

Dear Mike, Cathy, elders and leaders of Grace Community Bible Church,

I am writing to express my sorrow over events I was involved with on behalf of Harvest Bible Fellowship in 2012, and to ask for your forgiveness for the hurt and pain I caused. My purpose and heart is not to blame anyone else or to re-visit the issues that culminated in that evening visit, but to confess my own sin and ask for forgiveness from the brothers and sisters I love and have injured.

Not as an excuse, but as an explanation, I was asked to join Rick Donald for a meeting with Pastor Mike regarding concerns he (Pastor Mike) had expressed. "As a good soldier" I willingly accepted the orders from those I trusted to know more about what had transpired than I personally was aware of—and I willingly "submitted" to those I felt had authority over me. Again, this does not excuse my involvement, but I hope provides some context for understanding. Over time and through a variety of personal circumstances, I have seen and been convicted of the need to abstain from such assignments. So then, why was I complicit?

One of the idols of my heart has regrettably been people pleasing. I wanted to be the prodigal's older brother who always obeyed and played by the rules, which in this matter, meant that I did not rightly seek the Lord through prayer, counsel and reflection. I was more concerned with the approval of men than of God. In addition, my own heart and environment was fed, furthered and self-justified by my "performance-junkie" habits. The book of Galatians was a great corrective for my soul, with 3:3 in particular confronting me: "*Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*" I was listening to men instead of the Spirit, working on self-righteous optics, living by law and not operating in love toward His family and Kingdom.

Perhaps you'll remember Kent Shaw's repeated axiom, "truth and time go hand-in-hand." In time, the Lord has allowed me to see my propensity to say "yes" when I should have said "no." Through some very difficult chapters of my own, I have been reawakened to the sweetness of God's kindness, grace and mercy. Although I am still a very real work-in-sanctification-progress, I have dealt with many of the sinful patterns of behavior. The Lord has been so gracious, allowing me to realize my self-righteousness and pride in what I did, more than the "who" I was doing it for. With a litany of charges against me, a standard I knew I hadn't kept/couldn't keep, I had to surrender afresh to God's love, embrace, adoption and son-ship. I've had a "grace awakening" as Swindoll's book title describes.

Although it perhaps sounds strange for a guy involved in ministry for a while, but I have come to a love and understanding of the Gospel and my own daily desperate need of it, like never before. For me the imperfect analogy is what parenting means before you have kids—and after. It's a very different lens. And that's how I feel about what God has allowed me to work through with fear and trembling...and about what took place that evening.

I have been seeking to make things right with those the Lord has reminded me that I have sinned against. While I cannot answer for others, I am seeking to own my sin. Specifically, I should not have said "yes." Mike, you and I had a long relationship...I wish I had honored you by first seeking to hear from you what was on your heart. And while I am sure I cannot fully grasp the consequence of my actions, I would repent and seek your forgiveness as a sinner coming to you in humility.

Praying for His continued presence and favor toward your families and ministry and praying for a redemptive chapter that I am eager to be a part of.

In Christ's love,

joel