

# Robert Duvall Discusses 'Utopia,' Faith-Based Films

Throughout the years, the landscape of Christian films has changed. While movies like *Fireproof* and *Courageous* enjoyed success at the box office, decades ago those pictures may have flopped in the box office.

Along with the blockbuster success of faith-based films comes big-name actors willing to lend their talents. Kirk Cameron starred in *Fireproof*, Helen Hunt and Dennis Quaid were in this year's *Soul Surfer*, and more recently Oscar winners Robert Duvall and Melissa Leo graced the silver screen in *Seven Days in Utopia*.

Duvall, who grew up a Christian Scientist, is often reluctant to talk about his faith—he told NPR it is a personal thing. But his most recent role is not his first time starring in a faith-based film. He played Mac Sledge in the 1983 film *Tender Mercies*, for which he won an Academy Award for Best Actor. Duvall was also nominated for the same award for his portrayal of Pentecostal preacher Sonny Dewey in *The Apostle*, which he wrote, directed and starred in. Last year he appeared alongside Lucas Black—his *Utopia* costar—in *Get Low*.

Charisma News spoke with Duvall, 80, about his involvement in faith-based films and his latest project. When asked what attracts him to the faith-based film industry, he said a lot of factors come into play when choosing a role.

"It depends if it's a good part. Everything comes in waves. I do secular films and faith-based," Duvall explains.

The iconic actor said his character, the cast and the Texas film location all drew him to play Johnny Crawford in *Seven Days in Utopia*. Crawford is an eccentric rancher who helps young golfer Luke Chisolm, played by Black, perfect his swing

during a weeklong stay in the small town of Utopia, Texas.

“It was a nice project, that’s what it was,” Duvall says. “If there is a message, I hope it’s not too direct and doesn’t hit people over the head too much. Sometimes if there is a message it could be a little more offhand.”

He didn’t know what viewers should learn from his character, but Duvall said maybe a sense of goodness and positiveness. “You’ve got to be careful with message movies,” he notes. “I think whatever the message might be, it has to be an individual thing that people take away.”

Duvall adds: “A philosopher once said this: ‘Just don’t be a farmer but be a man on a farm.’ You’re a human being before you are what you are professionally. Try to be a good person before you’re a good actor or whatever.”

The Hollywood great has played roles such as Tom Hagen, the Corleone family’s consigliere in *The Godfather* trilogy, a demanding marine pilot father in *The Great Santini*, and Josef Stalin in the TV movie *Stalin*. But Duvall says his favorite character he has played is Augustus McCrae, a fun-loving and stubborn Texas Ranger, in the 1989 TV miniseries *Lonesome Dove*.

He said he has some favorites, and although *Lonesome Dove* is not the best made, the miniseries had the greatest impact on Duvall.

“I said let the English play Hamlet and King Lear. I’ll play Augustus McCrae. That was my favorite character,” he says.