



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on February 27, 2023

“Jesus Revolution” a Box-office Smash, Takes Third in Opening Weekend

Jesus Revolution, [a faith-based film](#) that follows Pastor Greg Laurie’s book of the same title, [was expected to gross between \\$6 million and \\$7 million](#) in its debut this past weekend, though previews by various secular viewing sites were not enthusiastic.

At the close of the day on Sunday, the film had grossed more than \$15 million, resoundingly contradicting those secular viewers. (Rotten Tomatoes reviewers came in at a paltry 54 out of 100, yet viewers gave it a 99. Cinema Score gave the film, based on viewers’ feedback, an “A+” (only two films in all of 2022 earned that rating), while those polled by PostTrak gave it a 97-percent positive score, with 89 percent saying they would definitely recommend it to their friends.

It’s the remarkable and often forgotten story of how the “Jesus movement” of the late ’60s and early ’70s transformed worship, first in Southern California and then across the country, and now around the world.

It’s the story of a recalcitrant pastor of a small church who was initially put off by the behavior of a hippie preacher that his daughter brought home one night. He was preaching to hippies and baptizing them in Pirates Cove off Newport Beach, California — baptizing hundreds of them at a time.

Chuck Smith, the pastor of tiny Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, saw his church grow from just 25 individuals to over 35,000 by 2006, and spawn related Calvary Chapel churches around the globe — currently numbering over 1,800.

The ministry was galvanized by Lonnie Frisbee, the hippie preacher, and led to the salvation of Greg Laurie, who now serves as senior pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside, California.

After viewing the movie, this reviewer, who was in his mid-20s when the Jesus movement was taking place, found himself astonished at the impact the hippie preacher, the recalcitrant pastor, and his student continue to have on the country and the world. Although Frisbee passed away in 1993 and Smith died in 2013, the ministry’s influence continues unabated.

In 1973, at age 19, Laurie, under the wing of Smith, was given the opportunity to teach a Bible study to 30 people. From this group, Laurie’s ministry grew to become one of the largest churches in the country. In 1990 he founded Harvest Crusades, and in 2013 served as national chairman of the National Day of Prayer Task Force. In 2017, then-President Donald Trump invited him to give a message at his



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inauguration. Laurie has written more than 70 books and hosts a radio program, “A New Beginning,” syndicated on more than 1,100 radio stations worldwide.

Smith’s ministry, despite his passing a decade ago, continues to grow. As mentioned above, his Calvary Chapel Association now numbers more than 1,800 congregations worldwide. He founded Maranatha Music!, which continues to publish music with which most congregations are now familiar, involving drum sets, guitars, and voices of worship leaders guiding and celebrating the worship services.

The theology is thoroughly mainstream, including belief in the inerrancy of the Bible and the Trinity. It emphasizes the gifting of the Holy Spirit; this makes some traditional denominations nervous, but Smith’s followers say they straddle a middle ground between fundamentalism and Pentecostalism.

Followers practice “believer’s baptism” by immersion, holding that it is “an outward sign of an inward change.” That is made clear in a remarkably memorable moment from the movie when Laurie is baptized. He is immersed and then the film shows him sinking into the water in a state of unconsciousness. He then awakes, sees the light above, and reaches for it. He bursts through the surface, a new creation.

Joel Courtney, who plays the part of Greg Laurie in the movie, remarks on the efforts made to portray the baptism in the most realistic terms possible:

Pirates Cove is exactly where Greg and Cathe (Laurie’s wife) were baptized. This is the same beach they’ve been baptized. They’ve taken people to this beach to baptize them. There have been incredible stories seen at that wall of stone with a little tiny, very scary path that leads down to that beach.

It was [a] golden hour, so we had like 15 minutes to film it....

We were definitely chasing the tail-end of that light, but we got it, and it’s one of my favorite scenes in the movie.

And I hope people really connect with it.

The film is rated PG-13 for some unsettling drug scenes. But aside from that, the film is a momentous achievement celebrating a little-known and under-appreciated period in the religious history of the country that continues to resonate to this day.

Laurie himself is astonished at the impact the Jesus movement continues to have, now freshly revitalized in *Jesus Revolution*. As he noted in an interview with Fox News over the weekend, God’s timing for the film couldn’t be better:

As we look at the despondency among [today’s] young people, as revealed recently by a CDC report, where one out of every three teenage girls contemplate[s] suicide, to an outbreak of prayer and repentance on the campus of Asbury College [in Kentucky], you see, here’s the problem, here’s the solution.



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