

116,000 Pack Angel Stadium for 25th Anniversary Harvest Crusade

For months drivers all over Southern California have been seeing bumper stickers that read "Harvest: Greg Laurie. August 15-17, 2014: Angel Stadium." There have been radio advertisements and newspaper articles leading up to the 25th anniversary Harvest Crusade in Orange County. Christians have been praying for the event and inviting their friends. And this past weekend, they came.

The three-night count for the 2014 SoCal Harvest Crusade: 116,000 people packed the stadium in Anaheim; 62,733 more watched via webcasts; and 12,791 made decisions for Christ.

Each night opened with video testimonies and music from various contemporary Christian artists and worship leaders, including Phil Wickham, Skillet, Chris Tomlin, Sidewalk Prophets and Crystal Lewis. On Friday night, Laurie interviewed former Mafia kingpin Michael Franzese about how Christ had transformed his life when he was in prison. On Saturday, POD point man Sonny Sandoval said the opening prayer. And each night, emcee Levi Lusko stirred up the crowd.

But it was Laurie who hit home with the audience. Through the years at the Anaheim crusades and others around the country, nearly a half-million people have made decisions for Christ.

Who is Laurie? He accepted Christ as a teenager during the Jesus Movement-era and studied the gospel under the tutelage of Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa pastor and movement founder Chuck Smith. Laurie started a Bible study and eventually a church in Riverside, California. Today, Harvest Christian Fellowship is one of the largest churches in the nation and has a second campus in Orange County.

On Friday night at the crusade, Laurie opened with the message, "The God Who Loves and Forgives." He followed on Saturday and Sunday with simple yet poignant messages titled "Jesus and You" and "See You in the Morning." All three messages can be viewed at .

Laurie peppers his teaching with quotes from celebrities, even referring to Robin Williams' suicide and singer Lana Del Rey this year. Yet he always comes back to the gospel. In one message this year he told the story of Jesus and the woman at the well who had many husbands, making it real with a story from his own life: His mother had more husbands than the woman at the well, and as a child Greg had a front-row seat.

"Some people water down the gospel in an attempt to be relevant," emcee Levi Lusko told *Charisma*. "But that backfires. Greg keeps up to date. He is curious and always asking questions about social media or some popular singer. He is cool but does it without compromising the Bible's teaching."

Second-generation Calvary Chapel leader and Whosoevers co-founder Ryan Ries agrees. "It works because Greg is in tune with the Holy Spirit," Ries told *Charisma*. "As he gives the words that God prepared for him, God does all of the rest. Greg is just the instrument. When people hear the plain Gospel they get hit by the Holy Spirit and come forward, and their lives are changed."

Indeed. As has been happening for 25 years, on each night of the crusade, Laurie gives a passionate altar call. He has shown people the problem of sin and the hope of an answer in Christ. And they respond by the thousands. From all over the stadium, even the nose-bleed seats, they come to the outfield grass to make a decision to follow Christ. Singer Jaime Owens-Collins once described the response as looking like a flow of lava. Once in the outfield, Laurie leads the new followers of Christ in prayer and then volunteer counselors give each one

who has made a decision a Bible and additional help.

"This is when the battle is at its peak," Laurie told *Charisma*. "I pray for the right words as we call people to Christ. Each one is an answer to someone's prayer. It is a privilege to spread the gospel and call people to Christ."

A few years ago, 21-year-old Matt Denson attended a crusade. "I wasn't a Christian, and I didn't want to be one," Denson told *Charisma*. "It was the altar call that got me. I stayed in the stands. I listened to what Greg was talking about, and I repeated the prayer. I already had my own Bible. I grew up in the church, but I didn't want anything to do with it until I came to Harvest."

Today, Matt attends Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside and volunteered to be an usher at the crusade.

Another 21-year-old, Jessica Montano, was attending her 15th Harvest Crusade.

"I grew up at Harvest Crusades," Montano, who attends Calvary Chapel Chino Valley, told *Charisma*. "My family always came. We would always invite friends. And many have made decisions for Christ. It is easier to get my friends to come here than to come to church. This is like a concert at a stadium. People are used to it. Today people don't really know what a church is. This is more modernized, but we still preach the Bible. This is church, but it isn't church."

Xavier Cornejo was in Angel Stadium for the crusade, visiting from Ecuador to see if a Harvest Crusade would work in South America.

"It is amazing to see that these things still are happening in the U.S.," Cornejo told *Charisma*. "Greg isn't just having a fun time, he is actually doing the Great Commission. This happens when the church works together. It is the love of the people."

John Collins has been with Laurie since the first crusade and serves as executive pastor at Harvest Christian Fellowship.

“The technology and our ability to reach so many more people has changed in 25 years,” Collins told *Charisma*. “What hasn’t changed is the message. Greg is faithful to the gospel.”

Laurie’s Sunday night message was on the hope of heaven, which had both broad and personal meaning. Harvest Crusade co-founder and Laurie’s spiritual father, Chuck Smith, died last year, and this was the first crusade without him.

“Chuck helped us to get started. He laid the foundation for us,” Laurie said. “He is just a reminder that all of us are here for just a short time, then we pass on. Our goal is to take as many people to heaven with us as possible.”

Laurie will speak at a Harvest Crusade event in Dallas in October.