

*Real Life Stories*  
*Benny Hinn Is My Uncle, but Prosperity Preaching Isn't For Me*

As part of the family empire, I lived a life of luxury. Then doubts began to surface.

COSTI HINN SEPTEMBER 20, 2017

Almost 15 years ago, on a shoreline outside of Athens, Greece, I stood confident in my relationship with the Lord and my ministry trajectory. I was traveling the world on a private Gulfstream jet doing “gospel” ministry and enjoying every luxury money could buy. After a comfortable flight and my favorite meal (lasagna) made by our personal chef, we prepared for a ministry trip by resting at The Grand Resort: Lagonissi. Boasting my very own ocean-view villa, complete with private pool and over 2,000 square feet of living space, I perched on the rocks above the water’s edge and rejoiced in the life I was living. After all, I was serving Jesus Christ and living the abundant life he promised.



Little did I know that this coastline was part of the Aegean Sea—the same body of water the apostle Paul sailed while spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. There was just one problem: We weren’t preaching the same gospel as Paul.

### **Lavish Lifestyle**

Growing up in the Hinn family empire was like belonging to some hybrid of the royal family and the mafia. Our lifestyle was lavish, our loyalty was enforced, and our version of the gospel was big business. Though Jesus Christ was still a part of our gospel, he was more of a magic genie than the King of Kings. Rubbing him the right way—by giving money and having enough faith—would unlock your spiritual inheritance. God’s goal was not his glory but our gain. His grace was not to set us free from sin but to make us rich. The abundant life he offered wasn’t eternal, it was now. We lived the prosperity gospel.

My father pastored a small church in Vancouver, British Columbia. During my teenage years, he would travel nearly twice a month with my uncle, Benny Hinn. Prosperity theology paid amazingly well. We lived in a 10,000-square-foot mansion guarded by a private gate, drove two Mercedes Benz vehicles, vacationed in exotic destinations, and shopped at the most expensive stores. On top of that, we bought a \$2 million ocean-view home in Dana Point, California, where another Benz joined the fleet. We were abundantly blessed.

Throughout those years we faced countless criticisms from both inside and outside the church. Dateline NBC, The Fifth Estate (a Canadian news program), and other shows did investigative work. Well-known ministry leaders took to the airwaves warning people about our teachings, and local pastors told their congregations to steer clear of pulpits filled by a “Hinn.” At the time, I believed we were being persecuted like Jesus and Paul, and that our critics were just jealous of our blessings.

Within the family, we didn’t tolerate criticism. One day I asked my father if we could go heal my friend from school who had lost her hair due to cancer. He replied that we should pray for her at home rather than going to heal her. I thought to myself, shouldn’t we be doing what the apostles did if we have the same gift? At that point, I didn’t question our ability to heal, but doubts began to stir about our motives. We only did healings in the crusades, where music created the atmosphere, money changed hands, and people approached us with the “right” amount of faith.

Other doubts would surface. What about unsuccessful healing attempts? I learned that it was the sick person’s fault for doubting God. Why would we speak in tongues without interpretation? “Don’t quench the Spirit,” I was told. “He can do what he wants.” Why did many of our prophecies contradict the Bible? “Don’t put God in a box.” Despite the questions, I trusted my family because we were so successful. Tens of thousands of people

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followed us, millions packed stadiums annually to hear my uncle. We healed the sick, performed miracles, rubbed elbows with celebrities, and got incredibly wealthy. God must be on our side!

Before going to college, I took a year off and joined Benny's ministry as a "catcher" (someone who catches the people who are "slain in the spirit") and personal assistant. This was a rite of passage in my family, as nearly every nephew worked for him at some point. It was a show of loyalty and gratitude. That year was a whirlwind tour of luxury: \$25,000-a-night royal suites in Dubai, seaside resorts in Greece, tours of the Swiss Alps, villas on Lake Como in Italy, basking on the golden coast of Australia, shopping sprees at Harrods in London, and numerous trips to Israel, Hawaii, and everywhere in between. The pay was great, we flew on our own private Gulfstream, and I got to buy custom suits. All I had to do was catch people and look spiritual!

### **A Life-Changing Verse**

After graduating college and returning home, I met my wife, Christyne. I had no idea that God would use her in bringing about my salvation. In fact, my family and I were nervous because she didn't speak in tongues. We set out to fix that problem by having her attend one of Benny's crusades, but nothing happened. Next, she attended a service at my home church in Vancouver, but that didn't work either. Finally, she received some coaching at a youth conference, but she couldn't manage more than a few mumbled syllables. I truly thought I could never marry her unless something changed.

Then one day she pointed to a verse I had never seen: 1 Corinthians 12:30 ("Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?"). I was shaken to the core. There it was plain as day—not everybody has to speak in tongues. Soon, the domino effect began. Other longstanding beliefs were failing the biblical test. No longer did I believe that God's purpose was to make me happy, healthy, and wealthy. Instead, I saw that he wanted me to live for him regardless of what I could get from him.

While struggling to strike out into ministry, I received a call from a pastor-friend who was planting a church in California, offering me a part-time youth pastor position. It seemed like a perfect place to learn and grow, so Christyne and I packed up and took a step of faith as newlyweds.

Soon after joining the staff, God put the final crack in my false belief system, and the truth came bursting forth like a wave of grace. One of my first preaching assignments was John 5:1–17—the healing at Bethesda. As I studied for the sermon, my pastor-friend gave me a trusted commentary. Then the Holy Spirit took over. The passage showed that Jesus healed one man out of a multitude, the man didn't know who Jesus was, and the man was healed instantly!

This left three treasured beliefs in tatters. Isn't it always God's will to heal? No, Jesus only healed one man out of a multitude. Doesn't God only heal people if they have enough faith? No, this crippled man didn't even know who Jesus was (let alone have faith in him). Doesn't healing require an anointed healer, special music, and an offering collection? No, Jesus healed instantly with a mere command. I wept bitterly over my participation in greedy ministry manipulation and my life of false teaching and beliefs, and I thanked God for his mercy and grace through Jesus Christ. My eyes were completely opened.

I am thankful that my wife was willing to question my insistence on speaking in tongues and that my pastor loved me enough to disciple me out of prosperity gospel confusion. I've seen how God uses evangelism and discipleship to transform lost souls into found saints. A Christian's greatest ability is availability. When God's people are willing to take a step of faith and speak the truth in love, lives are transformed and God is glorified. You never know who he might save through your faithfulness.

*Costi Hinn is executive pastor at Mission Bible Church in Orange County, California.*

. . . . Gleaned from *Christianity Today*