

Judah Smith: How Talking About Jesus Birthed a Best-Seller

Author Judah Smith is the lead pastor of The City Church in Seattle, the fourth largest-growing church in the nation. His *New York Times* best-seller, *Jesus Is: Find a New Way to Be Human* released in February. Charisma News sat down with Smith to talk about the book and the Jesus Is movement. This is Part 1 of a two-part series.

Charisma News: How did you come up with the idea for the “Jesus Is” project?

Smith: There was a desire from our staff just to get Jesus on the mind of Seattle-ites. That’s all we really were concerned about. That’s all we were really thinking about. We figured if we could get Jesus on the mind of Seattle-ites, that could be one step farther in the journey of accepting Jesus and knowing Jesus. It was really a heart—a desire to make Jesus a big deal. We recognized that Christians are famous for monologues but not so good at dialogue. They’re not great at listening. Oftentimes they’re really good at talking. We just kind of wanted to extend an invitation to our city: Let’s start a dialogue. We wanted to converse about this, and it just seemed to take on a life of its own.

Charisma News: What are the most important things to consider when it comes to defining who Jesus is?

Smith: The Bible talks about in John chapter 1, probably my favorite chapter in understanding the person of Jesus, that from His fullness we have all received grace upon grace. From His death we have all received endless grace. It’s pretty phenomenal, considering that we serve a God who’s full of grace and truth. I think it really starts right there. Jesus is not just to be intellectualized. He’s there to be

experienced and encountered, and that's certainly our passion.

Charisma News: What has surprised you most about "Jesus Is"?

Smith: The receptivity of people that are seekers, people that are lost, people that are searching. We have seen porn websites and prominent atheist websites link up and create links to our website and really engage. Just the idea of having a dialogue—being a Christian and say, "Look, let's dialogue. We want to listen and not just talk." It's surprising to see the interaction and receptivity of people. It's just amazing.

Charisma News: What has inspired you most about the "Jesus Is" campaign?

Smith: I think what's inspiring is the compelling, provocative nature of the gospel. Just seeing what the gospel does and what it does best, which is that it captures people. It totally captivates people. I don't think it was just a cute marketing campaign or anything like that. It was just the gospel doing what the gospel does. The person of Jesus still and always will be the most compelling person who has ever lived. I think we're living in an era and a society that is in desperate need of seeing Jesus for who He really is.

Charisma News: Is there a way for participants to connect, or do they just submit their answers?

Smith: On the website there are projects—in most cases Seattle, but also projects in other parts of the world. And people can submit a project, where basically we show who Jesus is by not just our words, but by our interaction, our service. I think that's a huge part of what has become a movement.