

Igniting Passion for God

If you had the opportunity to meet Pastor Shavon Smith in person, you'd no doubt notice her fashion sense. In fact, her chic style was one of the first things that attracted her husband, Cheyenne—a fashion stylist as well as a pastor—to her. But you'd also find Smith a woman of God undeterred in her kingdom mission; unashamed to equip others with practical and spiritual truth; and unafraid to practice the bold, biblical values she preaches.

Smith, a native of Norfolk, Virginia, has a mission “to ignite a renewed passion for God in the hearts of men and women everywhere,” according to her website, [. To that end, she ministers to others in a variety of ways, including through the Ignite podcast she hosts on the Charisma Podcast Network. Smith spoke with Charisma recently about God's call on her life and the ways she carries it out with passion and purpose.](#)

Smith, who holds a Bachelor of Science in music education from Norfolk State University, has taught in both the Norfolk and Newport News school systems in Virginia. This wife, mother of three and new stepmother of five more says, “nothing but the grace of God gives us a balance to handle it all without pulling all of my hair out.”

In 2012, Smith founded what was then called Shavon Sellers Ministries, now Shavon Smith Ministries. The ministry's vision is “to spread the love of God, ignite the passion of God in others throughout the kingdom and to assist others in carrying out their God-given assignment and fulfill purpose.” Its mission is “to provide services such as vision-casting development, leadership development, church planting, ministry coaching and mentorship.”

Smith also launched a partnership program, a mentorship program and, in 2015, The Prize Foundation, which supports

communities and empowers women. The foundation describes its founder as one whose desire is “to teach life skills, job readiness and ultimately spiritual awareness and to assist in the holistic recovery of those who have been hurt and abused.”

Smith went on to plant The Life Center in Portsmouth, Virginia, in May 2016, with the vision “to be the voice and hands on the earth that will help people find their way back to God and begin a new life through Him,” according to her website. Installed as pastor of the church Nov. 19, 2017, Smith partnered with the Lord to grow the congregation and develop various means of community outreach.

In 2019, Smith also founded a publishing company, Prize Publishing House, with the mission of assisting in the “creation, publication and marketing of high-quality products to fulfill the vision of future authors.” She has released five books herself, including a No. 1 Amazon bestseller, *When Obeying God Makes You Look Stupid*.

Transition Time

Her book title describes a challenging but fruitful season in Smith’s life.

“My last experience that the Lord allowed me to go through was something that made me look stupid to me and to so many. Last year, June 2019, the Lord told me clearly to resign from the ministry that I had planted.

“I had founded the church in Virginia, the Life Center, pastored this ministry for three years,” she says. “It grew rapidly. God blessed the ministry there in the DMV area [District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia]. And then the Lord told me after three years, ‘I need you to release the ministry into the hands of someone else. Get some boxes and start packing, because you’re going to move.’

“I said, ‘You want me to just walk away from the church that

You told me to found?'" Smith says she asked God. "'And You want me to get boxes? And You haven't told me where I'm going?'

"He said, 'Correct,'" Smith explains. "So I did as the Lord told me to do, and it was not a decision that was easy because I loved what I was called to do. We were finally breaking ground, and people from all over our area were coming and becoming partners with the ministry, and marriages were being healed. I had some of the major drug lords get saved and give their lives to Christ and become partners with the ministry. Those who were in the lifestyle of stripping ... they came; their lives were changed.

"And so now for God to say, 'All right, that's it. I have something else for you to do'—it did not make sense to me. And then on top of that, 'Pack your boxes because you're moving, and then where you're moving is not going to be in Virginia.'"

Not knowing where she was headed, Smith says it felt like a modern-day version of Abraham's call in the Old Testament.

"Many were asking, 'What are you doing? This doesn't make any sense. How can you walk away from this ministry? What about the people? ... You've been in Virginia all your life. You've established yourself here—where are you going?.'"

Those who were questioning her wondered if she heard from the Lord.

But like Abraham, Smith had a powerful faith in God and His plan.

"I would say, 'I know what God told me, and I have to obey His instruction, even if it doesn't make sense to me, even if it makes me look stupid.'" she says.

"In my book [I discuss] that journey of ... the feelings I had, the fear, the sadness, the expectation of what was to come,

knowing it was God's voice," Smith says. "I talk about being able to discern His voice clearly, how to transition correctly, how to transition the right way. So I deal with so much in the book, and just to see in a year later, to see what the Lord has done, because of the obedience, it has blown me away."

Smith obeyed God and turned over the New Life Church to another woman in the congregation who was in the ministry.

"She's pastoring the church, and she's doing well," Smith says.

Like Abraham, Smith did not know specifically what lay ahead. However, she says, "I knew that for God to require me to leave something, that evidently He had something else He wanted to give me."

And God did not disappoint.

"A year later, I am in Sicklerville, New Jersey," she says. "A year later, I am married to an amazing man who loves God, who loves me. A year later, I'm still in ministry, because it just so happens that my husband is a pastor. I never knew him a day in my life ... never had a conversation with him until March [of this year]. We met on social media; we got married in August. I'm here in New Jersey, all because of what the Lord told me to do."

Indeed, Smith and her husband have a love story just as unusual as her faith journey to New Jersey. A widower, he first reached out to her on social media—"Maybe one message a month ... nothing disrespectful," she says in an interview with the Munaluchi Bride website. "I never knew who it was who was sending me the messages," she says. "I did not find out until the last message, when he said, 'I know you from ministry in Church of God in Christ, and you're absolutely gorgeous.'"

That began a series of phone calls that led to the couple's

first in-person date and then, by Father's Day weekend, a proposal.

"We know that this was God, and God put us together," Pastor Cheyenne says. "Because not only do I now have a great woman, an amazing woman of God, but now my children, who were used to having a mother in the home, who were used to being loved on and cared after—now they have that again, and it wasn't a fight for it. They just loved her instantly. ... This was all God's timing."

Smith was happy to add to her family.

"God sent me to help them to heal and to fill that void," she says. "But God also sent him into my life to help me heal from what I experienced."

"It has been a joy," she adds. "We're a blended family. I have three, my husband has five, and we brought it together. We call ourselves the Smitty clan. ... We need a bus to transport our family everywhere."

Today, the couple co-pastor New Generation Church in Sicklerville, described on the church Facebook page as committed to affecting its community "by building a generation of families through faith and by faith with the guidance of the Holy Spirit."

Leadership Lessons

Before and since these transitions, Smith retains her passion for sharing with others everything that intimate fellowship with God can bring.

"I believe that men and women should be encouraged to be all that God has called them to be here on the earth," she says.

"I have master classes that I've been doing for the past eight weeks, where I teach women and men about the power of obedience, my talk to them about the transition," she says.

“Actually, the class is based on my book [When Obeying God Makes You Look Stupid], and that’s for men and women. Then I have a separate class for women only, teaching them how to be leaders and have balance—being effective at being a mother, a wife, maybe a business owner, maybe as a single woman. How do you live a single life to please God in a world that is so tempting? And so I feel the need to just pour into people, so they can be able to really maximize their God-given potential here on the earth.”

And Smith shares her wisdom with other leaders as well.

“Some leaders just need another leader to be an encouragement, to give insight, to give wisdom,” she says. “So I share the lessons that I’ve learned from being in ministry for over 20 years. And the lessons that I’ve learned, even the failures that I’ve experienced, I share them with leaders.”

She doesn’t take being a leader lightly.

“Being a leader comes with great responsibility,” Smith says. “Being a leader comes with great scrutiny. Being a leader comes with loneliness; it comes with being misunderstood. And so because I’m a leader, I know what it feels like to not have anyone you can glean from or anyone to sharpen you. And so I purposed in my heart to be that person for leaders, even for those who desire to plant churches, for those who desire to really launch out and do ministry beyond the church walls.

“I share with leaders how to do that, how to start, how to find your location ... how to determine your group,” Smith says. “Who are you assigned to? What is the heart of your ministry? What is the goal? Who are you really aiming to be a witness to? [I teach] how to brand the ministry, how to evangelize effectively. So I deal with so much as it relates to being a leader so that we can be more effective.”

Smith says her obedience to God in turning over leadership of her church yielded another completely unexpected avenue of

ministry through Bishop T.D. Jakes and his television show The Gospel.

“Right after I released the church in June, I received a call from Bishop Jakes’ ministry team, saying that he’s looking for some of the best preachers who many have never heard,” Smith says. “And my name came up before him, and he wanted me to be on his show. And so we traveled to Dallas, and we spent some time with him, and we did TV tapings. The show lasted two months.”

Along with being part of the show, Smith enjoyed learning from Bishop Jakes.

“We were able to sit and glean from him and the professors there from his divinity school,” she says. “He allowed us to really minister and just demonstrate the gift that God has given to us. And so we preached at [Jakes’ church] The Potter’s House and were able to share the gospel all over the world by way of his network.”

Being in Dallas with Jakes and his ministry was another door God opened unexpectedly for Smith.

“That was something I did not look for, something I never even imagined. ... But again, the Lord had it up His sleeve,” Smith says. “He was just waiting for me to release what He asked me to release so He could release some things to me, and it was a life-changing experience.”

As Smith sees all God has done in her life, her heart is full.

“I love God, and I love people,” she says. “I believe I’ve been sent here on the earth just to be a blessing to people. I don’t believe you can do ministry aside from loving people. That’s what Christ did for us. He loved us in spite of us. And I believe that that is the greatest reflection of Jesus’ character—that is, just loving people.

“And so if I never speak on a huge stage again, or do all the things God has allowed me to do, I will always make sure that I pour love into people,” she says. “So many just need a word of encouragement. So many just need to know they’re not by themselves. So many need to know God has not changed His mind concerning them. So many need to know they can do this. They survive because God is not done with them.

“And so I’m committed to being that voice, to being that igniter, that reminder that there’s much more God has for them, and that He’s allowed them to be alive to fulfill His promises and His mandates here on the earth,” Smith says. “So I’m pretty easy. Those who hear me will say, ‘Oh, she’s very bold. She’s so strong.’ But when you meet me, I’m just like a little kid. I am a little girl at heart, and what gives me the greatest joy is being able to love on my children, love on my husband and just see people’s lives change. That’s the most fulfilling thing for me.”

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