

He's Not Just Acting

The Hollywood establishment often criticizes actor Kirk Cameron. But he's found his best role as a believer who takes his faith seriously. 

As the California sun sets over the Santa Monica Pier, Kirk Cameron approaches four rough-looking shirtless guys with big tattoos and shaved heads. The actor is filming an episode of the evangelistic television series *The Way of the Master*, but these men are not extras for the program; they're total strangers. He doesn't know how they will respond to the questions he has for them.

Cameron begins a conversation about God and asks one of the men—Mario—if he believes he's a good person. "Yeah," Mario says flatly, as his friend Alvie and the two other men gather ominously around the former teen idol who starred in the ABC family sitcom *Growing Pains* from 1985-1992.

Using the Ten Commandments like a moral mirror, Cameron asks Mario to examine himself in light of God's standards. Has he ever lied, stolen or committed adultery by looking at a woman with lust? Mario admits he's committed all those sins and concedes he would be guilty before God on the day of judgment.

Confiding he too has been sinful, Cameron tells Mario as a good judge God must one day punish sinners and that the place of punishment is hell. But, he adds, Jesus Christ took the punishment for his sins by dying on the cross and Mario too can have eternal life by putting his faith in Jesus.

The encounter, filmed several years ago for the award-winning TV show and radio program, has since been viewed more than 300,000 times on YouTube.

"We later found out [Mario and Alvie]—who at the time were on drugs and homeless on the streets—had come to the Lord and

became Christians,” Cameron told *Charisma* during a recent interview at a Los Angeles-area hotel. “We saw [Alvie] at a rally holding up a sign saying, ‘Abortion Is Wrong.’ He told us he loves the Lord and reads his Bible every day.”

Some five years had passed since Cameron shared his faith on the pier that day. Astounded by the result of his encounter, Cameron says the men’s conversions remind him of what the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 3:5-7, that one person plants the gospel seed and another waters it but God makes it grow.

“Never be discouraged when you sow the gospel into the heart of an unbeliever,” says evangelist Ray Comfort—co-host with Cameron on *The Way of the Master* and the developer of *Hell’s Best Kept Secret*, a method of open-air preaching.

With the release last summer of *Conquer Your Fear: Share Your Faith*, which Cameron co-wrote with Comfort, the star of *Fireproof* and the *Left Behind* movies is on a mission to encourage Christians to overcome their fears and share their faith with a world in dire need of the truth.

Troubled by studies that show only 2 percent of evangelical Christians tell others about Jesus, Cameron is passionate about equipping believers with the biblical tools they need to share the spiritual salvation message of Jesus.

“To effectively share your faith, you don’t need a Ph.D. in church history. You don’t need to be an archaeologist, and you don’t need to know Greek,” he says.

“You just need to let love swallow your fears and learn a couple of simple principles that Jesus used in the Scriptures to be able to effectively reach people with the gospel.”

That simplicity of the gospel—appealing to the conscience of hearers rather than getting stuck in heady, intellectual arguing matches with people—is what the two teach. They note that every 24 hours 150,000 people pass from “time to

eternity.” And although many prophecy teachers believe there is little left on God’s “prophetic calendar” before the Second Coming occurs, the body of Christ in America is a “sleeping giant” that needs to overcome its “evangelophobia,” they state.

“Every time I see an act of lawlessness, a dead church system, a nation rising against another nation, people loving pleasure and ignoring God, an increase in immorality, turmoil in the Middle East, a collapse of a financial system and even the rise of atheism, I check off another sign of the end of the age,” Cameron writes. “Of all times in history, this isn’t a time for Christians to sit back and do nothing.”

Spiritual Growing Pains

Ironically, Cameron hasn’t always been a passionate preacher. Although he grew up in a conservative family, he was not raised in a churchgoing home and was a devout atheist from a young age. His dad told Cameron’s mother he wanted his children to choose their own religious path in life, which laid the foundation for Cameron’s earliest religious choice as a “full-fledged atheist,” Cameron wrote in his 2008 autobiography, *Still Growing*.

Named after his dad’s favorite TV character—Capt. Kirk of *Star Trek*—Cameron was born October 12, 1970, and grew up in Canoga Park, California, in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles. During his childhood, his mom became friends with the mother of Adam Rich, a star on the television sitcom *Eight Is Enough*. Rich’s mother encouraged them to see her agent about TV work for the young Cameron.

They did, and although Cameron dreamed of becoming an astronaut or fireman, he began instead a career in Hollywood at age 9 with appearances on commercials and TV shows.

Naturally shy, yet very funny, Cameron at age 14 landed the

role of the charming troublemaker Mike Seaver on *Growing Pains*—putting him in girls' hearts and on the covers of teen magazines. At one point, he was receiving 10,000 fan letters a week.

"It was exciting," says the twice Golden Globe-nominated actor, now 39. "It warped your sense of reality and sort of makes you think that somehow the world revolves around you. I'm really thankful for my parents and ultimately to God for rescuing me from a completely self-absorbed, narcissistic way of looking at life and setting me on the right path—helping me to understand this world is God's world and I'm not the center of it; God is."

Although he had obtained what most boys the world over craved—fame, fortune and the adoration of girls everywhere—Cameron's life amid chauffeurs, security guards and paparazzi only seemed to heighten his teen insecurities. He thought being rich and famous would make him "infinitely happy," but he began to ask himself deep questions instead.

Initially interested in New Age claims that each person is god and can make up his own rules, the 17-year-old soon turned his attention to Christianity after a female friend invited him to church.

"I was right in the middle of *Growing Pains*, things were going great, and I was on top of the world," Cameron says. "But a friend had invited me to go to church one Sunday. I really wasn't interested in church or God, but I wanted to hang out with this person."

"So I went and was just really captured by the message. I was asking myself questions like: 'How did we get here? What happens after we die?' And these questions were answered by the Bible in a very persuasive way."

Drawn by the Holy Spirit, Cameron became preoccupied with spiritual questions. The girl's father gave him a copy of Josh

McDowell's classic book on Christian apologetics, *More Than a Carpenter*.

To his surprise, he learned many of his intellectual heroes—including Albert Einstein, Sir Isaac Newton and Copernicus—believed in God. One day, after dropping his friend off at her acting class, Cameron sat in his sports car on Van Nuys Boulevard and prayed.

"I was just thinking that I could get in a car accident and die, and at that moment I'd find out if there is a God," Cameron says. "And so that's when I prayed: 'God, if You are there, I need to know. Please show me. I don't want to get tied up in false religion, but if You are there, I want You to reveal yourself to me.'"

His conversion shocked those who knew him. As he lived out his faith, it ignited controversy on the set of *Growing Pains*. Despite the growing tension, Cameron met his future wife on the show, Chelsea Noble, who played his fictional girlfriend Kate.

A New Stage

Since Cameron disclosed his faith in Christ, the Hollywood establishment has criticized him often, but he's found his best role as a believer who takes his faith seriously.

"I get mocked, I get slandered, I get blacklisted; but that really shouldn't surprise us because Jesus said all those who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution," Cameron says.

Since *Growing Pains* ended in 1992, Cameron has appeared in dozens of television shows and movies. From 2000 to 2005, he played reporter Buck Williams in three *Left Behind* movies, which chronicle events after God removes Christians from Earth in the rapture. The movies have helped inspire people to share

their faith because no one has “forever here on this Earth,” Cameron says.

While attending a book convention in 2000 to promote the movie, a fan handed Cameron a training CD by Comfort that demonstrates how Christians can share their faith using the Ten Commandments. Describing the teaching’s effect on him as “foundation-shaking,” Cameron later called Comfort—whom he calls the “funny little character” who reminds him of the apostle Paul.

Comfort sent him a copy of his book *God Has a Wonderful Plan for Your Life: The Myth of the Modern Message*, which features prominently on the cover a picture of Stephen the martyr being stoned to death. The book had a profound impact on Cameron, and he rededicated his life to the Lord. Not long afterward, he watched a video of Comfort publicly preaching outside a Hare Krishna convention in New York City.

“I was just stunned,” Cameron says. “Here he was, in the middle of a Hare Krishna convention, preaching to a crowd of people at a mock funeral he had staged—a guy was underneath a sheet with a bunch of pall bearers—and he’s talking about the fact that every one of us has an appointment with death.

“I was just riveted to the screen, watching him as he intelligently reasoned with people. I was so intrigued by it, I thought to myself, *We’ve got to get this message out to the church somehow.*”

Later, the two men had lunch together and decided to create *The Way of the Master* program to teach Christians how to share the gospel. Today the show is seen in 70 countries.

In 2008, Cameron played Caleb Holt, a firefighter struggling to save his marriage, in the independent *Fireproof* movie. The film and the accompanying book—*The Love Dare*—have helped save numerous marriages.

As he travels the country speaking on the subject of marriage, Cameron notes that many people get counseling or read a book and try to use its techniques to fix their marriage, but often wind up divorced anyway.

"The real problem lies in the heart—as long as you have two people who are selfish, all the different techniques are not going to help," Cameron says.

"Only God can change a sinful heart and cause a person to deny themselves, surrender to the Lord and love their spouse unconditionally; and that's what is necessary to make a marriage healthy."

Today Cameron and Chelsea have been married 18 years and have six children, four of them adopted.

"We love kids," he says. "I come from a family of four children, and my wife is an adopted child herself, and she always wanted to adopt children. It's kind of like the *Brady Bunch*. We have three boys and three girls."

Cameron will share the stage with singer-songwriter Warren Barfield for the Love Worth Fighting For tour scheduled in March and April in Lexington, Kentucky, and Atlanta.

The nonprofit events bring Christian speakers, authors and performing artists together to raise money for the needy. The two men previously worked together on *Fireproof*, which featured Barfield's song "Love Is Not a Fight."

Meanwhile, Cameron wants to see Christians equipped and awakened to go into the harvest and share the gospel with the lost. Churches are full of laborers who have been given the secret of eternal life, he says, yet they aren't sharing it because they fear what other people will think.

"We've found the cure to death," Cameron says. "We've found the one thing that can wash away our sin, shame, guilt and

pain and that will give us joy, hope and eternal life.

“The question is why we aren’t telling people about this. Why don’t we have an excitement for evangelism?

“When you really think about it, we’ve found the fountain of youth. At least you’d tell your friends. If they didn’t want to go, fine, but at least you’d tell them.”

Troy Anderson *is a reporter with the* Los Angeles Daily News.

KIRK CAMERON VIDEO

Watch Kirk Cameron share how God miraculously transformed his life at a point when he was rich, famous—and an atheist. Go to .