

Ted Haggard Speaks on Scandal for First Time

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Ex-evangelical leader Ted Haggard, who fell from grace after the exposure of his sex and drug scandal two years ago, recently opened up about the dark secret from his past that likely led to his downfall as an adult.

He spoke at Open Bible Fellowship Church, a small congregation in Morrison, Ill., on Nov. 2 – the second anniversary of his resignation as president of the 30 million-member National Association of Evangelicals.

The church's pastor, Chris Byrd, is a long-time friend of Haggard of over 30 years.

"The first thing I want you to know is I sinned," Haggard told the congregants.

He revealed that at the age of seven a man who worked for his father had a "sexual experience" with Haggard.

"I didn't think anything of it and I tell you that not simply as an explanation, certainly not as an excuse," Haggard said.

After the incident, Haggard lived as if he never had such an experience: accepting Jesus into his life at age 16, meeting and marrying his wife Gail, having five children, and founding a successful megachurch in Colorado.

But at the age of 50, the same-sex incident came back to haunt him.

"There I was, 50 years old, a conservative Republican, loving the word of God, an evangelical, born-again, spirit-filled, charismatic, all those things," he said. "But some of the things that were buried in the depths of the sea from when I was in second grade started to rage in my mind and in my heart."

He recalls driving to his church in the middle of the night in September 2006 and praying, "God, do whatever it takes to deliver me."

"I thought do whatever it takes. I'll lay anything on the altar. I hate this thing, but there were times I loved it," Haggard remembered. "But I hate this thing, but there were times I loved it."

"I'd walked around the auditorium in the middle of the night thinking this is going to cost me everything," Haggard recalled. "This incredible war was going on inside of me."

During one intense prayer session before the scandal broke out, Haggard remembered feeling a deep connection with God and firmly vowing to "never do it again."

He did not say specifically what "it" was and how he sinned during the sermon, but former gay prostitute Mike Jones had accused him of immoral acts of sex and crystal meth use.

After Haggard made his promise to God, he said he felt like a demonic power spoke to him and said, "All hell will break loose on you because of this."

Then a few months later in November 2006 news of Haggard's sex scandal made headlines around the world with a newspaper carrying the headline, "All Hell Broke Out at New Life Church."

"I'm very, very sorry that I sinned," Haggard said at Open Bible Fellowship Church. "And if any of you are in sin right now it is going to cost you more than you could ever imagine. And it is going to bring shame on your wife and your kids. And so no matter what it is you get rid of it no matter what the cost. I mean you just do whatever it takes to get rid of sin. Do not sin."

He added, "You are going to pay. Your family, everyone that loves you will pay. Everyone that hates you will pay. Everyone will pay if you sin."

He noted in particular that one of his sons is named Ted Haggard and because of the scandal he was forced to carry his father's shame in school, as did his other children.

"I want to assure you that I am deeply sorry for the sin that arrived in my life," Haggard said. "To all of you at Open Bible Fellowship, because of my name's relationship to you. I'm confident that I embarrassed you and shamed you and I'm sorry that I did that. And I will not do that again."

He also apologized to his former church in Colorado, New Life Church, to the National Association of Evangelicals, to the body of Christ, and to his wife and family.

"My wife - all my sin and shame fell on her. People treated her as if she had fallen. And my children - they all went through carrying my shame," Haggard said.

There was a time after the scandal that he was suicidal and would lay in bed "paralyzed with shame" about what had happened. During that period, he could not pray or read the Bible and was figuring out "how I was going to kill myself and rid the world of the horrible curse of Ted Haggard."

Nearly no one wanted to associate themselves with the Haggards and many would say or do things to hurt the family but would say "I love you" when they met face to face, he recalled.

Through the painful experience he learned that love is action.

He shared that one of his children is handicapped and is very expensive to care for. Haggard remembered a friend had offered to cover all of his son's expenses for awhile when they did not have money.

"There was no way we could have taken care for Jonathan because he was handicapped in the midst of our handicap," Haggard said. "So that was Jesus' hand extended in a practical way."

"The mark isn't the emotion of fuzzy love," he said. "The mark is courage. To love the unlovable. The courage to heal the guy with leprosy," the former megachurch pastor said.

"I got leprosy, now we are starting to come out of it," he said noting that he is starting to make a living selling life insurance.

Jesus wasn't just sympathetic to "lousy people," or kind to awful people, but he became one of them and took on their identity, Haggard preached.

In contrast, some Christians say, "Let's help the poor and needy, we need to help those little people" when Jesus taught that Christian should think, "I am poor and needy and I'm going to help every poor and needy person I know of. I am depraved, Jesus has done a miracle in me, I'm going to help the depraved."

He ended his first public message since his scandal by stating that in all aspects, ranging from his spiritual life to his family life, he has become stronger as a result of the incident.

"I thank God that He completes the work that He began in us," Haggard said.

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