

Tony Evans will not return to lead Dallas megachurch

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(RNS)—Dallas megachurch founder Tony Evans, who stepped back from leading his church due to an undisclosed “sin” he announced last year, will not return as pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship.

Evans apologized to his congregation and his family on Oct. 5, after the elder board of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship announced the pastor had completed a “restoration process” and will not return to lead the church.

“To the flock, to the congregation, for the consternation I may have caused you with questions and wondering and uncertainty, I’m sorry,” he said as he sat on the church’s stage during a worship service and answered questions from his son, Jonathan Evans, who has been preaching regularly at the church.

“I apologize sincerely for any instability that this season has caused you because you are my treasure.”

Evans, who abruptly announced he was “stepping away” in June 2024, is the first African American to have both a study Bible and a full-Bible commentary bearing his name. In addition to his church, he founded the Christian Bible teaching ministry The Urban Alternative, which continues to air his messages on radio outlets worldwide.

Nature of sin not disclosed

During the “Restoration Sunday” service, which lasted an hour and 40 minutes, neither Evans nor Chris Wheel, associate pastor of outreach,

disclosed the sin Evans described in June 2024 as requiring “the same biblical standard of repentance and restoration” he had applied to other people.

“While I have committed no crime, I did not use righteous judgment in my actions,” Evans, now 76, said at the time. “In light of this, I am stepping away from my pastoral duties and am submitting to a healing and restoration process established by the elders.”

Some churches offer or demand a restoration process of their leaders to overcome what they consider a violation of the Bible.

During the worship service at the nondenominational, predominantly Black church, Wheel said Evans’ “discipline and restoration process” included counseling with professionals outside the church’s staff, “evidence of genuine repentance and godly sorrow” and pastoral mentoring.

Citing the Bible’s epistle to the Galatians’ guidance about restoring a sinful person, Wheel said: “In keeping with this biblical framework, the elder board exercised deliberate and prayerful discretion regarding the timing, the manner of disclosing specific details throughout the restoration process.”

“This was not done to conceal wrongdoing, but rather to uphold the integrity of the process, to protect the dignity of all involved, and prevent unnecessary speculation or sensationalism,” he said, adding that Evans “fully submitted” to the restoration process.

Wheel said Evans also took a 12-month absence from pulpit ministry to “focus on personal growth.”

“In alignment with biblical principles and unanimous affirmation of the elder board, Dr. Evans has successfully completed this restoration journey,” Wheel said.

Jonathan Evans likely next pastor of church

As the congregation applauded and cheered, Evans entered the stage.

“While he will not be returning in a staff nor leadership role at OCBF, we joyfully look forward to seeing how God uses Dr. Evans’ gifts and calling to proclaim the truth of Scripture with clarity and conviction for the strengthening of the body of Christ,” Wheel said.

Evans made a major public appearance shortly after his yearlong absence concluded, speaking at the July summit of The Family Leader, a Christian organization known for its conservative evangelical stances, in Des Moines, Iowa.

Wheel said more details about the future plans for the church will be announced at a “Vision Sunday” service, set for Oct. 12.

“Key steps include Jonathan Evans has been appointed as an elder,” he said. “Our expectation is that he will formally be installed as the lead pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship.”

As soon as Wheel concluded speaking, Jonathan Evans led the congregation in a brief Communion service.

“Somebody celebrate our Lord for restoration, forgiveness and reconciliation,” Jonathan Evans said.

‘Hardest part was disappointing the Lord’

The service then pivoted to him sitting with his father for a 20-minute

discussion in which the two men expressed their pride in each other, and the elder Evans thanked the church, his family and friends for their endurance and described the “bittersweet” period that had just concluded. He said those days often were filled with depression, loneliness and tears.

“It’s certainly bitter when you’ve done something for 48 years every day, every week, and then you’re no longer doing it—and it’s your fault,” Evans said. “I had to search for God, but not for a sermon.”

Asked about the hardest part of the yearlong process, Evans said, “The most important and hardest was disappointing the Lord, who had given me so much and in such a unique way.”

He said he particularly was thankful for the support of his wife, the former Carla Crummie, whom he married in December 2023, after Lois Evans, his first wife of 49 years, died in 2019.

“The way we came together was shared loss,” he said. “Our mates died a few days apart as she and her late husband were on their way to my wife’s funeral.”

Evans said he was concerned about “many things that were not true being said” on social media.

“The way they beat up on my wife who knew nothing about any of this, and then the way they came after my children and then came after the Lord,” he said. “And I was the reason why all of that was happening, on a worldwide scale.”

Speaking directly to the congregation, he said, “For anything that has hurt you from me, I’m sorry, but I’m so glad I have you and you have me.”