

Haggard's new life after New Life

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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[It's official:](#)

Ted Haggard is starting a new church, just a mile from his old one. The former charismatic megachurch pastor and National Association of Evangelicals leader left both positions in the wake of a 2006 sex-and-drugs scandal.

Most [reactions](#) are [focused](#) on the [gay](#) questions—Haggard's protestations as to his own sexuality, along with his attempt to welcome gays and lesbians to his new church without welcoming their gayness and lesbianism. This is understandable—there's no blogger catnip quite like public hypocrisy.

But it's also frustrating. An evangelical church that doesn't perform same-sex marriages is [hardly headline material](#), and more importantly, Haggard's fall from grace wasn't really about sexual identity—though you wouldn't have known it from the press coverage. This excerpt from Lauren Sandler's 2006 [write-up](#) begins with a quote from New Life Church men's group leader Steve Glaeser:

“There is evil, and...it can attack us. Each of us could potentially succumb to the same as Ted if we do not stay on course.” Glaeser's message...is clear: Homosexuality is something for which there is no tolerance.

Well, not quite so clear. What's clear from the quote is that Glaeser sees Haggard's behavior as evil, which is a fair assessment of a married pastor's buying sex and crystal meth from a prostitute. Sure, plenty of the folks at New Life no doubt felt that the detail of a *male* prostitute made the whole thing measurably worse, but it was striking how hard the press pushed this as

the primary issue.

The

gay angle remains tantalizing, but what's far more crucial here are questions Haggard's new plans raise about decency and order, about accountability and qualifications for ministry. The

charismatic/Pentecostal movement can be long on entrepreneurial personalities and short on ecclesial structure. We all remember Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart; many of us with connections to that world know of lower-profile scandals (and dubious pulpit comebacks) as well.

J. Lee Grady, a former *Charisma* magazine editor, offers an [internal critique](#) on this subject in his new book.

Perhaps not coincidentally, *Charisma's* [news story](#) on Haggard's plans favors the accountability angle over the sexuality one. [David Gibson](#) and [Phillip Luke Sinitiere](#) are worth checking out as well, as is the [conversation](#) at *Leadership* magazine's blog.

Haggard himself [anticipated](#)

the "not qualified for ministry" objection in his press conference:

"For the people that believe I'm not qualified, I believe they're probably right." Okay, but then why is he doing it? Because [people need him to](#)? Because otherwise [his and his wife's lives will end](#)? Rod Dreher's [not impressed](#) by this reasoning. Neither am I.

Before this week's announcement, Haggard sat for an [interview](#) with Bill Forman. Here's Haggard on whether he might return to ministry:

Maybe.

That's up to people. Remember, it's a free-market religious system. I have somebody that tells us to start a church every day. If...they say we want you to do it, then I get to choose.

When I read

this, I was grateful for denominations, for structures in place to set the bar for ministry a bit higher than "it's a free country." Which isn't to say that all you need for accountability is a [good strong hierarchy](#). I think Daniel Schultz [has said it well](#):

Bosses

will cover up for the people they supervise, especially at the highest levels. So you need to be responsible to the laity in particular, who will hold you accountable. When those mechanisms are not in place, or don't function, it's like giving a license to do bad things. That's particularly true of entrepreneurial leaders like Haggard, but it also works for apparatchiks like Cardinal Bernard Law.