making them, but also on the family members, friends and colleagues. Gordon McDonald rightly refers to both the one committing the sin and those affected by it as “broken-world people.” He asks “And what of those who live with the side effects of broken-world choices? The deceived employer? They often live with a pain they can hardly describe, and they ask hard questions about their rights and responsibilities. In the final analysis, few broken-world people touch only one life. Like a hand grenade, the effects of one person’s terrible choices explode outward to wound many others” (*Rebuilding Your Broken World* [Nashville: Nelson, 1988], p. 35).

In Jim’s situation, it would be premature to evaluate and label his restoration complete, pseudo- or nonexistent, but many danger signs exist. His story highlights a tremendous lack of burden-bearing. No one stood in the gap; no one asked the hard questions; no one was willing to hold Jim accountable; no one became concerned about relapse. Confession does not assure either repentance or rejection of sin. When a person says he is sorry, he has not told you a whole lot. He may simply mean he is sorry that he was caught. He may be embarrassed but not repentant. Integral to the ministry of restoration is a clear understanding of whether or not the person has changed direction and a commitment to help him install barriers that will prevent him from turning back. No one is asking Jim the hard questions that could bring about the cleansing and change his needs.

When the sinning individual wants to continue life as before and does not want to deal with the consequences of sinful choices, often the person is only interested in pseudo-restoration or a quick cover-up. Churches often promote this problem by saying “Aren’t we supposed to just forgive and forget?” As a restoree, I register an emphatic “No!” I need to thoroughly deal with my sin and devastating consequences of it in order to complete the repentance process.

You might ask, “Why? Why can’t we just forgive and forget? Why can’t we just move on?” The answer is that I, as a sinner, have spent hours, days, possibly years denying the truth that my sin has consequences for me, for those I have sinned against and for innocent bystanders. I do not need to be continually confronted with what I’ve done, but neither should I be allowed to deny the impact my sin has had on me and others or to slip back into sinful ways. God lets me, and all of us, remember our sins and the consequences so that we will not return to them. Complete restoration is impeded when we don’t help wayward Christians examine the full extent of the shambles their sin has caused.

In John 21 Jesus conducts his ministry of restoration for Peter. Peter had boasted at the time of the Last Supper that he was willing to be imprisoned or even die because his love for Jesus Christ was so strong (see Luke 22:31-34). A careful study of John 21:15-19 reveals that Jesus takes Peter back to that vain proclamation by questioning three times Peter's love for him. Is he rubbing Peter's nose in it? Is this a method of punishment chosen by Jesus to further humiliate or shame Peter? No; I think Jesus is simply calling attention to the problem so that Peter will not lose sight of the defectiveness of his internal structure. Peter's sin was not just denial of Jesus. It also involved arrogance and pride, which had to be dealt with before restoration could occur. Jesus was thorough so that the restoration Peter experienced would be complete.

**True restoration.** The positive impact of restoration begins when the one being restored has confessed all sin and is no longer living in secrecy and denial. These choices and actions clear the path for involvement in the restoration process. I cannot overemphasize the importance of restoration being seen as a process rather than an event surrounding confession. The restoration process requires renewed involvement with God, the family and other believers who are connected with that person. And it involves commitment to the restoration team.

During the process of true restoration the heart of the person being restored is open to God's discipline, grace and mercy and to direction from the Spiritual Care Team. A repentant person is freed from defensiveness. As my own restoration process progressed, I found myself more and more open to suggestions. I saw the Spiritual Care Team as my allies rather than my enemies. I wanted input from them because I realized that I had blind spots that could not be corrected unless I allowed the team, my wife and my therapist to point them out to me. This was a conscious decision. Following repentance, it was the most important decision I made during the restoration process. This has changed my view of the role God intends us to play in each other's lives. We need each other more than I ever realized.

### **Pages 64-69**

Consent is a very complex process, and it is not a once-and-for-all decision. The first step of consent for me was *deciding to be honest* –to stop the patterns of lying and deceit that were so ingrained. Virginia's piercing question "Have you swept the corners clean?" had to be answered honestly. With the passing of time more dirty corners came to light, revealing self-absorption, pride, disrespect for others, selfishness, mistakes in parenting, and a distorted view of my own spirituality.

A second step in the consent process is *being willing to submit to the authority of God* as revealed through the Spiritual Care Team. Jim, a fallen music minister, was directed by his Spiritual Care Team to curtail the use of his musical talents for a period of time as part of his restoration process. Not only did he lose his position at church, but also he was required to give up additional income-producing opportunities. His Spiritual Care Team believed that the

priority of restoration would be lost if Jim proceeded with business as usual. Jim reluctantly submitted and concentrated his attention on his personal growth and healing. The Spiritual Care Team released him to use his talents again, but only after time had revealed true repentance, personal healing and restored relationships.

A third aspect of giving consent is *being willing to give up secrecy*. Paul, Virginia, Larry and Nancy know more about me than they ever cared to know and certainly more than I ever intended anyone to know. Such awareness is necessary for the Spiritual Care Team to provide sound guidance and to know how and when to provide support. Secrecy is a major part of the problem. Consenting to abandon secrecy is a necessary step in the process of restoration. I believed that the worst thing in the world would be to be found out. I did everything to avoid discovery. Paradoxically, God in his wisdom revealed that discovery was exactly the thing that needed to happen to me. When I stopped hiding my sin, God was able to begin the work of restoration in me.

Consent is not really consent unless the advice of the team is actually followed. Just as medical advice is helpful only if followed, spiritual guidance must be carried out to be effective. The psalmist wrote, “When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’—and you forgave the guilt of my sin” (Ps 32:3-5). Much more than lip service is required. A person must be willing to change and to engage wholeheartedly (even though painfully) in the process.

We see the importance of being willing to change when we contrast the attitudes and outcomes of Jesus’ encounters with the rich young ruler (Lk 18:18-25) and the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:4-29). Both had needs and unresolved issues. Each asked important questions. Both reached a point of having to decide what to do with the answers they received. The outcomes were drastically different. The rich young ruler would not consent to Jesus’ requirements. He walked away. He chose to keep his life as it was—and lost it. The Samaritan woman was thoroughly confronted with her sin and the sinful circumstances she was living in. But her choice was different from the rich young ruler’s. She chose to give up the old and embraced the process of being made over. Not only did she find life, but her choice pointed to life for many of her family and friends.

A fourth aspect of consent is *being willing to “avoid the edge”*—to break the habit of coming right up to sin and then trying to lean away just enough to keep from falling. Jane’s problem was alcohol. She knew that she could not honor God with her life if she continued her drinking. She walked on the edge by not telling her friends about her problem and by going with them to restaurants and lounges where they went to drink. Even if she chose to drink just soft drinks, she was still placing herself in jeopardy. Her process of restoration was hindered by her choice

to stay perched on the edge. She created continuous stress for herself and wasted massive amounts of time and energy that might have been channeled toward restoration. I too had to resolve to stay away from the things that previously had caused me to sin. I had to change my travel routes to avoid driving past nude bars and massage parlors; I had to carefully monitor what I watched on TV and what I read; I had to fastidiously avoid any area of known temptation. I couldn't afford to walk on the edge.

### **A Closer Look at Repentance**

Giving consent for the restoration process begins with repentance. And repentance is *turning away from sin*. Saying "I'm sorry" is never enough, even if you mean it. People are often sorry or at least say so and yet choose to continue in sinful patterns. This is not repentance.

Repentance involves several steps.

***Sin must be acknowledged as sin.*** People rationalize, "Well, I have a little problem," or "The devil made me do it," or "I get tempted sometimes; I'm only human." They gloss over sinful choices and behaviors. I had to confess my sexual sin in its totality. I also had to say to God, Sandy, my family, the Spiritual Care Team and others, "I have lived a double life. I have been a liar and a deceiver for ten years." This acknowledgement was horribly painful, but it was an essential part of true repentance.

***Bridges must be burned.*** It is not uncommon for sinners to want to take "one last look." Adulterers want to have just one more contact. Alcoholics want one last drink.

When Trevor ended his affair with Betsy and repented of his adultery, he had in his possession a number of items that belonged to Betsy. What was he to do with them?

- keep them until she asked for them
- call Betsy to see what she wanted him to do
- meet her at work to make the exchange
- ask his friend Bob to return the things to Betsy

Only the fourth answer will help Trevor successfully burn bridges. Every other option leaves open the possibility of rekindling the sinful relationship by allowing the potential for further contact. Very often, when repentance has not taken place, an individual may be remorseful and even acknowledge the sin—but be unwilling to make changes that burn bridges.

***The possibility of sin must be ruled out.*** As long as the option of returning to the sin remains open in your mind, the danger of relapse is acute. Saying "I'll *try* not to repeat the sin" is not enough. This is residual behavior from an old, non-repentant pattern. Most people who practice recurring sin have repeatedly said they were sorry and asked for forgiveness. "I'm sorry, Lord; please help me" is insufficient. A person who has ruled out sin in this way will pray, "God, I *will* not do this. I know it is a sin against you. Create in me a pure heart, O God" (Ps

51:10). He or she will also recruit help from other people in order to burn the thought-bridges to sin.

Sam, a recovering alcoholic, knows himself well. He knows that Friday nights are a time of great temptation for him. He has ruled out a return to his sinful pattern because he recognizes that the battle is first in his mind. Having made the decision, he plans Friday nights very carefully. He tells his friends he is committed to not drinking and invites them to check up on him. He stays away from the people and places that will pull him back to his old pattern. He limits himself to safe places where the people and the atmosphere encourage him to succeed.

Scripture powerfully depicts the absurdity of returning to sin in Romans 6:21-23: “What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

***There must be a willingness to allow other sin to be brought to light.*** I was willing to admit to my sexual sin and to confess that I had deceived and lied. Wasn't that enough? No! It was only the beginning. Underlying these sins were basic patterns of self-centeredness and rebellion against God, as well as hypocrisy and a refusal to do good. All of these needed to be confessed and cleansed.

Two years into my restoration process, someone on the Spiritual Care Team said, “We're not sure that you're aware of how your sin has affected your parenting.” I spent time with my kids. We sometimes had good talks. Besides, I was a recognized authority on parent-teen communication. Our family was seen as a model family. We used to go from family camp to family camp, parading our product. Now the team was suggesting that something was wrong.

With hindsight, I believe that what I was lacking was spiritual and moral leadership. When someone is in denial about his or her own moral and spiritual condition, it is impossible to lead others to a higher level. I was now being asked to face this issue head-on.

The Spiritual Care Team dared to broach this area because it was part of their job. They needed to bring to light the sins of commission and omission that were hindering God's purposes. This was one of the hardest areas for me, because it challenged my delusion that my sinful lifestyle had not negatively affected my parenting. I needed help to finally realize that sin had permeated *all* areas of my life.

***Repentance needs to be understood as both an event and a lifestyle change.*** The event is like having a tooth pulled; the lifestyle change is like entering a total dental care program: it's a lifetime commitment. The illustration on page 69, *The Cycle of Repentance*, shows God's plan

for continued cleansing of the heart. It is never-ending, because we are always affected by our sinful nature.

\*Mark R. Elliott served as a Director of Missions (Associational Mission Strategist) in western Iowa and eastern Nebraska for almost three decades. He is a strong advocate for obedience and Biblically based disciple making. As such, he knows that making healthy disciples requires Christian leaders to be constantly pursuing spiritual maturity—be lifelong learners. Because of the time constraints of ministry, most pastors focus their reading list on resources that assist them in teaching and preaching the Word of God. As such, books focusing on church health, leadership development, and church growth tend to find their way to the bottom of the stack. With that reality in mind, Mark has written discussion summaries on several books that have helped him to personally grow in Christ and that tend to find themselves on the bottom of most pastor's stack. Many pastors have found them helpful as they are able to more quickly process great insights from other pastors and authors.