

Todd Bentley's New Wife Breaks Silence

✖ The new wife of former Lakeland Revival leader Todd Bentley said she believes it was wrong to begin a relationship with the evangelist before his divorce was final.

In an interview with MorningStar Ministries founder Rick Joyner, who is overseeing Bentley's restoration process, Jessa Bentley said her relationship with Todd Bentley began after he filed for divorce from his first wife, Shonnah. But she now believes they should have waited six months to a year after the divorce was final before beginning a relationship.

"Even though Todd was getting a divorce and Todd was already separated, it was still wrong for us to have anything romantic, regardless if anything physical happened or not," Jessa Bentley said. "Even that emotional line that we crossed, I think is wrong. I think it was a sin. I think it was a mistake. I think we missed it."

She said she doesn't regret marrying Bentley, but repented for "being deceived" and "allowing things to happen that shouldn't have happened."

"We hurt a lot of people," she said. "For that, there's nothing we could say to take that away or to make it right or justify it. It was wrong, and it was sin. ... We made a huge mess. I want to apologize, I want to repent for that." (Watch video.)

Joyner's interview is the latest in a series of videos he has created to update the public on Todd Bentley's restoration process, which he has been overseeing since March. After leading popular revival meetings in Lakeland, Fla., for nearly four months, Bentley suddenly stepped down in August 2008 after announcing that he and his wife, Shonnah, were

separating.

At the time, leaders of what is now known as Transform International, which is no longer affiliated with Bentley, expressed concern about the evangelist's relationship with Jessa as well as his alcohol consumption, which a senior board member said had "crossed the line."

Jessa Bentley, 26, said she met Todd Bentley, 33, two years ago when he visited California to lead a conference. She and other church members struck up a friendship with the evangelist, and a year later she moved to Canada, where Bentley's Fresh Fire Ministries was based, to participate in their internship program.

After the Lakeland Revival began, she moved to Florida and helped Bentley's first wife, Shonnah, with the couple's three children. She later became part of the ministry's staff.

Jessa said Fresh Fire staff knew Todd and Shonnah Bentley were having marital difficulties. But the problems grew worse after the revival began, and the couple eventually separated.

"When [the marriage] broke, he broke," Jessa Bentley said. "He crumbled and fell apart."

She said church and Fresh Fire leaders largely weren't available when Todd needed someone to talk with, so he began confiding in a small group of ministry staff. Because she was often the only woman in the group, she would comfort him when he cried.

"He was crying a lot and weeping and crying out to God and praying," she said. "And when there was a group of us, there were a lot of guys, so not a lot of them would be there to comfort him in the way that he needed."

"I did hold him when he cried [when] there were other people there," she continued. "No one else knew what to do. I didn't

know what to do. I wasn't just going to walk away from that. There was no one there for him, really, except for the few of us."

She said their relationship was sparked through those times but formally began after the Bentleys separated. Bentley married Jessa earlier this year.

Jessa Bentley said she believes she was deceived part of the time. "I did make up excuses," she said. "I did try to justify it. I did try to say that this was right. But in hindsight, looking back, I realize, it was wrong-period."

She said the couple wants to make things right, but they believe they will have to pay a price for their mistakes. "There are consequences we're walking out, and there are going to be consequences that we're going to have to live with, a price that we have to pay for the rest of our lives because now we're married, and because we made mistakes, we created sins," Jessa Bentley said.

Todd Bentley said Jessa did not break up his first marriage, but that their relationship "shouldn't have happened the way it happened."

He said he and Jessa are not trying to justify their actions. "I'm going to have to bear something the rest of my life, Jessa and I together are bearing something," he said. "And that's difficult. It's cost me my family, ministry, reputation. And nobody did that to me. No anybody in Canada, not a leader. Me. My sin cost me. ... But God's grace, goodness and mercy far outweighs."

Joyner said the Bentleys' situation has been challenging to him personally, but believes Christians "need to find God's grace and His purpose now."

"If we want to receive God's mercy ourselves we have to learn to sow mercy," he said. "If we want to receive His grace, we

have to learn to sow grace.”

Likening the Bentleys to the biblical King David, Joyner said Israel may have followed Absalom after David committed adultery with Bathsheba because they thought God could no longer be with him after what he did.

“But God was still with David,” Joyner said. “And I think there’s something in the lesson, in the challenges, of this situation. Nobody’s being challenged more than Jessa and Todd in this situation and will be from now on. But they’re overcoming it. And I believe the body of Christ is overcoming too.”

Bentley continues to minister through Fresh Fire USA Ministries based in Pineville, N.C.