

A Word to Christians Fatigued by the World: 'Give Courage to Your Leaders'

At 30 church gatherings in 15 states over an eight-week period, Youth With A Mission leader Andy Byrd says he witnessed courage, zeal and hunger among believers in meetings large and small, online and in-person amid the continuing COVID-19 pandemic.

Among the final stops of a 7,000-mile trip with his wife and six children traveling in a van, Jesus Culture Sacramento members watched an online worship service during which Byrd shared his observations from 140 hours on the road.

Before returning to YWAM headquarters on the Hawaiian island of Kona, Byrd wanted to assess the state of the church and how well it's prepared to "re-present" Jesus to people amid the pandemic, as well as the political, financial and racial "shaking" that began last year.

Byrd says he's encouraged by the courage of churches, and the opportunities believers have to "re-present" Jesus to people in love and truth.

"No matter the regulations, we're finding courage in the church in America," says Byrd. "I thought maybe we were going to hit disappointment and discouragement.

"I have met some of the most courageous leaders, pastors, churches, believers that I have ever met in my life. I want to encourage you with something right now, wherever you are, and wherever you're watching this ["The Re-Presentation of Jesus to the Nation" on]: Give courage to the people around you."

In the middle of last year's lockdowns, Byrd felt the need to

respond proportionally to the crisis of the pandemic. So, after praying about the urgency of the hour, Byrd responded by putting the family's possessions in storage, selling its van and hitting the roads of America for eight "astounding" weeks, starting on the East Coast.

As a missions leader with YWAM and partner ministry, The Send, Byrd was curious about the emotional and spiritual state of believers, and how pastors, movements, churches and believers felt after events of last year.

"Here's what I want to say: I am blown away by the courage, the zeal and the hunger that we have encountered in the churches of America.

"There is enough discouragement, division, finger-pointing and accusation," says Byrd.

"We need to be people who are giving courage to everyone around us. I want to encourage you today, give courage to leaders in your life. Give courage to the pastors in your life. Encourage them as they walk forward in the radical calls of God on their lives," he says.

Ignore the "wildness" of social media by encouraging someone instead, giving "life" to people through a text message, phone call or in a face-to-face conversation, he says. "Let's be life-bringers, life bearers. That's what I believe we need more of," says Byrd.

As he's traveled across America, Byrd senses the Lord is speaking to the nations from the book of Isaiah. "I've been struck these last months with Isaiah 6, where it says, 'This is the year that King Uzziah died.' This is a famous chapter," Byrd says.

In its verses, the writer and prophet Isaiah says he saw the Lord high and exalted, seated on a throne and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above Him were angels who declared,

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty. The whole earth is full of His glory.”

Isaiah was ruined by what he saw and heard but, after an angel touched his lips and declared cleansing from his sin, the prophet tells the Lord he will go in response to His question, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”

As a missionary and YWAM leader, Byrd says Isaiah’s words “Here am I; send me” are important to him and to The Send—founded by prayer and fasting leader Lou Engle—because they communicate hearts that are intent on reaching nations with the gospel.

“I was struck by the beginning of this passage because it begins in a time of shaking. And what I have seen in America these last weeks among courageous believers in the body of Christ are people who see God as bigger than our crisis. There is a people rising in America who see the Lord exalted above all of the urgency, the crisis, the difficulty of the hour we live in,” says Byrd.

He also sees a nation of people who are desperate for a savior and a world that is longing and groaning under the weight of brokenness, sin and division. “People are longing for a messiah and, in the midst of it, God is shaking the church so that we would become a ‘re-presentation’ of Jesus to the nations of the earth,” he says.

Byrd believes Jesus is longing to show who He is in truth to America. “Jesus is longing to reveal himself to Gen Z as He really is.

“I think we can all say with total confidence, ‘Jesus has been misrepresented in America.’ Jesus has been misrepresented in the nations of the earth.”

Byrd says there are few things worse than being misrepresented by someone. As a father of two adopted children, Byrd says

fatherhood has been misrepresented by other men.

He believes Jesus is zealous for the church to “re-present” him to a nation that has a skewed perspective. The broken in America, in its foster care system and those divided by race represent people Jesus is after in this hour, Byrd says.

“Jesus is longing that we would pull back the curtain and unveil him as he is in America. I believe that the result of a ‘re-presentation’ of Jesus to America will be the largest wave of salvation that this nation has ever seen. There is a spiritual awakening on the doorsteps. We’ve all been praying for it. But none of us thought that it might come through an awakening and a shaking like we’ve experienced in the last year,” Byrd says.

He wonders if there was another way to wake up the church than to shake it. Could it have been an anointed preacher? Might it have been a worship song that united the whole church?

“Was there any other way to get to the core of the issues? Was there any other way to truly pull us out of sleepiness, apathy, mediocrity, any other way than to shake everything?”

This much Byrd knows with certainty: America is absolutely resistant to religion, but it is also longing for the Messiah. “Many of the manifestations of the brokenness that we have seen over this last year are simply a cry for a Messiah,” he says.

Byrd says the world needs to see the church celebrating truth right now. Celebrating the dignity of masculinity. Celebrating the beauty of femininity. Celebrating the covenant of marriage, celebrating and living in truth, so that the world knows it’s for everybody including the Gen Z—and Millennial—generations.

The Gospel of Mark is written, largely, to Gentiles in what Byrd says is a “re-presentation” of Jesus to the Roman world.

“He’s writing with of goal of ‘re-presenting’ Jesus to a people who are asking, ‘Is Jesus for us, or is he only the God of Israel. Is he Jesus our Messiah or is he only the Messiah of Israel?’ He tells these early stories right at the start of what Jesus is like because He’s been misrepresented,” Byrd says. {eoa}

Steve Rees is a former general assignment reporter who, with one other journalist, first wrote about the national men’s movement Promise Keepers from his home in Colorado. Rees and Promise Keepers Founder Bill McCartney attended the Boulder Vineyard. Today Rees writes in his free time.

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