

EXCLUSIVE: Jim Bakker's Son Ricky Believes This Is the Generation That Will See Christ Return

The Holy Spirit is moving among this generation in miraculous ways. Charisma reached out to nine "new voices" who are advancing the kingdom of God around the world. Each story is featured in our Charisma January issue, and we've posted the transcripts below. This interview has been edited for grammar and clarity. For the full interview, be sure to download the podcast.

Ricky Bakker is the adopted son of Jim and Lori Bakker. He is a co-host on *The Jim Bakker Show*.

For those who might not have seen you on *The Jim Bakker Show* or on *Revelation in the News*, could you fill us in on who Ricky Bakker is?

Absolutely. Ricky Bakker is just a kid who was adopted by Pastor Jim and Lori Bakker. I was taken out of Phoenix when I was 4 years old. It was a very gang- filled, drug-filled environment, and I was brought into a home where Jesus could be the forefront. The reason I'm able to be on the [shows] and be seen via those venues is simply because God ordained something to happen, which was my adoption, so that's a little bit about Ricky Bakker, who he is.

You were among several children who were adopted, right?

Yeah, absolutely. So it wasn't just me. I was actually the last one to be brought in. There were initially nine kids; I'm the youngest, and I'm the only boy, so I always had a fun fight fighting for food growing up, because my sisters—we were

always in the same general vicinity of each other. So we initially went to Florida. We were in a little city right outside of Panama City for about a year, and then after that, we moved to Branson, Missouri, and that's where I grew up from the age of 5 and on. So Branson is really all I've known as a home.

I understand it's a beautiful place.

It is a beautiful place. It's the Ozarks. I lived in Dallas for two years, because I attended Christ for the Nation Bible Institute there. I enjoyed the city, but I'm definitely a country boy.

So you're the baby of the family with all those sisters around. Must be fun.

Yeah, it is a lot of fun. I enjoy it. They're all having babies. I have—I think it's up to 13 right now. 13 nieces and nephews, and I could not ask for any better joy because I've been going to their birthday parties, hanging out with on the weekends with them. That's a lot of fun. Christmas is a blast. I mean, there's like 35 people in our house. And we're all crammed in our living room. It's loud. It's fun. There's food. Everybody brings something, and that's just the spirit of having the family. I've noticed in America, one of the sad things is I've noticed is that the family is being deteriorated, so to be able to have just a place where unity. We're not all the same ethnic background. We don't all believe the exact same theology. We don't all line up on our political views exactly. But when it comes to being with family, we're family, and so that's what I love about it.

May I ask how old you are now?

I'm 21 years old.

So tell me what is your role at *The Jim Bakker Show* and also *Revelation in the News* and in your parents' organization as a

whole?

Absolutely. So *The Jim Bakker Show*, I'm a production assistant, and I do biblical research, which is a blast. It's an honor to be able to call that a job. As well as I work for Morningside Church, which is our blanket over *The Jim Bakker Show*. I'm the youth pastor there. That's super exciting. For *Revelation in the News*, I'm a host, and we do all of our own research. I'm a researcher as well there.

Would you describe yourself as a research geek?

I love research. I love being in the know. So if you would have asked me a couple of years ago, "Are you a researcher?" I would have said no. But I realized I just love being up-to-date. So I definitely call myself that now.

Well, many people are probably understanding what *The Jim Bakker Show* is, but what about *Revelation in the News*? Tell us about that show.

Yeah, so *Revelation in the News* is simply—we wanted to take something that was already happening, which is our current events, and bring it back to what the Bible says about it.

You know, "We're seeing a lot of diverse people. What does the Bible say about that?" We're seeing anything from rioting in the streets to what is the people in our political platform saying? We want to make sure it goes back and it lines up with God.

If it doesn't line up with what the Word of God says, we need to make sure that we don't support it, or we go out there and actively say, "Hey, we need to stand up for the things of God." So it's taking the current news and the Bible, specifically around the book of Revelation, and marrying them together saying "Hey, you know what, we're living in a time where we believe Jesus will return soon."

I did watch one of your videos where you talked about being the generation that gets to see Christ return. You believe that strongly, don't you?

Absolutely I do. Just seeing the times and how they line up. Like I said, if you asked me four or five years ago, my dad has been steadily preaching Jesus' return, but I had to find it out for myself. One thing my dad taught me that I absolutely fell in love with was that he said, "Don't trust anybody's word just because they said it. Just because they sounded good when they said it."

He said "Let's go back, be like the Bereans and actually research it for yourself. Look for yourself." I got to go to Christ for the Nations. I had some time reflecting where I was taught everything from a pre-Tribulation rapture to a mid-Tribulation rapture to a post-Tribulation rapture, and I had to spend my time with Jesus and find out what is my belief system? Where's my core? Where's my foundation? It all relatively lined up perfectly with what my dad believed. We do believe that Jesus is going to return soon; we are living in that final generation. But that's an honor. That's an absolute honor to be called the generation that gets to see the second coming of Christ.

What all did you study there in Dallas?

Well, I went to Christ for the Nations for two years. So I got the associate's degree, which I really enjoyed, in practical theology. But the entire first year is classes they pick for you. So it's going to be your general Old Testament, New Testament. But my second year, I really tried to put an emphasis on biblical counseling. So I took all the classes I could that focused on counseling, on spiritual warfare and spiritual disciplines. I knew those were the main things for me.

I knew if you're going to be any type of leader in this

generation, if you're going to be any type of voice or any type of influence, and you don't have spiritual structure, being that spiritual discipline, or being able to fight a spiritual battle like spiritual warfare, then essentially, you have nothing but a pretty face, and that's not going to win souls in the end times.

So let's step back a little bit and tell us how you became a believer in the first place.

Absolutely. So I was adopted young. And you know, both my parents are pastors. So I grew up knowing who Jesus was. That was a great thing. When I was a kid, I would go to kids camps about Jesus. I'd go to Bible camp. I'd go to this and that, and there were so many things that filled me up with who Jesus was, but around the age of 12 or 13 years old, I kind of started questioning, "Why do I believe what I believe?"

I believe every young person at some point questions. I took a step back, not necessarily leaving the faith, but taking a step back saying, "Why do I believe this? My parents believe this, but I need to have this revelation of my own." So I had a few years of searching, and I actually had the opportunity to go to North Carolina, to the first ministry that my dad had built, called Heritage USA. This was during a time I was really struggling with the Lord. I was trying to figure out, "Where am I supposed to go? Who am I supposed to be? I'm not hearing from you, God. I'm praying but I'm not hearing anything. I'm trying to fast but I'm not hearing anything. Like, I need you to say something."

So I was in a place of desperation. And as I was walking to my room one night, it was actually the night before we were supposed to leave, get on our big tour bus and come back to Missouri—I think we were going to get on the bus around 4 a.m.—around 1 a.m., I'm walking back to my room because I was still needing to pack, I'm still needing to do some things. There was a man in the in the hallway of the hotel, and he's

standing by an ice machine.

He said "Hey, can I pray for you?"

And in all reality, I didn't want to say yes, because my flesh is like, "I'm tired and I have stuff I have to do."

But out of respect, I was like, "Of course. I can always use some prayer."

So he started to pray for me. The only thing I can remember is him placing his hand on my forehead, and I was actually pretty much woken up and brought back into, I'd say, this physical world after an encounter with the Holy Spirit after four hours. If you would've asked me, I'd have told you I was there for five minutes, but I lay by that ice machine in that hotel lobby for four hours, just hit with the Holy Spirit.

And I had a few visions of kind of where I was supposed to go, what I supposed to be and some situations in my life that God was like, "Hey, I need you to fix these things so that you can advance to your next level."

That's when I was 15, and that's when I radically became a believer in Jesus. I was like "OK, this is the real deal."

Have you seen any of those things come to fulfillment that you saw in visions?

I've seen everything except two. It was everything from friendships that needed to be severed to new friendships that need to be blossomed, from relationships and family things that needed to be worked out even with my original birth family. So I've seen everything except two. And those two—they're on the horizon. They're coming up. I can feel them. But God's faithful. And so everything else just lined up absolutely perfect.

So how have you grown in your relationship with the Holy Spirit?

My growing in the Holy Spirit definitely began at that moment, because that's when—I'd heard about seeing visitations of angels, I'd heard about being, you know, when people say "slain in the Holy Spirit," I'd heard about all these things. But I'd actually never personally encountered these things. So that was my first experience. And that was definitely a huge first experience. And ever since then, I've wanted to know more about the person of the Holy Spirit.

Because everything I've been taught by that point, whether I went to Bible camps or anything, not necessary from my parents but just from other people, was that the Holy Spirit was this spirit that came and was there when you needed it. But you read the Bible, and you realize the Holy Spirit is just as much of the Trinity as the others. You need the Holy Spirit as the person, as the deity, as the guidance. Jesus said, when he ascended, "I'm going to send you a Comforter," or someone to be there for you, and so realizing that this person could be there for me all the time, that I could actually have a relationship that I could cultivate and grow and care for, having those things made me realize, I need to get closer to the Holy Spirit. And then getting close to the Holy Spirit included for me, just being in the Word of God.

The Bible says, we have a more sure word, which is this Word of God. So I realized that I would try to get close to the Holy Spirit by doing things, like when I go out for walks and I do this and I do that. But when I really got deep with the Holy Spirit is when I just immersed myself in the Word of God. And that's when the fruit starts growing.

You can have a steady tree. You can have your roots planted. You can have a steady foundation, yes, but you want fruit to grow on that tree, because that's what bears witness to people when they come to see you.

I realized whenever I got deep into the Word of God, whenever I started spending my time in the morning, I'd wake up early

and pray in tongues as long as my physical body would let me and then I'd continue to try and push on and push on because—you know, what a lot of people don't realize about that is it does take a physical toll on you. But you have to push past that, and there's kind of like a breakthrough moment. I realized when I hit those breakthrough moments, the fruit that's free would just absolutely start exploding. Whenever I'm wearing my armor of God, whenever I'm going out and I'm witnessing, I'm talking to people or ministering in any aspect, whether it's going down to the 7-Eleven to get some water or something to drink or whether it's actually standing in a pulpit preaching to people, that I'm protected from any type of spiritual attacks that could come against me. But I also have the honor of relaying the message that the Holy Spirit's there for someone else, because I have a personal experience.

Could you give us an example of how you've grown as a leader, as you seek to bring other people along in their walk with God and their experience with the Holy Spirit?

Of course, yeah. I'll take it back a few years. When I initially went to Christ for the Nations Bible college, I had just come out of being a youth pastor.

And I remember telling God, "All right, God, I'm ready for whatever you have for me, as long as you don't make me a youth pastor again."

I loved it. I had a good time, but I was like, "This is definitely a stepping stone for my next place, God. So we're good here, right?"

And so I went to school, and I got my education. I enjoyed my time there. And right as I'm coming back to Missouri to rejoin my dad's church to help serve him and his vision, I get a call that says "Hey, our youth pastor just got another job and this is open. Would you mind taking it?"

Before I could even answer in my mind, I said yes, and then he said "Alright, great, we'll call you with the details later" and hung up the phone.

Legitimately, a couple minutes later I was like, *What did I just do? Alright, God, you're gonna have to explain this one. You're going to have to talk me through it.* It was something I initially didn't have the burning passion to do, but the very first Wednesday that I got there and got to see the kids' faces—we have anywhere between 50 to 70 kids on an average Wednesday—seeing their faces, whether they were hurt, whether they were excited, full of joy or whether they looked like they've had a rough day, I realized this is where I want to be. This is definitely what I want to be doing because I have an opportunity to impact these kids.

I love preaching on Sundays whenever I get to preach to our main congregation, which their age range goes from anywhere between 30 to we have people that are 85, and I love that, but I realized that this next generation is a very, I don't say this lightly, but it's a very lost one. Not in the sense of they don't know where they are, but it's—they don't know what the absolute truth is. Because in our public school systems and our school systems, they're not taught absolute truth. They're taught theory. They're taught, well this is a possibility and this is a possibility. Come up with your own possibility. And if you have an absolute truth like the Word of God or that Jesus was a real person; He came down; He was born of a virgin; He died on the cross; He ascended into heaven; He sits at the right hand—if you have those absolutes, then you're kind of made fun of. You're made to be as a joke.

They'd rather you have series or these lofty explanations of why you think it is. But you can't really put a push pin in it. But I realize being a leader in the aspect of coming back to Blue Eye, leading the youth, I get to go into the schools on Wednesdays. If I have time, I'll go and eat lunch with the kids at the high school or the middle school. Being a leader

for me didn't start as me like wanting to go after and get a microphone. I realized if I'm going to lead, I'm going to have to spend a lot of one-on-one time with these kids. I have another phone that I use for the youth.

And I say, "Hey, if you need anything or you're in trouble, if you need a ride somewhere, just go ahead and give me a call. And I'll be there if I can do that."

I've had a few kids call me, and they're an hour or two away; they need a ride back home; they're in a sticky situation. In my fleshly body, I'm like, "Man, it's 1 in the morning. I don't want to do this, but I get my car, and I go do it."

I realize that conversation on the way back of, "What are you going through? How can I help? How can I be there for you?"

That changes their lives. And that, to me, that's leadership, because I get an opportunity to touch someone individually. Yeah, I can lead from the stage or from behind the camera. But leadership boils down to, if I can be there with you and show you something that I've learned, either the hard way or something that I've learned from the Bible, so you don't have to make the same mistakes, so you can use my shoulders as a stepping stone to your next place.

So is there a certain message you'd like to leave with *Charisma* readers?

Yeah, absolutely. The message is always, if you're listening to this, and you don't know Jesus, there's never been a better day to know Jesus, not in a "I go to church on Sundays and Wednesdays" type of way. But in an absolutely life-changing way. I'm constantly reminded of one of my favorite Bible stories, and it is Acts 9.

That's where Saul is on the way to Damascus, and the Bible says he was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples on his way to the high priest. And so he was a man

who was in a dark place, going to do a dark thing, where he thought he was doing a good thing, but he was in a bad place, but God touched him, and that one touch changed his entire life. Just a few chapters later, I mean, he's in the synagogues preaching.

He radically changed. That's exciting to see. Because, you know, he calls himself the "chief of sinners," and to see someone who, esteems himself of that to be so radically changed by Jesus, the Holy Spirit, by God and the full Trinity, just to be completely wrapped up in that absolutely powerful. To tell people to go to church and to know who Jesus is, that's one thing; but to tell them to have an encounter, to show them how to have an encounter, to teach them it's not just going to come through, I'm going to go through stuff A and B and C and D, and I'm going to follow this program. But it is finding that personalization between you and God, because my relationship is going to be different from yours, [whoever's] listening. It's going to be very different. But it all boils down to being in the Word of God, and having that deep, intimate relationship.

In Romans 10, he said, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved." If you're a Christian and you're listening, it's soul-winning time. I truly believe that Jesus is coming back soon, that we are the generation to see Jesus come back, and it's soul-winning time. In the end time, this is going to be the great harvest time. The Bible says the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. I've always wondered, with the majority of the religion in the entire world, being some type of belief in Jesus, whether it's a Catholic belief or a Baptist belief or however people believe in Jesus, but that the laborers would be few, and we hold the majority, but I truly believe it is because a lot of people claim Christianity, and I'm not one to judge their faith, but they claim Christianity and they say, I am a believer, but they never get out and actually do anything for

Christ.

I was guilty of that for the longest time for the first couple years of my relationship with Jesus. I realized I called myself a Christian, I went to church, I played my part, but I never did more than I had to. I would get intimate with Jesus on my own, but I never went out and actively pushed it as much as I should have been with other people in helping them experience it. So if you're listening right now, the message that I would have to share is this: Jesus is coming soon, and there's never been a better time to go out and soul-win. There's never been a better time to be an evangelist, to be a missionary, to go out and be a part of a fivefold ministry, serve someone.

You don't have to have a microphone. You don't have to be on a stage. You don't have to have some big position to be a leader. You can be a leader wherever you are. The Bible says that we're all different members of the body. But if we don't have a foot, we're not walking correctly. If we don't have an arm, we're not doing things to our full ability. We have to have each other. So I would say, go out, win souls, get ready for Jesus's return, but most importantly, have that intimate relationship. Be one-on-one with Him. Be in a place where you can go, and you can cry in His presence.

You can go and you can be intimate in his presence. You can go and you can say everything that's on your mind that day. Why you had a hard day. Why you had the best day of your life. Just being in a place where you can say, Jesus, I'm going to give you absolutely everything every single day.

EXCLUSIVE: How Chris Mikkelson Went From Drug-Dealing Biker to International Evangelist

The Holy Spirit is moving among this generation in miraculous ways. Charisma reached out to nine “new voices” who are advancing the kingdom of God around the world. Each story is featured in our Charisma January issue, and we’ve posted the transcripts below. This interview has been edited for grammar and clarity. For the full interview, be sure to download the podcast.

Chris Mikkelson is an international evangelist who preaches the gospel in some of the most unreached and dangerous nations on the planet near the Middle East and also at churches across the USA. His sermons are distinctly marked with the presence, power and authority of God, where many are saved, healed and delivered. His gospel crusades near the Middle East are attended by hundreds of thousands, where many in attendance hear the gospel for the first time and receive salvation through Christ alone. Often, incredible miracles of healing and deliverance confirm the gospel message when Chris preaches domestically and abroad.

Tell me about your background. What’s your testimony?

Yeah, so I got saved in 2006. My wife and I were partying and living for the world, and God radically came into our lives. To make a long story short, we just needed Jesus. We needed Jesus really bad. And we were partying; I was a drug dealer. I was living a very wild lifestyle. I knew all about Jesus growing up. I grew up in the church. I had a mom who was praying for me the whole time that I was lost. And then in

like, 2005, 2006, my wife's sister had gotten saved and had been inviting my wife to come to church with her.

And I was also part of a huge motorcycle group of guys, anywhere from five to 50 of us, and we would all ride these crotch rockets, the ones that go really fast, and we were just wild. We just didn't care about life. We were 160 miles per hour down the highway, over 100 miles per hour on one tire, just living for the moment, really. And then one of the guys I was riding with started talking to me about Jesus. And the same time that he started talking to me about Jesus, Amanda, my wife, was asking me if I would go to church with her, because her sister had kept asking her to go to church.

So long story short, we just decided, "Hey, why not go to church on a Sunday morning?" So we went to this huge church in Minneapolis. I'm from Minnesota originally, and we went to this big megachurch, and it was, you know, great message, great service. There was an altar call for salvation. Of course, I thought, *You know, I was born a Christian, I was sprinkled with water when I was a baby, so I must be saved, right?*

So I didn't respond to the altar call that was on Sunday morning. But the pastor said something. He said, "Make sure you come back on Wednesday night for our midweek service." So that's what I heard. And what the pastor actually said was, on Wednesday, we're having a special service for parents whose teenage children are dealing with drugs and alcohol and all these things we were currently living in.

All Amanda and I heard was "Come back on Wednesday night for the midweek service." So I don't know. Maybe God was plugging our ears. Maybe there was an angel there covering her ears. But all we heard was, "Come back on Wednesday." We hadn't been to church in years on our own, making our own decision to go. For whatever reason, we decided to go back. I know it was the Holy Spirit. We went back on Wednesday night. And to our

horror, we showed up to the wrong service. But God had a plan in all of it.

And so we get there, and we realize, *Here's the pastor, here's all these parents, and we're at the wrong service.* So we decided to not be rude and just sit way in the back, listen to the service, let the parents sit all the way up in the front of this huge megachurch, and we'll just sneak out when it's done. And while the pastor was talking about the sin issues we were currently dealing with—drugs and alcohol and all of these things that go along with that lifestyle—the Holy Spirit just started really touching both of our hearts.

I really felt just convicted because I knew that God had a better plan for me, and I currently wasn't living for the Lord. And I looked over, and Amanda was next to me, and she was crying. She couldn't hold back the tears. There was no altar call for salvation that night, because the service was not really designed that way. So we left. We snuck out, and we went out to the car. We made a decision that night that we were going to start following Jesus. And so that was really kind of the beginning.

And then there was kind of a season for a few months—and I like to share this because I think a lot of Christian can easily wind up in this in this lifestyle where we're on fire for God, we love the Lord, we made this commitment to follow Jesus, but we were still halfway in the world and halfway in the church. We were still drinking, but not as much because now we're Christians. We were still doing drugs, but we weren't getting as high as we used to, because we're Christians now, and we shouldn't do that. So there was kind of this lukewarm halfway lifestyle that we were living for a period of a few months.

And then there came a moment where I was sitting at the gas station in my car, about to go in and buy a pack of cigarettes. I was smoking a pack and a half every day. It was

just part of my lifestyle. There just came a moment where I was sitting in the car, and I just said, "God, I'm done. I'm done living for me. I've tried to live for me for so long. I'm just done. It's gotten me nowhere. Jesus, I know You. You have a plan for my life. And I'm currently still living for myself. I'm tired of living for me, because it's gotten me nowhere. I don't know what You have for me. But I'm willing to just give You everything and just surrender all." And so I just kind of prayed that prayer in the car. That was my real repentance prayer.

My real salvation prayer was just, "God, I'm done. And I don't want this anymore. And I want to follow You 100 percent." So I turned the car around and never went and got the cigarettes. I went back to our apartment.

I told Amanda, "Listen, I want to follow Jesus with everything, and I'm just done with this lifestyle."

She said, "Okay, I want to do this with you."

And from that moment forward, everything changed. No more drugs, no more alcohol. God just set us on a whole new course where I became passionate about reading the Word. I would just spend hours every day reading the Bible and praying and just seeking God. This was really the beginning of this new walk with the Lord. So that happened in back in 2005, 2006.

And how old were you then?

So I would have been like 23.

So then how did you go from that point to becoming an international evangelist?

Yeah, so that's another process. You know, we just love Jesus. And we wanted everyone to know about him. But we didn't know how to preach the gospel. I'd never preached before. I didn't see myself as a public speaker. You know, I tell people all

the time, I think I got like a C in public speaking in high school. And so I never saw myself as doing that. But God has a funny way of taking the things that are foolish in the world and confounding the wise with them. And so that was really my lifestyle, really my life story.

So we were just on fire for Jesus. I had a mentor in my life who said, "You really ought to consider going to Bible college," and I thought, *Bible school? I just got saved a year, year and a half ago; I don't know about all of this.*

And he said, "You should really consider and pray about it." He told us about a Bible school in Dallas, Texas, called Christ for the Nations Institute.

And so we began to pray about it. And it just didn't make sense in the world's system to go, but in God's system, it made perfect sense. We just felt like God said, "Go." We sold a bunch of our stuff. I sold my motorcycle to pay for school. And we just said, "God, let's go. Let's just run after Jesus for a few years, learn as much as we can about Him."

I never thought I would leave there and be in ministry. I just thought, *I just want to go learn about Jesus.* And so we ended up in Bible school in Dallas in 2009. And I signed up to be on the evangelism team. I wanted to learn how to share my faith. Because every time I had tried to share my faith, prior to this, it was like a disaster. I had this passion, but I didn't have the tools and didn't really know what to do. I signed up for the evangelism team, and we would go out to the streets a couple of times a week.

And my first experience on the streets, I was so nervous, I didn't want to talk to anyone. And I was paired up with somebody who was really experienced at this. So I walked around with him and saw that it's really simple to tell people about Jesus, and to just share your story and how Jesus changed your life. After that first night of evangelizing, I

was like, *This is so simple*. So then we went out [on a] second outing, and I was talking to a homeless man, and I was praying for him. And the Holy Spirit spoke to me so clearly about this man. He gave me a prophetic word about him. I began to share that word with this guy, and he just started weeping and weeping and weeping. And he ended up receiving Jesus as Lord and Savior, totally repenting and turning back to the Lord. After that, I was like, "God, this is all I want to do. I just want to tell people about Jesus."

Then a few months later, Reinhard Bonnke came to Dallas, Texas to do a big conference. And I had never heard of Reinhard, but some of my friends had told me about him. I couldn't even pronounce his name right at the time. They said, "You've got to come to this conference." So we went to the conference. And we're sitting there, and I'm watching Reinhard, and I'm watching these videos.

And there's Daniel Kolenda, who at that time had just become the successor of Reinhard's ministry. I'm watching Daniel preach, and a friend of mine leans over while Daniel is preaching, this friend who invited me to come with him, he leans over and says, "Chris, one day, you're going to work for Daniel Kolenda."

And I thought, *That's crazy. They're famous. I'm like this kid from a small town in Minnesota. I'm nobody.*

And he said, "No, I feel like it's the Lord."

So I just kind of tucked it away in my heart. And then after the conference, I was praying, and I said, *God, if You call me to do crusades, I'll go. I'll do whatever You want me to do. I'll go wherever You want me to go. Just show me if You're calling me to do crusades.*

Well 15 minutes after praying that prayer. I went on Facebook, and another friend of mine, who was also at the conference, messages me and says, "Chris, I had a dream about you last

night. You were in a distant land, preaching the gospel to a crowd as far as the eye could see.”

And I said, “Bro, you have no idea. I just prayed 15 minutes ago and said, ‘God, if You’re calling me to do crusades, just show me. Just show me. I’ll do whatever You want me to do.’”

And so that was really the beginning of that evangelistic call where I knew that I knew God was calling us to do that. And then for years, throughout the rest of my Bible school, every time someone would pray for me, they’d start prophesying about Reinhard Bonnke and crusades and Daniel Kolenda and all of these things, and so we knew that we knew that we knew, but we had no connection to them or anything like that.

And the Lord spoke to me in that season and said, “After you graduate Bible school, I’m going to connect you with an evangelist to learn from them before you start your ministry.” And so I had no connections with them. But then right before graduating Bible school, I connected with another evangelist. His name is Bernie Moore. He’s still a great friend of mine to this day. And Bernie told me, “Chris, you’ve got a great call in your life. And I just had a phone call this morning with a friend of mine who’s an evangelist, and he needs a personal assistant. And I just think you’d be great for the job. His name is Daniel Kolenda.”

And so it came full circle back to this prophetic word that I’m supposed to work with him, and he connects me with Daniel. I interview, and Daniel ends up hiring me to be his personal assistant. He knew at that time that I was called as an evangelist, because we talked about it. And he said, “Listen, I’m willing to train you how to be an evangelist while you work for me.” It was the most amazing opportunity to be able to grow and to learn and to be able to learn from the best in the world, you know. So it was awesome. I traveled with them for about three and a half years, working for them.

Then in March 2015, we felt like God was saying, "It's time to launch out." With their [Bonnke and Kolenda's ministry, Christ for All Nations'] blessing: "Take what you've learned, and launch out and begin to do your own crusades." And so in 2015, we did that. My wife and I started our own nonprofit organization. We started traveling to India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan. We started doing crusades. At the beginning, we would see anywhere from 5,000, 2,000 people there, 3,000, and then it just began to grow. And the crusades began to grow. And the impact began to grow. And then in 2017, a big door opened up for us to go to Pakistan and to do huge crusades in Pakistan. And so they've continuously been growing to where now this year, we have seen almost a half-million people come to Jesus Christ and make him their Lord and Savior in Pakistan in 2018.

You said a door opened up for you. Do you mind if I ask what that door was?

I was on a trip to Pakistan. We had a hard time getting visas to go there. It's kind of difficult to get visas. And so I called up a friend of mine who had been there before. And I was telling him like, Listen, we're having a hard time. Do you know anyone that can maybe help us in any way to get the visas approved? And he said, "Listen, I've got a friend there. His brother pastors the largest church in the country. They know everyone. Maybe he can help you." So he gave me this contact, and long story short, I ended up getting the visa. I went on that trip, and I met this guy, his name's Pastor Emron.

Emron became a really good friend of mine. We developed this relationship, and he and I just made this decision: "You know what? Let's work together to do crusades."

Emron's passion is to organize crusades; my passion is to do them, to preach them. And so we decided, "Let's do this. Let's work together." And this door opened up for us. As a result, we're just seeing an incredible wave of harvest across the

country. We've found that people are hungry for the gospel, because they've never even heard the gospel before.

The majority of the people there, they've heard about Jesus, maybe, but they've never really heard the gospel preached. And so what we're seeing is in our crusades, when I'm preaching the gospel, I'll make the altar call for salvation. And I'll tell them, "Listen, if you've already received Jesus as your Lord and Savior, if you're already a Christian, praise God. You're on your way to heaven. But if you've never received Jesus before"—and this is after I've already preached the gospel—I'll tell them, "If you've never received Jesus before, and you want to tonight, on the count of three, I'm going to ask you to stand if you want to receive Him for the first time." We make it very plain, very clear if you've never done that before, to stand.

When I count to three, we're seeing anywhere from 70 to 90 percent of the crowd standing up to their feet, making Jesus their Lord and Savior for the very first time. So it's really amazing what we're seeing there. We're going to continue to go back and go back and just continue to reap the harvest. God's really pouring His Spirit out there. We're seeing people get saved and healed, and credible miracles are happening, and mass baptisms of the Holy Spirit are happening at our crusades. And so it's really special.

That's really powerful. And we'll get into more of that. But you said that you've been to Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka. Am I missing any?

No, I've traveled to Africa with Daniel and Reinhard and with Bernie, but I've never done any of my own work in Africa. All of our work has been in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

You were talking about the miracles you've seen: healing, deliverance, mass baptism of the Holy Spirit. Do you mind talking a little more about that?

Yeah, absolutely. We're seeing God do incredible miracles. In those places, people have a tendency of making the evangelist or the person that's praying and performing, "the miracle;" they want to make that person almost into a god. And so I tell people, "Listen, I'm not the healer. Jesus is the healer. We just pray.

"I'm just an evangelist who preaches the gospel and prays for the sick, and Jesus does the saving, and He does the healing, and He does the baptism of the Holy Spirit."

But what I tell people is, "Listen, I believe that this gospel is so true that God is willing to confirm the message that I preach with miracles, signs and wonders, according to Mark 16."

We see that all the way through the book of Acts. When the disciples preach the gospel, God would confirm it with miracles. So I'll preach the gospel and make the altar call for salvation, and then begin to pray for the sick, and Jesus is doing incredible miracles.

We've seen people who were paralyzed for life. We had a guy that was paralyzed since he was 3 years old. He contracted polio when he was 3. It crippled him. He couldn't walk. He hadn't walked in 30 years. Jesus touched him, and he began walking for the very first time with me on stage at our gospel campaign. We've seen people who were blind; God's opened their eyes.

We've seen the deaf ears opened. We've seen a lot of tumors vanishing in our meetings. And we've seen a lot of deliverance, especially when we were in the mountains of Sri Lanka.

For whatever reason, there was just a spiritual stronghold there or whatever. And as soon as we would start praying, people would just start falling down on the ground manifesting demons, and Jesus would set them free. It's really amazing. If

I could share one story from Sri Lanka, I was preaching the gospel. You know, I believe Romans 1:16 says the gospel is the power of God unto salvation for them that believe.

That word "power" is the word *dunamis*; it's the same word that Jesus uses to tell the disciples, "You will receive that power on the day of Pentecost." It's a miraculous type of power. And so when we preach the gospel, there is literally a miraculous power that is available for people to be saved out of darkness and into light, for people to be healed of their bondages, disease, addictions, whatever.

I was preaching the gospel. We were up in the mountains of Sri Lanka in the middle of nowhere in a small village of like 2000 people. We had probably like eight or 900 people from that village at our at our meeting that night. And while I'm preaching, we have a speaker system on top of the tent that's blasting the message throughout the mountains. And these people are poor. So they don't have TV. They don't have the radio. And so no matter what, they're listening to the gospel, whether they like it or not.

There was a family there, and they heard me preaching each night and about how Jesus heals, how He delivers from evil spirits, how He can set you free, save you—all these things. Well, one of the nights, I'm preaching, and while I was preaching the gospel, there was a family sitting on the side of the mountain, and their 16- or 17-year-old daughter falls down in the living room floor and starts convulsing and slithering like a snake in their living room floor. And they realized that this was a demonic attack against their daughter. So they grabbed their daughter, and they brought her down to the side of the mountain. They brought her down to the meeting. They tried to put her in a chair on the back of the tent. And she was still convulsing and manifesting, and it wasn't happening. But my wife was sitting in the back, and she saw this commotion taking place where they were trying to get her in a seat.

My wife was back there taking pictures, and she said to some of the pastors we brought with us, she said, "Hey, take her outside to cast the demon out of her." So the pastors took her outside, and they began to pray and pray and pray. And I finished preaching the gospel. I prayed for the sick. And I began taking testimonies on stage of people who had been healed.

Well, these pastors brought this woman up onto stage, and she still had not been set free from this evil spirit. So as soon as she gets on stage, now in front of the entire crowd of people, she falls down on stage and continues this manifestation. And all the people are watching. Now all week, I've been telling them, "Jesus is the Savior. He's the one who can set you free from evil spirits." And now they're watching this woman have this attack on stage, and I'm standing there in front of her and it's like, "What are you going to do in this moment?"

It's a big test.

Yeah, it's like a big test. And I said, "Alright, Jesus, if I ever needed You to show up, it's right now." And so I just knelt down and just began to pray for her very gently, "In the name of Jesus, I command you to leave. Be set free."

It was almost immediate. Within 30 seconds of praying, she was totally set free. She sat up in her right mind; the entire crowd saw; and she asked Jesus to save her. She asked Jesus to fill her with the Holy Spirit. And she got completely set free that night in front of this entire crowd of people. This crowd of people now is seeing the gospel literally happen in front of their eyes.

It made the rest of the crusade really easy to make altar calls for salvation after everyone saw that! So Jesus is the healer. He's doing these miracles, and He's bringing honor and glory to His name.

A big focus of your ministry is the gospel—just pure gospel evangelism. Although you like the miracles, you like the deliverance and all that, your passion is getting people saved. Sometimes I feel like within the Spirit-filled community, while of course we value salvation, I think sometimes we put a little bit of an emphasis on the experiential aspects of faith, like, “Did I feel God or the Holy Spirit moving?” So can you talk a little bit about why your heart is for the pure gospel?

My heart is to see people get saved, because that’s the greatest miracle of all. Somebody coming from darkness to light, somebody coming from sin to salvation, someone coming from bondage to freedom. I think a lot of times, we love to see the miracles happen, because it’s something you can see happen. A tumor was there, and now it’s not. Somebody who could not walk, and now they can. We rejoice over that. But the Bible says that when one person comes to repentance, all of heaven rejoices.

And so I had a revelation one day. I thought, *I wonder what heaven sees to make them rejoice when that person makes that decision to repent and start following Jesus. Because when we see a miracle, we rejoice because we can see it. I wonder if heaven can see that person going from darkness to light, that person going from bondage to freedom in the Spirit. Maybe they see their name all of a sudden being written in the Lamb’s book of life when that happens in heaven. I don’t know.*

But it gets me excited to think about that all of heaven rejoices over just one person. Because someone can get healed and never even repent, never even give their life to Jesus, never even get saved, and go this entire life not thinking—like “Oh, God healed me, so I must be good with Him.” But then never really making that decision to follow Jesus. So for me, I love the miracles because they point to Jesus, but Jesus didn’t come to just perform miracles. He came to save the lost. So that really is the foundation of our ministry is

to see people come to Jesus and to see them get saved. I tell people all the time, "It's not our responsibility to save people. It's their response to God's ability."

But our responsibility is to give them an opportunity, and so our responsibility is to preach the gospel. It's to share Christ; it's to share salvation. He does the rest of the work.

You brought up earlier how it was valuable for you to essentially be mentored under Reinhard Bonnke and Daniel Kolenda before launching your own ministry. Can you talk a little bit about the value of mentoring, specifically for the next generation of Christians?

Yeah, it was super valuable for me. You know, I think God puts us all on different paths, but for us to be where we're at today, I don't think we would be where we're at if it weren't for Daniel and Reinhard really pouring into us, believing in us and giving us the opportunity to learn from them.

I think a lot of times, we look to mentorship to be, "I want someone to just teach me everything, and then I'm going to do it" But a lot of times, mentoring, at least for me, it was coming alongside of them and working with them, and being exposed and seeing the inner workings of the ministry. And that's why I think it's so important for young people who feel called into the ministry to get under and serve someone. Just serve their vision, serve their call for a season, for a few years. Make a commitment to them.

When I started working for Daniel, he said, "Listen, would you be willing to commit a certain period of time?"

I said, "Yeah, I'll commit at least three years. The next three years to just serve you and to serve your ministry, whatever capacity that is."

I think it's important that young evangelists, young pastors—whatever your calling is—to get under and serve

someone for a season just to learn the ropes. There's so much to learn that is the non-spiritual. I think a lot of times we have the spiritual down, right? Like, we pray for the sick, we can preach, we can do all of these things. But there's so much about ministry that is behind the scenes, administration, organization, promotion, all of these things that people don't really know about unless you actually serve somebody. And so for me, just being able to serve Daniel and Reinhard was an incredible blessing to be able to learn how a healthy ministry is supposed to look and operate.

I know that a lot of our audience for Charisma may be older Christians who have been in the Spirit-filled movement for decades, who are strong men and women of God in terms of their faith. So as someone who was mentored—and I'm sure you're now starting to shift toward looking to younger people whom you can mentor as well—what was really valuable for you when older believers were mentoring you? What advice would you give them for mentoring younger people?

That's a really good question. I guess I would just say to not just see them as a worker to help you, but how can I invest in this person in the long-term to really help them? Daniel would give me projects, and he would say, "Chris, I want you to do this project. I know you have no idea how to do it. But I want you to do it so that you can learn how to do this, so that you know how to do it for your own ministry." And that was so incredibly invaluable. I mean, he would give me a lot of projects like that, where I had to figure it out.

He would kind of help me along the way, but there was a process of learning how to do this. And in that process, I learned the right way to do it, the wrong way to do it. And it helped me so that when we launched our ministry, I knew already how to do that. I think that was probably one of the greatest things is just giving them— not just having someone come work for you, and to serve you in that way, but to really give them real solid tools and opportunities to grow and learn

how to be an evangelist or pastor, whatever the calling is.

And I'm sure there were times when you messed up on something he gave you. But he still kept believing in you and investing you and giving you responsibility.

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, especially at the beginning, because I was not administrative. I'd never done an administrative position before in my whole life. And so when Daniel hired me, it was really difficult for me. His assistant that he had, he had an interim assistant who was a female, and she was amazing—Lorraine, she was just like an administrative genius. So I felt like, "Man, I don't know how to do all of this."

I worked and worked and I thought, *The only way I'm going to be able to do this is if I work really, really hard at it.* And still, like, after three months, I was doing a terrible job. I felt like there was a moment where I might end up losing my job, just because I'm not qualified to do administration.

There literally came a moment where Daniel sat me down, and he was like, "Listen, I know you're trying really hard. I'm not sure. Maybe this isn't going to work out for you." That sort of thing.

He was like, "If you want to continue doing this, it's gonna be hard, and I'm going to be hard on you. Because the only way you're going to be able to do this is if you learn how to do it right. And I'm going to have to be hard on you and correct you a lot."

He said, "If you want to do that, we can do that. If you don't, I will help you transition seamlessly into your own ministry and all of that. I'll try to be make that process as seamless as possible. But if you want to continue being my assistant, it might get really difficult."

And I said, "You know, Daniel, I really feel like God has me here. Like, I'm supposed to serve you."

And I said, "I don't care how difficult it is. I'm willing to go through that process." And it wasn't long after that that there was literally a shift where I felt like things were so difficult and I was putting so much focus on "Man, I'm not good at this. I can't make it. I'm not smart enough. I'm not administrative enough," and all of these things, to where God showed me, "Chris, I've called you to this ministry. I've not called you here to fail. But I've called you here to grow and to learn."

So there was a shift in my mind where I said, "You know what, devil? I'm not going to listen to your lies anymore. I'm not going to listen to these things. I'm going to believe God has called me to this place. And He's not called me to fail. But He's called me to succeed."

From that moment forward, everything shifted. Everything changed. It was supernatural. I just began to grow and to be able to learn and remember all of these things. It grew to a place where Daniel was really, really happy to have me as his assistant, and I just thank God for the time that I had with him. But yeah, it was difficult at first.

As one of the next generation of Spirit-filled leaders who's rising up and taking your position, what are you seeing in your generation? What do you see as the future of the Spirit-filled movement?

Yeah, I believe that we're on the cusp of the greatest harvest this world has ever seen. And I believe God is raising up evangelists. For years, the evangelistic gift has kind of been lost in the church.

You know, I remember when I got saved, and I started doing evangelism in Bible school, I would go online to try to find evangelistic sermons— you know, people who were preaching the pure, simple gospel so I could learn how to preach it on the street corners— and I couldn't find it. I couldn't find people

at that time online. And so I felt like, “God, where are the evangelists? Where the people who are really going after soul winning?”

I think, a lot of evangelists, we have that title as “evangelist” and people just assume you’re an itinerant speaker, you have a book deal and you’re just traveling around preaching, but really the evangelistic gift is somebody who’s a soul winner, somebody who’s going after seeing souls saved.

That’s what we see Philip doing in the book of Acts. He was the evangelist. He was going around preaching the gospel; and I feel like God is raising up a whole new generation of Holy Ghost evangelists who are going to go and preach the gospel, who are going to say, “God, I’ll go to the uttermost parts of the world. I’ll go where no one else wants to go and preach the gospel” because Jesus is coming back for a bride. He’s coming back for a harvest, and it’s not going to be a small harvest. He’s coming back for a big harvest. And I believe God is just now really beginning to birth a new movement of Holy Spirit soul-winning evangelists across the world.

Connect with Chris Mikkelson Ministries on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

EXCLUSIVE: Evangelist Ben Fitzgerald Talks European Revival and How He

Prophetically Reclaimed a Nazi Monument

The Holy Spirit is moving among this generation in miraculous ways. Charisma reached out to nine “new voices” who are advancing the kingdom of God around the world. Each story is featured in our Charisma January issue, and we’ve posted the transcripts below. This interview has been edited for grammar and clarity. For the full interview, be sure to download the podcast.

Ben Fitzgerald serves today as the leader of Awakening Europe. But this prophetic evangelist, who reclaimed a Nazi monument as ground zero for European revival, was once a drug dealer encountering the supernatural in a nightclub. Fitzgerald shares about his testimony, the importance of mentoring and the way God is rekindling Holy Spirit fire in Europe in this exclusive interview.

So what’s your testimony?

I grew up in a Christian home. My father was a golf professional but heard from God that He wanted him to move to Africa to work for Reinhard Bonnke’s ministry. So he went over to Africa ... to help set up their ministry tent. That’s when Reinhard Bonnke had a tent, and basically called my mother after three weeks of being in Harare, Zimbabwe and he said, “The walls are moving in my bedroom.” She got people to pray for him, told people in Africa, [who] said “Hey you need to pray with the staff of Reinhard’s team.” But it got worse and worse. And so she said, “You need to come back home.”

To cut a very long story short, when I was 6 years of age, on my brother’s first birthday, around 10 months after he returned from Africa, he had his first what they call a “mental episode.” And he was diagnosed that day after he

smashed the front window of our house and went crazy, saying he was seeing snipers in the front yard trying to kill us. He was having all these demonic visions. He was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. So once he had that, he was completely immobilized. They put him on a thing called lithium. Back then, the drugs weren't very—they're much better today than they were then. And it would just knock him out.

So after that, I spent the next four years watching my dad struggle and battle in between prayer, people going to healing meetings, having deliverance, prayer, people coming to try and help him get free of this mental illness. And it got a little bit better. Then it got really bad, worse again. A little bit better, [then] worse again.

Then I remember the very last thing my father said to me. He sat me down at the kitchen table of our house and he said, "Ben, I love you." And he gave me a fishing reel, a hand-fishing reel like you give children, and he said, "Catch me a fish." And I went that night. I actually caught a fish when my mother took us away from our house for the first time in four and a half years, and I caught a fish supernaturally. I mean, it must have been supernatural, because I didn't know how to fish properly. I was 10 years of age. But he told me, "Ben, catch me a fish."

So the next day, we just expected to return home, and I caught a fish. I slept with the fish that night. I loved it so much. My mom was very angry at me, but I slept with it, came home the next morning, and I ran into the house saying, "Dad, I caught you a fish! I caught you a fish! Dad! Dad!" And no answer. So I get into the bedroom of our house, and I dropped the fish. I'd come to find my dad in the bed—he'd committed suicide.

I went over and touched his head. He was dead. And he took his life that one night we went away, the first night we ever went away in four and a half years. He'd committed suicide.

From there, I just walked away from God pretty quickly. My voice dropped. I started to get very angry. I left school at 14 years of age, full of rebellion. I became like a Luke 15 prodigal son in a hurry, you know? But I wasn't leaving because I wanted to spend my inheritance. I was leaving because I was angry and in a lot of pain. I used to hide drugs like Ecstasy and those kind of things at my faithful mother's house. Every time I would go to the house, she would say, "Jesus loves you, and I'm praying for you." And I'd say, "Don't ever talk to me about God." One time, I threatened her really bad, and I said to her, "Listen, don't ever speak to me about Jesus again." I actually kind of grabbed her. And she said, "Not only will I tell you about God, but God has promised me that you'll travel the world preaching the gospel. You'll be an evangelist. You'll speak to millions of people."

From there, I left the house. I didn't want anything to do with her. And I avoided her for several months after that. And then one night, when I was 20, this is when I got born again: in a nightclub at four o'clock in the morning. My girlfriend worked there, and I was dealing drugs in the club.

It was like this veil began to lift off me. I felt this deep sense of emptiness. I saw humanity. I saw the search they're having for significance. I saw people rubbing up against each other and putting things up their nose and drinking like crazy just to feel significant and I thought, *Something's wrong with this.*

So I left the nightclub and went to my house. I lit up a cigarette in my lounge room by myself. I turned off all the lights. I was afraid of physical light. And in that lounge room at four o'clock in the morning, I felt this strange, kind of very strong, very loving, and yet fearful presence. And it began to speak to me, and it was Jesus. And the first thing He said was, "Ben I love you." He said, "My son, I love you." And he kept saying that to me, over and over. And then God spoke to me for one hour, and asked me to receive Him. And he told

me, he said, "I'll send you around the world to preach the gospel of My mercy. I'll have mercy on thousands when you speak about what I've done for you." So that was the beginning of how I was saved and how I began to be transformed.

So then you go from that point of giving your life to Christ to becoming an evangelist and a minister. How did that transition happen?

All I knew to do was I started reading the Bible three or four hours a day. All I saw in the Bible is the disciples preaching. So I started on the street. That was 16 years ago. I just began to speak to people every day about Jesus. And so God really put me into the ministry in that sense. I just could not stop talking about God. And so from there, a speaker came to Australia where I'm from. I'm from Melbourne, Australia, and a speaker came named Bill Johnson. When he came over to Australia, I saw him and I recognized such a true conviction of God on His life and, to cut a very long story short, I ended up, seven years after I was saved, being at Bill Johnson's School of Ministry in Redding, California. I did the school there, and after two or three years, they invited me to become a staff member as a paid evangelist and pastor in the School of Ministry. So I was actually working as a pastor at Bethel Church. I entered the ministry at 30.

Are you still a pastor at Bethel?

I'm an ordained pastor. I register with them every year. I have my credentials through them. But I'm no longer at Bethel. I was sent out two and a half years ago to Germany to start the ministry Awakening Europe. Now people have come from all over the world and have joined us there in Germany.

So you're from Australia. You came to Bethel here in the United States. What was it that made you say, "Now I need to go to Europe with the gospel"?

Well, I used to have these weird visions that never made any sense to me at all. I would see these pictures sometimes as I

worshipped God in my bedroom. I'd see these visions of a black-and-white army, like the old black-and-white VHS tapes or like YouTube clips of the war. I'd see this stuff in my head. I used to rebuke it and said, "Get out of my thoughts" or whatever. I didn't understand it. But it didn't feel bad. I remember that.

While I was in Redding, California, they asked me to start leading mission trips, taking students to different places around the world. But for me, the place that they selected for me to go was actually Europe. And so I went to Austria for the first trip and to Croatia, and that was my first time in Europe. I began to fall in love with the place. I went two or three times.

But then in 2014, someone invited me to come to Germany, and a friend of mine was with me doing a conference there, and I invited him to come with me. His name's Todd White. So we went to a field where Hitler spoke in Nuremberg, Germany, where they have all those black-and-white videos that I used to see. So I said, "I want to go there. I've never been to one of those sites." Todd and I went there and prayed, and I had one of the strongest visions of my life on that field.

We walked out to the edge of the field where Hitler had some 150,000 youths there in the 1940s, and I had a spiritual vision, like a mind's eye vision, and I saw all these Europeans faces: people with a Ukrainian look, people who were Norwegian—you know, blond hair, blue eyes—people from Germany and Spain. I saw all these European people standing in that field, and they were saying one thing. They had their hands raised. They were saying, "God, would you take back Europe? Take back Europe."

I could see the spiritual vision in my spirit and I said, "Todd, I'm seeing that something's going to happen here." And he said, "Bro, I'm seeing the same thing." We had the same vision at the same time. I said, "We need to do something

here. We need to do something in Europe.”

I went back to the United States to Redding, and a man came at Bethel, two weeks later, at a conference called our prophetic Open Heavens Conference. He came off the stage, and he put his hand on my head, and he said, “The German-speaking world is calling you.” And when he said that, I knew this vision I had was from the Lord, and I was convinced that I was being called by God to go to Germany, to go to where Hitler spoke and, 70 years later, to do something for Jesus. But I had no idea of all that stuff. I didn’t know any of that prophetic significance at that point. I just knew God was calling me to Germany. To cut a long story short, around one year or a year and three months after that, with zero influence, zero favor with the churches—no one knew my name, no one knew Todd’s name, hardly any people knew us—around 27,000 people rocked up in Germany at the stadium that was once built for the Nazi regime. And where Hitler used to speak to the youth of Germany, 27,000 people came from all across Europe.

So since then, what has your ministry looked like? What does an average day of serving the people of Germany in Europe look like?

Our heart behind these things was not that they just would be an event for believers, but for thousands of Europeans—like that vision I saw, “God, would you take back Europe?” and that meant European people. So part of what we do from day to day is we train and equip people to be free and live a lifestyle free of the fear of man, the fear of human opinion. To not come underneath the culture that says, “It’s not normal to preach here, or you need to be more polite.” On a day-to-day basis, we’re interacting with people like that, and we have a team here in Europe that we’ve trained up to share the gospel every single day in Europe. And they do. They stop people all the time. We’re doing that day to day.

And then also the day-to-day operations are putting on our

next major event, our next Awakening Europe, where we bring denominations and churches from all across the nation together for one major event. We're doing two of them per year now, actually, but we go from city to city. So we went from Nuremberg, Germany, to Stockholm, Sweden, and all the nation of Sweden comes together—most denominations come. That's our day to day, is just breaking the fear of man, sharing the gospel and then working on these major events to see a big harvest in those events.

Can you talk about that upcoming event you just mentioned?

We went from Nuremberg, Germany, in 2015 to Stockholm, Sweden, 2016, to Prague, Czech Republic, 2017, and then we just finished, a few months ago, we did Riga, Latvia, for the 2018 one and next year, God is calling us to the city of Vienna, Austria, in June 2019. In these stadiums, sometimes the meetings are ranging anywhere between 10,000 people to 27,000 people. Next year should be about 30,000 for that one.

And so at these meetings, what are you seeing there? Is it mostly training and equipping, miracles and revival, or just worshipping together as a group? What has been the experience?

Well, there is a sound going out all across Europe. You guys may have even heard it in America. The sound is a declarative statement. You'll find it in the tongue and the mouth of almost every leader in Europe, speaking the same kind of language. They're declaring, "Europe shall be saved."

One thing that's happening in these meetings is ministers and different denominational leaders are laying down their egos and their logos for the sake of the gospel coming in their city. They're joining forces. So we do equip people. We do train people. But the unity aspect of it is what really inspires people to this common goal of seeing cities won to God in Europe. We told them this is a beginning point for them to start working and collaborating together. Since we've done

events in those kinds of cities, many different churches have continued doing constant outreaches on a weekly basis and really, like I said, stepping away from the fear of man and sharing the gospel in their own city. So although it's about the event, in one sense, it's also about what happens afterwards.

Another thing that happens in the event that's unique is we flood the city for three days. We call it "Flood Nuremburg," "Flood Stockholm"—we flood the city for three days before the event with hundreds of evangelists that go and give out around about 50,000 free tickets to each event to bring people to the stadium. And then in the actual event itself, which usually lasts for four days, we do two major outreaches. During each outreach, we send around 10,000 attendees of the event out into the streets to share the good news, the gospel. In Europe, that is unheard of when you go into a city, in a town, and there's 10,000 people speaking about Jesus at once. It's a complete culture shock. It's amazing because Jesus is being boldly proclaimed. What we find is that for 90 percent of those people who go out in the streets, it's often their first time, and they've never shared their faith before in a simple pressure-free way.

That's really changing the dynamic of the way the church in Europe is looking at their nations now. They're seeing it is a harvest field, instead of saying "We need to just go and become missionaries to Asia or Africa." Europeans are becoming missionaries to Europe.

The mission field in Europe is very interesting, because, compared to other places where you would send missionaries, Europe has this long history of being formerly Christian. Because of that, what I've heard is that a lot of people say, "Oh, I already know about Jesus, I don't need that." It's easier for them to brush it off. Has that been your experience evangelizing in Europe?

When I got there, people told us, "This will be difficult, because it's not like America. It's not like Australia." But in fact, what we find is a lot of people have only heard of a religious perception of Jesus. So when we're sharing the goodness of God, or when we're sharing His power to heal and His power to bring life and hope to people, the response has been a lot stronger. When we speak to people and say "Jesus loves you" in Europe, the No. 1 question we get back is not a statement like, "Aw, thanks. I know that" or "Bless God, bless you, too." It's not a cheap statement. The No. 1 thing I hear back is, "Why does He love me?" So there's a question even in the European people's hearts.

All the prayer is doing something. God is beginning to remove the veil from the people. And they ask, "Why does He love me?" So they're curious to know, "Why would God care about me?" That's an amazing thing. It shows that they don't believe in just some religious God anymore. They want a personal experience with Him. And we've seen many people saved because of that, because of the hunger that's stirring up in people.

Can you make sense of some conflicting reports out of Europe? Some people report, "Yes, Europeans are coming back to faith now and are rebounding in that direction." Others say it is still mostly on the downswing. What is your read on the situation?

Well, in 2016, 1.6 million people statistically left the church of Europe. That's proper statisticians, who studied across denominations. But a lot of the denominations where people left were probably the ones that are a little less inviting of the moving of the Holy Spirit, or a little bit more religious. We're not picking on them or anything. But we would say this: that in this huge exodus from religion, there's at the same time happening a big swing of new conversions and people who once followed God or believed in God returning to the Lord. We're seeing both happen at the same time. You're seeing people come back to God.

I would say right now, it's probably in the middle of a tension, where there's a huge resurgence of people willing to preach the gospel, willing to share their faith. That is very, very strong. I've only been saved 16 years, but I've never seen this kind of unity where leaders from the pulpit will lay down their agendas and tell the people, "It's time for us to begin to reap a harvest in our city." And many, many denominations are going after that same concept. So that's one thing. I'd say there's a resurgence of preaching the gospel, which means many new ones are coming and also old people who walked with God once are returning back to him. At the same time, many people are leaving the dead religion stuff. There's a big exodus from the churches that are not moving with God. I know that's a complex answer.

Any time you bring up the topic of religion in Europe, the other major factor is the rise of Islam in Europe. Have you experienced that? Has Europe's Muslim population been, in your experience, open to evangelism?

I have a friend who has seen probably about 400 people who were Islamic come to faith in the last few years. We believe that God has sent or allowed many people who have exited from different nations around the world to come into Germany and Sweden and different nations of Europe. It's an opportunity for us to preach and share the gospel. And of course, they're open because they've seen Islam create so much damage in their nation. But at the same time, of course, there's also a strategy to try and take Europe from other religions; they're trying to do that as well. I see both happening.

But the most important thing that I'm seeing—and I'd emphasize this—is I'm seeing European people focused on their own nation, like Germans wanting to win Germany, not just wanting to go to Africa. Or people from Switzerland wanting to preach in Switzerland. So with that happening, that will really begin to combat some of the enemy's strategies to bring other faiths and other different things. If they focus, and we take this

divine opportunity at this moment in time, then we'll see a huge harvest if we put our sword to this battle, you know?

What lessons are you seeing in the European church that you think the American church would do well to also hear?

I think a great lesson that the American church could take from what's happening is really the remarkable unity. It's not just unity in saying, "I believe what you're doing is good." This is a unity around a purpose. It's unity with a purpose. It's us getting together for the sake of seeing a huge move of God in our nations. I would encourage the different nations of the world to look at the example of what's happening.

The declaration's gone all over Europe: "Europe shall be saved." Christians pray every day at 5 p.m. Thousands of them are praying at 5 p.m. every single day declaring, "Europe shall be saved." And we started that only a few years ago. The combining of people's strengths is a huge gift, and there's swapping of people's pulpits.

You know, the funny thing about Awakening Europe is when people come to our events, we'll have sometimes 15 leaders who are known leaders like Peter Wenz, who's got the largest church in Germany; or Jean-Luc Trachsel, who's the leader of Europe Shall Be Saved. We'll have all these different leaders from all across Europe come, and they will come to the event not to speak and not to attend, but just to bring their spiritual strength. They're not coming because they need a microphone, and they're not coming because they're trying to seize an opportunity to speak. They're coming because they really believe that they can mother and father this harvest, and they can push it forward. If people see their faces standing together just in unity, not even preaching together but just being on that stage or near that stage unified and bringing their spiritual strengths, it will encourage the family of God in Europe to continue in this. So that's something I think they can learn from.

Another thing I'd say that they can learn is this: that culture doesn't define the gospel. A lot of people in Europe are very cultured. Those nations are so individually cultured, and you get Christians who are choosing heaven's culture above what's culturally normal. I think that's a big lesson because, sometimes we could easily say, "Well, everyone knows God down here in the south. In South Carolina, everyone's a Christian." Well, that's a cultural mindset that we need to actually not believe in. We need to believe that no, people are hurting, we need to bring the gospel. Or in LA: "People don't want to hear it in LA." Or New York: "People are busy, and they're fussy, they don't want to hear that. They don't want to be stopped." That's their cultural mindsets that we need to divorce and come away from so that we can adopt heaven's mindset that everyone's important and everybody needs Jesus. They're all made in the image of God.

With you being a young rising leader within the Spirit-filled movement, what are you seeing among the next generation?

My impression of the next generation is that they're going to adopt three things that will be such key pillars to us. And the three things that I see that they're going to adopt is they're going to adopt remarkable creativity of where they bring the gospel in the world and how. It's not just going to be the way it's always been. It's not just going to be handing out a tract on the street corner, although we still celebrate that. But I see remarkable creativity because our generation is just moving so quickly in creativity in general, so we're going to need to meet that kind of demand and reach people where they're at, in social media or in different ways as well.

The second thing I see is that the people in our upcoming generation are going to be more full of the eternal consequences of their choices. I really believe that God is releasing a revelation into every believer of eternity. In other words, it's not just going to work out for my unsaved

brother if I don't think about his eternity. I believe the Lord's waking His people up in this generation, and they're going to carry the revelation of eternity. So they'll be able to carry that revelation in their spirit of eternal life, that my life could end in weeks. Not a fear of it, but knowing, "I'm eternally sealed, and I need to see other people eternally sealed" or "This choice I make will have an impact on generations to come." I believe they're going to be more intentionally minded.

The third thing I'd say is we're moving to the model of living our life like Jesus—not just worshiping Him, but living like him. Those three things are what I sense the most.

Some of our readers of *Charisma* are people who came in during the Jesus Movement of the '60s and '70s.

Yeah, it's like that's coming back.

Really? In what way?

The Jesus Movement was all based around Jesus, and everybody wanting to adore him and be like him. That's what I mean. I think that's coming back. The Jesus People Movement was led by ordinary people. In our generation, you don't have to be a 20-year college degree Bible school graduate in order to lead a movement. You have to be willing. It's like God is looking for those who are willing to walk with His Son and honor His Son. So that's what I mean by us walking like Jesus as our model.

We have all these people who are older in the faith and more mature, who have seen a lot over the years. What can they do to really help pass the torch to the next generation? To give the next generation the tools they need to succeed?

Well, first of all, when we say generation that's coming up, sometimes people think, "One must be rising, therefore the other must be falling." I personally don't believe that. I believe that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—because He's

Spirit, He's eternal—can work equally as powerfully in a 70-year-old person as he can a 17-year-old. We need to make sure that this harvest that we're involved in and the spreading of the gospel is multigenerational, and we learn to honor our fathers and mothers that have gone before us.

But for the fathers and mothers, I think it's important that they teach us how we can build correctly on the foundations that they've laid. Sometimes you can just expect that your kids will kind of just grow up and learn from what they saw, but if you take time and invest in them and raise up other people and say, "Look, these are the mistakes we made" or "These are the points we didn't unify, and we were too strong in our secondary difference. Instead of keeping our main truths our unifying points, we started to disunify over our little secondary differences. You guys don't do that." You know?

I think a wonderful thing they could do is just continue in the harvest and teach the people by example what to do for the Lord—what is fruit-bearing—and what not to do. Because I want to learn from them. I have many fathers in my life, and my whole relationship with them seems like all I really do is ask them questions.

Before we go, do you have any last words of advice or things that you would want to say to the *Charisma* readers?

Yeah, I would just encourage them deeply to break the fear of man in their life. Jeremiah 17:5 says, "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strengths." I think we're in a time of such opinion that sometimes we're worried about what people are going to think of the way we live and what we do. I would encourage people to put the thoughts of God over their life and the thoughts of their destiny over their life, far above any thoughts of what a person can think of them or the opinions that could be formed about their life.

You can't change history from your armchair. You can't cheat. You have to get out there amongst it. And you've got to take the risk of being misunderstood.

So I just encourage people, take the risk of giving Jesus away. Put Him in front of people every day, because we're filled with Him for that reason: to shine. That would be my encouragement to people, just to shine bright. While the darkness seems dark, it's a perfect time for us to shine.

You know what they said to us in Europe? Right now, for the last four years, we've seen God pack these stadiums in Europe. And they said that it'd never happen. Most of the people, when we went to do this, told us this will fail. People won't come. Something really has changed in Europe. It's been on God's heart because people have written it off as a continent that's gone religious and it's increasing heavily in atheism in some cities as you probably know. It's become more humanistic in the last 30 years tremendously, unfortunately. So a lot of people wrote it off like "Europe's getting worse, Islam's invading, there are a lot of terror attacks." And in the midst of that, God is just doing something tremendous.

The enemy's proclaimed that Europe is dead and these nations are turning from God, but God is raising up a bold, fearless people that are above culture, that believe Jesus can do anything. That's what's happening right now. It is a grassroots move of God in Europe. Most of the people that are going to read this have some kind of European roots. The gospel came from Europe to the United States, to Canada, to Australia, even to places like Singapore. Most of the people that read this will probably have some family background that comes from Europe. I would just encourage them to turn their heart back. If they think of Europe, pray for that continent again, where the gospel came from, that the gospel would go back to Europe.

EXCLUSIVE: Evangelist Mattie Montgomery Talks Dutch Sheets, the Metal Mission Field and Prophetic Evangelism

The Holy Spirit is moving among this generation in miraculous ways. Charisma reached out to nine “new voices” who are advancing the kingdom of God around the world. Each story is featured in our Charisma January issue, and we’ve posted the transcripts below. This interview has been edited for grammar and clarity. For the full interview, be sure to download the podcast.

Mattie Montgomery is the founder of Awakening Evangelism and former vocalist for the metal band For Today.

How did the Lord take your testimony and turn it into this ministry?

So I’m still trying to figure all that out. I grew up in a Christian home, sort of. My father died of cancer when I was 8. And for the next decade, I struggled with anger, lust, self-destructive behavior that manifested themselves in a lot of different ways. At around 15 or 16, I stopped going to church, stopped being interested in the things of God. I had never seen anything real there. I’d seen a lot of hypocrisy. I’ve seen a lot of white, upper-middle class people coming together on Sunday mornings to pretend like everything’s OK with them.

But then, at 16 or maybe a little older, I started to realize there are other philosophies, religions, worldviews out there. I started to study Islam. I started to study Rastafarianism and Buddhism, Taoism, and then I went off to college and continued to study some philosophy and world religions.

The summer after my freshman year of college, I decided to stay on campus and work. I was still studying and I was reading a lot, and I [was] learning a lot. I was reading about Buddhism. I had finished reading about Islam. I had finished reading about Taoism and all of these philosophies. All these ideas had at least some simple ideas about the way we should live, the way we should treat each other, the way that we should care for our community, the way we should take care of ourselves.

There was one haunting thought that prevailed in the back of my mind throughout this entire exploration, this time of exploration that I was on: What about the times that I have failed to do that? In these books I was reading on Buddhism and even in the Tao Te Ching of Taoism, there are these beautiful ideas about purity and love and mercy, and humility, and patience, and I just could not shake the fact that I had not been those things in my life. I had not been patient. I had not been humble. I had not been merciful. I had not been kind. I had not been loving. I had been selfish and arrogant and destructive to myself and people around me.

I'm realizing that the moral standard that religious leaders or philosophers all around the world have set is essentially the same and yet all of us has fallen short of that. Every human being has fallen short of that, and if you try to abide by the standards of Allah, in the Quran, every person falls short. If you tried to abide by the standards of Buddha, every person falls short. If you try to abide by the Tao Te Ching, every person falls short.

The horror of this one thought which I could not shake, and

this one thought was "What am I going to do about my guilt?"

In the summer of before me sophomore year of college, I did something real crazy.

I said, "God, if you're real, I don't want to just read about You in books. I want to know who You are."

And almost immediately it was like my whole world got flooded with the sudden awareness of God's intense and overwhelming nearness to me. I sat there on the steps of the dorm of my college, shaking and weeping in the presence of God.

It felt like at the same time, the awareness of my own sin and the awareness of his acceptance of me, in spite of my sin, became just overwhelmingly available, accessible to me. All I could think about is that I don't deserve to be close to you. But I'm close to you. Honestly it just felt like I was being washed in the blood of Jesus.

The best way I could describe it is, it was like, as this moment continued on, I became suddenly very aware of the great host of heaven, the supernatural. I became very aware of the Spirit of God. I became very aware that Jesus was alive. And he's not just the hero of a book I read when I was a kid.

It felt like waking up in a room full of strangers. It was terrifying, very unnerving and disconcerting. But I was finally aware of what I had been surrounded with my entire life. I could finally see what I was looking for.

I think that's the moment that God conquered my heart. And I'd love to tell you that I went to church the next Sunday, and that it's been all sunshine and rainbows ever since. The truth is, the next day, I quit my job. I put all of my worldly possessions inside my car, and I gave the keys to my car to my best friend and I hitchhiked around the United States for a month.

I slept on park benches, took food out of dumpsters. I just went west. I slept on a park bench in San Francisco for a week, was down in Los Angeles for a week as well. I spent the rest of the summer just searching, trying to find this God that I had just encountered. And it was a process. I came home from that trip knowing that God is real, knowing that He's a protector and provider. I had found this God. But I was disconnected from church, disconnected from discipleship or leadership or mentorship in my life.

I came back to college, tried to live after that encounter the same way that I did before it. I think the thing that changed is that sin just didn't fit me anymore. It was like trying to put on a shirt that had shrunk in the wash. God had so transformed me that the things I used to be proud of now made me feel disgusted with myself.

The things that I used to love I now hated. And so I think that's the moment, like I said, that God conquered my heart, and I spent about the next year and a half just in school. Not in college. I mean, in school with God. Waking up early every morning, getting in the Bible.

Eventually, I got into a church back home with my mom, and I would go to church every time the doors were open: young adults' meetings, conferences, men's group meetings, small group meetings. You know, every church service, every Bible study I could get to I would just go grab people that have been walking with God for 40 years or more to tell you what you what they've seen him do.

And so I just go grab these people and say "Hey, tell me about the most amazing miracles, everything."

And I would just listen to their stories.

"Tell me how God has displayed his glory in your life."

I spent about the next year and a half just doing that.

Just listening, learning, trying to absorb how do I hear God's voice? How do I walk in a real relationship with Him?"

Then in September of 2007, what had been happening is that the closer I got to God, the more this thing of music started to kind of explode in my heart. I was never much of a musician. I played drums a bit growing up. But I went to college on a soccer scholarship. So I thought, *That's my ticket, right?* But the closer I got to God, the more he began to take soccer out of my heart and replace it with music.

I had played in the band in high school, but never anything serious. But in September 2007, I mentioned to a friend of mine, "Hey if you ever know any bands are looking for a vocalist, let me know. But I just want to preach Jesus. So they've got to be guys who love Him."

Couple weeks later, she called me and she said "Hey, this band, For Today, their vocalist just left. They're not signed. They haven't been touring. But they do love Jesus."

So I ended up linking up with these guys. And that's a whole story itself. And in September of 2007, leaving for a 30-day trial tour to see if our personalities meshed and if they liked how the shows went, and that 30 days turned into almost 10 years that we were in the band. I thought we'd put out one album and do a couple tours, get to meet some cool people.

We ended up playing thousands of shows on every populated content, preaching the gospel to millions of people, putting out seven albums, signing to three different record labels, just doing so much more than we ever could have possibly imagined. And so much more than I think we ever even could have possibly asked for. I've seen God move in incredible, incredible ways.

You boldly proclaim the gospel at your shows. How is that different from what a lot of musicians, even those who say they love Jesus, do at their own shows?

I think that we sometimes as artists, we tend to view our music like a product to sell instead of like an expression of who we are or an overflow of who we are. I think that's a mistake that a lot of young artists make. They go into the studio and they ask themselves, *What's going to sell albums, what's going to get people to go like them?*

And as a result, you end up releasing something that's inauthentic, and that's something every artist struggles with. It's something honestly every creative struggles with. When people write books, when people preach sermons, when people paint paintings, when people do graphic design, whatever you're creating, the temptation is always to look at what everyone else is doing and to emulate that.

But the difficult thing about being in the music industry is that the music industry is OK with you being positive and uplifting and inspiring and encouraging.

But when you draw a line in the sand and say, "Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father, but through Him," then suddenly it gets a little bit divisive, and you know, alienating and exclusive, and people don't like those words, because it might mean fewer album sales.

I think the reason our band stood out in that regard is because we said early on, "We are here to preach the gospel. And if it ruins our career, we're willing to do that. And if it makes it so no bands ever want to tour with us, we're willing to do that. It's a sacrifice we're willing to make to be able to preach the gospel. I'd rather preach the gospel to 10 people that blow an opportunity to preach the gospel to 10 million."

You know, I'm thankful for bands that have Christians in them that play their music for millions of people. And that's probably a good thing. But I think if God's given me a talent, then the best thing I can do with that talent is to give it

back to him. So that's a decision that we made early on in our ministry, that we would pull no punches with the gospel and people could take it or leave it.

But it didn't hurt our career. I remember early on in our career, we actually had a Christian record label turn us down because they said we were too preachy, and there's no way they could market a band like ours. I don't want to say their name because they're still around. They're great people, bless them. But that was just a funny part of our our journey.

The hardcore scene is such an untapped outreach field. What kind of miracles did you see as you began to proclaim Jesus?

Oh, man, the list is long. I wrote a whole book about them called "Lovely Things in Ugly Places," right at the end of the band. I wanted to sit down and answer some questions because we've seen some incredible things.

I think, for me, the most, the most beautiful miracle—I mean, we saw cancer leave people's bodies, we saw blind eyes open, deaf ears healed. We saw God do impossible, amazing miracles—But to me, I mean, the most beautiful and incredible miracle is salvation.

And to see to see people come into a concert, planning to kill themselves after the show—I mean, in fact, there's one girl who's become a friend over the years, who's this amazing girl who's actually a missionary in Africa right now, her name is Kelly, and Kelly lived in New Hampshire. We played a concert, and Kelly was planning to go to this concert, have one last concert and go home and take her own life.

She was outside in her car toward the end of the night. And our guitar player walks out there; he sees this girl sitting in her car alone crying, and he goes up and he speaks to her, starts to encourage her, and he leads her to Christ. She finds hope in Christ, and she cancels her plans of suicide and becomes this amazing, radical Jesus-loving girl, and now she's

a full-time missionary in Africa. I'm seeing miracles like that. Just the transformation that can happen when Jesus becomes the king of someone's life.

I think that has always been my favorite thing: seeing people who could go from being suicidal, drug addicts, people that were maybe even satanists or hardcore atheists, coming into a room where the presence of God is evident and feeling something different.

And maybe they've heard the idea. Daniel Kolenda has said for a long time that when we preach the gospel, we need to present people with an experience that needs to be explained, not an explanation that needs to be experienced. So that was our hope, and our approach is that people would come into the venue and when we started playing, they would feel something different. They would be able to sense something different. And then when I preached the gospel, it would be the explanation of what it is different about our music.

Every day, we would have satanists and atheists and people who hated everything we stood for standing there in the crowd singing lyrics to our songs that are overtly Christian lyrics, with their hands raised, rocking out with us. And then I stop to preach the gospel, and the same person that was just singing every lyric to my song is flipping me off with two middle fingers, and maybe the person right next to him is sitting there with tears running down their cheeks as their hands are raised in surrender, and they finally give their lives to Jesus. Just having the opportunity for people to be able to experience God in a way that maybe they never thought was even impossible. I think that's the greatest miracle of all.

How did your time with the band and ministering in the gospel prepare you for your ministry today, Awakening Evangelism?

I don't know if you are familiar with Dutch Sheets.

I am very familiar with Dutch Sheets. And I can tell you our audience is as well.

Oh, great. He's incredible. I love Dutch. A long time ago, gosh, seven, eight years ago, my wife and I got an apartment because God told us to. About a month later, Dutch and his family moved into a house 200 feet away from the apartment that we moved into.

I would walk every morning to go pray. I would walk in front of this vacant house. Then Dutch Sheets moved into that house. And so every day, I'd still go walk and I'd just pray for Dutch and his family when I walked in front of their house, which is a little bit creepy, but to be fair, they moved into my prayer lane. I didn't just start walking by their house just to pray for them.

Do you know who he was when he moved in there?

I did, yeah. So we got connected with them. They became family. I mean, he and his wife were the very first people to ever babysit our oldest son. So they are family to us. We love them.

And years ago, Dutch he came to a couple of our shows, which is funny to imagine, Dutch Sheets at a metal concert. But he came to some of our shows and would just pray and intercede with us and just generally be awesome. I could never get him to stage-dive. But he did come to the show.

Once after a show, he said, "Man, I'd hate to have your calling."

And I said, "Dutch, I'd hate to have yours." And we both laughed together and said, "Keep doing it." "So we celebrate each other. But the truth is, I think Dutch saw what a lot of people in the church couldn't see or wouldn't see about the assignment that we had there. And that is that it is a hard place to preach the gospel.

You don't have people running up to Todd White after he preaches at a conference, girls running up asking them to sign their bra. But that was the stuff we would deal with. You don't have people offering cocaine and alcohol in the green room at the Passion Conference in Atlanta. That's not a normal thing for ministers to deal with. But it was a nightly occurrence for us.

Honestly though, I think the biggest struggle is that rock stars get worshipped. Every night, you're in a room full of people who think you are the most amazing thing happening. And every night, you have to perpetually remind yourself first, and then everyone else, that Jesus is the most amazing thing to happen. And so it was a hard, sort of dry, sometimes lonely way to do ministry.

I mean, we'd be on the road for seven or eight weeks at a time on tours. When I first started, we were on tour for over 300 days a year. So you don't have fellowship, you don't have accountability. You're just sort of out there on your own. Especially when we first started, we couldn't get the church to pay any attention to us. If Christians ever noticed what we were doing, it was because they thought we were possessed by demons.

I know people like that.

Oh, for sure. Yeah. Now we have these amazing charities. And we've been blessed. But when we first started, we didn't have any support from churches. There were no pastors praying for us or calling us to check in on us. So we were just alone. It taught us early on in my ministry that if you want to be an evangelist, you've got to learn to eat and walk at the same time. So I learned real early to feed myself. I had to learn real early to motivate myself and if I didn't have a pastor firing me up for preaching the gospel, then I had to find a way to get myself fired up.

There's a popular story where David encourages himself in the Lord, and then he rallies his troops to go and get—there's a story where a nation invaded and took all of their wives and their children, and everybody's thinking about killing David, and the Bible says, "David encouraged himself in the Lord." And then he rallies these guys who were all thinking about killing him, and he says, "Let's go get them back," and they go get back their families.

So it was something we had to be really good at, encouraging ourselves in the Lord.

Now that I'm ministering to the church primarily, I think God has given me a unique perspective, in that people tend to psych themselves out when it comes to evangelism or outreach.

They think "I can't do it in my workplace. That's not socially acceptable."

And I would say, "Yeah, but I had a workplace where it was not socially acceptable for 10 years, I had these issues, and I did it every day."

Music was my job. I wasn't a gospel singer, where I had to pretend. Everybody would have liked it more if I had shut up about Jesus. But we stayed determined in our workplace.

I think in the church people say, "Well, I'm not very articulate with the gospel."

And I would say, "Well, I practiced. I was really terrible at it at first, but God had grace for me, and you get better with practice. Anything you really care about, you'll work at. And I think if we're going to work at anything, it should be the articulation of the gospel."

I think now as I'm ministering to the church, God has given me some tools from my years of experience in preaching the gospel in harsh conditions that can maybe help equip and inspire

believers just to carry the gospel with greater confidence and greater urgency, with less focus on their own weaknesses, and more focus on the sufficiency or the ability of Jesus.

The last time we talked, about a year and a half ago, you gave a prophetic word that the evangelism seat is rising. Do you still see that happening?

I absolutely do. In fact, I see it being fulfilled. I'm sure you've heard about that Todd White has just planted his training center at Dallas. My wife and I, within the next year and a half, are going to be—it's not a training center, we're probably just going to call it a church. We're going to plant a local community, to just invest in local community, to begin to just multiply what God has given us, and to be able to elevate people into their calling as well.

And I think that what's happening is that God is taking evangelists, and he's giving them a burning heart for the body of Christ. And instead of the evangelist being the one who just leaves and goes and preaches the gospel everywhere else, and only spends a weekend at a time at a church, he's calling evangelists to help be pioneers and builders to help create a place that people can be launched from into the earth.

What are you seeing happening in the charismatic movement as a whole? What are you seeing in the next generation?

Well, I see two things. And really, those two things are family and worship. And here's why. Honestly, it all really stems from what we were just talking about. I guess I'll say it like this. I'll back up a few steps.

The reason that that God is reestablishing the seat of these Ephesians 4 evangelists—that is an evangelist who equips the saints for the work of the ministry—is because he's intending to pour out on an entire generation of believers a burden for souls. So it's not just going to be your Billy Graham or your Reinhard Bonnke who care about souls. It's going to be Jim

from the grocery store. It's going to be your barista at Starbucks. It's going to be your stay-at-home moms and your factory workers and your high school teachers who are going to be burdened for souls in the same way that Billy Graham was, in the same way that these great revivalists that we study in history were.

But in our generation, in an unprecedented way, God is putting the burden that He put on dozens in generations past; He's putting that burden on millions. So he's calling people like Todd White, people like me, people like Ben Fitzgerald, people like Cliff Overstreet, to do more than just get people together in stadiums.

He's calling these men to get people equipped and inspired and awakened to the urgency of the hour in which we live. Now that, I think, is setting the stage for something incredible. If you've heard about what Lou Engle is doing down in Orlando called The Send.

We are very excited about The Send.

I'm very excited about The Send! And the interesting thing to me as an evangelist is that there has been this thought—I said Lou Engle's name, and now I'm standing up rocking back and forth in the backyard of my office. I just caught a bit of importation from Lou Engle just now.

The anointing is fresh for everyone here.

That's right. It's interesting for me, because this seems backwards. I would think, *Sixty-thousand people in a stadium in Orlando, they're going to go to the ends of the earth, and I'm sure at some point, all those 60,000 people are going to raise their shoes up in the air and say, "God, I'm here, send me," right?*

And yet, in the back of my mind, I can't help but wonder where are they going to be sent from? Who's going to send them? How

are they going to be covered? Who's gonna be praying for them when they go? How are they going to be funded? You know, these are the questions that are sort of in the back of my mind. And here's why.

If there's one thing I've learned about the kingdom, it's that you never go, you get sent. When I go to a place to minister, I'll go find my spiritual father. He'll pray with me about the event that I'm going to, and then he'll lay his hands on me, and he'll pray over me for my time of ministry there.

He'll say "I send you with my full blessing. You're not in this thing alone. We're in this together."

What I'm seeing that needs to happen in our time is that we have to be better at family. If we try to send people to go preach a gospel that invites people to start a new life for Jesus but does not create a space for them to be able to operate in family, then we're preaching only half the gospel.

Let me explain it like this. Right now, statistically speaking, the fastest-growing religion in the world is the Muslim religion, which is crazy, because as long as I have lived and as many places I've been, I've never met a Muslim evangelist. I have never met somebody that came up to me on the street and said "Hey, Allah told me to come and talk to you about this."

But they have a lot of kids.

Exactly. I've never met anybody who had a tract that says "Hey, consider Islam." But all they do is have kids and raise their kids in Islam. And we in the American church, tragically, we will let our kids go to hell for the sake of doing another outreach event. We'll skip our kids' soccer games, and we'll make our entire family suffer because we've got a call on our life. We're trying to get to the next conference. We're trying to build the next thing, right? Trying to go do another prophetic ministry event, and our

family is falling apart, because we are “sent.”

So I think that what God is wanting to do, to fortify this evangelistic movement, because the evangelistic movement is happening one way or another. It could be the most glorious moment ever in church history, and it could also be the most disastrous moment ever in church history.

Think about this. We have been praying for revival in America for a long time. And when we say revival, we mean like lots of people coming into the church. Now we had revival on Sept. 16, 2001. That’s the first Sunday after 9/11 happened. We had millions of people come into the church that week, and by the next week, they were gone, because they came in to see if we had an answer for the brokenness of the world that we live in. And we didn’t. And so they all left.

What’s going to happen if this evangelistic moment that we’re in comes to our generation, and millions of people are sent into the nations of the earth, and the gospel is preached with more urgency and passion and power than ever before?—and that is going to happen. It’s already begun. But if that happens in our generation, but we don’t do family well, people are going to come into our church, and then they’re going to go out of our church just as quickly as they came in. They’re going to find that what we talked about is all talk. It’s the same thing that I found when I was a 16-year-old kid, and my struggling, depressed, suicidal mom couldn’t find anybody to help her inside our church. So she turned to alcohol.

And I thought, “You guys talk about hope. You talk about freedom. You talk about power. But I don’t see it.”

There has to be a revival of family in our church; otherwise, we will undermine our own evangelistic effort. Similarly, let’s take it even a step further when we talk about family. What if I told you that I was going to start a ministry today that would lead to 20 to 25 million people coming to Christ in

the next 15 years? That'd be pretty cool, right? That would be a successful ministry. Check this out.

We are in a moment politically in the United States of America, where there's a very real possibility that within the next year or so, that Roe v. Wade could overturn and that abortion could become illegal. And that sounds great, and that sounds tragically to a lot of Christians like the end of the fight. But the truth is, that could be the worst thing that ever happened to our country.

Why's That?

Imagine if abortion suddenly ceased. Imagine what our country will look like in 15 years with an entire generation of kids who were born to parents that didn't want them or couldn't afford them. You'd be talking about poverty and sex and violence and abuse and perversion, and addiction, absolutely decimating our country. There is an opportunity, I think, coming to the church to be the answer for a problem we created.

There's going to be millions of children every year being born to parents that would have aborted them if they could. If that comes, there has to be a revival in adoption. There has to be a church-lead movement for adoption. And if we do that, for 15 years after Roe v. Wade gets overturned, we will have brought in 20 to 25 million people into the kingdom without doing a single conference, without holding a single service, without spending a single dollar in marketing or advertising, without building a website, without handing out flyers or putting up a billboard. Just doing family. Twenty million more people in the kingdom.

Do you have anything you'd like to say to our readers?

I am an evangelist at heart. I love seeing souls saved. I love seeing people come to the saving knowledge of God through Christ. And yet for the last year God has had me stuck on this

message of worship. And he's had me saying this all over the world. Evangelism is what happens when worship breaks out of the secret place. And what that means is this: When I go into worship, and I say, God, you're beautiful, and you're faithful, and you love me, even when I don't deserve love—that's worship, right? I'm developing language to describe God by talking to God about what God is like. That's essentially what worship is. And then when I go out into the street, I say, God is beautiful, and He's faithful. And he loved me, even though I don't deserve this love. I'm using the same language, just pointing it in a different direction.

We, I think, so often think that evangelism is based on strategically explaining our faith, and in such a way that it's philosophically sound and unable to be argued with, right? We have to be smarter than the person we're talking to. We have to know history better than they do. And we have to be able to defend the validity of the Bible and all of these sorts of things.

The truth is that I believe God is raising up worshippers. And he's unleashing worshipers out of the place of just listening to Christian music. And he's unleashing them in the grocery stores and coffee shops and workplaces and local parks. And he's letting these people not just confine their worship to the lyrics during a song but allow worship to come out of them.

When somebody at the grocery store says, "Hey, how are you today?", what an incredible opportunity to tell them how good you are, and why you are that good. Man, I love evangelism. I love seeing the body of Christ empowered to carry the gospel into their lives. But the truth is, if we do not become worshippers our evangelism will always be confined to the intellectual instead of the personal.

But when we can get into the place where we stand in awe of the beauty and majesty of God, and we carry that sense of awe

with us into our everyday lives, we will see and take any opportunity we can get to lift Him up, and that is what kingdom evangelism looks like. So honestly, I think that the two things God is wanting to release right now, kind of the two legs that I think our generation's evangelistic movement is going to stand on, are the legs of family and worship. And so I want to see an unprecedented evangelistic movement. But I think my contribution to that is going to be to disciple people who do family right and who worship like crazy. {eoa}

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EXCLUSIVE: Grammy Nominee Tauren Wells Talks Power of Prayer, Baptism in the Spirit, Israel Houghton

The Holy Spirit is moving among this generation in miraculous ways. Charisma reached out to nine "new voices" who are advancing the kingdom of God around the world. Each story is featured in our Charisma January issue, and we've posted the transcripts below. This interview has been edited for grammar and clarity. For the full interview, be sure to download the podcast.

Tauren Wells is a Dove award-winning and Grammy-nominated Spirit-filled artist. His songs "Known" and "When We Pray"

have dominated Christian radio in the last year.

At the time of our interview, you've had a pretty special month of October. Can you tell us a little bit about your Dove Awards?

So I apparently won four Dove Awards. I got one for Pop Contemporary Christian Album, Pop Contemporary Christian Artist, Hip Hop Recorded Song of the Year, and New Artist of the Year. So it's very exciting, [and] really, really cool to be celebrated among all my peers. And it was a lot of fun.

Can you tell me a little bit about your testimony and how you first came to know the Lord?

Yeah, I started going to church when I was 10 years old. My dad kind of made the decision for our family that we were going to start going, which was a fantastic decision. We started going, and I went to a church camp one summer, got baptized in the Holy Spirit. I got baptized when we got back home. That was really it for me. I found a place I really belonged at the church, and I had a lot of opportunity to grow and discover who I really was in Christ. And that is what has kind of led me in a long path to where I am now.

You got baptized in the Spirit at 10 years old?

Yeah. That was how we did it. I grew up Pentecostal, so we just went down to the altar at church camp and prayed. It was amazing. That's like a normal thing that would happen all throughout my life.

I get that. I went to church camp beginning when I was 8, because I was also raised in a charismatic church. I had never seen it before, though. Like, "What is happening and why is everyone around me doing this?"

Yeah. But you're also interested as well. I think that's part of the wonder of it.

Did you have any experience that you remember during that time? Did the Lord speak to your heart or give you any special

gifts?

I don't think so at the moment. I know that that same year was the first year I got a solo at camp. So those experiences happened simultaneously.

How did you really start your music career and kind of get involved with the Christian music circuit?

Well, I started singing in church and stuff, and then when I was 17, I started leading worship. My uncle, who was also my youth pastor, was like, "OK, if you're going to lead worship, you need to know how to play an instrument." So I started playing piano and started playing guitar. That's how I got started leading worship and really grew during that time as well.

In 2011, Royal Taylor put out their first CD. Tell me a little bit about your time with the band.

Well, that was one of the greatest times of my life. We started our band in college and wanted to continue touring. We toured in a choir in a small vocal group. And we didn't really have any context for real touring. So like with venues and promoters—we barely knew that stuff existed. What we did know was that we could go to different churches and be able to sleep on their couches, playing their Sunday-morning worship services, so that's how we started. And then we ended up getting signed and put out a couple albums.

Recently, you've been going solo. You've put out some incredible singles. What has that journey been like?

It's been amazing. I really think it was the right time and the right move for me and my family. I'm married. I've got three little boys. I wanted to be able to have more say over my schedule and how I spent my time. So being a solo artist kind of liberated me, in that sense, to create my own world. So I'm loving it. The songs are connecting with so many people, and it's been amazing to be a part of.

I personally like your song "When We Pray." Can you tell me a

little bit about the inspiration behind that song?

You know, we are looking in this day and age for so many different ways to impact the world and culture and our country and some of the things happening. We want to change the world through social media with 280 characters or with a Facebook status. But real change happens when the church prays. So I wanted to write an uplifting anthem that would encourage people to access our greatest strength and power. And that is the strength and power of God, activated through prayer.

Tell me a little bit about your songwriting process, how you work with the Holy Spirit, and just listen to Him and let Him guide you.

The whole process is just me kind of excavating, trying to dig deep and figure out what messages God is speaking to me, and how am I learning and how am I growing, and then I place that in the context of a song and see if it happens to connect with other people. And it has been. I think that's the power of writing honestly, and being honest in your creativity, because ultimately, that creativity isn't a distraction from God. It's an expression of Him. And God uses that to connect people to His glory.

Besides music, what else are you focused on right now?

Family is my biggest focus. Like I said, I've got my beautiful wife Lorna and three little boys that are 5 and 2 [years old] and 10 months old. So that's really the focus and trying to maintain the right rhythm with them, and with ministry and all that.

So your boys are really little right now. I'm sure you're taking them to church and teaching them so much. How are you teaching them about the Holy Spirit and how to communicate with God?

We're teaching them primarily that it starts at home. We are grateful for our church. We love our church. But we really feel like it's easy to use the church as a crutch. That faith happens first in the home. So we'll get around together, we'll

sing worship songs, we'll read the Bible, we'll pray and just try to show them that this is a part of everyday life.

We need so much more of that. Especially when you hear so many statistics of kids who go off to college and lose their faith, even after growing up in good Christian homes.

Right. There has to be a demonstration of that [Christian lifestyle] in front of them. And honestly, the younger your kids are, the more in control you think you are. So as they get older, we will learn a lot. I think there are many instances where there was authentic faith models in the home, and then kids just make different choices. But we hold on to the promise that if we raise our children in the way they should go, when they're old, they won't depart from it. And that's kind of the hope that we cling to.

Given your recent Dove awards, your Grammy nominations, who are some artists that you grew up listening to whom you really respect?

On a musical level, I respect Michael Jackson, people like that—Prince. So many different folks that I grew up listening to. And then once we started going to church, we listened to a lot of Kirk Franklin and Fred Hammond and Israel Houghton. And then later I discovered Hillsong. That kind of blew my mind when I was in college. So I've had a lot of different musical influences over the course of my life. There are different things that I take away from different artists, different albums, that definitely inspire what we're currently doing.

Can you tell me a little bit about some of those takeaways right now?

Yeah. So like, with Israel Houghton, I feel like he did such an amazing job bridging the gap between the black church and the white church, if we're just going to keep it 100. I think that Sunday is a segregated day in America, primarily in churches. And Israel created music that bridged the gap. He and his team, Aaron Lindsey and New Breed. So that was something that I wanted to incorporate in my music is music

that would bring people together from different cultures, different backgrounds, different ethnicities, all having something that they are passionate about it and enjoy. So that was one of the takeaways from my black gospel roots. I just love kind of the jazz influence that is in black gospel. You don't hear it as much on my albums, but if you come and experience one of my live shows, you'll definitely hear that influence as well. And then I love the accessibility of modern worship, how things are said in a new way, in a fresh way. But we're just saying the same things, trying to figure out how we wrap words around this amazing God and this big, big grace that we get to receive freely. That inspires me as well.

So what is something that the Holy Spirit has really been working with you through right now?

That image is overrated. I think that's the biggest thing. There's a lot that accompanies significance and success, people looking at you and creating whatever type of image that they would want to see you as, and I'm learning that what I am known for is not as important as who I am known by. The fact that God knows me, loves me, sees me before I ever had a record deal, ever had any awards, ever had a wife or kids. I was still His child and valuable, and that's the truth that I have to keep coming back to day after day, because it's easy to get lost, even in the midst of good things, and forget the best thing, which is that I am known and loved by the Creator of the world.

What do you have next on your plate? What's coming up in your life?

I'm getting ready to jump on tour with Chris Tomlin, which I'm super pumped about. That starts next spring, the Holy Roar tour, and it is going to be amazing. Myself, Chris Tomlin, Pat Barrett, so I'm getting excited about that.

What is it like just going on tour with these big artists and being like, "Wow, how did I get here?"

I love just seeing how they acclimate. Everyone is so unique.

Their gifts are unique. And I love learning and studying them and seeing how they handle people; how they handle different situations; how they're approaching their ministry, family, music career. There's just so much to be learned, you know, from some of these guys, so I love getting around them and sharing life and hearing from their perspective.

Who is the person who has kind of surprised you the most when you've met them?

Oh, man, everyone has been really cool. You know, a lot of people say, don't meet your heroes. There's only a few people that I've met where I was like, "Aww, man, I wish I wouldn't have met you. You ruined it." For the most part, I have been pleasantly surprised with so many people that I look up to, who are rooting me on and just genuine people. It's been really cool. It reminds me that good people actually make it and that usually the more successful you are and secure in your identity, the more gracious you are to the people around you. And I hope that that is true of my life as well.

Find Tauren on social media: Twitter, Instagram, Facebook

Does Ezekiel Foreshadow the Four Gospels?

Rabbi Jonathan Cahn shares a part of a new mystery that might reveal some divine foreshadowing of the four New Testament Gospels in the book of Ezekiel.

How This Woman Went From Drug Addict to Miracle-Working Healing Evangelist

“We came in, they were blasting the worship music in the whole building. Every woman in there was singing, so the whole building was just vibrating with worship. How awesome! I said, ‘Oh, this is gonna be good,’” says Katie Souza.

Souza’s ministry, Katie Souza Ministries, has helped tens of thousands of prisoners over the last decade to experience and love and power of God.

It’s fitting, given that Souza herself was once an inmate.

“When I look in the mirror, I can still see reminders of my criminal past,” Souza shares in the January issue of *Charisma* magazine.

After years of drug abuse, Souza was ultimately arrested by federal agents who caught her cooking in a meth lab.

Souza was bitter, but God ultimately used her past to His glory.

Now, she willingly returns to prisons to share His Word and see His miracles come to pass.

Listen to her phenomenal story here and subscribe here to read her article.

Jonathan Cahn: The Secret to Understanding the End Times

Join Rabbi Jonathan Cahn as he starts to unpack how Hanukkah carries several end-times secrets, including a template for the abomination of desolation.

EXCLUSIVE: Jeannie Ortega-Law Talks Witchcraft, Spiritual Warfare and Social Media Evangelism

The Holy Spirit is moving among this generation in miraculous ways. Charisma reached out to nine “new voices” who are advancing the kingdom of God around the world. Each story is featured in our Charisma January issue, and we’ve posted the transcripts below. This interview has been edited for grammar and clarity. For the full interview, be sure to download the podcast.

Jeannie Ortega Law is a former “bad girl” pop star who was signed to a Disney label. Now, she’s the host of In the Mix on TBN Salsa, as well as a prolific writer and musician.

You have quite the testimony. Can you tell me a little bit about how you came to know the Lord?

Sure. It's a long story. I'll give you the *CliffsNotes*. I grew up in Brooklyn, New York. Back when I grew up in the neighborhood that I did, it was a rough neighborhood, so I couldn't really hang out outside because of the violence and the danger. It was a hard situation to grow up in, as well as on the inside, because life is life, and my parents didn't know the Lord, and I dealt with violence and all of that as well.

Didn't you also grew up with a strange religion that mixed witchcraft with Catholicism?

My aunt is like a high priestess in Santeria, which is witchcraft. It's like the Latin version of witchcraft. Or Obeah, which is what Caribbean people call it. That was in my mom's side of the family.

I was being groomed early as I could remember to take my aunt's place and be the high priestess when she's gone. That was kind of the upbringing in terms of religious beliefs. It was Catholic as well, which I still don't get and can't wrap my head around how that religion thinks Catholicism or God is OK with it. But whatever.

I had kind of these beginnings of understanding that there was a God when I needed there to be a God, because of the violence outside, the violence inside, I needed there to be an outlet. So as young as I remember, I was always crying out to God. But I didn't know anything about relationship. I didn't know about the redemptive power of Jesus, the saving grace of God. I had no idea. That was just my outlet to cry, and then I started to get suicidal thoughts as young as 7 years old. That's when the Lord used music. I didn't know it was the Lord. I didn't know anything about God. But clearly, I know He intervened by using music.

It wasn't Christian music. I didn't even know Christian music existed. But He used music to get my attention and helped me just cry it out and realize that music has power, that it is

an outlet. This made me want to be a singer, because music has the power to help me feel better.

I became this person who just constantly was letting everything out into music. Once I knew music had power, it became my goal to become a famous singer. I went from being groomed for Santeria to wanting to help people feel better through music. I started to really actively work towards that.

How can I reach people? I was going to my neighbors' houses. I was knocking on their doors with my karaoke machine: "Can I sing for you?" It was that serious. I did that for many years, until I finally was discovered.

This is the craziest story, but it is 100 percent true. I was discovered in a taxicab in New York City. I was singing along to the radio. The cab driver was also a limo driver. He pulls up by my house, and it's me and my mom, and we're doing grocery shopping. It's kind of creepy, but he was like, "You're beautiful, and you have a great voice. Do you sing? Are you a singer?"

I was like, "Yeah, I'm totally a singer. I'm from New York." I'm letting him know, "This is what I do. I have a demo. I do all of this.'

He's like, "Oh, give me your demo. I drive around famous managers, and I'd love to give it to somebody."

Lo and behold, two weeks later, I got a call from a major manager in the secular pop industry. That was the beginning. It was then from about 13 till 16, I was working with these top-of-the-line—you would know their names if I told you—top producers, and they were kind of grooming me. I went from being groomed in Santeria to be being groomed to be like this kind of pop girl from the hood version of Kesha.

It was Kesha, but like the hood side. But basically that's kind of what happened. I got a record deal. But before that, I

just said "Hey, I write."

You know, my whole heart was always to write. But when you get involved with people in the industry; they try to silence your voice and make you what they want you to be—you know, their little puppet. So the whole Kesha thing wasn't working for me. I said, "Hey, I write. Let me write."

Finally, when I did write, that song was picked up by Hollywood Records for a soundtrack. They wanted to sign me. At the age of 16, I was signed to Hollywood Records, the Disney subdivision record company, and I went from a girl in the hood to a girl in Hollywood.

I had a top 25 Billboard hit.

I was touring with Rihanna.

I was doing all these things that a little girl from where I came from could only dream of, and I quickly forgot that I wanted to make music to help people. I became a product. I became a brand. I was told that "People have gotta want to be you, or they gotta want to be with you." Obviously, I'm saying it very PG, because that's not how it was said to me—and I was a teenager, you know what I mean? So I started to do music. I don't even know if you know that part of me, but my whole life up to a couple years ago was solely music.

But in the midst of my pop career, God got a hold of me. I was invited to a Christian church. I had still been feeling the same things about inside of my home. Although I had money, although I had all these things, nothing had changed. I was still a broken little girl, and I couldn't make my parents stop fighting, and I couldn't make my friends really be my friends and not be jealous of me and all these things that I had no control over.

Again, I was faced with, "You should just end it all." Now I'm a teenager on my way to becoming an adult. Here I am, hearing

these voices again to just end it all, like “Look, you have money now. You have fame now. You can have whatever and whomever you want, and you’re still broken, and you’re still lost.”

Then someone invited me to a Christian church. I knew it was the answer. I don’t know how I knew. But inside of my soul, I was crying out to go to a church. It couldn’t be the same religious church that I grew up in, because that had done me no good. I went to this Christian church, and I had an encounter with the Holy Spirit.

Tell me a little bit about your encounter with the Holy Spirit.

Funny thing: because of how I grew up, I had never seen people be charismatic at all. I walked in thinking, *These people are nuts.*

But, oddly enough, I was jealous. I had this godly jealousy or something that I wanted to be as free and open with God as they were. I had cried myself to sleep. The shower and my bed were my most charismatic moments up to that point. But I had never been in the religious or Christian setting that I saw people really be that open, and I became jealous of them. I wanted to be that free. But I wasn’t. I was still thinking, *These people are crazy.*

I had kind of given God an ultimatum. So I went to the church. I said, “God, if you don’t speak to me, I’m going to do what I want to do. I’m going to leave my family, and I’m never going to look back. I’m going to just do whatever it is that I want, and I’m not gonna ever look back.”

That’s how my attitude was going in. Halfway or maybe towards the end of service, the pastor called me up. I remember, I had a gray hoodie on, and I probably looked like a street kid, you know? I didn’t want to be noticed. I didn’t want anybody to know me. I was just so broken. I was unknown. I walked up to

the altar, and he didn't say anything to me. He just simply walked by me, placed his hand on my shoulder and just kept moving. But as he prayed for me, when he put his hand on my shoulder—and I'm assuming he prayed—I became overwhelmed with this emotion. I felt this power come over me that I had never felt before. I fell to my knees and began to weep and weep and weep and weep. It was absolutely incredible, because, understand, I grew up in a spiritual world.

But up to that point, I never felt, I had never even known that there was a such thing as the power of the Holy Spirit until that moment. I knew it was God, because I had felt other things. So when it was God, I knew it was God. I mean, I guess he was just healing me in that moment. Then I get up and I go to my seat. I was embarrassed because I had never reacted that way in front of other people, but it was completely normal to everyone else.

I sat down and I said, "God, that was amazing, and I know that was you, but you didn't speak to me. That's why I went to church. I needed answers."

Then I hear God through His Holy Spirit for the first time, saying, "Go back home and tell your mother and your brother what you encountered."

It was crazy, because I got a ride home, but I could not stop crying. I cried from the moment I fell to my knees till they brought me to the front of my home, and I stayed in the car with them for another two hours because I was weeping uncontrollably. I could not stop. It was just the years of anguish and pain, and I was just letting it out, and I knew it was God healing me.

Then I went upstairs, told my mom and my brother, and then that began their journey with God. from that part, understand, I was already a pop star, so I wasn't willing to give up my dream. I was just like, "Cool. God is along for my life now."

Two or three years after that, I was 21. I had already had this top hit song, and I'm doing all these incredible things. Because I started to fall in love with Jesus so much, I just wanted to talk about Him everywhere. I wanted everyone to know, everyone that I encountered. I didn't care what your resume said, didn't care how popular you were. I wanted you to know that you can feel God and that the Holy Spirit was real, and He was here and He was willing to work with you on your brokenness. So I became a little mini-evangelist. But remember, I wasn't signed for that.

Actually when I was signed, they told me they had signed me to be the bad girl on their label because up to that point, they only had Disney stars: Hilary Duff, Miley Cyrus, Selena Gomez. So I was the bad girl.

That was before they became the bad girls.

Oh yes, this was before. This was even before Rihanna became the bad girl. Up until that point, that was me, but then I became this evangelist, and they're just like, "What's going on here? We didn't sign a Christian artist."

Even the songs—because out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks—so even the songs that I was writing, they were coming out from a Christian woman's perspective. Eventually, they just dropped me. No explanation. I obviously understand why they let me go, just thinking about it. They didn't sign a Christian. They signed a bad girl. But you couldn't stop me.

I was wasting precious studio hours for four hours straight, just telling somebody, "You can feel God. I can pray with you right now, and you can have an encounter with God." Like, that was me. I wanted the world to know this. that's kind of how everything else started. I know my story's kind of long.

Basically, from there, I kind of took off, after I lost the deal and everything. I didn't feel compelled to just jump right back in the music industry. I wanted to discover who I

was in God. you know how it is: He has to kill all your idols.

Dying to self is the most painful, horrible thing. But it's so worth it.

Oh, it was so worth it. In the middle of it, it's brutal. This is where I was. But it was the first time that I even asked God, "What do you want from me? What are your plans for my life?"

I was a 21-year-old woman at this point. I had already lived a very old life, just because of the life that I had. I had to grow up really quickly. It was the first time that I asked, "God what do you want?" I took a three-year hiatus where I just went to church, and I discovered everything that I could learn about this God, this person I was falling deeply in love with.

I didn't want any relationships. I didn't want any distractions. I even prayed for God to take away my voice, because I was afraid it was an idol. He never took away the voice, and He just continued to pour into me and nourish and love on me.

Then I started to get giftings: hear prophetically from Him, dream dreams, all these incredible things that—I had always been super-spiritually in tune, because of the life that I had. But I never knew that I could use them for God or that they were even from God. I had some church hurt in between that and all that.

I had to learn quickly the reality of church, because I was super naive going in. I thought church was a very safe place, and I'd never get hurt. And there wouldn't be jealousy in church like there was in the world, or all the competition and things like that. So I learned all these hard lessons.

But then I met my husband. Once we were married, the Lord told me, "I want you to go out and share your story now." It was

kind of like He was waiting for me to get married, and it was probably for my own protection. Because even in the Christian world, if you're not married, everyone thinks you're their wife. So God knew I needed to be completely covered and secured before He released me again.

Then I started to do singing and speaking and sharing my testimony. That's kind of how I was introduced to TBN. I was a guest on TBN for many, many years as an artist and a minister before I was offered my own show. Then even before I found my voice in the media, because I never thought I would be doing Christian media either, but, you know, when you're a pop star and you have a change of genre, and you start doing things for the Lord, the finances are not the same. It's a very different world when it comes to that.

But I didn't care. I knew the truth, and I was rich in the Spirit. I didn't need the financial part until I did. So God was like "OK dear, time to look for some sustainability." That's how I got involved in media. The finances were dwindling, and I wanted to continue to do what God had called me to do. But I needed the money to do it. So I was looking for stuff that I was into. I'm like, *Oh, well, I pretty much went from high school on tour, and then I have this huge career, and any employer who looks at my resume, they're gonna laugh.* So I was like, "God, what am I good at?" I just felt this pull toward media. I understand media from art, from the creative side. I did, and I wound up getting a job for a Christian media company and started to do media.

Having been raised in Santeria and then coming full circle and being filled with the Holy Spirit, what is the spiritual warfare in your life like on a daily basis?

Well, the interesting part is in the beginning. It was hardcore, because in my life, because I grew up in this culture, and because it was so close to my family, literally, there were things all over my house that were prepared, if you

will. Meaning they were cursed to kind of keep me and lure me into this religion.

So upon becoming a Christian, and realizing I needed to cut ties with anything that was witchcraft, or witchcraft related, or was dedicated to another spirit or god, or whatever, I literally threw thousands and thousands of dollars of things away in my home. I literally walked through my home. I had to comb through it, and make sure it was all clean.

This is a thing Christians don't do. Even when they go on trips, they'll buy things in the Caribbean or the islands, and they think it's cute, and they don't realize that they can have things like spiritual ties.

So my spiritual sensitivity really was heightened, and I have to do a clean sweep of my house and make sure I got rid of all these things that were given to me and, oh my gosh, from my sweet 16 crown. That was a gift to me from my relatives who were in Santeria. I got rid of it all. That was one thing.

It was a rough thing, because I needed deliverance. I had things living in me that were not of God. Just even growing up in the industry, the things that you do open the door to the enemy. I needed deliverance. So I actually got prayed for, and I felt the spiritual battle within me, which was very crazy. [Only] one time in my life before that, I had felt that there was a tug back and forth on the inside of me. It was during one of those feasts, a spiritual feast that my aunt had thrown on Halloween. They were trying to conjure a spirit into me.

Tell me a little bit more about that.

They were like chanting over me—a bunch of adults and I was a teenager—and they're chanting over me and, you know, I didn't want to. I didn't want to feel it, but you know, you just do what your family tells you to do, right? Then in the midst of that, I felt that stirring inside of me, and I just screamed, and I said, "Get away from me!" and I ran out of the house.

That was the first time I felt that stirring. The second time I felt that stirring was that day in church years later, where the pastor was praying for people to be delivered from things that were not of God. And I went up to the altar, and I felt the stirring. And they prayed and they prayed for me, and then I went to my feet and I'm like, "It's still in here! Pray for me!"

It was at that moment that I realized that it was the Holy Spirit years before then who fought for me that day at the feast. That night, it was actually that evening, we went back to my house—the pastor, a deacon, my mom and myself—and we got rid of every tie that I had to that religion. That's kind of like the beginning of how that whole spiritual warfare began. But constantly as you grow as a Christian, you just continue to exercise the truth, and knowing that greater is God in you than any demonic spirit or force or curse or anything that's in the world. Where the blood of Jesus is, the devil has to flee.

I'm very intentional about constantly covering myself like that and my home like that. I don't even know if you know, but now I'm a pastor's wife, and we open up our home to people from everywhere to come and hear the gospel and partake in fellowship with us. We do Bible studies a lot. Even when you do that, you still have to make sure that your home is covered. Because you don't want—and you know people do, they come in with their own things, their own spiritual things, and you just want to make sure that you're sealed, and there's no ties to any spiritual kind of things that are not of God.

You talked about how once you were filled with the Holy Spirit, you began to have prophetic dreams. Can you tell me a little bit more about those?

I never knew that I could even have a relationship with God ever. I didn't know that. I always thought God was this person in the sky and was very distant from me. So as I began to grow

in the spiritual, the Lord just started to take me through my life in so many times where he intervened and where he was there and I had no idea.

So that was kind of a way of Him just telling me, "Hey, I've always been here."

Then as I started to pursue him, I would say, "Lord, I want time with you."

Then I feel like I would go to these special places with God that only He and I could go, and He would just pour into me and fill me, because remember, for so many years, I tried to fill my void with all these other things. So in this moment of these incredible moments with God, He started to fill me with Him, and I literally started to see—you know, I felt like he took me all over.

I wrote a song on one of my albums after becoming a Christian called "Loved by You." It's saying, "I can dance across the moon with you/ I can sail across the deep blue."

That's kind of what my spirituality became with this God, that any place that I wanted to be, I could go there with Him and find this moment of intimacy and love and just know that He's God. He's the Creator of everything and holds everything in His hand. He has me. He has me, and He loves me, and He was just pouring into me. That's what being loved by God was like. I started to really go into my prayer closet and have these moments where I could just feel like I was dancing with God across the moon, and beautiful things. Then I started to get dreams where I would dream about things happening, and then they would happen.

It actually still happens. Just this week, I had a dream about a church in New York. I called them to say, "Hey, I was in spiritual warfare for you. The Lord showed me this, this and this. I just want you to know that he's with you, and he's fighting for you. He has people lifting up across the country

to pray for you.” There was something going on. These are the types of things that God will get me, and I’m so grateful for it. I don’t take it for granted at all.

I feel like a lot of people are prophetic, or they’re like “I knew that was gonna happen,” but they don’t know what to do when God gives them these things. my advice would be, “If God gives you something, pray. Just pray. Pray because you never know.”

So what is next for you right now? What are you doing with your ministry, with your church, with your TV show?

Oh, gosh. I’m always doing so many different things. It’s hilarious. As a pastor’s wife, our goal now is to just really utilize what we have: access to social media, access to this live field of media that we can use to reach out to the world, even on Facebook Live.

God has talked, and He’s been like, “Get on Facebook Live, and I want you to worship.”

I’m like “OK.”

“Get on Facebook Live, and I want you to pray against depression.”

“Okay.” As I am obedient with doing these things, it’s incredible.

Because so many people followed me throughout the years. Many of them are not charismatic Christian people, so they have no idea what worship looks like. They have no idea what true praying for deliverance looks like. They don’t know anything. So just me, being a voice, even in a digital world, to show them that, it’s helping people find freedom and even become curious on how they can access that same power. So that’s kind of what we’ve been doing.

We’ve just been utilizing everything God has given us, whether

it's online or here and just doing that. We want to cultivate Acts 2 communities. We want the fire that's in us to spread like wildfire, especially where we are in Orlando, because it's very different than New York. But we want that same fire to spread. We're determined to do that wherever we go. We travel all over the world, and we do that. So that's what we're doing in the ministry. With the TV show, I'll continue to do what I am doing, using my platform to help highlight other people and overcome the devil by their testimonies. I was offered a book deal. So we're in that.

What do you see happening within the charismatic church as a whole right now?

What I see in this generation is a generation that is not afraid to go out and spread the gospel, the unadulterated gospel. But that's also not, I think, like in the past, where people would be just kind of excluded or shunned. I feel this generation is so bold that they're willing to go in the face of these people who might be living on opposite life than we are to show them, "This is what God has to offer. This is why you want it," and I see that happening.

I feel like obviously, we can't compromise, and we have to show the love of Jesus. That's a fine line. But I do feel like God is raising up a generation that's bold enough and loving enough to do it. I see that that's happening. I know everyone keeps saying, "There's another Great Awakening. There's a Great Awakening coming." I feel like we can all cultivate that. I think it starts with sacrifice. We have to be willing to get on our face and our knees and spend the time.

I think time is a big factor here—to really call on God and be willing to just get in that place and that posture where we're available for Him to pour out himself to what He wants to, but I feel like we all have access to it. I don't feel like it's this wave that's going to come. I feel like it's this thing we need to activate.

That's wonderful to hear. I think the time thing is so important, because so often, I'm like, "All right, God, what can I do now?" I'm reminded of the verse "Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord."

Amen. See, that's the secret place. We look at the secret place as this place where we go to find strength for ourselves. But it's in that secret place that we become activated to do really what He's calling us to do. I think for our generation, that's the hard part. But that's where it is.

Do you have anything else you'd like to share with our readers?

I know my story is crazy. It takes all these turns. It's obviously written only by God. But it's not unique, in the sense that we all have our stories. There's pain in all of us. There's a longing in all of us. Jesus is the answer. I don't want to sound cliché or whatever, but it's true. When you come from a place where you've had everything you ever thought you wanted, and it didn't fulfill, and then you lost everything that you thought you wanted, but you found the greatest thing ever that can fulfill you and sustain you and keep you, you'll never let go. My husband and I, we've been through the loss of two of our children. We've gone through miscarriage. We've been married almost 10 years, and you know, we've certainly been through church hurt where we've been so hurt by church people, leaders and faith people that you respect.

But if you never forget that Jesus is the one, Jesus is the one that sustains. Jesus is the one that stills. Jesus is the one that strengthens. If you never forget that, you will be able to get through anything and everything. That's just something I want people to understand. We can't put our stock in anything but Jesus: not politics, not church, not life or successes or even family. It has to be Jesus. Let that be your foundation because when the world cracks around you, you'll only stand if Jesus is your foundation.

Find Jeannie online, on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

Why Are You Stuck in Trials and Tribulations?

If you feel like you can't get your head above water, you're not alone.

Depressing news cycles, exhausting responsibilities and additional holiday stress are enough to knock anyone down into the dumps. When you continually feel pummeled by the tidal waves of life, it might be tempting to ask if you're doing something wrong, if you're going against God.

Popular author Stasi Eldredge addresses these fears in her most recent book, *Defiant Joy*.

"Everybody has seasons where you're pressed to the mat, and it's in those that we have a choice to make: To hope or to despair," Eldredge says in an interview with *Charisma*. "You can either blame God for it or Invite Him into it, that we might bear it together. And He comes in an instant and you learn that pain and suffering don't win."

Listen to the podcast for the rest of the interview.