

# THE TOMCZAK DEPARTURE FROM S.G.M. — WHAT REALLY HAPPENED?

— Larry and Doris Tomczak (November 2011)

As you read of our time with Sovereign Grace Ministries, we are sharing some traumatic experiences, yet endeavoring to do so accurately and redemptively. I want to say at the outset that I am not blameless, but I at times yielded to a spirit of fear when told I “lacked discernment” and was at times cowardly when I should have addressed unrighteous behavior. Where we participated in any unredemptive treatment of God’s people, we ask for your forgiveness. Over the years Doris and I have met with numerous people to ask forgiveness and people have been most gracious to us. Feel free to contact us if you feel a need to revisit any past experiences. Thank you in advance for your mercy and love. Let us unite in prayer that what we communicate will help many, bring healing and glorify our Lord Jesus Christ.

*“But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place? And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. So therefore do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones. So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.” Gen. 50:19-21*

**“Encountering departures and desertions from our ministries—we must see them as tutors—revealing our real motives and deficiencies in our methodology. These are tests from God. They will reveal our hearts.” -Dave Harvey, SGM Leader**

Note: This quote appeared on the cover page of a paper I submitted to SGM leaders one year after our 1997 departure, “An Appeal for Repentance, Reconciliation and Closure.”

Five issues were highlighted at that time: 1) Pride, Sectarianism and Elitism 2) Self-righteousness and Judgmentalism 3) Blackmail and Intimidation 4) Lack of Integrity and Deceitfulness 5) Abuse of Spiritual Authority.

The paper cited the names of 61 former leaders who experienced mistreatment (the list is currently over 100) and included an appeal for a forum where “individuals with outstanding offenses and unresolved issues could be addressed...these issues will not simply fade away but will continue lingering for years until dealt with redemptively and honestly.” I received no response from any team leaders to the paper or appeal for adjudication. Date of submission: December 1998.

“The sins of some men are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them.” (1 Tim.5:24)

Next year I will celebrate God's faithfulness in my 40<sup>th</sup> year of full-time Christian ministry. At this juncture I sensed it would be helpful to tell the story of a painful turning point in my life and ministry.

Recently, I wrote a "Statement of Reconciliation" with CJ Mahaney, attempting to be as gracious and discrete as possible regarding specifics. But as more details surfaced on the Internet it became apparent that God wanted everything in the light. Our experience is not an isolated case. It is probably one of the most egregious and ignominious examples of deceit and abusive behavior surfacing in SGM at this time. But it did not create the crisis. Instead, it revealed how root issues have been ignored and left unaddressed for too long. May we all proceed in humility and mercy, mindful of Prov. 28:13, "He who conceals his sin will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes his sin will obtain mercy."

After 24 years of service in the DC area with the "Take and Give Ministry" (TAG), co-founding Covenant Life Church in our home and then serving in leadership in Fairfax Covenant Church, I with my family departed disappointedly, yet hopefully, for better things in Atlanta in 1996. We knew for a number of years that I was being marginalized in Sovereign Grace Ministries (formerly People of Destiny International) and when differences with Reformed doctrine began surfacing, the tension only increased.

At a youth rally in Atlanta, one of our teen-age sons responded along with other youth to an appeal for living genuine Christian lives. That night at home he voluntarily shared with me areas of waywardness and his desire to change, but the door was now open to confront me for "failures at home" and "character deficiencies." "Apostolic Team" leaders forbade me to be present for a later meeting with my son where he was told to "share all your sins" with the vow of their "confidentiality" (which was later broken).

Subsequently, the team said it "lost confidence in my leadership," and agreed to a "leave of absence," sending out a "letter of confession" written by me, then undergoing several revisions affirming SGM leadership and inserting material with which I was uncomfortable but required to include. At the church meeting announcing the shift, I was told to nod in agreement for the congregation to observe.

The agreed upon 6-12 month period was short-circuited when we experienced a pattern of spiritual abuse, deceit, harshness and hypocrisy (including premeditated blackmail, communicated and reaffirmed on numerous occasions and subsequently left to silence and hang over us for over a decade). The entire apostolic team and the new senior pastor and his staff participated in this. We also were told to consider uprooting to Virginia Beach or Phoenix, which we said we could not do because we did not sense this to be God's will for our family. Criteria established for returning to my former role as senior pastor made that outcome an impossibility unless I embraced the Reformed doctrinal tenets (although people nationwide were deliberately misled with information to the contrary).

My wife and I finally left PDI when things finally reached the "untenable" point. It became for us a matter of conscience. Disingenuous public statements and letters sent nationwide misrepresented what actually happened and I was publically slandered at

Covenant Life Church, called a “liar” (with guests and non-believers present) as the leader declared, “I’d rather be dead than do what Larry Tomczak is doing!” Local leaders were affirmed leading to an almost unanimous standing ovation. My reputation built upon 25 years in ministry, was debased nationally and abroad. My “Seven Reasons for Departing PDI” were not conveyed and for 13 years this perception remained in the public domain, separating our family from many relatives, friends and leaders in the Body of Christ. It also resulted in serious financial repercussions for us as a family of six.

For over a decade we tried to bring CJ and the apostolic team to account for the injustice, even enlisting nationally known leaders in the effort, but to no avail. Finally, in November of 2010 he consented. Years of confrontation by SGM leaders and CLC pastors along with the turmoil and defections of people in the network of churches brought CJ to the realization he needed to repent of longstanding sins, some of which were committed in our unfortunate departure. CJ later made a public confession of some of his transgressions at Covenant Life Church and announced a “leave of absence.” Many believe his confession was a start but was incomplete and minimized the severity of the issues. We were invited to the November SGM Pastors Conference and Covenant Life Church to speak on reconciliation, but the invitation was rescinded. At the conference CJ shared he regretted having taken the leave of absence.

CJ’s example, problems surfacing in churches affiliated with SGM, and Internet disclosures from a former apostolic team member were catalytic in some SGM leaders beginning to come forward to repent and rectify matters with our family. One former team member had already done so years previously, after experiencing abusive treatment leading to his departure. An independent advisory panel, Ambassadors of Reconciliation, has been retained to engage in a discovery process to help facilitate reconciliation with former members and leaders who believe they have been spiritually abused. The panel is also collecting information to assist with reforms needed in SGM as well as assist in determining CJ Mahaney’s future status.

May the Lord guide us all as we redemptively deal with past transgressions and find His grace manifested in this time of reconciliation, reform and discipline for Sovereign Grace Ministries. The changes are not cosmetic but substantive to effectively eradicate systemic issues and transform a leadership culture that has drifted from Biblical norms. Two of the churches in Revelation faced the practice of the Nicolaitans (“suppress the people”). One hated it; the other held to it (Rev.2:6 & 15). May SGM leaders align with the former.

To be faithful to criteria for Biblical leadership; to steer clear of the sin of favoritism and partiality; and to be consistent with what was expected of former SGM leaders, I believe senior leaders should step down for a season to be retooled for ministry according to I Pet. 5 and I Tim. 3 standards. Public repentance and public statements should be made along with restitution where appropriate. Then and only then, can the favor of Almighty God return in its fullness to this ministry and unity be restored. The warning of God’s “lampstand” (His Presence) being removed (Rev. 2:5) is very real when a church or ministry is being evaluated by Jesus and fails to respond. Many onlookers are hoping and praying that will not happen.

Then we all can pray like Nehemiah did after he instituted reforms to restore the walls of the city of God: “Remember me with favor, O my God.” (Neh. 13:31)

PS: Because the issues and contents of this statement have already been made public at church meetings and on the Internet for months, I sensed it was appropriate to release my story at this time. CJ and I are almost 40-year friends and our reconciliation statement still stands. In my study I keep a plaque he gave me decades ago. On it are the words: “My Brother, I would not be the man I am without your care and example. I am eternally indebted to you. Your Yokefellow, CJ.” I would add: “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.” (Prov. 27:6)