



May 24, 2020

To: Members of The Summit Church

From: Pastor J.D.

Subject: Statement for Members Regarding Pastor Bryan Loritts

Summit Family,

Over the past five years, the Summit has been privileged to enjoy a growing relationship with Pastor Bryan Loritts, and he has become our favorite guest speaker. In fact, he has felt like part of our extended church family. This is why I was excited to announce this weekend that **beginning June 1, Pastor Bryan Loritts will be joining our Summit Church staff as executive pastor of teaching and development.** In addition to joining our Summit teaching team, he will be developing future church leaders and overseeing our effort to become a multiethnic church. With his addition to our leadership team, we look forward to what God will continue to do through us as a church united as one, prioritizing the gospel above all.

Pastor Bryan has unique gifts and experience that have made him a church leader with national influence. He has authored or co-authored six books including *Right Color, Wrong Culture*, *Saving the Saved*, and *Letters to a Birmingham Jail*. In 2014, Pastor Bryan launched the Kainos Movement in order to build multiethnic unity in the body of Christ. The mission of Kainos has been to reclaim the first century biblical roots of the church, where ethnic diversity was both normal and a powerful witness to the world of the power of the gospel. He has prophetically called on the church to face the issue of diversity, not because it is a cultural issue but because it is a gospel issue. In all of his teaching, Pastor Bryan prioritizes the centrality of the gospel. When he was here as a speaker at our “Centered and Sent” leadership conference, Pastor Bryan said,

“Contextualization without the punchline of the gospel is compromise. Your changing methods must get you to the central message of the cross.”

From 2003 to 2015, Pastor Bryan served as senior pastor of Fellowship Memphis Church in Memphis, Tennessee. And we want to be completely upfront with you about his experience there, particularly related to one grievous incident.

In 2010, Fellowship Memphis discovered evidence that their director of worship, Pastor Bryan’s brother-in-law, engaged in alleged criminal behavior: voyeurism.

As is always the case, this conduct devastated its victims, their families, and the church. Sexual abuse is a pervasive problem in our society, which is why we have tried to take swift and strong actions to prevent sexual abuse in our church, as well as follow best practices for reporting and the care of victims.

Additionally, as SBC president, I have, in conjunction with the ERLC and Executive Committee, established the Caring Well initiative, a resource designed to challenge churches to do everything possible to prevent sexual abuse within their congregations. My prayer has been that through these efforts our churches will become safe sanctuaries for the vulnerable, where they can hear, understand, trust, and feel the safety of the gospel.

So through this lens, and as we do with any key Summit hire, the directional elders and members of our leadership team thoroughly familiarized themselves with Pastor Bryan’s past, including this incident. Our goal was and is to ensure that his prior conduct aligns with our missional values and beliefs. As part of the interview process, Pastor Bryan freely disclosed all information regarding this painful chapter of both his ministry and family life. Pastor Bryan recalled that once he discovered evidence of this individual's actions, he immediately reported this information to the church elders and terminated the individual less than two hours later.

Pastor Bryan confirmed that he had no prior knowledge or hint of suspicion that this individual had engaged in any such behavior before the moment he discovered evidence of this conduct. The church sought to notify the victims immediately, and soon after, church leaders had also engaged legal counsel. Pastor Bryan instructed his team to contact the authorities.

Due to his familial relationship with the individual, the elders of Fellowship Memphis removed Pastor Bryan from any further involvement on the matter roughly two weeks after he notified them of this individual's conduct. They did this to protect the victims by preventing the appearance of any bias (because the incident involved Pastor Bryan's family).

Pastor Bryan confirmed that he wholeheartedly supported the prosecution of the individual, if the victims so desired, and on more than one occasion, he encouraged it.

After being terminated from Fellowship Memphis and going through three months of counseling, the individual appeared before the Fellowship Memphis congregation, confessing to sexual addiction and improprieties of a sexual nature.

A little less than two years later, the individual sought employment with Downtown Church Memphis. In evaluating this person's candidacy for employment, Downtown Church asked to speak with Pastor Bryan about this person's past. Pastor Bryan reported that he was fully forthcoming with Downtown Church about the individual's past, disclosing everything of which he was aware regarding the voyeurism the individual committed at Fellowship Memphis. According to a joint statement issued by Fellowship Memphis and Downtown Church, as a condition to obtaining full-time employment status with Downtown Church, the individual was required to make a statement of full disclosure before the members of Downtown Church, in which he admitted to past sexual predatory behavior, specifically his history of voyeurism.

Tragically, several years later, the individual repeated his crime of voyeurism, this time at Downtown Church. The individual was prosecuted and spent 60 days in jail as part of a plea deal. Although wholly forthcoming with Downtown Church about this individual's past misconduct, Pastor Bryan was saddened by the harm this individual's subsequent acts caused to more innocent victims and their families at Downtown Church.

This is why we believe pastors demonstrating predatory behavior should never again have the opportunity to serve in vocational church leadership again. While we thank God that in the cross of Jesus is forgiveness for all sins, we believe predatory behavior should disqualify one from leadership in vocational ministry for life.

We grieve the situations at Fellowship Memphis and Downtown Church, but we are grateful for the convictions that have guided Pastor Bryan throughout this process. Pastor Bryan is a gifted pastor and church leader who has a great love for God's people and for God's purposes. He has been a leader in the movement of churches seeking to reflect the gospel through multiethnic reconciliation, a true reconciliation that demonstrates the power of the gospel to bring people together as one. He is also a pastor and leader who has been matured by experience and demonstrates the humility that we all need to continue to grow in grace. Pastor Bryan feels God calling him to be here, at The Summit Church. He and his family look forward to making this their church family. I am thankful for his friendship and look forward to him serving on our team. Please pray for him and pray for The Summit Church as we continue to seek to make Christ known through a movement of disciple-making disciples and recommit ourselves to doing whatever it takes to reach all people.

For the gospel,

Pastor J.D.