

Comfort and Cameron Make An Unlikely Preaching, Evangelism Team

A street preacher and a Hollywood actor combine to take the gospel outdoors to draw unbelievers to Christ

Call preacher Ray Comfort and actor Kirk Cameron “the odd couple” of evangelism. Just like Odd Couple stars Felix Unger and Oscar Madison of the 1970s hit TV-sitcom, Comfort and Cameron are opposites who attract plenty of attention. Unlike Unger and Madison, though, Comfort and Cameron are a real-life duo—veteran street preacher and Hollywood actor—who are getting the public’s attention as a pair dedicated to preaching and sharing their personal testimonies open-air.

Comfort is best-known as a zany New Zealander who each Friday night for years has parried with hecklers and preached the gospel on the colorful Santa Monica, Calif., beachside Promenade. A seasoned speaker, accomplished writer and aggressive open-air evangelist, Comfort also has preached in more than 700 churches but always stays loyal to his most favorite preaching spots—anywhere in public.

Said Cameron: “Standing in a pulpit in front of 10,000 people—that’s easier than open-air preaching with 50 strangers.” The actor, who has been a Christian for some time but is new to public preaching, noted: “It’s where the rubber hits the road.”

The pressure of preaching may be new to Cameron, but performing is not. At 15 and already a seasoned actor, he

landed the roll of Mike Seaver on Growing Pains, a TV series about a family far more dysfunctional than his own who lived in the nearby San Fernando Valley.

Seven years and 166 episodes later, it ended with the clean living, anti-Hollywood type married to Chelsea Noble, the pretty actress who played Kate McDonald on the show. Last year Cameron played Buck Williams in Left Behind, the much anticipated but poorly received film adaptation of Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins' first book in their thus far 10-volume series. Cameron also starred in Tribulation Force, the movie adaptation of the second book that was recently released on video to good reviews.

While promoting Left Behind last year at the Christian Booksellers Association convention in Atlanta, someone gave Cameron a tape of Comfort's Hell's Best Kept Secret. Impressed, he ordered the entire 16-cassette series. Comfort's office included his latest book, Revival's Golden Key. After listening and reading, Cameron called Comfort, whose home base is in the Los Angeles suburb of Bellflower.

Last October the two met for lunch. "I was expecting this real godly man," Cameron recalled. "You know, this giant of a pastor to step through double doors—who had written this masterfully weighty book. Instead I met this 4-foot tall lunatic."

At first, Cameron was put off by Comfort who writes, sells and personally distributes tracts by the truckload.

"Ray was running around the restaurant passing out tracts and saying, 'Did you get one of these; did you get one of these?'

I wanted to crawl under the table. Then I watched some of the open-air preaching tapes and I thought: Whoa, this is hardcore. This is like the book of Acts. This is the real thing.

Soon the two were flying cross-country together.

When they visit churches, Comfort teaches his theology of using the Ten Commandments law to reveal the universality of sin, as well as the art of moving from reliance on self to reliance on the Holy Spirit in sharing the gospel, and the importance of Christians' ignoring the promise of a rosy future in heaven so they can focus on the ultimate fate of nonbelievers. Then Cameron gives his testimony and invites the congregation to join Comfort and him for a nearby session of open-air preaching and sharing the gospel individually.

Cameron and Comfort have plans for a joint formal tour also. The Way of the Master will be nationwide, and they hope it will take them to 12 of the country's largest churches. Comfort will host afternoon teaching seminars, and during the evening Cameron will relate his experiences in filming the two movies, give his testimony, and in some cases invite the congregation to preach publicly.

Cameron said Comfort's teaching has turned his weak walk into a long run.

"It shook the foundation of my theology and even caused me to question my own salvation," he said.

While Cameron hopes his new zeal will not jeopardize his blossoming career, he said he has made a decision to entrust it all to Jesus. In a newsletter, he underscored how the

apostle Paul in Galatians 1:10 had said, "If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ."

Cameron wrote: "I know that whoever tries to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for [Jesus'] sake will find it. So I got out my photo ID, got on the airplane and started passing out more tracts."

Comfort smiled when asked about Cameron's transition and noted: "He has not only come out of the closet, he's come out of it riding a motorcycle."

Ed Donnally