

Spirit-Filled Starlet Shuns Fame to Follow God

Editor's note: This is part 2 of a two-part story. Read part 1 [here](#).

When push comes to shove, Lydia McLaughlin, former star of Bravo's *Real Housewives of Orange County* knows where to turn to find God.

One constant in McLaughlin's life has been her relationship with other Christian women—whether in Young Life, her sorority, Housewives or community groups.

She sought refuge in her group when the Bravo's offer first came about, and found confirmation through friends. When she revealed what the network was handing her, a close friend stood in the gap with her.

“(She) said, ‘I don’t see a storm coming. I don’t understand why you’re going to build an ark in the middle of the desert, but if you feel called to build an ark ... I’ll hold a hammer for you.’”

Her community group is also how she deals with spiritual battles of being in the lime light. She points to the honesty and vulnerability of the women she surrounds herself with and the value of community prayer.

Being famous doesn't make her a magical person, she says, but instead allows viewers to see that she deals with the same struggles other Christians face: namely, how to be a light in the dark world. The magnified pressure, however, does present its own set of challenges. McLaughlin freely proclaims she has nothing to hide, but she still felt pressured when dealing with some of the other cast members and show circumstances.

During filming, she wanted to openly represent Jesus, letting His light shine through her actions. He remained at her center, even though she knew she was going to get “reamed” for times she refused to participate in sinful activities, such as seeing a stripper while on a group outing to Mexico.

Through *Housewives*, “I got to be around these people who aren’t Christians, preaching the gospel and, when necessary, using words. I welcomed Jesus into my home, and without the show ... I would never have been able to say, ‘Let me introduce you to Jesus.’”

McLaughlin had a profound impact on her hairdresser and make-up artist, Nicole Sayer.

Sayer says she was most impressed with how “normal” McLaughlin was compared to the rest of the castmembers, but beyond that, everything about her was 100 percent genuine—from her lack of plastic surgery to personality.

Most of the women on the show are big into drama and gossip, a sin Sayer says women as a whole really deal with, but for McLaughlin, it was a no-brainer.

“She’s really a great encourager of people. When I think of Lydia, that’s what I think of most; I admire her ability to do that and try to model more of my life in that way, be positive, be a light, be encouraging, I think especially as women, women tend to tear each other down ... and that’s just not something Lydia does. I just think of someone who is like, just a light.”

Every aspect of her life was overrun with cameramen and crewmembers, every moment recorded for potential television exposition. She counted it all joy, though, as she felt confident she was called to spend her time on Bravo as a ministry.

And just as the Lord led her to *Housewives*, He led her away a

few months later.

The Unexpected Answer

So often, Christians claim the Lord is ignoring their prayers, when the reality is just the opposite—He is answering prayer, just not with the desired outcome.

When the time came to consider another season, McLaughlin presented her life to the Lord as a living sacrifice. She devotedly prayed night and day, and “couldn’t deny that I was getting an answer.”

“My prayer of clarity was being answered; I was just receiving a no, which was a hard pill to swallow,” she says.

After one season, McLaughlin closed the Housewives door because the Lord asked her to. Though He said “no” to another round on Bravo, he said “yes” to her expanded platform for the gospel.

McLaughlin’s friend Sayer says that while fans adored McLaughlin, she never fit into the show because of how genuine and pure she was.

While other castmembers spent time trying to tear each other down, McLaughlin was always trying to build others up. Sayer says she’s the type of person who was always friendly, asking how she can pray for you.

“The girl wants to lift you up in your endeavors in life,” Sayer says of McLaughlin. “The other women are all about drama and gossip, how can we tear each other up? They spent way too much time tearing each other down, and I think trying to fit into that crowd and still be a light and be positive can be really hard when they really just want to talk trash.”

McLaughlin looks back on her television time fondly, pinpointing exact moments where she sees how the Lord worked in her life and in others. She calls the reality show a faith

builder, and is eager to pass along how the Lord held her hand through the journey.

“It’s such a process,” McLaughlin says. “I think God’s like, ‘Here’s this step,’ and I don’t see the next step, then He’s like, ‘Step over here.’ It’s a constant walk. ... Walking is continual, constant, every day. Some days you get it wrong, but your journey still continues, and faith is a journey with Jesus.”

McLaughlin recognizes that everyone’s journey with Jesus looks totally different. Though there were those who questioned whether the Lord actually called her to such a secular network, she’s blunt in her response.

Any place can be a mission field if you let it, she says. The caveat is following the Lord, not your own heart. How dare someone limit God based on his or her personal beliefs about what the Creator of the universe is capable of.

“I feel bad for people who put God in such a small box,” she says of the naysayers. Whether it comes from the mouth of a pastor or reality TV, “Truth is truth wherever you hear it. It doesn’t mean it has to be endorsed with a Jesus stamp.”

In all actuality, to label something as “Christian” could be a turn off to those who have been hurt by religion, but by bridging the gap of the secular and supernatural, McLaughlin allows the Holy Spirit to use her beyond her wildest dreams.

She knew her faith would make an impact, but McLaughlin has been overwhelmed with the support she’s received from fans—even people who stop her on the street who share with her how her faith made a difference in their lives.

The vision she had for herself came in a neat, little package, but that wasn’t in God’s plan.

“I’m just trusting God,” she says of her steps for the future.

“I’m really seeing Him work—but work in ways I didn’t expect. None of my vision happened, but better and different things—God things happened. ... He tells us to do something, but it never turns out the way we expect; it’s always so much better. Not a worldly better, but a godly better.”

While her efforts are not explicitly focused on evangelism, there’s no denying that spreading the truth in love is what’s in her heart.

McLaughlin is aiming toward her goals, spiritual, familial and personal, but she’s holding them all with an open palm, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead her. Jesus is at the center of her actions, and she knows that may result in a pressure unique to Christians—avoiding sin.

“We’re called to be a light, and we’re going to get judged and criticized,” she says. “But Jesus is supposed to be at the forefront of your actions, your identity, what you say and what you don’t say.”

She does her best to ignore the world and focus on the glory of God—whether through a beach sunset or even a graduation speech. To McLaughlin, it isn’t about keeping up appearances as much as it developing a community in which you can be honest and vulnerable.

Though media may like for people to believe otherwise, God has not been removed from Hollywood, and McLaughlin is eager to show that to anyone willing to listen. She’s open about her experiences and even more willing to share about the faith she holds near and dear to her heart.

McLaughlin is consistently seeking the Lord, and her fruits thus far have revealed that “there is no place where God isn’t there.”

And while Christians may be doubtful of her mission field, God is bigger than Bravo, and His love will shine wherever people

are willing to go.