



MY TAKE ON THE LAKELAND MEETINGS

We all want and need a move of God, but let's be humble, discerning and focused on the clear patterns of Scripture so we won't be thrown off track. – by Pastor David Cannistraci

1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 – *“Do not stifle the Holy Spirit. Do not scoff at prophecies, but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good.”*

I believe God is pouring out his Spirit today. I believe in divine healing, prophecy, worship, visions, apostles, prophets, angels, dreams and miracles. I believe in the laying on of hands, spiritual warfare and casting out devils. I believe a new generation of young leaders is arising. But I'm very concerned with what is happening in Lakeland and in other places.

For those who are not aware, thousands have been a part of the Lakeland Outpouring, which began early in April 2008 at evangelist Todd Bentley's meetings in Florida. God TV is airing the meetings live worldwide, and thousands have been gathering nightly. Bentley and his team believe this marks the beginning of a worldwide revival.

Though I've not visited Lakeland and don't plan to, I've watched hours of it on God TV. As a national speaker, author, and local church pastor, I get a lot of questions. Here's my take.

I have some affirming comments to make about Todd Bentley and the Lakeland meetings.

- I believe Todd is dedicated, sincere and gifted by the Holy Spirit.
- In my view, the worship is authentic, inspiring and wonderful.
- The crowds are hungry and I believe the Lord is really touching people.
- Those who are critical of Todd simply because of his youth, unusual appearance or his criminal past are too stuffy for me. Youth or appearance is not a big concern.

But a few things I've seen going on at Lakeland have me truly alarmed:

- The lack of a Scriptural basis for Todd's "revelations" and exotic experiences is by far my biggest apprehension. The message seems to be "experience trumps Scripture." There is dangerously small ratio of Bible teaching to controversial experiences.
- It angered me when Paul Cain, a fallen evangelist who bailed out of a discipline process was celebrated and given a platform in these meetings – on which he promptly denied his sin after previously admitting to perversion and alcoholism. How can the church be taken seriously when our leaders violate proper discipline of a fallen minister? It smacks of an arrogant independence from other leaders in the Body of Christ.
- There are some pretty obvious and wild exaggerations of resurrections, healings, the significance of the meetings, and the overall results of Todd's ministry. Hype undermines Todd's credibility, but also the credibility of all who believe in the power of God. The power of the Holy Spirit needs no embellishment. Our exaggerations may be fooling immature Christians, but they are not fooling the media or the public.
- It bothers me that Todd is defensive and smart-mouthed toward those who see things differently than he does. It is clear that he does not appreciate being evaluated. Paul encouraged us to "test all things." Honest evaluation should be welcome in Lakeland.

All of us are flawed, and thankfully God does not require perfection before He moves. But we can't miss the point: Even well-intentioned errors can open doors to false doctrine, spiritual abuse, damage to people and a discredited Gospel. We need to hunger for God but not abandon the call to be mature and discerning. We need wisdom as much as we need power.

Let me now add a few concerns about prophetic mysticism in general. This is a part of the Lakeland ethos, but also an increasing number of events and movements lead by "prophetic revivalists" who are active in the church. I'm feeling very uncomfortable with things like...

- *Being taught by angels.* Some speak of visits to heaven, "third heaven revelations," and conversations with spirits with names like *Promise* and *Winds of Change*. Bentley has described a voluptuous female spirit named Emma who guides him, but angels are not sexual beings (Matthew 22:30) and we are cautioned not to be deceived by angels (Gal. 1:6-9, Col. 2:18). Isn't getting insight from angels how Joseph Smith got started?
- *Talking to dead people.* Some prophetic ministers claim to have had conversations with Paul the apostle and others, but necromancy is forbidden in the Bible (Det. 18:11).
- *Veneration of bizarre phenomenon,* such as feathers, gold dust, gems and oil, vibrating, jerking and acting drunk. Let's not forget that self-control is a fruit of the Spirit.
- *An overemphasis on prophetic acts or personal prophecy.* Everything does not require a prophetic word or act to "seal the deal." It borders on superstition and witchcraft. God speaks, but it's never trivial or common when He does. Let's not trivialize His voice.
- *An under emphasis on the Bible and sound teaching.* Too many of us neglect the Scripture.
- *"Tapping into the anointing" of past miracle workers who are morally disqualified.* It's wrong to venerate AA Allen, Wm. Branham, and any other leader who has been involved in homosexuality, pedophilia, alcohol and drug abuse or false doctrine. Do we really want to connect with that when we can connect directly to Christ for the anointing?
- *A culture of weirdness that is a poor representation of Jesus Christ and Biblical Christianity.* Violating social boundaries with strangers, incomprehensible messages and services, giddy silliness, and esoteric terminology ("portals" and "vibrations") all dilute the message and make the job of reaching intelligent people harder. As the Bride of Christ, we're supposed to be attractive and glorious, not goofy and embarrassing.

I believe God is moving in our day, and His glory is increasing in the earth. He is restoring the church to full power. As this happens, we need the apostolic as well as the prophetic to stay balanced and strong. In the end, the goal should be maturity, Christlikeness and every member ministry, not a new wind of doctrine or an outbreak of ecstasy (Ephesians 4:14-16).

While I pray for an outpouring, I strongly advise our people against participating in anything imbalanced, unwise or that damages the credibility of the Gospel. I counsel the leaders at GateWay to watch over these issues and be active in protecting the sheep from wolves and false doctrine. Each of us needs to pray for revival and stay grounded in the Word.

Cynics may say nothing in Lakeland is of God. Novices may say everything there is of God. But mature believers should check it out, reject the false and hold to what's good. We all want and need a move of God, but unless we're humble, discerning and focused on the clear patterns of the Bible, we'll quickly become a circus sideshow instead of a victorious church.