

From the desk of Pastor Johnny Hunt

Friday, May 27, 2022

Dear First Baptist Woodstock,

One week ago, I saw the same task force report you saw at the time you saw it. All of us, in different ways, were shocked by the contents of that report.

I made a brief public comment then, but I would like to say more now. I owe you the opportunity to hear the truth from me directly.

Twelve years ago, right after my service as SBC president, and in the aftermath of my battle with cancer, I entered into a season of deep despair and probably clinical depression. I remember Janet asking me then how I felt and I said to her, *"I feel like something inside of me has died."*

It was during that summer that I allowed myself to get too close to a compromising situation with a woman who was not my wife. It happened when she invited me into her vacation condo for a conversation. Against my better judgment – I chose to go.

Our brief, but improper, encounter ended when — in response to an overwhelming feeling of conviction— I stopped it and I fled the situation. I remember saying just before leaving the condo, *"this is not right. I have no business being here. I love my wife."* I have never been in a room again privately with the woman involved.

I thank God we did not go further than we did, but that is also no excuse for my grievous sin. I will regret that day for the rest of my life and I take responsibility for the situation because I chose to enter her condo.

I am sorry.

It was an awful sin but it was a consensual encounter. It was **not** abuse **nor** was it assault.

Almost immediately after the incident in 2010, I began a process of taking personal responsibility for my personal sin.

Within the same week, to my shame, I confessed the situation in detail to my wife. Janet is a truly Godly woman and was far more gracious than I deserved. I also spoke to the husband of the woman involved about one week later and I spoke to the husband together with his wife present. I apologized to both and sought their forgiveness. I also sought professional help from a counselor in order to better understand how this had happened and to seek advice on an appropriate process of repentance, reconciliation and restoration. I was willing to resign my ministry then, forever. However, after completing that private process, which involved seeking the forgiveness of God and those involved, and recovering from that dark, depressing season, I felt I could return to Woodstock in the Fall of 2010.

That is what happened. I want you to know that this is the truth. It is also the whole truth.

Church, I want to be direct: I'm not seeking your sympathy. I am not a victim. I have to bear the responsibility for my sin, which has basically cost me everything, except my faith and my family, over the last seven days.

I'm also not asking you to feel sorry for me. This is my burden to bear. I *am* asking you to please pray for us.

But, I do want you to know — and you've known me for over 40 years — that as awful as my sin was, on that terrible day, the account described in the Guidepost report is sensationalized. I did not groom the woman involved nor did I intentionally arrange the encounter (I didn't even know who owned the condo), and there are other details in the description that are stated as fact which did not happen.

The most absurd allegation is that this brief, consensual encounter constituted assault. It did not. This is the reason why I denied the accuracy of the report, and why I deny it, now.

As I said in my statement on Sunday: I have never abused anybody. With God as my witness, while the situation described in the Guidepost report is based in reality, the allegation made in the report is false. I also am sorry I wasn't more forthcoming with the interviewers because it has made a bad situation worse. I guess I was just so surprised and so shocked by the allegations of abuse that I shut down.

You may be wondering why I did not make my confession to the church at the time of my sin. I justified not doing so on the basis of a Biblical principle that sin is first and foremost against God. King David wrote in Psalm 51:4, “against You and You only have I sinned and done this evil in Your sight.”

I’ve also always taught that confession should be as broad as the offense. Since I had sought forgiveness from those I had offended and put myself under the care of others during the process, I thought I had done my part.

So, now, I ask all of you also to please forgive me. As I did twelve years ago, and again today, I confess that I sinned. I crossed a line. I repent in brokenness and shame. I turn from my sin, *again*. Back then, I confessed and sought forgiveness from all persons I sinned against. I would ask the same of all that learn of my confession, now.

Please forgive me.

I took then, and I take now, responsibility for my actions. I am also submitting myself to the care of a small group of wise, Godly leaders to enter into a season of intentional restoration given the public nature of the events of recent days.

And, finally, for all of those whose ministries I have influenced over many years.

My prayer is that this season - the most difficult of my 50 year ministry — is a reminder to every one of you that no spiritual leader is beyond temptation.

I thank God for his grace and I’m sorry for any disappointment this news will cause to anyone.

I’ll leave you with a few words from the book of first Timothy which seem appropriate, *“this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief”* (1 Timothy 1:15).

Blessings,
Johnny Hunt