

How the Holy Spirit Led This Starlet to Bravo's 'Real Housewives'

Editor's note: This is part 1 of a two-part story.

When Bravo launched *The Real Housewives* franchise nearly a decade ago, the show ushered in a new era of “pretty trashy, pretty outrageous” reality television.

The show—and its many spinoffs in cities across the world—focuses on “housewives.” More specifically, it focuses on wives and mothers known for living in the lap of luxury and enjoying much of what the world has to offer.

Enter Lydia McLaughlin, the self-described “anti-housewife” who became the fans’ darling in the eighth season of *The Real Housewives of Orange County*. The magazine editor, blogger and mother knew right away that she wasn’t the traditional fit, but she couldn’t let it go: She saw the *Housewives* set as a mission field, one where few dared to go.

“Once I started looking at it, I kept seeing God speaking to me to do it,” McLaughlin told *Charisma*.

Two years later, McLaughlin’s time on *Real Housewives* has come and gone, but her Christian legacy as salt and light lives on beyond her time on the popular television show.

Throughout her life, she’s allowed the Holy Spirit to guide her steps, and as she moves out of the reality television spotlight, she’s continuing to follow the Spirit’s calling.

Beyond Orange County

McLaughlin has always been a writer. She kept a journal throughout her life to remind her of God’s promises and to

refresh her memories of His love when He doesn't feel close.

Now, her love of writing and Scripture has found its way onto the pages of her new book, *Beyond Orange County: A Housewives Guide to Faith & Happiness*.

"I wrote it to train myself to inspire young girls and women to have a love affair with Scripture and ignite their faith," McLaughlin says. "I actually would love to see myself doing Bible studies or a nine-week series. I felt like this was a good introduction for me and my readers ... for people who watch the show and want to know why I left."

The hybrid biography-devotional book is a way for her fans to see her beyond her role in *The Real Housewives of Orange County*. In the book, McLaughlin reveals why she made the controversial decision to walk away from the program to pursue her passions—faith and family. She also shares the "inside scoop from the television series." But more importantly, she encourages readers to "boldly live out the calling (God) has given you."

Behind the Scenes in Orange County

Beyond Orange County tells the behind-the-scenes story of how a telephone call in 2013 "changed everything" in her life. The producer told McLaughlin that she was a "perfect fit" for the show.

To this day, McLaughlin has no idea how the producer got her name. She has a handful of suspicions, from friend Lisa Vanderpump—now the star of *Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* and *Vanderpump Rules*—to her work with other Housewives for her magazine, *Beverly Hills Lifestyle Magazine*. She and her husband Doug are known in Southern California social circles for her role as the managing editor of the upscale magazine in Beverly Hills and for the art gallery they own in Laguna Beach.

When she got the call, McLaughlin told the producer that she wasn't interested. But that night her husband suggested she meet with the producer.

"Was he crazy? I had two young children, a magazine, an art gallery and a household to run," McLaughlin wrote. "Oh yeah, and I'm a Christian. I even led a Bible study for moms at my church. I had no business being on a reality show like that!

"Sure, *The Real Housewives of Orange County* was entertaining to watch, but why would I ever choose to be part of such a thing? I remember telling Doug, 'I love my life. Why would I want to ruin it by being on a reality TV show? Doug encouraged me to think and pray about it. He suggested that maybe this could be a great adventure, a chance to shine my light for Christ in a unique way."

After praying about it that night, the following morning McLaughlin read a passage from Nehemiah about a biblical character who was the king's "right-hand man," but was called by God to go to a foreign land to help others.

"Similarly, God was tugging on my heart with an out-of-the-blue call," McLaughlin wrote. "At that moment, I realized that this opportunity to be on *The Real Housewives of Orange County* had come from the Lord. I knew in my heart of hearts that God was calling me to do the show—I don't know how else to explain it.

"As I was reading the Scripture verses describing God's call to Nehemiah, I quickly understood my Bible study lesson that morning wasn't a coincidence but divine timing. I had gotten the phone call the day before to step out of my comfort zone and go into a 'foreign land,' to 'get my hands dirty' by joining the world of reality TV, and to help people I had not yet met by shining the light of Christ through the show."

A Lifelong Passion for Pursuing Jesus

Despite their turn in the spotlight on the show, McLaughlin and her husband remain focused on pursuing Jesus and sharing the gospel—a passion developed in their youth.

The two met at a Young Life camp, a nondenominational Christian ministry focused on building relationships through mentoring, and Lydia credits much of her zest for life to the friendships she built while there.

“A lot of people influenced me in high school,” McLaughlin says. “My (mentor) Casey, really through her actions and loving on me, really affected me. The same thing happened with my youth group leader. My youth minister, Bob, who still does ministry, had such a huge impact on me. I can knock on his door and talk to him about the boys and my faith. ... These are lasting relationships in my life.”

McLaughlin became a Christian in high school, rededicating her life to the Lord in college. She initiated a Bible study in her sorority, and has fulfilled every effort to surround herself with a godly, Christian community.

To be a Christian is part of the McLaughlin lifestyle, through actions over words, and part of that extends to her three young sons. For McLaughlin, it’s not so much about instructing her children in the way they should go, but leading by example.

They know mommy and daddy go to Bible studies and small groups, praying before their meals, she says, and naturally living lives with integrated faith.

That faith has carried over into McLaughlin’s entrance in the blogosphere through OCLydia. The website is her way of connecting with fans and offering advice now that she’s moved beyond Bravo.

She calls OCLydia a lifestyle community and offers recommendations for everything from recipes to inspirational

Bible verses to jewelry.

"I can show people my favorite coats, active wear, World of Lydia action, inspirational things, Bible studies, good children's books, Scriptures," she says. "It's an outlet for me, an extension of me, my book, *Housewives*. It's a place for everyone."