

Ted and Gayle Haggard

Charisma sits down with Ted Haggard and his wife, Gayle, after living through a very public scandal that took a toll on their lives and their relationship.

Charisma: You probably feel as though you've been to hell and back since your very public moral failure in late 2006. How are you doing spiritually these days?

Ted Haggard: My visit to hell on Earth as a consequence of my own actions was both devastating and eye-opening. It took a tree to fall on me, but I did get the point. As a result, my spiritual life is undoubtedly stronger now. I am becoming the man I always prayed to be in my heart and my actions.

Becoming worse than a leper in the eyes of others has deeply humbled me, to say the least. But I am thankful because it has enabled me to experience Jesus relentlessly pursuing me. Knowing He came for the unrighteousness, and that He came after me and rescued me when I was helpless, is incredibly reassuring. In my new life, the Scriptures and the ministry of the Holy Spirit are more powerful, and my relationships with other believers are healthier because they are based on the righteousness of Christ in us rather than our own goodness.

Charisma: You spent about a year at Tommy Barnett's church in Arizona, and now you're back in Colorado Springs, Colo. What exactly are you doing, and do you have any plans to go back into ministry?

Ted Haggard: I believe all believers are in ministry regardless of our vocation. In August of 2008, Gayle and I started selling life insurance. But since the release of the HBO documentary *The Trials of Ted Haggard* in January of 2009, and the accompanying repentance interviews, we've had millions of visitors to and thousands of e-mails that included words of encouragement, requests for ministry, and invitations to speak

and write. Since that time, we've appeared again on *Oprah*, had two appearances on Fox network talking about how we strengthened our marriage in our darkest hour, and have spoken in a variety of venues.

It's all humbling and embarrassing for me, because the worst characteristics and moments in my life frame these discussions. But it does seem to help others, and we are being received with more love and respect than I've ever had in my life. I would like to be able to move on to a less embarrassing topic, but amazingly we now minister to more people on a regular basis than we did prior to the crisis. Currently, Gayle and I sell insurance and are busy traveling and speaking.

Charisma: New Life Church, the congregation you founded, has a new pastor—and you were asked not to talk to people there after you left. Has that been difficult?

Ted Haggard: Exclusion from our friends was the most painful and disheartening part of the story after the crisis for me. I so regret that I allowed sin in my life, and I hate that I deeply dismayed others. Because of good counselors, recovering from my personal struggles has been relatively easy compared to dealing with being removed from fellowship. I willingly stepped down from my position as a leader because of my sin but did not realize at first that I would also be shunned as a member of the church even after I had repented of what I had been disciplined for.

Some did try to reach out to me, and I didn't always respond well. But I had been so marked as a person to be distrusted and avoided that it was difficult for communication to occur in a life-giving way. The cloud of suspicion that was generated about everything in my life effectively prohibited constructive relationships—not just with folks at New Life Church, but also with the rest of the body of Christ and even potential employers.

I fell into deep despair, entered into the darkness of depression, and became suicidal after being separated from the body of believers that I loved so deeply and to whom I had devoted most of my adult life. My emotions swing back and forth about this to this day. Some days I'm angry at me, other days I'm just woefully sad.

Gayle Haggard: Probably the most shocking and difficult part of this journey has been the separation from New Life Church, the church we founded and pastored for 22 years. I viewed the church as a family and felt deeply devoted to the people. I never dreamed I would be separated from the church when I faced my darkest hour.

In my thinking, families pull together when facing difficulties, and that is how they heal their weak or wounded members. I believe it is a commitment to this process that leads to a strong, healthy family and a strong, healthy church that understands the gospel.

To this day I want to honor the people of the church we once pastored with the choices I am making. I hope that one day they will say of me that I represented them and the body of Christ well in this process.

Charisma: For about a year you were under the discipline of a team of ministers. Is that accountability process over now? What did you learn from it?

Ted Haggard: As far as discipline from the church goes, it consisted of two legal contracts, one from the board of trustees of New Life Church and the other from the Overseers and Restorers. Gayle and I signed the contracts because we desired to submit, but we expressed our deep grief and biblical opposition to both the style and content of the contracts to the Overseers before signing them.

In December of 2007, Gayle and I asked pastor Tommy Barnett to talk to the Overseers and Restorers to adjust their contract

so we could move home to Colorado Springs. In January of 2008, they completely released their contract, which allowed us to move back home and to minister again. We waited six months before we moved home, and eleven months before publicly speaking in a church.

My accountability to God, my wife and the body of Christ is ongoing, as it should be for all believers. Now that Gayle knows the worst about me, I am determined to keep our communication open, honest and constant. I meet regularly with a well-qualified counselor to help me identify my blind spots and to keep me moving forward in my healing process. I also have close friends, several of whom are pastors, with whom I maintain frequent, honest and open communication.

What did I learn? I learned that what I had been teaching others for years is true: We should all live our lives as though there is no such thing as a secret. And I realize how much my sin costs others. I was so ashamed of my struggle with sin and concerned about the impact it would have on everyone I loved and who depended on me that I tried to battle it on my own and failed. Secrecy empowers sin.

What I should have done is resign my positions, find a safe place to openly confess my sin, and find a path to effective repentance. My crisis forced me to do this and ultimately led me to the knowledge, tools and healing that have given me victory.

I am deeply sorry for those I have hurt and disappointed in my process. Sin deeply wounds those we love and those who have loved us. When I sinned, I immeasurably violated the love and trust of my family, my friends, the general public and those who had connected with me in ministry. The cost for everyone I care about cannot be calculated.

I found in my process that there is little padding provided to absorb the consequences of sin in relationships. God forgives

and restores us to Himself through the cross. He is not shocked by our sins and is fully prepared to wash us and restore us.

But among people, sin forfeits trust and goodwill. Sin gave others incredible authority over me, my family, my relationships and my life's work. It is the No. 1 way we lose our personal influence and ability to protect and serve those we love and for whom we are responsible. My sin dehumanized and demeaned me and rendered me powerless. Because of my sin, not only I, but also my wife, my family and our church lost control to a significant degree over our own lives and futures.

Gayle Haggard: I was deeply dismayed by the lack of a relational commitment to us in the process. Legal agreements have their place, but they cannot be a substitute for biblical relationships that bring about true healing and restoration.

Ted had served the body of Christ well in spite of his personal and private battles. Many of us benefited from his leadership and teaching. So when he went through his season of discipline from the Lord (which turned out to be a divine rescue), I was shocked at the level of scrutiny and judgment leveled at him that went far beyond what he was initially disciplined for.

History was rewritten: Things that he was commended for before the crisis now became grounds for additional condemnation and judgment toward him. His life and ministry were so scrutinized that even what was innocent was viewed as suspicious.

The misinformation and mischaracterization of Ted both publicly and privately was excruciatingly painful for us at a time when the contracts left us powerless to defend or represent ourselves. In addition, we were having to submit to a "restoration process" that had no hint of restoring us with the body of believers we had loved and been in relationship

with for 22 years. There were a number of other aspects of the contracts that we think were very counter-productive to everyone—us, the people of New Life Church and the body of Christ—but our attempts to discuss these issues were mostly viewed as lack of submission, sadly.

The paradox is that I believe God has used all of this to shape us and position us where He wants us, and this has been our journey in God. I am thankful to be where we are today and to have learned what we have learned. Our marriage and family are stronger, our close friendships are better grounded and healthier, and I believe we have a greater understanding and appreciation for the gospel as it relates to the human condition that we may not have otherwise gained. I thought we were happy and free before our crisis, but now we are much more so. Ted and I both feel God has answered prayers we had given up on.

Charisma: Is there anything about that process that you wish had been done differently?

Ted Haggard: I don't want to presume on those who had to make difficult decisions in the horrific environment that I created, nor do I want the speck in someone else's eye to distract me from the plank in my own. But with what I know now, I would emphasize the function of the body of Christ, the family of God, and the fact that we are all built together in Him.

I would also highlight Galatians 6:1, where Paul writes, "If any person is overtaken in misconduct or sin of any sort, you who are spiritual [who are responsive to and controlled by the Spirit] should set him right and restore and reinstate him, without any sense of superiority and with all gentleness, keeping an attentive eye on yourself, lest you should be tempted also" (The Amplified Bible). I would also highlight the many Scriptures that instruct us about the dangers and boundaries of our judgment toward one another. At the same

time, I would teach and encourage actions of love, the fruit of forgiveness and practical assistance toward the weaker brethren.

If the one I was working with were unrepentant, then 1 Corinthians 5 would need to be applied. If they then [repented], 2 Corinthians 2:6-7 would be applied as quickly as reasonable: "For such a one this censure by the majority [which he has received is] sufficient [punishment]. So [instead of further rebuke, now] you should rather turn and [graciously] forgive and comfort and encourage [him], to keep him from being overwhelmed by excessive sorrow and despair."

I think I would also have people exclusively working with the fallen leader and a different group serving the local church, if requested by the church. I would work to keep the church in the same theological, structural and philosophical stream that it had been in, out of respect for the members of the church.

I would not let lawyers make core decisions. I would respect the pre-existing governing structure. Note, though, that I am guessing. I have learned much in this process and am sure I will keep learning, but I am already starting to receive calls from churches dealing with this dilemma. My counsel is hopefully more informed now than before my crisis.

Gayle Haggard: I wish the process had been more relational and that we would have been included in the discussions about us and the church and the resulting decisions. I think it would have led to greater understanding and more informed decisions.

I also wish we had been given the opportunity to walk through a process of forgiveness and healing following Ted's confession with the people who knew us and loved us.

Most people do not know Ted's amazing process through the last few years and have been left to form opinions based on misinformation and mischaracterization. I wish the way we were represented had been more accurate and better informed.

I would have liked to have explained to the church my response to the crisis and why I made the decisions I did.

Charisma: No minister actually plans to have a moral failure. What mistakes did you make that led you to make those wrong choices?

Ted Haggard: Part of me wanted to commit sin, and I didn't resign from my positions until I truly faced that unfortunate part of me. I wrongly thought I could take care of my problems without embarrassing my family and friends. I feared the consequences and shame so much. I didn't trust others enough to talk about it. I thank God, though, that the crisis got things out in the open so I can enjoy honest communication and freedom today.

Charisma: You've said in other interviews that it was a childhood experience that triggered some homosexual temptations for you. What do you say now to people who struggle with gay feelings?

Ted Haggard: I am not a psychologist, so I don't have any advice for others who struggle the way I did. Nor do I know with certainty that my childhood experience contributed to my problems. Some of my counselors have made that connection, and the treatment of that childhood experience completely removed all compulsive thoughts and behaviors. I no longer deal with conflicting desires the way I did.

I loved God, His Word and His people. To have succumbed to sin in the midst of loving God so much was confusing to me. I'm so relieved now. That's my experience, but I wouldn't presume that my experience applies to others.

Regardless, though, I do not believe my childhood experience is an excuse. I fell into sin and failed to extract myself. I am responsible, and I have repented.

I highly recommend qualified Christian counseling (at least

master's level and licensed by state authorities) for anyone losing their fight with any kind of compulsive thoughts or behaviors. Just as Pentecostals used to believe it was lack of faith to need a physician for physical treatment, I believe our generation of believers is going to have to accept that it's not always lack of faith if we need counseling for assistance with integrity. If I had gone to counseling, I probably could have completely avoided my crisis.

Charisma: Many of us watched *The Trials of Ted Haggard*, the HBO documentary about your fall and restoration process. How did that movie help you heal?

Ted Haggard: I believe a person needs to repent as far as the circle of their sin's impact has gone. My sin was broadcast all over the world, so I believe my repentance needed to be broadcast all over the world. The first time I saw the documentary in October of 2008, it was deeply disturbing and embarrassing for me, which my counselor said was good for me. I had been so isolated after the crisis that I hadn't seen any of the footage of the scandal.

But when I saw the documentary, I knew that though it might cause additional pain for me, my family and everyone involved, it may ultimately help us all heal. That is happening. God is using the documentary and the repentance interviews to resurrect our lives and provide an opportunity for people to hear from us directly, which has been healing to many.

I believe God sovereignly used HBO, Larry King, Oprah Winfrey, Dan Harris at ABC and Harry Smith at CBS to communicate that God is doing a wonderful work in our lives. HBO gave my kids T-shirts that said, "What this City loves is a Comeback." It was tangible evidence for my children that people outside our family were investing in restoring their dignity.

Interestingly, now churches and men's groups are using the DVD of the documentary in their services with incredible results.

I don't get any financial benefit from the documentary, but when I hear about churches using it and the results they are seeing, I am blessed, even though it's embarrassing to me.

Charisma: When you were both on Oprah Winfrey's show, she tried to get Ted to admit that he is a homosexual just because he struggled with temptations. How has the gay community treated you during all of this?

Ted Haggard: I did more than struggle, I succumbed, which is more serious. And I didn't confess on my own, I was exposed. Those facts are why Oprah had serious questions.

As for gay response: The vast majority is understanding and supportive of my process and decisions. We have received thousands of e-mails from gay, bi, straight and heterosexuals who have some measure of same-sex attraction and are so grateful for the honesty and strength my family and I have demonstrated by refusing to be stereotyped by others. Homosexuals, especially homosexual believers, understand that simplistic platitudes by others don't help, but instead know that sexuality is complex and confusing.

Because of the nuances in my story, I haven't been able to explain much in public interviews. I look forward to my upcoming book because I'll be able to discuss some of these nuances in detail.

Only 2 percent of the homosexuals who have written to believe I am in denial and are angry that I've chosen to live with Gayle and my kids. On public Web sites, my critics are a higher percentage. Believers, however, are just now starting to communicate a loving, biblical response to me, and that speaks volumes to believers and nonbelievers alike who struggle. In this debate, though, I've chosen to be true to myself, my faith and my family, regardless of the views of others.

Charisma: And how has the church treated you?

Ted Haggard: Individual believers have been exceptionally supportive and have seen our situation through the lens of the gospel and have had the courage to risk their reputations with others by associating with us. A few churches were kind and supportive during our darkest hours, most notably pastor Chris Byrd and Open Bible Fellowship, pastor Tommy Barnett and Phoenix First Assembly and pastor Keith Craft and Celebration Covenant Church.

Since my repentance interviews, a growing segment of church leaders are choosing to publicly forgive us and welcome us. I have been told that some of the silence and distance from church leaders was because they were led to believe that we were being taken care of and that we wanted to be left alone to heal. But with the documentary and the interviews, they learned that their role in our lives was very much valued and needed by us.

I am no longer a church leader, so naturally there are fewer reasons for leaders to communicate with me. I am irrelevant to some and, I think, embarrassing to others. Others haven't known what to do, so they have done nothing. For the vast majority (not all) of my old co-workers in His kingdom, the silence has been deafening. I think that because I disappointed them so deeply and violated their trust, they felt too hurt or conflicted to communicate.

My guess is that they justifiably don't trust me and would rather not be in relationship with me any longer. I have to guess about the reasons because there has not been adequate communication. But I am responsible for this situation and don't blame those who have chosen to go silent in my life. I created the mistrust and dislike by my actions.

When people are quiet, mean, judgmental, ignorant, angry or distant, I think that is justice, and I don't blame them. When

others are kind, gentle, loving, helpful, supportive and gracious, I consider it a gift and am grateful.

Gayle Haggard: After our crisis, the leadership of New Life Church gave us a year of severance pay, which included health insurance, and the truck Ted drove while he was senior pastor. In addition, they contributed to a fund that was set up by Pastor Mike Ware of Denver, which enabled our disabled son, Jonathan, to stay at the special school he was in at the time. We were extremely grateful for their monetary assistance during our transition.

Since returning to Colorado Springs, we have discovered many church people who were as eager to reconnect with us as we were with them. In this atmosphere of love and forgiveness, true healing and restoration is taking place.

We have also experienced restoration as kindness and grace is being extended to us from churches around the nation who have invited us to come and do interviews. We feel more genuine love and acceptance from those who welcome us than we ever have.

Charisma: How are your children doing after walking through this scandal with you?

Gayle Haggard: Our children are remarkable people, and each has won my respect as they have walked through this process. Perhaps because they have been raised with a disabled brother, they understand the value of pulling together as a family during our difficult seasons. Ted and I have drawn tremendous strength from their commitment to our family and their love for us.

Sure, it was painful, but we all knew to process our anger and sorrow face-to-face. I believe our family is stronger as a result. I know each of our children has their own story, and I hope one day each will write that story. I believe others would benefit from the wisdom they gained and exhibited in

their process.

Charisma: During the early days of the scandal so many women watched you from a distance, Gayle, and wondered how you could stay with Ted. What do you tell women today whose husbands have had affairs?

Gayle Haggard: Certainly every relationship is unique so I would not presume to have a pat answer for everyone going through such a difficult trial. However, I would encourage women, as much as they are able, to do what Jesus has told us to do—forgive and love. You still have to process through your pain, your anger, your sense of betrayal, and this will be hard at times, but set your trajectory toward forgiveness and love. In the end you will be better for it, even if the outcome of the marriage is not ideal because of choices your husband may make. As in all relationships, never lose sight of that which is good. Remember everything you appreciate and respect about your husband, and remember these things continue to be true about him.

You have no control over the choices or behaviors of your husband and the pain he has caused, but you do have the power to choose how you will respond. You have to determine what is truly valuable and worth fighting for and decide who you are going to be in the midst of your pain.

The reason I could stay with Ted was that I settled in myself that he is worth it. Sure, I was hurting. I felt totally let down and betrayed. My heart was thoroughly broken. But I had to believe that in spite of all the pain, Ted loved me and I loved him, and that our relationship was real. He was and is so much more than this one battle that raged within him. I determined that he was worth fighting for, our marriage was worth fighting for, and the honor and dignity of our children was worth fighting for.

I would encourage other women with the words that encouraged

me: Love covers a multitude of sins. When I pressed myself to forgive and love Ted, I healed. When I judged him and scrutinized him for all the pain he caused, I would spiral down into despair.

Love never fails—if we choose love and let it do its work, we are all better for it. Not only does Jesus instruct us in the way of forgiveness and love, but His Spirit empowers us to do it. Then what we have is a relationship that is strengthened through fire. For Ted and me, this means we have each other, we have our family, and at the end of the day, we win.