

Androgynous, Gender-Fluid Singer Exchanges Emptiness for Holiness

Edward Byrd, a former member of the LGBT community, opens up his heart in “Ran Into You,” which he defines as his testimony in a song.

Byrd, who previously identified as a gender-fluid or androgynous person, says he was giving himself away until he ran into God.

“Nothing could make me whole,” he belts in the song. “Until I ran into You.”

Byrd’s mother was 15 years old when she had him. Byrd was raped, abused and then abandoned by his father.

Broken, confused and devastated, Byrd turned to the LGBT community for acceptance. Yet he knew something was missing.

“God met me right in my sin and loved me into a personal relationship with him. This year actually marks my seventh year of being free!” Byrd tells *Charisma*.

Byrd, who co-founded the [Freedom March](#), was also featured in the [Here’s my Heart](#) documentary.

This song will blow you away. Just listen!

Byrd will drop new music at the top of next year. Find him on Instagram @Edwardbyrdmusic. His music is available on all digital media outlets.

Grammy Winner Francesca Battistelli, Andrea Bocelli Stun in Fabulous Special

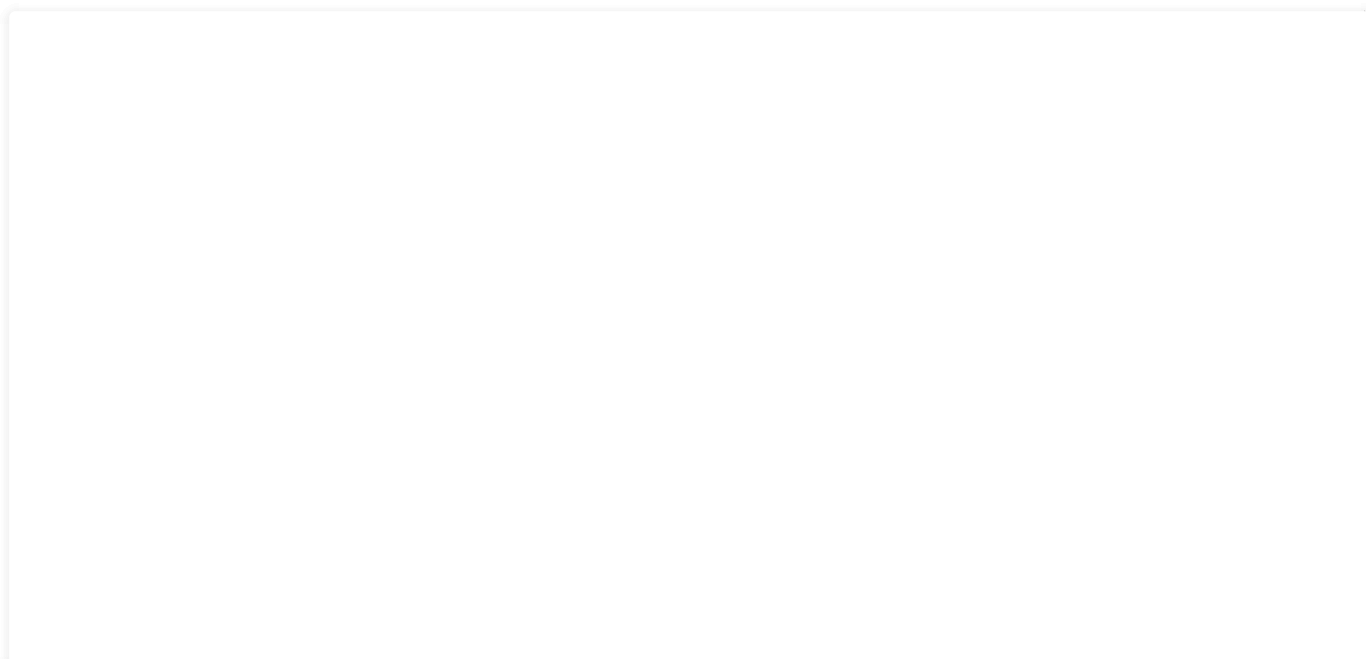
In the heart of Tuscany, Italy, international music legend Andrea Bocelli explores the [heart of Christmas in a new TBN special, set to air Dec. 20.](#)

“It’s been an absolute joy to welcome TBN viewers into the little church in my beloved birthplace, Lajatico—the exact spot where I discovered, as a child, the power of music as an instrument of prayer,” Bocelli says.

Grammy winner Francesca Battistelli joined Bocelli for the special for “What Child Is This.”

Battistelli told *Charisma* the behind-the-scenes story, as well as her love of all things Christmas, in an episode of “C-Pop,” the Christian pop culture podcast on the Charisma Podcast Network.

Her interview begins at the 26-minute mark. Check it out.



[View this post on Instagram](#)

Friends!!! I'm so excited to finally tell you why I was in Italy last month! I was asked to film a duet with the legendary Andrea Bocelli @andreabocelliofficial for a Christmas special for @tbn that is airing on December 20th at 8/7 central!!! Ahhhh! It was SUCH an honor to sing alongside such an iconic artist and definitely one of those pinch me moments—a dream come true. I will never forget it!!! Can't wait for you to see it...who's setting the DVR and tuning in?! ðŹ“

A post shared by [Francesca Battistelli \(@francescamusic\)](#) on Dec 12, 2018 at 9:01am PST

EXCLUSIVE: Nick Hall Talks Billy Graham, Unity Across Denominations and Prophecies for 2020

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.

[Nick Hall is the founder of PULSE](#) Movement and has been referred to as the next Billy Graham because of his evangelistic work.

At the time of recording, you just finished your Together 2018 event in Dallas. Tell us about that.

We gathered at a NASCAR track, Texas Motor Speedway, and really just had a vision of seeing one of the largest equipping events America has seen in decades, trying to equip a generation to move closer to Jesus, and really to move closer to the world that needs Him and just really trying to rally a generation of revivalists and from pastors and evangelists or even going into the workplace. It was full of preachers. Everybody from Sammy Rodriguez and Todd White, Ravi Zacharias, Francis Chan, Priscilla Shirer, Brian Houston to artists like Jesus Culture, Bethel, Hillsong, Lecrae, Christine D'Clario and many, many more.

There were over 50 people on the platform. There were thousands of organizations that partnered toward this, and we saw over 100,000 people flow through the track and get hands-on training, equipping, and it was just an incredible, incredible experience. I would say it was probably the most in-depth equipping time I've ever seen or been a part of. I'm just so excited about what God is doing in this generation.

How did you first come to Christ and get this vision?

I came to faith at a young age, and God had some grace early on to protect me from a lot of the things you hear from different people's testimonies. From the time I was a little kid, I really had a hunger for the things of God. And my mom, actually, we knelt by her bedside when I was probably 4 years old, and I surrendered my life to Jesus, and just wanted to know God, wanted to be a part of the things God was doing. Immediately, I just felt this urgency for the gospel.

And it's kind of funny to say that because I have kids now, and I see it in them. But man, when I was a kid, I was telling everybody about Jesus. I mean, kids on my baseball team, kids in the neighborhood—there's really not a time in my life I can look back at that I wasn't seeing people come to Christ. I'll even joke with people that no one had to ever tell me to share

my faith. I actually will joke that I had to go to church to learn not to share my faith, because sometimes it's not popular for people to be bold. It's just been this incredible ride. But that's really how it started.

You've traveled a lot with people like Greg Laurie, Billy Graham, Todd White and now Francis Chan. How did you meet up with these incredible men of God?

It's been a crazy ride. I'm from North Dakota, and I didn't come from a ministry home. My parents were ordinary lay believers in love with Jesus, but they never had those kinds of connections or people who could immediately open doors for me. I was 17-18 years old when I experienced just a real strong sense that I was on earth to preach the gospel. Specifically, I just felt this urgency and passion that I wanted to tell more than a billion people about Jesus. I remember this vividly. And then there was this word that I had of, "My life exists to put Christ at the pulse of a generation."

It was in my notebooks, and that eventually turned into this college English paper at a secular university, and that led to all these opportunities. When God calls you, He opens the doors for you, and He goes before you. It's not a matter of you making it happen. I always love to encourage people who are stressed and worried and anxious; it's like, man, all the good things that happened from God, they just happen. Yes, there's a role we play in trying to be proactive and certainly trying to pursue holiness. But man, every good thing in my life, it's just happened naturally, like God opens the next door, opens the next door. And it's as you are being faithful where you're planted that God loves to open up what's next for you.

There I am; I'm surrendered to this call. And all of a sudden, I start getting opportunities to travel with people like Billy Graham and Luis Palau and others. It just started to steamroll into these chances for me to travel with these men of God who had really impacted my parents' and even grandparents' generation. I really learned under them as we traveled around the world: India, Africa, Europe, North America. That was really my training. All the way through college, I was traveling to crusades and revivals and different meetings. Then simultaneously while I'm serving under these men and

women of God, I'm trying to lead my own efforts and trying to start where I'm planted—reaching my friends, reaching my classmates.

That's how PULSE started in the midst of that, just university campuses from North Dakota to Minnesota to Wisconsin. It's grown now to become a coast-to-coast movement. I mean, we're in front of about a million students every year just in the United States alone.

I love to encourage people that this is from the next generation for the next generation. This is a tangible answer to the prayers of intercessors and people crying out to God. This year alone, we've already seen 150,000-plus young people give their lives to Christ in the US. And so we just see kids are hungry. They're searching. It's happening from Texas Motor Speedway to university campuses to small coffee shops and just sharing the gospel everywhere we can go. We can't *not* talk about Jesus.

How does your ministry compare to Graham's or Palau's?

I always think God raises up for each generation exactly what that generation needs. Billy Graham specifically came about at a time when people were largely writing off the next generation. There was a lot of division in the church, and that started a youth movement. Youth for Christ was kind of the banner they launched under. That wasn't a time of a bunch of megachurches or even megaministries. It was a new thing to have a youth grassroots movement.

In the same way, we really see this as a grassroots youth movement. We might not be called Youth for Christ. Maybe it's called PULSE. Maybe it's called Together. But honestly, the name doesn't really matter. What matters is it is a generation coming after God, and saying, "We want to follow Jesus. We want to be a part of the things that God's doing, whether that means people being healed, whether that means people being saved, or set free, we just want to see people unleashed into what God's calling is for their lives."

Graham and Palau started in the '40s. Here we are starting into 2010, 2015 and into today, and now, it's grown. Similarly, I would say is just that calling to unite. We really feel called to be a neutral vehicle. I'm often kind of in between a lot of different streams and movements, and I even think Together was a great example of this. I mean, we

had Todd White on the platform, who's up there just calling down heaven, signs and wonders and deliverance. Then on the same platform, we have a leader from the Russian Orthodox Church, who is very stoic, but just in love with Jesus. In the middle of those movements is PULSE, and it's our team of just saying, "Man, can we come together? Can we unite around Jesus, the need we have? Is there room at our table that we can actually see a demonstration of what it's going to be like in heaven?"

I always loved to encourage my friends or fellow believers that heaven is not going to be a bunch of people just like you. It's going to be different streams, different expressions, like different movements—and then, how awesome is that? Man, if it were just people like us, it would be so boring. But heaven is going to be so beautiful in its diversity and diversity of worship styles, diversity of prayer, diversity of people groups and ethnicities. I just think that's really our calling. Certainly, we picked up that baton from leaders like Billy Graham and others who went before just trying to unite.

Something that's different about our ministry, though, is we certainly are more charismatic than some of the previous more neutral evangelical movements. But that's also a personality trait of the next generation. We're not wanting to play it safe. Just last night in the hotel lobby here, our team was gathering; we were celebrating what God is doing. And then all of a sudden, somebody was talking about having cancer, and then all of a sudden, it's a huddle of people praying out this cancer out of this man's body, and just praying and asking God for healing.

I think in past generations, especially in the evangelical world, it was almost like a tagline of "Don't put the Lord your God to the test." That almost becomes a little bit of, "We don't want to do anything that would potentially make God look bad." It's almost like, "We want to give God a back door in case He doesn't want to answer our prayers."

I just think this generation is much more like, "You can't make God look bad." Like, "He is God. He doesn't need our help. And so let's just believe Him for the greater thing. And let's trust him for revival, awakening. Let's trust Him for all the gifts God has for his people. We ultimately just

believe He does not want us to be these lifeless, powerless believers, but He wants to unleash us. He's given us the Spirit, and He's given us revelation. He's given us truth. He's given us the gospel. We have all the weapons we need, and the time is now."

What do you see happening among this generation?

I think it's just a willingness to walk across every aisle. It's so easy to be labeled. It's so easy to just be in one stream. I just think this generation longs for everyone, and I think there's just an openness to God speaking in different ways. There's an openness in just the reality that we don't have all the answers, that my vantage point isn't the only one. Obviously, we have all the answers from God's Word. We have all the history from Jesus. There's no question on what's truth, and there's no compromise in that.

But I think at the same time, I think it was easy in past generations to feel this sense of being dogmatic or looking down on those who are different. With this generation, there is just like a willingness and a desire to learn from those who are coming from a different perspective than your own. I think that positions them both for a greater depth of understanding of Scripture and understanding of the things God is doing. But it also positions them to be even more effective evangelists, even more effective apologists, even more effective revivalists, because there is a willingness to go out there and meet people where they are, understand where they're coming from, and then see where God is moving in their lives and intersect right there with the power of God and the power of the gospel. There is so much happening that people write off as negative that I actually see as part of God's narrative for what's potential.

Someone may say, "All these kids are so into technology, and maybe they're exposed to too many worldviews."

I'm like, "Yeah, they are. That's their greatest asset."

Or, "Oh, man, they're not good at this." Well, they might not be good at that. But they're really great at eight other things that previous generations weren't great at. I think God is positioning them and has created this situation that maybe the enemy intended for evil, but God can always redeem and work out for good.

What does this mean for speaking truth about social issues?

Yeah, it's one thing to talk about a sin or about an issue—and I love to just paint a picture for people and say, “It's one thing to talk about sin, but does the issue you're talking about—does it have skin on it?” 'Cause it's one thing to talk about it as a Bible verse or as a principle. It's another thing to talk about as a person. And when somebody embodies what you're talking about, it very much changes the way you talk about it. It changes the way you think about it. It changes the way you process it. It humanizes it.

In past generations, it's been really easy to talk about specific sins or specific issues or politics or whatever and to really talk about it in a very tone-deaf way that can come across really not loving, not caring and not grace-filled. And it's not intended that way. Like I don't think that's the heart of any believer. But young people are surrounded by people with differing viewpoints, friends from different orientations and different backgrounds, different religions. One of my friends, he heads up Barna Research Group, his name's David Kinnaman, and he describes this generation that they've grown up in what he calls a digital Babylon. He says it's similar to how Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were surrounded by culture, worldview, religion. These kids have been surrounded from the time they were born. But because of that, they're able to adapt. They're able to contextualize. They're able to speak and reason and process. And I just think, *Man, the church is struggling, and you all need to see it.* So it's so hard and often so awkward seeing the church try to figure out how to speak to culture and speak to these issues of flourishing, or sexuality, or politics, or race or whatever.

Meanwhile, God has hardwired these kids with life experiences, Holy Spirit and Scripture. I think they are the ones who are going to lead the church forward with the right way, the right methodologies and ways that can, yes, not compromise on truth, but come alongside people in their sin and lead them to a better way.

What's next for you?

We are really just after unleashing this generation. For us, that manifests in a couple different ways. We will continue to work towards these large-scale campaigns. I mean, we have a team that is really built to put on the biggest events in the

world. Right now, we're working on some massive events in Russia. We're praying with leaders there about something even in Red Square, praying for a Together event there.

We have leaders here in Texas for working toward a stadium event in Mississippi in the heart of the deep South. In the midst of the time of racial tension, we just see this revival happening, and we think it's going to be a national movement launching in 2019. Come 2020, we're looking back at the National Mall. In 2016, we gathered at the National Mall and had upwards of half a million people come, but we got shut down five hours early because of the heat. But it was also honestly because the crowds overwhelmed the infrastructure the government had.

We've really just felt the sense that God is still working and still unleashing, and we have a little bit of a sense of unfinished business. So we're looking at 2020 in the summer being back on the Mall. And frankly, we talked about a million people in '16; I think a million is not going to be a big enough number for what I think God wants to do in 2020, because this thing just continues to grow. And so we really see just these streams colliding.

Probably something I'm most excited about beyond all these big things is we've launched this digital platform, which is really a ministry training tool for discipleship, life-on-life discipleship, like just seeing simple multiplication. I think a challenge for all of our churches and after so many events and gatherings is just, "How do we take this down and actually get simple multiplication of believers? How do we get real discipleship to take place?"

[So we built out this platform called the Move platform.](#) It's like a Spotify-type digital discipleship thing. It's videos and curriculum. We've got everybody from Banning Liebscher from Jesus Culture on there to different urban leaders to different Hispanic leaders. But it is very much a Millennial and Gen Z-built platform. But it's for anybody who wants to go through a discipleship experience with a friend or neighbor. It's about going through it and then bringing others. Complete it; grab somebody else. Complete it; grab somebody else. So it really is built for life-on-life multiplication. And I just think that's the future of effective ministry. So much is going to be digital, and so much of it is going to not have to

do with specific brands or streams, but it's just going to be a neutral vehicle for the whole church to use. This is really a huge initiative that we've been working on with hundreds of partners, and it literally just launched, so I'm super excited about that.

What else can you tell us?

I would just encourage people that God is not done. He's moving. He wants to break out of our mold. He wants to break out of our boxes, and I don't care how free and Spirit-filled you are. We all inevitably place God in a box. We all start to think, "This is how it happens. This is not how it happens." I want to encourage people: He's doing a new thing.

He's not done working in America. He's not done working in the nations of the earth. But this is about all of us uniting. This is about all of us praying. This is about all of us fasting.

Sept. 25, 2019, is the 70-year anniversary of Billy Graham's tent revival in Los Angeles. And so 70 years ago, not only the ministry of Billy Graham launched, but I would say an era of Christianity launched. This is super important for those who are from the Spirit-empowered movement. Because I think people would say, "Man, it was great what Billy Graham did, and it was great how God used that vehicle."

I really see that this next September on the 25th, this is an opportunity for not just America, this is an opportunity for the world to unite. We're going to call for a 40-day season of fasting and prayer as we head into 2020, and you think about 2020 as a year of vision. We can't refute this. It's too obvious: 2020, we have to do something. But it's like, man, if we're going to have a vision, we need to get before the Lord. And we need to be desperate before the Lord. And we need to cry out to God that He would be our vision.

And so far more than what we do for the Lord in 2020, I think what's even more important is how we prepare the way with fasting and prayer in 2019. And so starting on Sept. 25, which is the day of See You at the Pole next year, high schoolers across the country will be praying on the 70-year anniversary of that tent in Los Angeles. And we're going to call for over 2 million believers to fast and pray for God's vision for their lives, like not fasting and praying for an event or initiative, just really getting simple, calling people to fast

and pray that God would give them a fresh vision for their life.

Even if we get half the churches in America with one of the senior pastor leaders, can you imagine what God would do in the church if we would have all these leaders fasting and praying? This is a longtime vision. There was a leader named Bill Bright who had a vision in the '90s and early 2000s that revival was going to be unleashed when 2 million believers united in fasting and prayer.

And so it wasn't fulfilled, but we're like, "Man, now is the time to fulfill this past generation's vision." And this is the next generation taking up the baton to say, "Man, we need a vision from God. We need revival." And so that's something we think is super important, and it's on the heart of God.

Follow Nick on social media: [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#)

Follow his ministry: [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#)

What Happened When Holy Spirit Stopped Rod Parsley in His Tracks

Televangelist Rod Parsley spoke with *Charisma* publisher Dr. Steve Greene recently to talk about the televangelist's new book, [Grace](#), and how the Holy Spirit stopped him in his tracks while he was working on another project.

Parsley was preaching in Texas and resting at a hotel. As he walked through the adjoining door between his family's rooms, "the Holy Spirit as plainly as I've ever heard Him said to me, 'I want you to set that book aside, and I want you to write a book on grace.'"

The church often swings between two extremes when it comes to grace, and Parsley strives to walk a balance between them.

“There seems to be a great great polarization between government and glory, between law and grace and misunderstandings about what both of them are, so I decided to take some time and and just begin to write about it,” Parsley says.

Listen to the podcast to hear the full interview.

International Evangelist Morris Cerullo Announces Major Update on Legacy Center

Famed international evangelist recently returned from mission trips to Israel, Egypt and beyond to check on his Legacy Center, which is being constructed in San Diego.

At the heart of the Legacy Center is a state of the art Worldwide Training Center and E-Learning Library that will feature the lifetime teachings of Cerullo and others.

Cerullo’s vision for the Legacy Center is to continue to equip the next generations of leaders and to be a launch pad for the gospel to the four corners of the globe until Jesus comes.

Watch the video to see the full update.

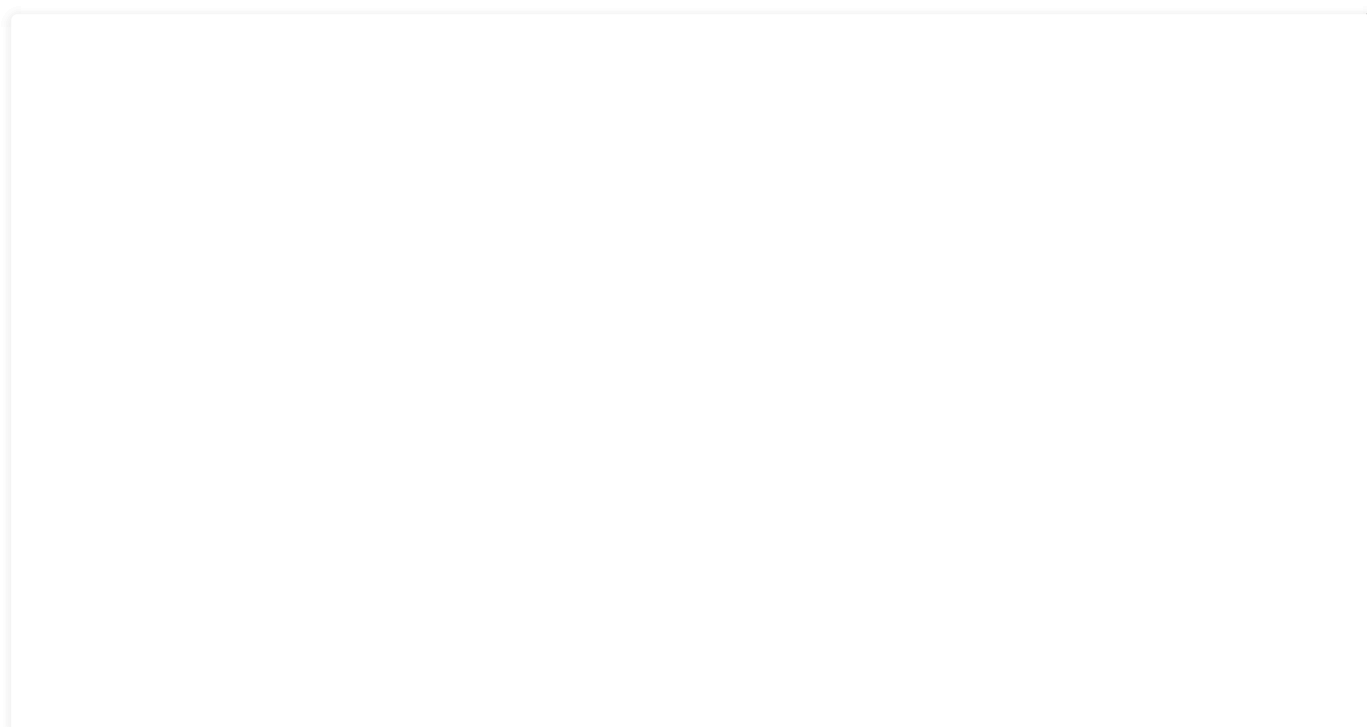
Marriage Restored: Lysa TerKeurst Shares Stunning Photos of Recommitting to Her Husband

Nearly 18 months after announcing the end of her marriage, Proverbs 31's Lysa TerKeurst shared gorgeous images celebrating her restored relationship with husband, Art.

In June 2017, TerKeurst announced her marriage was over after her husband had been unfaithful. The Proverbs 31 ministry leader, author and speaker was later diagnosed with breast cancer.

But our God is one of miracles.

Last week, TerKeurst posted to social media about recommitting to her husband.



[View this post on Instagram](#)

On an unusually sunny Tuesday in December, we dressed up a bit and whispered healing words, heartfelt promises, and holy vows. A million prayers. A miracle answer. A marriage restored. . Thank you @brianschindler @hannaheschindler for capturing these moments. . And @madvincent for draping blooms of grace and beauty all around our day.

A post shared by [Lysa TerKeurst \(@lysaterkeurst\)](#) on Dec 12, 2018 at 6:01am PST

[View this post on Instagram](#)

Family. These people have my heart forever.

A post shared by [Lysa TerKeurst \(@lysaterkeurst\)](#) on Dec 12, 2018 at 6:11am PST

[View this post on Instagram](#)

Never doubt we serve a God who still does miracles. In the middle of the work He did from the devastation in my marriage nothing looked like I hoped and everything felt impossible. I prayed a million suggestions to God that never ever came to be. And the number of tears shed in the process about leaked the life out of me. But all the while when I saw nothing, God was doing something. And in His way and His timing, new life came. No matter how impossible that miracle you are praying for seems, please trust that only God knows the full story. He is working. He is hearing and shifting and intervening and convicting and stirring and doing what only He can do. God does some of His best work in the unseen. . And thank you @jenniferabercrombiebeauty for making me feel pretty on this day of my

dreams.

A post shared by [Lysa TerKeurst](#) (@lysaterkeurst) on Dec 13, 2018 at 7:43am PST

[View this post on Instagram](#)

I still cry over what was. I still find myself wishing the hurt wasn't part of our story. But God has whispered deep into my soul, "I haven't 'cursed' you with this. I've 'entrusted' you with this." Oh God, may we be found fiercely faithful. We will go to those on the brutal battlefield of heartbreak and speak Truth. Show redemption. And call forth life from dead bones in the name of Jesus. Then at the end of each day, we will seal our commitment with a kiss of togetherness. For we can't change what was. But we sure can lavishly love, honor, and appreciate the breathtaking reality of what is.

A post shared by [Lysa TerKeurst](#) (@lysaterkeurst) on Dec 16, 2018 at 10:01am PST

Megachurch Pastor Responds to Allegations He Took Money From a High-Profile Drug Trafficker

Famed pastor Carlos Enrique Luna, aka “Cash” Luna firmly [denies allegations](#) he took money from a high-profile drug trafficker to construct his church, Casa de Dios evangelical church, in Guatemala.

Luna shared a video on his Facebook page decrying the allegations as false and hurtful.

You can watch the video (in Spanish) [here](#).



Heidi Baker Sings, Prays in the Spirit

We're at Jesus '18, and so is the Holy Spirit.

His presence moves freely among attendees and speakers. Even those who are tuning in remotely know something incredible is happening.

Heidi Baker of Iris Ministries led the morning session,

opening with a powerful time of prayer.

Watch the video to see.

Jentezen Franklin: We Need to Be Honest About the Elephant in the Room

As senior pastor of the multi-campus megachurch Free Chapel, Jentezen Franklin could let the size and scope of his ministry go to his head. But if that's ever a temptation, he has close friends in ministry, his wife and their five grown children to bring him back to earth.

"I've got an older bishop pastor who is 84 years old and speaks into my life," Franklin said. "I've got peers who are my age. We've grown up in ministry and have done things in ministry all of our lives, watched our churches grow. It's been a journey, and they've been on the journey with me."

Because of their long relationship, these friends know when Franklin needs accountability or support.

"They can tell when I'm having trouble," he said. "They know when Cherise and I need a good talking-to. They know when I'm going through something with one of my kids. You don't tell all your business to everybody, but boy, if you've got two or three good people who are good sounding boards who you can talk to, that is critical for a pastor."

Franklin's wife, Cherise, is very involved in the ministry as well, working with a world-class women's program and serving

as the chief advisor and host of three major conferences per year. And with her background in building design and construction, Cherise has been involved in planning and coordination for all of Free Chapel's locations.

She and her husband share their life together in their recently released book, *Love Like You've Never Been Hurt: Hope, Healing and the Power of an Open Heart*. In its pages, they reflect on "real, raw ministry" and family life in the public eye.

"People see you in front of thousands of people or on television, but we have a real family," he said.

The Franklins have raised four daughters and a son. Now empty-nesters with two grandchildren, they admit to their disappointments and failures.

"The things that we've gone through are not different from anybody else's family," he said. "Yet we had to deal with them. And I had to preach through some of these storms that we went through. How do you do that? How do you hold your family together? How do you make it through the storm? That's the heart of the book."

The Franklins know they are not alone in these trials.

"So many pastors, pastors' wives and pastors' families are desperately hurting, and nobody's talking about that elephant in the room," he said. "Marriages are in trouble, and we need to get brutally honest enough to understand that there really are answers and that we need some kind of accountability in ministry."

In leading such a large congregation, Franklin has seen problem after problem in families.

"Christian families are just in a mess," he said. "The body of Christ is full of parents who are estranged from their

children. I hear it all the time. 'I haven't spoken to my child in a year.' 'I haven't seen my grandchild since he was born.' 'We just don't get along.' 'There's got to be something we do.' 'We live across town and we don't talk.' I hear this stuff. 'We don't talk.' 'We've been offended at one another.' 'We've gotten hurt.'"

Some leaders are dealing with a family member on drugs, a daughter who is pregnant or a son who says he's gay. Franklin dealt with the latter in his congregation, and he dedicates a chapter of the book to how it was handled.

"We can pretend that stuff doesn't happen. The truth is it's happening. How do I manifest love in those kinds of situations? It's never wrong to love. Here's a big one: You never compromise your faith or your belief in the Bible to love. It's never lowering your standard to love."

In fact, Franklin wrote the book to remind people that love never fails.

"If somebody does something that really offends you, it may take a while," he said. "It gives an illustration in there of a ketchup bottle. You have to hit it and hit it until finally what's been under pressure is released. That's kind of how our journey has been in some of the situations we've had to deal with. But love never fails."

Preaching Through the Fear

The pastor with a delightful drawl and a rather unusual name—his mother got creative with the Jantzen Sportswear brand name—has a strong ministry heritage. He never expected to preach, but God had other plans.

Musically gifted, Franklin played the saxophone so well he earned a full ride to college. He played a number of other instruments—including piano, bass guitar and drums—and then added singing to his skills, which pushed him more to the

front of the platform.

Franklin committed his life to Christ at age 16. He calls it "one of those God-moments that really changes your life."

Raised a pastor's kid, church life had a profound effect on him.

"Being raised in it has its ups and downs and its pluses and minuses," he said. "Dad always pastored pretty small churches, and there were a lot of challenges. When we were growing up, our whole lives were basically around the church. On Saturdays, I would cut the church's grass, and my brothers and sisters had to clean the church and get it ready. We would sweep the bottom out and put the bulletins in and make sure the hymn books were all set."

His dad's little country church in North Carolina became the place where he began to develop his musical talent. He was always his "dad's musician," so initially he thought he was headed that way in life.

In fact, there was one significant reason Franklin didn't want to preach.

"I was terrified of crowds, terrified of public speaking," he said.

But when his dad asked him to teach the junior boys class, he went for it.

"I had a hunger for the Word when I was about 18, and that class began to grow," he said. "I was just terrified the first lesson. But I think that there was a gift there that I wasn't aware of, and the more I did it, the more I got relaxed with it. It was my training ground, that little Sunday school. The class packed out, and it was cool to see that."

Engaging those kids with the gospel "got in my heart," Franklin said, but he went on to pursue his dream of musical

performance at Barton College in Wilson, North Carolina.

One of his brothers preached for a series of revivals during the summer and asked Franklin to do the music. That was also when he decided to go on a three-day fast.

"I really wanted God to do something that summer in my life," he said. "I felt a stirring, a dissatisfaction. 'God, I'm kind of desperate, and I need to know that I'm on the right track.'"

That's when the call came.

"On the third day, I knew without a doubt that God had called me to preach," Franklin said. "And I asked, 'God would you please confirm it and help me in ways that only I would know?' And He did that in some pretty amazing ways."

Persuaded of his call, he announced he was going to preach and told his family he sensed God wanted him to change direction in life. His brother Richie, a traveling evangelist, chimed in with an invitation for Jentezen to speak at a revival he was to hold the following week, which gave Jentezen his first preaching opportunity.

"I stumbled through the message, but some people were saved," he said. "I became addicted to seeing people come to Christ, and that began my ministry."

Soon, instead of just having the services on weekends, the pastor extended the revival to include weeknights too. At the suggestion to extend the revival, the people stood to their feet and clapped.

"I was terrified because I didn't have any more sermons," he said. "But my dad helped me, and he would write me little sermon outlines and bulletins and talk to me. I had sat under him all of my life. And to make a long story short, we got busy and got going that weekend."

Franklin never went back to his music. His preaching schedule simply wouldn't allow it.

"We booked up and we went for three years after that," he said. "I got married, my brother got married, and we went our separate ways. And then Free Chapel came into our lives."

Finding His Place at Free Chapel

Franklin's father was part of Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee, and as a traveling evangelist, Franklin was too. He was happy in his role, but God moved him to an interdenominational church in a rather unusual way.

"My wife's grandmother went to a little church in Gainesville, Georgia, called Free Chapel," he said. "Her pastor asked my wife and me to come hold a revival there."

Finding a strong connection with Roy Wellborn and with the congregation, Free Chapel booked Franklin annually for revival. The second or third year, the pastor had booked Franklin about nine months in advance for a particular Sunday.

Then something unexpected and difficult happened. The pastor became ill and died the Friday night of the weekend Franklin was booked to speak at the church.

"He was the only pastor that they had ever had," Franklin said. "The church was about 300 people, and they loved him. He was a fatherly, great, good man."

But the board still wanted Franklin to come "because the church needs a trusted voice and everybody knows you," they told him.

After he preached Sunday morning, it was time for the pastor's funeral.

"As soon as service was over, they rolled in the coffin and had the funeral of their pastor."

“While I preached that morning, I felt like that Scripture kept coming in my heart that they are like sheep without a shepherd, and they need a shepherd,” he said. “And I knew that God was dealing with me about pastoring.”

It didn't take long. The board called him within a couple of weeks to become Free Chapel's new pastor.

“I shunned him and told him all my excuses of why I wouldn't,” Franklin said. “But I had that little voice of the Spirit saying, ‘You need to do this.’ And then it was my wife who said, ‘I think we ought to do this, and you really need to fast and pray about it.’”

At yet another critical point when he needed to hear from the Lord, he went on a three-day fast.

“Sure enough, God got me in alignment with what He wanted me to do instead of what I wanted to do,” Franklin said. “And so we went to Free Chapel and became the pastor, and it's been an amazing ride.”

Continuing the heritage of family ministry, Franklin's mother is also employed by Free Chapel, where he has served since 1989.

“My mother, who is 82 years old, is on staff and has been on staff for about 15 or 16 years, and she does our seniors and our rest home ministry,” he said. “That is her passion. She does about 17 rest home services a month.”

Experiencing Growth in the Church

Free Chapel has come a long way. Attendance is now 20,000, with multiple services each week. Franklin describes the church as being “about seeing people come to Christ and then inspiring them to live for Christ.”

Apparently, the congregation has done both those things well. Not only has Free Chapel grown in numbers but also in

campuses. The church has five locations—three in Georgia, one in South Carolina and one in California—and is launching two more this year.

“One is a beautiful new building in midtown Atlanta,” Franklin said. “It’s been a dream of mine for over 20 years. It opens in April.”

The seventh location opens in Forsyth County, Georgia, in fall 2018.

Franklin knows God placed him where he is. The fruit is in his life and in his church.

“I think it’s critically important that you know that God has called you to the place that you are,” he said. “Some people would say that it doesn’t matter where you go, but I believe there’s a place of your assignment. And for us, it was Gainesville, Georgia. It wasn’t Atlanta, it wasn’t L.A. at that time. It wasn’t Dallas. We would reach all of those places all over the world, but I knew there was no doubt in my mind that I was supposed to come here, and we were all-in. We left the denomination we were in. They were great people. We left right, we left good and we left with their blessing. But we knew this was the place we had to go.”

Along with being in the right place, it is critical to be open to the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

“There were those transitional moments,” Franklin recalled. “I think you constantly have to go with change if you’re going to see a ministry grow. We could not stay at the same level and hold on to the same traditions and styles. You have to be relevant.”

Being relevant can sometimes mean change to a pastor’s platform and presentation.

“You need a lot of young people around you helping you connect

to this generation,” Franklin said. “And that’s why my family has been such a blessing to me. We have five kids, and my wife and I have been married 30 years. I’ve pretty much had a teenager in my house for 20 years. Getting that kind of feedback from kids—they’re brutally honest—they’ll tell you, ‘You need to check this out, Dad. This is what’s going on.’ We don’t change our message, but we sure can change our presentation.”

There was a time when Free Chapel’s service needed an update in its music. Franklin saw what was possible when Brian Houston of Hillsong asked him to preach at his church in Australia.

“Darlene Zschech had written that song, ‘Shout to the Lord,’ and they were really beginning to be a force in the body of Christ, especially in the area of worship,” Franklin said. “We were real traditional in our worship. We still had the choir robes, and there’s nothing wrong with that if that is what God’s called you to be. But we knew we were missing a demographic of younger people and couples.”

Franklin believed his visit to Hillsong was a “divine encounter,” because he saw a model of the church enjoying worship in a more relaxed atmosphere.

When he returned saying, “I want that,” the music began to change. It was another critical development in the life of what was to become a significant interdenominational megachurch.

And somewhere along the way, Franklin got over his fear and grew into an exceptional preacher.

“Not the least of Jentezen’s considerable skills is his preaching,” said Dr. Mark Rutland, founder and president of Global Servants, who often preaches at Franklin’s church. “He is a talented musician, a pastor, a leader and an author, but above all of these, Jentezen Franklin is a preacher’s

preacher. His content is rich, and his style has been honed to a keen edge. More than all that, however, when he preaches, the good hand of the Lord is upon him in a remarkable way.”

Beyond Free Chapel’s campuses, the church extends its ministry through media around the globe. Listeners can hear Franklin on his self-titled podcast, and viewers can watch services on the television broadcast *Kingdom Connection*. Each broadcast has the potential to reach 2.3 billion viewers.

Becoming a Fasting Church

Free Chapel also has become known as “the fasting church.” In 2007, Franklin wrote *Fasting*, one of his many best-selling books.

“When I feel myself losing the edge, when I feel myself becoming mechanical in routine, especially in my preaching, I fast,” he said. “I think it’s so important for ministers to know that what people want more out of us on Sunday—they don’t want what’s in our outline—they want what’s in our heart. Head talks the head, but heart talks the heart.”

Franklin sometimes fasts from sunup to sundown.

“It’s my private preparation that determines my public success,” he said. “There’s something about seeking God those ways that it can really take you up a notch or two even in your passion for God and your passion for your sermon.”

His congregation engages in a corporate fast starting each January.

“Fasting is disconnecting with the world and reconnecting with God,” he said. “And it’s good when you can say in your church, we’re going to disconnect some from the world. I challenge young people to fast social media, fast sugar. We have all kinds of fasts going. But the whole church is on a journey for 21 days.”

Along with fasting and special nights of prayer, Franklin says worship also changes during this time.

“The worship goes to another level because there’s something about when you fast, it brings clarity,” he said. “It brings a reconnecting back to God, and that’s been the greatest benefit for us.”

Dreaming Big for God

Members of the Free Chapel staff speak highly of Franklin and his visionary leadership.

“I’ve had the privilege of watching pastor Franklin face many obstacles and opportunities with great faith, humility and character,” said Tracy Page, executive pastor. “Pastor is as passionate about his private worship as he is about his public ministry. He has instilled in our team, and even our whole congregation, an enormous capacity to dream big for God. We all carry his vision for reaching the next generation and evangelizing the world. Pastor and Cherise model courage and commitment that create a contagious passion for Jesus and an extraordinary dependence on the Holy Spirit. ... Our entire team is grateful to be a part of such a relevant and important vision.”

Bryan Woodson has served at Free Chapel for nearly a decade in a variety of roles from student ministry to campus pastor. He sees Franklin as “a man of great courage, godly wisdom and sincere faith.”

As marketing and communications director at Free Chapel, Jason Vernon has experienced “extreme kindness and love” from Franklin toward his family. “He has always been a wonderful example of a caring leader who displays impeccable character and a desire to serve others,” Vernon said.

Franklin knows it’s God who has granted this success. He said he is “more shocked than anybody” about it.

“I never in my wildest dreams imagined that I would have the opportunity to get to do what I do,” he said. “We must never forget that it’s God. It’s all God. He gets all the glory. And He’s looking for people right now that He can use in amazing ways. So dream big. Go for it and don’t limit God.” {eoa}

Christine D. Johnson is editor of Ministry Today. She invites your comments on this issue at chris.johnson@charismamedia.com.

Kim Daniels Bill to Promote ‘In God We Trust’ in Schools Gains Support

A bill, sponsored by Democratic Rep. Kimberly Daniels, in which every school and administrative building in the state of Florida must prominently display the words “In God We Trust” is now moving through the state’s legislature, the Associated Press has reported.

Daniels told the AP that the bill would be a lesson to children about the national and state motto that’s printed on currency and included on the Florida state flag.

The AP reported that the bill received unanimous approval Tuesday from the House PreK-12 Innovation Subcommittee and that Democrats and Republicans alike were praising it.

“The nation was ‘built on God,’ and the bill is a great idea at a time when many young people aren’t going to church,” Democratic Rep. Larry Lee said. “We’re taking God out of everything.”

Republican Rep. Ralph Masullo said the passage of the bill should be a no-brainer.

“Students should know about the state’s history and, as part of that history, ‘we do trust in God,’” Massullo said.

Officially designated in 2006, the Florida state motto is the same as the national motto for the U.S., “In God We Trust.” Florida’s first state motto, “In God is our Trust,” was adopted by the Florida legislature as part of the state seal in 1868. {eoa}