

'Hairpiece Revival' Spreads Worship Awakening Across the Country

Humble act by a surrendered preacher stirs Austin, Texas

Touché for the toupee—or its removal, that is. When the hairpiece came off in Austin, a revival took off from Texas.

Now, three years afterward, a praise-and-worship movement based in the Lone Star State has hit the country's TV airwaves, reaching millions of homes with the help of participating networks. It all started when the minister who wore the toupee sacrificed his humility in what became known as the "Hairpiece Revival."

The resultant Austin Awakening TV show—dedicated to praise-and-worship programming and now in its second season—has captured a growing audience on the INSP, Daystar and TBN Christian networks. Because there is such a need for its type of programming, each of the networks has for a second season donated the airtime.

"A year ago we made a pilot show and showed it to several networks," said Randy Phillips, the visionary behind the show. "Many people told us they wanted their viewers to see this. They said they didn't have any programs that conveyed this kind of panting after God."

Phillips—senior pastor of PromiseLand Church in Austin and a member of the popular Christian group Phillips, Craig & Dean—credits his father's dramatic act of humility three years ago with being the springboard for the TV show.

As he was preaching on the book of Acts, Kenneth Phillips, who founded the church more than 30 years ago and now functions as its bishop, focused on issues such as why the contemporary American church doesn't see the power and miracles that the Acts church witnessed.

"Part of what he talked about was our pride and contentment with the things of this world," Randy Phillips noted.

The elder Phillips asked God if there was anything in his life he needed to lay down and sensed that the Lord wanted him to do something very personal. On June 4, 2000, in front of 2,000 church members and an even larger TV audience, he removed the hairpiece he had worn for more than 20 years.

"My mother and I didn't even know he was going to do it," Randy Phillips said. "But it was right in line with what Old Testament prophets would do to try to get the attention of Israel to turn from their entanglements."

PromiseLand began to experience what became known as the "Austin Awakening," and the movement birthed songs, sermons and a new way of worship, the younger Phillips said.

It also paved the way for a 30-minute praise-and-worship TV program. Randy Phillips said he wanted to convey some of the things his church was experiencing in an effort to help awaken others.

And it has. In the last year, PromiseLand has received thousands of calls and e-mails from viewers whose lives have been changed as a result of The Austin Awakening program. Many

fans have left positive messages on the ministry's Web site, .

Phillips also has witnessed a positive response in Austin, where only about 10 percent of the population regularly attends church. "I see people everywhere, from the grocery store to the gas station, saying, 'There's nothing on television like what you're doing,'" he said. "Many of them [say] it has brought them closer to Jesus."

Some shows spotlight well-known guests such as The Katinas, Larry Gatlin, David Huff and Israel. "I'm looking for guests who are hungry for God and have a fresh look at worship," Phillips said. Tentative upcoming guests include Gary Oliver, The Martins and Lenny LeBlanc.

One of Phillips' favorite shows featured PromiseLand member Garwin Dobbins, who has a rare disease that causes his muscles to turn to bone. There is no known medical cure.

After Phillips briefly interviewed Dobbins about his condition, he and a couple of other men helped Dobbins get out of his wheelchair and propped him up so he could sing. Dobbins began to sing in a feeble voice, "I Can Only Imagine," written by MercyMe. There was hardly a dry eye in the theater by the time the song ended.

Phillips has put all original worship tunes on Songs of the Awakening 2, which released in January. The ministry's Web site includes CDs and videos of previous shows for purchase, downloadable songs and tracks for worship leaders, and television and taping schedules.

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