

Kelsey Grammer's Jesus Revolution fails to spread the good word

AMIL NIAZI

REVIEW

Jesus Revolution

CLASSIFICATION: PG; 120 MINUTES

Starring Kelsey Grammer, Jonathan Roumie and Joel Courtney
Directed by Jon Erwin and Brent McCorkle

Written by Jon Gunn and Jon Erwin

Jesus is having a moment. I first noticed it when the bearded prophet popped up in a Super Bowl commercial promoting an evangelical Christian website, leaving viewers wondering why one of the most well-known figures in history needed publicity. And the release of a new film called *Jesus Revolution* starring Kelsey Grammer makes it clear the big guy is staging a comeback.

The movie opens on a sun-soaked California beach strewn with hippies getting born anew in the salty ocean waves. A bell-bottomed Grammer is standing on the beach chatting with a reporter, describing the moment as an "experience." From the very outset the costumes and music feel straight out of a satire of the 1970s, like an AI-built naive fantasy of what was happening, man, in the flower child era.

Cut to a year earlier, we meet Chuck Smith (Grammer), an uptight ("square") pastor whose dwindling congregation has seen better days, as he spends his sermons decrying the scary young people he sees on TV dropping acid and refusing to bathe. Pastor Chuck makes an offhand comment to his more "with it" daughter about wanting to ask a real-life hippy what it's all about and she takes him to heart, bringing a bearded, caped man named Lonnie Frisbee (Jonathan Roumie) into the Smith household. Frisbee spreads his particular hippy-soaked gospel to the Smiths' church, bringing a hoard of unwashed love children and their beaded vests to the congregation, creating an uproar with the older worshippers and starting a revolution behind the church's small doors.

At the same time, a young man named Greg Laurie (Joel Courtney) is having his own awakening. Laurie is rebelling against a ne'er do well, alcoholic mother (Kimberly Williams-Paisley) and a deadbeat dad who's out of the picture. When he meets a group of far-out high-school kids, he finds Janis Joplin, acid and love, all in short-order. When Laurie's girlfriend Cathie's sister has a near-death experience, they both go looking for something more meaningful and find it in Frisbee and Smith's church.

Jesus Revolution is based on the real-life story of Laurie, an author and pastor who co-wrote a book by the same name about his relationship with the Jesus movement that took place on the American west coast in the sixties and seventies.

The "Jesus freaks," as they were often called, helped influence much of what is now contemporary Christian culture, including Christian rock and gospel music. Laurie went on to start his own church, the Harvest Christian Fellowship, which has become one of the largest in the U.S. He was even part of Donald Trump's National Prayer Service during his 2017 inauguration.

Directed by Jon Erwin and Brent McCorkle, two Christian filmmakers, the movie bills itself as more than just entertainment. The creators are looking to spread the good word and encourage moviegoers to do the same in a special message that opened the screening I saw.

It's easy to be dismissive of the moviemaking, in what often feels like a church production of *Hair*. Other times it felt like watching an infomercial hawking something that already has billions of people buying what they're selling. Although I'm not really sure who *Jesus Revolution* is for — much like how Super Bowl viewers wondered about the ad for Christ — it's hard not to be curious about the roots of a religious movement that has such a stranglehold on modern American politics. At least in that regard, it wasn't time entirely wasted.

Special to The Globe and Mail

Jesus Revolution opens in theatres Friday.

FIRST PERSON

THE CALAMITIES OF CUSTOMER 'SERVICE'



ILLUSTRATION BY DREW SHANNON

After experiencing credit-card fraud, I called my bank. Given the gravity of the situation, I only had to wait several hours on hold, **Marcel Strigberger** writes

There are three certainties in life: death, taxes and the impossibility of getting through within a reasonable time on the telephone to a bank. Since there is not much more we can do about death or taxes, let me complain about those banks. Actually I am not certain we can do much about them either.

I recently received a statement regarding a credit card I never use. I am not sure why I applied for that card other than a perk is bags fly free on an airline, which I also never use. For that matter, I had not used — for years — the bank issuing this card.

I opened the statement and noticed a charge for \$1,175 allegedly incurred by me in Moose Jaw for something like the Antler Motel. As I have never had the pleasure of visiting Saskatchewan, I called the bank to report it. Presumably, whoever did run up this bill either spent a few nights there or maybe one or two in their royal suite.

Given the apparent gravity of the situation, I expected to get through to the right bank department within minutes. Then again the Blue Jays probably expected to win the World Series last fall.

The recording prompted me to hit seven to report unrecognized charges. It continued with, "We are experiencing more calls than usual. Wait times might be longer. Our team is busy assisting other customers. Please stay on the line..."

I wonder about this all-too-familiar excuse for keeping us waiting. When were calls ever "usual"? In 1897?

What then followed was about an hour of unrelenting annoying and repetitive music. The best of Mick Jagger shouting would have been preferable. This ordeal was interrupted sporadically by a comment like, "Did you know you can visit us online where you can resolve your issue." No doubt had I gone online, there would have been an option reading, "Got charged for Antler Motel? Click here."

The recording also said we can go online where we can also review the bank's privacy policy. Just what I wanted to check out. No doubt that Moose Jaw knave reviewed their privacy policy and got ideas.

I decided to call again from my mobile phone this time and opt for the "lost or stolen card" department, while keeping my place for the fraud department open on my landline.

After a half-hour, I got through to a live agent called Marlene. She told me she could take some information, but I should still hang in there on my call to the fraud department. But first, she had to ask me some verifying questions.

My date of birth. I passed this one with flying colours.

Next, she asked how many accounts I had with this bank. I likely had a dormant account. I guessed one. Pass.

Then came the kicker. "When did you last use it?" I had no clue, other than that's why it was dormant. I said, "ages ago." She paused and then replied, "The system does not accept this answer. You are locked out."

I was aghast. I tried to reason with her by offering other information that might satisfy the system, like my mother's birth name. No go.

Marlene told me with regret, that once I'm locked out, I'm locked out. Her hands were tied. She did mention the system a couple of times more.

Marlene then apologized, saying she knew how I felt. She added that she lives in Vancouver, but she also had never visited Moose Jaw. At least we had a rapport. But this too did not satisfy the system.

I continued to wait on my other line for almost three hours until a live person from the fraud department came on.

Hello John, from Moncton, N.B. He asked how he could help me.

I told him about those charges, and he asked whether anybody else had access to my credit card. I told him not to my knowledge. He was curious about the Antler Motel. I told him that I had heard good things about that Antler Motel. But alas, in addition to never having set foot in Saskatchewan, I was not even sure how to spell it.

After a brief post-midnight chat, he noted the debits would be removed.

Two days later, I received a survey querying how I enjoyed this telephone experience. I was asked to rate on a scale of one to 10, factors such as how soon it took to reach an agent and whether I would recommend this bank to my friends. Whoever said algorithms don't have a sense of humour?

The survey also asked whether I was okay with a bank rep getting in touch with me. I answered of course. I was just dying to say to them, "Your call is important to me. Here's some music you can listen to while I go for a spin around my neighbourhood on my bicycle."

We cannot do much more about death or taxes. Can we do something about trying to reasonably get through to banks or for that matter other behemoth organizations such as insurance and utility companies? Keeping customers on the line endlessly, adding insult to injury with annoying music and robotic lame excuses is abusive.

Are there legal remedies? I say there ought to be an amendment to the Geneva Convention banning this behaviour. Criminalize it, calling new regulations something like, "Throwing Customer Service Under the Bus Act."

I am sure had Alexander Graham Bell known consumers would be treated like this, he would never have invented the telephone.

Marcel Strigberger lives in Thornhill, Ont.

First Person is a daily personal piece submitted by readers

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TODAY'S SUDOKU SOLUTION

1	4	2	8	9	7	5	6	3
7	9	3	2	6	5	8	4	1
8	5	6	3	4	1	7	9	2
5	8	7	4	1	6	2	3	9
3	1	4	7	2	9	6	5	8
6	2	9	5	8	3	4	1	7
2	6	1	9	7	4	3	8	5
4	3	8	1	5	2	9	7	6
9	7	5	6	3	8	1	2	4

TODAY'S KENKEN SOLUTION

1	5	4	2	3	6
2	6	3	5	4	1
6	3	2	4	1	5
5	4	1	6	2	3
3	2	6	1	5	4
4	1	5	3	6	2