

Transcript 147

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. Recently, a movie known as the Jesus Revolution came out and we've been starting to get some questions about it. I'm always excited when a movie like this comes out, whether I agree with what's in the movie, whether or even like what the movie is about. But when it's about spiritual things like this it causes a lot of people to then ask questions. And we at Got Questions one of our goal is to point people towards God's word, point towards truth. In this movie, which is primarily a sort of a testimony of Greg Laurie, how he came to faith in Christ through the very early Calvary Chapel movement, but a lot of people are kind of have some questions about what was going on? Who's Chuck Smith? Who is Lonnie Frisbee, et cetera, all the characters.

Shea Houdmann

Well, today joining me is Gino Geraci. So Gino came to faith in Christ in the very early Calvary Chapel movement, and he knows most or all of the individuals that are in the movie and that are mentioned in the movie. And so he's seen the movie. I have not had the opportunity to see it yet. And so we'll kind of be talking about some of what's in the movie. And Gino will be able to give us both his perspective and also help us to understand what's actually going on. So Gino, welcome to the show today.

Gino Geraci

Thanks.

Shea Houdmann

Briefly, what is your connection to the events that are portrayed in the movie?

Gino Geraci

Well in the early 1970s, I was a a high school student in Apple Valley, CA. I got invited to go to Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa at at one of their Christian concerts on a Saturday night. It was March 3rd, 1973, as a matter of fact, this Friday marks my 50th year as a person who became a Christ follower. A believer in Jesus repenting of my sin, hearing the gospel. And so 50 years have gone by. So I got I got invited by a high school buddy along with a couple of cheerleaders to go down to Calvary Chapel to see all of the excitement. To see what was going on. The tent, by the way, is featured in this movie and I was saved in that tent so. This is at the height of of the Jesus movement. And so I received Christ at that time. And of course over the years formed friendships and relationships. I became a Calvary Chapel pastor. I went on to plant churches in in, in Hesperia, CA, and and Albuquerque, NM and Santa Fe and of course here in South Denver over the course of can you believe it 50 years? So yeah, I I've been deeply involved with Calvary Chapel and the principles of Calvary Chapel, including friendship, relationship with Chuck Smith, his family, and the principals who were involved in the early leadership of Calvary Chapel.

Shea Houdmann

So you saw the movie, what were your essential thoughts? I mean, did you find it to be accurate and what it portrays? And what would you like to be the main message that people take away from seeing the movie?

Gino Geraci

Well, I think that one of the things that I would say is that the the movie isn't a documentary about the early Jesus Movement. It isn't a documentary about what happened. It's really a movie. It's a story about Greg Laurie's testimony and how God used both Lonnie Frisbee and Chuck Smith in his life. So there's several different things about this movie that I find really compelling. The first is Greg lays out kind of the social and cultural circumstance that had unfolded during the 1960s. The the sort of lost generation of young people looking for answers. Wondering if they're they're gonna find it in materialism. And and that's not the answer. Wondering if they're going to find it in peace instead of war. Wondering if they're going to find it in in love and acceptance, in drugs. In other words, what are the boundaries of how we discover what's real? What's true? What's meaningful?

Gino Geraci

And so this movie, I think, rightly characterizes a generation who are all of a sudden introduced, what I'm going to use the term in a supernatural way, that that now the gospel is being preached and considered. And ongoing young people began to hear the gospel and to respond to the gospel. So the the take away that I think most people are going to get from the movie and I I want to just caution people that there's maybe some spoiler alerts up ahead. And I don't want to spoil it for people like you who haven't seen the movie, but I I want to remind them that it is a movie. It's not a documentary. It's tracing a vision and a perception of 1 particular person, Greg, Laurie. And of course, Greg Laurie is going to go on to become the pastor of Calvary Chapel in Riverside, which will change its name to Harvest Christian Fellowship. In the later 70s and 80s, it will become one of the 10 largest churches in America. And of course, Greg Laurie is a well known evangelist, having spoken to literally millions of people. And so what Greg is, is, is trying to do is is remind people that the events that took place then, people search for meaning the emptiness and the desperation. That the gospel and the and having a right relationship with Jesus is going to provide, it's going to fill the emptiness.

Gino Geraci

And again, without going too far and giving a a sort of a spoiler alert, there is a scene in the movie that I find really compelling. And it's where Greg has, heard the Gospel, responded to the gospel, but he's experiencing a moment of what I'm gonna call doubt and and and and sort of an existential dilemma. He's wondering, as a young person is Christianity, is Jesus, is the gospel, is becoming a Christ follower is it like a drug? And is it gonna wear off? And am I gonna grow disillusioned with this thing called Christianity? And again, what's powerful in part is now we we go fast forward 50 years, Greg is still a pastor. The Calvary Chapel movement has over 1400 churches in the United States of America alone. And so it isn't just simply about the Jesus movement, which is far greater and far more culturally and socially encompassing. But it's a powerful story of redemption and whether or not disillusioned people can respond to the gospel. Is it real? Is it meaningful? And is it long lasting?

Shea Houdmann

I'm I'm looking forward to learning more about Greg Laurie. You know in person.

Gino Geraci

And I'm happy to tell you about his life or, you know, his his origins or his, you know, I'm happy to share some of that with you.

Shea Houdmann

Never had the privilege of meeting him, but I have read a few of his books. Just watching from the seeing the previews and hearing what other people talked about it, what I found really interesting is that right now in our current culture, there's the Asbury Revival, which is another revival among young people. And how exactly that's going to play out it's still to be determined. But looking back and now that the movie comes out about a revival that took place in the 60s and 70s. So you having experienced that first hand, what what was the unique about that particular revival? And what were some of the things that you saw and that you experienced that would be informative for us to know?

Gino Geraci

Well, I think that looking back, there's several things that I would think about. The the first thing is the skepticism. Can hippies get saved? What about these lost drug, you know, there's a scene in the movie where, you know Chuck wants to meet a hippie, and the hippies, of course, are countercultural individuals who are questioning everything and everyone. They know that the materialism of their moms and dads aren't satisfying. And and again part of the whole cultural thing is important because remember, I grew up in a world where my parents and their their parents were a part of World War Two generation. And we're the baby boomers. And there's this, this turning away from materialism. A flirtation, if you will, with with boundaries.

Gino Geraci

Here's what I'm going to say. The things that I think that we could we we could take from this, even using the Asbury Revival. Here you have another group of young people and people, people are wondering these are the least spiritual people in a generation. Barna has come out and said less than 5% of people in America, even self-described Christians, have a biblical worldview. And I was watching an interview that was done with a young person at the Asbury Revival and she said something compelling that was really reminiscent of the Jesus movement. She said my generation in our hearts, it's full of depression and doubt and despair. And we want something in our heart other than doubt, desperation and despair. And so there's that, that that question. The question is, is the bill of goods that are being sold in the social and popular culture, is that really what's meaningful? Is that the true meaning of life? And so again looking back, there's this growing group of people who because my generation was willing to, to question everything they were willing to also question what was being said about religion or religiosity. So in a very real sense, the Jesus movement was a return, if you will, to historical biblical Christianity. A return to this idea that a supernatural Jesus having preached the gospel and risen from the dead gave us a kind of an example of how could we live with meaning in our life. And so I think that that's the the parallel that's taking place. And the and the question that young people are asking right at this very moment, how can I live with meaning in my life? Is Christianity a joke? Is it real? Is it true and can I live my life if it's true? And so those are some of the things that I think are the important connections between then and now.

Shea Houdmann

One of the things I've always intrigued me and what I've admired about the Calvary Chapel movement just looking back through history, so early 20th century, the Pentecostal charismatic movement takes off. And then you have like a divide between, you have churches that teach the Bible and then you have churches that are into the miraculous spiritual gifts. And with the Calvary Chapel movement you had sort of the 1st, you could correct me on the history here, but the first time where you had a movement where focused on solid verse by verse teaching of the Bible, but also an openness to the miraculous, and openness to worshipping God fervently. And that's some of what it was, so unique at the time is what it is so many people both of the hippie type and also of the even the Bible church type, who are attracted to this because it was so different. So refreshing.

Gino Geraci

Right, I think.

Shea Houdmann

Is is that an accurate?

Gino Geraci

Well, that is that is like here. But what I what I would, from a historical standpoint, what I would point out, is that there, there was in the early 60s, throughout the 60s, there is what's what was called a spiritual revival in the sense of the supernatural. You had the Catholic charismatic movement. You had the Pentecostal movement. And Chuck Smith himself grew up in a Pentecostal movement with the with the Foursquare. He went to life Bible. And Foursquare church in Los Angeles was very famous for Amy Simple McPherson and Pentecostalism, and all of that stuff. And so part of the of the story, if you will, is that Chuck has been inundated with Pentecostalism and what some people would call hyper charismatic practices, if you will. And and in a very real sense, Chuck is a corrective to that. Chuck rebels against his own Pentecostal movement and says, hey, you know what, I I believe that there is such a thing as a Holy Spirit and the movement of the Holy Spirit. I believe that Christianity is a supernatural religion on its face because we believe that there's an invisible world that Jesus is God, that he came to the earth that miracles are real. That there is such a thing as truth with a capital T, and that nihilism is false and philosophical materialism is false. So where do we find the balance? And Chuck used to say, well, if you're getting hit on the left side and you're getting hit on the right side, chances are you are right in the middle. And so there is that sense where coming out of the the, the Pentecostal movement or the Pentecostal revivals of the of the of the 20th century and then fast forward to the 1960s. And then you have this youth revival, and then you have this juxtaposition of a Lonnie Frisbee who's a Hippie, and by the way.

Gino Geraci

For those people who don't really understand about Lonnie, Lonnie was a person who was right at the very beginning of the baby boomer. He was a for real hippie in hate ashberry. He was a person who there were no boundaries. When you talk about sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. He was a person who lived in a commune in San Francisco. He was a person who would go into the desert and take massive amounts of LSD and then commune with what he thought were UFO's. Lonnie would talk incessantly about UFO's. And so you've got this kind of hyper person who's open to every kind of supernatural manifestation. So here you have Calvary Chapel and you have this this commitment to a certain way. You know, in first

Corinthians, Paul says let all things be done decently and in order. Lonnie would say we're going to do everything. And Chuck would say no, we're going to do this with decency and order. And that was that point of conflict. That and it remains a point of conflict. How do we think about what happened? And of course, it's been my experience throughout all of these years that God entrusted this movement, in part not to a charismatic figure but to a Bible teaching pastor, a Bible teaching pastor. And so if we ask and we answer the question which played the more powerful role? Now we're back to the movie for Greg, Lonnie's gonna play an important role because God uses Lonnie to preach the gospel for, for, for, for Greg to consider the truth about the claims of Jesus. But when he gets saved, he winds up with Chuck Smith in the Calvary Chapel movement and becomes arguably one of the most influential Bible teachers and evangelists in America in the 20th and the 21st century.

Shea Houdmann

Absolutely so. You don't want to spoil too much of the movie for those who haven't seen it yet, like myself, but interesting question and a couple of people have talked to me about.

Gino Geraci

Right.

Shea Houdmann

I've seen some questions come in about it after the movie ends. What some of the the rest of the story about how things played out? I mean you have the the Calvary Chapel movement. Have the vineyard movement. You have the harvest movement. All that comes from this. Maybe give us a a I know this is 50 years of history we're talking about, give us a brief breakdown of what happens after the movie?

Gino Geraci

Yeah, in in the brief things that happen afterwards and the movie talks about Lonnie will leave and he'll wind up going to Florida. And Greg will wind up going to Riverside. And God will use the planting of the Calvary Chapel in Riverside. But then there's just very quickly there's other things that are going on. Ken Gullickson goes out and starts a church. John Miller in San Bernardino, Don McClure in Riverside, Tom Stipe will go out to Colorado. In other words, that we young, you know, Skip Heightset will go to Albuquerque, where where I will go as well. So a lot of so, there's a sort of a Jesus people diaspora that leaves Orange County, we begin to plant churches. John Higgins, who is involved in the house ministry, will plant the Shiloh Ministries in Oregon. And by the way there there will be over 150 communes across America. On that. So the communal situation was another thing where about 100,000 young people over a period of maybe four years are going to wind up in hippie communes and Jesus communes, if you will.

Gino Geraci

And and of course, we would be remiss if we, if we refuse to talk about the the incredible cultural shift that takes place because of the music. In other words, contemporary Christian music is birthed for all intents and purposes in Southern California and the Calvary Chapel music industry is born. And so if anyone listens to contemporary Christian music, we owe a great debt of gratitude to the Jesus people. So you, you, Lonnie, goes off, gets involved in some more weirdness. And then in early 1980, there's a guy named John Wimber who becomes, he he will associate with with the the vineyard. Now the

vineyard began, had its origins in Calvary Chapel. The first vineyard pastor Ken Gullickson, was a Calvary Chapel pastor. So there was a group, a growing group of of Calvary Chapel pastors who were more and more interested, signs, wonders, miracles. And so back to the First Corinthians passage, let all things be done decently and in order. And so there was this sense of we want to be open to the movement of the spirit and the manifestation of spiritual gifts, Chuck Smith being a recovering Pentecostal, if I could use that term, understands the dangers of emotionalism and subjectivism and and spirit manifestations that have no accountability that's linked to the Bible. And so in early 1981 and 82 Calvary Chapel and the vineyard split. The vineyard will form a substantial denominational presence in the 90s, 2000. They also will be leaders in contemporary Christian music. So we see now all of a sudden over a 50 year period, the the amazing if, if you will different roads and branches that that that stem out from this original movement between 1969-1970 and and 1973.

Shea Houdmann

It's very, very it's fascinating to hear the the history and to know this movement came from this and how something that started so small can impact millions of people around the world. Let's close with a kind of a two-part question. One for those who've seen the movie what's something you you would like, you want them to know? And for those who haven't seen the movie, what's something they can be thinking about before they go in to to see the movie?

Gino Geraci

The movie well again for everyone I would say remember, it's a movie. This is not a documentary. It is a movie. And because it's a movie, there are things where artistic license is taken. And I know I watched the the podcast Shea that you did about The Chosen and some of the challenges that people have when when they're putting a story onto film and and you're trying to fill in the blanks. So #1, it's Gregg's story of how God used individuals in his life to change him forever. And so I'm hoping for the people who have seen the movie and who are anticipating seeing the movie, that I I think what both of them are going to find out that if that's the part of it. It is a compelling story of transformation that takes place when a person enters into a right relationship with Jesus. Now some people will criticize. They'll criticize and they'll say, well, you know, the gospel isn't preached. I think that that that's an an open question. Uh, clearly Greg Laurie preaches the gospel, repentance from sin, trusting Christ as savior. People will criticize well, they left out a lot. Well, yeah. It's a movie. You, you have central characters that you have to focus on in order to have a coherent story. So I guess that would be the other thing is the expectation thing, the expectation is what do you expect to see, what do you expect to see? And if if what you're expecting to see is a compelling story of transformation of a disillusioned person who believed and trusted the gospel, and whether or not that has long lasting effects, I don't think you'll be disappointed.

Shea Houdmann

I look forward to seeing it. MeLissa and I are trying to find some time in her schedule to to go out and see it. And from what I've heard from others and from you, I definitely worth seeing. Just go into it like you said with the understanding this is a movie where artistic license is taken. This not meant to be entirely historical documentary. And it's also the story from Greg Laurie's perspective. This is how he experienced these events and how they impacted him personally. Not everyone involved in the early parts movement would have had the exact same experience as as Greg, so. So, Gino, thank you for joining me today. Thank you for your insight and for those who don't know, so Gino serves on the Got

Questions Board of directors. Has been a friend of mine for I don't know, probably 15 years now I think and he's.

Gino Geraci

Can you believe that?

Shea Houdmann

Has a Bible question and answer radio show, been on the air in Denver for a long time so. And and today for some reason Gino and I decided to wear the same shirt, so.

Gino Geraci

Yes, I love my I love my Got Questions shirt.

Shea Houdmann

Gino, thank you for joining me. This has been the Got Questions podcast is discussing the Jesus Revolution. Got questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.