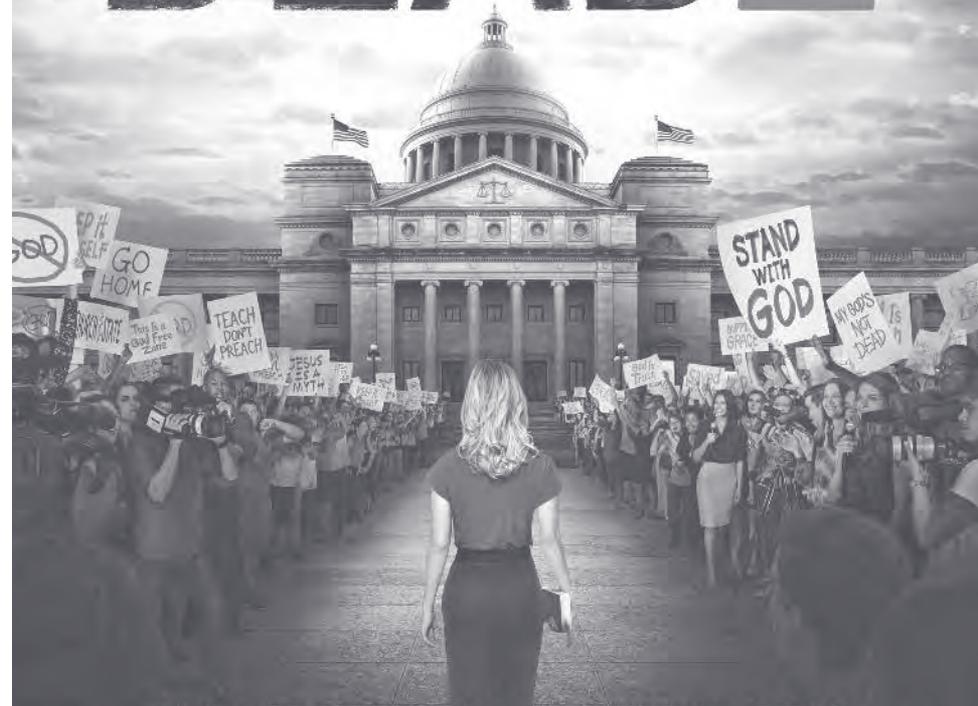


PURE FLIX PRESENTS
A HAROLD CRONK FILM

GOD'S NOT DEAD 2



WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?

BY JIM POOLE & GARRY POOLE



God's Not Dead 2: Who Do You Say I Am?

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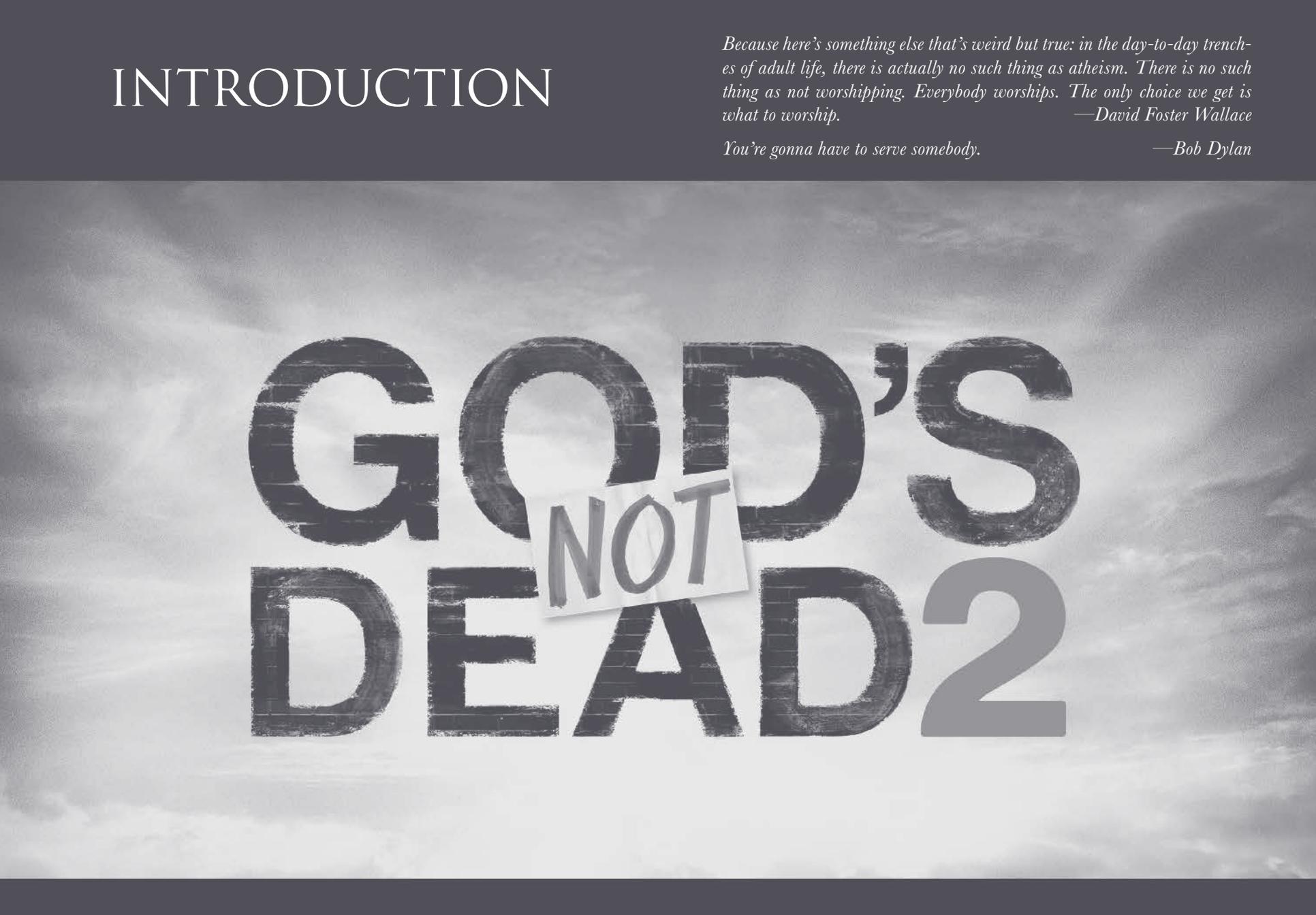
INTRODUCTION

Because here's something else that's weird but true: in the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.

—David Foster Wallace

You're gonna have to serve somebody.

—Bob Dylan



GOD'S
NOT
DEAD 2

Suppose you expressed a belief you firmly held—a deep, personal conviction that shapes the very core of who you are—and the act of merely talking about it was declared illegal. How would you feel? How would you react? What would you do?

At the heart of the movie *God's Not Dead 2*, Grace Wesley, a history teacher who is a devoted Christian, answers a student's question about Jesus. She is careful with her answer, yet confident about quoting a Bible verse. She'd been teaching about Martin Luther King Jr., so it was quite natural for her to respond to the student's inquiry comparing Jesus's ideals with those of the civil rights leader and former minister. However, when parents and school administrators find out about the incident, Grace is accused of crossing the line of what's acceptable—by “preaching and proselytizing her personal faith” in the classroom.

As the case goes to court, the prosecuting attorney builds a strong case against Grace for inappropriately overstepping the wall of separation between church and state as articulated by Thomas Jefferson. If convicted, Grace would not only lose her job, but

even more distressing, she could be forced to forfeit her teaching certificate and possibly never be allowed to teach again.

The trial intensifies as Grace's defense attorney, Tom Endler, calls Lee Strobel and Detective J. Warner Wallace, two experts who have written on the authenticity of Jesus, to the witness stand. If the defense could establish the person of Jesus and the events in His life as historical fact, then Grace would be found legitimately teaching about Jesus as she would any other historical figure.

It's the jury's duty to examine the facts and weigh the evidence. The proof must be convincing, based on reason and common sense, and not based solely on speculation or mere conjecture. They must undergo a careful, impartial consideration of all the evidence, or lack thereof, and reach a verdict beyond a reasonable doubt.

But can the life of Jesus be proven beyond *a reasonable doubt*? Does any hard evidence really exist for the events in Jesus's life? If so, is it reliable? What about His death by crucifixion? And can His alleged resurrection be credible? Perhaps it's our duty

to also examine, question, and test the evidence for the historical Jesus, and draw a conclusion one way or the other.

Meanwhile, another character in the film begins to investigate these very same questions. *God's Not Dead 2* zooms into sharp focus on the life of Brooke Thawley, the young student who raised the question about Jesus in Grace's class. We see Brooke somberly sitting alone in her brother's room. Workers had been walking in and out of the room, removing his belongings and loading them into a truck. Her brother died six months earlier, but in many ways it seems like yesterday. She can't believe he's really gone. The empty, barren room becomes an outward picture of her heart—and the constant ache in her chest. Life just doesn't make sense anymore.

One of the workers returns to hand her a book. "I found this among your brother's things. It seemed like it would be something you'd like to keep." Apparently, her brother was reading the Bible without Brooke knowing about it. Why didn't he tell her? Didn't he trust her? As she turns the pages, she discovers notes and markings in the margins of the Bible and wonders

if he had been searching for something, some purpose to life, as she is now. Or had he already found what he was looking for?

SEARCHING FOR MEANING

In another classroom, in another country, many years earlier, Viktor Frankl was intently observing his science teacher walking up and down the rows of desks declaring, "Life is nothing! In the final analysis, life is nothing more than a combustion process, a process of oxidation." Thirteen-year-old Frankl jumped up out of his chair without asking permission, as was customary at the time, and replied, "What meaning, then, does life have?"¹

Driven by that haunting question, Frankl went on to study psychological patterns and behaviors based on the pursuit of meaning. He proposed that finding meaning in life is humanity's primary motivation. The theories he subsequently developed are known as the third school of psychotherapy, after Freud's and Adler's theories.²

In 1942, Frankl had the opportunity to put his theories to the test. He was newly married, with his

career just starting to take off, as the Nazis began rounding up the Jews in Vienna. Eventually, Frankl, along with his wife and parents, were transported to a concentration camp. He survived; his family did not. Three years after he was liberated, he wrote his magnum opus in nine days: the 1946 best seller *Man's Search for Meaning*, based on his dreadful experience in the concentration camp. It's become one of the most influential books of our time.³

Meaning is defined as something bigger than ourselves, regardless of our circumstances. Frankl wrote, "If there is any meaning in life at all, then there must be meaning in suffering."⁴

A central theme of Frankl's work is about finding or ascribing a meaning to our losses, our sufferings, our tragedies. When any of us experience pain, a very human reaction is to cry out, "Why? Why me? Why?" Frankl contended, "Those that have a 'why' to live can bear with almost any 'how.'"⁵

Out of the suffering he witnessed and experienced in that horrific concentration camp, Viktor Frankl found that he came away with a deeper faith, incredibly, in humanity and in God. We are designed at the

very core of our beings, our souls, to long for something more.⁶

Many believe that designer is God, who invites us to seek Him out and discover meaning, as described in the Bible: "God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us."⁷

Brooke's emptiness and heartache lead her to pour out her heart to her teacher, Grace, at a chance meeting in a coffee shop. "Why did my brother have to die? There's no reason. . . . I feel totally lost."

As Brooke opens up with her teacher, it's obvious she respects Grace very much. Finally, Brooke reaches a breaking point and blurts out, "How do you keep it together in spite of the challenges of life?"

Grace calmly gives her a one-word answer: "Jesus."

CHAPTER 1
WHY JESUS?

These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

—John 20:31



“I’d like to talk to you about Jesus.” Is there anything more uncomfortable than someone you don’t know approaching you with that question? Stand-up comedian Jim Gaffigan raises this scenario in his comedy routine. He imagines his retort to that stranger: “Yeah, um, I’d like you to *not!*” Gaffigan jokes that even with some religious leaders, if you walked up to them on the street and said you wanted to talk about Jesus, they’d say, “Easy there, pal, I like to keep work at work. I’m not some freak! Make an appointment to catch me in the office, okay?”

While he uses humor to poke a little fun, Gaffigan brings to light just how powerful the name of Jesus is—it can clear a room or stop you in your tracks. When Jesus is first mentioned in the classroom scene in *God’s Not Dead 2*, one student’s reaction is to immediately text his parents, presumably accusing the teacher of inappropriately sharing her faith. However, Brooke’s reaction to hearing the name of Jesus mentioned in the coffee shop is quite different. Her curiosity is piqued, intensifying her search to find more information, discover answers to her questions, and uncover the truth about Jesus.

Why is Jesus a lightning rod for such strong reactions? Why has He created spirited controversy throughout history, from the first century when Jesus walked the earth until today? Although some perceive Jesus as meek and weak with a few nice things to say, the truth is He confronted the religious leaders of His day, was unafraid to stand counter to the culture, and did not waver when He clashed with Roman authorities. The cause behind all the controversy springs from the bold, audacious claims Jesus made. Not only that, the trouble intensifies when vast numbers of people actually believe Jesus’s claims, devote their lives to Him, and are even willing to die for Him. Other historical figures have influenced and left their mark on the world, but the impact of Jesus over the last twenty centuries is unparalleled.

In the movie, the name of Jesus sets Brooke on a path toward a better understanding of what Jesus claimed, but it also begins the spiritual journey of Grace’s lawyer, Tom. Initially, Tom took on the case for the sheer challenge of it! But as he delves further into his preparation for trial, Tom realizes that the facts about Jesus would play a major role in winning

the case. And the more he learns about Jesus, the more passionate he becomes about knowing the truth surrounding Jesus's claims. This endeavor challenges his preconceived ideas—it quickly becomes personal! At one point, Grace hands him a book, *Man, Myth, Messiah: Answering History's Greatest Question*. The title refers to a question Jesus asked His disciples: “Who do you say I am?” It's a life-changing question because the answer is life changing. Grace knowingly pats Tom on his shoulder and says, “You've got a lot of reading to do!”

CLAIMS ABOUT GOD

Throughout history, people who paid attention to Jesus got their preconceived paradigms challenged and their lives transformed. For instance, Jesus claimed we could address God as “Our Father.” This startled His listeners and broke away from centuries of tradition imagining God to be distant, very high up in His heaven, and the sort of God you wouldn't want to get too close to. If people could envision God as “Father,” they would obtain a frame of reference regarding who God is that could reorient their relationship to Him.

If God is the Father, then we are the children. Jesus claimed we could experience a parent-child relationship with God. And we are invited to call the creator of heaven and earth “Our Father.”

The implication is that God is not distant and uninvolved, but rather He is intimately interested. He cares. He hears. He loves. Just as a parent would care, guide, correct, discipline, and love his or her child, God desires to relate to us in a similar way. Now certainly, our relationship with our earthly parents isn't perfect, which can sometimes twist our understanding of what Jesus is really saying. Yet undoubtedly, there are few relationships that can either wreck us or bring deep, transformational love like our relationship with one of our parents. Jesus taught that God is the most consistent, loving Father one could possibly have.

Holding this image of a father in our minds is only one way of describing the depth of love, care, and concern God has for us. Jesus illustrated the nature of God and our relationship to Him through parables, which affirmed God's protection and provision. Jesus also claimed God's generosity is limitless, that He is relentless in His pursuit of us, and that He desires to be in right relationship with us.

CLAIMS ABOUT HIMSELF

If we made a list of the world's great religious leaders and compared what they said about connecting with God, a striking revelation comes into view.

First of all, it may come as a surprise that Jesus didn't claim to be a religious leader. He did the majority of His work of ministering to people outside of the established religious institutions. In some ways, He was against religion. Religious leaders of His day were, in fact, shocked at His lack of respect for their traditions. He seemed to have a habit of calling them out on their hypocrisy. Jesus knew that religion could be like a dangerous weight hanging overhead, and He wanted to set people free from its heavy burdens.

Secondly, the founders of other religions all had a message about how to live. They spoke about instructions and rules for getting along with others and getting right with God. They elaborated on how to religiously follow a right way of living. For example, Buddha pointed to the Noble Truths and offered this as the way to get aligned with the truth and achieve nirvana. Buddha distinctly made a point to say that he was a mere man, not a god. It is not Buddha to whom you *turn*; it is Buddha to whom you *listen*.¹

On the other hand, Jesus's message time and again was all about following Him, that He Himself was the Way. He not only taught a right way of living, but He claimed He *embodied* the way to live rightly.² Jesus said that He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but instead came to fulfill them. In other words, He didn't just point to His message, He pointed to Himself. Jesus declared, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."³

If that didn't shake up His listeners enough, Jesus also claimed He had the authority to forgive sins. When people heard this, their immediate response was to ask, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"⁴ The religious leaders clearly understood the implication Jesus was making, because they knew only God could forgive sins.

"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father,"⁵ Jesus asserted. Then He removed all doubt as to what He meant when He stated plainly, "I and the Father are one. . . . Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son?'"⁶ Here Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, and the people picked up rocks, ready to stone Him for saying such a thing.

On top of that, He boldly stated that it was through Him that we could receive everlasting life. He didn't merely say where people could go to find eternal life, but He declared that He, and only He, could provide eternal life. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die."⁷

Do the claims of Jesus start to seem outrageous and far-fetched to you?

For many, these claims of Jesus are nothing short of good news. For instance, Desmond Tutu, Archbishop of Cape Town, said, "What a tremendous relief it is to discover that we don't need to prove ourselves to God. That is what Jesus came to say, and for that he got killed. He came to say, 'You don't have to earn God's love. It is not a matter of human achievement. You exist because God loves you already.' That is tremendous stuff—that is the Good News."⁸

Yet many people object that simply making outlandish claims in and of themselves does not make those claims true and real. In his early life, C. S. Lewis was very skeptical regarding the claims of Christianity. "Here comes the real shock," Lewis

wrote in *Mere Christianity*. "Among these Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if He was God!"⁹ Lewis expressed reluctance about Jesus's claims, even deeming Jesus was nothing more than a myth.

So, is there any real proof that Jesus was who He said He was? And what exactly determines the adequacy of that proof?