

Like Father, Like Daughter

When Priscilla Shirer steps into a pulpit, you don't have to wonder if she's related to Texas pastor Tony Evans. She carries his mantle with grace.

When 35-year-old Priscilla Shirer stepped onto the platform at LifeWay's Deeper Still conference in Orlando, Fla., last September, she was dressed stylishly yet casually, as a woman her age might be if she were going out shopping or to visit a friend. But there was nothing low-key about her message—or her presentation of it.

For nearly two hours she held the attention of thousands of women as she expounded on a solitary passage of Scripture—Ephesians 3:20-21—with captivating power. It was clear that this dynamic teacher truly believes her God is “able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think,” and through demonstrations, object lessons and multiple real-life examples, she made certain her audience came to believe it, too.

“[Priscilla] is quite possibly the most gifted communicator I have ever witnessed,” says consummate Bible teacher Beth Moore, who has ministered alongside Shirer and Kay Arthur at Deeper Still events for the last three years and has been on a ministry circuit for more than 15.

Shirer's gift of communication comes as no surprise to those who are acquainted with her father, Tony Evans, founder and pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, who is known for his powerful preaching. Clearly, Shirer has the same penchant he does for public speaking and a similar passion for studying and sharing God's Word.

Evans has been both a model for and a mentor to Shirer from the time she was a child, and she continues to rely on him for counsel. “To have access to the mind he has and the revelation

God has given him from the Word of God is a blessing," she says.

He is also one of her greatest supporters and delights in seeing his daughter use her gifts. "Her ability to communicate is extraordinary," he says. "She not only can teach, but she can host events because she has such an engaging personality and communication skills."

Not surprisingly, Shirer receives more speaking requests than she can accept. Besides sponsoring her own events, she ministers regularly at the Deeper Still, Colour, and Pink Impact conferences held in the United States and abroad. She also ministers powerfully in print, having written numerous books and Bible studies, including several about communicating with God: *He Speaks to Me*, *Discerning the Voice of God* and *Can We Talk? Soul-Stirring Conversations With God*. Her upcoming book, *One in a Million*, releases next month.

Shirer considers it an honor to teach nationwide alongside Moore and veteran Bible teacher Kay Arthur—whom she sees as mentors—in the Deeper Still conferences, which draw tens of thousands of women per event. The three leaders are each about 20 years apart in age. "What an incredible blessing to be able to pattern my life after women who have done their marriage well, parenting well and ministry well," she says of Moore and Arthur.

As a younger woman in ministry, Shirer connects particularly well with single women and busy mothers. Her messages are Word-based yet filled with humorous real-life illustrations that often include her husband of 10 years, Jerry; and sons Jackson, 7; Jerry Jr., 5; and Jude, 1.

Because of her African-American heritage, she has strong ties with the black community and sees herself as a bridge between black and white audiences.

"There is a need in the African-American community for there

to be someone who is teaching the Word of God who looks like them,” she says. “While they love Beth Moore, Anne Graham Lotz and other women who run in those circles—and use their resources—they have told us that they find it refreshing to be able to present Bible study curriculum to their women’s ministry that [has] been created by someone who looks like them.”

Going Beyond

Shirer believes she is becoming a bridge between conservative and charismatic audiences as well. About eight years ago, God began to bring people into her life who “were led by the Spirit of God, heard the voice of God, expected the power of God, believed in miracles from God—those kinds of people who had a radical faith and were willing to take risks,” she says.

“It was so foreign to expect the Holy Spirit to be that bold ... to anticipate miracles in my everyday living, not just with the big things but with the little things,” she says. “These people opened my eyes to see what was available to me because the Spirit of God lives within me.”

During this season, Shirer went to speak at an event and was dismayed when she discovered that only about 50 women were present. But the event turned out to be life-changing—one of the most powerful spiritual encounters of her life.

“It was one of the first times I can recall actually feeling the presence of God in a tangible way,” she says. “It reminded me ... of what Isaiah may have been talking about in Isaiah 6 when he said, ‘The train of God’s glory filled the temple.’”

Shirer says God reminded her that day that He would rather be with 50 women who are serious about honoring His presence and going with the flow of what He wants to do than with 4,000 women who are worried about the program.

Shirer's inner revival led to the official launch of her Dallas-based ministry, Going Beyond Ministries. The name comes from Deuteronomy 1:6-8, a passage that records Moses' telling the Israelites, who had been camped just outside the Promised Land, that God wanted them to move on and possess the land He had promised to their forefathers.

Moses told them that they had been at Mount Sinai long enough and needed to "go beyond," Shirer says. In her case, God was speaking to her about going to "the place of abundant living—an *experiential* relationship with God."

"He said: 'Priscilla, you've been at this mountain long enough. There is a new place that I want to take you to,'" Shirer says. In light of God's challenge, Shirer naturally desired to "go beyond" personally. Her prayer, however, is that she will also inspire other women to anticipate more in their Christian journeys—to not only "know the uncompromising truths of Scripture intellectually" but also "experience them practically by the power of the Holy Spirit," she writes on her Web site ().

"I believe God can do whatever He wants to do through whomever He wants to do it," she says. "A lot of the demonstrative gifts of the Spirit aren't used all the time in my church—almost never—so I could easily box God in and say because that is not my experience, God must not operate in that way.

"We need to accept that the body of Christ is full of other believers who have experienced God in equally relevant, equally reliable ways. Sometimes I'm amazed at how much we miss out on in terms of our relationship with God because we amputate another part of the body of Christ simply because that part is different than ours."

Although Shirer embraces new experiences, she believes balance is critical. "We have a tendency as humans to lean toward

extremes,” she says. “We’re either heavy on the truth of the Word and we lack the experience of the Spirit, or we’re heavy on the power of the Spirit and lack the foundation of the Word of God.

“There has to be a marriage between the two—God’s Spirit and His Word coming together to teach God’s people what life can be like when they are founded in God’s Word and yet fully anticipate the experience of that Word in their lives by the power of God.”

A Speaker Is Born

Shirer credits an aunt, Elizabeth Cannings, who has served as Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship’s director of children’s ministry since Shirer was a child, for recognizing her gifts and potential as a teacher. When Shirer was in the sixth grade, Cannings occasionally asked her to teach. “I enjoyed figuring out a fun way to share the Bible in a way the children would remember,” Shirer says.

Though she accepted Christ as her Savior in first grade, Shirer admits that she became very rebellious as a teen. “Whenever my parents said, ‘Don’t do that,’ I took it as a green light for me to go that direction. I was probably the one out of all my siblings who gave my parents the most worry and concern.”

During high school, Shirer prepared for a future in radio and television. She went to the University of Houston to study. She admits that she made numerous bad decisions during these years.

“No longer was I surrounded by the cozy comfort of my church home and Christian friends,” she says. “[But] I remember for the first time really beginning to hear the voice of God and feeling that stirring conviction—and knowing it was God Himself.”

In Houston, she had an internship at a Christian radio station and began to receive invitations to speak at Bible studies and emcee events. She found herself enjoying these assignments so much that she wasn't sure what to do after she graduated from college.

Wisely, she sought her dad's advice. Evans asked her which vocation she would focus on if she weren't getting paid to do the job. Shirer immediately responded, "Teaching."

"She was loving teaching the Bible, and she was loving communicating—so I said, 'Why don't you go deeper so that you can go further?'" Evans says. He directed her to his alma mater, Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS), where he earned his doctorate.

Shirer's experience at DTS was rich and life-changing. She earned her master's degree in biblical studies there in 1999.

Sue Edwards, assistant professor of Christian Education at DTS, notes that God has "graced Priscilla with all the ability to bring the Bible alive in the minds and hearts of countless women of all ages, stages and races."

A New Legacy

While she was in seminary, Shirer received a call that would ultimately impact her future. The Zig Ziglar her to speak at one of their Monday morning devotionals. Shirer accepted. It went so well that later in the day, she received a call inviting her to join their small team of motivational speakers.

"Priscilla certainly has a unique talent," says Bryan Flanagan, director of corporate training for the Zig Ziglar Corp., recalling that the organization has asked only a few young speakers to come on board. "She can give a message that will move you, but with enough logic and reinforcement that it

makes sense—it's not just hype."

One of Shirer's speaking events for Ziglar took her to a quarterly luncheon that Hilton Hotels was hosting for its executive team. There she met Jerry Shirer, who at the time was a Hilton vice president responsible for international operations. To her surprise, Jerry had been a member at Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship for several years. They began dating and were married in July 1999.

As Shirer's ministry began to grow, Jerry partnered with her, focusing on the business side. He takes care of the details while she does the ministering.

But one detail Shirer had to grapple with after she married was her name. Though she had been known as Priscilla Evans for years, she felt as if God told her not to use her maiden name any longer. Letting go of it, she says in her book *And We Are Changed*, was a painful experience.

"My difficulty in releasing this to the Lord indicated there was a problem," she writes. But God had a purpose in asking her to make the change. She believes He gave her a mandate to create a new legacy: to help make the Shirer name one that represents integrity, character and honor—and not just on the ministry platform.

Though Shirer loves her role as teacher and author, she is focused on being a good wife and mother and stewarding her time well. "I'm sure this [emphasis] was heavily influenced by my mom," she says. Her mother, Lois Evans, put a lot of things on hold—including her college education—to raise four children.

Her father, too, made a point of being available to his children, despite his full schedule. "Although Dad was very busy with the church and speaking engagements and writing books, I have no recollection of my father not being around," Shirer says. "What I remember is Dad being at a speaking

event, and me having a cheerleading competition, and him flying home to be there—and then flying back to finish the event. He didn't want to miss those important things in my life."

Shirer is deliberate about being available for her three sons, just as her parents were for her as a child. When she travels, a close family member takes care of the boys.

But the Shirers try to be home on Saturday evenings so they can be involved in their home church, Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship, where her three siblings also still attend. "We can't just be all over the place doing ministry and pouring out, and not receiving and pouring into the storehouse that is feeding us," she says.

Shirer feels it is important for her sons to see their dad taking pride in getting dressed, being on time for service and serving in ministry at Oak Cliff.

In what little spare time she has, Shirer enjoys going on a morning jog, reading a good book and watching "nonsense TV" for 30 minutes or so. Not surprisingly, she loves to study God's Word.

And she looks forward to the day when she can take her sons on the road more frequently. One of her greatest joys is being able to see the body of Christ in all its diversity in various places, including at events such as the 2008 Hillsong Colour event in Sydney, where some 30,000 diverse women gathered—and she wants her sons to witness the same thing.

"I want my children to see that God is global—that there are people everywhere who are so different from us, who look different from us, who talk different from us and yet who are all worshiping the same God," she says. "To travel and instantly be connected with people who are on the other side of the world or different side of the country is an amazing opportunity."

For now she is concentrating on stirring in them and the women she ministers to a desire to be “one in a million”—someone who wants to go beyond hearing about God to experiencing Him personally.

Approximately 2 million Israelites were delivered from Egypt and followed Moses, she explains. They all had the same opportunity to walk into and reap the benefits of the Promised Land, but only two went.

“That’s one in a million,” she says.

“It’s kind of like the church today. There are millions of us on the church pew, hearing and knowing about God. But there’s only a handful walking on Promised Land soil.

“If there is going to be one in a million, I surely want to be the one. ”

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