

Marty Hogue, Father of Sexual Abuse Survivor and Pastor of First Baptist Church of Ravenel



As Pastor, on Sunday mornings I always got to church way ahead of most others. On this day, when Wesley got back from this particular camping trip, when he saw me he grabbed ahold of me tightly and would not let go. I couldn't even walk. I thought he was just happy to see me, not knowing the trauma he was going through.

That night, after the children were in bed, my wife, Carol, told me what Wesley had told her. I was flabbergasted. Shocked. Hurt. Angry. Bewildered. We decided I would talk with Wesley about it the next day. We chose the evening, since she was out of the house for the evening, and I would have Wesley all to myself. He and I were sitting on the bed. He was in my lap, his back to me. I asked him about what he had told his mom about what Bob had done. I was careful to not try to lead him in any way. I just let him tell me what he wanted to. I could hardly believe what I was hearing. I knew he would not make up something like this. But even if he had, I would err believing my son. When he finished, I hugged him and told him we would put a stop to it, and we would do all we could to keep Bob from ever being able to do this again.

I knew Bob and his wife were going on a cruise. I purposely stayed away from the church the next day so I would not have to see him. Then I contacted our Deacon leaders and asked for a meeting. In that meeting I laid out the story for them. With Bob away, we had some time to properly plan and respond. The deacons spoke with an attorney and got good legal counsel. Carol and I wanted to do everything the right way through the process. We had to take care of our family. I also had a church congregation that would be grieving through this process.

When Bob returned home two of our men met him at the door of the church and asked for his keys. He was terminated because we had no confidence in him. They had taken me out of the picture at that time, which was good.

Carol had reported the incident to the local police where the abuse had happened. A detective met with us at the Children's Advocacy Center, and he observed a trained counselor interview Wesley about the abuse. When it was over the detective said he would arrest Bob that day if he could find him. When the arrest was made Bob was surprised there was only one count, since there had been another boy on the trip as well. The other boy did not tell until long after our ordeal. This was on a Wednesday, so at Prayer Meeting I told the folks present that Bob had been arrested and was in jail, and I gave no other details.

When Sunday came, I took time in the worship service to address the situation publicly. I wanted to assure folks that we were doing everything we could to make sure children were safe in our church.

We hid nothing, except I did not say it was Wesley who had been involved. Many did not ever know who the child had been until months later.

Going through the legal process was long, tedious, and trying. There was never a trial. The solicitor worked out a plea agreement in the end, which just put Bob on probation. But he also had to be on the sex offenders list. In our meetings with the Solicitor we gave all the facts we could, as well as giving names of other children we knew Bob had been with and were possible victims. In the end, some of the others did come forward, and then Bob's family knew we were telling the truth.

During the legal process, which was a year and a half, we made sure every attorney and judicial official knew that we were not going away. We have never been afraid to stand up and take on anyone we had to. Though we were frustrated with the way the process went, we never wavered. We were at every meeting of any kind, even when we had been told we did not need to be there. We were not going away.

After the story about Bob had gotten out, I was amazed at how many other people told me stories and their feelings about Bob. He was crafty. Many, and even myself, had felt something wrong in the beginning, but gave him the benefit of the doubt. Over time he snookered us all. I also had many people tell me they had been abused as a child, and had never told anyone, or they were not believed. It was like we turned on a faucet. Since we were open about everything, other people felt empowered to tell their stories to us. We were suddenly thrust into a whole new ministry opportunity we never imagined or looked for. But since God had us there, we were going to embrace anyone and everything we had to. That ministry has not stopped. The dirty little secret is out. Other pastors have sought me out for help when they were faced with similar situations. Victims have come to us for counsel as well. I have learned more about child sexual abuse than I ever wanted to, but now we certainly see the reason.

We are very fortunate. Very few victims tell, and certainly not on purpose. Wesley came to us freely. We are so thankful for that. God has led us through this so far, and we are still following him today as we continue this ministry opportunity passionately.

Have I forgiven Bob? Absolutely. I have prayed for his reconciliation. I have not seen or spoken with him since all of this. Maybe I will run into him someday. I want to tell him, "I forgive you." Forgiveness is much more empowering than anger.