

Couple's Healing Ministry 'Scripted' For Film and Television Professionals

Mel and Desiree Ayers, whose TV success almost brought them tragedy, share with Hollywood what God has done for them.

Healing is a hallmark of Mel and Desiree Ayers' fast-growing ministry, a work that's touching the heart of the film and television capital of the world with the gospel.

The Ayers pastor In His Presence Church in Studio City, Calif., near Hollywood, and a few blocks from the CBS Studios television-production lot. The church, which the Ayers began in a tiny production studio, was relocated in 1993 and today is housed in a 40,000 square foot, 2,000-seat building in nearby Woodland Hills. Sunday attendance has grown from nine people to more than 1,000.

Once Hollywood professionals themselves, the Ayers minister to everyone from cameramen to casting directors. Part of their strategy is to equip those working in film and television with Christian leadership qualities and to encourage them to make Christian films that will influence Hollywood's creative decision-makers, as well as the masses.

"I think you could make relatable, powerful, entertaining, anointed films," Mel said. "And it would be exciting, and we could still see a million people at one time ask the Lord into their hearts."

His point of view isn't mere Christian idealism but is based on his own experience as part of well-known television programs. Mel first came to Hollywood for the same reason millions of others have—to become an actor. But he wound up a successful pastor.

When he arrived in Hollywood after college, Mel soon landed parts in Days of Our Lives, Three's Company and General Hospital. Raised in a Christian family in Tampa, Fla., and saved at 12, he still attended church. Yet he found himself drinking excessively and eventually using cocaine. While driving with a hangover one morning, he said a prayer.

"The Holy Spirit hit," he remembers. "It was powerful. It was life-changing."

A few months later he was in an acting class when a beautiful woman wearing skimpy clothes began giving him looks.

"I tried to get him to date me," Desiree said. "But by the time we went out on a date, I was saved and baptized in the Holy Spirit."

In 1982, the two married, just six weeks after first meeting. They served at three local churches, becoming Sunday school teachers and eventually assistant pastors. Mel was still acting and Desiree had followed her father into business performing stunts on Hollywood sets, working on The Dukes of Hazard, Remington Steele and The Fall Guy. A successful stuntwoman, Desiree was severely injured while filming an episode of TV's Airwolf.

Ignoring a prompting of the Holy Spirit one morning, Desiree arrived at the set of the TV show ready for work. While driving a truck during filming, she was to press a button that would cause the hood to go up in smoke. Instead, she ignited a 14-pound napalm bomb she said she didn't know was there.

The truck became a ball of flames. Her entire face, neck and arms suffered second- and third-degree burns. Airlifted to a burn center, she was so disfigured that Mel cried the first time he saw her. She quickly healed, with no visible scarring.

"She would have had scarring the rest of her life, if we'd depended solely upon the doctors for healing," Mel said. "But

to have perfect healing, we needed God's deliverance and intervention, and that's what we put our faith in. He came through."

Her healing led to opportunities to share her testimony and has added to the healing ministry of the couple's church. Desiree told her story on The Phil Donahue Show, TBN and The 700 Club. When the couple started In His Presence Church, prophetic minister Kim Clement prophesied that the church would be a "church of miracles."

Though their ministry includes several annual conferences for men, women and Christian leaders, as well as acting workshops, jail visitations and original music sung by Mel, it is their Friday-night healing service that sets their ministry apart.

"We've had so many testimonies and miracles taking place that we're asking people to bring us doctors' reports just to have all the documentation. It's just been miracle after miracle and it's been powerful."

Ed Donnally in Los Angeles