

I'm Excited About The Sequel to the Movie *God's Not Dead*

One of the most successful Christian movies of 2014 was a low-budget film about apologetics called *God's Not Dead*. It was made for a little over \$1 million, but grossed \$100 million at the box office, including DVD sales. It now has more than 7 million fans on Facebook.

I knew about the movie before it happened because it was based on the book by the same title written by my longtime friend Rice Brooks. I knew Rice was a passionate apologist for the Christian faith and skilled at explaining complex Christian concepts in a way anyone could understand. I was also aware of the many faith films being made—most of them were mediocre. So I was skeptical when Rice called wanting coverage for the movie, especially since they were having trouble getting theaters to screen the movie. But wanting to encourage any effort to bring Christ into the wider culture, we gave the movie extensive coverage right at its release launch.

I'm not the only one who liked the movie. When we ran our article, it was shared and reshared by our readers. The first weekend, the relatively few theaters showing the film were nearly sold out. The number of theaters showing the movie doubled the second week. Clearly something was happening. The rest is history.

I tell you this because last week I visited the set for *God's Not Dead 2* in Arkansas. I was the guest of Troy Duhon, who provided the funding for the first *God's Not Dead* movie (which an insider told me may be one of the most successful movies in history based on return on investment).

I wasn't sure what to expect for a sequel, though. Would it be the same actors in a different setting? I rewatched the first

as I flew to the set and noticed all sorts of subtleties in plot and characterization that I missed the first time I saw it.

I was impressed again by how good the movie was: the acting, cinematography, the Louisiana State University location. The film even featured a huge rock concert from the Newsboys and a scene where car struck and killed one of the main characters (but not before he accepted Christ).

The basis of the plot is how a young Christian university student defended his faith (using apologetics arguments from Rice Brooks' book) in his philosophy class before a hostile atheistic professor. Yet it had interesting subplots that somehow all fit together: a leftist reporter who discovered she was dying of cancer, and a Muslim student expelled from her home when she accepted Christ (but her father, who was a strict Muslim, was shown to be emotionally torn over losing his daughter).

Another subplot was the anguish of a Christian mother with Alzheimer's. But when she spoke with her wayward selfish son, she spoke about spiritual things with clarity as if she was being led by the Holy Spirit.

The movie had star power: Willie and Korie Robertson of *Duck Dynasty* fame made two short appearances as themselves that added to the plot.

Hollywood has taken notice that clean "faith-friendly movies" are more successful than R-rated films. I'm constantly being invited to screenings where the marketers are hoping Christians will pack the theaters and fill marketers' pockets with money. I walked out of one screening recently, horribly disappointed at a movie that claimed to be faith based, but was nothing more than a Catholic priest, a couple of Scriptures and a heart-warming plot. It didn't come close to communicating the gospel or even real Christians being a light

in a dark world.

But *God's Not Dead* filled this need—a strong Christian witness in a well-written, well-acted film. Its sequel is about a high school teacher, played by Melissa Joan Hart, who is arrested for speaking about Jesus in the classroom.

The movie climaxes with a courtroom scene in Little Rock, complete with real experts playing themselves being called to testify.

I was pleasantly surprised by what I heard and saw. The stars like Melissa Joan Hart and Sadie Robertson were likable and seemed passionate about this new movie. Everyone I talked to from Director Harold Cronk down to the extras said they believed the movie would help teach a generation of Christians how to defend their faith in an increasingly hostile environment.

It was fun watching the takes and retakes and to watch and listen on the monitors at Benton High School in Benton, Arkansas, about a half-hour outside of Little Rock. They used an actual classroom and some local teens, along with members of some Christian bands and the children of a few well-known Christian leaders as students in the school.

Troy was at my side most of the day, explaining the movie business and talking about some of the exciting things that resulted from the first *God's Not Dead* movie. He also gave me a play by play on what I was seeing and who was who. But when he would reel off how this actor or that actress was on some well-known network TV program, I was clueless because I don't follow those programs.

Many of the actors professed to be Christians, including Hart—who I know as a spokesperson for Wal-Mart—who told me being in the movie allowed her to “come out” as a Christian in Hollywood.

I've traveled the world, interviewed three U.S. presidents and spoken at the United Nations. But I was unprepared for how much fun this was. Even though I play the role of a CEO at the office, I think I must still be a reporter at heart, because I quickly fell back into that role as I interviewed Troy the financier, Harold the director and some of the stars.

While at the filming, I recorded numerous interviews to be used on upcoming podcasts of The Strang Report. You won't want to miss them over the next few weeks. If you haven't subscribed, [click here](#) to do so. We're excited how the number of our podcast subscribers is growing every day.

The first time around, no one knew how *God's Not Dead* would succeed. The promoters were starting from scratch to get an audience. This time around, they have a brand, and many people like me eager to see what is next. How many of their 7 million fans on Facebook do you think will want to see the sequel?

Leave your comments on what you thought about *God's Not Dead* or this trend toward faith-friendly films in Hollywood. Share this with your friends. Let's get a buzz going in anticipation of this exciting new movie that I believe will be better than the first.

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