

Reflections on the *Jesus Revolution*

(Lionsgate Films, 2023)

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(February 24, 2023)

Last night I saw the *Jesus Revolution* movie with some friends. Unlike so many “Christian” movies that are notoriously simplistic, this one actually has some depth, and I was not disappointed.

(If possible, see the movie with friends – especially if you know anyone who was involved in the Jesus Movement to some extent – so you can discuss it afterward. Watching a movie later on Netflix by oneself or with a spouse typically doesn’t have the same effect.)

In 1972 my wife and I attended Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, CA at the height of the Jesus Movement. Straight out of college, it had a profound impact on our lives. Later, for several years prior to returning to grad school at the end of the ’70s, I traveled throughout the Southeast representing the companies that produced most of the “Jesus music” of the era including recording artists such as Love Song (featured in the movie), Larry Norman, Barry McGuire, Phil Keaggy, the 2nd Chapter of Acts, Keith Green, Chuck Girard, and many others. I’ve also written and taught on the Jesus Movement in the past in various Areopagus seminars (see below).

The Jesus Movement of the early 1970s sparked some remarkably creative and innovative ministries. It was almost certainly the greatest evangelistic explosion in all of American history based on the sheer numbers of those who experienced life-changing spiritual conversions during this time.

Jesus Revolution is a powerful and emotive film depicting the joy and celebration, but also some of the intense struggles and pain associated with the first phase of the Jesus Movement as thousands of young people – including mostly hippies, drug addicts and other countercultural rebels – were brought to faith in Jesus Christ when one faithful and courageous visionary pastor, Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California opened up his small, conventional church to those who were being drawn to Christ through the remarkable ministry of a very gifted, eccentric and mercurial hippie street evangelist named Lonnie Frisbee.

What these young people experienced, in their words, was the ultimate “spiritual high” in life. But soon, reality set in as we cannot live our lives on feelings alone. The exhilaration and sense of community that these young followers of Christ initially experienced was soon challenged by the realities of living in the material world with all the pressures of life. Over the subsequent months and years many learned the hard way how to live authentically for Christ in a society and culture that values above all else status, success, power, wealth and entertainment. In his letters to the church in Thessaloniki, the apostle Paul offered sage advice applicable to followers of Christ in every era of history when he wrote:

“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands,... so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so you will not

