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**Subject:** Charisma - Questions about Lakeland

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NOTE: We are not publishing this because we fully agree - but because it is important - and it's just come out. Our comments follow the article:

HONEST QUESTIONS ABOUT the LAKELAND REVIVAL  
-by J. Lee Grady [CHARISMA EDITOR]

I support any holy outbreak of revival fervor. But let's be careful to guard ourselves from pride and error.

God is stirring deep spiritual passion in the hearts of the thousands of people who have traveled to Florida during the last month to experience the Lakeland Healing Revival. Since these meetings began in a 700-seat church on April 2, the crowd has moved four times to bigger venues, the fervor has intensified and the news has spread worldwide-thanks to God TV and online broadcasting.

Within a few weeks, the bandwagon effect was in full swing. It's safe to say that no outbreak of Pentecostalism in history has gained so much international exposure so quickly as these meetings have.

I'm a cheerleader for the charismatic movement, so I rejoiced when I heard the news about revivalist Todd Bentley's extended visit to Ignited Church. It was thrilling to hear the reports of miracles and to watch the crowd grow until a stadium was required to hold everyone.

When I visited a service on April 15, I was blessed by Heather Clark's music and the audience's exuberant worship. And I laughed with everyone else as I watched Bentley shout his trademarked "Bam! Bam! Bam!" as he prayed for the sick and flailed his tattooed arms over the crowd. Hey, Jesus didn't pray for people according to the Pharisees' rulebook, so I'm open to unconventional methods.

But I would be dishonest if I told you that I wholeheartedly embraced what I saw in Lakeland. Something disturbed me, but I kept my mouth shut for three weeks while I prayed, got counsel from respected ministry leaders and searched my heart to make sure I was not harboring a religious spirit. The last thing we need today is more mean-spirited heresy hunters blasting other Christians.

I am not a heresy hunter, and I support what is happening in Lakeland because I know God uses imperfect people (like me and you) to reach others for Jesus. At the same time, I believe my questions are honest and my concerns are real.

My motive is not to criticize Bentley or the pastor who is sponsoring these meetings, Stephen Strader. In September 2002 Charisma featured a seven-page article about Bentley's amazing conversion from drug addiction. I believe Bentley is a sincere brother who wants people to encounter God's presence and power. No doubt this 32-year-old evangelist needs our prayers now more than ever, especially since he has become the focus of international media attention.

But as the noise from Lakeland grows louder and its influence spreads, I'm issuing some words of warning that apply to all of us, not just the folks in Lakeland. I hope everyone understands that these cautions are offered in love:

1. Beware of strange fire. The name of Jesus is being lifted up in the Lakeland revival, and three people came to the altar for salvation the night I attended. Larger numbers have come to the front of the auditorium to find Christ every night since then.

Yet I fear another message is also being preached subtly in Lakeland-a message that cult-watchers would describe as a spiritual counterfeit. Bentley is one of several charismatic ministers who have emphasized angels in the last several years. He has taught about angels who bring financial breakthroughs or revelations, and he sometimes refers to an angel named Emma who supposedly played a role in initiating a prophetic movement in Kansas City in the 1980s. Bentley describes Emma as a woman

in a flowing white dress who floats a few feet off the floor.

All of us who believe the Bible know that angels are real, and that they work on our behalf to protect us and minister to us. But the apostle Paul, who had encounters with angels himself, issued stern warnings to the Corinthians, the Galatians and the Colossians about angels who preach another gospel or that demand attention. In Colossae, believers were so enamored with angels they had seen in visions that they became "inflated without cause" by spiritual pride (Col. 2:18, NASB). Paul was adamant that preoccupation with angels can lead to serious deception.

We need to tread carefully here! We have no business teaching God's people to commune with angels or to seek revelations from them. And if any revival movement-no matter how exciting or passionate-mixes the gospel of Jesus with this strange fire, the results could be devastating. We need to remember that Mormonism was born out of one man's encounter with a dark angel who claimed to speak for God.

2. Beware of bizarre manifestations. When the Holy Spirit's power comes on people they may feel weak or even fall. The Spirit's power can also cause people to tremble, shake, laugh or cry. Such manifestations are biblical and we should leave room for them. But where do we draw the line between legitimate experience and fanatical excess?

The apostle Paul had to deal with outrageous charismatic manifestations in the Corinthian church. People were acting like raving lunatics-and turning the church in to a free-for-all of unbridled ecstatic behavior. Paul called for discipline and order, and he reminded early Christians that "the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets" (1 Cor. 14:32). In other words, Paul was saying that no one under the influence of the Holy Spirit should act out of control.

In many recent charismatic revivals, ministers have allowed people to behave like epileptics on stage-and they have attributed their attention-getting antics to the Holy Spirit. We may think it's all in fun (you know, we're just "acting crazy" for God) but we should be more concerned that such behavior feeds carnality and grieves the Spirit.

When exotic manifestations are encouraged, people can actually get a religious high from jerking, vibrating, screaming or acting intoxicated. (I have even been around people who writhed as if in pain, or made sexual noises-thinking this was a legitimate spiritual experience.) But emotional euphoria doesn't guarantee a heart change. The person who is bucking like an untamed bronco in a church service would benefit more from sitting still and reading the Bible for an hour. When we put bizarre behavior on the platform we imply that it is normative. Thus more strange fire is allowed to spread..

3. Beware of hype and exaggeration. Our hearts are crying out today for a genuine move of God. We want the real deal. We've read about the Great Awakenings of the past and we long to see our nation overcome by a wave of repentance. The church is in a backslidden state, and our nation has rebelled against God. We are desperate!

In our longing for a holy visitation, however, we must be careful not to call the first faint breeze of the Spirit a full-fledged revival. If we do that, we are setting people up for disappointment when they realize it may not be what we blew it up to be.

Some of the language used during the Lakeland Revival has created an almost sideshow atmosphere. People are invited to "Come and get some." Miracles are supposedly "popping like popcorn." Organizers tout it as the greatest revival in history.

Such brash statements cheapen what the Holy Spirit is doing-and they do a disservice to our brothers and sisters who are experiencing New Testament-style revival in countries such as Iran, China and India. We have a long way to go before we experience their level of revival. Let's stay humble and broken before the Lord.

I am rejoicing over all the reported healings at the Lakeland meetings. Miracles are awesome. Crowds are great. But miracles and crowds alone don't guarantee a revival. Multitudes followed Jesus during His ministry on earth, but many of the people who saw the dead raised or ate food that was supernaturally multiplied

later crucified the Son of God.

It was the few disciples who followed Jesus after Calvary who ushered in a true revival-one that was bathed in the fear of God, confirmed by signs and wonders, tempered by persecution and evidenced by thousands of conversions, new churches and the transformation of society. We should expect nothing less.

-J. Lee Grady is editor of Charisma.

ANDREW STROM: For the Editor of Charisma this is a very courageous thing to put out - and I certainly welcome it. But he says in the article that he has been concerned for several weeks - yet did not say anything until now. (Let's be honest - he put out one of the first articles promoting the revival and everything in it!) Meantime, in the last 3 weeks, this movement has exploded, and it is simply too late to pull it back now. The "anointing" has gone worldwide. I have been getting reports from all over the USA, Hong Kong, England, New Zealand, Hawaii. It is everywhere. Sorry, Lee, I know you are trying to be "balanced" and 'cautious'. Its just that we desperately could have done with these warnings 3 weeks ago. But I am sincere when I say that I do appreciate your words. You have been a lot braver than many others. -God bless you! -Andrew Strom.

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