

Shining the Light of Jesus in Hollywood

For most of her life, Candace Cameron Bure has been a household name, first as a spunky child actress on a hit sitcom and later as a talk show host, speaker, author and even “The Queen of Christmas” television films. But when she’s asked about what guides her and keeps her life grounded, she frequently points to a name much greater than her own.

“I can’t imagine not having faith,” Bure said during an appearance on ABC News. “The Bible is the source of truth for me that I go to.”

At age 10, the bright and bubbly young actress rose to national attention as Donna Jo “D.J.” Tanner, the oldest daughter on all eight seasons of the long-running TV series *Full House*. In recent years, after taking time off to raise her three children, Bure reemerged as a co-host of the ABC television talk show *The View*.

During her time on the talk show, Bure was often the dissenting voice, offering her opinion as an unashamed conservative Christian. During one hot-topic segment focused on the Oregon baker who refused to make a wedding cake for a gay couple, Bure and co-host Raven Symone had a widely reported disagreement. When she left *The View* in 2016, Bure cited her mental health, especially considering that Donald Trump had just won the presidency and she didn’t want to take the heat from the other panelists for the next four years.

“In front of the camera it can look like a hostile environment because it’s five opinionated women giving their opinions on very hot topics that are mostly political, sometimes religious topics and social topics,” she reflected in a podcast in January 2023.

‘Faith-Filled Programming’

Bure next gained attention with a series of successful films for The Hallmark Channel, including *Christmas Town*, *A Shoe Addict’s Christmas* and *Christmas Sister Swap* as well as *The Aurora Teagarden Mysteries* series. Her film *The Christmas Contest* debuted in November 2021 and a few months later, after more than two dozen films, Bure surprised viewers by announcing her move to a competing network, Great American Family.

Former Hallmark CEO Bill Abbot, who resigned after pressure mounted from removing an ad featuring a lesbian couple, acquired GAC Country in 2021 and launched GAC Family, rebranded as Great American Family, soon after. In April 2022, Bure announced that she would reunite with Abbot at her new network home, which also gave her an executive role of curating and developing content.

“I’m very excited to develop heartwarming family and faith-filled programming and make the kind of stories my family and I love to watch,” Bure said in a statement. “I am constantly looking for ways that I can inspire people to live life with purpose. GAC fits my brand perfectly; we share a vision of creating compelling wholesome content for an audience who wants to watch programming for and with the whole family. Great, quality entertainment with a positive message is what my partnership with GAC is all about!”

But Bure soon found herself once again the unlikely subject of controversy as people began to make their own assumptions about her move. She responded, telling *The Wall Street Journal* in a lengthy interview that “I knew the people behind Great American Family were Christians that love the Lord and wanted to promote faith programming and good family entertainment.” She also cited GAC Country’s commitment to “keep traditional marriage at the core.”

Meanwhile, Hallmark was doubling down on LGBT content, releasing the first romantic Christmas film featuring a gay couple, *The Holiday Sitter*, in December 2022.

Bure's comments on marriage quickly garnered backlash from a variety of LGBTQ entertainers, leaders and supporters, including her *Full House* co-star Jodie Sweetin, JoJo Siwa and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation.

"Bure is out of sync with a growing majority of people of faith, including LGBTQ people of faith, who know that LGBTQ couples and families are deserving of love and visibility," said GLAAD president and CEO Sarah Kate Ellis.

'I Love You'

Despite the criticism, living out the command in Luke 6 to "love your enemies," Bure reached out with additional comments. In a follow-up statement on Instagram, she reiterated her strong faith and spoke to the controversy:

"I would like to address my comments on Great American Family's programming as reported in *The Wall Street Journal*. All of you who know me, know beyond question that I have great love and affection for all people. It absolutely breaks my heart that anyone would ever think I intentionally would want to offend and hurt anyone. It saddens me that the media is often seeking to divide us, even around a subject as comforting and merry as Christmas movies. But, given the toxic climate in our culture right now, I shouldn't be surprised. We need Christmas more than ever.

I am a devoted Christian. Which means that I believe that every human being bears the image of God. Because of that, I am called to love all people, and I do. If you know me, you know that I am a person who loves fiercely and indiscriminately. My heart yearns to build bridges and bring people one step closer to God, to love others well, and to simply be a reflection of God's huge love for all of us.

To the members of the media responsible for using this opportunity to fan flames of conflict and hate, I have a simple message: I love you anyway. To those who hate what I value and who are attacking me online: love you. To those who have tried to assassinate my character: I love you. To everyone reading this, of any race, creed, sexuality, or political party, including those who have tried to bully me with name-calling, I love you.

The Book of Acts on the Big Screen

After making history with *The Passion of the Christ*, the highest-grossing Christian film of all-time, director Mel Gibson is rumored to start filming the sequel this spring. The original film, released in 2004 to sellout crowds and earning an estimated \$622 million, had been rumored to have a sequel ever since its release, especially since it did not highlight the Resurrection of Jesus.

In 2020, after years of speculation, star Jim Caviezel revealed to the Breitbart website that Gibson had sent him the third draft of the project. "It's called *The Passion of the Christ: Resurrection*. It's going to be the biggest film in world history," Caviezel said.

Pastor Greg Laurie hosted Gibson at a 2016 Harvest Crusade, where the director first shared that he was doing the project. At the time, Gibson said, "That is a huge undertaking. And you know, it's not *The Passion 2*. It's called *The Resurrection*. Of course, that's a very big subject, and it needs to be looked at because we don't want to just do a simple rendering of it—you know, read what happened."

Gibson enlisted *Braveheart* screenwriter Randall Wallace for the story, which is said to focus on the three days between Jesus' death and Resurrection, particularly how it affected His followers.

"But in order to read it, experience and explore probably deeper meanings of what it's about, it's going to take some doing, and Randall Wallace is up to the task," Gibson said. "He is also, as well as a brilliant writer ... a great director."

In a statement on his personal website, Wallace said he was indeed working on the film but not ready to share more details.

"I've been getting lots of questions about the progress of *Passion of the Christ: Resurrection*," he said. "I'm not ready to talk much about the movie, except to say that I'm deeply excited and committed to the story; I've been pondering the Resurrection and studying all I can about it since I did an independent study on it as a religion major in college."

Since then, although he does stay in touch with Gibson, Laurie said he hasn't heard much else but is excited about the prospects for the sequel.

"I don't have any inside information apart from what the public knows, and it appears that he is going to make a sequel to *The Passion* about the resurrection," Laurie said. "From what I've heard, the person who will write the screenplay is Randall Wallace, who also wrote the screenplay for *Braveheart*, one of my all-time favorite films. That's a dynamic duo. So I'm very excited to see what they will produce."

Edward Pentin, writing for the *National Catholic Register*, reported in September 2020 that many of the other cast members, such as Maia Morgenstern (Mary), Christo Jivkov (Pilate) and Francesco De Vito (Peter) had also agreed to be in the film. He also said that filming would take place in Israel, Morocco and some parts of Europe, including Italy.

If the sequel begins filming this spring, some have speculated the release might coincide with the 20th anniversary of the original in February 2024, leading up to the Easter holiday.

I have long wanted to find a home for more faith-based programming. I am grateful to be an integral part of a young and growing network. I had also expressed in my interview, which was not included, that people of all ethnicities and identities have and will continue to contribute to the network in great ways both in front of and behind the camera, which I encourage and fully support. I've never been interested in proselytizing through my storytelling, but in celebrating God's greatness in our lives through the stories I tell.

The God we serve is a wildly creative and loving God. He didn't just capture a small part of my heart. He has captured all of my heart. He will be reflected in everything I do and say; in my family, my work and my interactions with people from all walks of life, God's love and God's compassion is front and center. All of that comes from the LOVE that God himself showered upon humanity when He gave the gift of joy and forgiveness on the first Christmas morning 2000 years ago. It is why I love Christmas stories and sharing true joy and true peace with millions of people around the world. And in the sole motivation of pure love, I hope you'll join me in sharing God's hope for all the world this Christmas season. Call that my Christmas wish."

'Salt and Light'

Great American Family star Danica McKellar, who also migrated from The Hallmark Channel, came to Bure's defense, revealing that Bure had been instrumental in the actress coming to faith in Jesus.

"Candace, I don't want to brush over the huge, huge impact that you've had on my life this year," McKellar said on Bure's podcast. "I don't even know how to call that, like, friendship. It's more than that. Because of you helping me to find my relationship with God and Jesus, it's been like a

revolution in my life. It's been a revelation in my life. You gave me this Bible that I read all the time, and I love it so much and I go to church now and I just, I talk to Jesus all the time every day. It's unbelievable. And you were like my guide. You were just an angel in my life, and you still are. And I just want to thank you for that publicly."

Paul Greene, who stars in Hallmark's *When Calls the Heart*, also defended the actress in an interview with TV Insider.

"She is loving to all people," he said. "Whatever she chooses to produce is her choice, and I don't judge her for that. I don't agree with everything she does, and I don't disagree with everything she does. I just wish the media was fair enough to put in her whole statement. That's what people need to know. That Candace truly loves people."

A Christmas ... Present, Bure's first Great American Family film, debuted in November 2022, helping the network propel into the fastest-growing network in all of cable television. In its second year, the network ranked No. 1 in Total Day ratings growth in Households (+113%), People 18-49 (+100%), Total Viewers (+116%) and Primetime ratings growth in Households (+128%) among all cable networks.

In a follow-up interview with Fox News Digital's Tracy Wright, Bure acknowledged a "difficult year" that included the sudden loss of her TV dad, Bob Saget, as well as the backlash against her comments.

"My faith is so the core and foundation of who I am that sometimes I don't verbally acknowledge it because it's just my assumption," she explained. "It's like, well, 'If you get Candace, you get faith.' It's one and the same. It is with me all the time. It is in all that I do. I'm very grateful for God's protection and love."

Entertainment journalist Michael Foust says, "[The films] promote themes that are beautiful and true," he said. "They

even promote chastity. The best part: Films on Great American Family are as good as—if not better than—those on larger platforms. Candace Cameron Bure's entry into Great American Family was a sea-change moment in its rivalry with Hallmark. She was one of Hallmark's most popular actresses. Instantly, people of faith knew they could trust this growing new network."

Bure's passion to be "salt and light" in the world, as Jesus said in Matthew 5, continues to be driven, first and foremost, by God.

"[My faith] has affected [my career] tremendously," she told ABC News. "It's really given me the path that I've chosen, and I've been very intentional to choose all family-friendly projects and produce family-friendly entertainment. I think my faith is a big reason why I co-hosted The View for two years as well. My faith is not something that stays at home when I go out to work. It follows me everywhere I go."

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