

# How She Overcomes

Priscilla Shirer was stunned when Alex and Stephen Kendrick asked her to star in their film *War Room*. Though Shirer was well-known as a powerful Bible teacher and a best-selling author, she had never acted before—and she felt it would be a distraction from the work God called her to. She politely told them no. The brothers responded with one final pitch: “This won’t just be entertainment. This is ministry.”

That got Shirer’s attention. She read the script and discovered they were telling the truth. God had anointed *War Room* with a powerful message to teach believers worldwide about the power of prayer. Acting could be ministry.

“You know, some people may never read a book I might write,” Shirer says. “They may never come into the church to hear a message I might give. They may never go through one of those Bible studies. But they will go to a movie.”

In the movie, Shirer plays Elizabeth Jordan, a realtor and mother whose marriage is falling apart. Encouraged by a client to pray through her problems, Elizabeth witnesses the power of prayer firsthand as God restores her marriage. Despite no previous experience, Shirer received plenty of praise for her performance in *War Room*, and the film went on to become the Kendrick brothers’ most successful film to date. And while Shirer’s career remains focused on Bible teaching, she didn’t quit acting after *War Room*. She had a small role in last year’s hit *I Can Only Imagine*, and this year, she reunites with the Kendrick brothers for their upcoming film, *Overcomer*.

It’s an unexpected but natural extension of Shirer’s ministry, which likewise came unexpectedly but naturally. Though her father is megachurch pastor Tony Evans, Shirer at first had no interest in preaching. She studied communications in college with plans to become a news anchor. But during school, she

interned at a Christian radio station. Listeners would call out of the blue and ask her to emcee church events or lead Bible studies—and Shirer obliged. As a 19-year old, she'd show up wherever she was invited, sometimes preaching to 10 people and sometimes to 500.

“That’s when the fire was lit in my heart for the possibility that sharing God’s Word could be something I could do,” Shirer says. “It never occurred to me that it would be my whole life. I just thought that would be something on the side—I would do Bible studies [for any] people the Lord would bring in my path. To make a long story short, the invitations to share God’s Word just never stopped coming. So for the past 20—going on 25—years, that is what has happened. People have invited me to share God’s Word in writing and publishing and Bible studies and now in film. And I just have had the privilege to just share God’s Word wherever He lets me.”

Hundreds of thousands—if not millions—have listened to Shirer preach over the years. But she believes what people are responding to is not her but the truth she carries.

“It’s not that I’m particularly talented or anything,” she says. “It’s just truth. They’re hearing something that gives them peace in their soul. That’s what people need. ... I just keep asking Him, ‘Lord, how can I package Your truth in a way that will speak to this group of people, and make sure that they do not miss the truth that’s enveloped in this message?’ You know, the packaging may change, but principles never do. That’s what I think draws people in: something that is true yesterday, today and forevermore.”

## **Overcoming Identity**

*Overcomer*, which releases in theaters nationwide August 23, is the first film by the Kendrick brothers in four years. While *War Room* focused on the power of prayer, *Overcomer* tackles the concept of identity and knowing who your heavenly Father is.

“Are your value and significance rooted firmly in who you are in Christ—or are they subject to external factors?” Shirer says. “Is your significance found in your career, your ambitions or any number of other things where we tend to place our value? Sometimes we don’t realize it until those things are stripped away. All temporal things can be stripped away from us. And when they are, we can tell if we’ve placed our identity in them based on whether or not we’re just disappointed by the loss or devastated by the loss.”

Shirer admits that even she struggles sometimes with basing her identity on the opinions and acceptance of others.

“As I was looking at the script, even before we started filming, it made me look at myself: *Have I misplaced my identity in Christ as the primary governing factor of my life, the place where I’m rooted and find my value?*” Shirer says. “The Lord has a way of revealing you to yourself. Just when you feel like you need to pray about everybody else in your life, He says, ‘No, actually, it’s you. And let’s work together.’ That’s the grace of God: ‘Let’s work together. I will allow you to bring to Me all your stuff, and I turn messes into miracles.’”

Shirer’s sons even assisted on-set throughout the production, working as “gofers” who helped with any little task that needed doing. In doing so, Shirer says they got to see true men and women of integrity honoring God at work.

“Alex and Stephen and [older brother] Shannon Kendrick call the entire cast and crew together every morning of filming ... and we have devotions together,” Shirer says. “We pray together. Several times throughout filming during the day, they might stop and ask everyone to pray over a particular scene that we’re about to film, that God would be glorified in it. ... What a privilege to be able to have my sons on set, watching directors who honor Christ very boldly in the work environment.”

After all, Shirer says, our rapidly secularizing society will not provide such strong Christian role models. She prays for her sons and the next generation regularly.

“My sons [and] young people like them are going to have to—in this post-Christian era—really know what it means to be bold for their faith,” she says. “They’re going to have to know how to be apologists, how to have concrete theology behind them, so they can speak the truth in love [without fear] and have the know-how to be able to do that intelligently. ...

“I can teach them God’s Word. I can pray with them. I can take them to church with me. But at some point, that is where the Holy Spirit kicks in and gives them a fire that their mama can’t give them, their daddy can’t give them, and the pastor can’t give them. It’s got to be God’s own Spirit, ringing in their ears, convicting, challenging and ... encouraging them to be Daniels in a Babylon time.”

### **Overcoming Physicality**

Nearly 10 years ago, Shirer was spending quiet time with God and writing in her prayer journal when she heard Him speak to her. She felt He wanted her to act as a bridge between divided groups: between black and white audiences, and conservative and charismatic believers.

“I still believe that’s part of my mission, that the Lord has opened wide the doors of the church in different streams to me for a reason,” Shirer says. “And I intend to use that as best I can to be a full demonstration of the creative genius of God in making me who I am.”

As a black woman, Shirer stands out in a preaching circuit that is often predominantly male and Caucasian. She says God has made her successful not in spite of her external “packaging,” but because of it.

“The reality is, He has packaged me in this body,” Shirer

says. "I'm made in the image of God. So I get to be proud of the fact that I am a woman. He didn't make a mistake there. I get to be proud of the fact that I am a woman of color. I'm a black woman. He didn't make a mistake there. So all those parts of my demographics are something I value and that I'm supposed to bring to the table of the ministry the Lord has given me. There's a reason why he would have me on a platform where there might be mostly white women. There's a reason as well why he would sometimes have me on a platform where there are mostly black women. And every single time, I am bringing not only the message that's coming out of my mouth, but I'm bringing it in the package of who he created me to be."

She says her physicality and life experiences enable her to bridge audiences, explaining black concerns to white audiences and vice versa. She's able to more quickly connect to people of different ethnicities. And by just being herself—as a black woman anointed with the Spirit of God to preach—she's able to show other women of color that they too have a place in the kingdom.

"Representation does matter," Shirer says. "I cannot tell you how many women ... come up to me and tell me that they appreciate something that I've said—but the next sentence, or sometimes the first sentence, is that they just appreciate seeing me. It says to them that they matter. It says to them that there is a space for them, that there's a place for them, that they do not have to become something more palatable to the church or palatable to our culture in order to be received."

That representation even extends to the movie screen. In *War Room* and *I Can Only Imagine*, Shirer says, "I didn't have to quiet my blackness. I didn't have to make my hair less black or make my expressions less than I am. I get to bring the full expression of who I am and trust that God fully intended to make me this way, and so He will use this to minister across the spectrum of the body of Christ. When someone sees me on a

screen in a faith-based film, it allows them to enter into the story in a way they might otherwise just be watching as a spectator instead of realizing 'That's me! That's what God can do in and through me.' It just draws people in when they see themselves."

Shirer also points out that though we are created in the image of Christ in every aspect, our identity is ultimately found in Him rather than any individual identity markers. That's one way she lives out the message of *Overcomer* in her daily life.

"Our identity obviously includes our physicality and our personality," Shirer says. "All of that is created in the image of Christ. But it means that, as a daughter of Christ Jesus, my identity is in Him. I'm being consistently conformed into the image of Christ. So I've got the image of God stamped on me and my creation, and I'm being conformed to the image of Christ as a daughter of God. Both of those things are simultaneously being used by God to change me and use me for His glory. So I submit all of my physicality and all of my personality to His work. He uses all of that for His glory."

### **Overcoming Division**

But the racial divide isn't the only place where Shirer feels called to unite. In 2010, Shirer told *Charisma* she felt called to serve as a bridge between the conservative and charismatic movements within the church. Today, she feels more confident of that calling than ever. Better yet, she says she's starting to see the fruit of that union, as convergence between the Word and Spirit movements increases.

"I heard one preacher say—many years ago—that the great sin of the Old Testament was that they didn't believe in God the Father," Shirer says. "The great sin of the New Testament is that they didn't believe in Jesus the Son. The great sin of our generation is that we don't really believe in the Holy Spirit. So if you have the Word without the Spirit, you have

an imbalanced relationship with God. If you have the Spirit without the Word, you are still imbalanced in your relationship with God. We need both to come together.”

Shirer says she is encouraged by the growing unity in the body of Christ. She believes both the charismatic movement and the conservative movement can grow stronger by sharing their experiences and testimonies with one another. For example, Shirer believes that conservative circles would benefit from the charismatic practice of leaving margin for God. She says overly scheduled services leave little time for the Holy Spirit to speak.

“Our altars may not be flooded, and the reason is because we haven’t even left margin for that,” Shirer says. “We haven’t left room for God to do the work only He can do.”

She joyfully recalls attending a charismatic church service years ago in which, after each worship song, the band was completely silent for four to six minutes.

“The silence was so pregnant with the presence of God,” Shirer says. “You’d just sit there, and you would see around you tears begin to fall, people getting on their knees as the Holy Spirit began to speak to them. And I think that’s something that we can learn. There’s beauty in the stillness and the silence.”

But Shirer also believes that charismatics could learn a few lessons from conservative believers. For instance, she says, a renewed emphasis on exegetical preaching could revive a love for the Word of God in many Spirit-filled congregations. Too often people are solely chasing “mountaintop experiences that [are] fun and enjoyable,” seeking physical manifestations like goosebumps, getting slain in the Spirit and weeping before God. But Scripture provides concrete truth that will guide believers in everyday life long after the supernatural thrills have worn off.

“There is concrete truth from the Word of God that people can take home with them,” Shirer says. “People need to know, ‘What do I do as a result of this truth that I learned?’ Yes, I got prayed for freedom today. I’m delivered from my addictions. But I need to know how to walk in accountability. I need to know how to actually go home and live in this victory ... that was just prayed over me.”

If the Word and Spirit movements can unite, Shirer believes the church will be uniquely positioned to change the world.

“The reality is that we have one spectrum of the church that swung too far in one direction, and another spectrum of the church has swung so far in the other direction, and there’s a balance,” she says. “We can learn that balance from each other, if only we would stop the infighting amongst ourselves over these issues, swing our doors wide open, and say, ‘Come and share with us. Let us share with you. Let’s learn from each other and bring to the table what God has accomplished in each of our circles, and see how we can help to bring balance to the other.’ And in that way, we’ll see the body of Christ rise to her full maturity and be who she was created to be.”  
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# Why Christians Should Avoid Marijuana—Even If It’s Legal

Marijuana has recently become legal in many states, forcing many Christians to determine whether it’s a sin—or whether, as many argue with alcohol, it may be acceptable in moderation. In a recent video produced by The Gospel Coalition, pastors Thomas Terry and Joshua Ryan Butler explain why they would urge churchgoers not to use marijuana.

Butler begins by noting that Scripture does not explicitly prohibit marijuana usage—although in states where it is still illegal, Christians are called to obey the laws of the land. But Butler says he would have major personal and pastoral reservations regarding the wisdom of using marijuana.

“People often make the comparison to it being like alcohol,” Butler says. “We see that there are appropriate uses of alcohol in Scripture and all, but I do think there’s some important differences and distinctions. One of those would be I think it’s a lot harder to use weed, to kind of toke up, and not get the equivalent of what with alcohol would be intoxicated, right? Seems like it’s a very low bar to reach that level of intoxication with weed. Likewise, I don’t know for every individual, but it does seem like in our culture, much of the use of weed and marijuana is geared towards kind of disconnecting and disengaging from life and from people. You see, in alcohol, even in Scripture, when it’s used appropriately in moderation and all, that part of the goal was community and celebration and bringing people together to celebrate what God’s done, to celebrate the life that He’s given and all. Yet in contrast to that, marijuana seems to have kind of an individualistic bent that pulls you away from people, pulls you within yourself, causes you to become more disengaged not only from people but also kind of from life in

general.”

Butler tells the story of a high school friend who he saw disconnect from his friends and relationships over three years, until all this friend wanted to do was “sit in his room all day and smoke out.” While Butler says this is not applicable to all marijuana users, he believes weed encourages people to move in this direction.

Terry agrees that whether or not to use marijuana a discretionary, “wisdom” call, but he would have strong reservations about recommending it to congregants.

“I could never as a pastor say to one of the members of my congregation, ‘Yeah, feel free to enjoy marijuana recreationally,’ just because I also feel like you really can’t have sound mind when you’re high. I think a lot of people gives you this false idea that there’s a functional high, and it just kind of keys you out and you’re OK. But I’ve never experienced that personally. ... The challenge with marijuana is it’s kind of like a ‘one hit and done,’ so you’re immediately in that place of intoxication.”

Terry says he should know, as he used to smoke marijuana before he came to salvation in Christ. His goal at the time was to “disengage.”

“I would actually ask people in my congregation, ‘What is the reason for the desire to unhinge from community and unhinge from reality?’” Terry says. “And then begin to ask the deeper and more significant questions like, ‘Where does this desire come from? What are you experiencing in your life that is causing for you to want to escape?’ I mean, it’s the same question you would ask somebody who consistently would be intoxicated: ‘What are you running from? What is it that you are escaping?’”

Terry also acknowledges that his pastoral advice might change in the context of medicinal usage versus recreational usage.

“There’s some unique challenges medicinally,” Terry says. “Some people use it for medicinal purposes, and that—I would really have to flesh that out with a member of my congregation. But in the category of recreational, I couldn’t in good conscience tell them to partake in marijuana recreationally.”

What do you think? Let us know in the comments.

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## **This Acts 6 Strategy Will Relieve Your Stress**

Kyle Winkler cautions believers to make sure that you are doing the work God has truly called you to—and not stressing yourself out with things He has not placed before you. In a sermon, he uses Acts 6 as an example of this principle in action.

Winkler says Acts 6 highlights a moment when the church was growing—and like anything that grows quickly, some things began falling through the cracks.

“The Bible says that discontentment was arising, and that’s what happens,” Winkler says. “So the 12 apostles got together, and they said, ‘Okay, we cannot be faithful to our responsibility of teaching and praying and also be serving tables.’ So look what they did here. Acts 6:2-4: ‘So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. They said, “We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program. And so brothers, select seven men who are well respected and full of the Spirit and wisdom”’ and let them do it.”

As a result, Winkler says, the early church grew and became successful.

“The church grew, [and] their spiritual lives grew whenever they learned to stay within what God had asked and tasked them to do,” Winkler says. “Feeding people was a good thing, but it was not their God thing. So maybe you need to ask yourself, and I have to ask myself this on occasion: ... ‘Am I stressed because I’m too involved?’”

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## **Ryan LeStrange: The Prophetic Key to Growing in Wisdom**

Ryan LeStrange said in this week’s “Monday Word” video that only people who pursue wisdom will find it.

“Wisdom is available to everybody,” LeStrange says. “Some will get it and some won’t. The difference maker is pursuit. Wisdom demands pursuit. If you want wisdom, you’ve got to be in pursuit. We find that all throughout the Bible.”

Watch the video to learn how to effectively pursue wisdom.

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## **Kanye West: ‘The Bible Is**

# Better Than Pinterest'

Kanye West told Forbes that the Bible is better than Pinterest and serves as an inspiration for him during a video interview posted Tuesday morning.

"I'll be working on home designs and looking at references from 3,000 years ago and reading the Old Testament at the same time," West says. "So it's like a soundtrack to the visuals of the shapes and the ideas and ideals of what we're creating. A lot of my creative friends, I tell them like the Bible is better than Pinterest. You can bring something into space and time we exist in while reflecting thousands of years of truth."

Then West began reading Leviticus 19:19 for the interviewer.

West says, "[It] says 'You should keep my statutes. You should not let your cattle breed with a different kind. You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor shall you wear a garment of cloth made of two kinds of material.' I tell my apparel team that the clothes that we're using [are] a single material. I remember sending a manager I used to work with a really rude email about how every time he wore this wool jacket with leather sleeves, he set culture back by 10 years. So now I can send him the verse from the Bible that says 'You should not wear a garment of cloth made of two kinds of materials.'"

Watch the full video interview [here](#).