

Words of Repentance From Ted Haggard

In an interview with Charisma, the fallen Colorado pastor reaches out to the Christian community and asks for forgiveness.

After Colorado pastor Ted Haggard admitted to an embarrassing moral failure with a male prostitute in November 2006, the Christian community wasn't sure what to do with him. Some people wrote him off and kicked him to the curb. A few wept and prayed for the pastor and his devastated wife. We all tried our best to move on—knowing that the American church had suffered a big black eye through the ordeal.

I didn't know what to say to Haggard when the news broke two and a half years ago. Like so many others who had read his books, listened to his sermons and admired his church, I felt betrayed. I sent one brief e-mail to let him know I was praying. After he appeared in the HBO documentary *The Trials of Ted Haggard* earlier this year, I decided to ask him if he would talk to Charisma about his healing process.

"I am becoming the man I always prayed to be. Becoming worse than a leper in the eyes of others has deeply humbled me, to say the least." – Ted Haggard

Ted and Gayle drove to Orlando and we talked for more than two hours over lunch. I thought it would be awkward, but both of them were as gracious as they were eager to share their hearts. They still seemed to carry a lot of pain. Their emotions were still raw from having the ugliest details of

their personal lives broadcast on national television.

The Haggards agreed to do a print interview, and I gave them the liberty of writing their answers so that they could be sure the sound bytes didn't get distorted. I wanted them to express their hearts clearly. Below is a short version of that interview. The longer version has been posted on our Web site and is available here.

Charisma: You probably feel as though you've been to hell and back since your moral failure in 2006. How are you doing now?

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. Becoming worse than a leper in the eyes of others has deeply humbled me, to say the least.

Charisma: Do you have any plans to go back into ministry?

Ted Haggard: Since the release of the HBO documentary *The Trials of Ted Haggard* in January, we've had millions of visitors to and thousands of e-mails that included words of encouragement and invitations to speak and write. We've appeared again on *Oprah*, had two appearances on Fox network and have spoken in a variety of venues. It's all humbling and embarrassing. 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.

Charisma: For about a year you were under the discipline of a team of ministers. What did you learn from that?

Ted Haggard: 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. Secrecy empowers sin. What I should have

done is find a safe place to openly confess my sin and find a path to effective repentance. I am deeply sorry for those I have hurt and disappointed in my process.

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

Ted Haggard: 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: 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.

Regardless, though, I do not believe my childhood experience is an excuse. I am responsible and I have repented. I highly recommend qualified Christian counseling for anyone losing their fight with any kind of compulsive thoughts or behaviors. 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: How has the church treated you since your fall?

Ted Haggard: A growing segment of church leaders are choosing to publicly forgive us and welcome us. Other church leaders

are quiet, which I think may be the way they communicate that we are irrelevant and/or embarrassing to them. Others haven't known what to do so they have done nothing. 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: 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.

Charisma: Women watched you from a distance, Gayle, and wondered how you could stay with Ted. What do you tell women whose husbands have had affairs?

Gayle Haggard: 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 our relationship was real. 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 encourage 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.

J. Lee Grady is editor of *Charisma*. You can find him on Twitter at leegrady. To read the full transcript of the interview with Ted and Gayle Haggard, [click here](#).