

## Chapter 17. Faith in action: the ballad of Ted Haggard.

*[W]e don't have to debate what we think about homosexual activity. It's written in the Bible.*<sup>1</sup> Ted Haggard

*Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.*<sup>2</sup> The Bible

Born in 1956, Ted Haggard became one of the most influential evangelical Christians in America. A 2005 Time Magazine article named him one of the 25 most influential evangelicals noting that Haggard led the 30 million strong “National Association of Evangelicals” and spoke weekly with the George W. Bush White House. High on Haggard’s agenda was opposition to gay marriage.<sup>3</sup>

Married, Haggard fathered five children and led a 14,000 member church in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Housed in an \$18 million building, Harper’s Magazine called Haggard’s New Life Church, “the most powerful megachurch in America.”<sup>4</sup> In 2006, he earned an annual salary of \$338,000 and lived in a house worth more than \$700,000.<sup>5</sup> In addition, he collected royalties from 12 books and earned fees for speaking and public appearances.

In 2006, Haggard and his church supported “Amendment 43” to the Colorado Constitution.<sup>6</sup> It provided, “Only a union of one man and one woman shall be valid or recognized as a marriage in this state.”<sup>7</sup> Although Colorado law already defined marriage as being between a man and a woman, Haggard and other gay rights opponents sought to enshrine the prohibition in the state constitution.

Six days before the election on the anti-gay amendment, a 49-year-old Denver man named Mike Jones came forward and said Haggard, whom he knew as “Art” (Haggard’s middle name), had over a period of three years paid him for sex about once a month and also used methamphetamines (meth) in his presence. Jones provided a letter and two answering machine messages in support of his claims. Jones said, “After sitting back and contemplating this issue, the biggest reason is, being a gay man all my life, I have experienced with my friends some sadness. I had two friends that were together 50 years, when one of them would get in a hospital for an accident or something, their partner could not get in to see them. I saw a lot of sadness. I felt it was my responsibility to my fellow brothers and sisters that I had to take a stand.”<sup>8</sup>

Haggard’s immediate response was denial. He told a Denver television station, “I did not have a homosexual relationship with a man in Denver . . . I am steady with my wife. I’m faithful to my wife.” Haggard also said, “I have never done drugs--ever. Not even in high school. I didn’t smoke pot. I didn’t do anything like that. I’m not a drug man. We’re not a drinking family. I don’t smoke cigarettes. I don’t socially drink. We don’t socially drink. We don’t have wine in our house. We don’t do that kind of thing.” Cornered by his voicemail to Mike Jones requesting meth, Haggard told the press, “I bought it for myself but never used it. I was tempted but I never used it.” Haggard claimed he bought the meth but threw it away.<sup>9</sup>

Although well enough versed in Bible lore to write multiple books, he must not have remembered the biblical instruction to tell the truth.<sup>10</sup> He must also have forgotten a quote from his own book

*Primary Purpose*, “As soon as we believe that we can think, say or do secret things, there is a greater opportunity for the enemy to persuade us to violate God’s Word. After all, the newspaper’s best headlines are accounts of people doing things they thought would remain a secret.” But there is some humor in his final New Life Church sermon, where he prayed, “Heavenly Father give us grace and mercy, help us this next week and a half as we go into national elections and Lord we pray for our country. Father we pray lies would be exposed and deception exposed.”<sup>11</sup> Despite the revelations about Haggard’s misdeeds, anti-gay Amendment 43 passed by a 57% to 43% vote.<sup>12</sup>

Soon after Mike Jones’ revelations, New Life Church member Grant Haas came forward with more allegations about which Brady Boyd, Haggard’s successor leading the church, said an “overwhelming pool of evidence” pointed to an “inappropriate, consensual sexual relationship” that “went on for a long period of time . . . it wasn’t a one-time act.”<sup>13</sup> Haas alleged Haggard masturbated in front of him and sent him thousands of sexually explicit text messages including Haggard talking about sexual positions, pornography, masturbation and drugs.<sup>14</sup> Haas estimated Haggard sent 1,000 to 2,000 messages a month and included descriptions of Haggard’s sexual experiences and drug use while traveling. New Life Church agreed to pay Haas \$179,000 because of his claim.<sup>15</sup> That is not all. A Colorado Springs bail-bondsman claims he has uncovered ten additional cases of sexual misconduct by Haggard.<sup>16</sup>

In 2010, as part of the promotion of her new book, Haggard’s wife Gayle said her knowledge of Haggard’s extramarital affairs dated back to the late 1980’s when Haggard told her he had sex with a man in an adult bookstore. She further said, “Our marriage is everything I ever hoped it would be,” and that her husband had cleared up his issues with homosexuality.<sup>17</sup>

Haggard has made a bizarre journey through the media and ended up back where he started, with a church in Colorado Springs. One day after Mike Jones’ allegations, Haggard resigned from New Life Church and left the American Association of Evangelicals.<sup>18</sup> In exchange for severance pay, he agreed to leave Colorado Springs and to avoid media contact. Haggard moved to Phoenix where he attended the same church that helped “rehabilitate” fellow evangelical Jim Baker after he finished his prison sentence for bilking supporters of \$158 million.<sup>19</sup> Despite his relative financial well-being, Haggard emailed devotees asking for donations to help support him.<sup>20</sup> Haggard went on to appear in HBO movie *The Trials of Ted Haggard*, to appear on *Larry King Live*, *Oprah*, and TV’s *Divorce Court*, to fail as an insurance agent, and to return to Colorado Springs. Bit by bit, Haggard admitted almost all of the allegations against him, including using meth.<sup>21</sup>

In November 2009, Haggard began holding prayer meetings in his Colorado Springs basement. One hundred and ten people attended the first prayer meeting.<sup>22</sup> By the next meeting, the large number of attendees forced him to move the prayer meeting to his barn. Haggard also says he has been named an overseer at a church, someone who counsels and advises church leaders on moral, ethical and religious issues.<sup>23</sup> In May 2010, Haggard announced he was incorporating a new church for accounting purposes,<sup>24</sup> perhaps so that he could operate his business tax-free as he had in the past.<sup>25</sup> And by June 2010, Haggard said he would operate a full-blown church.<sup>26</sup> Gayle Haggard’s book *Why I Stayed: The Choices I Made in My Darkest Hour*, is making money. Haggard’s Website, TedHaggard.com, included this message in early 2010:

[Gayle and I] are both writing, traveling, and speaking testifying to the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus, the Scriptures and the body of Christ in our lives. The dynamics that created the confusion in my life and consequently the sin that gripped my life have been resolved through counseling accompanied by Jesus' faithfulness, the supportive decisions of Gayle and my children, and patient friends. It is true, he who has been forgiven much loves much. Thank God!<sup>27</sup>

The problem with Ted Haggard is not his gay relationships, the problem is his illegal conduct of patronizing prostitutes, buying and using illegal drugs, using his position of trust to take advantage of a congregant and violating his promises to his spouse and family. Ted Haggard is probably eligible to be named one of the top hypocrites of the decade. But I do not include his story for that reason. Instead, I include it as a sad lesson in the role of religion in his and his family's life.

Haggard is obviously a talented man. He built a successful business, amassed considerable political power, and wrote 12 books. But think of the great unhappiness he must suffer because he refuses to be true to his nature, simply because of teachings from an ancient book, written by men and fixed in time.

If Haggard were raised differently, if he had different beliefs, or if he admitted the truth, both about himself and about religion, things could have been different. He might have become a similarly successful gay rights activist. His efforts would have been to make life better for himself and his brethren, rather than condemning his fellow gays to second class status. At least he could have helped change the nasty political climate evangelical Christians have created for gays and lesbians. And as a healthy, self-actualized gay man he could have had healthy relationships instead of using drugs, prostitution and coercion to satisfy his desires.

Take, for example, Congressman Barney Frank. He too had a scandal involving a male prostitute.<sup>28</sup> But instead of sweeping it under the rug, he acknowledged his errors, acknowledged his sexuality, and today he is a role model for young gays. Currently, he serves as Chair of the House Financial Services Committee. Both before and after coming out he was a strong supporter of gay and minority rights. He is openly gay and has a long term boyfriend.<sup>29</sup> Ted Haggard could have had a life like Frank's. Instead, he is back in Colorado Springs, building a new church.

And think about the pain for Haggard's wife and family. Gayle Haggard could have married someone who truly wanted to be with her, not a man who led a double life patronizing prostitutes and using drugs and then bringing the risks of his secret lifestyle home to her.

But instead of taking the opportunity to live an honest life, Haggard has returned to his Christian roots. Instead of trying to create a world where a boy like he was could live a happy well-adjusted life; he keeps supporting a world where gay kids are called sinners, and where gay kids are two to seven times more likely to kill themselves than their heterosexual peers.<sup>30</sup>

Ted Haggard presents a pitiful story, not just because of his hypocrisy, but because he is unable to accept the truth about himself and the truth about religion. Instead he continues to live a lie—both his sexuality and his religion.

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benefit from municipal police and fire protection, but pay nothing for it. Taxpayers are forced to pay for municipal services to religious groups.

Truly charitable acts by any group should be exempt from taxation. Serving food to the homeless or providing medical care to the poor are activities that deserve societal support. But any proselytizing that goes along with these services should be taxed.

The greatest majority of religious money is spent on propagating and perpetuating the religious myth. This activity is no more deserving of tax exemption than the entertaining myths created by Hollywood.

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