

A STATEMENT and APPEAL REGARDING LAKELAND

-Dutch Sheets. (Aug 21, 2008).

It has now been a couple of weeks since I heard about Todd Bentley's plans for separation and divorce. Like everyone, I have had a variety of emotions including anger, sadness, and grief. Every time I see this scenario repeated, I grieve: for the husband and wife involved; for the family that will be scarred in so many ways; because of the incredible reproach it brings to Christ; and the distortion it gives concerning God's heart and ways. I am praying for Todd and his family.

I was asked numerous times to write my position on Lakeland while it was happening, but always felt checked by the Lord—the waters were too muddy and emotions too high. I now feel strongly that the Lord wants me to do so. It will be arguably one of the greatest risks of my ministry to date, but one I feel must be taken. Fathers, when given the voice to do so, bear the responsibility of giving correction and wisdom. I hope mine qualifies for the latter. I assure you I have spent many hours praying and thinking through the situation. The risks are broad: with some of my dearest friends and co-laborers, I risk harming those relationships; with many in the charismatic body of Christ, I risk appearing to be an arrogant, “self-appointed” spokesperson for them; to the “I told you so” crowd, I risk the accusation of “spinning” the situation. (As far as the heresy hunters and revival police—not those who raised legitimate questions about Lakeland, but the attack dogs who make their living and build their ministries criticizing everyone else—I lost respect for them long ago and couldn't care less what they think.)

My purpose and sincere prayer in writing this statement, however, is three-fold: to see healing begin for the body of Christ; to initiate a process that can remove the reproach brought to Christ and the Church; and to do these things while preserving and honoring my current relationships. I pray that these desires, along with my heart, come through loudly. And I hope I'm writing this with true humility—who among us clearly sees all hidden in our own hearts? Let me also preface this statement by saying that what needs to be said cannot be done quickly or carelessly. I do not want my heart to be missed and am not willing to run that risk for the sake of brevity, so please bear with the length. (Incidentally, I think it will be obvious no one involved in the Lakeland situation has asked me to write this; and for the sake of integrity on my part, none have been consulted concerning what I'm stating.)

Mistakes at Lakeland

Did leaders handling the Lakeland situation make mistakes? Yes—huge mistakes. Beyond the obvious fruit of salvations and healings,

can good come from Lakeland, as some have suggested, even with the recent revelations concerning Todd Bentley? Yes, but only if there is complete honesty and transparency, the removal of all attempts at self-preservation, and absolute humility from all sides.

Did I endorse the Lakeland meetings? No, I did not, nor did I condemn them. I acknowledged that healings were occurring and some were being saved, which I still believe and rejoice over. I realized and stated that the thousands of people attending were hungry and sincere, as were those involved in leading the meetings. The worship was regularly good. But looking past some of the immediate and positive results, I, like many, also looked ahead to the possible fruit from questionable doctrine and experiences, exaggeration and hype, youthful pride, character issues and the frightening potential of a 32 year “young” man leading a movement that could shape the future of the Church.

These things were frightening, very frightening, to others and me. When something has the potential of setting precedent, birthing a movement and being reproduced as a prototype, we are no longer simply endorsing good brothers, good intentions and miracles. Doctrine and foundations will be built on these events. Teachings and paradigms for future ministries will be formed—in short, the next generation of the church and the move of God in the earth could be greatly impacted. This is why I stopped short of endorsing everything at Lakeland. Just as importantly, I could not ignore the “check”, the uneasiness, the sickening feeling deep in my spirit telling me something else was wrong—terribly wrong—in this situation. Like other leaders I tried to push past my uneasiness with the showmanship, the “bams,” the head butts and kneeling, along with certain experiences and doctrines, all in order to embrace the good. Like many of my friends I tried to be—and believe I was—gracious, accepting, ready to think “out of the box”, etc. But try as I may, the uneasiness in my spirit just wouldn’t leave.

Did I voice my concerns to the appropriate people? Yes, including stating my concerns for Todd’s marriage to the Lakeland Outpouring Apostolic Team. Did they listen? Some did, some didn’t. But I want to state emphatically, this is not an “I told you so” statement. In fact, much of what I want to address goes back several years into our charismatic Christian history. And I assure you that concerning our present weaknesses in the charismatic church, there is plenty of blame to go around. Personally, I’ve been right at times with my discernment and decisions, wrong at others. It would be worse than hypocritical for me to point the finger of accusation—I have no stones of judgment to throw. Nonetheless, mistakes were made and must be acknowledged and learned from in order for us to heal, grow and move forward.

Some of my closest friends endorsed and participated in the

Lakeland meetings. For them I have both criticism—all of us lose credibility at this point if we're not completely honest—and affirmation. Should they have been more discerning and have listened to the warnings they received? Obviously. Should those who “aligned” Todd with spiritual fathers (which was a good thing and positioned him to receive help if he chooses to accept it) have realized to do so publicly was a mistake and could be interpreted by those watching in no other way than as a complete endorsement? Yes, they should have, especially when the event became a commissioning ceremony, complete with decrees and prophecies of going to higher levels, predictions of Todd's increasing world-wide influence and leading a world-wide revival, emphatic and prolific endorsements of his character, etc. How could those watching believe the evening was anything but an aligning, endorsing and commissioning ceremony? It was. It really doesn't matter who laid their hands on Todd—all share responsibility. This was unwise at best, naïve at least and at its worst, foolish. And should the leaders involved have realized that those of us connected to them relationally, ministerially, and as movements—some even in alignment with them apostolically and as sons and daughters—would feel minimalized, if not betrayed, by the fact that they were in essence taking us onto the stage with them? Yes. These feelings were inevitable, especially when we had such uneasiness and asked them not to. Should there be an acknowledgment of these mistakes to the body of Christ for the sake of accountability and in order to rebuild trust? I believe so, and remain hopeful this will happen.

With such strong statements of disagreement, what is the affirmation toward my friends who led, participated in or endorsed this ceremony (and the meetings in general)? Simply stated, I know their hearts. It is not a contradiction of my criticisms toward some of their actions to, at the same time, defend and endorse their hearts and character. It is completely appropriate — when true—to defend a person's heart and integrity while disagreeing with their actions.

I think the blunder of that night was huge and very damaging to the body of Christ, but I also realize that in their hearts, those involved honestly felt they were doing the right things. Again, while not defending the action taken, I would defend the character and integrity of Peter and Doris Wagner as vigorously as anyone I know, and do so with absolute confidence. There are no two people, and I mean that literally, who embody the qualities of humility, integrity, holiness (no compromise!), sacrifice, unselfish kingdom-thinking, the tireless giving of themselves to Christ's cause and the body of Christ—and do I need to add risk-taking?—as much as Peter and Doris Wagner. It remains my great honor to be associated with them and call them a spiritual father and mother. And again, while not minimizing or “sweeping under the

rug” any wrong decisions, I remain steadfast in my belief that similar affirmations could be made of others involved—either directly or indirectly—in the ceremony. And some of them still see their endorsing of Lakeland as an endorsement of revival generally, not of Todd personally.

The Bigger Picture

It may come as a surprise, however, that my real purpose in writing this is not to only state the above, as important as I believe saying it is. My primary purpose, and I believe my assignment from the Lord, is to identificationally repent on behalf of the leadership of the charismatic body of Christ (see Nehemiah 1:4-7; Daniel 9:1-19). In doing so, I do not have a pompous, “no one else will, so I’ll do it” attitude, nor am I arrogant enough to think I have become the spokesperson for the charismatic church. But in the same way that I can identify with the racism of white predecessors and repent to blacks, Native Americans and other races, I can represent the leadership of the charismatic body of Christ and identificationally repent for our sins and weaknesses. I encourage leaders who find my statements true and appropriate to join me.

Beyond the simple fact of it being appropriate, I firmly believe it is the only way to begin the process of rebuilding trust with those asked to follow us and to remove the cynicism of the world we ask to listen to us. As you know, regaining credibility is much more difficult than attaining credibility. Concerning what I’m about to say, I don’t believe I have a critical spirit, nor do I want to diminish the sacrifices, faithfulness, and hard work done by so many in ministry. The fact remains, however, that we have failed the Lord and His people in many ways—not just with Lakeland but in countless other situations—and must repent if we are to be trusted in the future. And as you also know, no repentance is effective if watered down and couched in excuses, therefore, I intend to be brutally honest:

- 1) We, the leaders of the charismatic community, have operated in an extremely low level of discernment. Frankly, we often don’t even try to discern. We assume a person’s credibility based on gifts, charisma, the size of their ministry or church, whether they can prophesy or work a miracle, etc. (Miracles and signs are intended to validate God and His message, not the messenger; sometimes they validate the assignment of an individual, but never the person’s character, lifestyle or spiritual maturity.) We leaders in the Church have become no different than the world around us in our standards for measuring success and greatness. This has contributed to the body of Christ giving millions of dollars to undeserving individuals; it has allowed people living in sin to become influential leaders—even to lead movements, allowing them influence all the way to the White House. Through our lack of discernment we built their stages and gave them their platforms.

We have been gullible beyond words—gullible leaders producing gullible sheep. When a spiritual leader we're connected with violates trust, is exposed for immorality or falls below other accepted standards of behavior, it does not exonerate us simply to say we don't condone such behavior. Those we lead trust us to let them know whom to trust. We have failed them miserably in this regard. For this lack of discernment, and for employing and passing on inappropriate standards of judgment, I repent to the Lord and ask forgiveness of the body of Christ.

2) We, the leaders of the charismatic church, spin our involvement and fail to acknowledge our responsibility when other leaders fall—all of which stems from our self-preservation and pride. Enough of the spin—we're no different than Washington, DC. Every time another embarrassing and disgraceful situation is exposed, the dancing begins. It seems that no one bears any real responsibility except the man or woman who actually commits sin. Incredibly, we even blame "revival" itself—the pressures, attacks, weariness, the "revival is messy" argument, etc., saying it is responsible for the failures. This is disgusting. Those of us on boards of fallen leaders, those who helped give them a voice, put them on TV, published and endorsed their books (yes, I have), etc., are not exonerated simply by saying we don't condone the wrong behavior or that we didn't know. We're supposed to know. I don't believe anyone is expecting perfection from us—I know I'm not. We're far too human for that. But we are expected to have enough humility to look the world and those who follow us in the eye when we miss it and say, "we were wrong and we are sorry." Our careless accountability has caused the body of Christ to be spiritually raped and abused. It has produced disillusionment and brought immeasurable reproach to our God and cynicism to His message. Concerning Lakeland, what was called the "greatest revival since Azusa Street" has become possibly one of the greatest reproaches. We, the leaders of the charismatic church, are responsible. For not accepting and acknowledging our responsibility, for caring more about our own reputation than Christ's, I repent to God and ask forgiveness of the body of Christ.

3) Our procedures and standards of accountability are incredibly inadequate. We have provided camaraderie, not biblical accountability. For those on Todd Bentley's board who had previous knowledge of his marriage problems and said nothing, it was more than a mistake—it was reckless, foolish, and irresponsible. For those on the stage the night of his aligning and commissioning who knew and said nothing—ditto. For those there who didn't know, my question is, "why didn't you?" You were trusted to know. That is one of the purposes of public commissioning and the purpose behind the concept of endorsement. I'm not trying to point the finger; I'm endeavoring to get us to be honest about our failures—we have serious credibility

issues. Have I ever laid hands on, commissioned or endorsed anyone without adequately checking them out? Yes, but you better believe I'll be more careful next time! And we must not single out Lakeland. We're all guilty. What about the leader in my city who ran with some of the leading spiritual fathers in our nation—sincere and good men, I might add, and not all “charismatic” leaders—who sang his praises and helped build his stage—all while he was doing drugs and having sex with other men? But we shouldn't blame only the high profile cases—what about those of us who unknowingly have had adulterers on our staffs or appointed elders that turned out to have compromise in their life? Sounding familiar yet? This is so epidemic that every member of the body of Christ stands guilty—what pastor or leader did you follow that turned out to have sin issues? What ministry did you support that was unworthy? There is plenty of blame to go around. The big question becomes not “who do we blame” but “how do we fix this mess?” Leaders can live in sin—adultery, homosexuality, financial wrongdoing, drugs, etc.—for years without it being realized. They can offer completely unacceptable lifestyles for the body of Christ to follow and still keep their TV programs and lavish lifestyles. In the name of grace, compassion and forgiveness we have lowered the standard so much that often there isn't one. We have bought into the lie that true discipline is “shooting our wounded.” We have made a mockery of biblical restoration, making “ministry”—not healthy individuals, marriages and families—its ultimate goal. The fact is, integrity matters. No, we don't need legalistic, pharisaical standards, but we must have standards. For this lack of biblical accountability, I repent to God and I ask forgiveness of the body of Christ.

4) We, the leaders of the charismatic church, have built on hype, sensation, innovation, programs, personality and charisma. This has produced: shallowness; false movements; novice leaders—gifted but immature and untested; a deficient understanding of God's word; the building of man-centered rather than kingdom-centered churches and ministries; competition rather than cooperation; humanistic, self-centered Christians who don't understand sacrifice and commitment; Christians without discernment; superstar leaders; a perverted and powerless gospel; prayerless and anemic Christians; a replacement of the fear of the Lord with the fear of man; and a young generation that is cynical of it all. We are responsible, not the devil; he takes what we give him. For this compromise in the way we build, for giving the Church watered down wine, commercial Christianity, a flashy but weak Church and hype disguised as anointing, I repent to God and ask forgiveness of the body of Christ. Galatians 6:1-5 is an appropriate reference with which to end this statement: “Brethren, even if a man caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is

something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. For each one shall bear his own load.” NAS

My passionate prayer is that God honors this repentance — I believe He led me to do it and therefore, will—and uses it to begin a process of cleansing and healing for all of us. In order for the coming great awakening to bear maximum fruit we must have both, as well as a course correction that sets us on a path of wisdom leading to life. There is no doubt that past moves of God have been aborted, ended prematurely and contained error or heresy that have wounded, if not destroyed, many. The healing revival of the 40's and 50's, the charismatic movement, discipleship movement and Jesus movement are all examples. My heart is to help shape a movement, the fruit of which will last for decades — better yet, forever. And I have great expectations for us—I am not a cynic.

My passionate prayer is also that Todd Bentley's marriage survives and thrives...that he turns his heart fully toward Christ and toward those with whom he is aligned, and allows them, as God leads, to put him on a path of complete restoration. I thank God for those who were touched by the Holy Spirit at Lakeland and while watching it on God TV and the web. May we all move forward into all God has planned for us in this awesome season of endless possibility.

With great hope—Dutch Sheets.

~SOURCE: <http://www.dutchsheets.org/index.cfm>