

# 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.