

Introduction: Welcome to Engage360 Denver Seminary's podcast. Join us as we explore the redemptive power of the gospel and the life changing truth of Scripture at work in our culture today.

Dr. Don Payne: Hey friends, welcome to Engage360 at Denver Seminary. We're glad to have you with us. My name is Don Payne, and I love interacting with people in ministry environments that are vastly different from my own, and who have been involved in ministry in ways, totally outside my own experience and our guest this week represents just that for me. And maybe for some of you as well. His name is Andy Byrd. And Andy is a student here at Denver seminary, but he has a long ministry with YWAM, which is youth with a mission. He's based in Kona, Hawaii. Andy. It is so good to have you on the podcast.

Andy Byrd: Hey, thank you. So, grateful to be on this with you and yeah, excited to talk,

Dr. Don Payne: Andy, tell us particularly for those who may not be familiar with, YWAM tell us a bit about that. Give us the YWAM story, the elevator speech.

Andy Byrd: Sure, absolutely. Yeah. YWAM is we just actually celebrated our 60th anniversary this last Fall. And YWAM started six years ago, really with a real simple vision, which was an empowerment unto the great commission and this initially started by sending young people, that maybe a lot of a lot of the church of the day may not have seen as qualified permissions, but over the last 60 years, that has massively broadened. And YWAM has been one of many that God has used to empower all ages, many from many different nations and ethnicities and different social economic backgrounds, and many denominational backgrounds, to really step into their missional calling. So YWAM does training does evangelism does mercy ministry and we're in about 190 nations around the world with full-time teams, but roughly 30,000 volunteer staff.

Dr. Don Payne: Tell us a little bit about your own journey, both as a follower of Jesus and then your past and present ministry with YWAM.

Andy Byrd: Yeah. Yeah. I grew up actually most of my life in Alaska amazing family, amazing parents that absolutely loved Jesus with all their hearts. And but when I was 18, I would say I was pretty lukewarm, pretty apathetic, and just kind of going through the motions of my faith and didn't really know what I was going to major in, in college. My dad is very educated and has a high value for education, which wasn't opposed to. I just didn't really have vision that matched any kind of a need for education. So, he sent me him, he kind of gave me a gap year to figure it out. And so I went, I ended up going to this discipleship training school and didn't really go for the right reasons. I kind of wanted to get out of Alaska. I wanted to travel. I knew that, you know, it would go international. All of that sounded pretty fun, but in the first week of that school, I had my life completely turned upside down and had a pretty profound encounter with Jesus and just the power of the Holy Spirit.

And it changed everything for me, just in terms of seeing God as somewhat distant a little bit on the, maybe more the tradition, which isn't bad, but I hadn't limited God, maybe just some boxes. And those boxes were pretty well shattered. And I just discovered an intimate friendship with Jesus in a way that I didn't even know was possible. And so that turned everything on its head for me. And at the same time, I really became aware of what was happening around the world, which small town, Alaska, you know, that's just not common. Wasn't common conversation. So, I went to Cambodia for three months as part of that. And I was just, I was ruined, ruined for what I experienced. What I saw how, how most of the world is I came to find out where we're living, the lack of even gospel opportunity or awareness or resources. And so, in a pretty short amount of time, I could've never predicted the future, but at 18 in a pretty short amount of time, I radically fell in love with Jesus and really began a wholehearted pursuit.

And at the same time, it coincided with a real passion for the nations and for the places with little gospel access. So that kind of set me on my journey. And it's been 22 years that we've been rolling with YWAM. I met my wife there you know, seven, six kids later with a seventh right now, a foster child. We are still going for it and you know, kind of still living that out. So, we wear a number of different hats, but all in the realm of, of training and sending young people into the nations and into the workforces of their own nations as well, but hopefully with a wholehearted love for Jesus and a real passion to make him known.

Dr. Don Payne: I'm curious, Andy, do you find that a number of younger adults sign on with YWAM on terms similar to what you did? I mean, they may be kind of apathetic about their faith, but it looks like a cool thing to do to travel in the world. And then even though they're getting involved in ministry, so to speak, it's that ministry that then turns them around. I mean, is your experience kind of common for many others?

Andy Byrd: I wouldn't say it's real common. Yes. It's very common. And I would say that YWAM now has enough recognition, you know, around the world that a lot of young people are coming from lots of different church backgrounds and my story gets repeated over and over again. So, it's pretty amazing to watch. And it's, it's really rewarding to be a part of people's journey towards wholehearted devotion to Jesus.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. That's really interesting because, you know, in one respect, maybe in a traditional or a previous generation, you would expect that a lot of people who would sign on with a mission organization of some sort would already have a real clear commitment to ministry and a clear commitment to Jesus before they went there. And now that seems kind of do a flipped. Is that fair, at least with a lot of them?

Andy Byrd: So, I would say that that's very true in our experience.

Dr. Don Payne: And among that, I know you, you've had some really fascinating opportunities to speak to pretty large crowds, like in stadium events internationally, right?

Andy Byrd: Yeah.

Dr. Don Payne: So how'd that come about? Yeah. Tell us about that.

Andy Byrd: That's a wild journey. And you know, the funny thing is my town that I grew up in, in Alaska would have fit on the field of any one of those stadiums that we've gathered, you know, I just come from a tiny little town and Alaska and grew up fly fishing and hunting and camping. I didn't see any of this coming.

Dr. Don Payne: Just parenthetically, you're an American, who's never lived on the mainland, right?

Andy Byrd: That's right. No, I only a very short window and I met my wife. We spent a year living in Pennsylvania, but other than that, we've lived in Hawaii and Alaska most of our lives. Yeah. Yeah. So about three years ago, we gathered with a handful of other ministries across America. About seven of us actually came together from different movements. Really kind of a longer story as to what brought us together with the sense that America was not only desperate, but that there really was another great awakening coming to America and the feeling not only the urgency of the need, but also that the Lord was really speaking about a third grade awakening in this nation that out of it would come the greatest missions movement this nation has ever experienced. And we didn't ever think necessarily to be exclusive to America. That was just where the war began to speak to us the most. So out of that, we planned our first stadium gathering and the event was called the send. And YWAM was one of the seven ministries there.

And I was asked to lead this. So YWAM I'm kind of helped at the tip of the spear on this. And we were, we were way over our head, but God moved in an amazing way. 58,000 people came to that stadium in Orlando, Florida. And the whole thing was about the great commission. It was hours of worship, prayer, and basically opportunities to make a difference in the great commission. Anything from foster care in America and adoption to seeing our high schools as a mission field, to considering the unreached of the nations all over the world. And that, that really, it went beyond what we could have imagined. And we found ourselves a year later in three stadiums in Brazil, simultaneously the same day, about 150,000 Brazilians, another 3 million watching live online as we did the same thing in Brazil, the 12 hours of worship and prayer remarkable move of the Holy Spirit and asking Brazil to take its place on the global stage for the great commission and out of that thousands committing to adoption, committing to reach their high schools.

And out of all that we follow up and help all of those people essentially to join an organization or a movement that will help equip them to be a missionary to

their high school or a missionary to the nations of the earth. So we did a couple of those and then COVID shut the whole world down. So, that happened in Orlando, Brazil, and our next gathering is actually Kansas City about a year from now in most likely in early summer, like June of 2022, just so that we are way on the other side of all of this COVID stuff. So yeah, that's the, it's called The Send. It's a collaborative movement and we've had a privilege to have a seat at the table as YWAM as part of that. And it's been a wild ride.

Dr. Don Payne: Oh, I bet. What are some of the unique challenges or risks and the unique impact of that kind of ministry?

Andy Byrd: Yeah, I think this thing's definitely kicked my butt in a lot of ways. And I think I didn't, I didn't realize how difficult in some ways broader unity movements are in the body of Christ. And of course we, we know that it's such a need and that we struggled with division at so many levels. And I think through this journey understood a little bit more as to why we struggle with division so many levels and how difficult unity really can be. So there, you know, just the challenges of getting various streams of the body of Christ together under a simple or a primary banner and not an organizational name or a brand, but really around a message. And at the same time as that being maybe one of our biggest challenges at the same time, I also feel like it's probably been one of the biggest breakthroughs has just been watching how the message of the great commission has the power to bring together different streams and different leaders and unifying around an urgency to see the nation's reach and to see America re evangelize. And so that's been a mega challenge, but also in some ways has been very rewarding just to see what God's done in that.

Dr. Don Payne: That is so fascinating. And well, I and probably many of our listeners can relate to that because we've seen that tragically in lots and lots of ways, at least in this country where it gets so difficult to unify different sub traditions in different splinter groups under a common cause. And it's really great to hear that that you've at least got some anecdotal evidence that that's a thing, right. That can happen. Yeah. When you talk about God bringing another great awakening at least to this country, which a lot of us have been praying for some time I just, you know, I wonder a lot of us wonder what shape that might take, what will be the, you know, the presenting issues, the kind of iterations of reconciliation and redemption. Because in each great awakening, historically, there've been certain kinds of focal points, cultural forms of brokenness that the gospel really tackles head on. And I'm just curious what that might be. You may have some thoughts on that?

Andy Byrd: Yeah. I so agree with you. I think in studying some of the first and second grade awakenings, and of course, some of the revival and reformation movements in history, you do see each of them marked with a distinct elements that were so real necessary and needed in the day that they occurred in. And of course always reflected various attributes of God's nature and character. And I think we are in a remarkable season right now of shifts at a global level and in the US massively, I think in the last year, we have probably experienced enough change

that might be equal to any 20 year period of time before this. Don't you think? I mean, the cultural shift. Oh man, the ideological shifts. So many things have been accelerated in a one-year period. And of course, a lot of division has occurred in that. So in some ways I feel the need to be pressing into God and understanding his heart for not what he did five years ago or what we even saw working in a sense five years ago.

It's the same nature and character, the same God, the same gospel, but to understand what spiritual awakening will look like in this next generation with gen Z and young millennials and our current political climate, our current body of Christ climate, our current cultural climate, I think it is probably one of the most pressing needs of the hour is to understand what the Lord's doing in the midst of all of it. And how do we see him move beyond our wildest imagination? And what will mark that? What will his fingerprints look like in this move of God that we've all been praying for and all believing for? And honestly, I feel like even seeing some of the beginning signs of, so that to me is one of the most important questions that we should be, that we're seeking God about right now.

Dr. Don Payne: Oh yeah. May it come Lord because yeah, it can. I mean, I would think it almost has to be that some of that brokenness that has been in our faces and been crushing in, on us globally, as well as in this country will be the backdrop, the, the foil for what God does uniquely and in these next seasons.

Andy Byrd: It sure feels that way. Yeah.

Dr. Don Payne: What have you, in your experience seen or what are you seeing God doing in the world that might kind of be off the radar for lots of North American Christians?

Andy Byrd: Mm, I love that question. Yes, I think you know, one of the most remarkable things, or some of the, I should say some of the most remarkable things happening will never make, you know, Fox or CNN or BBC, or, you know, pick the news outlet. And yet our historic, on a global scale right now. And I think so much of what's happening because our mainstream media is so dominated by some of the current crisis. And some of the things that, frankly, we're probably all a little tired of hearing about, whether it be the, some of the political difficulties or whether it be COVID. I mean, I get it, it's all real. And of course we want to be informed people, but none of those are a report card on how the kingdom of God is growing or what God's doing in places all over the earth. And I think one of the things we, we love about what we get to do is we are constantly hearing testimonies of remarkable moves of God across the world and of real finish lines of the great commission.

If you could even use the term finish line, such as every major people group having the gospel in their language. All the way down to every single language, having a portion of the scripture in their language, down to every people group being engaged with the gospel. And so many of those lines are either right in front of us or a few years away. And that is some of the most exciting things

happening around the world. The most of the translation experts would say that by the year 2030 to 2035, that we will begin the last transformation of the last language on earth. And that's, you know, we're 2000 of waiting for that moment. And we are in that season, you know, we're, we're 10 to 15 years for seeing that happen and that we're the first generation in human history to wake up to some of those realities. Yeah. Remarkable. And we're probably right now, I would say based on some of the recent studies that there are roughly a hundred to maybe 150 people groups on the earth that have not yet been engaged with the gospel. And just maybe 15 years ago, that number was over a thousand.

So, the speed at which people, groups that have never one time that we're aware of had a gospel representation or the opportunity to understand the good news, that number is moving so quickly. And because of unity, among missions, organizations, and translation organizations, today, most Americans wouldn't know that statistically, the fastest growing church in the world is in Iran. And I think if we just said that 20 years ago, we would have been like, that's not even possible, but that's the reality of the day that we live in. And places that have been historically closed to the gospel are now some of the places where the gospel is spreading the fastest and that there's so many testimonies like that. On a personal level, got to, was in a conversation with one of our long-term workers, who is a good friend. We sent him out from here in an area of the world that I can't mention. But he was sending me pictures of the first known gathering of believers among a people group that nobody knows, have possibly ever had communion together, have ever been baptized, have ever sat around and discussed the Scriptures together. So those are some of, I think the remarkable and exciting things that are actually happening in the midst of a lot of chaos, a lot of confusion and a lot of crisis as well.

Dr. Don Payne: And how do you think the church needs to prepare to deal with all that? Because with every historic and dramatic movement of God, there have come unintended side effects and risks and aberrations and you know, just all kinds of things that get off the rails. How does the church prepare to be faithful through what God may do in this next season?

Andy Byrd: Yeah. Wow. Good, great question. I'd love to hear your thoughts on that.

Dr. Don Payne: You're the expert on this not me.

Andy Byrd: No, definitely not expert, but I, you know, the places that I see that are thriving, whether in America, or even globally are the places that have returned to the simplicity of a love and an obedience to the Scriptures. And I think that the people and the places, the movements and the churches that have brought it back to loving Jesus and obeying the Scriptures, walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, taking the Scriptures, you know, at face value and just living them in everyday life, to me is the most potent force in all of human history. And I feel like today we're seeing the same thing, especially with the radical assault on truth on absolutes, the relativism of truth that, you know, some of the postmodern tendencies is the communities that I'm finding that are reaching

their cities. That are impacting the world around them, whose marriages are growing and strong, whose kids are being raised in the ways of the Lord, are simply the communities that have brought it back to what it's all about, loving Jesus and obeying the Scriptures.

And that gives me great hope that some of the shakings that have occurred in the last year, which some of them, of course, I believe the enemy gets his fingers in there and causes all kinds of extra chaos. And some of it is, you know, there's some natural element to something like a virus, but in the midst of it all, I also believe God has been shaking us. I think he's been shaking the church so that all that remains is what's really built on him. And I think that's where I get great hope. We just finished a 7,500 mile road trip across America with my whole family. We drove for two months and spoken probably 35 gatherings. And I would say that the hope that I'm coming away with for America is based on the number of leaders who are bringing it back to that simplicity. And it looks and feels a whole lot like some of what you read about in the book of Acts.

Dr. Don Payne: You know, I was just going to say, this sounds remarkably first century.

Andy Byrd: Yes. Yes. I think if we were to, you know, drop in right now to the church of Iran, which is thriving and multiplying, we would literally feel that we have dropped in to first century Christianity.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. Right there in Antioch. Huh?

Andy Byrd: Yes.

Dr. Don Payne: Andy, with the level, I'm going to ask you a personal question here with the level of ministry exposure and ministry opportunity that you have had through YWAM what prompted you to attend Seminary? I mean, because frankly, because many, many people who have the type of influence and the type of platform, frankly, that you've been given, many of them give the impression that they think they kind of have everything pretty much figured out and they become accustomed to others sitting under their instruction. So what made you come to Seminary at this point in your ministry career?

Andy Byrd: Yeah. Yeah. I first of all, say how honestly grateful I am for Denver Seminary and for each professor I've had. It has been just a remarkable blessing and think for me, it really came down to having a value for constantly learning. And the insight that going to seminary has given me even through, you know, books and content and papers that I just would probably not have read on my own. Wouldn't have even known where to start on my own. You know, wouldn't have had some of these assignments in a way that really require you to get the work done. All of that, honestly for me was about catalyzing, deeper intimacy with Jesus. And I just felt like going to Seminary was going to push me in a direction that I probably wasn't going to push myself and then even leading in such a pluralistic society, I felt the need to have stronger biblical foundation at a

theological level because my primary work is discipling and pouring into and teaching 18 year olds. And we just had about 300 students arrive here last Thursday and they'll spend three months with us.

And many of them are coming from not only broken families, but they're coming from you know, confusion. And in our current educational system, they're coming from pluralism at many levels. And I just felt I needed to be more grounded myself. And of course the deeper you are in something, hopefully the greater grace, you have to present that in a simple and understandable way. So I just felt if I could spend a season going deeper in the word, understanding the Scriptures, theology, New Testament, Old Testament, and as my professors being able to be sages or guides in that, that not only was it going to take me deeper in my own walk with the Lord to begin to see Jesus in ways I've not seen him before to fall more in love with him, but also that I would be able to hopefully bring a more simple and understandable yet strong foundation to the 18 year olds that we're pouring our lives into.

Dr. Don Payne: Man, that's really well said. I appreciate and applaud that because you've, I mean, you've got it. And that exemplifies what we hope a good theological education will do. Will actually empower ministry, will ground people in ministry, not sterilize it and take the guts out of it. And you said that very well.

Andy Byrd: I have loved it.

Dr. Don Payne: Well, I'm glad you have. Andy, I want to give you kind of a, you already have the mic so to speak, but I'm going to even, at another level, kind of give you the mic to do a call to any younger people who are thinking about where they wanted to vote their lives and what God might have for them. What do you want to say to them? What do they need to be about? How would you challenge them?

Andy Byrd: Yeah. I love that. Well, I would say first, and I'm assuming that a lot of people listening to this, you might be, you know, in, or at least connected to Denver Seminary, or maybe you're a student right now, or a faculty or considering Denver Seminary. And I just want to say to each of you that are in any of those categories at a student level, you would never regret giving a season of your life to going deep in the Scriptures and building solid foundation. It's parenting prep, it's marriage prep, it's life prep. And it's so needed in our current age of confusion. And the lack of clarity that is being offered right now at many levels. And so I just, I would say first and foremost, don't neglect or despise the seasons of training so that when we're 50, 60, 70, 80, we're standing on strong foundation and we're not blown and tossed by the winds of confusion that come around us and culture and you know, mass opinion, whatever it may be.

And I would say, you know, second to that, that the power to me of training and education is of course really wrapped up in the practicum and really wrapped up in and having real application, real incarnate Jesus in everyday in life. So I just encourage each person listening to this right now that Jesus didn't have a passive bone in his body. And he was the ultimate example of action from the

place of love. He was constantly moving and taking new territory and meeting in new needs and finding people and meeting them where they were at. He was activated in his faith and from a real place of intimacy and rest. And I think one of the greatest needs of the hour right now is for the world to see an activated church for the world, to see an activated, a believer, a person who is living their theology, living their faith out loud, full of love, full of initiatory courage. So that would be my encouragement to every person listening. Let's live on strong foundations. Let's build our lives on the rock and let some allow that life on the rock to be also trumpeted from the mountain tops from the rooftops. And let's let the world see a church that isn't lost in arguments or division. A church that's not just known for what it's against, but let's let the world see a church that is an action that is full of love, that is moving forward, taking ground with great humility for the gospel. And I think many, many thousands will come to the kingdom as the church activates in that way.

Dr. Don Payne: Amen to that brother pass the offering plate. Wow. Yeah, you go, Andy bird. This has been a real treat. Thank you friend for taking some time to spend with us.

Andy Byrd: Oh, thank you. Such a privilege. And I love Denver seminary. It's been a gift to me, gift to my faith, a gift to my leadership, experience in life. So such an honor to do this together, Dr. Payne, I've so enjoyed the courses that you know, we've been able to do together. And I hope everyone listening is just massively encouraged and carrying great hope for where this is all headed.

Dr. Don Payne: Well, you've encouraged me, my friend. Thanks again. We look forward to a future conversation with you on other topics. So friends, we hope you'll find us again really soon and check out our webpage. You'll always find good stuff there. Not merely for students, but a lot of free resources that we hope will enrich your life and your faith in your ministry. So check that out. Denverseminary.edu, and as always, you can email us if you'd like to make a comment or a question. Our email address is podcast@Denverseminary.edu just wish you all God's best. And we'll talk to you again soon.