

Leaders of Todd Bentley's Former Ministry Break Silence

Months after the revivalist announced he was divorcing his wife and stepping down from ministry, the board at Fresh Fire Ministries gave their perspectives on Bentley's current status.



[] Leaders of the Canadian ministry evangelist Todd Bentley founded a decade ago say the one-time revivalist is “intent” on divorcing his wife and is yet to begin a restoration process.

In a six-page letter to ministry supporters, the board of Fresh Fire Ministries (FFM) released more details about the circumstances that led to Bentley's departure in August from the Lakeland, Fla., revival meetings he led for four months.

“Todd Bentley has demonstrated himself unfaithful to his wife by entering into a relationship with another woman while still legally married,” the board said in a statement issued last Friday. “Todd has yet to enter into a clear system of accountability with the leaders he identified that would be involved in such a process.”

The leaders claim Bentley, 32, has no biblical grounds for leaving his wife, Shonnah, and their three children, and that the nature of his relationship with his children's former nanny is “that of adultery.”

“The legal separation from Shonnah was initiated completely by Todd and he has not seen her or the children since the last week in July,” they stated.

“It also needs to be clarified that Shonnah has in no way

initiated this divorce and has no present intention to do so at any time in the future. She is understandably hurt by Todd's infidelity, but is not asking or pressing for a divorce."

On Tuesday, Bentley said there had been no sexual immorality between him and the former nanny. He claimed that for two years no "spark or interest" in the former staff member existed, and that the two developed only an emotional relationship several weeks after July 1, when Bentley filed for divorce.

He admitted, however, that the budding relationship was "absolutely" bad timing.

"I would call it an inappropriate relationship, in the sense that it was too soon, too quick, and should've never happened the way that it happened," Bentley said. "Emotionally, she had stepped in to comfort me as a friend would.

"But I never left my wife to be with another woman," he said. "There was nothing premeditated or inappropriate in my heart. I had never even entertained the idea that I liked this girl. It never went there."

Claiming to have gone through years of counseling with his wife, Bentley said he is divorcing her over "irreconcilable differences."

He denied disconnecting from his children and told *Charisma* he is in constant phone contact with them and plans to see them as soon as he sorts out issues with his visa.

Bentley said FFM let him review the letter before they made it public and that he was unhappy with portions of it. He said he felt the letter implied that the breakup of his marriage could be blamed on his relationship with his former nanny and the pressures of leading daily nonstop revival meetings in Lakeland.

"I have the utmost respect for my team in Canada and we have

had a lot of years together," he said. "[But] I'm not in agreement with my board on this. The point is, [the former nanny] wasn't the cause. And I don't want to blame Lakeland. I want to blame a bad marriage."

Bentley said he is willing to take 100 percent responsibility for his actions and that he readily admits he's guilty of doing a lot of things wrong over the years. "In a lot of ways, the ministry has been my mistress," he said. "That did destroy my marriage. That I have to take responsibility for."

The FFM leaders said they had been on an "emotional rollercoaster" for several months before releasing the statement, seeking to persuade Bentley to abandon his relationship with the former nanny, return to his wife and children, and quickly embrace a process of counseling and accountability.

In the letter, the board thanked leaders of other ministries who have reportedly tried to help implement a process of restoration for Bentley. "But what we have come to realize is that ultimately, the buck stops with the FFM board of directors," they said. "No one knows Todd better, or has more access to all the facts from both sides than we do."

MorningStar Ministries' founder Rick Joyner announced in October that he would be leading a team to help restore Bentley and would be assisted by Revival Alliance member Bill Johnson and Texas pastor Jack Deere, along with pastors John Arnott and Che Ahn serving as advisers.

Bentley said he is still involved at an emotional level with his former nanny and soon plans to move to Joyner's headquarters in Fort Mill, S.C., to "fully embrace a healing and restoration process."

Joyner confirmed that the process could begin as early as January. He did not confirm if abandoning his relationship with the nanny was a precondition Bentley would need to agree to before entering a healing process led by Joyner.

Joyner did express disappointment with FFM's recent statement about Bentley and said he tried to persuade them not to send

the letter in its current form.

“There is almost always another side to a story, as there is to many of the things they presented in this letter,” Joyner said. “Sometimes the truth is found somewhere between the two sides, but if we're going to ever get to real healing and reconciliation I don't think this kind of thing helps.”

The FFM board said they decided to send the letter to supporters after spending months of silence “in deference to [the] leaders” involved in trying to lead Bentley through a restoration process. “We struggled for a while with the question of how to satisfy two important obligations—that of honoring Todd, while believing for his restoration, and at the same time, our obligation to be completely honest and open with you.”

Although Bentley experienced a moral failing, the FFM leaders said the Lakeland Revival he led was an authentic move of God. “Through the weakness and failure of man, the enemy seeks to defame and discredit what God has done,” they said. “[But] Lakeland was and is an authentic move of God. God poured Himself out in Florida and through the Internet and television around the world.”

FFM is in the process of restructuring its ministries with assistance from Johnson's church in Redding, Calif., and Joyner's ministry in South Carolina.

Their letter also stated that Bentley has officially resigned and that the Abbotsford, FFM is searching for another leader. “We love Todd dearly, [and] it is our deep desire that our brother should be restored,” they said.

“Please let us make it clear, that although what Todd has done is inexcusable, it is not unforgiveable. We do not judge him unworthy of a second, third or even fourth chance.” —**Paul Steven Ghiringhelli**