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Healer or Heretic?

By Didi Williamson

The Good News
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Editor's Note: The staff of The Good News does not endorse nor condemn Todd Bentley or The Florida Healing Outpouring. This article is merely meant to educate readers so they can make an informed opinion about the events occurring in Lakeland, Fla. This article is not to be reused without the permission of The Good News.

People say there's a modern-day Pool of Bethesda in Lakeland, Fla. – of all places.

Canadian evangelist Todd Bentley of **Fresh Fire Ministries** came to the small town of 90,000 people on April 2 for a weeklong revival at the charismatic **Ignited Church**, and reports of miracles like those from Bethesda in Jesus' day began pouring out of Lakeland.

Broken elbows heal. Hepatitis C disappears. Heart murmurs are no longer recognizable. Crippled people walk. And the dead rise.

These claims come with very little documented proof, but Bentley says he wants to certify every healing he can.

"The Bible is full of visions, encounters, signs, wonders, miracles and manifestations that people have experienced, some of which may be downright hard for many to wrap their minds around, let alone believe it could happen today," Bentley wrote in a **letter to the public June 8**.

Bentley's nightly meetings, called The Florida Healing Outpouring, are now held under an air-conditioned tent with room for 10,000 visitors at Lakeland Linder Regional Airport and are broadcasted live online at www.God.tv. They're drawing international attention, and hundreds of thousands from all over the world are flocking to Lakeland for healing, revival and "more of God," which Bentley frequently cries out for.

Answered prayers

Pastor Mario Bramnick of **New Wine Ministries in Cooper City** say The Florida Outpouring is an answer to his church's prayer for revival.

Print Article



Todd Bentley began The Florida Healing Outpouring April 2 at Ignited Church. Now, people from all over the world watch the nightly revivals on www.God.tv.

God's Word, Todd's Words
Decide for yourself

"If you're not big on the prophetic, supernatural and angels, I'm sorry. It's my testimony. ... I told the Lord, 'Why can't I just do the healing and forget about all that other stuff?' And He said, 'Because, Todd, you gotta get people to believe in The Angel. I said, 'God why do I want people to believe in The Angel? Isn't it about getting people to believe in Jesus?' He said, 'The people already believe in Jesus, but the Church doesn't believe in the supernatural.'"

—Todd Bentley, in a recording available on YouTube.com.

"Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father."

—Jesus, from John 14:11-13

"I think it's totally counterfeit. I'm not saying that God can't use crooked sticks. I'm a crooked stick. ... I just think God chooses not use people like this. They bring attention to

When he visited on more than one occasion, he says, "It really appeared that there was a sovereign move of God at Lakeland. ... Some believe that healings have stopped with the apostles, which is not scripturally true. Jesus said these signs shall follow those who believe. They shall heal the sick, cast out devils and raise the dead. ...

"It would be difficult to fabricate so many miracles."

But, many notable Christians say these miracles are a result of fabrication – and are merely magic meant to soothe itching ears (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

"I have no problem going on record and saying this guy is a false prophet ... with a capital 'F,'" says **Tullian Tchividjian**, grandson of Billy and Ruth Graham and pastor of **New City Church** in Margate, Fla. "And it shouldn't surprise any of us because the Bible warns us about this from cover to cover. **John Piper** once said that Satan does not tempt us with poison, but with apple pie."

Bentley's appearance

Bentley's prickly exterior and colorful past make some Christians flag him as a "questionable." He is covered in tattoos and piercings, was reportedly imprisoned for sexual molestation (prior to becoming a Christian) and practices being "slain in the Spirit," which sometimes makes him laugh hysterically or roll on the floor in fits of spiritual fervor.

But, Bramnick says God uses the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.

"Todd is very clear about glorifying the Lord," he says. "Anyone who has accepted Jesus has the same power to pray for the sick in the name of Jesus, and they will recover."

Healing and angels

While Bentley frequently rouses the crowd to cry out for "more of God" in anticipation of healing, Tchividjian, who recently authored the book "**Do I Know God?**" says promising to heal hurting people is dangerous.

"At least from a biblical standpoint, there is no doubt that God can and does heal people. ... Sometimes he chooses to do so, and sometimes he does not. ..." he says. "There are many people, like my grandmother, who God chose not to heal, and that's OK."

In fact, accounts have surfaced that Larry Reed, pastor of Olympic View Assembly of God in Silverdale, Wash., visited The Florida Outpouring in early May and celebrated being healed from terminal bone cancer. On May 27, he went to be with the Lord.

Tchividjian also notes that Bentley claims to physically abuse people in order to heal them.

In one sermon recording provided by **Way of the Master Radio**, Bentley said the Holy Spirit told him to bang a crippled woman's legs up and down on the stage, and then finally, "The Holy Spirit came over me ... and said, 'Kick her in the face,'" and he did.

Only then was she healed, he says.

Financial angels and accountability

themselves, not to God."
— Tullian Tchividjian, New City Church pastor and grandson of Billy Graham

"Our mission is to save the lost. Period. Everything that is happening at Lakeland is to that end. God is good. People are being saved. That should be the priority of every believer."
—Todd Bentley, in a June 8 letter to his critics

"Then if anyone tells you, 'Look, here is the Messiah,' or 'There he is,' don't believe it. For false messiahs and false prophets will rise up and perform great signs and wonders so as to deceive, if possible, even God's chosen ones. See, I have warned you about this ahead of time."
—Jesus, from Matthew 24:23-25

"People had a problem with Jesus. The religious establishment, the ones who were supposed to receive Jesus, rejected him and came against him. The apostles were martyred. And in every great move of God there is going to be an opposition ... and often times it comes from the people of God."
—Mario Bramnick, attorney and pastor of New Wine Ministries

"Don't let anyone condemn you by insisting on pious self-denial or the worship of angels, saying they have had visions about these things. Their sinful minds have made them proud, and they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For he holds the whole body together with its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God nourishes it."
—Paul, from Colossians 2:18-19

"Nevertheless, trust that if what I'm doing is of the flesh or of the devil, I will fail, but if what's happening is from God, nothing and no one can quench this blazing fire unless God wills it."
— Todd Bentley, in a June 8 letter to his critics

"Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. On Judgment Day many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws.'"
—Jesus, from Matthew 7:21-23

To respond to this article, please e-mail the editor.

Bentley also says he's been visited by many angels and seen Jesus in the flesh.

Bentley says one female angel, named Emma, visited him and sprinkled "gold dust," illustrating financial blessings, on the congregation where he was preaching.

"She floated a couple of inches off the floor. It was almost like Kathryn Khulman in those old videos when she wore a white dress and looked like she was gliding across the platform," Bentley wrote on a page he has since removed from his website due to controversy.

"Within three weeks of that visitation, the church had given me the biggest offering I had ever received to that point in my ministry," he adds. "Thousands of dollars! Thousands!"

When Geraldo Rivera questioned Bentley about his finances, he said he receives no monies from the offerings taken at The Florida Outpouring. His salary provided by Fresh Fire Ministries provides him with a modest living, he says.

In another interview, he also noted that one night's offering at The Florida Outpouring was being sent to help refugees in the Sudan.

Heavenly anecdotes

Bentley also claims to have visited the "third heaven" on more than one occasion. In one interview with Patricia King of the TV show "**Extreme Prophetic**" and Prophetic Minister **Bob Jones**, he claimed to have ascended into heaven with Jones after simply closing their eyes at a noisy restaurant.

In another instance, he said he visited the cabin where Paul lives in heaven, and Paul told him that he and Abraham co-wrote the Book of Hebrews.

"We obviously have a problem with these statements and do not believe them to be biblical," stated Dan Hickling, ministry assistant to Pastor Bob Coy of Calvary Chapel Ft. Lauderdale. "... We would hesitate to put the 'revival' tag on what's happening in Lakeland. True Spirit-led revival is always accompanied by the conviction of sin, the confession of sin and the repentance of sin. And if these aren't the dominant evidences in Lakeland, I don't see the scriptural validation for true revival," Hickling said.

Bentley responds to his critics

Despite the criticisms of The Florida Outpouring, Todd Bentley maintains that the entire point of The Florida Outpouring is indeed salvation.

"Our mission is to save the lost. Period. Everything that is happening at Lakeland is to that end," he says in a letter to his critics. "God is good. People are being saved."

According to Bentley, his visions, manifestations and encounters with the Lord, like when he saw Jesus face to face in his kitchen and God in his living room as referenced in his **Nov. 13 sermon** available on www.FreshFire.ca, are God's response to his faith and are meant to point him closer to Jesus Christ.

"To apply doctrine to the response of God in our lives is wrong," he wrote. "For someone to assume that something that happens to us isn't of God because it's not in his or



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her doctrine or knowledge of Jesus is, in my opinion, to grieve the precious Holy Spirit.”

He also says that he does not practice in the worship of angels like many people claim.

“Mary, Paul, Peter, Jesus, the shepherds and several disciples ... had angelic encounters and some interacted with them in conversation. That doesn’t suppose they worshiped these angelic beings or sought them for revelation apart from God. ...” he says. “Let it be said, that I seek only God for revelation and should He send me an angel to me to impart revelation, get my attention, or open wells of revival and healing, so be it.”

Bentley also writes that he is well aware that Jesus said there would be false signs and wonders in the last days done by workers of iniquity.

Bentley writes, “Salvation is knowing Jesus and being known by Him – it’s much more than spiritual works or a verbal confession. I understand that lofty places in this visible kingdom are no proof of anyone’s acceptance with God, and neither are the mighty works, even done in Jesus’ name.”

However, he also says his miracles and healings are proof that The Florida Outpouring is a move of God and that “we should place no limit on further revelation from God.”

Bramnick of New Wine Ministries also believes these miracles validate Bentley’s ministry.

“It is just elevating the faith of the Church to believe what the Bible says. Beyond the signs and the wonders and the healing, it is bringing a new dimension of hunger and intimacy with our Heavenly Father,” he says. “With the fruit of drawing people closer in their relationship to Jesus and people who are bound with cancer, crippling diseases and other infirmities being set free, I have a hard time understanding how other Christians would say that this is not a move of God.”

However, Tchividjian reminds Christians to test every word that comes out of Bentley’s mouth like the Bereans tested what Paul said in Acts 17:11.

“We increase our scrutiny of people like Hugh Hefner, and we decrease our evaluation of people like Todd Bentley just because he comes in the name of Jesus,” Tchividjian says. “Hugh Hefner is not nearly as dangerous to the Church as someone like this.”

“I would pay much more attention to those people who have stood the test of time. I would pay very little attention to anyone who comes and says, ‘God told me something that He’s never told anyone else, and you can’t find it in the Bible.’ It’s a lie, it’s that simple.”

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