

Haggard Memoir May Give Hope to Couples in Crisis

✖ Today's release of Gayle Haggard's book *Why I Stayed: The Choices I Made in My Darkest Hour*, detailing why she stayed with megachurch pastor Ted Haggard after learning of his secret homosexual activity and drug use by way of a national scandal in 2006, is opening up a conversation that is long overdue.

So say Christians who counsel men and women facing revelations that their spouses have been grappling with same-sex attraction for the duration of their marriages.

"Her book is an opportunity to talk about a huge problem in the church," said Renee Dallas, wife of author and sex addiction counselor Joe Dallas and founder of WifeBoat, a blog and support group network to help women whose husbands battle same-sex attraction and other forms of sexual immorality.

"There are Christian women married to men who have been leading secret lives, and this is a huge problem in the church," Dallas added.

"Sometimes these men are involved in homosexual sin, sometimes adultery, sometimes pornography, but in all cases there is the shock of finding out, there is the humiliation and embarrassment, there is a loss of community—all of these things these women face."

In her book, Haggard writes that she suspected her husband had trouble with immorality. Early in their marriage he told her he wanted to speak to a counselor about thoughts he was having related to same-sex attraction.

After their special-needs son, Jonathan, was born, her husband confessed to having had "an incident" after visiting an adult bookstore 18 months earlier while taking graduate courses in another city. He told her he had visited a counselor and had resolved never to visit the store or return to the school.

She said she was shaken by the revelation, but believed it was in the past. Occasionally she would ask if he still struggled in that area, and he would answer, "No, I never really think about it anymore."

Haggard says she was blindsided by the revelations in November 2006 that her husband had visited a male masseur for three years, and that those massages had sometimes involved sexual activity and drug use.

When a text message surfaced that a male escort in Denver was making an accusation against a nationally known pastor in Colorado Springs, Colo., Haggard pulled her husband aside and asked him to be honest with her. "Do you know this man? Don't let me be surprised," Haggard writes.

She says he told her, "I don't know this man."

The following day, Ted Haggard came clean after talking with

an attorney hired by New Life Church, the 14,000-member congregation the Haggards founded.

"I felt myself trembling, tears flooded my eyes, and my throat tightened until I could barely get words out," Haggard writes. "'Who are you?' I sobbed from the depths of my soul. 'Didn't I tell you not to let me be surprised? You lied to me! How could you?'"

Haggard writes that she heaped "spadefuls of guilt" onto her husband, who contemplated suicide and encouraged her to divorce him.

"I'll ruin you," she writes he told her. "You and the kids could leave me. The church would take you in and help you."

But she says she knew almost from the outset that she would try to forgive her husband-though it may take time-because forgiveness is "the proper response" for Christians who have been wounded or offended in some way.

Haggard writes that she always felt there was a part of her husband that he kept walled off from her through the nearly 30 years they were married before the scandal. When he admitted the depth of his struggles with sexual sin, she writes that she was glad to finally be allowed into that part of her husband's world.

But she said if she had not been sure that her husband had repented of his sins and was committed to doing what right, she might have chosen another path.

"I hope our story convinces people to believe in one true principle: The best thing you can do for your children is to love and cherish your spouse," she writes.

Warren Throckmorton, Ph.D., a psychology professor at Grove City College in Pennsylvania, says Haggard's example may encourage some couples to work through difficult issues and strive to maintain their marriages. "I think the phrase 'for better or worse' may take on new meaning and lead to some considering counseling to repair a broken marriage," he said.

Dallas said most of the women she counsels want to save their marriages, and she encourages them to work toward that goal if their husbands are repentant and committed to rebuilding their family's trust. She says Haggard's book may serve the church well.

"She's modeling staying with her husband through such a tough time," Dallas said. "She's modeling working through a really rough situation, working through forgiveness, working through understanding and giving healing a chance and giving the Holy Spirit a chance to work in light of probably a lot of misunderstanding. I think her book's really going to serve the church well in that way."

Mike Goeke says not all marriages survive revelations of same-sex attraction, but he is encouraged by the small successes he sees at the marriage conferences he and his wife, Stephanie, launched two years ago for couples whose marriages were being impacted by homosexuality.

In the last two years, attendance has grown from 13 couples to 52 last year.

"I think if both parties are willing to do whatever it takes, I think there's a strong chance of that marriage being restored," Goeke said. "Our goal is not just to keep marriages together on paper. This is really about your marriage becoming what God intended it to be."

The conferences were born out of the Goekes' experience. Married in 1994, Goeke left his wife in 1996 to live a gay lifestyle. His wife was unaware he even struggled with same-sex attraction but determined to believe that God would somehow restore their marriage.

He returned home six months later after reading a book by Jeff Konrad titled *You Don't Have to Be Gay*. "I sensed a powerful love of God," Goeke said. "It wasn't really conviction, but it was more God telling me, 'I love you. I have more for you.'"

Although his wife accepted him back at home, the process of rebuilding trust and restoring their marriage was long. "Both of us had to grow individually," Goeke said. "She says she forgave me out of obedience but trust did not come for a long time."

The couple eventually helped launch the Steadfast marriage conferences through Exodus International, where Goeke served as executive vice president for roughly two years. The Goekes are still involved in the Exodus conferences, which are funded in part through their church,

but also focus on mentoring couples and churches through their Cross Power Ministries.

“There’s so much sexual sin and struggle in marriages today from pornography to affairs to everything else,” Goeke said. “What I hope for us is that our testimony here in this church will show other marriages in crisis that there’s hope not just for the marriage to stay together on paper, but for the marriage just to flourish and to thrive, for those relationships to be what God intended them to be, which is a reflection of Christ and His relationship to the church.

“And that’s what I hope Gayle’s book will show too—that there’s strength in forgiveness and it’s not a sign of weakness. It’s a sign of power. Not human power but the power of the Holy Spirit.”