

Stephen Bennett Testimony

With his outreach events, CDs and a weekly radio program, Stephen Bennett stresses that Jesus can heal homosexuals

Stephen Bennett and his wife, Irene, are vexing the gay community preaching the liberating power of Jesus Christ via Stephen Bennett Ministries (SBM) based in Huntington, Conn.

Bennett, 40, is a former homosexual who says he no longer has homosexual desires. He stresses that overcoming one's same-sex attraction is a process, which for some may not be easy, yet it is completely possible. "I am perfectly happy as the man God created me to be," he said. "I am in love with my wife. My nightmare has turned into a fairytale because of God."

Even though Bennett recalls feeling effeminate as a child, he attributes his homosexual past to a rocky relationship with his father, a high-energy inventor and entrepreneur. "I grew up in a very wealthy home," he said. "I had everything physically I wanted, except I just wanted his love, his approval and his attention and never really got it."

Pursuing a career in art, he enrolled at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, N.Y., where he experienced his first homosexual encounter at the age of 18. "That began an 11-year descent for me into the gay lifestyle," he said.

Bouts with cocaine, alcohol and bulimia followed. He had sex with more than 100 partners, many of whom died from AIDS. "It's a miracle I never got infected," he said.

For a while he ran with the Hollywood crowd, painting

portraits of movie stars and working for country singer Crystal Gale. After hitting bottom selling drugs and living in a cockroach-infested building, he entered a secular rehab program in 1988. He kicked his addictions but continued his gay lifestyle. He met the man of his dreams in a gay bar and began a three-year relationship.

During that time a Christian young woman confronted him with the gospel and gave him a Bible. He battled with abandoning homosexuality until January 1992 when he prayed to receive Christ. "I confessed my sin before God," he said. "I physically felt the peace of God."

Within two weeks he fled his partner's home. However, homosexual urges lingered until he reconciled with his father. "I had to forgive my father," he said. "That was for me the breaking point of my homosexual struggle." A year later he married Irene, a friend of the woman who witnessed to him.

The Bennetts had two children, were active in evangelism and operated a lucrative sign-painting business. Yet something was missing. Their moment came during the summer of 2000 after an evangelistic service at a Connecticut beach. "I really felt that God was calling us to do something special for Him," Irene Bennett said. "We dedicated our lives. Whatever He wanted us to do, we would do it."

Encouraged by friends, Bennett recorded a CD, I Believe in Miracles, which featured his testimony. Almost immediately it aired nationally on Christian radio stations. "It had nothing to do with my voice or the music," he said. "It was because of the testimony."

As a result, requests for interviews from Christian and secular TV programs flooded Bennett's phone line. During this time the sign business nose-dived and racked up almost \$65,000 in debts. Miraculously the Bennetts received \$125,000, which enabled them to erase their debts and by faith launch SBM ().

The Bennetts share the hope of Christ to the gay community through CDs, literature, concerts, targeted outreaches, a weekly radio program, counseling, e-mail and media interviews. Bennett has appeared on FOX News' The O'Reilly Factor, and speaks regularly at churches and events sponsored by the American Family Association (AFA) and Concerned Women for America.

"We have partnered with SBM on several projects," said Buddy Smith, executive assistant to the chairman of AFA. "The dominant message we have heard from Stephen is a love for Christ and a heart that is broken for the homosexual."

When not traveling Bennett ministers by phone almost daily. His tract I Was Gay is distributed nationwide. In January a distraught 20-year-old man phoned him from Texas crying, "I can't take this homosexual lifestyle any longer." Someone gave Bennett's tract to the young man at a gay pride parade in August 2003. Bennett prayed with him, sent literature and directed him to a local church.

Last summer SBM sponsored a national outreach in Provincetown, Mass., a known gay enclave on Cape Cod. Volunteers gave out more than 600 gift bags containing a Bible, CD, T-shirt and tract. Bennett plans a similar event this year at gay pride day at Disney World in Orlando, Fla., in June.

In response to the November ruling by the Massachusetts Supreme Court sanctioning gay marriage, Bennett is launching a national billboard campaign. Signs show the Bennett family and copy that says: "Wonderful husband. Loving father. Former homosexual. Jesus Christ changes lives."

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