

JESUS REVOLUTION

HOW GOD TRANSFORMED AN
UNLIKELY GENERATION AND
HOW HE CAN DO IT AGAIN TODAY

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To Greg's grandchildren, Stella, Rylie,
Lucy, Alexandra, and Christopher,
and Ellen's grandchildren, Brielle and Daniel:
may they all experience their own,
personal Jesus Revolution.

Break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the
LORD, until he comes and showers his righteousness on you.

Hosea 10:12

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PROLOGUE

Plunging In

It's 1970.

Google Earth doesn't yet exist, but imagine that it does. You are in outer space. The earth is a round blue marble. Then you zoom in, in real time, on the map of the United States, the West Coast, Southern California. You see the dark blue waters of the Pacific Ocean . . . and as you get closer, you see the long ribbon of the Pacific Coast Highway, the beach towns south of Los Angeles, the furrows of the waves. You see the slender strip of land called the Balboa Peninsula, and you draw close to Corona del Mar. There is the beach, dotted with fire pits. There is an outcropping of cliffs that form a natural amphitheater near the mouth of the harbor. The rocks look wrinkled at this height. The sun is setting.

As you get closer, you see that there is a huge crowd massing the area. At first the people look like ants. They're perched on the rocks, sitting on the sand, standing in the shallows of the rolling water. They have their arms around each other. They seem to be singing.

Beyond the scene on the beach, the world is a chaotic, confused place in 1970. The Vietnam War is raging. Richard Nixon is president of the United States. The nation is convulsing with divisions between young and old, black and white, and hippies and “straights,” meaning conservatives. Young women are burning their bras in the streets; young men are burning their draft cards. Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, and Jim Morrison rule the airwaves, though drugs will take their lives within a year. The hippie movement, born of drugs, sex, and rock and roll, has been turned inside out by disillusionment, bad trips, cynicism, and pain. For many of the flower children, their kaleidoscope colors have faded to shades of gray.

Now you are close enough to the beach to hear the music. There are simple choruses and haunting, melodic harmonies. Something about “one in the Spirit, one in the Lord.” The setting looks like a baptismal scene from the New Testament except for the cutoff shorts of the slender teenaged girls. Most have long hair parted in the middle; some are shivering, sharing a striped towel, and weeping tears of joy, with huge, fresh smiles.

There is a long-haired teenaged boy. He looks like he’s about seventeen. He’s more quiet and reserved than the girls, as if he still carries the burdens of the past dead ends of drinking, drug use, and skeptical despair. A bearded pastor in a flowing tunic, sopping wet, dunks the young man down in the cold water for a long moment. It’s as if he’s been buried.

Then the hippie pastor raises the kid up, and the teenager bursts out of the sea, water streaming from his face and hair and shoulders. His heart is on his face, and he is weeping. Joy. Release. Freedom. The first thing he gasps, though, is strange: “I’m alive!”

1

What Was It and Why Does It Matter?

There can't be any large-scale revolution until there's a personal revolution, on an individual level. It's got to happen inside first.

Jim Morrison

A true revival means nothing less than a revolution, casting out the spirit of worldliness and selfishness, and making God and His love triumph in the heart and life.

Andrew Murray

The hippies who plunged into the Pacific Ocean during that summer sunset in 1970 didn't know they were in a revival. They didn't even know what a revival was. They were not acquainted with Christian vocabulary words like *revival* or *salvation* or *sanctification*.

But thanks to the Beatles, Jim Morrison, and other countercultural icons of the day, the hippies did know about words like *revolution*.

They were part of a youth culture that revolted against what they called “the Establishment,” the mainstream’s reigning values of conformity and the rat race of material success and achievement. They were more interested in achieving higher levels of consciousness through drugs, grooving on the music of the day, and enjoying sexual adventures free from the convention of marriage. They were for the planet, flowers, and everybody just getting along.

This youth revolution was in full swing when a deeper, stronger, and more radical tide began to surge.

It was called the Jesus Revolution, or the Jesus Movement. It swelled among young people—the baby boomer generation—in the US from the late 1960s into the early 1970s. It was the largest public movement of the Holy Spirit in the United States since the celebrated revivals of the nineteenth century. National magazines wrote colorful feature stories about this mass spiritual phenomenon, as did newspapers like the *New York Times*.

More people were baptized during the Jesus Revolution than in any time since people started keeping records. They were flower children, hippies, yippies, druggies, and square church kids. Teenagers who had run away from home got saved on the streets. Junkies got clean. Churches—the ones that would accept barefoot flower children sitting on their carpets and curling their bare toes in the communion cup racks—overflowed with new believers. Bible studies caught fire in coffeehouses in Haight-Ashbury, communes in Greenwich Village, a strip joint converted into a “Christian nightclub”

in San Antonio, and in public high schools, where converted hippies taught Bible studies and druggie students decided to follow Jesus, right on campus. The movement spread into dramatic charismatic renewals in various church traditions and gave birth to Jews for Jesus. Only God knows how many lives the Holy Spirit touched and transformed during that time.

In the first wave of the Jesus Revolution, the converts were mostly hippies who'd been searching for love, spiritual enlightenment, and freedom, and hadn't found it in sex, drugs, and rock and roll.

As these people—called “Jesus freaks” by other hippies—started coming into churches, there was a bit of cognitive dissonance, that psychological discomfort we all feel when we simultaneously hold two contradictory beliefs. To put it plainly, the church people knew they were *supposed* to love people different from themselves, but they found it much easier to do so in theory than in actuality.

Perhaps that's because some of the church folk had mixed cultural values with their “Christian” perspective. Being a Christian somehow had to do with conforming to cultural norms regarding hair length or conservative clothing or sturdy footwear. So while it was great to love hippies as a concept, actually doing so became a challenge for some Christians when they encountered hippies wearing beads and bells strolling barefoot down the aisles of their sanctuaries and then plopping down right next to them in their pews.

The churches that welcomed the hippies grew in grace and vigor; the ones that didn't missed both the boat and the blessing.

Soon the movement spread beyond the long-haired flower children. Soon conservative Christian kids were flashing One

Way hand signs and grooving out on the Word of God, excited about Jesus in a new way.

The Holy Spirit ignited embers of awakening and revival all over the country. Awakening: people who were spiritually dead came to know Jesus and became alive in Him. Revival: Christians who'd lost their "first love" for Christ caught a fresh wind of the Spirit, and were renewed and invigorated in their faith.

Some religious leaders, like Billy Graham and Campus Crusade founder Bill Bright, embraced the Jesus Movement. Their Explo '72 drew eighty thousand kids to the Cotton Bowl in Texas for a five-day festival of Bible study, worship, telling others about their faith, and serving needy people in the surrounding areas.

The Jesus Revolution brought new forms of worship into mainstream experience. Before it, young people in churches had two musical options: old hymns or cheery camp songs. Then, as hippie musicians who came to Jesus applied their talents to writing praise music about Him, Christian teenagers had new music to call their own. The resulting creative explosion—what's known now as contemporary Christian music—changed the face of worship in many churches for decades to come.

Many who came to faith in Christ in those heady days went on to become missionaries, pastors, and lay leaders. They had families. They started all kinds of new churches and parachurch and social justice ministries. Many of the '70s converts who became pastors started churches that grew . . . and grew. Since they'd once been outsiders, the Jesus People generation wanted to make sure their churches weren't just bastions of comfy Christians speaking a language only the

faithful could understand. They welcomed outsiders, whom they called “seekers,” and within a decade or two, mega-churches started popping up, like very large mushrooms, across the United States.

And yes, like anything involving human beings, the Jesus Movement also had its share of flawed characters. Some were like Samson—mightily blessed by God, but then they fell off His wagon. If their paths are not always worth following, their colorful stories are still worth reading. For even when revival wanes and awakenings lull, God is still at work.

Today there’s a growing sense that history has run one of its cycles, and we’re back in ’60s mode. At first glance, today’s young people seem more tied to their iPhones and double-tall soy lattes than they are into renouncing material things, living communally, or marching in the streets like the flower children of old.

But like the hippies, millennials—people born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s—say they are hungry for authenticity, a sense of community, and real care for people who are needy and marginalized. Like the hippies, they’re a bit cynical about big business, big institutions, or organized religion. Bombarded by competing content online for most of their lives, they shy away from advertising, causes, or techniques that feel superficially targeted toward them. They gravitate toward “user-generated content” that feels like it came from a real person, not a brand.

Meanwhile, their phones ping with news alerts all the time, feeding a generalized anxiety about racial unrest, environmental sustainability, gender issues, long-range missiles, terrorism, and a polarized political process full

of haters. Issues like sex trafficking, genocide, starvation, and natural disasters are on their screens and in their faces all the time.

The old baby boomers were the first generation to see body bags coming back from Vietnam on the evening news, and the first actual murders on video and live TV—think the Zapruder film of the assassination of President Kennedy and the live shooting on the news, forty-eight hours later, of alleged assassin Lee Harvey Oswald.

Today's violence is constant, stark, and immediate. We see mass murders at concerts, nightclubs, offices, malls, cafes, churches, and everywhere else in real time. ISIS murders innocent victims online. Suicide bombers blow themselves up in crowds; assassins in trucks mow down pedestrians and bikers. Earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, and fires sweep through communities. People don't dance in the streets with flowers in their hair, benign and blissful. The innocence is gone. We scan crowds, alert for suspicious characters. If you see something, say something. We're all on edge. Studies show that Americans are the most stressed people on the planet. Meanwhile, wars in faraway places drone on. Afghanistan. Iraq. Iran and North Korea threaten. Russia menaces, dreaming of reclaiming its Cold War glory.

There's another harsh parallel with the '60s. After the hopeful, peaceful civil rights marches of the '60s came the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. There were riots in the streets. Today we see ongoing, anguishing racial division. *Time* magazine called the streets of Baltimore, Ferguson, and other racially charged cities a scene from 1968. When our first African American president was elected back in 2008, polls showed that Americans were optimistic about new heights

of racial unity. By the close of Mr. Obama's two terms, those cheerful expectations were gone.

On the political front, it's safe to say that we've lost the ability to have civil discourse among those who hold different points of view. The national "conversation," if you can call it that, has never been uglier, even as the many issues confronting our body politic—like ongoing debt, unemployment, health care, taxes, national security, immigration, and refugee policies—are absolutely daunting.

Spiritually, many young people are fed up with conventional church, political Christianity that is mad at everyone, and the faith-virus of affluenza, today's version of the prosperity gospel. Pew Research studies have found that the "nones"—people who self-identify as atheists or agnostics, as well as those who say their religion is "nothing in particular"—now make up almost 25 percent of US adults. (There are also a lot of Christians, young and old, who call themselves "dones," as in they are done with church, though they still like Jesus, but that's another story.)

Today, 75 percent of young people who grew up in Christian homes and churches are now abandoning their faith as young adults. More than one-third of millennials say they are unaffiliated with any faith, up 10 percentage points since 2007.

People say that they are "spiritual" but not "religious." A lot of them feel like "going to church" is irrelevant. They're impatient with big churches that are more concerned about fellowship groups than helping the poor. The seeker-friendly megachurches of their parents' generation are too slick and programmed; they want something more real, more radical, and more rugged.

As one Christian journalist summed it up,

Millennials have a dim view of church. They are highly skeptical of religion. Yet they are still thirsty for transcendence. But when we portray God as a cosmic buddy, we lose them (they have enough friends). When we tell them that God will give them a better marriage and family, it's white noise (they're delaying marriage and kids or forgoing them altogether). When we tell them they're special, we're merely echoing what educators, coaches, and parents have told them their whole lives. But when we present a ravishing vision of a loving and holy God, it just might get their attention and capture their hearts as well.¹

This is what we all need today, young or old. In a weary, chaotic, selfe-satiated culture, we need a big, ravishing, transcendent, and transformational vision of who God really is. That's what happened fifty years ago. It can happen again today.

This book tells the Jesus Revolution story through the experiences of one person God transformed back in the '70s, one person whose story is unique yet representative of hundreds of thousands of others. His name is Greg Laurie.

Today Greg is primarily known as a West Coast megachurch pastor and a big-arena crusade evangelist. He's one of the "usual suspects" mentioned when members of the media profile well-known pastors or Christian leaders. He's served on Billy Graham's board of directors for years. He's written lots of books; you can hear him on the radio. Perhaps he's better known on the West Coast than in other parts of the country, but many on the East Coast like him too. He's a funny, intense, creative guy. His knees never stop jiggling;

he's full of quirky, pent-up energy. He loves to eat breakfast, lunch, dinner, and anything in between. He works out. He doodles on restaurant tablecloths and has more ideas before breakfast than most of us come up with all day long. He's been studying the Bible and preaching the gospel almost all his life.

If you didn't know Greg Laurie, you might assume he was born into an affirming Christian home that was somewhat like a seminary, that he was homeschooled by a loving mother and cheered on by a godly dad who was probably a pastor himself.

Greg would be the first to say that such a scenario would have been absolutely wonderful. But he came from a far less functional home.

In 1970, Greg was just another California teenager, drifting, doing drugs, and pessimistically hating any type of authority, conformity, or convention. His dad was not a pastor; in fact, Greg did not know who his biological father was until he was well into his forties. Greg's mother was married and divorced seven times. His home of origin was a perpetual briefing on alcohol, casual sex, dysfunction, and distrust. Greg was cynical from the time he was about five years old, a skeptic who had little hope of ever having healthy relationships, let alone finding the life of love, stability, and meaning that he secretly longed for.

So it was a shock—actually, a divine surprise—when Greg Laurie came to know Jesus in 1970 and was swept right into the tide of the Jesus Movement. He didn't know that he was living in an unusual torrent of God's Spirit. He didn't know that the way he and his friends would tell people about Jesus every day—and how those people would enthusiastically

come to faith in Christ—was unusual. He didn't know that being part of a church that welcomed dozens of new believers every week, and baptized thousands of new Jesus People every year, was uncommon. He thought the faith, fervor, and fruit of the Jesus Revolution was just normal Christianity. He and his friends were astonished that they got to be part of it. They were perpetually overwhelmed, in fact, that God's love story had actually included *them*.

So this is an account of some of what God did during the Jesus Revolution of the late '60s and early '70s, seen through one particular lens. As with other movements of God, we will have to wait until we get to Heaven to hear the full, enormous narrative with *all* the stories of the people God so beautifully saved and transformed during that time period, and how their lives, in turn, touched others.²

Our story here is more than just a vintage tale of what God did in a past generation. It's a bit of time travel, or a message in a bottle from an intriguing, long-gone era. And the message is this: *God can do it again*. He can surprise us all with a new season of extraordinary, radical, spine-tingling hope, and a new flood of His Holy Spirit on a new generation.

A new Jesus Movement would not look the same as it did fifty years ago. But in our own unruly times, God can certainly bring powerful revival to His church and an awakening among people who don't yet know Him.

But that is something He tends to do only if people admit they need Him.

The hippies, flower children, and others who came to Jesus back in the '60s were *desperate*. They were willing to go to any lengths, or on any trip, to find what they were looking for. They'd throw off their clothes or their conventions,

longing to break free of sin and shame. And when they heard the gospel—the good news about Jesus Christ, and that He was real and alive and loved the whole world—it blew their minds, to put it in '60s vernacular. Their desperate search was satisfied.

So that's the central question for all of us today. Young or old, are we going through the motions, comfortable and complacent, consuming some brand of cultural churchianity that has little to do with the electrifying gospel of Jesus Christ? Are we really desperate to know God, to embrace the fresh, mysterious, powerful wind of His Holy Spirit?

Revival, after all, is not about human plans, programs, campaigns, or particular denominational movements. It comes from the real revolution that only God can bring.

That word, *revolution*, cuts both ways. It's a paradox.

First, revolution means a sudden, radical, complete change in a structure in favor of a new system.

Think about it in a personal sense. The spiritual revolution means that Jesus touches our lives and radically transforms them from the inside out.

The old allegiances are gone, the old structures torn down and replaced by the fresh presence of His Spirit and the new paths of obedience. Even if we don't happen to have a dramatic experience, when we're saved by grace, the reality in terms of our eternal standing is that it's a new beginning. The past is finished and gone, the new has come. We belong to Jesus and will see Him in Heaven when we die. Boom.

But the revolution that Jesus brings is more than just this sudden, radical new beginning. Revolution also means the act of revolving in a circle, back to a fixed point. It's like the rolling of a wheel, revolving, returning to the same place,

yet moving forward. So the Jesus Revolution, really, is not just a one-time, dramatic upheaval. It is also the process of an ongoing relationship with God. A long obedience in the same direction.

In that continuing journey, we can grow cold, distant, and apathetic. We can lose the fire. Whether you're a pastor or a person on the street, that's the challenge. We all know so many, whether celebrated religious leaders or our friends or ourselves, who've lost that first love of Christ and drifted away.

How do we keep it fresh?

Churches across the country, both large and small, are holding prayer sessions, yearning for revival, with people on their knees crying out, "Oh Lord, please do it again!" Evangelistic, revival-oriented movements are introducing young people today to the Jesus Movement of the late '60s, hosting all-day seminars about what God did then and how revival might come again. Contemporary magazines are posting articles with titles like "What We Can Learn from the Jesus Movement." Christian colleges and universities are bringing in guest professors to teach on the worship music of the Jesus People. Millennials are organizing big conferences that focus on mass awakenings and revivals, seeking a new Jesus Revolution for the twenty-first century.

Again, this isn't just a peace-sign nostalgia fest for old baby boomers. Telling stories of former revivals can help spark repentant and expectant hearts in all who long for a new Jesus Revolution today. As Isaiah 64:5 says, God meets with those who remember His ways.

Maybe some will read this book, at first, for the exotic stories from the '60s. Hopefully those stories will awaken or

affirm a desperate desire in people who are hungry for the same sort of movement of God's Spirit. That's great. But this book is also about the ongoing revolution over the long run, how the wheel of faith turns in all our lives, and the surprising ways in which God can make it new and fresh. So if you come for the history, stay for the more important story of the personal revolution that God can do in you. Today.