

## Transcript 146

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. Today's episode we will be discussing something that is going to be coming out in movie theaters soon, and this is known as The Thorn. For those who live in Colorado Springs, probably very familiar with it, because it was the production was put on at a church here for many, many years and that's how I first became familiar with the Thorn. But it's actually going to be released in movie theaters. So hopefully will broaden its audience. And I've the two times I've seen it, I was tremendously encouraged by it. As were the people who were with me. So joining me today is John Bolin, the creator producer of the Thorn. So John, welcome to the show.

John Bolin

Hey, Shea, so glad to be with you here today.

Shea Houdmann

So John, tell us a little bit about the background history. What led you to start doing The Thorn to begin with?

John Bolin

So Shea, the the back story behind the Thorn really goes back 25 years. I had moved to Colorado Springs with my wife and we will volunteer youth pastors at the church there in the Springs. And I remember there was, I wasn't a great preacher. I'm not a seminarian. I don't have a theology degree. My degrees in marketing, but I love the word of God. I love Jesus and I was working as a youth pastor and I really cared for young people. So there was one Wednesday night after youth meeting that I was sitting on the edge of the stage and a 16 year old girl came and sat next to me and she began to weep. And and and she held out her arms and I could see where she'd been cutting up and down her arms. And I looked at her and Shea, I told her, I said you don't have to do that because 2000 years ago Jesus did that for you.

John Bolin

And so then I thought right then and there, you know what I want to do a drama next Wednesday night that would communicate two things. Number one, it would communicate the depth of Jesus love for us. And so I wanted to show the the passion of Jesus from the the garden of Gethsemane through Calvary and then the resurrection. And I want, I didn't want to pull any punches. I wanted them to really feel this visceral sense of life. I know you're going through pain in your, in your personal life, and maybe in your in your physical body or in your relationships or in your own mind. And whatever you're going through, Jesus understands because he's been here and and he wants to give you victory there. So I really want young people to understand that and see that sacrifice of Jesus. And then #2 I wanted to communicate this sense of, like, the spiritual battle for the calling, the destiny, and the identity of young people. And so so The Thorn kind of has this focus on the passion of Jesus and then also on this sort of supernatural battle for the calling and destiny of young people.

John Bolin

And so the next Wednesday night we did the first storm performance. And it was not great. The the music wasn't great. The acting wasn't great, the makeup wasn't great, the lights weren't great. But it didn't matter because I believe when when God's in something it works. And and he loves it when we tell His story. And so that first Wednesday night Thorn performance was October of 1996. And several hundred young people, they responded, and we saw God move. Then the senior pastor of the church said, hey, John, would you do this for the church next Easter? So we we kind of revamped the show a little bit, we improved some things, we added a narrator to kind of glue the scenes together.

John Bolin

The Thorn is not a traditional passion play. It's not a musical. The characters, Peter doesn't sing from the garden. There's no Jewish line dancing in the production. It's more like an immersive theatrical experience, maybe more like a Cirque du Soleil type experience. But Jesus is the core of the whole thing. And so it's it's it was designed for young people, so it's engaging. It's immersive. It's it's emotional and and then we we we did it for the church and that was a that was a huge, I mean, the Holy Spirit showed up and and we saw thousands of people that attended there. And then for the next 10 years, it continued to grow. And that's probably when you saw The Thorn there at New Life is is during those years. It continued to grow and we would have as many as 30 or 40,000 people people that would come from all over the state. Sometimes all over the country, to see the production live and then after that we began to tour. That's kind of the back story of how it began.

Shea Houdmann

I remember the first time going to it, having heard a lot of people talking about it but thinking it was just a passion play. And then being this amazed that no, you you started creation and kind of tell the whole biblical story, providing the background for why Jesus had to die and so forth. And that for me was one of the most powerful parts of it, it's. Today's culture, a lot of people aren't familiar with the biblical story, and to drop them right off at the beginning of Jesus life, sure, you can still have be powerfully impacted by that alone. But to have the full back story to me was especially powerful.

John Bolin

Yeah, I I think that I think that's important because it gives context to Jesus. The need for Jesus and the why for Jesus. And so The Thorn it opens with creation, of the preceding, even before creation, we introduce our narrator. And the narrator has changed over the years. We've had different characters play the narrator, and that changes the whole complex complexion of the production. We've done it from the perspective of doubting Thomas. So it's kind of a skeptics view of the story of Jesus as he's remembering his time with Jesus. We've done it from the perspective of the disciple Peter, and so to me that's kind of the everyman, the guy who says one thing and does another. Makes a promise then breaks it. But Jesus loves him anyway kind of a thing. And then we've done it from the perspective of Mary Magdalene. That narration is all about identity and and freedom. And then the the perspective in the film and in this year's live show and the one we've done the most over the years is the perspective of John the beloved on the island of Patmos remembering his years with Jesus. So that's kind of the the character or the narration that drives the story. But yeah, then it begins at creation, it goes through and we kind of have those those beats of like creation and then the fall. And then this crying out for Jesus. And then this restoration of of what Jesus did. And and it kind of follows those be points. Of course it

focuses on the life of Jesus in Act 2. But act one begins at creation and we end at the end of the production in the book of Acts, with the calling of the church to go and make disciples.

Shea Houdmann

So I'm sure you're familiar with them, whether you've seen an episode or not with The Chosen. I mean we've been inundated with questions about it and we've done it a podcast episode on it. How do you personally, as the producer, creator of it, handle the issue of artistic license. When you want to to portray these scenes in a powerful way, but obviously you, not everything you're going to have that is in The Thorn is directly from Scripture. So how do you handle that balance?

John Bolin

You know, I think I would handle it similar to how Dallas talks about that with The Chosen. And that is we are we're we are sharing the gospel, now and maybe a little different than Chosen. We're not just telling the stories of the characters we we are presenting the gospel. And so we have to do that with the, with the understanding of of theology and the good sense of what that means and and how to handle that properly, that's important for us. But in terms of the, the, the artistic, it's expression like nobody knows how heaven looks and so I can pretty much guarantee the angels in heaven don't look like our angels in The Thorn. And and certainly if you're gonna embody Lucifer, he's not gonna look or she or whatever is not gonna look anything like we put on on the stage. And so we don't know those things, but, but we do our very best to have our interpretation of of what the what the Bible says and be true to the scripture. Be true to the scripture as much as we can. But then also take the right kind of creative license where we feel like it's appropriate. And so we do that with The Thorn. We go back and revisit every year. You know we always question it. Are are we on are we are we taking the right approach? Should we change anything? Is there anything we need to lean into? And and I think that's the right approach to take. So it's similar to what I think Dallas is doing with the chosen is kind of the same approach that we take with The Thorn.

Shea Houdmann

What can people expect for people who've seen the live production of it? Go and see it in theaters. How is that experience going to be different?

John Bolin

Well, a number of things. The the theater version, the movie theater version of the Thorn, was filmed over a one week period of time. We filmed for three days what they call coverage or pick up shots. So no audience there. We were able to get angles of The Thorn you will never see in the live performance. So there's this one scene when Jesus is praying in the garden of Gethsemane and we call the battle scene, and there's we imagine this spiritual battle raging around as he's praying. And when you're watching it live you see that on the stage you know from 30 or 50 or 100 feet depending on where you're sitting. But in the film version you see that scene in and around the action. So you're on the stage you're seeing it from a whole different perspective. The same thing is true in the crucifixion scene. In the live live experience you watched that from a distance, but in the film version you're on that stage, you're around the cross. It's a whole different perspective.

John Bolin

And the other thing we've done very differently is in the live experience, the narrator in this case, again John the beloved, he typically breaks the 4th wall and he talks to the audience. And and we watched, we filmed it that way. We watched it and we thought, oh, we're not sure this is going to work for the big screen. And so we thought, I wonder if there's another way to handle the narration portion portion of this. And and so we reshot all the narration footage in Los Angeles and we took John the beloved and we put a little 12 year old slave boy Asher opposite him as a mechanism for John to tell the story to. So now you've got kind of a story wrapped in a story with The Thorn in movie theater. So you have the footage from the live show and it's wrapped in this smaller story of John the beloved telling the story of Jesus to this 12 year old slave boy. And it's a beautiful way that we've done this I think because Asher is dealing with his own identity. And who he is and what maybe the people around him or the enemy has whispered in his ear about who he is as his identity. And so by the end of the movie he realizes who he is in Christ. And and it's all about freedom. And and it's a it's a beautiful communication of the gospel. And then John the beloved tells Asher the gospel message in a really clear crystal clear way in one particular scene. So that's how it's different is is that we have this story wrapped in the story that you won't get in the live experience. And then the the angles and the way that we shoot it is different than the live experience.

John Bolin

And of course, the live experience is something unique all in itself, for all the obvious reasons. It's so hard to capture a live experience on film. I think we've done a really unique and and job of of how we've shot it for the for the film version. I think people will love the film version. And then many of them want to go and see it maybe live as well.

Shea Houdmann

Next question might be hard for you to answer but it's kind of like choosing which of your children is your favorite, but what would you say having been a part of The Thorn for over 25 years now, having seen it many, many times, produced it, made changes to it here and there, what for you is your favorite scene?

John Bolin

Well, from the beginning, The Thorn was all about the passion of Jesus. So there's no question to me. My favorite portion of the Thorn is the it's the the sacrifice and resurrection. I mean, that's my favorite. Obviously, the resurrection is the happy moment. Sacrifice really makes you take pause and remember, and so much gratitude, and it's sort of really realigns my focus as a believer. So that probably would be the top would be the the that portion of of the show. But then of course the heaven scene for me is like the spectacular scene. It's the scene. It's the opening big scene of the production that always has the audience pretty much on their feet. And so it's the big wow factor. It's the moment when people say this is not your grandma's passion play. This is not normal. I don't. I don't expect this in a church. But the part that's most deeply meaningful to me would be the the Jesus sacrifice and and his resurrection.

Shea Houdmann

So for me both times I mean hands down, the scene where the nails are being hammered into Jesus to attach them to the cross. Like everything went completely quiet and just attention grabbing, focus inducing, like powerful. That's how I'd describe it, because so much of the of The Thorn is there's so

much going on, it's eye-catching, it's, it's amazing. It's beautiful. But then there's that one scene where it's, you don't really see or hear anything other than the sound of the hammer hitting the nail. Just a reminder of Jesus did that, went through that experience that willingly for me, and that's not even talking about the spiritual suffering he was doing at that at that time. So both times, I mean I think I saw it maybe five or six years apart and the second time I was even prepared, I thought I was prepared for it, but just emotionally powerful to experience that the way the Thorn portrays it.

John Bolin

Yeah, that's, that is a moment, Shea. I can tell you in the auditorium, one of the things with the thorn is is the audience goes on sort of this emotional journey and they open with laughter. And then you have this awe moment of heaven. But when it comes to the Act two of the thorn it's gut wrenching. And during that particular moment, when he's taken to the cross, you it's quiet except for you can hear the audience audibly weeping across the auditorium almost every time that's done. And I can tell you right now we're rehearsing. Just last night I saw the rehearsal for tomorrow night. We opened the live show run in Colorado and it's powerful. That moment is so powerful. And and every time it it grabs the audience attention. And it will in the movie as well. It we didn't we didn't change anything for the movie version. So I think people will be deeply moved by that for sure.

Shea Houdmann

So sorry if that was a spoiler for a big scene in the movie, but just.

Speaker

Oh, that's great. That's great.

Shea Houdmann

Truly, truly powerful. I've, like I said, I thoroughly enjoyed both times I saw the live action production of it. The movie version coming out on March 6th and 7th I believe in in theaters across the country.

John Bolin

That's right, yes, March 6th and 7th. The Thorn will be in about 900 movie theaters across the country. So in most major cities and some medium sized cities you'll find it there. You can go to [thethorn.com](http://thethorn.com). The Thorn [thorn.com](http://thorn.com) and you click on the movie button or get movie tickets button and then there's a place you can put in your zip code and find if there's a movie theater near you. And then the live experience is touring to 10 cities across the country. And there's information about which cities are there is as well on the website.

Shea Houdmann

Like I said, I really enjoyed seeing it in person and hope to be able to catch it in movie theaters at the timing of course with Easter coming up, I'm I'm sure that was intentional, but the time of year like even at Got Questions, the time from really Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday is our busiest time of year for questions for web traffic. And millions of people who don't think about Jesus the rest of the year, this time of year, for whatever reason, hopefully it's the moving of the Holy Spirit in the heart and minds are asking questions or wondering or thinking about it. So I'd strongly encourage people if the timing works out for you, go see The Thorn in theaters. And if there's a live production of it near you, see that as well.

We'll include links to where you can purchase tickets to either the movie theater version or the live production. It's to me it's powerful and it's it's unique. Like you said, it's this is not your grandma's passion play by any stretch. So we'll, like I said, we'll include links to both those options. So John, just briefly kind of in closing what who do you think most needs to see The Thorn? I mean, with all the changes the development is gone through over the years. Who would you say it's most for?

John Bolin

Well, that's a great question, Shea. The Thorn was designed for young people, so that's high school and college. Which is still sort of my avatar. When we're creating a new scene, we think of that character, we think of a college student when we're writing music or creating a scene. Or I think The Thorn is appropriate for anyone right about 12 years old, younger than 12, parents have to decide because the second part of The Thorn is pretty intense. And and then it's of course, for anyone that's teenage, college age, up to honestly, we have old people that come. I shouldn't say old people. I'm getting there myself, but we have older people that see The Thorn, think they've died and already been to heaven a little bit. And so it works for anybody, anywhere, age wise.

John Bolin

But I'll tell you the the primary, if there's a demographic or who we would love to come to The Thorn are people that are that that maybe have questions about Jesus. That wonder what this story means. That have heard about it, but don't really know what the gospel is. And so people that have friends or family that are sort of outside the circle of faith, I would encourage you to invite them to experience it because this will be a a version of the gospel that will be fun to watch, but it will also be deeply emotionally moving, and it will it will leave them with questions, right? It will leave them wanting to talk further and dialogue about what is this big God story and how do I fit in the God's story? And does it really matter to me if this happened 2000 years ago? Why does it matter to me right now today? And so I I think that's the main thing.

John Bolin

Now if you're a believer, you go to The Thorn, you're going to be encouraging your faith. You're going to be on fire for Jesus. You're going to remember why it is that so many months or years ago, you gave your life to Jesus. So for all believers, it's going to be great. I want as many people that are wondering about faith that are wondering about Jesus to go to this as possible. I think God's doing something Shea across our country. I think we see right now. And maybe it's just the like, this the coincidence of events, but I don't think so. I think the Holy Spirit is doing something with what's happening with The Chosen and with the revival of Asbury now spreading across the country and Jesus Revolution and and I think things, things like Got Questions. I I believe God is drawing people to him and saying, look, I'm here. Let's explore who Jesus really is. And if The Thorn can draft behind that a little bit and be another expression of Jesus love for people in a in a dramatic way, then we're happy to do that. So we want as many people that are asking questions about Jesus to watch The Thorn. And we want as many believers that want to be encouraged and remember why, to watch the production. So that's kind of my, my, my appeal I guess it would be. Is it get your friends and family that that need to hear a clear presentation of the gospel, but in a package that would be exciting and they want to lean into. But that doesn't compromise at all in the word of God or or the core gospel message.

Shea Houdmann

I was tremendously blessed and encouraged and impacted by the two times I saw The Thorn, so I'd strongly encourage you if this is something you're interested in. Some you've been wanting to share the gospel with and might be interested in going with you. It's excellent opportunity that Thorn is is definitely worth seeing. I have absolutely no doubts about that. So John? Thank you for joining me today. I truly appreciate the years that you poured into this and I know God has used it and I believe he will continue to do so. So thank you again for joining me today.

John Bolin

Thank you, Shea. I appreciate it. God bless to all your listeners today.

Shea Houdmann

So this has been the Got Questions podcast with John Bolin, the creator, producer of The Thorn will be in theaters soon. We'll include links in the description on YouTube, the show notes, and also at [podcast.gotquestions.org](http://podcast.gotquestions.org) where you can purchase tickets. So got questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.