

## A Story From Texas

When I first came to work as an associate pastor's assistant, I was on fire for the Lord, hungry to learn more and wanting to do the Lord's will in my life. Inspired by the passion of senior pastor Bob's sermons, I also felt awed by his very presence. He was charismatic and very personable. The congregation loved him and the way he preached. I felt blessed when he stopped by my office and talked with me, asking me about myself. As he left, he complimented me on my passion for the Lord and how blessed the church was to have me there.

Pastor Bob began to share with me the direction he wanted his ministry to go. He felt I would be an asset to get that new direction going but, feeling quite happy where I was, I resisted. Even though I expressed my resistance, I was pulled into meetings with him and it was during this time period that I began to counsel with him about my marriage. My husband and I had been drifting apart for a couple of years. I fought with him about the lack of intimacy, that I felt the romance had gone out of our marriage and that I missed that "first dating" pursuing. Bob counseled me and encouraged me to seek him out whenever I needed to talk.

As time progressed, I felt a dependency grow. Bob always seemed to make time for me and wanted to listen to my problems, even probing for more intimate details. It was during this time period that he startled me with a touch that seemed too sensual. I felt confused and guilty and I didn't understand why. While the associate pastor that I worked for was out of town, Bob made me his assistant.

As weeks passed there was more time together with me seeking Bob's counsel on my marriage and of sharing emotions I was going through. One day, as we were going out to get materials for a church project, Bob confessed his feelings for me and said he had been having a mental affair with me. I didn't know what I felt: fear, excitement, disbelief, numbness. I thought that maybe I was in love with him. I told him these feelings were wrong and his feelings could never be realized.

Immediately, he became cold and began to shut me out. His withdrawal hurt me and made me feel isolated and alone. I felt I had just lost my counselor, encourager, and my will to work at the church. That weekend he preached a sermon that he told me was just for me. He said he loved me and he had never felt the way he was feeling, and this had never happened to him before. He would call, send messages on my pager, and arrange for meetings and lunches for us to be alone. I was overwhelmed by his pursuit, his romance, and the feelings he was bringing out in me.

By then, I no longer had an office at the church but reported for my ministry work at a separate building that Bob was renting. I began to feel resentful towards my husband as I felt my self esteem grow under another man. Even as it was built though, one word,

one action, one day without communication would destroy it. He seemed to know exactly what would build me up or what would hurt me deeply. Bob's approval became so important that when I didn't get it, I was devastated all day. When the guilt became too much, I tried to pull away. He would become cold and distant and either wouldn't talk to me, or would "punish" me by taking duties away from me. I wanted to talk to someone but couldn't, for Bob had made me promise to only talk to him about us. I told him we needed to stop once and for all, that if we were ever found out, it would destroy the church and our lives. We prayed. I wept as I begged for God's forgiveness.

As weeks went by, I felt I was in a bottomless pit of hopelessness that I could never get escape. Even though we had prayed to stop, there were times he "accidentally" touched me or looked at me in a certain way or made sexual remarks. I am ashamed to say I was filled with both guilt and weakness, as if that attention was a drug fix, a hunger being temporarily filled. I hated myself for my reaction, yet I also yearned for it.

When my husband and I separated that summer, Bob distanced himself from me. I desperately needed counseling, but he continued to stay away. In the end, through counseling with Jack and Pam, a mature couple who had taken us under wing since we first started attending that church and had built the church with Bob, my husband and I got back together and began to work on our marriage. Seeing all I could lose, I knew if I was going to make my marriage work, I had to pull away from Bob and every situation that put me alone with him. When a job became available in the church for a full time executive assistant working under Jack, I told Bob I wanted to go. If possible, things became worse. Some of my new ministry continued to include work where I had to interact with bob. I would get memos, directives, and phone calls at all hours when he felt things went wrong. I was talked down to and corrected in front of others. It was humiliating. I felt there was no one to talk to about what I was dealing with. I finally sought out treatment from a Christian counselor at church without revealing "Bob's" name for the next two years.

Just when I thought I had achieved a peace about my job, I received three emails with copies to "Jack," as well as a board member of our church, from Bob stating his severe dissatisfaction with my job performance. I felt I was being set up for being fired. I repeatedly called for meetings to talk about his dissatisfaction. Finally, he pulled me into an impromptu meeting, saying he had just been testing my loyalty to the ministry, and that the church was going in new directions and for the past two years, my attitude had changed. I said it was because I had almost lost my marriage and I was putting it and not work first.

After spending time praying to God about the whole situation, I submitted my resignation to Bob. I told him he knew why I had to leave. Seeing him every Sunday was like having my sin paraded in front of me. I had been trying to have a child for years

and felt, like David and Bathsheba, this was my punishment for our sin, just like they had lost their child. Bob said David's child was lost not because of the adultery but because David had killed an innocent man. He went on to say, "We all have files in life and sometimes they get filled and sometimes not. We just happened to fill a place in each other's files. If it hadn't happened, our files would have just stayed empty." I was stunned by his words. I knew I had to leave.

A month after leaving Bob's church, God revealed my secret to a family member, counselor and the pastor of the new church we were attending. The pastor told me that I would have to tell my husband and that Bob needed to step down from his church. I was afraid to tell my husband. I knew he would leave me and things had been going so well for us, but our marriage couldn't be blessed if I kept this secret. I told my husband and we separated for a short time as we tried to work on the issues we faced. I praise God that he blessed me with such a godly man who stood beside me as we walked through this together. We went to Jack and Pam and shared with them what had happened. It was then that I learned Bob had done this years earlier but had been restored. Jack said Bob promised it would never happen again. I then called Bob and left the message I had told my husband everything and we all needed to meet. The next day Bob denied everything to Jack and said I was being vindictive. I wrote a letter to the board of the church detailing and time lining what had taken place. I was intending on reading the letter before the board but, in the process of getting permission to appear before the board, its president wanted to know what was going on. He asked for the letter, promising no copies would be distributed, that only he would keep it. Then, two days later, he and some of the board met with Bob who still would not fully confess.

The next morning, Bob, his wife, Jack, our new pastor, my husband and I met. Bob's wife attacked me. She said she had known about the situation four years earlier when it had started. She also said that Pam had told her details about reprimands I had never received. Jack backed up what Bob's wife said. The betrayal I felt at the hands of the couple who had been our mentors and confidants is incomprehensible.

That night the board convened and unanimously asked Bob to step down. I wish I could report the church handled everything properly and biblically. In the end, Bob sited health issues as the reason. My name, which was supposed to have been kept secret, was revealed to ministry staff and gossip spread. Because of this gossip, one month later, a legal statement was read that stated Bob would not be returning due to an "unspecified sin," not because of health as earlier specified. The church was in an uproar. People were damaged and left the church and Bob continues to infuse congregants who will listen, with half-truths to rally them behind him. He never publicly fully admitted what he had done and now belongs to another church where he is in a teaching position. I had to confess to my family what happened. I have faced looks from people who know only half-truths, who walk away from me and have betrayed me. We have lost many of our

friends and our church family. Even the new church we started to go to betrayed us, unintentionally, when Bob befriended that pastor in the name of “accountability.”

I do know God is getting me through this. Each day I pray to be the Christian woman God wants me to be and that my husband needs me to be. The greatest blessing I have received from this ordeal is how much my husband loves me and how precious my marriage is. I could have lost it all! My eyes have been opened to appreciate the wonderful blessings I have been given by God through my husband exhibiting Christ to me.

I have forgiven Bob and myself and now I just seek peace in my life, and end to this drama. I know God will grant it to me one day at a time, if I let Him. Thanks be to my Savior, Jesus Christ who will one day make me whole again.

