

My Journey With James 5:19, a Gospel of Grace, and Anthony Moore

This article documents actions that Cedarville University took regarding Dr. Anthony Moore to balance protecting our community and attempting to restore a brother in Christ.

The Fallout of Sin

I believe it was Saturday, January 14, 2017, when I received a phone call from my friend, former student, and former employee Dr. Anthony Moore. I first met Anthony around the spring of 2006. When I answered the call, I knew immediately from the tone of his voice that the purpose for the call was not a joyful one. He told me he had wronged another person in a morally serious way using video and technology, but his transgression was not physical in nature. He also told me that he would lose his ministry at the Village Church. He was repentant, sobbing, and crushed. I was heartbroken for my friend, his family, and all parties involved.

On February 24, 2017, I spoke at a convention in Fort Worth, Texas. That night, I went to see my friend. We cried a lot. Dealing with the devastation of sinful actions is difficult, and I could tell it had taken its toll. Yet, he respectfully submitted to the request of his local church and stayed in place while working construction to provide for his family. I tried to love my friend well, encouraged him that the Gospel offered hope, and prayed for him before I left.

On Monday, April 24, 2017, I spoke in chapel at Cedarville University, as I do almost every week, as part of my yearlong sermon series through James. I had planned the series the previous summer and as part of that plan, on this day, I spoke on James 5:19-20, “My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”

I directed my sermon to an audience of University students. God directed my sermon to my own heart. I began to evaluate my thinking toward those who wander from the truth, either in belief or in action, and I began to acknowledge my lack of effort or desire to “bring back a sinner from his wandering.” How selfish of me to care more about myself than others. Too often, we enter into risk management rather than extending the same grace that God extended to us. God was working in my heart, but to what end, I did not know.

A Plan for Restoration

During the week of June 19-23, Anthony reached out to me to discuss the possibility of a plan for restoration at Cedarville. He told me that this idea came from a nationally recognized expert on same-sex attraction, who was also a friend, and some of the elders at the Village Church: Fort Worth.

Anthony and I talked on the phone multiple times that week. We began to talk about the possibility of him moving his family to Ohio and working at Cedarville University. He and I talked about a five-year plan of restoration, beginning with transparency and accountability and moving toward more freedom and trust.

I took the following steps in my efforts to develop this plan:

- Spoke on the phone multiple times with elders at the Village Church.
- Corresponded on an ongoing basis with the Village Church as we designed our plan.

- Spoke with members of the Cedarville University Board of Trustees to gain input and expertise, acknowledging the risk of attempting to restore someone.
- Obtained a letter of support from someone who had been meeting and working with Anthony.
- Obtained a letter of support from a counselor who had been counseling with Anthony over the previous six months.
- Obtained a letter of support from a pastor who knew Anthony as a high school student, officiated his wedding, and counseled Anthony and his wife through this difficult time.
- Talked with Anthony several times with Dr. Jason Lee, Dean of the School of Biblical and Theological Studies at Cedarville, and others about the situation and about the need for ongoing counseling and accountability in order to proceed with restoration.
- Performed a criminal, educational, and employment background check, which all came back clean on July 7, 2017.

On July 3, 2017, I sent a long email to the full Board of Trustees at Cedarville University, requesting feedback on moving forward with a five-year plan of restoration. I told them about Anthony, about some details of his past, and about his sinful actions that resulted in the end of his ministry at the Village Church. The Board of Trustees supported moving forward with the plan and the hope for restoration.

On July 24, 2017, I wrote Anthony a four-page letter laying out the five-year plan. His primary service in the beginning was as a Multicultural Recruiter at Cedarville University, working with our Admissions team, and also as a Biblical Research Fellow, working administratively with Dr. Lee in our School of Biblical and Theological Studies. To the best of our ability, we attempted to establish that in the beginning of this plan, Anthony would be a staff member performing administrative responsibilities and doing whatever was needed to allow for more time between his sinful action and meaningful ministry. That letter included the following statements:

- He would begin as staff, and not faculty, to build a track record of continued faithfulness before engaging with our students.
- He would undergo counseling focusing on personal- and/or marriage-related issues and that Cedarville would cover the cost as needed.
- He would be required to attend chapel every weekday as part of his spiritual healing, in addition to his local church membership.
- He would maintain a close accountability with Dr. Lee and do whatever was asked of him to provide appropriate and healthy accountability and to demonstrate the spiritual growth expected of those in ministry.
- He would agree to live in town in campus housing (Harriman House), which is a very public house on Main Street in Cedarville.

This letter laid out the following expectations: year one, focus on getting Anthony healthy; year two, Anthony could begin some teaching; and at 30 months out, Anthony could expect more freedom, with the hope of some normalcy to life on a trajectory toward a full 60 months of documented success. Anthony agreed to everything willingly.

Arrival on Campus

Friday, August 11, 2017, marked the beginning of the fall semester at Cedarville University with our annual faculty and staff all-day session. With the goal of a transparent restoration, in that session, I made the following announcement to all of our faculty and staff who were present:

Announcement:

I am thankful that we serve a God of grace — a God of second chances, third chances, and more. We serve a God that didn't give up on us in our most sinister days. He also did not give up on Noah, the drunk; on Abraham, who said his wife was his sister; on Sarah, who doubted; on Jacob, who deceived; on Moses, who murdered; on Rahab, the harlot; on Barak, who wasn't brave at first; on Samson, who violated his vow; on David, who slept with Bathsheba and had her husband killed; on Peter, who denied Him three times before morning; and those are our heroes in the faith ... the list goes on and on.

As much as possible, we want to have this same culture of grace at Cedarville University. Now, we all understand that the reality is we can't do this in every situation, and we must not minimize sin or its consequences, yet we must balance that with the recognition that we all desperately need grace. Our community must desire to extend grace where possible. We dare not presume upon the grace of God or make peace with our sin, but knowing that our hearts are deceitfully wicked and but for the grace of God, we all may fall, the Cedarville community must extend care, compassion, and concern to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

This year we have a new staff member. His name is Anthony Moore. In January, Anthony was serving as pastor of the Village Church's Fort Worth campus. He sinned. His mistake resulted in him stepping down from that ministry. Through consultation with others, we believe his sin, while serious, does not permanently disqualify him from ministry. I have been working this summer with the elders at the Village Church, two counselors who have been working with Anthony closely, our Trustees, Jason Lee, Tom Mach, Scott Van Loo, and others on a multiyear plan where we will walk with Anthony through his continued restoration and reentry into ministry. After this year goes well, with appropriate accountability while serving in a staff capacity, he will transition to teach in the School of Biblical and Theological Studies.

While I am talking about grace and redemption, let me speak to you from my heart for just a moment. Every year that I have been at Cedarville, we have lost at least one employee due to a moral failure. As you heard me preach last year from the end of the book of James, our desire is to rescue those who may be starting to wander. Listen, we cannot be a self-righteous community of pharisaical deceivers. God will not bless such hypocrisy. We must be humble, servants of King Jesus who recognize that we are our own worst enemy, that our sin nature is strong and that without the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of the Gospel we are all doomed. If you are struggling with something, please, please seek help before you act in ways that mandate consequences. We want, we need, we are called to come alongside each other and to lock arms in unity, marching together in service to Jesus. My heart's desire is that we will be a grace-filled, authentic community of Christ followers and not a fake community of rule followers ... that we will be a place struggling through life's hard times to serve God together, supporting one another through prayer rather than pointing fingers or spreading rumors. My prayer is that if we, the faculty and staff of this place, get our hearts right with God, humble ourselves, repent of our sins, that God may then decide to send a revival to our campus, the likes of which we have only read about in the history books. That God will change our lives, take away our apathy, remove our cynicism, and give us a heart to see lives changed with the power of the Gospel. My prayer is that this will not just be a place of granting degrees. That we will not see what we do as jobs. That we will not think of ourselves as simply working in higher education, but that we see our service to God as a stewardship at a place where lives are changed for all eternity and where

people encounter a Holy God with such reverence and awe that we live our lives truly sold out for Him.

So, today, would you examine where you are in your walk with God? Would you repent of areas where you may have been slipping? Would you seek help if you need to do so? Would you join me in trying to create a community of compassion that shows grace to another with humility as we seek to serve? And would you join me in welcoming with open arms of fellowship and the grace of the Gospel our brother in Christ, Anthony Moore, to the Cedarville family?

I wrote this verbal announcement out to attempt to get it right. I did not go into the details of Anthony's sin. We encouraged him to tell his story openly, to seek accountability, friendship, and help from others, and to know that he was among other sinners seeking to grow more like Jesus Christ.

During the first year, Anthony did the following in order to grow in restoration:

- Maintained accountability with Dr. Lee
- Lived in a University-owned home where his internet usage was monitored by Human Resources, with a report issued monthly to me and Dr. Lee.
- Placed accountability software on his phone.
- Underwent individual counseling and marriage counseling with his wife.
- Told his story to the entire faculty in the School of Biblical and Theological Studies during a meeting and entertained questions. He then met with some of them regularly for accountability.
- Told his story to multiple elders at his local church.
- Told his story to the basketball coach, since he planned to volunteer with the basketball team.
- Agreed voluntarily not to use Cedarville's locker rooms to avoid any appearance or possibility of misconduct. He has been in the locker room for basketball purposes, accompanied by other coaches who knew his story.
- Did not accompany the basketball team on overnight trips.
- Moved his membership from the Village Church in Texas to Grace Baptist Church in Cedarville.
- Met weekly with the pastor at Grace Baptist Church, for accountability and conversations about life. He also oversaw his pathway back toward speaking engagements though not formal ministry. He did this up until COVID-19 restricted opportunities to meet.
- Agreed to only meet with students in a public place or in groups to avoid any appearance of wrongdoing or the possibility of any accusation.
- Met with the faculty of the School of the Biblical and Theological Studies as they interviewed him, listened to him teach a class, and performed the same process we would for any potential faculty member.
- Continued in counseling with his wife and built close friendships in the community.
- Went with me and other men on a weeklong hunting trip in June after the first year. Anthony voluntarily told his story that weekend as a continued means of walking in humility and honesty.
- Talked with me multiple times about where he was and how he was doing spiritually and practically.

Let me be clear. During the first year, Anthony voluntarily did everything we asked him to do with humility. Through ongoing conversations, accountability, adjustments, and living life, we sought to balance loving the Moore family well and protecting the Cedarville community from risk.

Year Two and Following

Going into the second year, I checked with his pastor and Dr. Lee to see if they had any concerns, since those two had worked most closely with Anthony. Neither expressed concerns. We proceeded with our stated plan for year two. At this point, it was 18 months from when I first learned of this incident before Anthony served as a professor in a classroom.

On October 3, 2018, our Trustees interviewed Anthony, just as they would any other potential faculty member at Cedarville University. On October 4, 2018, Trustees voted to approve granting Anthony a faculty title and allowing him to teach in our School of Biblical and Theological Studies.

In the fall of 2018, Greg Dyson, our Director for Intercultural Leadership, accepted a new opportunity at Taylor University. I found myself in need of someone who would offer insightful, candid advice on racial issues. In November, I announced to the campus that I was appointing Anthony as Special Advisor to the President for Kingdom Diversity, effective January 1, 2019.

During the 2018-19 school year, Anthony did everything that we asked him to do. In early 2019, the Moores moved into their own house and out of campus housing.

During that year, Anthony also went through our Leadership Development Program with Gen. Loren Reno. This yearlong program allowed Anthony to continue growing and introduced a new group of Cedarville leaders into his life. He excelled in this program. Anthony continued to meet with his pastor.

As we approach 40 months since the first phone call, we continued to have agreed-upon boundaries, both for Anthony's protection and to avoid the appearance of putting any Cedarville student at risk. Anthony has continued to do everything asked of him during his time at Cedarville and no new incidents have arisen to my knowledge. The safeguards include:

- Anthony will not use the locker rooms at the University. If basketball business should take him into any locker room area, then he will be accompanied by coaches who know his story.
- Anthony will not meet with students alone in a private setting. He will meet with them in public settings or in groups.
- Anthony will continue regular accountability with Dr. Lee and others.

April 22, 2020

During a phone call on April 22, 2020, I learned new information that I did not know about the original situation that occurred during Anthony's ministry at the Village Church. I spent the day talking with various people and tracking down further information. After further consideration, based on this new information, I became convinced that we could not continue with the five-year restoration plan at Cedarville University, and Anthony's employment at Cedarville ceased on April 23, 2020.

Summary

This article documents steps we took to demonstrate that we attempted to be wise and to put proper protections in place for Cedarville. This is not the ending that I had hoped to write. I am devastated personally.

At the beginning, our plan was to exhibit the grace of the Gospel and the restoration encouraged in James 5 while protecting those in our community. We sought to do this through accountability and clear boundaries along with transparency and clear communication within our community. We grieve for the

pain that will result for many as we now must end this restoration process. My own actions were driven by a desire to love others and follow the Lord after preaching James 5.