



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on April 8, 2011

Soul Surfer: An Uplifting Christian Film

Based on the true story of professional surfer Bethany Hamilton, who undergoes massive physical and emotional trauma after suffering from a shark attack, *Soul Surfer* is an unapologetic Christian film that has the capacity to hold the attention of its moviegoers from beginning to end.

Through the occasional voiceover narrating the film, moviegoers learn that Bethany Hamilton seemed somehow destined to be in water, virtually from birth, likely because of her parents' passion for surfing. The youngest of three children, Bethany grew up in Hawaii and enjoyed a close friendship with fellow teen surfing champion Alana Blanchard.



The film begins with both Hamilton (AnnaSophia Robb) and Blanchard (Lorraine Nicholson) celebrating their first endorsements, winning a berth in a National Scholastic Surfing Association regional event. Though the achievements were certainly worthy of celebration, Bethany's church youth minister Sarah Hill (Carrie Underwood) articulated concerns that Bethany may have lost sight of her priorities, after having learned that Bethany backed out of a mission trip to Mexico in order to continue training.

Bethany Hamilton was on the road to a promising surfer career when, at age 13, she was attacked by a 14-foot tiger shark. Though Hamilton miraculously escaped with her life, she lost her left arm in the attack, jeopardizing her entire career.

The shark attack scene was a well-constructed one, with the director effectively creating the impression of impending disaster moments before the actual attack.

Hamilton was then faced with two choices: give up on her hopes and dreams, or accept the new hardship and adopt the proper coping skills to overcome her situation. When Bethany's minister Sarah takes Bethany on a mission trip to Thailand, where the devastation of the 2004 tsunami continues to be evident, Bethany's faith in God is renewed and her decision becomes a simple one.

What is so effective about the film is its representation not only of Hamilton's struggles, but those of her loved ones as well. Bethany's father (Dennis Quaid), so fearful that his daughter may lose her ambition and passion to pursue her surfing career after the attack, pushes her to her limits after a mere month of recuperation. Bethany's brother Noah (Ross Thomas) protectively shelters his sister from the media that hounds her incessantly, and Bethany's best friend suffers from nightmares and develops nearly maternal feelings towards her friend.

What is so impressive about *Soul Surfer* is its ability to reach a variety of audiences. The film can be characterized as an underdog sports story, only one that somehow manages to avoid the massive clichés that typically encompass films of that nature. So much more than the average sports story, however, *Soul Surfer* is truly about the kind of courage and fortitude that is not typically demanded



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from athletes, even among professional ones.

The film's special effects play a major role in its realistic quality, wonderfully depicting surf sequences that are both exciting and believable. Likewise, the cinematography artfully captures both Hawaii's natural beauty and its more rugged qualities as well.

Soul Surfer's greatest attribute by far is its focus on Christian and moral worldviews. Throughout the film, God is praised through song, words, and actions, and it is Bethany's deep faith in Jesus Christ that ultimately sustains her throughout her ordeal. The film does not attempt to mask this deep-rooted faith either. In fact, *Soul Surfer* opens with upbeat Gospel music being performed in a tent on the beach. Likewise, when Bethany is rushed to the hospital immediately following the shark attack, all of her loved ones are shown praying for her survival. And the moment in which Bethany decides to embark on her life-changing mission trip to Thailand, Bethany had been grappling with a Biblical passage that says God's followers gain strength through Him.

At times, the film is a true tear-jerker, an element that can only be achieved through poignant directing and fantastic performances. However, the film also manages to achieve some levity, particularly in the scenes with Bethany and her family that, at times, are so realistic they come off as home videos.

Amazingly, the cast and crew of *Soul Surfer* met with the real-life Bethany Hamilton numerous times throughout the making of the film, and have described her passion and faith as inspiring and contagious. Knowing that those performing in the film share the very same faith that the film delivers adds greater value to the overall production, at least to this reviewer.

Overall, *Soul Surfer* manages to entertain while delivering its powerful Christian message, propelling *Soul Surfer* to the ranks of other powerful Christian films like *Fireproof*.

Photo: Surfer Bethany Hamilton poses for a portrait while promoting the movie Soul Surfer in Los Angeles: AP Images



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