

A Bridge Between

Chelsea Hurst wants to be a bridge reaching out to her peers who have never encountered Jesus. As a YouTube vlogger, she says many of the people who watch her videos have never seen Christianity modeled in action and may even be unfamiliar with basic tenets of the faith. She says God has called her to bridge that gap and introduce them to the joys of living for Christ.

In her interview with Charisma, Hurst discussed her own testimony, how she became a successful vlogger and author, and what the biggest crises facing the next generation are.

This interview—originally recorded for our New Year, New Voices podcast series—has been edited for length and clarity. Listen to the full interview here:

Berglund: Can you tell me your testimony?

Hurst: I always feel like this story can definitely be pretty long. But I guess we could start when I was a little bit younger. I was raised up in the church, but my family kind of stopped going for about eight or nine years. And by that time, I was friends with a lot of people who just went to church anyway. I think that was a really big part of what grew me and my faith and actually kept me in walk with the Lord, because it's kind of hard when you don't have friends who are kind of on the same page as you. So I'm really thankful for those women; I honestly just went and visited them recently, and I love them.

I started a YouTube channel when I was about 13. And at the time, I was saved. I asked the Lord into My heart when I was like 10 in the bathtub. It was pretty funny. But I don't think I really made the connection that this takes walking with the

Lord and following Jesus and what that looks like, until high school, when I went to an event called DNow. It stands for Discipleship Now. I loved that weekend. It was just a bunch of time to hang out with friends and eat a lot of junk food, but then also hear the gospel presented and what it means to walk with Jesus.

I share this testimony in one of my YouTube videos from a few years ago, but I mean, it really rocked my world, because I had never seen the gospel presented in the way that said it's a relationship. It's not necessarily like this big broad religion or perspective that I can't really have a close relationship with God. It really changed me, and I feel like I was encouraged in that time to start making faith-driven videos.

During this two- to three-year trek, I was doing a lot of faith videos, and then I realized that my calling online was moreso to be a bridge for nonbelievers and believers to be encouraged and uplifted and hopefully pointed towards the gospel. It's been amazing to see the messages I've received from people who are now more open and receptive to what it's like to walk with Jesus or who went from practicing some different religion I had never even heard of to inviting Jesus into their heart and seeing visions. It's crazy what God has done through just the platform that he's blessed us with.

So now the channel I have is the Hurst Family, because my husband and I wanted to make it a family channel that we can take into the next few years of our lives when we have kids. We were thinking more long term with that. But I love doing anything creative. I think the Lord has encouraged me in that, with not feeling like I have to just have one job or one thing that I'm sticking with the rest of my life. I think He has instilled these gifts in me and encouraged me to walk in seasons.

Like right now, I'm focusing on launching the book I wrote

called Above All Else. It's a 60-day devotional for young women. I wanted to just focus on that. I feel like, as someone who can get easily distracted, it's just fun to have several different things I love and then focus on them one by one, if that makes any sense.

So God's really moved in my heart and my life through the people He's put in my path. I really am thankful for those people, because I don't really know where I'd be if I didn't have that encouragement and those people to lean on. I'm thankful to be where we're at.

We're learning a lot in marriage; we got married in March 2019. So it's been so cool to see how God is wanting to teach us new things in this time. It's way different than being single, for sure.

Berglund: You made the YouTube channel when you were 13. I'm guessing the channel did not blow up in popularity immediately. At what point did you start to realize, "Oh, I might be onto something here"?

Hurst: Yeah, it definitely did not blow up in popularity immediately. I did start recording videos on YouTube about a year after I created my account, and I was really into all the comedy videos and anime/cosplay makeup tutorials. ... I started in the makeup scene, and when I think I blew up, it was honestly from this makeup competition that I entered. It was an online competition where there were different themes and challenges. I ended up going to Los Angeles to compete live, and I was 14 at the time, competing against like women in their 30s and 40s.

It's pretty fun, but I just think I got a lot of exposure from that event, and I went from like a couple thousand to 100,000 subscribers at that point. But the channel's really evolved because I went from doing makeup to lifestyle to faith videos. Recently, then, it's been positive encouragement and being

unapologetic about my faith, but also not wanting to shove anything down people's throats. My husband and I just like to make content that's natural to us and that's fun, but also draws people into what we believe as well.

It definitely was not a hit right at the start. It took me about a year to even see any traction at all, and people were weird at the start of the YouTube channel. They requested some different types of videos, and I was just like, "I'm gonna stick with the makeup right now." I did all different sorts of costume videos, and those are my most popular videos on my channel still today. People comment on them like it's 2019 and I just uploaded the video, and then when they go to the channel, they realize, "Wow, she's married, and she used to make Barbie tutorials."

Berglund: You're one of many people in the next generation who are not in formal ministry, but because of what you're doing online, you have this massive platform to reach millions of people with the love of Christ. Do you view making videos as a form of ministry?

Hurst: For sure. We definitely see a lot of people asking questions on a deeper level outside of just the topics that we talk about. So we'll get DMs on Twitter and Instagram of people asking questions about the videos that we create and saying, "Hey, why do you even do things this way? I've never seen things viewed from this perspective." You know how our world can be. People are very quick to judge if it's not their perspective. People view things differently. So I think that it's really cool that we're intentional about being inviting to what we believe but also not shying away from the truth and just communicating it in a way that's effective.

I've really had to pray for that voice, because sometimes I can come across as too agreeable to other people's beliefs. I think my husband has really helped me out with this, because he's just really blunt and honest. Then I'm more like, "Well,

let's communicate this to the whole audience and make sure we're not offending certain people—while still standing firm in what we believe.”

People are obviously still going to be offended in some ways, but I think it's just a matter of how you treat them through the process. Are you going to dodge away whenever they have a really deep question, and they believe differently than you? Or are you going to lean in when they do have questions? Maybe their perspective is a bit different than yours, but it's worth listening to, and it's worth hearing out and it's worth encouraging them, because people really need that.

So it's been amazing to see how God has used the platform. But also, there have been times where I've really wanted to just quit, because it is a lot of work, and people change. The YouTube space is not what it used to be. A lot of people are making content that's really negative and gossip-driven, and that's just not who we are. And we just don't want to do that.

So it's hard to keep gaining momentum, like more subscribers, when people just feed off of this drama content. I'm really hoping that that will fizzle out, and people will want something that actually has meaning and depth. That's our goal.

Berglund: You said you feel your calling is to be a bridge, and I think that that's going to be increasingly important in the years ahead. We can't just assume that people have the Christian faith like maybe they had in past generations, when there were more nominal Christians. Today a lot of people aren't raised in Christian homes and don't have any exposure to Christian teaching. It's hard to reach those people where they are, without offending them or assuming they have background information that they don't. For people who are [reading] this who are similarly passionate about reaching the lost, what advice can you give them about being a bridge to people who have never encountered Jesus?

Hurst: Well, I like to look at my life before I knew Jesus. Obviously, I was really young. But I also like to see the examples in my friends who have been transformed by Him later in life. Even my husband talks about how, as a teenager, he made decisions he ended up regretting. And then that was God's kindness drawing him in: "There's more to life than all these things that you keep doing that you think will fulfill you, but you end up in this cycle."

So I just like to see from honestly a perspective of grace and mercy and knowing that God has extended that to us so freely, but also, He does require us to sacrifice those parts of our lives that we [inaudible]. It's important that we invite Him into those spaces.

I like to sit and listen to people. I think it's important that, before we speak, we really hear them out and listen to their stories and ask them questions. I think the more we're engaged into what they have to say, instead of just firing back with a short answer when they don't agree with us, I think that's when we start becoming bridge builders. We are more inviting in that case. People will not be quick to either log off when you offend them or not want to continue a conversation in person. I think if we are able to just sit and listen, and maybe even if we know that we're investing in them as friends, that the first time they bring up something that we don't agree with, or we want to see them do better in, then we don't even talk about what we are hoping that they see in us or whatever at the first time they meet. Maybe we just listen to them first. And then we just start getting deeper with them as time goes on.

I think it's important that we establish those relationships as well. And obviously this isn't the case with everyone. But I think that's what I've learned with friendships is the best thing you can do is just be a great listener, because most people around the world aren't even that. You really have to work to just kind of lean in and listen to people. Because I

think that really is what shows up as being a great friend and someone who actually cares about someone is hearing their story and figuring out how we can be of service to them, rather than them agreeing with us. I think that's really the difference between just being there and trying to defend our faith, rather than trying to be friends and hear them out. I think that's just the first step in all honesty.

Berglund: How old are you?

Hurst: I'm 21.

Berglund: That makes you the youngest of all the people we're interviewing for this series, which is cool. A lot of the people you reach with your content are people who are teenagers or young adults, people close in age to you. What do you see as being some of the biggest struggles and issues facing teens and young adults today?

Hurst: Honestly, the biggest problem I see nowadays—I think it can just go without even saying—is mental illness. People are more depressed than ever and seeking to fill that lonely void that they have. We've heard this so much—that although we're the most connected generation, we are the most disconnected generation because of the invention of social media and how it's impacted us. People are just more comfortable digitally; when they're in the presence of people, they don't know what to talk about, and they just immediately go to their phones.

I think being involved in so many other people's worlds has really increased this whole depression thing, and I've been there. I know what it's like. I don't want to feel stuck in that at all. I had to get help on so many different levels. I had to go to therapy and just believe that there is healing in medicine and praying my guts out that things would change.

I think just having community around you—real face-to-face interaction—is what the next generation needs. That's what I'm hearing all the time: “I don't even know what I believe

anymore, because I'm so sad and I'm so lonely. I don't have any friends in person. The only people I talk to are people in my DMs or on Twitter." I think that's one of the biggest problems

I also think a lot of people don't even know where they belong in church, because a lot of the church has gotten this rep of being a force that's against certain things in our world that are becoming so popular that it's not even a place where they feel invited, first of all.

I think a lot of people are just searching for belonging, to not feel lonely and then for real, true friendships. I think we need to start figuring out how to make those things happen, how to heal those things, because those are all vital parts of having a thriving life. I think it's so important that we figure out how to do that exactly. And I think it starts with encouraging people where they're at instead of trying to change them when we first meet them. So many people think that's the solution, and it's just not.

Berglund: Your new devotional, *Above All Else*, recently released. Tell me about what inspired you to put this book together?

Hurst: I'm super excited for this book in particular, because my first book that I wrote was a lifestyle/beauty/faith guide for young women. I love that book, but it was mostly my story, woven with Scripture and just encouragement. And a devotional is just so, I think, direct to the hearts of people, because they can go right into Scripture, where the true power is. I keep telling people that the words that I write in my devotional may be encouraging, but there's really no power in them, because it's not God's Word. So I encourage people to go straight into Scripture and then see the breakdown that I have for that day and the challenges I put forth. I've heard a lot of great feedback so far of how it's encouraged people in their faith.

It also tackles certain subjects that young adults face today in this world, like dating and friendship and mentorship and how to live a healthy life. What does that even mean today?

I got the inspiration from getting so many DMs from girls just asking, first of all, for a devotional. I think that's almost like another way of being a bridge, because some people don't even know where to start in the Bible. I think it's great to have a resource that points you to Scripture where you can read even more. But you also hear a different perspective of maybe how you hadn't thought something in the past, or maybe there's some story connection to real life.

I just loved writing it, honestly. It was a lot harder than writing a normal book, because Scripture was involved. But I felt very honored that God was just drawing me in this direction to put out this resource. So I hope people are encouraged by it.

Berglund: In your own quiet time, when you're spending time with the Lord, what's on your heart? What are you praying about right now?

Hurst: Right now, I would say I'm praying to figure out the ability to be still in the right moment and just take God at His Word, and then also how to work effectively. What does work for God actually look like? How do I devote that time to Him? Oftentimes, I feel like a busybody, like I'm just doing things to feel accomplished for the day. But I truly want everything I do to be in line with His Word, but I also want to feel like I'm communing with Him throughout the day, instead of just getting through the day and being a busybody. I don't want to be that, so that's my prayer.

I've been reading 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and I really love it. It speaks a lot about "Do not be just simply a busybody, but be someone who's intentional and who encourages believers to call our people out whenever maybe they're needing to be

encouraged in the right direction.” That’s something I’ve been learning and praying for.

–Find Chelsea Hurst on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

When God’s Presence Came Crashing Down

Putty Putman may have attended a Vineyard church, but this quantum physics grad student couldn’t have believed less in the gifts of the Spirit. Then a mission trip to China radically transformed his life and forced him to confront the supernatural reality of our world.

Today Putman leads the School of Kingdom Ministry, which trains and equips believers of all ages and backgrounds to live out the gifts of the Spirit in their community. He spoke to Charisma about his incredible testimony, how Millennials and Generation Z approach the Holy Spirit differently than previous generations, and three common misunderstandings Christians have about the gifts of the Spirit.

This interview—originally recorded for our New Year, New Voices podcast series—has been edited for length and clarity. Listen to the full interview here:

Berglund: What’s your testimony?

Putman: I grew up in the church. My dad worked for a Baptist denomination since shortly before I was born until about two years ago, when he retired. So a lot of my testimony is framed around the fact that I have never not known Jesus, as long as

my memory goes back.

I grew up in the church. I love the church. I always had a real walk with God that was really significant for my life. But a lot of my journey was around coming to meet the Holy Spirit. I got a lot of wonderful things out of that upbringing: real value for the Scriptures, for the church, for fellowship in the body, things like that. But what I didn't get a lot of was exposure to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. I knew He was real, but I never really understood what He did.

So I had this wonderful upbringing. I considered ministry when I was choosing career paths, but I honestly never saw a pastor who seemed really happy. They always seemed like their job was really heavy and hard. It didn't seem like they were having any fun. So I didn't head toward ministry. I headed into the sciences. Turns out I was or I am very gifted in the area of physics especially.

When I say that, a lot of people kind of get a little stunned, and they must think I'm superhuman or something. Just to speak into that: I'm really good at physics. I'm not great at everything else. But for some reason, I'm very good at physics.

So I got my undergraduate degree in physics. After completing undergrad, I chose to go and get a Ph.D. That was how I came to the community I'm in right now, Champaign-Urbana in central Illinois. I came here to get a Ph.D.—in quantum physics of all things—at the University of Illinois. When I got here, I immediately thought, OK, graduate student in the sciences? Not exactly an environment conducive toward faith. I need to get plugged in to a faith community.

I had some friends down here who were studying, and they were plugged in with this goofy church that I'd never heard of called the Vineyard Church. I showed up. The first day was kind of an interesting church experience. Everybody is warm.

Everybody is kind. The worship is a little more expressive than I'm used to, but, you know, I can live with all that. The message is fine.

But at the end of the service, the young adult pastor pops up on the stage and says, 'Hey, here at the Vineyard, we believe God is still real and that God still heals. Our prayer team met beforehand, and here's some things that we felt like God had brought to mind.' He starts listing off these words of knowledge and conditions that could be happening in people's lives. He essentially closes by saying, 'Hey, if any of this is going on with you, I'd just like to invite you to come up. We have a prayer team that would love to minister to you. Who knows? You may even see God heal you today.'

Now I am coming from my Baptist framework, where I've never seen any of this. And coming from that Baptist framework—where I assumed I knew everything, because part of being a Baptist is assuming you know everything—I thought, Who are these people? And what have I stumbled into here? These people are crazy. I was very closed. I was not open to this at all. I was pretty judgmental. Not my thing.

So what wound up happening is since I had enough invested in graduate school, and I already had some friends at this church, I decided, 'I'll keep attending this church. I don't have to get on board with the crazy, but I need something that keeps me connected to the body and building my journey of faith.' So I sat at this church for four years, really judging just about every single service because I'm not on board with all of this Holy Spirit stuff.

What winds up happening is over time, being in that environment, I did see that in the Bible, there's more of a value for things like healing than I had first acknowledged. Jesus does a lot of miracles, and the Gospel writers seem to really care. They don't just say 'Jesus healed a lot of people.' They go into these painstaking accounts. Sometimes

they'll just be like, 'Jesus taught a lot. But then He did this miracle...' and they'll go into great detail about that miracle. I wrestled with that and came to the conclusion, OK, this stuff seems to matter to Jesus. But I don't know about this expression of this, and this church feels weird.

After four years of being an evangelical fish in a charismatic pond, what happened was God essentially cornered me, and I wound up going on a mission trip to China. Our church had started a partnership with house churches in China, where we [would] go train and equip local believers. I was really excited about that, because when I was young, about 7, we had spent a year living in China as missionaries. It was a very formative experience, and I had always wanted to go back.

So when our church started this partnership, I said, "Oh, I've got to go get signed up for the trip." I got the plane ticket and bought all the supplies. It's only after all of that do I learn that the purpose of this trip is to go train these Chinese churches in healing ministry. I thought, Oh, do we have to do that? Can't we go build a hut or a well, or do some sort of other mission work? But nevertheless, this was the trip. I'd already committed to go. I'd already spent money.

So I worked out this deal with the trip leader. I said, "Here's the deal. I'll participate, but when it comes to all the prayer stuff, that's on you guys. That's not really my thing."

She says, "OK, that's fine. We can do that." We struck this deal. So the day the training came, during the first part, the team is sitting there, listening for words of knowledge, and I'm just twiddling my thumbs like, I made the deal. This isn't my thing. I'm waiting for the clock to run out.

Meanwhile, my left forearm starts feeling very odd. It's a very distinct sensation. I wasn't feeling that earlier, and I didn't know if I'd felt that before. As I paid attention to

it, I realized the feeling was on the inside of my arm, like right between the two bones and your forearm—right in the core of the arm.

I didn't know you could feel something there, and it is distinctly getting stronger, I thought. This is a very weird experience.

While I'm having this experience, I remembered attending a prayer training class three weeks earlier—I knew we were going to go teach it, so I figured I should at least be familiar with the material even if I didn't believe in it. I remembered in the class they had mentioned this thing called "sympathy pains," which I just thought was the silliest thing: "That's absolutely crazy." But the idea of a sympathy pain is where you feel something in your own body that's a mirror image of what's happening in someone else's body. It's a way to get one of these words of knowledge.

So I thought, Hmm. I'm having this weird experience. This idea of sympathy pain is sort of coming back to mind. I'm in China. ... Whatever, I'll throw it out. If there's anything to it, the team will deal with it.

So the time for listening concluded and I share, "Does somebody have a left forearm condition?"

We're sitting in a room with about a dozen house church leaders. This isn't like a massive audience. Up until this point, most of what I'd seen modeled are words of knowledge with rather large crowds, and what I'd mostly seen is kind of generic words of knowledge with large crowds. You know, I'd see a room of 300 people and someone on stage say, 'Someone here has knee pain or back pain.' Like, OK, as a physicist, I know there are a dozen people in this room with knee pain. That's just playing the odds. That's statistics. You don't need the Lord to say it to know there's someone in this room with lower back pain. I mean, 1 in 5 people over 40 has lower

back pain.

So I had processed words of knowledge from a very naturalistic paradigm, but in a room where there's 12 people and I'm calling out "left forearm," all of that goes right out the window. I couldn't name another person anywhere who had a left forearm condition, and we were in a room of 12. One woman responds to this word. So I was processing all this as a physicist, not as a pastor, and trying to think through the odds of this.

Meanwhile, the team leader wrapped up conversing in Chinese with all the people there and says, "OK, Putty. It's time for you to come up."

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

She says, "Well, you got the word of knowledge, so you lead the prayer time."

I forgot that's what they do at the Vineyard. I should have known that. I'd seen them do that a ton of times. But I just kind of blanked on it. Now I'm the "expert missionary who came from America" who got the word of knowledge, and they're all thinking I'm some expert. Whereas internally, I know I don't even believe in this stuff.

Truth be told, I just decided, It's not like I've really seen this thing work at home anyway. I can just fake it, and it will be OK. I'm just telling you how it was. I thought, OK, I've seen how they do this. You ask a couple of questions about the condition and you put your hand on their shoulder. You invite the Holy Spirit to come. Then you pray for a little bit. And then you try and encourage the person because nothing happened. That's what I'd seen play out a bunch of times at church. So I asked some questions, put my hand on her shoulder, and invited the Holy Spirit to come.

When I do, basically He showed up and blew the whole room

apart.

The first thing that happened is the presence of God comes crashing through the ceiling of the hotel room right above this woman and drops on her with what felt to me like the force of a waterfall. It wasn't this kind, gentle, "Oh, I feel God's peace" or something. She just buckles and drops straight to the floor in a heap. Not forward. Not backward. She just collapses and drops straight down. As that happens, the rest of the room stands in a circle around us watching, and about half of them I hear gasp collectively around me as the presence of God enters the room. I hear thud, thud, thud, thud, thud. People start falling in every direction.

In basically 10 seconds, we went from classroom to war zone. I looked around, and there were people on the ground. They were rolling; they were shaking; they were snorting; they were crying. I look behind me, and there's someone who's dry heaving into a trash can. I didn't even know what that meant! And I just thought, What on earth is happening? This is absolutely crazy. I don't believe in any of this stuff. I don't do this stuff.

I turned back and looked at the girl. My hand is still on her shoulder. She's now sitting kind of roughly cross-legged on the floor. I look at her, and she's kind of twisting and contorting, and making all kinds of weird faces and saying all kinds of things in Chinese that I can't understand but I can clearly see aren't positive sentiments. I asked the team leader, "What is she doing?"

The team leader says, "Oh, it's a demon."

"What's the demon?"

The team leader said, "she's manifesting a demon right now."

I think, Oh my goodness. I have no idea what to do here. The one class I took, which I didn't even believe in, never

mentioned demons. I'm so far in over my head. What on earth do I do?

It really looked like I knew how to do this, but I had no idea what I'm doing. I'm racking my brain, and as I think about it, the thing that comes to mind for me is that, being raised Baptist, I spent a lot of time in Awana and spent a lot of time in the Word. I knew Jesus had driven out demons. So what did He do? The only thing I could think of is He commanded them to come out, so I started commanding the demon, "Come out of her in Jesus' name."

It doesn't respond immediately. She would become lucid, but then when you commanded the demon to come out, she would snarl at you. Then eventually we'd get her lucid again, and you'd command the demon out, and it was this back-and-forth thing. It was really mind-boggling to me.

Eventually, after probably 45 minutes—it wasn't quick—she shuddered and said, "Whoa. Something just happened."

We asked, "What happened?"

She said, "It left."

"Well, be specific," I said. "What left?"

She said, "I felt this dark presence over my life that hung over my life like a cloud all the time. And it just left. It's gone."

I said, "Well, check out your wrist."

She rolls her wrist around, and says, "My wrist feels great. I think I'm healed."

So everybody got up off the floor, and there were about a million questions—you know, because it's training, and all of this has just happened. Everybody's telling me, "I need help processing this," and I'm like, "You don't understand. I need

more help processing this than any of you. I have more questions than anybody else.”

That became a turning point in my life. Suffice it to say, there were a lot of things I had to adjust in terms of how I understood the world and God in the more than 10 years since. After that, I defended my thesis, graduated and got my degree. I was faced in my own personal life with a choice: I could choose to continue in physics, or I could choose to be part of what God was doing here at our local church—but in my situation, I couldn’t really have both. I’m not saying others couldn’t; that’s just how it worked for me. So I decided to follow Jesus’ words: Sell all that you have to buy the pearl and get the kingdom.

I stayed here, crash-landed a promising career in physics, and that was the beginning. Eventually I came on staff at the church, and we started this thing called the School of Kingdom Ministry, which does training and equipping in all of this Holy Spirit ministry stuff. God has really breathed on that. It’s just multiplied. Eventually, churches started coming to us, saying, “We want to participate as well. We want to be a part of this thing.” We started it in 2011, and we really opened it up to other churches in 2013. We’re now six years into that; we’ve had classes in 196 different locations, and 7,064 people have been students or leaders—mostly across the U.S. but increasingly around the world.

So what started for me as judging the ministry of the Holy Spirit has actually turned into something I was called to, and I just didn’t even know it. Now what I do is train, equip and release people in the very thing that I sat in the back row and judged for four years. Isn’t that the justice of God for you?

Berglund: It’s funny how God tends to work like that. Even as you’re now describing your experiences then, you clearly have a very rational way of explaining and approaching the

supernatural. But of course, supernatural is in many ways “super-rational”—beyond the rational world and fully what we can understand. So how does that work for you when it comes to training and equipping people to operate in the supernatural?

Putman: I love that question. I think you’ve really pegged me and my approach to this. There can be a sentiment in the charismatic church of ‘Shut your brain off. This isn’t supposed to make any sense. Just go with it.’ Part of the reason why I struggled for four years was that I could never do that with integrity.

To be fair, there were some ways in which I was closed—I didn’t want it to be real, because I was afraid of what that meant. But in another way, God has wired me so that I use my mind, and I don’t think that’s a negative thing. For me to embrace practices that I can’t wrap my worldview around, to some extent, is just requiring me not to be me. For me, a big part of my journey has been, How can I see these things without giving up my perspective and the scientific training that I have? Do these things really have to be opposed to one another? I don’t think they do.

I attended undergraduate at Bethel University up in St. Paul, Minnesota. One thing I heard a lot up there which I find very helpful is they would say all truth is God’s truth. All truth belongs to God. Not all truth is in the Bible. All that’s in the Bible is true, but the Bible doesn’t teach about genetics. That’s just not in there. It’s not supposed to address everything. And the truth that we can learn about the world that isn’t in the Bible, it still does belong to God. It’s still God’s truth. So for me, I think that frames the way I approach it.

If people really get healed, then that’s a true thing, and we don’t need to be afraid of thinking about that. We don’t need to be afraid of scientifically testing that. We don’t need to be afraid of examining that with the tools we have. If a

prophecy is accurate, then that prophecy is accurate, and it should be demonstrably accurate, not just in a fuzzy, "We're going to choose to find a way to believe it" kind of way.

If you look at the history, Christians have always been great thinkers. I don't think being charismatic means we can't be a good thinker. I mean, look at the apostle Paul: one of the most incredible thinkers of all time, and he sure was charismatic. He found a way to embrace being able to use his mind effectively but also walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. And that's what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to produce people who have a rounded, theological approach, who understand how ministry in the spirit fits in the broader framework of Christianity.

Berglund: That's great. At the School of Kingdom Ministry, I'm sure there are people who come to it who aren't necessarily starting from ground zero, like you did, but rather come because they love the gifts of the Holy Spirit and want to get better at operating in them.

Putman: Absolutely.

Berglund: Among those people, what do you find are the most inaccurate or problematic ideas people can take into the training?

Putman: There are a number of them! The first thing that comes to mind, and I kind of hinted at this earlier, is that we can incorrectly correlate weird and God activity.

Look, when God does something, by definition, it's going to be weird because He's transcending the natural order. It's going to not fit in the "normal." When God does something, it's going to be weird. But we don't need to add weird to God. God has the free range to do whatever He wants. He's God; we don't boss Him around.

But there's a lot that happens that, to me, feels like an

attempt to participate in what God's doing, where what's actually happening is we're being weird, hoping that being weird will make God do something. There's a balance there. Sometimes God does ask you to do something that's weird, and you have to be willing to go there. But my approach is to start as normal as possible, and let God mix in whatever weird He wants. We don't need to start weird and then hope that God will breathe on our weird, if that makes sense.

I think that really matters, because my goal is to produce people who can move in the things of the Spirit, in the context of both church and the community outside the church. I want you to be able to get a word of knowledge and pray for healing in the church building or at your home group meeting. But what I really want is for you to be able to prophesy to your neighbor or pray for your family members at the family reunion or minister to someone who's going through a divorce at your workplace. To me, that's the holy grail I'm aiming for. If it only stays within the bounds of the church, then in my opinion, we haven't really aimed ourselves at Jesus' model.

The majority of Jesus' miraculous ministry was not done in the synagogue. There were some times—it's not zero. But a lot of the times Jesus is engaging and ministering out in the midst of society. If we're not careful, we can create a culture in the church where we correlate weird and God, but then there's no way for us to bring out the gifts in a way that doesn't turn people off so much that an unbeliever will say, "You're being weird. I'm out of here." We don't need to add weird to God.

Another thing I regularly see believers lack is a thorough understanding of how all of this Holy Spirit ministry stuff fits within the broader context of salvation and the redemptive story. I'm 1000% for the ministry of the Spirit. But that is a component of Christianity, and we need to understand how that weaves together with the other major components, like: What does it mean to be reconciled in

relationship with God? What does it mean to be a new creation? How do those things connect with the idea of being empowered by the Holy Spirit and sent to continue the ministry of the kingdom?

If we don't understand how those questions weave together, we wind up presenting a partial package. That can result in practitioners that don't have the ability to go the long haul.

I've seen it play out this way many times, where people will come to a conference, and perhaps they'll get an impartation or just be really inspired: "I've got to do this again. I'm going to pray. I'm going to see God do amazing things." And they lean in, and they go for it for three weeks. And then life catches up with them, and they lose their initial enthusiasm. Before they know it, they're mostly back to normal life, and hopefully they've gained 2% above whatever they had before they went to this conference. To me, that's the sign of a nonintegrated understanding of how the miraculous and the Holy Spirit are connected to the overall journey of faith.

We see Jesus lead and live an ongoing lifestyle of Holy Spirit and kingdom ministry, where He's doing this stuff all the time. It is natural and normal for him. He doesn't need to be psyched up to do it. He doesn't need to be inspired to do it. It is the natural overflow of the belief system that He has and the walk that He has with the Father. If we don't come to that point, then we'll create practitioners who need constant enthusiasm and re-inspiring to keep them doing it, when in reality, it's supposed to be the normal overflow of our lives. So that's another piece.

Finally, I believe that partnering with the Holy Spirit is a learnable skill. Now, that doesn't mean I can do healing or prophecy outside of the leading of the Holy Spirit. He supplies the supernatural juice. But my ability to discern and effectively partner with what He's doing is a skill that I can develop. When you think about it that way, you wind up

approaching learning how to do all of this stuff with a different mentality.

For much of the church, I see a mentality where doing Holy Spirit stuff is approached as a kind of “magic pixie dust” that gets sprinkled on people. Once you get the magic pixie dust sprinkled on you—if you’re so fortunate—all this supernatural stuff just happens. You don’t really know or control how it happens any more than you knew or controlled how it didn’t before you had the magic pixie dust sprinkled on you. The target and goal of this kind of thinking is, “I’ve got to have something I don’t presently have, which will somehow magically make this stuff start working. I won’t understand it when it does, but at least it’ll be working.”

To be clear, I do believe in impartation. I’m not trying to undermine impartation. I think that’s real. I think that matters. But what I find is that most believers have a whole lot more going on with the Holy Spirit than they are tracking and partnering with effectively. God is talking to Christians way more than most of us recognize. The problem is we dismiss His voice. And if we do recognize that it’s Him, we don’t know what to do with it. We don’t know how to act on it. We don’t know how to test it. We don’t know how to actually take that experience, recognize it and convert it into something useful.

God is actually doing a whole lot more through most Christians when they pray than they realize. For a lot of believers, healing actually starts to happen. They just don’t know how to perceive it and partner with it when it does. So they come to conclusions like, “Well, it’s not my gift,” and they assume they can’t do it. My approach is to say, “Hold on. No. Learning how to do what you see the Father doing is a learnable skill. You learn how to see what the Father’s doing, and then you learn how to do what He’s doing. Those are skills that can be developed.”

That means we want to create arenas for practice. We probably

want to create feedback loops where people are helping us understand what we're seeing and what we're doing and what in that is working and what isn't. If we're wise, it involves learning to layer complex skills on top of simple skills, the same way we learn every other skill set. When you learn to play piano, you learn the basic scales before you move up to basic songs before you move up to complicated songs. I think there are actually basic-level skills of partnering with God and then more intermediate and then more advanced; and we can learn to develop all of those so that as the Holy Spirit leads, however He leads, we're cooperating with a developed skill set, instead of just saying, "God showed up, and something random is going to happen. I guess I'll do whatever feels natural in the moment. Hopefully it'll take"—which tends to be the approach I see most people take. I think that's better than doing nothing. I'm 100% for that. But I want to develop competent practitioners, ones who understand how to recognize the leading of the Holy Spirit and how to partner very effectively.

That results in a model of training and equipping that can at first feel dissonant for people, because they're expecting the Holy Spirit to move in inherently extremely unpredictable and random and almost chaotic feeling ways. But that's not an environment that helps people develop skills. The environment that helps people develop skills is a little more structured, intentional and purposeful.

So what we do is we create environments like that. And then we say, "OK, Holy Spirit, would You come and be the teacher? Jesus promised You would come and teach us and guide us into all these things. So here's a structured environment. Would You come and act as the teacher? Would You show us how to partner with You in this kind of way?" What happens is people actually begin to develop skill sets and become more and more competent practitioners.

Berglund: Obviously, we know that the Holy Spirit doesn't

change. God is unchanging. But from your perspective, have you noticed any differences between how younger and older charismatics engage and interact with the gifts of the Spirit?

Putman: In short, the answer is yes. I definitely have. There are a few different directions I could take this answer.

One would be the understanding of where all of this fits with respect to the journey of faith—and how this meshes with society as a whole. Another would be expectations of where the ministry of the Holy Spirit takes you and what you're supposed to do with it. And then the third would be different expectations in terms of how that correlates to our connection to the church body. So let me kind of take each of these in turn.

First, let's talk about my expectations of experiencing the Holy Spirit within the realm of Christianity and how that intersects with society as a whole. I'm a very early Millennial, by my understanding of the generations and their cut-off dates and stuff. I'm 36 right now. What I see is Millennials—and I think Gen Z also is somewhat similar—struggle to embrace something where experience and teaching don't have a high amount of synthesis.

I didn't experience the Charismatic Renewal, so I can't accurately speak to that. But it feels to me that, in previous times, sometimes the gospel could have been thought of as inherently sufficient: "The gospel is good enough. And if you have the Holy Spirit, that's icing on the cake." So to speak. I think that kind of thinking doesn't really fly very well with the younger generations.

I think younger generations are growing up in a far more post-Christian environment, where they're not going to believe in Jesus simply because it's the culturally acceptable thing to do. Because it's not. So where does the rubber meet the road with this? Because if this isn't experiential, if Christians

just want to give them a body of teaching, they're not really interested in that.

The truth is that all day every day, I already get marketed stuff. On every website, on every social media platform, on every media channel, I'm constantly getting marketed. I don't need you to market me your idea of what the truth is, too. But if you're offering something to me, where you can give me a legitimate experience and then help me understand that experience, now we're talking.

I really see the experience of the Holy Spirit and the ministry of the Spirit being increasingly critical to Christianity as a whole in America. Along with being a post-Christian culture, we're also increasingly a culture that's open to other spiritualities. Whether it's meditation or whatever, there are loads of spiritual practices that are largely embraced by big sectors of culture. And if we are offering a practiceless Christianity where we don't have experience as a part of the package, we're going to be looked at as less.

I think that that's actually a shift. Because 20 to 30 years ago, it was kind of like, "Here's Christianity. And, oh, by the way, there's this Holy Spirit experience stuff too, which you're not expecting, and I'm going to have to sell you on, and you're going to have to adjust your thinking and be OK with that." Now it's sort of like, "Oh, you don't have spiritual experiences? Then I'm not sure I would even give this a serious glance." I think the centrality of the ministry of the Spirit, experiencing the inbreaking kingdom, is becoming more and more important.

The second thing is, I think, a good thing and a gift from the Lord. The younger generations are very societally oriented. I care about our culture and society in a different way. I want to know that I'm improving the world that I live in. That doesn't just mean being part of a church that improves the

world I live in. I want to be able to feel I'm making my neighborhood or workplace better. I want to feel a strong connection to that.

What that translates to in Christianity—and particularly Spirit-empowered Christianity—is the younger generation takes more seriously and puts more stock in the idea that the gospel should be transforming our communities, not just great churches and getting people saved. We should be seeing the crime rate in our community drop. We should be seeing the lack of consistent education across different racial barriers go away. We should be seeing societal indicators changing because of the presence of the church in the community doing the kingdom things we're called to do.

In other words, the proof in the pudding is no longer going to be just in the church walls. If so-and-so got healed and so-and-so got the financial breakthrough we've been praying for, that's great. It needs to be happening in the church. But I think the younger generation is also going to be asking, "How is prophecy helping shape the business sector in our community?" I want to know that. Who's prophesying to businesses, and how is that helping business break through in our community? Where are words of wisdom speaking into our educational system? How can we partner gifts of healing with our hospitals?"

These are the kinds of things our generation and the younger generations have a lot of passion wrapped around. It's going to result in having to rethink the purpose of local churches. How do we structure and organize them? What does it mean to be a meaningful member in a local church? In the past, a lot of the "contract" was, "If you're a part of this local church, then we want you to help build the church." I think, in time, the contract's going to change to say, "If you're a meaningful part of this local church, we expect you to be on mission in our community." That's going to be a big shift. Exactly how all that works, I don't know.

The last thing that I see is we really want to do things together more. Family has almost entirely shattered and broken down communally in the last 50 years. So the majority of us come from, at best, a dysfunctional family, if not a split one. We have a big gap and need in our life for feeling like we're part of a family. When we come to the church, we don't want spiritual superheroes that we get inspired by and say, "I'm with that guy" or "I'm with that gal." We want to feel like we're a part of a family that has our hands linked together, that's doing something collectively.

I think that that has implications for our local churches and also the way our local churches relate to one another and pursue ministry in the community together. I think we're less inclined to get caught up on the doctrinal difference between this church and that church. We're more like, "All right, do you follow Jesus? Do you believe He's the only way to get saved? OK, that's what I'm looking for. Let's figure out a way to make this place a better place to live."

I think there's a kind of togetherness in the church. If I were going to frame it spiritually, I'd say it's a real spirit of unity. This generation really cares about unity, and I feel like I see God really breathing on it.

Berglund: Regarding the spirit of unity, it seems like among Millennials and Generation Z, there seems to be more openness to the gifts of the Spirit than there was in the past. I don't know if that's a result of the breakdown of the denominational barriers you described, and I'm not sure what would be causing that. Is that something that you've observed as well?

Putman: Absolutely. I think you're spot-on with that. I think we're kind of experientially wired, maybe? It feels to me like the idea of a Christianity that doesn't have a strong experiential component feels empty—in a way that it doesn't seem like, say, Generation X or the Baby Boomers felt.

I think the Baby Boomers and Gen X were really on a search for truth. That's what they wanted. They wanted to know, "Do you have the accurate truth? Are you giving me the real deal? Is it bulletproof? Can I build my life on it?" That really feels to me what those two generations wanted—the Baby Boomers were looking more to the build, and the Gen Z were looking more to the bulletproof.

But when you're coming to the Millennials and the Generation Zs, we're looking for a holistic experience of faith that does include truth, but also includes experience, and then puts them at much more equal footing than the previous generations did. The result of that is, for example, when I read the Bible, I see characters doing this healing thing or this prophecy thing. Well, then, I want to have that too. That's the experience the Bible points to, so I definitely am interested in that.

That's kind of my hypothesis as to the why—but who knows exactly? I'm not exactly like a societal analyst, but I do sense that.

In the past, it was a real barrier. You were either part of the Holy Spirit crowd or not part of the Holy Spirit crowd. There wasn't really much of a gray area there, and if you weren't part of it, you were closed. Now it almost feels like the default is "curiously open." We're not really debating, "Are these things real?" We're asking, "What level of experience do you want? Do you have, and do you want?" Almost everybody takes them as a given. It's just that some people really want to walk in a lot of the gifts, and some people are OK with the occasional dose. But most everybody seems like they're more open to it.

Berglund: I have to imagine that's such a different dichotomy for many of our older readers and listeners, who had to go through the movement's origins. In those days, like you said, you could be potentially ostracized for believing that the

gifts were real.

Putman: You're exactly right. There was a really big cost. There are a lot of forerunners who paid a heavy price there, which I think is something the younger generations need to keep in mind. We don't have a price, but they paid a price.

And also, for prior generations who took the cessationist side, there's a kind of skepticism that lives there. That's another thing that we need to realize. Just because you're curiously open to the gifts of the Spirit doesn't mean your mother or grandmother is, and we shouldn't judge her for where she came from and the world she lived in, you know? Just like I would hope she wouldn't judge me for the world I live in. There's a lot of nuance in all that that I think really matters.

One of the other unities that really matters is the intergenerational unity. I see God just doing that everywhere around the body as well. This is not just like sideways unity; it's generational, up-down unity. And a real element of that kind of unity is learning how to tackle all that.

—Find Putty Putman on his website, [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).

Twenty Billy Grahams

Bianca Juarez Olthoff has a big dream.

“Everyone knows Billy Graham, but Billy Graham had a mentor and a discipler that made him who he was,” she says. “I’m not trying to be Billy Graham. I’m trying to grow 20 Billy Grahams.”

Olthoff—who founded and co-pastors The Father’s House OC in Orange Country, California, with her husband—has a heart for mentoring the next generation, particularly young women entering ministry. She says she never intended to start a church, and even revealed on the most recent episode of the Charisma News podcast that she hopes someone else will be leading the church in 10 years. She’s not interested in building one single church building as much as building God’s global church and equipping the next generation to lead it. In this Q&A, Olthoff shares her testimony, her dreams for the church and her heart for the next generation of leaders.

This interview—originally recorded for our New Year, New Voices podcast series—has been edited for length and clarity. Listen to the full interview here:

Berglund: Can you share your testimony?

Olthoff: I grew up in the church. My dad is a church planter and has served the local church currently for 30 years in East Los Angeles, California. I love the church. I love the call on my dad’s life. But I always said I would never work in a church, and I would never marry a pastor, and I would never church plant. So the best way to make God laugh is just to tell Him your plans.

My faith journey, growing up in a faith-filled house, was so fun. I got to see my parents express their faith and their walk. But my dad always said, “One day, you will make a decision on whether or not my God is your God.”

I never understood that because I was like, “Well, of course your God is my God.”

Around the age of 22 or 23, I had come out of a devastating three-year relationship. My mom was diagnosed with two forms of cancer. One of them was brain cancer. And I’d lost my

grandmother. It just felt like everything was up in flames in life. And in full candor and disclosure, I was really upset with God. We had loved God, we served God, we did all the right things; therefore, our life should be okay. I thought, My mom shouldn't be diagnosed with brain cancer, she should get a yacht and a 6-month vacation in Europe. Don't give cancer to my mom.

I had professed my faith at a young age, and I made a cognizant decision at 13 that God was my God. But I think at the age of 23, it was a pivot point of faith, where I realized that I have to put my faith through the fire and let the impurities and the dross rise to the surface so that only the purest thing remains. That's exactly what my mom's battle with cancer did. It was just a really crazy season. I had to come to a realization where, like, either I believe God is who He says He is and can do what He said He can do, or this is all for naught. That was my "come to Jesus" moment. That was when my faith became very real to me, and my faith became my own.

Since then, it's been this adventure of daily fighting to discover a little glimpse of God more and more each day. Even my faith journey of just walking in the fullness of His Spirit has been such an adventure that I don't take lightly. And it's an honor every single day to tell people and point people to Jesus.

Berglund: You mentioned that you never wanted to become a pastor—and here you are. So tell me about how you got that call to ministry, and about your church today.

Olthoff: I think I'm a lot like a spiritual Gideon or a spiritual Jonah. I really want to be Paul. I want to be Deborah. But I think I'm the kid who just loves to have fun and run away from God's call. And I always come back, and God is so faithful, and He's so patient. He's so gracious. So I think in this season of my life, I'm running headfirst into the full gales of wind saying, "Okay, I'm just going to do it

the first time that God asks me to do it.”

But long story short, I was working for an anti-human trafficking organization called A21 under Christine Caine, and I had worked alongside her for 6 1/2 years. And I felt like this nudge and call to go into prison. It felt foreign. It felt weird. Why would I want to leave the covering of Nick and Christine? And it wasn't like a lead; it was like I felt this this holy hunch, this Holy Spirit nudge, that I had to go into prison. I had no idea what that looked like. But God used that as my stepping out and stepping into, because there was even a greater sense of freedom. I wanted to bring spiritual freedom to the incarcerated.

I realized, living in Orange County, California, that there are people who are not in physical prisons but are in spiritual oppression. My husband and I were just hosting Sunday night dinners at our house to whomever: my gym instructor, people he met at restaurants. We'd say, “Hey, do you need community? Come to our house.”

The ambition was never to start a church. In fact, it was the farthest thing from my heart and mind. I just love cooking. We love hosting and entertaining. And we would have people come and sit around the dinner table, and we'd have some of the most life-changing conversations around the dinner table. I began to look at the life of Jesus, specifically in the book of Luke. Jesus was either coming to a party, going to a party or at a party in the entire book of Luke. And I realized, “Wait a minute, throwing dinner parties is ministry.”

One night, as he crawled into bed, my husband said, “Hey, I think we're starting a church.” And I said, “I think you're crazy. We are not starting a church. We are starting dinner parties.” And slowly but surely, we started seeing God do some amazing things in the life of people just having honest, earnest, simple conversations around the dinner table. And slowly but surely, the Sunday night dinner crew just began to

grow from 10 to 12 to 30 to 50. We realized we couldn't meet in our house anymore.

I travel and teach at conferences and churches. I was up in Northern California, speaking at a women's conference, and I stayed through the weekend to preach at this very big church up in Vacaville, California. I'd never heard of Vacaville. I'd never heard of this church. But I still connected with the senior pastor. And before I was set to preach for the first Sunday morning service—I'd preached the whole weekend to the women's conference—the pastor gets in front of this huge congregation and says, "I want us to welcome Bianca Olthoff. She's going to be preaching with us. She and her husband are church planters in Orange County, California." And I remember sitting with my Bible and my notes and thinking, Hold up. Pump the brakes. This guy's a heretic. I'm not a church planter.

I flew home that night, and I was laughing. I was talking to my husband about it. I said, laughing, "Can you believe it? He said we're church planters."

And as serious as a heart attack, he said, "Bianca, we are church planters, and we're planting a church."

And my response wasn't elation. It wasn't a holy praise party. You know what it was? I cried. I said, "I think you're right. We are starting a church." And that is how our church was birthed: through laughter, through crying and through a prophetic word. So it's all the gamuts of a crazy Latina woman. You laugh, you cry, you don't know what's going on, but you love to have a good party.

And those are still the values of the house. We laugh, we cry, we worship God, and we love to throw a good party. And God has been faithful.

We have had some of the most crazy, insane church planting stories, like discovering a homeless person living in our venue for four months. ... Some churches can say that they're a

home for the homeless, but we literally are a home for the homeless. We rent a venue for our Sundays, but we can't control who's there on Saturday. And we've had magic shows, or some adult entertainment like the Thunder From Down Under. So we come in on those Sunday mornings, and we pray over the venue with anointing oil and bleach. We just take claim over our venue.

But we've had some amazing, life-transforming stories, and we feel privileged to join the ranks of other church planters, bringing the gospel to literally the least of these. So it's been fun.

Berglund: I'm sure you know that in many Christian circles, it's still somewhat controversial for a woman to be a pastor and to be a Bible preacher for men and women the way you are. Was that something you had to work through yourself when you felt the call to ministry?

Olthoff: I think that was part of the reason why I kind of wanted to run like Jonah. I love my upbringing. I loved being raised in the church, but I had more of a conservative background. So this concept of a woman leading was foreign, and a woman pastor was even more foreign. Dare I say, I would say that I was taught that it was wrong.

For my entire life, I felt like maybe there was something wrong with me. That I was in the wrong for doing what I felt God had called me to—and not just called, but equipped and gifted me to do. So there is and has been opposition, coming from as close as family to as far as the internet. I had to reconcile this.

I began to read a lot. I wanted to make an educated decision. And really what it boils down to, and what it distilled down to, is one day I'm going to have to come face to face with God. And He's going to ask me what I did with His Son. I feel privileged to have taught children and teenagers and women,

but I've been invited to bring the gospel not just to my state, not just to the nation, but to the globe. And one day when I come face to face with God, and He asks me what I did with His Son, I want to unashamedly, unabashedly say, "I preached Him to anyone who would listen, no matter the age, the stage, the gender, the socioeconomic status."

I just want to boldly proclaim who Jesus is. And for those who feel like it's wrong, hey, that's no problem. Don't listen. But for those who have ears to hear and a heart that knows, let the gospel go forward.

Berglund: I know one thing that's been really important to you in your ministry has been mentoring other women in the faith. Can you talk a little about that?

Olthoff: Absolutely. I believe it was Andy Stanley, the pastor out of Alpharetta, Georgia, who said, "Do for the one what you wish you could do for all."

I remember being a 25-year old female in church—having these leadership, preaching, teaching and evangelistic gifts, being passionate about developing people—but there was no one to develop me. And in a culture, in a church, in a time where it was wrong, I just had to figure it out for myself and stumble my way through.

So at 35, I look back on when I was 25. And I wish someone would have pulled me aside and said, "Hey, you have a lot of potential. You've got a lot of gifts. But let's steward that and let's groom you and develop you in a way that you can walk in maximum potential." Now I wish I had that. And I thought, Well, why can't I be that for someone else?

Here's the thing: I believe you can learn from anyone. You can be mentored by anyone. But for me specifically, I do feel called for women, because one, I am a woman, and two, I know the intricacies, the minutiae and the nuances of leading as a woman. So I pulled in about 15 young, great women of God who

feel like they are called either to the secular or sacred spaces or want to develop in their leadership, and I made the investment. I made the financial investment, and I met with them every single week, twice a week, for three months. And that started this passion for mentoring. Now, that program has since ended.

Now that we have the church, my husband and I are just passionate about grooming the next generation. Our goal is to hand off the church in 10 years. The vision is big: 10 churches in 10 years reaching over 10,000 people, and we want to not build it for us. We want to build it for the next generation, and the next generation needs to be called, equipped and trained and prepared to inherit what we're going to pass off. So we are passionate.

Personally, my legacy goal is to develop 20 world-caliber preaching, teaching, evangelistic men and women who radically shift and change the world. Everyone knows Billy Graham, but Billy Graham had a mentor and a discipler that made him who he was. I'm not trying to be Billy Graham. I'm trying to grow 20 Billy Grahams.

Berglund: So when you're planting these churches, you're not thinking "I'm going to pastor this for as long as I'm in ministry."

Olthoff: No!

Berglund: You want to plant it, pass it off to someone else and then go plant another church or go train someone else then?

Olthoff: You know what? My husband's of German descent. He was born here. His parents were born here. His grandparents were born here. But his heart for Germany and his heart for Europe has been contagious.

This is before we started the church. We were doing a lot of

stuff in Europe. I got invited to speak at some women's conferences. He got invited to come and consult for some smaller churches. And then it grew to larger churches and networks out there and churches out there.

I have two stepkids, and so our call first and foremost is to our family. We're committed to our kids. So when we tossed around the idea of coming alongside some churches in Europe, it just wasn't the time, because the kids were young. So then the Lord began to shift in my husband's heart and in my heart, so we are planted here stateside.

But our goal eventually is to be like Paul and Barnabas. We just want to go equip the saints. We want to go help churches build. We want to be fundraisers for churches that are in low-income areas and urban areas stateside as well as globally. (We haven't been public with this, so you're getting all the tea. I'm just spilling it, to be honest.) The goal is in 10 years. And of course, we'd have a transition plan and equip the saints to take over the church. But who knows what the Lord has for us? We could end up in Europe. We could end up in Canada. We could end up in Latin America.

We're passionate about God's people coming alive and equipping people who are weary in their season. Keep on reminding them, "Don't grow weary in doing good, for in due season you will see a harvest."

In God's greatness, we are seeing harvest right now. But this harvest isn't for us. This harvest is for the next generation.

Berglund: How are you seeing the Holy Spirit at work in that next generation?

Olthoff: Listen, brother, all my Baptist roots are going to come out right now. I spoke about my "come to Jesus" moment when I was 23. Again, I grew up in a very conservative environment. And I think theoretically I knew about the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God and the power that He possesses.

Like, I got the theology of it. I didn't have the practice of it. But when my mom was diagnosed with cancer, you can't talk about faith without having a full understanding of it. We can't talk about the miraculous without believing in it. We can't talk about the supernatural indwelling, the power that we possess, that rose Jesus Christ from the grave like Paul reiterated to the Ephesians and to the Romans.

I feel that for a long time I saw so many half-baked Christians walking around with an unvictorious life, without having an understanding of the power that we possess and the indwelling of the Spirit. That is what I'm passionate about. I'm depositing into the next generation.

Listen, we started the church with zero dollars, zero people and zero venue. And God has been so gracious that we're celebrating over 350,000 YouTube download views for the messages coming out of the house, over 500 salvations and giving away \$80,000 to people in the community domestically and internationally. That is not Matt and I. Who are we?

Listen, I'm the daughter of an immigrant. I couldn't read, write or spell at the age of 12. I grew up morbidly obese. My husband lived in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Like, we are not cool people. We don't wear skinny jeans, and we're not like the hippest and the coolest. We are passionate about Jesus, and we're passionate about developing other Jesus lovers. And God has found favor on that.

Yes, we are strategic. Yes, we are organized. Yes, we have a marketing background. Yes, we care about communication. But we are so utterly dependent and compliant to the very presence and need for the power of God and the indwelling of His Spirit that we choose not to go forward.

Honestly, I believe the movement that brought my parents to know Jesus—the hippie movement, the Way, the Jesus movement back in the '60s—is a microcosm of what God's going to do in

this next generation. I think it was an amuse-bouche. It was a bite. It was a tidbit of what we're going to see. And I want this next generation to know that that revival will not happen unless you're utterly dependent on God's presence moving before us.

Find Bianca Juarez Olthoff on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).

Spirit-Empowered Subversion

Tyler Burns is a busy guy. Beyond pastoring New Dimensions Christian Center in Pensacola, Florida—a full-time job for most people—Burns also serves as the vice president of The Witness: A Black Christian Collective, where he writes and co-hosts the podcast Pass the Mic.

With all that going on, we were grateful Burns took time to speak with us for our ongoing New Year, New Voices series on the Charisma News podcast—and it was an incredible conversation. Burns shares his own testimony of growing up within the charismatic movement, offers his perspective on why and how the church should cultivate diverse and international perspectives and even explains how speaking in tongues represents a spiritual game changer for victims of injustice and oppression.

This interview—originally recorded for our New Year, New Voices podcast series—has been edited for length and clarity. Listen to the full interview here:

Berglund: So Tyler, you're the vice president of The Witness. You're the co-host of the podcast Pass the Mic. And you're also the lead pastor of New Dimensions Christian Center. With

all that going on, how's your life right now?

Burns: Another fun fact about me is I'm also married to my lovely wife, Mylena, and we have two kids under 2. So we have a 20-month old daughter and a 2-month old son, so life is a lot of fun in the Burns household. With two kids under 2, it's always a party here. So my life is interesting! But I just feel blessed and honored to have the opportunity to speak with you and to talk about all the work that God is doing in my life.

Berglund: Do you mind sharing your testimony?

Burns: I was raised in a pastor's home. In 1992, My father actually founded the church that I now pastor. In one of our early services, even though I was a young child, I remember very vividly my father talking about eternity and talking about heaven and hell from a very fire-and-brimstone mentality of preaching. He was sweating and making the evangelistic appeal, and he kept talking about hell. The only thing I could grasp about it was it was hot. And I grew up in the Panhandle, so being a Panhandle kid—a country boy from the South—I recognize heat. He was just giving these analogies about how hot it was going to be.

So we get in the car after the altar call and everything, and I'm like, "Huh." So I bring it up to my parents. I say, "Hey, look, whatever we need to do to keep me out of this hot place that y'all are talking about, let's go ahead and handle that." They chuckled to themselves. But later on that night, my father sat down with me at the edge of my bed. He opened up the Scriptures, which were not foreign to me; I was familiar with the Scriptures, because that was just a part of our house, as a part of our routine. And he broke down something about the gospel and something about Christ that just made it leap in me, and it just opened something up in my spirit in a way that hadn't been before.

I'd cognitively understood Christ and the elements of the gospel—the core tenets and principles—but the way he presented it? I now know it was the Spirit meeting me in that moment and awakening a dead soul. I remember knowing what repentance felt like and knowing what God forgiving me felt like. So I had this radical encounter with Jesus at that moment. I don't know if that was my official conversion experience, per se. I was very young, so maybe I didn't understand fully. What I do know is that I had an awareness of Jesus at that moment that I didn't have before. And then it was confirmed in other ways as I grew up. It was confirmed in other instances and experiences as I grew in the knowledge of God and I was disciplined.

What's interesting about that is the intersection of the charismatic and the intersection of the gifts of the Spirit, it was always very closely aligned with where my father had placed us theologically. He went on to be a state director in the Azusa Fellowship under the direction of Bishop Carlton Pearson. (This was pre-doctrine of inclusion and all that from Bishop Pearson.) So I grew up in that environment and in that world.

At an Azusa national conference at the age of 12. I spoke in tongues for the first time. I'll never forget that. At a very prominent charismatic church in South Florida at the age of 16, I received a radical call to gospel ministry—one that I couldn't deny, one that consumed me and one that has continued to consume me over the course of my life.

All of that is to say the intersection with the gifts, as far as my testimony and my spiritual development, has been consistent with this charismatic stream and expression of faith, which makes me feel so privileged to be able to kind of talk from that vantage point and in that space, because I don't always get to do that. That really led to my introduction to Jesus, which was so precious that it was my father and my parents who introduced me to that. But then beyond that, the growing and the deepening of the Spirit's

power and the growing and deepening of understanding how Jesus holistically changes and transforms someone's life, that's that moment for me.

Berglund: You're now pastoring at New Dimensions Christian Center. Tell me a little bit about how you got there and what the church is like.

Burns: Oh, man, that's so interesting. It's a great story because, again, it's one of these radical experiences.

So to connect it to its roots and the charismatic movement, the name New Dimensions was inspired by Higher Dimensions, which was the church where Bishop Pearson was pastoring in Tulsa, Oklahoma. New Dimensions is the place where I met Jesus. New Dimensions is a place where I learned about the faith. It's a place where I memorized Bible Scriptures. It's a place where I had radical encounters. It's a place where I, frankly, cast out demons. It's a place where I saw people get healed. I saw radical transformation and miracles. I just never imagined that I would actually serve at my home church.

While the church was very large and big, I went off to college. When I went off to college, my mentality was that I was going to be a philosophy professor, and I was going to defend the faith in the academic, and I was going to have a broadcasting ministry of some sort. Those were things that I was very passionate about.

But when I received that call to gospel ministry at the age of 16, the two things I said to God were, "Listen, I'll do anything you ask me to do. Just don't call me to be a youth pastor. And don't call me to preach. Anything else I'll do."

And for 10 years I was a youth pastor, and I'm still a preacher. So it's just funny how that works itself out.

So it was my senior year in college at Liberty University, and the Lord would not let me sleep. Everything was laid out for

me. There was a track I was supposed to do that was going to keep me in Lynchburg, Virginia, for the foreseeable future. I never intended to go back home to live permanently. I intended to leave all that behind. And God wouldn't let me sleep. So I didn't sleep for seven days. I also fasted for seven days as well. I felt like I was losing my mind. But God was communicating to me: "This is not the place you're supposed to be."

So I dropped everything in January 2010 and came back to serve my local community. That's the only thing I knew that God had called me to do with any definitive certainty. In the midst of all that, through a confluence of events, he confirmed that now is the time for me to start gospel ministry. So I went into the ministerial practicum at our church and studied there for six months, and then was ordained right thereafter at 21. I came on staff in 2010 and was just recently ordained lead pastor a few months ago. It's just a joy and an honor to work with my parents and to walk with them through this new season of our church, and for them to trust me with that.

Our church is very interesting, because it's a nondenominational church, but at the same time, it's kind of a mash-up of a lot of different traditions. We have people who come from an AME [African Methodist Episcopal] tradition, people who come from a COGIC [Church of God in Christ] background, people who come from a traditional Missionary Baptist background and then people who just come from this radical Pentecostal side of expression of the faith.

What we say at the church is "our destiny is helping you to unlock your destiny," which means we want to amplify the gifts that God has given to you, so that the body can flourish, you can flourish and then your community can flourish as well. So we're built on core tenets: Christ, community and city. So we believe in exalting Christ. We believe in leaning into Christian community within the fellowship of the believers, and then also translating that in the overflow to our city, so

that our city is impacted and changed as well.

Berglund: So after all that, how did you also get involved in The Witness?

Burns: That's a really interesting story as well, because The Witness started in 2011 under a different name. But I actually met the founder, Jemar Tisby, who's the president now of The Witness in 2012. We met at a conference and—I'll never forget—there was a session going on, but Jemar was trying to get me to go to a particular seminary that he was basically hosting an exhibit for. We just stood there and talked for an hour and a half, and we saw so much symmetry—not in our life situation, but just in what we were feeling at that time. I remember that conversation being a moment where, even when I went into the next session, I just sat back and said, "There's something special about this Jemar guy. Is that somebody I'm supposed to be connected to in the future?"

A few years later, through a mutual connection, he actually invited me to come up to a retreat for what was then the Reformed African American Network, and he asked me to be a part of it. It was kind of random. I said, "I don't know if I have time." A few years later, I actually fully committed to hosting the podcast Pass the Mic and being a part of The Witness team.

The Witness exists to address the core concerns of black Christians, and that includes theology, culture, sociology, justice—any number of sectors that would affect and be important to black Christians. We try as best as we can to pull on the expansive black church tradition. We believe that while we all have different kinds of perspectives and different tracks—as far as how we came to faith and express it and even some of the unique sectors we're in right now—we all have a connection to the black church, and we all have a connection to black Christian expression of faith.

So what we try to do is give events and perspectives from that vantage point, from the unique black Christian vantage point—knowing that it's not the only perspective to view things, but it's a very important one and one that's been historically marginalized. We try to give space and voice to people in groups that may not have had that opportunity to speak. And we've seen amazing things.

We actually recently just had our first national conference in Chicago, Illinois, at the historic Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church, which is the birthplace of gospel music in America. We were able to have hundreds of people come from across the country to talk about joy and justice. What is the reflection and what are the inflection points as we think about 400 years of black joy and justice in the American Christian context? God has done great things through that and through the podcast Pass the Mic as well.

Berglund: You mentioned Jemar Tisby. We had him on the podcast earlier this year as part of our Prophetic Activism series. During that series, we talked about that throughout the Old Testament, we often see that when the Holy Spirit comes on these prophetic people—people like Jeremiah, Elijah and Elisha—one of the first things that they go out and do is preach against injustice. Clearly, justice is a thing that's very close to the heart of God. And I know today that racial justice is an issue that has come to the forefront for the church. Throughout this New Year, New Voices series, a lot of these young leaders have brought up racial justice as one of the most important issues facing today's church. Why do you think that this issue is getting such attention right now? Because obviously it's always been important.

Burns: I think, to that point—the idea that it's always been important and why is it just such a big issue now? In previous decades, these things have been allowed to be covert and kind of under the surface, because we just haven't had the prevalence of media and attention. So it depended on where you

grew up, where you lived, and your unique life experiences. And there wasn't the proliferation. There wasn't the pathway and the avenue for these justice causes and mentalities to get out into the mainstream, to cross borders and cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds and states and regions of the country. Now you're seeing the prevalence of that through instant interaction on social media, through the proliferation of viral videos.

So what a lot of people are seeing from 2012—when Trayvon Martin was killed—to 2014—when Michael Brown, Eric Garner and all these prominent examples that continue today—is that now there is a virality to it. Now the church can't run from them. We can't get away from it. And many of us, especially those of us who are black Christians, have tried to address this in an evangelistic context.

What we take a step back and say is, "What tradition can we pull from? What can we pull from, out of our tradition of faith, that will give us answers?" And what we're seeing is that it's not that we were taught wrongly; it's that the way we were taught was incomplete. The way that we were taught didn't fill in the blanks and give the contours and the nuances that are necessary to have these types of conversations that intersect with the American experience. To talk about these things that relate to the Old Testament or how Jesus came in Luke 4. We're just not seeing these intersections in the same way within the American church.

So many of us are reapproaching this, and we're being moved in certain ways to take an honest, hard look at the ways we've been disciplined. To see if those ways were ... not insufficient, but maybe incomplete. Maybe there are things that we can add to it.

You know, you mentioned Jeremiah. I think about Jeremiah in Jeremiah 22, when he's talking about basically ranting and railing against unjust kings and wicked kings. He talks about

the ways in which they built their throne. They built their palaces on injustice and unrighteousness. And then at one point, he's speaking on behalf of God, when he says, "Is that not what it means to know Me? To carry out justice for the poor and carry out justice for those who are marginalized and those who are oppressed?" I think that's what you're hearing a lot from young Christians—Millennial and Gen Z Christians: "Isn't this what it means to follow the Lord? That we would love him and love our neighbor holistically, so that our neighbor can flourish not just eternally but flourish physically right now?"

So many of us are sitting back and saying, "Isn't this what it means to follow the Lord?" And the church has a decision to make. The church has a continuous decision with what we will do with this moment. And I believe it's not going away. I don't think this is one of those moments that can pass quickly and will shift. I believe that it's something that the Millennial generation and Generation Z will continue to bring to the forefront and continue to call the church to account for. And it's incumbent upon us to look at the whole expanse of Scripture—not just a few verses, not just the American contextual concerns—but to look at the whole of Scripture to inform our response.

Berglund: You grew up in the charismatic movement and even mentioned earlier praying to cast out a demon. Can you talk about the spiritual dimension to the fight over racial justice in America right now? Because I personally think that plays a large factor, and it's not an avenue that gets addressed by a lot of people.

Burns: I'm so glad that you asked that question. Many of us think about the current divide solely from a cognitive, intellectual standpoint. So we say, "Well, if we present these facts, if we present this mentality, if we present this framework—or this rubric or this systematic theological perspective—that people will see it clearly. They'll see it

from my perspective. They're going to understand it, and they're going to come to a realization on their own."

The reality of the matter is, that's not how this works. We believe that we're not wrestling against flesh and blood, as Paul would say. What we're wrestling against are principalities and powers, the rulers of darkness over this world, spiritual wickedness in high places. A lot of times we don't see that the fight for justice must be Spirit-led, and the fight for justice must be Spirit-inspired, because we're not battling against human powers. We're battling against forces of darkness that seek to divide, oppress, steal, kill and destroy.

One of the things that really helped me with this is James K.A. Smith's book *Thinking in Tongues*. In it, he talks about the Spirit-led expression of speaking in tongues—the holy, heavenly language of speaking in tongues. He said that if you think about it from the perspective of someone who is not in a power position or from the perspective of marginalized people groups, speaking in tongues is actually unique in the way that it confounds the empire. It confounds the status quo. It confounds the powers that be, because it's not just heavenly communication, but in many ways it was being used as earthly communication between people who did not understand similar language.

If you think about what is subversive—Spirit-empowered subversion, Spirit-empowered protest and activism toward the powers—then what we see is these Spirit-led expressions that the powers cannot explain. That the powers that be cannot confound because it comes from a different place. What it does is it gives power to the marginalized where they have none. So we might not have political power, but we do have Spirit power, and that Spirit power gives us the energy and the strength to move in activism to correct the injustice that has been put on those who are oppressed and marginalized.

I think that's just one element. When I saw that, I was like, Man, that really helps me to understand that many of our churches must see the gifts not just as some spiritual exchange but as a spiritual gift for natural purposes, for human earthly needs. And not just personal needs, but also corporate and systemic as well. That's just one area, but I think there's so many other ways in which the gifts of the Spirit and Spirit-led living intersects with the call to justice.

Berglund: Honestly, if we had all day, I would love to get into all of the ways that you've observed that.

Burns: We need to do that one day.

Berglund: Trust me, I've already been blown away in this interview. You have an open invite to come back on the podcast anytime you want.

Burns: That's good. I appreciate it.

Berglund: I think those reasons are why it's so important that the Spirit-filled and charismatic church needs to be at the forefront of racial justice. Within that, then, what are some concrete steps that churches can take to make justice not just a trendy buzzword that's in the cultural zeitgeist now, but a real, practical, lived emphasis in their church?

Burns: I think the first thing we need to do is we need to shift the voices of authority in our minds. What I mean by that is, we live in the American Christian context. And in the American Christian context, the voices of authority are always those who come from our immediate locale, who come from our context, who come from our culture, who come from our country.

What we need to do is we need to take a step back and say that the average global Christian is a woman of color from the global south—and she is poor, typically.

So we have to take a step back and say, "Why are we privileging certain voices? Why are we elevating voices that come from one context?" If you elevate voices from one context, you will only get one perspective.

What the church needs to do is intentionally take a step back and say, "Have we privileged American voices—even American Pentecostal or charismatic voices—above the global perspective of the church?" God never intended for us just to glean from American voices. He never intended for us just to glean from privileged voices. But He intended for us to glean from the entirety of the body of Christ, and in that diversity, we find our strength.

One person said it like this in a private conversation with me when I was in South Africa. He said, "The answer to the problems that the American church faces will not come from America." It won't come from America. We believe it will just come from us. But it comes from the interdependence of the Spirit, which breaks down the barriers, which says that there is no distance in the Spirit of God. So whether it's someone who is Colombian or someone who is Nigerian or someone who is in the Ukraine, it doesn't matter, because the Spirit of God breaks down those barriers. And if the Spirit of God breaks down those barriers, there's an exchange there, even in the Spirit. So that is No. 1: We have to shift our voices of authority.

No. 2: I think what's important for churches especially to do is to examine why we're in the situation that we're in right now in our current context. We have to be honest. Are we repeating the same mistakes that previous denominations and generations have repeated? This is a shameless plug for Jemar, but that's why I believe his book, *The Color of Compromise*, is so important. It's important because it tracks many different ways in which the church has collaborated with racism in the context of America and American Christianity. And it's a difficult read. It's a frustrating read. But what it does is

it gives us the background to say we won't make these same mistakes. Those who are unfamiliar with the past are doomed to repeat it.

Then I think thirdly and finally, the church needs a theological imagination to see that justice is not just an issue, but justice is integral to Christian discipleship. This is something that we're going through in our church now. What I am trying to push our church toward, what I'm telling them constantly, is that we cannot just simply highlight maybe me or another person within our church who does justice.

Typically churches do justice from a top-down mentality, which means one of the pastors, members or leaders is a figurehead for justice. Because they're a figurehead for justice, we support their work.

But what the church must do is say we are all called to do justice and love mercy and walk humbly with our God. Because of that, we all must move in that direction. That is a normal part of Christian discipleship. A normal part of Christian discipleship is taking an audit of how you use your funds, how you use your money. A normal part of Christian discipleship is taking an audit of how you use your body or your mind. And in the same context, it must be normative for us to say it is integral to Christian discipleship for the church to be equipped—every member of the church, from the most important to the “least important,” from the oldest to the youngest, no matter what your culture is. It is important for all of us to follow Jesus in the way that He preaches good news to the poor. That is an integral part of Christian discipleship. And in that way, the church will experience a true change and a true understanding, a true re-shifting of our perspective of justice from a buzzword to something that we truly believe.

Berglund: We're at an interesting point right now in the charismatic church. A lot of ministry leaders right now are people who came into the charismatic movement in the '70s and

'80s, during the Jesus Movement. I think now we're starting to see those old leaders retire, and new leaders come up in their place. How are you seeing the Holy Spirit at work in that next generation?

Burns: I think the Holy Spirit is at work in unique ways because He's raising up young people who have a holistic perspective of Christianity and giving them access to arenas of culture that our parents and our grandparents—the fathers and mothers of the faith in our tradition—probably didn't have access to in the same ways. I think about my brother, Elder Mark Moore from Atlanta, who's doing amazing things with the Young Leaders Conference and being able to intersect—being able to preach and teach and hoot and do all these expressive, charismatic things that we see, but also being able to pay off \$1.5 million of medical debt for patients who are in that situation. Being able to bless thousands of families and clear their medical debt, even while he brings thousands of young leaders together in Atlanta.

I think what the Spirit is leading us to is a re-presenting, to kind of steal Mike Todd's presentation, of Scriptures: a re-presenting of Jesus as the holistic Savior. He's holistic in addressing not just things that happen in church in the four walls, not just things that happen as they relate to evangelism, but things that happen as they relate to the entirety of our society.

Our Latin American theologian friends would say this is nothing new. They talk about it in terms of integral mission. But it's this idea that, yes, we evangelize and, yes, we are preaching Jesus. But at the same time, we are preaching Jesus, and we're involved in society. I see that being something that is unique.

I also see that there is a sense in which younger charismatic believers, younger charismatic preachers, are actually focused on institution-building. We don't just want to go around and

be known as great preachers. We don't just want to go around and be known as great orators or people who can move a crowd or sing well or articulate. We also want to be doers as well, and we want to build institutions that will outlive us.

That's what I desire with The Witness. I desire that The Witness would be something my children and their children can be a part of, and that will continue to lead conversations into future generations. But I don't want it to just end with the church. I don't want it to just end with one sermon or being known as a great preacher. I want it to be something that continues long after me, as "This person was an example of how Jesus can refashion, reshape a community." I think younger charismatic leaders are understanding that and thinking of that in much sooner, deeper and wider terms than our parents and the mothers and the fathers of the faith.

Berglund: In your own personal quiet time right now, what has God been laying on your heart? What does He have you really praying about and passionate about right now?

Burns: Man, that is such a loaded question. And I think it's an important question, because hopefully, as preachers, as leaders of movements, we are not just telling others that they should be shaped by Jesus, but we are being shaped by Him as well.

I'll say the first thing is a personal element. It's something I've been pushing towards over the course of years, and that's this push towards emotionally healthy spirituality. Pete Scazzero wrote this book by that name, Emotionally Healthy Spirituality, that just drastically changed my life. I remember there was a point in my life where I was doing the spiritual disciplines well and had a fervent prayer life and I was opening up the Scriptures and studying it. I felt like I was doing everything I was supposed to do. I was in ministry. But there were just gaps in my interactions with people. There were gaps in how I talked to the people who are close to me.

There was a joy gap. There were just all these other things that were really frustrating for me.

I read that book, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*. The subtitle is, "It's impossible for us to be spiritually mature while being emotionally immature." It drastically reframed how I viewed my spiritual development. That became integral—that I needed to make sure that I observed my soul in a way that made sure I was emotionally healthy as a leader, as a man.

There's also a book, *Emotionally Healthy Leader*, that talks about it from a Christian leadership or overall leadership perspective. But it just drastically changed my life. I'm constantly going back to that, because it pulls on the contemplative tradition, which I believe can work in multifaceted tandem with the Pentecost tradition. So what it's pulled me to do is to observe silence and solitude and Sabbath and to journal ferociously, to go back to go forward, which means examining parts of my life that have been unaddressed.

So that's been a personal thing that I've tried to push the people around me—our staff, our team—to ensure that we are emotionally healthy.

Secondly, this is kind of something that is external. (We talked about internal; now let's talk external.) The Lord has really been moving me in this direction that's kind of tangential to justice, but I think it's a little bit deeper and a little bit more of a heart posture, and that's this question: "What does it mean to wash feet? What does it mean to wash someone's feet? And when Jesus does that at the Last Supper, when Jesus washes the disciples' feet, what does it mean to humbly serve someone in a vulnerable, intimate way that truly shows them who Jesus is?"

I've been convicted that I talk about justice, and I say things about justice, and I fight for it, and I serve. And I think I'm doing well in certain areas. But the reality of the

matter is, the Lord has been moving me to wash feet. That doesn't just mean externally in my community. That means in my home as a husband and a father. That means as a pastor, as a leader, as a brother, friend and mentor.

What does it mean to wash feet? What does it mean to humble myself and not to be the person who sits on the throne, not to be the person who has autonomy from any of the problems of people, but to truly be touched with the feelings of people's infirmities? To love them well and to love them as Jesus would? And in that, to sacrifice and to die to myself?

So those things have been very deep for me: emotionally healthy spirituality, and then what does it mean to wash feet as Jesus has done?

Berglund: I heard about emotionally healthy spirituality when I spoke to Pastor John Mark Comer earlier this year.

Burns: John Mark is amazing. Oh my goodness.

Berglund: He's talked about that need for emotional health as well. This might be too strong, but I wonder if that trend toward valuing the emotional health of our leaders is a partial course correction from the last generation.

Burns: It's interesting, because every generation has gaps, right? Every generation has little blind spot areas. I think what has been so incredible about Baby Boomers and Generation X is that they have this capacity to work and to work and to work and to grind and to do things in service of the next generation that we will never truly understand until eternity. There are many crowns that my parents will receive, that older leaders who have mentored me will receive, just because of their discipline and consistency. That's something that Millennials and Generation Z must be challenged by and must be encouraged to emulate.

But in the midst of that, there was not a lot of teaching for

Baby Boomers and Generation X about how to care for their own souls well. How to not sacrifice your body and your mind on the altar of Christian ministry.

As a generation, we're going to have our own battles to fight. We're going to have our own giants to kill. But we see the negative effects of just the human reality of how when you're pushed to the edge, when you're burnt out, when you refuse to engage in silence and solitude, when you refuse to know yourself so that you may know God, when you refuse to take Sabbath, what ends up happening? These massive falls. And I don't think these pastors were intending to get into ministry to misuse it or intending to get into ministry to fall away or to do things that make us gasp. I think it's just the reality of emotional immaturity that's just gone wild.

If emotional immaturity is not dealt with, and not addressed at a young age, it will manifest itself in costly decisions at an older age. I don't say that as a put down for the previous generation, because we have our own things with social media, with technology, with the way we spend our money. We have all those types of things in our generation as well. But it's important for us as young leaders to make sure that we're healthy first. We don't want to get these big platforms and be international if we're not healthy, because we're going to lead people astray and we're going to destroy families and churches and movements. So I do think that is something that we're going to constantly see. That's OK.

Plus, with the mental health issues that we see continuously arising in the church, we're just going to see the importance of it. We have to take care of our minds, our emotions, our bodies, everything—holistically. We have to love the Lord with all of us. We bring our full selves even to our ministry. So that's something that I do see is going to be important. Man, we need counselors. We need spiritual directors. We need therapists. We need to be emotionally healthy while being theologically precise and Spirit-led in our powers as well.

Berglund: Like you said, each generation has its blind spots. That's why we need each other as the body of Christ. That's why we as younger believers need those older mentors who can give us those years and decades of wisdom. But I'm sure there are also things the older generation can still learn from younger leaders if they will have the humility to learn.

Burns: That's something my father and I are actually walking through now. We're in the midst of a church transition, which means working together and sitting down and talking with one another and having these very difficult conversations where I'm sure it's frustrating for both of us. I know it's frustrating on my side. I know it's frustrating for him. We're just trying to work through what I'm calling "generational appreciation." What does it look like to take the best of the past and the best of the future, to work together in the present to accomplish the vision that God has given to us?

So working through those is going to be tricky, because what we're seeing is that, for Millennials [and] Generation Z, we have to have the patience and honor to sit under older leaders. And older leaders have to have the humility to listen to younger leaders, because we know the landscape. Those types of things, that push-pull—there's a generational beef that doesn't have to be. It doesn't have to be like this.

So my father and I are trying to figure out what that looks like in our local church context, in our small body. What does that look like? I know a lot of people are figuring that out as well. Not even just from father and son, but from generation to generation and transitioning well. That's going to be another big point as well.

Berglund: Is there anything that we didn't bring up that you want to tell our readers?

Burns: Man, there's so many things we could talk about. Love Jesus well. Love your family. Love your community. Serve your

neighbor. Wash their feet. And God will be pleased and will say “Well done” in the end.

–Find Tyler Burns on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) and read some of his work at [The Witness](#).

Hard Conversations

You’re not giving me any softballs,” Pastor Sharon Hodde Miller laughs, as I ask another interview question about a loaded sociopolitical subject. (In fairness, she brought up the topic in question that time.) But she doesn’t run away from the subject, instead clearly articulating the importance of racial diversity in today’s church.

Perhaps it’s only fitting. Our new Charisma News Podcast miniseries, *New Year, New Voices*, profiles rising leaders in the charismatic movement. Miller—an author and speaker who recently founded Bright City Church in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina—concludes the interview by noting that being a leader in today’s world means tackling the hard questions with grace and love. And in this episode of the podcast, she tackled plenty of complicated questions, from navigating her own call to ministry as a woman to promoting racial diversity in the church. Read it here.

This interview—originally recorded for our New Year, New Voices podcast series—has been edited for length and clarity. Listen to the full interview here:

Berglund: Can you start by telling me your testimony?

Miller: I grew up in the church. I grew up in a really

wonderful Christian home. I have a great relationship with my parents, who are wonderful, wonderful people. But I would say that while I grasped it as a kid, the gospel really came alive for me in this new way when I was in college. Up until then, I was very preoccupied with being just this good Christian kid. But I don't think I totally grasped just the radical nature of the gospel until college. And then it was right around that time that I discerned a call to ministry.

So right after college, I actually worked for Proverbs 31 Ministries. I don't know if you're familiar with them at all; Lysa TerKeurst is the president, and now the ministry is huge. But back then it was just a tiny little ministry. I think there were maybe five of us. I worked as Lysa's intern and assistant, and I just traveled with her and learned the ropes of women's ministry. During that time, I was also discerning my own path. I realized that I wanted to learn more and get better equipped for ministry. So after I worked for Proverbs 31, I went back to school, and I got my Master of Divinity, and then I actually also got my Ph.D. Also during that time, I got married and started having kids. Then fast forward to a year ago, when my husband and I—we met in seminary, and he also got his Ph.D.—started a church together. So we have been busy.

Berglund: Tell me about Bright City Church. How have the early stages been going so far?

Miller: It has been a wild, wild ride. We never wanted to plant and hunt. Let me just say that. We never wanted to plant a church. People would always say, "Have you ever thought about starting a church?" We would say no. You know, we know people that planted churches and it was really hard. But also, we felt personality-wise that we just weren't the people for starting a church. We envisioned church planters as being these entrepreneurial, sales-type people, and that is not really our style. So we thought, *That's just not something God would call us to.*

Then a couple years ago, in the middle of the night, my husband was awake, tossing and turning. He couldn't go to sleep. He finally said, "God is this You? Do You have something to say?" In that moment, he felt God say, "I want you to start a church."

The funny thing is, he did not tell me that happened. He went to sleep.

Then the next morning, he woke up and thought, *I'm not telling anybody about that*, because he didn't want to do it. Finally, he did tell me. We're not people who get visions very often. That was just not something he'd ever said to me before. So when he said that, I said, "You know, we've got to take this seriously. We need to start asking God for confirmation." And that is exactly what happened.

Over the next several months, God sent these clear-as-a-bell signs that we were supposed to be planting. So eventually, we reached a point where we said, "God has been patient with us. He's been gracious to us. He has sent us so many confirmations, but at some point, if we keep asking for confirmation, we're just being disobedient." So we said yes.

I guess that was around November or December, and then that following September is when we launched Bright City Church. [My husband] is the lead pastor, and I have a teaching pastor role. It's been the adventure of a lifetime.

Berglund: You mentioned you're a teaching pastor. The idea of women as pastors is still controversial for many churches and denominations. You talked about how you felt that call to ministry as part of your testimony. Did you receive any pushback when you tried to then follow that calling out?

Miller: First of all, thank you for asking me that question. When I first discerned the call to ministry, I was actually at a Southern Baptist Church, where—you know, women were not meeting in my church. So that was one of the reasons why I

went to Proverbs 31 and for a long time just really focused on women's ministry. I never felt compelled to become a pastor, to get ordained, any of that. I loved doing women's ministry, and I still do. So that was the path for a really long time.

But throughout the last number of years, my husband has been my biggest cheerleader and my biggest advocate. God bless him; he really believes in my gifts. And he takes seriously that as my husband, part of his call is to steward my gifts—like with me being his wife, he feels like he's going to answer to God one day for how he stewarded my gifts. That's been a conversation we've had a lot, where I think it weighs really heavily on him that he sees the speaking gifts in me.

I was going on my merry way, writing books and speaking. Occasionally, I was speaking at larger conferences where I was speaking to men, but most of the time, I was speaking to women. But when we discerned this call to plant this church, it was actually really important to my husband that I would have a pastor title.

I was still very open-handed about it, because our kids are also really young. My oldest is 7, and then we have a 4-year-old and a 1-year-old. So my need to be home is pretty high right now. Just to be with them. I'm already traveling some, and so I knew if I was going to have a pastor title, I wanted to do it justice. I knew there were expectations attached to that. That was kind of how the teaching pastor title came about; we felt like that communicated to the church kind of a narrow understanding of just what my role is in the church right now.

But in addition to just him believing in my gifts and feeling like I needed to exercise my gifts in the church, another reason why he really wanted me to have that title is we're in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. We're in one of the most highly educated areas in the country. There are three major universities. There is Research Triangle Park here that draws

a lot of really brilliant people. Women here are leading in the workplace. They are CEOs. They are VPs. They are doctors. They are lawyers. They are professors. So women are leading outside of the church, but when they walk in the doors of the church, women are not always being given a lot of guidance on how to exercise their leadership gifts in a way that invests in the kingdom of God. My husband said, "We need to be teaching women that. We need to be teaching women how to steward their leadership gifts in the world, and they need to see you doing that."

So for those many reasons, it was really important to him that I would take that position as teaching pastor. But at the end of the day, we are not doing this simply for pragmatic reasons, but because we also believe that this is biblical. Throughout the Bible, we see Deborah the judge. We see Huldah the prophet. We see Lydia, who was this influential woman who helped start the church in Philippi. We see Phoebe and other really influential women who helped launch the early church. We see Junia, who's counted as one of the apostles.

We see all these women in the Bible, especially in the early church, whose priority was not, "I am a woman. Give me my rights." Their priority was, "Hey, a whole lot of people don't know about Jesus. How can we leverage our gifts and our influence so people meet him?" So we see that precedent in Scripture, and we really want our church to be a New Testament church that way.

You mentioned this is a really controversial topic. I also want to say that we personally don't believe this is an issue worth dividing over. We believe this is an issue that Christians of good conscience who uphold the full witness of Scripture just come to different conclusions on and that we do not have to be divided over it. We can still be in unity and in fellowship with folks who do come to different conclusions than we do. So we hold all of those things together. Really and truly, this is just about proclaiming the Good News of

Jesus Christ to as many people as possible.

Berglund: You mentioned that where you minister, there's a lot of women who are getting higher education and going into the workforce. Do you think that those leadership trends will also continue in the church? That increasingly, in the next generation, you'll see more women in pastoral and ministering capacities?

Miller: That is hard to say. And I don't want to speak into, you know, cultural trends that I personally have not researched. But I think I will just speak from our particular context and say one thing that has really surprised me in taking this position.

I was really nervous. Because we're in the South, and women—especially evangelical women—are not usually in the role I'm occupying right now. So when we first launched the church, and we're telling people about what my role would be, I was really nervous about it. You know, we would call people about Bright City and our vision for the church and for the area. Then I'd get to the point and say, "And also I'm going to be preaching. How do you feel about that?" I would kind of hold my breath, and I wouldn't know how they were going to respond. And I was shocked by how many people's eyes just lit up. They would say, "Finally. Finally! We have needed this." We have sat across from men who have openly wept and said, "It is time. It is time."

It feels like the Spirit has been going before us in a lot of ways and just readying hearts for this. As I said earlier, I don't think that what we're doing something new. Ultimately, we want to be a New Testament church. I think we're trying to restore the radical place that women actually occupied. I mean, so much of what Paul says in the New Testament is radical—even him saying, "Men, honor your wives" was radical at that time. That was so much better and more loving than the cultural standard of the time. We just want to return to that.

But it does feel like the Holy Spirit is moving in that direction right now.

Berglund: What are some other ways that you're seeing the Holy Spirit move in the next generation?

Miller: Hmm. That's a big question. Another area that we as a church are working towards is racial diversity. This is something that my eyes are newly being opened to, that—speaking of the New Testament church—in the New Testament, we see this incredible, radical diversity.

We just preached on Romans 16. It's at the very end of Romans, after Paul has gone through all this beautiful, complicated, complex theology. And he ends on Romans 16. We kind of brush over it, because it's just this list of salutations, where he's saying, "Say hello to this person and this person and this person." But if you go through that list, which is kind of a snapshot of the church in Rome at the time, there is so much diversity. You actually have racial diversity. You have Jews; you have Gentiles; you have people from all over Asia and Europe. But you also have single people, and you have married people, and you have slaves, and you have incredibly wealthy people. You have politically influential people. And they are all in this Roman church, and they all consider one another brothers and sisters in Christ. The gospel has erased the differences. It has erased class distinctions and those hierarchies.

I really have just glossed over that in the past, and I think God is waking me up to the miracle of unity that you see in the early church. As the United States becomes increasingly diverse, I think we are beginning to understand that we need to take that seriously. If we, again, want to reflect the miracle of unity that we see in the New Testament, then we have to get really intentional about diversity.

For my husband and I, it wasn't the founding vision of our

church or anything like that, but we do want to be faithful to what we see in Scripture, and that is undeniably there. And I think that is becoming more and more important to young people as well, because a lot of young people are growing up with friends who have all sorts of different backgrounds.

Berglund: Obviously, you and your husband leading Bright City are both white. I think many of our readers will be wondering, "OK, if I'm a white person, how do I go about trying to encourage racial diversity at my own church?"

Miller: Taylor, you're not giving me like any softballs, man (*laughs*). "Let's talk about gender. Let's talk about race."

Berglund: In fairness, you brought up this one.

Miller: Yeah. We have sought the guidance of people who know a lot more than we do on this topic. Actually, just this past week, we were in Charlotte, North Carolina, attending training with Pastor Derwin Gray. He's a longtime friend of ours. We knew him, I think, before we were even married. He's got this amazing church just outside of Charlotte called Transformation Church, and it's incredibly diverse. Derwin has this vision, and a lot of what I just said to you about the diversity of the early church came from what we have learned from him.

But we went to this training for multiethnic churches and just sat under his leadership and learned about how to move forward and develop cultural competency. Because one of the things that is a huge obstacle is not just simply getting diverse spaces, but doing it in a way that is honoring to everyone.

Sometimes what happens is a church will say, "We need to be more diverse. Let's hire a person of color." It's almost kind of a tokenism where they're hired and put on stage, but they aren't given any real influence in the church. And if they have a different perspective, it's chalked up to just a cultural difference, where, "You just think that because of your background, but that's not necessarily biblical." It's

not taking seriously the interdependence of the body of Christ, which Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 12.

So we need to develop cultural competency about people of different backgrounds, so that you are dignifying and honoring people whose experiences are different from yours, and dignifying and honoring the image of God in every person. So that piece is really, really important.

It can be difficult for people of color if they're the only person of color on a church staff. That actually can be really lonely and really isolating, so we wanted to just learn how to honor. Right now our worship leader is an African American woman, and she is phenomenal. We really want to care for her well, and we knew we would have to learn from people who know better than we [are] to do that.

So I would say, listen. Read from folks who are talking about this. Listen to your brothers and sisters of color what they're saying, and then really take it seriously. That's super important. And then, honestly, hire people of color. That really practical step of hiring people of color and having them onstage leading is important.

Berglund: In your own personal quiet time, what has God been putting on your heart right now?

Miller: Oh, so many things. But I'll share this. I wouldn't necessarily say this is something I've been passionate about, but it's just ministering to me a lot in this season of our lives: Jesus talking about all who are weary and heavy laden coming to him because His yoke is easy and His burden is light. Because we just started a church, and our church is a year old, we are in a season of picking up very, very heavy things. Starting a church is extremely difficult. So there are days when we just feel really weighed down. And I've been leaning into that language a lot and remembering that, whenever God calls us to pick up something really heavy to

carry, He is going to carry the lion's share of it. He is bearing up the majority of the weight.

So whenever I am feeling weighed down by the responsibility ahead of us, when I feel overburdened, that is a moment for me to stop and ask, "Am I carrying something that actually God should be carrying? Have I taken on something onto myself, onto my shoulders, that I was never meant to bear?" To make sure I'm handing over things like the success of our church. That's a huge weight. And when I take that onto myself, I do feel almost suffocated by it. But I remember that God didn't call us to succeed; He called us to obey. So by handing the weight of the success of our church back over to God, there's so much lightness in that—whenever I give back to Him what is only His to bear.

Berglund: You've also got a new book out: *Nice*. Can you tell people a little bit about that and where they can pick it up if they want to keep hearing more from you?

Miller: It's called *Nice: Why We Love to Be Liked and How God Calls Us to More*. This book was birthed out of my own grappling with this kind of false faith that I realized I was practicing at times, where I was putting on this mask of "nice Christianity" that was only really skin-deep. It was also able to hide a lot of what was going on underneath me—like what was really going on inside of me.

I think that especially for those of us raised in the church, it is very easy to pull this off. We know how to look like a nice Christian. We know how to give all the right answers and to do all the right activities, whether or not we are actually flourishing in Christ.

I saw this tendency in me, and I noticed that it was actually bearing a lot of really bad fruit. Jesus says that you can know a tree by its fruit, and nice Christianity looks just like what we're called to in so many ways that you can only

know it by its fruit. I started to notice that I was being nice instead of truthful. I was being nice instead of honest. I was being nice instead of courageous. This was coming out in relationships, but also coming out in ministry, where I knew God was prompting me to say something that was biblical and true, but I didn't want people to reject me. I didn't want people to stop reading me. And so I would hesitate. I would flounder a little bit. I wanted to be nice.

That worked so well for me. It got me so many things. But when I saw that, I realized, "You know what? This is an issue in my heart." I think that it's really an issue in the church as well.

So I decided to look at what the bad fruits of niceness are: fruits like cowardice, inauthenticity, self-righteousness or even corruption—where we settle for someone who's nice to us, regardless of what's going on behind the scenes. Seeing all these bad fruits, I turned my attention to the question of "OK then, do we simply say, 'Don't do that. Do this'? Or should I help people to cultivate something better?" Because fruit of the Spirit is fruit that grows out of us. It's not simply a different mask we put on.

So that was the vision for the book. It's still honestly really convicting to me on a daily basis. ... The ironic thing is, I think writing that book on *Nice* sort of has prepared me to just lean into hard conversations, because we are in this really polarized time where people don't always receive it well. But it's really important.

I think that part of being a leader right now actually means modeling, "How do we talk about these really hard things, but in a way that is gentle and kind and unifying instead of just shying away from that?" Because otherwise, we have this fragile appearance of unity. I think having those conversations is actually really important right now.

–Find Sharon Hodde Miller on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).

Tyler Burns: How Speaking in Tongues Could Be a Game Changer in the Fight Against Injustice

Tyler Burns is a busy guy. Beyond pastoring New Dimensions Christian Center in Pensacola, Florida—a full-time job for most people—Burns also serves as the vice president of The Witness: A Black Christian Collective, where he writes and co-hosts the podcast *Pass the Mic*.

With all that going on, we were grateful Burns took time in October to speak with us for our ongoing “New Year, New Voices” series on the *Charisma News* podcast—and it was an incredible conversation. Burns shares his own testimony of growing up within the charismatic movement, offers his perspective on why and how the church should cultivate diverse and international perspectives, and even explains how speaking in tongues represents a spiritual game-changer for victims of injustice and oppression.

This interview—originally recorded for our “New Year, New Voices” podcast series—has been edited for length and clarity. Listen to the full interview [here](#).

Berglund: So Tyler, you’re the vice president of The Witness. You’re the co-host of the podcast *Pass the Mic*. And you’re also the lead pastor of New Dimensions Christian Center. With

all that going on, how's your life right now?

Burns: Another fun fact about me is I'm also married to my lovely wife, Mylena, and we have two kids under 2. So we have a 20-month-old daughter and a 2-month-old son, so life is a lot of fun in the Burns household. With two kids under 2, it's always a party here. So my life is interesting! But I just feel blessed and honored to have the opportunity to speak with you and to talk about all the work that God is doing in my life.

Berglund: Do you mind sharing your testimony?

Burns: I was raised in a pastor's home. In 1992, My father actually founded the church that I now pastor. In one of our early services, even though I was a young child, I remember very vividly my father talking about eternity and talking about heaven and hell from a very fire-and-brimstone mentality of preaching. He was sweating and making the evangelistic appeal, and he kept talking about hell. The only thing I could grasp about it was it was hot. And I grew up in the Panhandle, so being a Panhandle kid—a country boy from the South—I recognize heat. He was just giving these analogies about how hot it was going to be.

So we get in the car after the altar call and everything, and I'm like, "Huh." So I bring it up to my parents. I say, "Hey, look, whatever we need to do to keep me out of this hot place that y'all are talking about, let's go ahead and handle that." They chuckled to themselves. But later on that night, my father sat down with me at the edge of my bed. He opened up the Scriptures, which were not foreign to me; I was familiar with the Scriptures, because that was just a part of our house, as a part of our routine. And he broke down something about the gospel and something about Christ that just made it leap in me, and it just opened something up in my spirit in a way that hadn't been before.

I'd cognitively understood Christ and the elements of the gospel—the core tenets and principles—but the way he presented it? I now know it was the Spirit meeting me in that moment and awakening a dead soul. I remember knowing what repentance felt like and knowing what God forgiving me felt like. So I had this radical encounter with Jesus at that moment. I don't know if that was my official conversion experience, per se. I was very young, so maybe I didn't understand fully. What I do know is that I had an awareness of Jesus at that moment that I didn't have before. And then it was confirmed in other ways as I grew up. It was confirmed in other instances and experiences as I grew in the knowledge of God and I was disciplined.

What's interesting about that is the intersection of the charismatic and the intersection of the gifts of the Spirit, it was always very closely aligned with where my father had placed us theologically. He went on to be a state director in the Azusa Fellowship under the direction of Bishop Carlton Pearson. (This was pre-doctrine of inclusion and all that from Bishop Pearson.) So I grew up in that environment and in that world.

At an Azusa national conference at the age of 12, I spoke in tongues for the first time. I'll never forget that. At a very prominent charismatic church in South Florida at the age of 16, I received a radical call to gospel ministry—one that I couldn't deny, one that consumed me and one that has continued to consume me over the course of my life.

All of that is to say the intersection with the gifts, as far as my testimony and my spiritual development, has been consistent with this charismatic stream and expression of faith, which makes me feel so privileged to be able to kind of talk from that vantage point and in that space, because I don't always get to do that. That really led to my introduction to Jesus, which was so precious that it was my father and my parents who introduced me to that. But then beyond that, the growing and the deepening of the Spirit's

power and the growing and deepening of understanding how Jesus holistically changes and transforms someone's life, that's that moment for me.

Berglund: You're now pastoring at New Dimensions Christian Center. Tell me a little bit about how you got there and what the church is like.

Burns: Oh, man, that's so interesting. It's a great story because, again, it's one of these radical experiences.

So to connect it to its roots and the charismatic movement, the name New Dimensions was inspired by Higher Dimensions, which was the church where Bishop Pearson was pastoring in Tulsa, Oklahoma. New Dimensions is the place where I met Jesus. New Dimensions is a place where I learned about the faith. It's a place where I memorized Bible Scriptures. It's a place where I had radical encounters. It's a place where I, frankly, cast out demons. It's a place where I saw people get healed. I saw radical transformation and miracles. I just never imagined that I would actually serve at my home church.

While the church was very large and big, I went off to college. When I went off to college, my mentality was that I was going to be a philosophy professor, and I was going to defend the faith in the academic, and I was going to have a broadcasting ministry of some sort. Those were things that I was very passionate about.

But when I received that call to gospel ministry at the age of 16, the two things I said to God were, "Listen, I'll do anything you ask me to do. Just don't call me to be a youth pastor. And don't call me to preach. Anything else I'll do."

And for 10 years I was a youth pastor, and I'm still a preacher. So it's just funny how that works itself out.

So it was my senior year in college at Liberty University, and the Lord would not let me sleep. Everything was laid out for

me. There was a track I was supposed to do that was going to keep me in Lynchburg, Virginia, for the foreseeable future. I never intended to go back home to live permanently. I intended to leave all that behind. And God wouldn't let me sleep. So I didn't sleep for seven days. I also fasted for seven days as well. I felt like I was losing my mind. But God was communicating to me: "This is not the place you're supposed to be."

So I dropped everything in January 2010 and came back to serve my local community. That's the only thing I knew that God had called me to do with any definitive certainty. In the midst of all that, through a confluence of events, He confirmed that now is the time for me to start gospel ministry. So I went into the ministerial practicum at our church and studied there for six months, and then was ordained right thereafter at 21. I came on staff in 2010 and was just recently ordained lead pastor a few months ago. It's just a joy and an honor to work with my parents and to walk with them through this new season of our church, and for them to trust me with that.

Our church is very interesting, because it's a nondenominational church, but at the same time, it's kind of a mash-up of a lot of different traditions. We have people who come from an AME [African Methodist Episcopal] tradition, people who come from a COGIC [Church of God in Christ] background, people who come from a traditional Missionary Baptist background and then people who just come from this radical Pentecostal side of expression of the faith.

What we say at the church is "our destiny is helping you to unlock your destiny," which means we want to amplify the gifts that God has given to you, so that the body can flourish, you can flourish and then your community can flourish as well. So we're built on core tenets: Christ, community and city. So we believe in exalting Christ. We believe in leaning into Christian community within the fellowship of the believers, and then also translating that in the overflow to our city, so

that our city is impacted and changed as well.

Berglund: So after all that, how did you also get involved in The Witness?

Burns: That's a really interesting story as well, because The Witness started in 2011 under a different name. But I actually met the founder, Jemar Tisby, who's the president now of The Witness in 2012. We met at a conference and—I'll never forget—there was a session going on, but Jemar was trying to get me to go to a particular seminary that he was basically hosting an exhibit for. We just stood there and talked for an hour and a half, and we saw so much symmetry—not in our life situation, but just in what we were feeling at that time. I remember that conversation being a moment where, even when I went into the next session, I just sat back and said, "There's something special about this Jemar guy. Is that somebody I'm supposed to be connected to in the future?"

A few years later, through a mutual connection, he actually invited me to come up to a retreat for what was then the Reformed African American Network, and he asked me to be a part of it. It was kind of random. I said, "I don't know if I have time." A few years later, I actually fully committed to hosting the podcast *Pass the Mic* and being a part of The Witness team.

The Witness exists to address the core concerns of black Christians, and that includes theology, culture, sociology, justice—any number of sectors that would affect and be important to black Christians. We try as best as we can to pull on the expansive black church tradition. We believe that while we all have different kinds of perspectives and different tracks—as far as how we came to faith and express it and even some of the unique sectors we're in right now—we all have a connection to the black church, and we all have a connection to black Christian expression of faith.

So what we try to do is give events and perspectives from that vantage point, from the unique black Christian vantage point—knowing that it's not the only perspective to view things, but it's a very important one and one that's been historically marginalized. We try to give space and voice to people in groups that may not have had that opportunity to speak. And we've seen amazing things.

We actually recently just had our first national conference in Chicago, Illinois, at the historic Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church, which is the birthplace of gospel music in America. We were able to have hundreds of people come from across the country to talk about joy and justice. What is the reflection and what are the inflection points as we think about 400 years of black joy and justice in the American Christian context? God has done great things through that and through the podcast *Pass the Mic* as well.

Berglund: You mentioned Jemar Tisby. We had him on the podcast earlier this year as part of our *Prophetic Activism* series. During that series, we talked about that throughout the Old Testament, we often see that when the Holy Spirit comes on these prophetic people—people like Jeremiah, Elijah and Elisha—one of the first things that they go out and do is preach against injustice. Clearly, justice is a thing that's very close to the heart of God. And I know today that racial justice is an issue that has come to the forefront for the church. Throughout this *New Year, New Voices* series, a lot of these young leaders have brought up racial justice as one of the most important issues facing today's church. Why do you think that this issue is getting such attention right now? Because obviously it's always been important.

Burns: I think, to that point—the idea that it's always been important and why is it just such a big issue now? In previous decades, these things have been allowed to be covert and kind of under the surface, because we just haven't had the prevalence of media and attention. So it depended on where you

grew up, where you lived, and your unique life experiences. And there wasn't the proliferation. There wasn't the pathway and the avenue for these justice causes and mentalities to get out into the mainstream, to cross borders and cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds and states and regions of the country. Now you're seeing the prevalence of that through instant interaction on social media, through the proliferation of viral videos.

So what a lot of people are seeing from 2012—when Trayvon Martin was killed—to 2014—when Michael Brown, Eric Garner and all these prominent examples that continue today—is that now there is a virality to it. Now the church can't run from them. We can't get away from it. And many of us, especially those of us who are black Christians, have tried to address this in an evangelistic context.

What we take a step back and say is, "What tradition can we pull from? What can we pull from, out of our tradition of faith, that will give us answers?" And what we're seeing is that it's not that we were taught wrongly; it's that the way we were taught was incomplete. The way that we were taught didn't fill in the blanks and give the contours and the nuances that are necessary to have these types of conversations that intersect with the American experience. To talk about these things that relate to the Old Testament or how Jesus came in Luke 4. We're just not seeing these intersections in the same way within the American church.

So many of us are reapproaching this, and we're being moved in certain ways to take an honest, hard look at the ways we've been disciplined. To see if those ways were ... not insufficient, but maybe incomplete. Maybe there are things that we can add to it.

You know, you mentioned Jeremiah. I think about Jeremiah in Jeremiah 22, when he's talking about basically ranting and railing against unjust kings and wicked kings. He talks about

the ways in which they built their throne. They built their palaces on injustice and unrighteousness. And then at one point, he's speaking on behalf of God, when he says, "Is that not what it means to know Me? To carry out justice for the poor and carry out justice for those who are marginalized and those who are oppressed?" I think that's what you're hearing a lot from young Christians—Millennial and Gen Z Christians: "Isn't this what it means to follow the Lord? That we would love him and love our neighbor holistically, so that our neighbor can flourish not just eternally but flourish physically right now?"

So many of us are sitting back and saying, "Isn't this what it means to follow the Lord?" And the church has a decision to make. The church has a continuous decision with what we will do with this moment. And I believe it's not going away. I don't think this is one of those moments that can pass quickly and will shift. I believe that it's something that the Millennial generation and Generation Z will continue to bring to the forefront and continue to call the church to account for. And it's incumbent upon us to look at the whole expanse of Scripture—not just a few verses, not just the American contextual concerns—but to look at the whole of Scripture to inform our response.

Berglund: You grew up in the charismatic movement and even mentioned earlier praying to cast out a demon. Can you talk about the spiritual dimension to the fight over racial justice in America right now? Because I personally think that plays a large factor, and it's not an avenue that gets addressed by a lot of people.

Burns: I'm so glad that you asked that question. Many of us think about the current divide solely from a cognitive, intellectual standpoint. So we say, "Well, if we present these facts, if we present this mentality, if we present this framework—or this rubric or this systematic theological perspective—that people will see it clearly. They'll see it

from my perspective. They're going to understand it, and they're going to come to a realization on their own."

The reality of the matter is, that's not how this works. We believe that we're not wrestling against flesh and blood, as Paul would say. What we're wrestling against are principalities and powers, the rulers of darkness over this world, spiritual wickedness in high places. A lot of times we don't see that the fight for justice must be Spirit-led, and the fight for justice must be Spirit-inspired, because we're not battling against human powers. We're battling against forces of darkness that seek to divide, oppress, steal, kill and destroy.

One of the things that really helped me with this is James K.A. Smith's book *Thinking in Tongues*. In it, he talks about the Spirit-led expression of speaking in tongues—the holy, heavenly language of speaking in tongues. He said that if you think about it from the perspective of someone who is not in a power position or from the perspective of marginalized people groups, speaking in tongues is actually unique in the way that it confounds the empire. It confounds the status quo. It confounds the powers that be, because it's not just heavenly communication, but in many ways it was being used as earthly communication between people who did not understand similar language.

If you think about what is subversive—Spirit-empowered subversion, Spirit-empowered protest and activism toward the powers—then what we see is these Spirit-led expressions that the powers cannot explain. That the powers that be cannot confound because it comes from a different place. What it does is it gives power to the marginalized where they have none. So we might not have political power, but we do have Spirit power, and that Spirit power gives us the energy and the strength to move in activism to correct the injustice that has been put on those who are oppressed and marginalized.

I think that's just one element. When I saw that, I was like, *Man, that really helps me to understand that many of our churches must see the gifts not just as some spiritual exchange but as a spiritual gift for natural purposes, for human earthly needs. And not just personal needs, but also corporate and systemic as well.* That's just one area, but I think there's so many other ways in which the gifts of the Spirit and Spirit-led living intersects with the call to justice.

Berglund: Honestly, if we had all day, I would love to get into all of the ways that you've observed that.

Burns: We need to do that one day.

Berglund: Trust me, I've already been blown away in this interview. You have an open invite to come back on the podcast anytime you want.

Burns: That's good. I appreciate it.

Berglund: I think those reasons are why it's so important that the Spirit-filled and charismatic church needs to be at the forefront of racial justice. Within that, then, what are some concrete steps that churches can take to make justice not just a trendy buzzword that's in the cultural zeitgeist now, but a real, practical, lived emphasis in their church?

Burns: I think the first thing we need to do is we need to shift the voices of authority in our minds. What I mean by that is, we live in the American Christian context. And in the American Christian context, the voices of authority are always those who come from our immediate locale, who come from our context, who come from our culture, who come from our country.

What we need to do is we need to take a step back and say that the average global Christian is a woman of color from the global south—and she is poor, typically.

So we have to take a step back and say, "Why are we privileging certain voices? Why are we elevating voices that come from one context?" If you elevate voices from one context, you will only get one perspective.

What the church needs to do is intentionally take a step back and say, "Have we privileged American voices—even American Pentecostal or charismatic voices—above the global perspective of the church?" God never intended for us just to glean from American voices. He never intended for us just to glean from privileged voices. But He intended for us to glean from the entirety of the body of Christ, and in that diversity, we find our strength.

One person said it like this in a private conversation with me when I was in South Africa. He said, "The answer to the problems that the American church faces will not come from America." It won't come from America. We believe it will just come from us. But it comes from the interdependence of the Spirit, which breaks down the barriers, which says that there is no distance in the Spirit of God. So whether it's someone who is Colombian or someone who is Nigerian or someone who is in the Ukraine, it doesn't matter, because the Spirit of God breaks down those barriers. And if the Spirit of God breaks down those barriers, there's an exchange there, even in the Spirit. So that is No. 1: We have to shift our voices of authority.

No. 2: I think what's important for churches especially to do is to examine why we're in the situation that we're in right now in our current context. We have to be honest. Are we repeating the same mistakes that previous denominations and generations have repeated? This is a shameless plug for Jemar, but that's why I believe his book, *The Color of Compromise*, is so important. It's important because it tracks many different ways in which the church has collaborated with racism in the context of America and American Christianity. And it's a difficult read. It's a frustrating read. But what it does is

it gives us the background to say we won't make these same mistakes. Those who are unfamiliar with the past are doomed to repeat it.

Then I think thirdly and finally, the church needs a theological imagination to see that justice is not just an issue, but justice is integral to Christian discipleship. This is something that we're going through in our church now. What I am trying to push our church toward, what I'm telling them constantly, is that we cannot just simply highlight maybe me or another person within our church who does justice.

Typically churches do justice from a top-down mentality, which means one of the pastors, members or leaders is a figurehead for justice. Because they're a figurehead for justice, we support their work.

But what the church must do is say we are all called to do justice and love mercy and walk humbly with our God. Because of that, we all must move in that direction. That is a normal part of Christian discipleship. A normal part of Christian discipleship is taking an audit of how you use your funds, how you use your money. A normal part of Christian discipleship is taking an audit of how you use your body or your mind. And in the same context, it must be normative for us to say it is integral to Christian discipleship for the church to be equipped—every member of the church, from the most important to the “least important,” from the oldest to the youngest, no matter what your culture is. It is important for all of us to follow Jesus in the way that He preaches good news to the poor. That is an integral part of Christian discipleship. And in that way, the church will experience a true change and a true understanding, a true re-shifting of our perspective of justice from a buzzword to something that we truly believe.

Berglund: We're at an interesting point right now in the charismatic church. A lot of ministry leaders right now are people who came into the charismatic movement in the '70s and

'80s, during the Jesus Movement. I think now we're starting to see those old leaders retire, and new leaders come up in their place. How are you seeing the Holy Spirit at work in that next generation?

Burns: I think the Holy Spirit is at work in unique ways because He's raising up young people who have a holistic perspective of Christianity and giving them access to arenas of culture that our parents and our grandparents—the fathers and mothers of the faith in our tradition—probably didn't have access to in the same ways. I think about my brother, Elder Mark Moore from Atlanta, who's doing amazing things with the Young Leaders Conference and being able to intersect—being able to preach and teach and hoot and do all these expressive, charismatic things that we see, but also being able to pay off \$1.5 million of medical debt for patients who are in that situation. Being able to bless thousands of families and clear their medical debt, even while he brings thousands of young leaders together in Atlanta.

I think what the Spirit is leading us to is a re-presenting, to kind of steal Mike Todd's presentation, of Scriptures: a re-presenting of Jesus as the holistic Savior. He's holistic in addressing not just things that happen in church in the four walls, not just things that happen as they relate to evangelism, but things that happen as they relate to the entirety of our society.

Our Latin American theologian friends would say this is nothing new. They talk about it in terms of integral mission. But it's this idea that, yes, we evangelize and, yes, we are preaching Jesus. But at the same time, we are preaching Jesus, and we're involved in society. I see that being something that is unique.

I also see that there is a sense in which younger charismatic believers, younger charismatic preachers, are actually focused on institution-building. We don't just want to go around and

be known as great preachers. We don't just want to go around and be known as great orators or people who can move a crowd or sing well or articulate. We also want to be doers as well, and we want to build institutions that will outlive us.

That's what I desire with The Witness. I desire that The Witness would be something my children and their children can be a part of, and that will continue to lead conversations into future generations. But I don't want it to just end with the church. I don't want it to just end with one sermon or being known as a great preacher. I want it to be something that continues long after me, as "This person was an example of how Jesus can refashion, reshape a community." I think younger charismatic leaders are understanding that and thinking of that in much sooner, deeper and wider terms than our parents and the mothers and the fathers of the faith.

Berglund: In your own personal quiet time right now, what has God been laying on your heart? What does He have you really praying about and passionate about right now?

Burns: Man, that is such a loaded question. And I think it's an important question, because hopefully, as preachers, as leaders of movements, we are not just telling others that they should be shaped by Jesus, but we are being shaped by Him as well.

I'll say the first thing is a personal element. It's something I've been pushing towards over the course of years, and that's this push towards emotionally healthy spirituality. Pete Scazzero wrote this book by that name, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, that just drastically changed my life. I remember there was a point in my life where I was doing the spiritual disciplines well and had a fervent prayer life and I was opening up the Scriptures and studying it. I felt like I was doing everything I was supposed to do. I was in ministry. But there were just gaps in my interactions with people. There were gaps in how I talked to the people who are close to me.

There was a joy gap. There were just all these other things that were really frustrating for me.

I read that book, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*. The subtitle is, "It's impossible for us to be spiritually mature while being emotionally immature." It drastically reframed how I viewed my spiritual development. That became integral—that I needed to make sure that I observed my soul in a way that made sure I was emotionally healthy as a leader, as a man.

There's also a book, *Emotionally Healthy Leader*, that talks about it from a Christian leadership or overall leadership perspective. But it just drastically changed my life. I'm constantly going back to that, because it pulls on the contemplative tradition, which I believe can work in multifaceted tandem with the Pentecost tradition. So what it's pulled me to do is to observe silence and solitude and Sabbath and to journal ferociously, to go back to go forward, which means examining parts of my life that have been unaddressed.

So that's been a personal thing that I've tried to push the people around me—our staff, our team—to ensure that we are emotionally healthy.

Secondly, this is kind of something that is external. (We talked about internal; now let's talk external.) The Lord has really been moving me in this direction that's kind of tangential to justice, but I think it's a little bit deeper and a little bit more of a heart posture, and that's this question: "What does it mean to wash feet? What does it mean to wash someone's feet? And when Jesus does that at the Last Supper, when Jesus washes the disciples' feet, what does it mean to humbly serve someone in a vulnerable, intimate way that truly shows them who Jesus is?"

I've been convicted that I talk about justice, and I say things about justice, and I fight for it, and I serve. And I think I'm doing well in certain areas. But the reality of the

matter is, the Lord has been moving me to wash feet. That doesn't just mean externally in my community. That means in my home as a husband and a father. That means as a pastor, as a leader, as a brother, friend and mentor.

What does it mean to wash feet? What does it mean to humble myself and not to be the person who sits on the throne, not to be the person who has autonomy from any of the problems of people, but to truly be touched with the feelings of people's infirmities? To love them well and to love them as Jesus would? And in that, to sacrifice and to die to myself?

So those things have been very deep for me: emotionally healthy spirituality, and then what does it mean to wash feet as Jesus has done?

Berglund: I heard about emotionally healthy spirituality when I spoke to Pastor John Mark Comer earlier this year.

Burns: John Mark is amazing. Oh my goodness.

Berglund: He's talked about that need for emotional health as well. This might be too strong, but I wonder if that trend toward valuing the emotional health of our leaders is a partial course correction from the last generation.

Burns: It's interesting, because every generation has gaps, right? Every generation has little blind spot areas. I think what has been so incredible about Baby Boomers and Generation X is that they have this capacity to work and to work and to work and to grind and to do things in service of the next generation that we will never truly understand until eternity. There are many crowns that my parents will receive, that older leaders who have mentored me will receive, just because of their discipline and consistency. That's something that Millennials and Generation Z must be challenged by and must be encouraged to emulate.

But in the midst of that, there was not a lot of teaching for

Baby Boomers and Generation X about how to care for their own souls well. How to not sacrifice your body and your mind on the altar of Christian ministry.

As a generation, we're going to have our own battles to fight. We're going to have our own giants to kill. But we see the negative effects of just the human reality of how when you're pushed to the edge, when you're burnt out, when you refuse to engage in silence and solitude, when you refuse to know yourself so that you may know God, when you refuse to take Sabbath, what ends up happening? These massive falls. And I don't think these pastors were intending to get into ministry to misuse it or intending to get into ministry to fall away or to do things that make us gasp. I think it's just the reality of emotional immaturity that's just gone wild.

If emotional immaturity is not dealt with, and not addressed at a young age, it will manifest itself in costly decisions at an older age. I don't say that as a put down for the previous generation, because we have our own things with social media, with technology, with the way we spend our money. We have all those types of things in our generation as well. But it's important for us as young leaders to make sure that we're healthy first. We don't want to get these big platforms and be international if we're not healthy, because we're going to lead people astray and we're going to destroy families and churches and movements. So I do think that is something that we're going to constantly see. That's OK.

Plus, with the mental health issues that we see continuously arising in the church, we're just going to see the importance of it. We have to take care of our minds, our emotions, our bodies, everything—holistically. We have to love the Lord with all of us. We bring our full selves even to our ministry. So that's something that I do see is going to be important. Man, we need counselors. We need spiritual directors. We need therapists. We need to be emotionally healthy while being theologically precise and Spirit-led in our powers as well.

Berglund: Like you said, each generation has its blind spots. That's why we need each other as the body of Christ. That's why we as younger believers need those older mentors who can give us those years and decades of wisdom. But I'm sure there are also things the older generation can still learn from younger leaders if they will have the humility to learn.

Burns: That's something my father and I are actually walking through now. We're in the midst of a church transition, which means working together and sitting down and talking with one another and having these very difficult conversations where I'm sure it's frustrating for both of us. I know it's frustrating on my side. I know it's frustrating for him. We're just trying to work through what I'm calling "generational appreciation." What does it look like to take the best of the past and the best of the future, to work together in the present to accomplish the vision that God has given to us?

So working through those is going to be tricky, because what we're seeing is that, for Millennials [and] Generation Z, we have to have the patience and honor to sit under older leaders. And older leaders have to have the humility to listen to younger leaders, because we know the landscape. Those types of things, that push-pull—there's a generational beef that doesn't have to be. It doesn't have to be like this.

So my father and I are trying to figure out what that looks like in our local church context, in our small body. What does that look like? I know a lot of people are figuring that out as well. Not even just from father and son, but from generation to generation and transitioning well. That's going to be another big point as well.

Berglund: Is there anything that we didn't bring up that you want to tell our readers?

Burns: Man, there's so many things we could talk about. Love Jesus well. Love your family. Love your community. Serve your

neighbor. Wash their feet. And God will be pleased and will say “Well done” in the end.

Find Tyler Burns on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) and read some of his work at [The Witness](#).

Jack Van Impe, Televangelist Who Exposed Signs of End Times, Dies at 88

Televangelist and end-times preacher Jack Van Impe died Saturday, Jan. 18, at 88 years old, according to his ministry. For decades, Van Impe reached many around the world with broadcasts detailing the potential end-times significance of current events.

Further information about the nature of Van Impe’s death has not been publicly disclosed by the ministry at this time. In a statement, Jack Van Impe Ministries International wrote:

The beloved Dr. Jack Van Impe was welcomed into Heaven by His blessed Savior and Lord who he had so faithfully served in ministry for over 70 years.

Please pray for his beloved wife and lifelong ministry partner Rexella and their families as they grieve this immense loss and for wisdom as she and the Board lead the ministry in the days ahead.

Further details about Dr. Van Impe’s homecoming celebration will be published later.

Mike Bickle: The Devil May Be Behind This New Netflix Series, But God Will Use It for Good

On January 1, Netflix debuted *Messiah*, a political thriller about a mysterious Middle Eastern man who claims by the second coming of Jesus Christ. About a week after the series' premiere, the International House of Prayer's Mike Bickle weighed in on Netflix's new show in a YouTube video. In the video, Bickle says that he believes it is possible that the devil could be behind Netflix's show, but ultimately he believes the series will open doors for the kingdom and do more good than evil.

"This is an opportunity for the kingdom," Bickle says. "Even though the enemy might be involved—I don't really know what his agenda is in this—he might mean it for evil, but I think the Lord is going to use this as a kingdom opportunity. There's gonna be a lot of advancement of understanding and heart connect with the Lord on this subject [of end times]."

Bickle says he believes the show will be a major success and inspire similar series about the end times or the person of Jesus. He says many of these shows will have "a lot of non-biblical stuff [and] a lot of deception in them," but that God will use these shows to pique people's curiosity about the end times. This will be an opportunity, Bickle believes, for believers to grow in their own knowledge of the end times and for believers to start conversations with non-believers about faith.

“There’s going to be a tremendous escalation of the social conversation across the earth: ‘What is this Messiah thing about?’” Bickle says. “What this whole thing is going to expose is a tremendous lack of biblical literacy on the subject of the end time narrative. ... [Believers] are going to find out how much of the biblical narrative they’re not even aware of, and that’s a good thing! Because they’re going to go find it out. Pastors are going to be weighing in who never talked on this subject [before]. All of a sudden now they’re going to be—just by the demand—pulled into the conversation. There’s going to be lots of Sunday morning messages on it.”

Messiah features Mark Burnett and Roma Downey as executive producers, who previously produced the miniseries *The Bible* and *A.D. The Bible Continues* and the films *Son of God*, *Woodlawn*, and the 2016 *Ben-Hur* remake. But the show also features strong profanity and at least one sex scene.

Watch Bickle’s full remarks on the series *Messiah* [here](#).

Why Morris Cerullo Burned His Brand-New Building Contract On-Stage

Morris Cerullo’s latest move has his ministry’s vice presidents talking in a new video posted last Friday. During the final day of Morris Cerullo World Evangelism (MCWE)’s 49th Annual World Conference in San Antonio, Texas, Cerullo reportedly burned the contract of the newly-built Legacy Center on-stage.

Greg Mauro, vice president of ministries at MCWE, says Cerullo burned it “for the glory of God,” to symbolize the ministry’s freedom from debt.

“Brother Cerullo brought on the platform in the closing service the contract for the construction costs of this entire Legacy project,” Mauro says in the video. “... God told Brother Cerullo, ‘Build this Legacy Center debt-free.’ I believe this is God’s year for us to step into a debt-free miracle. So he brought that contract, [and] because of the giving of the partners in the conference and so many who have given, we were able to ... do something I’ve never seen in 32 years. [Cerullo] took the contract, and we were able to light that thing on fire for the glory of God—burn it—because it was paid in full.”

Greg Hodson, vice president of television at MCWE, called the act “remarkable” and “quite brilliant and incendiary.”

Watch the embedded video to see Hodson and Mauro recap other highlights from the conference.

Morris Cerullo: The Secret to Reaping Your 2020 Harvest

Morris Cerullo says the secret of harvest is knowing how to deal with “negative forces of unbelief.” In an archival video of Morris Cerullo posted to his official YouTube channel last week—titled “The Secret to Your 2020 Harvest”—Cerullo talks about harvest and also why he does not pick theological fights with fellow preachers.

“You know what the secret of harvest is?” Cerullo says. “It’s knowing how to deal with the negative forces of unbelief. You’ve got to know how to deal with them. ... You’ll never hear me get up in the pulpit and waste one second of God’s time criticizing any of my so-called enemies. Let them alone! God will deal with them. I don’t have time. I’ve got too much time killing the devil. Slugging it out. Kicking him here, chopping him there.”

Watch the full video [here](#).