

Email exchange with Dr. Steve Tracy and Ben Powers

Dr Tracy is Professor of Theology and Ethics at Phoenix Seminary and a colleague of Dr. Wayne Grudem. Dr. Tracy's research and ministry specialization is in gender, sexuality, and abuse. Dr. Tracy has served the state of Arizona on the Governor's Commission for the Prevention of Violence against Women, and is also Director of Research and Curriculum for Mending the Soul Ministries.

From: Ben Powers [redacted] >
To: Steve Tracy [redacted] >
Sent: Thursday, September 29, 2022 7:05 AM
Subject: The Network-Steve Morgan

Dr. Tracy,

Hi. I'm a new pastor at Scottsdale Bible Church. My family and I just moved to Phoenix from Saint Louis, MO this past July, it's been quite the adjustment but loving Arizona and loving SBC.

I wanted to ask a few questions about [Steve Morgan and The Network](#).

After I finished my M-Div. at TEDS in 2000 I became an Associate Pastor at Vine Church in Carbondale, IL, the church that Steve Morgan founded. I later went on to start one of the first church plants sent from the Network. I was a leader in it for 15 years (from 2000-2015) and very close to Steve Morgan.

We left in 2015 and a lot of my extra time has been spent helping, encouraging, writing, and pastoring many people who are coming out of this group of churches. The [documented stories](#) of spiritual abuse are staggering but more concerning is the new public news of Steve Morgan's past arrest of [criminal sodomy against a minor](#). The family of the boy Steve raped found Leaving the Network and reached out to us giving us more details of the crime. The boy was 15 years old at the time and after the assault suffered in many ways and still does today. Network Leaders continue to gloss over some of the most important facts about the crime and criticize the spiritual abuse stories being shared.

Currently, there are 19 former Elders, Pastors and Staff who are asking for [A Call to Action from Network Leaders](#) (with no response from Network Leaders). There is also 535 people who have [signed a petition](#) calling for change within the Network. And now 5 individual websites devoted to educating and helping people in and out of the Network.

- [Leaving the Network](#)
- [LtN Reddit](#)
- [NotOvercome](#)
- [Theology & Me](#)
- [Unorthopax](#)

Steve Morgan and the Network have recently been in the news Roys Report and Ministry Watch. In addition, other reporters are in process of writing stories about Steve and this group.

In 2019 you spoke with Andrew Lumpe, who is also helping people coming out of the Network. Andrew was an Elder on the board with Steve Morgan and has had many

concerns about the Network. Andrew put you in touch with Sandor Paull that same year, who is the Vice President of the Network. Andrew was hoping that you could encourage Sandor and help work through some of the resistance the Network has had when it comes to their practices, leadership structure and of course Steve Morgan's sexual crime against a minor.

As church members in the Network are now asking questions, processing this information and seeking guidance from Network Pastors, your conversation with Sandor Paull is being used to support Steve Morgan and these Network practices. Several people within the Network have told Andrew and me that Network leaders spoke with a seminary professor, Dr. Steve Tracy, and that he saw no problem with Steve Morgan's past or the leadership structure of the Network.

One, I wanted you to know this information. But I also wanted to know if it is true. I understand that you had one phone conversation and aren't close to the situation. As a ministry leader in the field of spiritual abuse, what would your advice be? What would you want those who are abused to do? What should Steve Morgan do?

Thanks



Ben Powers

Men's, Marriage & Groups Pastor



From: Steve Tracy [redacted]
To: Ben Powers [redacted]
Sent: Thursday, September 29, 2022 11:57 AM
Subject: RE: The Network-Steve Morgan

Ben,

I had to refresh my memory of this situation as it was over 3 years ago and I have countless conversations with church leaders about abuse situations in local churches. Furthermore, this was my only conversation with Sandor and I've never met or had any conversation with Steve Morgan and have had no experience with The Network. I believe it was a fairly brief conversation with Sandor and don't remember any of the specifics of that conversation. What I can confidently say is that what I told him would have been the same as what I told Andrew Lumpe in an email. I see that some of my email response to Andrew's questions have been posted online at <https://leavingthenetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/letter-to-network-leaders-July-2-2019.pdf>. In particular, I said that:

"The fact that he had a near nervous breakdown shows that the cover up strategy isn't working. The secrecy code of the elders isn't a healthy one and will most likely come back to bite them. Secrets like these have an amazing way of coming out over time, even if it is many years later. There have been numerous high-profile cases of abuse by

a leader being covered up, sometimes for decades, eventually to come out at great cost. Quite recently this issue has exploded for the Southern Baptists due to a Houston Chronicle investigation documenting almost 400 SB pastors and elders who had credible accusations of perpetrating sexual abuse but still being in ministry.

I believe that committing sexual assault/abuse (same sex or opposite sex) does disqualify someone from vocational ministry. The qualifications of an elder given in 1 Tim 3 and Titus 1 highlight being “above reproach” and “having a good reputation” in the broad community. I don’t see any way someone who has sexually assaulted, regardless of whether it was before or after their conversion, can meet these biblical qualifications.

Furthermore, all sin separates us from God and requires a savior but not all sin is of the same nature. As C. Plantinga states in his terrific book *Not the Way It’s supposed to Be*, “all sin is equally wrong but not equally bad.” Some sin is singled out in Scripture as worse than other sin based on its deviation from the created order (cf. Rom 1:26-27), based on the consequences on others, and based on one’s knowledge and willfulness (rebellious “sins of the high hand” in the OT had no sacrifice for forgiveness). For instance, of the 613 commands in the law of Moses, only about 20 are given capital punishment for violating them. Scripture singles out some sin, particularly abuse, as sin that is an abomination or particularly hated by God (Ps 5:6; 11:5; Prov 6:16-19). This is largely based on the graver consequences of certain sin, esp. abuse, on individuals and on the community. Sexual assault is a most serious sin in God’s eyes. It is terribly destructive to others (often having lifelong destructive consequences) and it demonstrates a particularly severe hard heartedness that is frightening in its implications.

It seems to me that having this in his past will cripple many aspects of your pastor’s ministry. I would consider sharing your concerns with the Elders. Maybe with all the MeToo fallout they will be more open to dealing with this.”

I furthermore went on to recommend contacting GRACE. So it is very disturbing to me to hear that my conversation 3 years ago with Sandor is reportedly being cited as evidence that I “saw no problem with Steve Morgan’s past or the leadership structure of the Network.” My email response to Andrew is on the internet and I have gone on record saying that as a theologian/ ethicist and abuse expert I believe perpetrating sexual abuse most certainly **does** disqualify one from ministry. And I expressed great concerns in my email about the reported lack of transparency/ honesty regarding Steve Moran’s past. I don’t remember discussing the leadership structure of the church but from what I’ve read in the Roys Report and Ministry Watch there appear to be serious issues with their leadership structure. The fact that there are apparently “19 former Elders, Pastors and Staff who are asking for [A Call to Action from Network Leaders](#) (with no response from Network Leaders)” speaks volumes. **After reading the call to action I strongly affirm it as wise and biblical.**

I have read the recent report on The Network and Steve Morgan in the Roys Report and Ministry Watch which gives considerable additional information I didn’t have three years ago and this situation has all the hallmarks of abuse cover up, lack of honesty, and blame shifting. I find The Networks response to the allegations very disturbing as it postures themselves as the victims of “persecution.” They are making an exceedingly serious moral judgement to state that “We believe it is cruel, evil and the antithesis of the gospel message to dig up and disclose a person's sin that has already been dealt with in a biblical manner. This is a great offense against the cross of Jesus Christ.” If they are going to make such a harsh judgment it is incumbent on them to have an outside group of experts such as GRACE do a thorough

investigation to determine whether or not Steve's past sexual sins have in fact been deal with "in a biblical manner."

From some of the reports I've read there are significant allegations of spiritual abuse in The Network. Their published response to people's concerns, apart from a group like GRACE doing an investigation and affirming that they have in fact handled this in a thoroughly healthy, biblical manner, gives a strong appearance of spiritual abuse. Thus, I've attached a short section on spiritual abuse from our forthcoming revision (due in March) of Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse.

As far as your final questions What would you want those who are abused to do? What should Steve Morgan do? I would reiterate the wisdom of the call to action steps. They are excellent. Abuse survivors should do all they can to articulate their concerns to the church leadership but at the end of the day church leaders may well not respond in a healthy, biblical way. That happens all the time sadly. So survivors must take confidence in doing what they can to share the truth and ask God to lead them on to a healthy church if the leaders don't listen and take appropriate action/ correction steps. As far as Steve Morgan, if he were to ask my advice (which obviously he isn't) given the limited data I have I would suggest he take a leave of absence while the church has GRACE do a thorough independent investigation.

I hope this sufficiently clarifies my posture. I'd be glad to discuss this further on the phone if that would be helpful.

May God bless your new ministry in Scottsdale. I've trained many of your fellow pastors and greatly appreciate SBC.

Steve



Spiritual abuse
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