

EXCLUSIVE: Evangelist Ben Fitzgerald Talks European Revival and How He Prophetically Reclaimed a Nazi Monument

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

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

So what’s your testimony?

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

worse. And so she said, "You need to come back home."

To cut a very long story short, when I was 6 years of age, on my brother's first birthday, around 10 months after he returned from Africa, he had his first what they call a "mental episode." And he was diagnosed that day after he smashed the front window of our house and went crazy, saying he was seeing snipers in the front yard trying to kill us. He was having all these demonic visions. He was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. So once he had that, he was completely immobilized. They put him on a thing called lithium. Back then, the drugs weren't very—they're much better today than they were then. And it would just knock him out.

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

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

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

the fish. I'd come to find my dad in the bed—he'd committed suicide.

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

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

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

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

So I left the nightclub and went to my house. I lit up a cigarette in my lounge room by myself. I turned off all the

lights. I was afraid of physical light. And in that lounge room at four o'clock in the morning, I felt this strange, kind of very strong, very loving, and yet fearful presence. And it began to speak to me, and it was Jesus. And the first thing He said was, "Ben I love you." He said, "My son, I love you." And he kept saying that to me, over and over. And then God spoke to me for one hour, and asked me to receive Him. And he told me, he said, "I'll send you around the world to preach the gospel of My mercy. I'll have mercy on thousands when you speak about what I've done for you." So that was the beginning of how I was saved and how I began to be transformed.

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

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

Are you still a pastor at Bethel?

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

over the world and have joined us there in Germany.

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

Well, I used to have these weird visions that never made any sense to me at all. I would see these pictures sometimes as I worshipped God in my bedroom. I'd see these visions of a black-and-white army, like the old black-and-white VHS tapes or like YouTube clips of the war. I'd see this stuff in my head. I used to rebuke it and said, "Get out of my thoughts" or whatever. I didn't understand it. But it didn't feel bad. I remember that.

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

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

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

raised. They were saying, "God, would you take back Europe? Take back Europe."

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

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

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

Our heart behind these things was not that they just would be an event for believers, but for thousands of Europeans—like that vision I saw, "God, would you take back Europe?" and that meant European people. So part of what we do from day to day is we train and equip people to be free and live a lifestyle free of the fear of man, the fear of human opinion. To not come underneath the culture that says, "It's not normal to

preach here, or you need to be more polite.” On a day-to-day basis, we’re interacting with people like that, and we have a team here in Europe that we’ve trained up to share the gospel every single day in Europe. And they do. They stop people all the time. We’re doing that day to day.

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

Can you talk about that upcoming event you just mentioned?

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

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

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

One thing that’s happening in these meetings is ministers and different denominational leaders are laying down their egos

and their logos for the sake of the gospel coming in their city. They're joining forces. So we do equip people. We do train people. But the unity aspect of it is what really inspires people to this common goal of seeing cities won to God in Europe. We told them this is a beginning point for them to start working and collaborating together. Since we've done events in those kinds of cities, many different churches have continued doing constant outreaches on a weekly basis and really, like I said, stepping away from the fear of man and sharing the gospel in their own city. So although it's about the event, in one sense, it's also about what happens afterwards.

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

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

The mission field in Europe is very interesting, because, compared to other places where you would send missionaries,

Europe has this long history of being formerly Christian. Because of that, what I've heard is that a lot of people say, "Oh, I already know about Jesus, I don't need that." It's easier for them to brush it off. Has that been your experience evangelizing in Europe?

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

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

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

Well, in 2016, 1.6 million people statistically left the church of Europe. That's proper statisticians, who studied across denominations. But a lot of the denominations where people left were probably the ones that are a little less inviting of the moving of the Holy Spirit, or a little bit

more religious. We're not picking on them or anything. But we would say this: that in this huge exodus from religion, there's at the same time happening a big swing of new conversions and people who once followed God or believed in God returning to the Lord. We're seeing both happen at the same time. You're seeing people come back to God.

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

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

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

But the most important thing that I'm seeing—and I'd emphasize this—is I'm seeing European people focused on their own nation, like Germans wanting to win Germany, not just wanting to go to Africa. Or people from Switzerland wanting to preach in Switzerland. So with that happening, that will really begin to combat some of the enemy's strategies to bring other faiths and other different things. If they focus, and we take this divine opportunity at this moment in time, then we'll see a huge harvest if we put our sword to this battle, you know?

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

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

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

You know, the funny thing about Awakening Europe is when people come to our events, we'll have sometimes 15 leaders who are known leaders like Peter Wenz, who's got the largest church in Germany; or Jean-Luc Trachsel, who's the leader of Europe Shall Be Saved. We'll have all these different leaders from all across Europe come, and they will come to the event not to speak and not to attend, but just to bring their spiritual strength. They're not coming because they need a microphone, and they're not coming because they're trying to seize an opportunity to speak. They're coming because they

really believe that they can mother and father this harvest, and they can push it forward. If people see their faces standing together just in unity, not even preaching together but just being on that stage or near that stage unified and bringing their spiritual strengths, it will encourage the family of God in Europe to continue in this. So that's something I think they can learn from.

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

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

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

where they're at, in social media or in different ways as well.

The second thing I see is that the people in our upcoming generation are going to be more full of the eternal consequences of their choices. I really believe that God is releasing a revelation into every believer of eternity. In other words, it's not just going to work out for my unsaved brother if I don't think about his eternity. I believe the Lord's waking His people up in this generation, and they're going to carry the revelation of eternity. So they'll be able to carry that revelation in their spirit of eternal life, that my life could end in weeks. Not a fear of it, but knowing, "I'm eternally sealed, and I need to see other people eternally sealed" or "This choice I make will have an impact on generations to come." I believe they're going to be more intentionally minded.

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

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

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

Really? In what way?

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

We have all these people who are older in the faith and more

mature, who have seen a lot over the years. What can they do to really help pass the torch to the next generation? To give the next generation the tools they need to succeed?

Well, first of all, when we say generation that's coming up, sometimes people think, "One must be rising, therefore the other must be falling." I personally don't believe that. I believe that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—because He's Spirit, He's eternal—can work equally as powerfully in a 70-year-old person as he can a 17-year-old. We need to make sure that this harvest that we're involved in and the spreading of the gospel is multigenerational, and we learn to honor our fathers and mothers that have gone before us.

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

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

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

Yeah, I would just encourage them deeply to break the fear of man in their life. Jeremiah 17:5 says, "Cursed is the man who

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

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

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

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

The enemy's proclaimed that Europe is dead and these nations are turning from God, but God is raising up a bold, fearless people that are above culture, that believe Jesus can do anything. That's what's happening right now. It is a grassroots move of God in Europe. Most of the people that are going to read this have some kind of European roots. The gospel came from Europe to the United States, to Canada, to

Australia, even to places like Singapore. Most of the people that read this will probably have some family background that comes from Europe. I would just encourage them to turn their heart back. If they think of Europe, pray for that continent again, where the gospel came from, that the gospel would go back to Europe.