

Healing Evangelist Todd Bentley Reveals Facts About Past Assault

The young preacher says he wants to set the record straight about an offense he committed at age 14, before his conversion. Canadian evangelist Todd Bentley knows well the power of a testimony to convince the lost that no one is too far gone to find healing in Christ. Recently, he has also learned that when the secular media digs into one's testimony, confession may not be so good for the soul.

In a lengthy feature article published in the September 2002 issue of *Charisma*, Bentley, 26, acknowledged that at age 14, as a juvenile, he had been arrested for assault. A March 2001 story about him that was published in *The Report*—a secular, conservative political magazine published in British Columbia and Alberta, Canada—offered a similar report.

But *The Report* story backfired when the mother of the victim of the assault read the article and informed the magazine that Bentley's assault had been sexual and that he had molested her son, also a minor, at the time. Bentley served several months in jail for the crime, and five years afterward he gave his life to Christ. Today his crusades around the world are producing reports of healing miracles and thousands of salvations.

The *Report* writer who filed the original story about Bentley's ministry called him back to verify the nature of the crime. As a juvenile offender, Bentley's record was protected from public disclosure, and he said he had no idea *The Report* would

then turn around and publish his acknowledgement of the crime.

"[The reporter] didn't tell me he was doing a follow-up story," Bentley told Charisma. "He was just friendly and told me what the mother had said, and I admitted to him in what I thought were off-the-record comments that it was true, but that it happened years ago and I had since been changed by the gospel."

Bentley openly acknowledges the rougher parts of his juvenile past when he preaches in public, including his near-fatal drug overdoses, criminal burglaries, physical abuse of his mother and several stints in prison. But he said he has never talked openly about the sexual assault because of the stigma the crime carries and what he says is "the inability of Christians to forgive certain sins."

His advisers, who include several pastors and counselors, have advised him to refrain from talking publicly about the sexual crime for the same reasons.

Bentley did publicly acknowledge the sexual assault during the summer of 2001 while leading a conference and crusade in Kewlona, British Columbia. He had received the support of the New Life Vineyard church in Kewlona to use their facilities for the events, and organizers had installed posters advertising the event around town.

The family of the assault victim had moved to Kewlona, and when they saw the posters with Bentley's name, they contacted local media. Bentley decided to address the local outcry by going on the 6 p.m. local TV-news broadcast. He admitted the crime on-air, asked for forgiveness, told viewers how ashamed

he was, and how he was transformed five years after the incident by the gospel's power.

"From that incident up to this article in The Report, our ministry has not had one complaint about this revelation from my past," Bentley told Charisma. "The church in Kewlona stood behind me and continued to allow me to use their facilities to finish the conference. The protests stopped after I went on TV, and they aired that broadcast two or three times."

Bentley, who is now married and has children of his own, said he has feared Christians would be afraid to leave their children around him if the juvenile sex-offense were known. He says he will report on the crime in a book he is writing that is expected to release this year.

Two ministers who provide pastoral covering for Bentley told Charisma they have full confidence that God has forgiven him for his juvenile crimes and that he is in no way susceptible to repeat offenses of that nature.

"Todd is in good standing with us, and we believe him most definitely to be restored," Pat Cocking said. "There has been no sign at all of any questionable behavior."

Bobby Conner of Demonstration of God's Power Ministries in Moravian Falls, N.C., echoed Cocking's sentiments.

"I do serve on Todd's watch-care group and minister with him several times a year," Conner said. "I know that he is a faithful young man. The anointing on his life is awesome. I feel he has been up-front with me and the watch-care group

about his life before Christ. It seems well to move on now and not to continue to open what God has forgiven and covered.”

Billy Bruce