

# WHY I STAYED

*The Choices I Made in My Darkest Hour*

GAYLE  
HAGGARD

with Angela Hunt



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*Why I Stayed: The Choices I Made in My Darkest Hour*

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“This book is not a defense for anything or anybody, but a poignant testimony to pain and perplexity being finally swallowed by love, forgiveness, fidelity, hope, and an increase of intimacy and family solidarity. The supreme impression left is of the unbounded goodness of God.”

**J. I. PACKER**

“You’ll be hard-pressed to find a more vulnerable account of a marriage that’s faced a dark night of the soul than this one. Gayle Haggard’s courageous ‘risk of love’ reveals a healing path that few would have ever predicted. Her authenticity is disarming. Her faith is inspiring. And her story will take you deeper into God’s healing grace. You won’t be able to put this book down.”

**DRS. LES & LESLIE PARROTT**

*Founders of RealRelationships.com*

*Authors of Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*

*Excerpts from letters the Haggards received after granting a series of interviews about the HBO documentary The Trials of Ted Haggard.*

“Words cannot express how much you all have touched my heart this evening [seeing you on *Larry King Live*]. My husband (of only five years) and I are separated due to far less severe circumstances. I am calling him as I write this.”

**CHERYL**

“Your choice to allow the journey to redemption to be public has helped more souls than you’ll ever know.”

**KELLY**

“God has blessed you with a love that I cannot grasp. Do you have a book that can explain how you got to this level of love? I just do not understand.”

**GLORIA**

“To see a woman stick with her man after so much misery is truly a modern-day miracle.”

**ANONYMOUS**

“Ted, even now I thank God for your wife, who has stuck by you when she had a biblical reason to leave you.”

**JASON**

“Your story, however sad it was (and still is), brings a powerful message. It’s a message of hope, love, compassion, and support. Exactly what religion should be.”

**VINCENT**

“Ted, you have no idea how profoundly your wife’s attitude toward you has touched me.”

**EMMANUEL**

“Gayle, you are an amazing woman, and my wife and I hurt for you because of what happened; but we have also found hope through your belief and action.”

**ANONYMOUS**

*Most important of all,  
continue to show deep love for each other,  
for love covers a multitude of sins.*

I P E T E R 4:8

*For Ted . . .  
and the rest of us as well.*

## Author's Note

*WHY I STAYED* is *my* story. In these pages, I share my observations of the events leading up to the fateful day when my world came crashing down and of the choices I made, along with my husband and many others, in the three years that followed.

In recounting this story, I have searched my heart, my memory, my journal, and my records. Conversations are told from my perspective and are recorded as clearly as I can remember them. I've done my best to present events accurately, but others may recall things differently.

Of course, much of what follows has already been made public. But because I want readers to think about the ideas I am presenting rather than about individual personalities, I have avoided using names where doing so might cause someone hurt or embarrassment. My hope is that through this story of my darkest hour, we all can achieve grace.

—*Gayle Haggard*

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## Special Thanks

. . . to the men and women at Tyndale House Publishers who believed that my story needed to be told.

. . . to Angela Hunt, whose keen insight, biblical understanding, and courageous heart compelled her to come alongside and help me put my story on the page.

. . . and to our dear friends who chose to stand by us and lighten our load when they could have heaped more burdens on us as we walked through our greatest heartache, shame, and despair.

To all these friends, I am forever grateful.



FROM MY JOURNAL ENTRY FOR WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2006:

*Today we found out that a man in Denver is accusing Ted of sin . . .*

FROM MY JOURNAL ENTRY FOR THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2006:

*Today our world changed. Ted confessed the truth to me . . .*

*Whom have I in heaven but you?  
I desire you more than  
anything on earth.  
My health may fail, and my  
spirit may grow weak,  
but God remains the  
strength of my heart;  
he is mine forever.*

PSALM 73:25-26

# 1

THIRTY YEARS AGO, Ted Haggard stepped into my life because he lost an argument.

We were attending Oral Roberts University—Ted was a senior; I was a junior—and along with several other students, we had been chosen as spiritual-life directors in the dorms. As custom dictated, each women’s dorm had been paired with a corresponding men’s dorm. The campus chaplain expected the spiritual-life directors from each pair of dorms to share responsibilities and plan activities together. Though Ted and his friend Paul Osteen had lived in the same dorm for the past three years, if both men wanted to be spiritual-life directors, one of them would have to move and take the dorm paired with mine. In other words, the loser got me.

I preferred to work with Paul because I knew of him. He was a really nice guy, good looking and well liked; but I kept asking my friends, “Who is this Ted Haggard?” Actually, I was surprised he and I hadn’t met before, because loads of my friends knew him.

Still, as I watched the two men argue over who would move, I couldn't help thinking, *Please, God, don't let Ted Haggard be the one who gets the dorm paired with mine.* But I had a feeling things weren't going to go my way.

To my dismay, Ted lost. He had to move to my partner dorm, and he had to work with me.

I wasn't attracted to Ted right away. For one thing, I was engaged to my high school sweetheart at the time. He had recently asked me to marry him, so I certainly wasn't looking for a boyfriend.

After getting to know Ted a bit, I found that he was not only friendly and outgoing but was also a veritable whirlwind of activity. In addition to going to school full-time, he was serving as the interim pastor of a church in Tulsa. In fact, he was so busy that I found it difficult to pin him down and get him to work with me on spiritual-life activities for our dorms.

One of the first activities we planned was a combined men's and women's retreat. When I arrived at the evening meal on the first night, I discovered that the organizers had arranged for guy-girl seating around the tables. I spotted Ted seated across the room and walked over to ask him about a joint presentation our chaplains would be giving later that night. What I didn't know was that Ted had just joked to the other guys at his table that he was going to marry the girl who sat next to him.

As I slid into the chair beside him, he yelled, "No! You can't sit there!"

While the other guys snickered, I shook my head. "Don't worry. I don't plan to stay."

At that moment, the other guys burst out laughing. "Don't leave, Gayle," they said. "Stay put. We all want you to stay."

"Well," I said, shrugging, "I do need to talk to Ted for a few minutes." Then, sensing that I had somehow missed a punch

line, I raised an eyebrow and looked around the table quizzically. “What’s going on here, anyway?”

One of the guys explained the joke while Ted grimaced. I smiled, telling myself that Ted Haggard was the last person on earth I would want to marry.

After covering for him a time or two, I didn’t think I was going to like working with Ted, but his genuine friendliness and quick smile began to grow on me. He made me laugh, and I began to see why so many people liked him. When I was feeling burdened and taking our responsibilities too seriously, a quick conversation with him could lighten my load. When he absolutely had to miss a meeting or delegate a responsibility, I found I looked forward to helping him out.

Then I heard him speak in front of a group. As I listened to him teach the Bible with more thoughtfulness, pragmatism, and relaxed humor than I was accustomed to, I thought, *I could learn to respect this guy*. I liked the way his mind worked, and I admired his direct and down-to-earth approach with people.

I began to see Ted Haggard in a new light. I tried to keep myself from developing a crush on him, because I was committed to someone else, but I did begin to think he was the sort of man I’d like to spend more time with.

These new thoughts left me feeling confused and disconcerted and caused me to question my engagement to my high school sweetheart. My parents and friends thought I was crazy. Everyone expected me to marry the great guy I had dated for so long. In fact, those expectations were part of the reason I had accepted his proposal, even though I’d felt unsure about it at the time.

When my fiancé came to visit me at school, Ted greeted him cordially, but privately he joked that my high school sweetheart was “way too serious” for me. I didn’t think so—in fact, I *liked*

serious—but Ted’s teasing made me further reconsider whether or not I was ready to enter into a lifetime commitment with the guy.

On occasion, I caught myself admiring Ted’s profile as I sat catercornered and a few rows behind him in a psychology class we shared that fall. And after a while, I found myself standing at my dorm room window one day, watching Ted walk to class as I quietly sang Karen Carpenter’s “Love, look at the two of us, strangers in many ways. . . .”

But I was engaged, and Ted was dating a good friend of mine. I considered him off-limits—until my friend confessed that although she liked Ted, she didn’t see the relationship going anywhere in the long term. Then Ted confidentially told me the same thing: He liked my friend, but he didn’t see a future in their relationship.

I found myself wondering if my future didn’t lie with a man like Ted Haggard.

Ted and I began to meet each other for meals and to walk to class together—as friends, nothing more. Other students would greet us and ask, “Now, when are you two getting married?” and we’d laugh at the question.

One day, the campus chaplain called Ted into his office and asked him about his relationship with me. He said that his wife had had a dream that Ted and I were getting married, and then he told Ted, “You’d better not hurt Gayle. She’s one of my favorites.”

Ted was stunned, because at that point we weren’t even dating.

As the months passed, I realized that I couldn’t marry my high school sweetheart—not when I felt the way I did about Ted. I didn’t want to hurt my fiancé, but I finally realized that if he wasn’t right for me, then I wasn’t right for him, either. And the more I learned about Ted Haggard, the more convinced I became that *he was* right for me—or that I at least needed to find someone *like*

him. I determined that I wanted to be with someone who had all the same qualities, someone I could admire and respect the way I did Ted, and someone who made me feel as if there were fireworks going off every time I was with him.

Once I had broken things off with my fiancé, word trickled out that I was once again “available.” When a friend heard the news, he told Ted that he was on his way to call me and ask me out. Ted bolted to his room and phoned me first, so when the other guy called, he got a busy signal.

Ted, on the other hand, got a solid *yes* to his invitation.



By the time Ted and I went on our first date, we had both developed a sense that we were right for each other. I remember our eyes meeting as we sat in the car in front of a friend’s house. In that moment, I felt that somehow, in God’s divine plan, he had brought us together.

Two years earlier, when I was a freshman pondering whether I should continue dating my high school boyfriend or date the guys at ORU, I had asked God to simplify the process and show me who I would marry. (The idea seems silly now, but I was serious at the time.) That afternoon, I fell asleep with that prayer on my lips and awoke with an image in my mind: a young man, standing some distance down a road marked by telephone poles. The young man remained far away, so I couldn’t see him clearly. But I could see that he had blond, blown-back hair and a ruggedly handsome complexion and that he wore blue jeans and a reddish plaid shirt. Because he hadn’t moved toward me, I intuited that our first meeting would take place at some point “farther down the road.”

I never told anyone about that fleeting vision. I tucked the

picture away in my heart, a little wary of believing it was a message from God. I chose instead to maintain a “we’ll see” attitude. But my high school sweetheart—who had dark hair and dark eyes—was definitely not the man I’d seen in my dream.

After our first date, Ted and I ate most of our meals together. In the evenings after classes, we took long walks around campus and talked about everything. One night, Ted got so giddy that he ran onto the grass outside my dorm and started turning somersaults while he yelled, “I am just so excited about *us!*” I laughed, watching him, and knew that life with Ted would always contain a dash of fun, drama, and the unexpected.

That year, my birthday fell on a Saturday, and to celebrate, Ted asked me to pack a picnic lunch. We planned to spend the day on a sandy beach bordering a nearby river. We spread our picnic in a deserted area and didn’t see another soul until we decided to walk along the water’s edge. We were talking, not really looking around, when we noticed a shirtless, barefoot man with long, brown hair. He seemed to have appeared out of nowhere, and without a word of explanation, he began to walk with us and eventually joined our conversation. The man spooked me a little, but Ted seemed so comfortable with the situation that I simply followed his cues.

When we decided to sit on a pile of logs beside the river, the stranger sat with us. At one point, conversation died, and we fell into a comfortable silence. I was hoping the guy would take the hint and leave, but at that point our beachcomber friend turned to Ted and said, “Do what you’ve come to do.” Then he stood.

I didn’t know what the man meant, but apparently Ted did, because surprise flickered across his face. Ted glanced at me, and when we looked back, the man was gone. He must have slipped away when we weren’t looking, but though we shaded our eyes and scanned the beach, we saw no sign of him.



“That was strange,” Ted said, turning back to me.

“No kidding,” I agreed. “I felt strange the entire time he was with us.”

Who was he? We had no idea.

Once the sun sank toward the horizon, Ted and I built a campfire on the beach. As we warmed ourselves beside the flames, Ted shared what he felt God was calling him to do with his life. He told me what he believed God had shown him about his future. When he finished, he swallowed hard and looked at me, and then he asked if I would want to share that life with him.

My heart had been pounding as I listened, but now it skipped a beat. My love for him and excitement over what he was planning grew with every word out of his mouth. I knew what he was asking, and my answer came easily to my lips: “I’d love to!”

“And would you marry me?”

My answer was a confident *yes*.

As I looked at Ted in the firelight, I saw a young man with blond, blown-back hair and a ruggedly handsome complexion. He was wearing blue jeans and a red-and-gold plaid shirt.

Then we kissed for the first time.

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## About the Authors

GAYLE HAGGARD IS a speaker, a teacher, and the wife of Ted Haggard, former senior pastor of New Life Church in Colorado Springs and past president of the National Association of Evangelicals. Ted and Gayle founded New Life Church in the basement of their home in 1985. By 2006, it had grown to a congregation of 14,000 people, and Gayle was directing women's ministries, in which she oversaw 150 small groups and taught classes to women of all ages. She also launched a ministry called Women Belong, which was based on the principle that no woman should ever feel alone, because we all belong to God and to each other. Soon, however, everything Gayle believed and taught was put to the test. On November 1, 2006, Ted Haggard was accused of having a secret life that involved infidelity and illicit drug use, and Gayle's world came crashing in on her. "In a few short days," she says, "my life as I had known it, that I had so lovingly embraced, was demolished." Over the past few years, Gayle and her husband

of thirty-one years have emerged from their crisis and now feel that their faith, their marriage, and their family are stronger than ever because of what they have learned and experienced. In addition to *Why I Stayed*, Gayle is the author of *A Life Embraced: A Hopeful Guide for the Pastor's Wife*. She and Ted reside in Colorado Springs with their five children and one grandchild.

ANGELA HUNT writes for readers who have learned to expect the unexpected in novels from this versatile author. With over three million copies of her books sold worldwide, she is the best-selling author of more than one hundred works ranging from picture books (*The Tale of Three Trees*) to nonfiction books to novels. Angie and her husband live in Florida with their two mastiffs—one of their dogs was featured on *Live with Regis and Kelly* as the second-largest canine in America. Angela admits to being fascinated by animals, medicine, psychology, unexplained phenomena, and “just about everything” except sports. Books, she says, have always shaped her life—in the fifth grade she learned how to flirt from reading *Gone with the Wind*. Her books have won the coveted Christy Award, several Angel Awards from Excellence in Media, and the Gold and Silver Medallions from *ForeWord* magazine’s Book of the Year Award. In 2007, her novel *The Note* was featured as a Christmas movie on the Hallmark Channel. Angie has recently released the sequel to *The Note*—*The Note II: Taking a Chance on Love*. Romantic Times Book Club presented her with a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2006. In 2008, Angela completed her doctorate in biblical studies. When she’s not home reading or writing, Angie often travels to teach writing workshops at schools and writers’ conferences. Visit Angela’s Web site at [www.angelahuntbooks.com](http://www.angelahuntbooks.com).