

Why Do 'Christian Films' Only Reach Church-Going Audiences?

Christian films have been with us a long time, and over the years we've seen a variety in quality levels. Being restricted by low budgets can make it harder to produce good content, but on the other hand we see many other low budget films which do quite well through Hollywood pathways. So why is it that "Christian films" are only reaching a church-attending Christian audience?

The better question here is, what sort of films should Christian film producers be making?

Josh Reid is the director and producer of a new Australian feature film *1500 Steps*. The film has taken three years to produce and was done on a budget of just under \$100,000. Josh is the executive producer of the film production company Earl Street Pictures and also works as general manager of Christian radio station Pulse 94.1 in Wollongong, Australia. He has plenty of experience within Christian media circles, but feels that now is the time to do things a bit differently.

At first glance, *1500 Steps* appears to be your standard hero's journey concept—the loser becomes a winner—but there is a subtle Christian message which flows throughout the film. Described as a transforming journey toward self-belief and brilliance, a cross between *Chariots of Fire* and *The Karate Kid*, this high-school coming-of-age drama is set in the beautiful Sydney beach suburb of Cronulla.

Jonas "Jobe" O'Brien, a homely, 16-year-old boy, lives in a struggling single parent family—his mother dead, his father an alcoholic and former champion runner. Jobe, a misfit and loner, has inherited his father's ability and love for running. Jobe encounters disastrous obstacles and must dig

deep to decide what type of man he wants to become.

However, *1500 Steps* is actually a different type of Christian film. Produced and written by evangelical Christians, this film was made for a secular audience. Rather than the film appearing obviously Christian, it uses symbolism and mise-en-scène to communicate the gospel message of being saved by grace, to an unchurched audience.

Growing up in the church, watching Christian films, Reid often wondered why we Christians couldn't be cleverer with our film-making abilities. Today he is passionate about using the medium of film to grab a good story and tell it well. He says, "As a Christian who is also a film producer, I simply ensure that the stories I choose to tell have a subtle Christian message woven into their DNA. This is very different to having a perfectly good story and ruining it by dumping a 'message' on top of it." Reid encourages more Christians in the industry to put the medium before the message, because by doing so we will have a greater opportunity to communicate the greatest story ever told to today's post-Christian culture.