

December 7, 2005

Lonnie Frisbee: Hippie Evangelist at the Beginning of the Jesus People Movement



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/pLYAni77260>

Lonnie Frisbee, preaching at Calvary Chapel

A hippie evangelist at the beginning of the Jesus People movement, Lonnie Frisbee was a key figure in the history of both Calvary Chapel and the Vineyard Christian Fellowship.

Although some argue that neither Calvary Chapel nor Vineyard would have existed without Frisbee – until recently, his contribution to these movements was largely ignored because Frisbee struggled with his homosexuality and died in 1993 of AIDS.

“Recently” here is 2005, the year in which the documentary Frisbee: The Life and Death of a Hippie Preacher came out.

Jesus Revolution

Fast-forward to February 2023, when the movie Jesus Revolution will hit the theaters:

Jesus Revolution (also titled *The Jesus Revolution*) is an upcoming American film directed by Jon Erwin and Brent McCorkle and starring Joel Courtney, Anna Grace Barlow, Jonathan Roumie, Kimberly Williams-Paisley, and Kelsey Grammer. The film is scheduled to be released worldwide on February 24, 2023 by Lionsgate. It is based on American author and pastor Greg Laurie and his book *Jesus Revolution* about the Jesus movement in California during the 1970s *Jesus Revolution*, Wikipedia. Last accessed Sunday, February 19, 2023 – 2:17 PM CET

Kelsey Grammer plays Chuck Smith. Joel Courtney appears as Greg Laurie. And Jonathan Roumie as Lonnie Frisbee.

The movie is sure to renew interest in Lonnie Frisbee – decades after he was airbrushed out of the histories of Calvary Chapel and the Vineyard Christian Fellowship.

It will be interesting to see whether Lonnie is portrayed accurately and fairly, or whether he is merely used to boost the reputation of Greg Laurie, on whose book “Jesus Revolution” the movie is based.

Frisbee led a Wednesday night Bible study at Calvary Chapel and the church exploded from 150 to thousands in attendance and eventually became an entire association of churches.





Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/-jb5ZGcnUbA>

Jesus Revolution – “One in The Spirit” – In the 1970s, young Greg Laurie (Joel Courtney) is searching for all the right things in all the wrong places: until he meets Lonnie Frisbee (Jonathan Roumie), a charismatic hippie-street-preacher. Together with Pastor Chuck Smith (Kelsey Grammer), they open the doors of Smith’s languishing church to an unexpected revival of radical and newfound love, leading to what TIME Magazine dubbed a JESUS REVOLUTION.

The Real Lonnie Frisbee

One thing is sure: Just like when Lonnie was still alive and ministering, stories, rumours, and opinions about him abound. For those who did not know him, it’s always been difficult to get to know the real Lonnie Frisbee.

We hope some of these research resources will help you learn more about the man.

Keep in mind that Lonnie himself always told people not to look at him, but to look at Jesus instead.

Lonnie Frisbee: “The First Jesus Freak”

Lonnie Frisbee put the freak in Jesus freak. With his long brown hair, long craggily beard, dusty clothing, scent of Mary Jane and glint of his last LSD trip in his eyes, he showed up out of nowhere, at the height of the '60s, literally on Chuck Smith's doorstep.

Smith was just another conservative Orange County pastor. He'd moved from a small church in Corona to an even smaller one in Costa Mesa, yet had impressively boosted membership from three people to more than 200.

According to a scratchy recording of Smith's voice in a new documentary, the pastor would look at “dirty hippies” and wonder, “Why don't you take a bath?” But his front-porch meeting with Frisbee in 1968 was awash in the wonderful coincidences Christians point to as proof of God working in mysterious ways. The hippie was fresh off an LSD-juiced vision in which God told him he'd turn hordes of young people on to Christ. Smith's wife, Kay, had just had a vision of her own: that her husband's church would reach out to those damn (but not necessarily damned) dirty hippies. “I turned and saw the tears streaming down her face,” Smith says on the recording, “and I could see she was praying.” So he asked his daughter's boyfriend to pull a random hippie off the street, bring him to the pastor's home and let him get inside the Flower Child mindset. Along Fair Drive in Costa Mesa, the boyfriend picked up a hitchhiker with flowing brown hair, flowing scraggily beard and a Bible clutched against his dusty shirt. The random hippie was Lonnie Frisbee.

Before long, the two men bonded. Despite his misgivings about hippie hygiene, Smith was always fascinated by the peace-and-love rhetoric. And this kid's Bible knowledge impressed him. Frisbee saw in Smith a much-desired father figure. They went on to stand side by side off Little Corona beach, dunking thousands of young people in the chilly waters for the most informal and joyous of baptisms. At his Calvary Chapel, Smith taught about the End Times on Monday nights and Frisbee packed in the hippies on Wednesday nights. Church membership skyrocketed. Young people around the land heard about “the hippie preacher in Costa Mesa” who was goofy, brusque and looked as if he's just walked out of the Bible. “People say I look like Jesus,” he once said, “and I can't think of anyone else I'd rather look like.”

He peppered his testimonies with “far out” and “we're blowing people's minds.” Witnesses say Frisbee blew their minds by walking into large crowds, yelling, “Jesus” and suddenly being surrounded by strangers. He'd stop random people on the street and engage them in gentle conversation; pretty soon, they were having long one-on-ones about God. A conservative-Christian intellectual swears that when he was a young man, he saw Lonnie-like Jesus—actually make a blind man see. They call that being “anointed” by God.

His ministries enrolled thousands of kids. Some were so turned on they'd soon set out to become preachers themselves; many today are evangelical pastors at churches around the world. Time and Life magazines ran cover stories in 1971 on the so-called Jesus People—known

in less polite circles as Jesus Freaks; words and images of Frisbee figured prominently in both. People would yell out his name when he walked the streets of Denmark, South Africa and Great Britain.

Lonnie left after about four years as Calvary's unofficial youth pastor and, after a brief time in the Shepherding movement, wound up at the soon-to-become Vineyard Church of Yorba Linda. Same thing happened there: his presence sparked a worldwide movement. Calvary and Vineyard have each propagated about 1,000 churches across the planet. Along for the ride in the early years was Greg Laurie, who was so taken by his mentor Lonnie that he'd dress in the same David Crosby-style faded leather jacket with fringe hanging off the arms. Laurie is more conservatively attired these days as he leads Riverside's Harvest Church, whose annual Harvest Crusades pack stadiums nationwide like mainstream rock tours.

But if you were to take a look at the written histories of Calvary, Vineyard and Harvest, you'd find barely any—if any—mention of Lonnie Frisbee. Vineyard doesn't even cite him by name, referring only to "the young man." Three local Christians I've asked about the original hippie preacher at Calvary assumed I was referring to Smith, as if the bald-headed Christian firebrand had been the preacher with the flowing brown mane in those old news photos. Mentioning Lonnie to Laurie is said to be verboten.

Besides inciting excitement, Frisbee could be volatile, argumentative and disrespectful toward authority. But that is not what has made him the invisible man of God. Turns out he was a special kind of sinner. Christians could overlook his past drug use, but at age 17—the year he accepted Christ—Lonnie was already immersed in Laguna Beach's gay scene. He succumbed to AIDS in 1993 at age 43.

"It's like John the Baptist walked through Southern California," says Lake Forest historian David Di Sabatino, "and nobody wants to talk about him because he died of AIDS." [...] *Matt Coker, The First Jesus Freak, Orange County Weekly, Mar. 4-10, 2005. Subtitled, "A pot-smokin', LSD-droppin' seeker turned Calvary Chapel into a household name. So why is Lonnie Frisbee missing from church history?"*

The foundation was not Biblical.

Chuck Smith has been called "the father of Contemporary Worship."

But he started Calvary Chapel on the basis of a **false** "prophecy."



Chuck Smith's wife had a "prophecy" that God was going to use Frisbee in a great revival.





Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/h0-r4XbTJrw>

Lonnie Frisbee on a television program with Kathryn Kuhlman. The man who introduces him is Duane Pederson.

Lonnie Frisbee and Calvary Chapel

Researcher David Di Sabatino is a recognized authority on the Jesus People movement. In his thesis on the history of the movement – which formed the basis of his book, The Jesus People Movement: An Annotated Bibliography and General Resource, he writes:



Frisbee performed "signs and wonders," particularly "ministering" spirit slaying.

The alignment of the internationally known Calvary Chapel church with the Jesus People Movement is centered around the work of two contrasting images. Calvary Chapel was founded on the alliance of pastor-teacher, Chuck Smith Jr. and hippie evangelist Lonnie Frisbee.

Chuck Smith grew up in a stable and loving family who became Christians as a result of the miraculous healing of Chuck's older sister. Upon entering Los Angeles Bible College in 1946, Chuck fulfilled a youth camp decision to enter the ministry. Taking a number of pastorates over the years, Smith speaks of enduring "17 years of denominational discomfort" where he believes that "God prepared him for what was about to happen." In 1965, after moving to a small church in Costa Mesa, Smith stated he was given a prophecy that he would "become a shepherd over many flocks. . . to the point where our gathering place would not be adequate to contain all of the people." In 1969, the tiny church had outgrown its facilities undertaking a building project. They erected a chapel on the border between Santa Ana and Costa Mesa. It was shortly before the building project that Smith would be introduced to Lonnie Frisbee.

Frisbee's background was very different than Smith's. Abused and sexually molested as a child, Frisbee carried this internal pain throughout his Christian life. Though raised in a Christian home, he found solace in the California drug subculture. A promising art student at the San Francisco Art Academy, Frisbee was initially drawn into the Jesus People Movement by members of the Haight's Living Room mission. His subsequent reaffirmation of an adolescent confession of faith provided the movement with one of its most pivotal and controversial characters. Lonnie Frisbee was the epitome of the biblical motif of strength through weakness. Although he could barely read or write, he is remembered by his peers as "someone who accomplished more with less ability, than anyone."

Frisbee's insistent Pentecostal orientation put him at odds with some of his friends and pastors at Calvary Chapel. Some of his critics state that he was concerned solely with obtaining conversions insisting that converts 'seek out' the baptism of the Holy Spirit which Frisbee believed was necessarily accompanied by the evidence of speaking in tongues. His physical appearance was also a direct contrast to Chuck Smith's large-frame. Frail and soft-spoken (unless talking about Jesus), he was a caricature of the Sunday-school images of Jesus. His charismatic appeal to those in the counterculture complimented the bible-teaching foundation of Pastor Smith. Those closely associated with the origins of Calvary Chapel state that 'Frisbee brought them in, and Chuck taught them.' Together, they forged an uneasy but dynamic twosome that propelled Calvary Chapel into a worldwide ministry.

Chuck Smith states that his original interaction with the hippies came as a result of his wife, Kay, feeling a strong attraction to the 'long-haired kids' that hung out at Huntington Beach. He confesses his "initial revulsion at the hippie movement" which was "miles away from me in their thinking and attitudes." As he began to see a number of the hippies accept Jesus into their lives, Chuck's heart began to change. He desired to make a connection with the hippies:

So, Late one evening came a knock at the door and here was John [Nicholson] with a long-haired, bearded young man with bells on his feet and flowers in his hair. A real live hippie! 'Chuck meet Lonnie.' 'Hi Lonnie.' I extended my hand and welcomed him into the house. As we began to talk, I was not at all prepared for the love that this young man would radiate. His love of Jesus and his Spirit-filled personality lit up the room. We asked him to please stay with us for a few days.

Though there are some discrepancies in the story of their meeting, Smith did take Frisbee under his wing and urged him to be Calvary Chapel's link into the hippie culture. Smith asked the young hippie:

If you could help John and a few of us share Christ with the hippies on the beach. . . I believe they would respond. You speak their language and you know better than any of us how, what and why they think and feel the way they do. Furthermore you could stay with us for a couple of weeks and help me understand what makes them tick.

When invited to share about his experiences in the drug culture Frisbee told the Calvary Chapel congregation:

. . . how he began using drugs in high school. He so zealously believed this was the answer to life's problems he turned on his brothers and most of his friends to drugs. . . 'But all that really didn't satisfy me. . . 'I studied eastern philosophy and religion. I went through Haight-Ashbury when it was supposed to be where it was at. And then one day some brothers from the House of Acts commune told me where it was really at. And I accepted Jesus Christ. And man, it's true, Jesus is where it's at!'

Frisbee took to the streets with a zealotry that betrayed a genuine concern for the youth of the drug culture. Having met John Higgins (who would later go on and lead the Shiloh Ranches), these two became the link to the formation of communal houses under the guidance and support of Calvary Chapel. Higgins had become a Christian without any outside contact, reading through his Gideon bible two years prior to meeting any other Christians. In the mid-sixties Higgins moved to California in search of excitement. Ironically, he accepted Jesus during an effort to disprove Christianity. At the time, Higgins believed that he was the only one that truly understood this profound message, having stumbled across it accidentally. It would be two years before he came into contact with Lonnie Frisbee and Chuck Smith:

. . . and it was here that the leader [Higgins] received his training in a particular interpretation of Scripture. The experience of the leader of 'baptism of the Holy Spirit' or 'speaking in tongues' (glossolalia) also took place under Smith's tutelage, and it was Smith who later encouraged the leader to serve as elder in the first Christian commune opened and supported in part by Calvary Chapel.

The History of the Jesus Movement, David Di Sabatino, thesis finished during the 1993-94 semester year at McMaster Divinity College (McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario,

Lonnie Frisbee: Homosexuality, Marriage and Mumford

Lonnie Frisbee struggled with homosexuality, but married a woman.

Lonnie Frisbee was like an Old Testament prophet walking out of the pages of the Bible, landing smack in the middle of the 1960s. Though some, including myself have compared him to a single prophetic figure, he was more of a composite combining the eccentricities of Ezekiel, the frailties of Samson and the miraculous powers evidenced within the Elijah/Elisha narratives.

While still a teenager, his picture was displayed throughout a number of prominent magazines (including *Time*, *Life* and *Bunte*) during the media's yearlong coverage of the "Jesus movement" in 1971. Thousands of people came to faith under his ministry and two of the largest evangelical denominations to emerge in the last 30 years bear his spiritual imprint. Lonnie Frisbee is so integral to the histories of both the Calvary Chapel and Vineyard church movements that it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that none of us would have ever heard of pastor Chuck Smith or "signs & wonders" teacher John Wimber had it not been for Lonnie's influence. And while many of those that were there openly corroborate this statement, Lonnie has not received the attention he deserves.

Sadly, there is a tragic element in Lonnie's life, since he is no longer with us, succumbing to the ravages of the AIDS virus on March 12, 1993. Lonnie Frisbee was very much like Robert Duvall's character in the movie *The Apostle*, a man who had the power to inspire others through to a dramatic God encounter, but one whose personal struggles ultimately got the best of him..

Who was Lonnie Frisbee? David Di Sabatino, author of [The Jesus People Movement](#) and director of the movie, ["Frisbee: The Life and Death of a Hippie Preacher"](#)

Mesmerized by a charismatic Jesus hippie named Lonnie Frisbee, Calvary Chapel, led by Chuck Smith, baptized thousands of hippies. They kept their long hair, immodest clothes, rock & roll, and sensual party thinking.



Frisbee was born and raised in Costa Mesa. His father ran off with a neighborhood woman when Lonnie was young. His brother claims Lonnie was molested by a baby sitter at age eight. [...]

His mother eventually remarried a man with children of his own, but Lonnie did not get along with his stepfather or his blended family. He ran away from home at 15—the same year he and a buddy entered into the underground gay scene in Laguna Beach. [...]

Like a lot of kids searching for meaning, Lonnie tried mysticism and the occult but found them unfulfilling. That led him to the Bible. [...]

He migrated to San Francisco and soon met up with a merry band of hippie Christians. [...]

One day, Frisbee decided he wanted to go back to Orange County, find a girl he knew and bring her back up to the Bay Area.

Like Lonnie, Connie Bremer had a troubled upbringing; to this day, she blames her mother for making her feel worthless. Bremer dabbled in drugs and prostitution to numb the pain. She appreciated that Lonnie made her feel special, wanted—although she says she never had romantic feelings toward him. They lived together for a year in a big house the hippie Christians shared in the Frisco suburb Novato, but she can't remember ever so much as holding his hand. She does remember one oddball she talked to for four straight days: Charlie Manson.

Despite their lack of physical intimacy, Frisbee told everyone he was going to marry Bremer. She rejected him first. She was among the very few people who knew of Lonnie's gay dalliances. Fuming at the rebuke, Frisbee stayed away from her. Bremer didn't think "I could be loved," but also did not want to feel rejection again, so she married Frisbee despite her misgivings. [...]

Lonnie and Connie moved back to Orange County, and that fateful meeting with [Chuck] Smith came not long after. During his first testimony at Calvary, Frisbee mentioned he'd rejected the homosexual lifestyle. A star was born again. [...]

As Lonnie's star rose, Connie's dimmed. She became lonelier than ever. She rarely saw her husband and felt like a slave. She was about ready to pack her bags when she confided in Smith. He told her that for someone with a gift like Frisbee's, God must come first, the ministry second and his family third—and that she'd just have to deal with it. But when Frisbee informed Florida pastor Bob Mumford about his marital problems, Mumford told him Smith had it all wrong, that Frisbee needed to get his house in order. The leader of the Shepherding movement,

a Pentecostal offshoot that holds a central authority figure should decide what is right and wrong for their flock, Mumford offered Frisbee a job—but only if he would spend his first year on sabbatical “knitting” his relationship with Bremer. Frisbee gave his year. Then he moved back to California. Alone.

The Calvary folks felt betrayed by Frisbee’s departure, and Smith had always had a problem with the whole Pentecostal thing. But he agreed over the phone to hire Frisbee back—in a reduced capacity. The former hippie preacher showed up to work looking totally different, with a styled haircut, a closely cropped beard and a three-piece suit. It didn’t work. Frisbee decided to move on.

Matt Coker, The First Jesus Freak, Orange County Weekly, Mar. 4-10, 2005. Subtitled, “A pot-smokin’, LSD-droppin’ seeker turned Calvary Chapel into a household name. So why is Lonnie Frisbee missing from church history?”

In an interview published by Christianity Today, Peter T. Chattaway asked David Di Sabatino:

Considering the role that his homosexuality plays in his story, it is striking that we don’t see any firsthand interviews about that.

Di Sabatino: This was a tough thing. I brought to light some things that not a lot of people knew. I’ve been in rooms with his family where I’ve had to tell them that he defined himself as gay, way back. Nobody knew that. There’s been some tense moments behind the scenes.

Now I love these people, and one of the things I wanted was for them to give the thumbs up to this story, but there were times when we battled. I would go over to his friends’ house and play this thing and they would reel, because I had things from Mel [White, an evangelical author turned gay activist] or Troy [Perry, a bishop with the pro-gay Metropolitan Community Church], and they would say, “How could you do this?” But by the time we screened it at Set Free Church, earlier this year in February, I think things had calmed down.

The hardest thing has been with some of the women who had a really close relationship with him, not in a physical sense but in a brother/sister sense. Lonnie admitted a lot of things to them, but I think he stopped short of telling them a lot of his sexual dysfunction because he didn’t want to hurt them, or because he didn’t want to be hurt. His early testimony at Calvary Chapel was that he had come out of the homosexual lifestyle, but he felt like a leper because a lot of people turned away from him after that, so he took it out of his testimony—and I think that’s an indictment of the church.

Peter T. Chattaway, Documentary of a Hippie Preacher, Christianity Today, April 19, 2005

Later, in the same interview:

Lonnie is not the poster child for gay Christianity. That would be a horrific thing to do to his memory. Voltaire said history is playing a pack of dirty tricks on the dead—turning Lonnie into a “gay preacher” would be a horrible thing to do to him. But neither is he this kind of Damascus-Road, I-once-was-gay-and-turned-away-from-this-lifestyle guy. He struggled.

Peter T. Chattaway, Documentary of a Hippie Preacher, Christianity Today, April 19, 2005

Interestingly, Lonnie Frisbee himself wrote the following in Book Two of his autobiography:

As far as the allegations that I am a homosexual, I will emphatically say right here, up front that I have **never** lived the gay lifestyle. At the same time, I have a ton of compassion for people who have been drawn into that world. They are some of the most interesting, creative, and gifted people. It’s a huge and controversial subject, but I have my personal experience and have witnessed many others who have walked down that road. I have also seen much of the fruit of a life “coming out of the closet.” It’s usually not a pretty picture once you get past the thin veneer covering the brokenness of a very hurting person. I also have the revelation from the Holy Spirit and the Word of God that homosexuality is a counterfeit. Don’t believe the lie of a third sex, you know: male, female, and homosexual.

Lonnie Frisbee, The Great Commission

Lonnie Frisbee and the Vineyard

After leaving Calvary Chapel, Lonnie Frisbee joined the then fledgling Vineyard movement.



In 2012 Greg Laurie said that Frisbee and Smith were the dynamite that founded the Jesus Movement.
“Frisbee was the nitro to your glycerin.”

[S]pringing from under the authority of the Calvary Chapel church was the establishment of the Vineyard church through the leadership of Kenn Gulliksen. Gulliksen had been chosen and ordained by Chuck Smith to start another Calvary Chapel church as a sister church to the original church in Costa Mesa. However, in 1973 Gulliksen began to orient his ministry towards a more charismatic outline bringing him into direct confrontation with Smith who was wary of an overemphasis on spiritual manifestations. Gulliksen decided that it would be best to leave the Calvary Chapel fold and start out on his own.

Beginning in the home of Chuck Girard (lead singer of the rock group Love Song), Gulliksen started a weekly bible study. Eventually, that bible study grew into a large number of participants fostering the establishment of other weekly bible studies throughout the Southern California region. Within a year, Gulliksen had twelve to thirteen simultaneous (and well attended) bible studies in place. Realizing that they had the beginnings of a small church, the group leaders decided that they would hold Sunday meetings. Initially, because they didn't have a church building, they met on the beach at Santa Monica for an entire year, having church "as the waves crashed in the background."

Taking the name 'Vineyard Christian Fellowship,' the group soon numbered a thousand. Gulliksen continued developing local congregations until there were five thriving Vineyard fellowships throughout Southern California all loosely connected under the 'Vineyard' title.

On Mothers' Day 1978 [AI: Incorrect. It was 1980], hippie evangelist Lonnie Frisbee was hesitantly invited to preach at the Yorba Linda Calvary Chapel by Pastor John Wimber. Having been "flitting to and fro throughout the body of Christ" since his departure from Chuck Smith's Calvary Chapel, Frisbee had reinforced his beliefs that the operation and manifestation of spiritual gifts were a necessity in the life of every believer. Author John White offers the following narrative that followed the closing of that momentous service:

. . . the young man [Frisbee] invited younger members of the congregation who wished to live their lives under the power of the Holy Spirit to come forward. . . .The congregation was predominantly youthful and a large number responded. The speaker waited until they stood before him on the floor of the gymnasium. . . . Then he prayed a brief and simple prayer, confessing the Church's failure to give place to the Holy Spirit. He concluded his prayer with the words, 'Come, Holy Spirit!' What followed was electrifying. . . the young people fell on the floor, some crying out noisily. One young man seemed to be flung forward in such a way that his mouth was jammed over the microphone. Since he was speaking in tongues, his 'jibberish' screeched through the public address system. Pandemonium erupted. The young preacher became agitated, shouting excitedly, 'More, Lord. More!' At one point, raising his hand he shouted, 'Jesus is Lord.' The people his hand faced fell untidily around the bleachers.

Afterwards, a number of believers reported a "trickle of miraculous healings that eventually became a flood." Amazed at what was transpiring before his eyes, Wimber talked about the phenomenon with Smith who remained steadfast on downplaying the emphasis on experience:

About this time, Wimber's ministry became more focused on 'signs and wonders' than Smith's. Wimber dropped the name 'Calvary Chapel' and approached Gullikson [sic] about his church becoming a 'Vineyard.' Gulliksen not only agreed but turned the entire Vineyard movement over to Wimber.

Under the aggressive leadership of Wimber, the Vineyard movement has rapidly expanded. Wimber's main congregation, located in Anaheim, grew to over 5,000 members by 1983 and has established over 300 churches throughout the United States and Canada. Along with the Calvary Chapel organization, the Vineyard is one of the most prominent institutions to emerge from the Jesus People Movement.

The History of the Jesus Movement, David Di Sabatino, thesis finished during the 1993-94 semester year at McMaster Divinity College (McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada)

John Wimber recounts – in typical Wimber style – what happened when Lonnie Frisbee asked the Holy Spirit to come on Mother's Day in 1980. The resulting outpouring of the Spirit proved to be hugely significant in the birth of a new movement called the Vineyard. [Hear Lonnie's full sermon that day.](#)

But his Vineyard stay was short. It's unclear how long Wimber, who died in 1997, had been on to Frisbee's secret. Chuck Smith Jr. says he was having lunch with Wimber one day when he asked how the pastor reconciled working with a known homosexual like Frisbee. Wimber asked how the younger Smith knew this. Smith said he'd received a call from a pastor who'd just heard a young man confess to having been in a six-month relationship with Frisbee. Wimber called Smith the next day to say he'd confronted Frisbee, who openly admitted to the affair and agreed to leave. But there are indications Wimber was already having Frisbee tailed before the lunch with Smith.

Matt Coker, [The First Jesus Freak](#), Orange County Weekly, Mar. 4-10, 2005. Subtitled, "A pot-smokin', LSD-droppin' seeker turned Calvary Chapel into a household name. So why is Lonnie Frisbee missing from church history?"

In an interview with Peter T. Chattaway, David Di Sabatino says:

Both the Calvary Chapel people and the Vineyard people have come back to me to point to books where Lonnie's been mentioned, but I'm careful to say in the movie that his influence has not been properly contextualized. I don't think putting his name in one of the lines in a book means anything. There was a concerted effort not to talk about Lonnie. I think John Wimber went through a lot of sexual scandal in his church that freaked him out, in the early parts, and to a large extent, he went through this kind of scorched-earth theory with regard to Lonnie and another guy named Blaine Cook — tapes were erased and so on.

Now, to his credit, Wimber went on to found Desert Stream ministry, which is one of the great ministries to gay and lesbian people in the last 20 years. I think the failure, with regard to what happened to Lonnie and Blaine, spawned this reaction which culminated in the Vineyard being at the forefront of ministry to gays and lesbians, to people that were struggling with sexual addiction. So when I parse Lonnie's story and say, "Okay, they failed in certain respects," that doesn't mean that they didn't then turn around and keep making these mistakes.

But that's another story. I'm interested in Lonnie's story, and they did contribute to his spiraling out of control, because they did treat him with contempt and they did spurn him. How much blame should his mentors shoulder when they said to Lonnie, "You're not welcome here, you're not one of us"? I don't want to let Lonnie off the hook, but what does that kind of treatment do to a person who's already hurt? My intention is not to smear these guys, but I think in this instance, they did some things that were worthy of a rap on the knuckles.

Peter T. Chattaway, Interview with David Di Sabatino, FilmChat, Patheos, April 19, 2005

Lonnie Frisbee: The Life and Death of a Hippie Preacher

Researcher David Di Sabatino is the author of The Jesus People Movement: An Annotated Bibliography and General Resource – the standard work on the movement. He is also the director of a documentary about Lonnie Frisbee:

"With his long brown hair, long craggily beard, dusty clothing, scent of Mary Jane [marijuana] and glint of his last LSD trip in his eyes, he showed up on Chuck Smith's doorstep" (Matt Coker, *OC Weekly*, March 2005).



Thirty-eight-year-old Di Sabatino never met the hippie preacher but kept hearing Lonnie Frisbee's name while doing research on the Jesus People movement for a planned book. As the author dug deeper into the many complex layers of Frisbee's life, he realized his story deserved something bigger than just another religious book "that'd be read by 100 to 200 people, including my parents." After 10 years of "sitting on the story" to make sure he'd nailed it, Di Sabatino recently unveiled an excellent new documentary, *Frisbee: The Life and Death of a Hippie Preacher*.

[...]

Now comes Di Sabatino's one-hour, 45-minute documentary—filled with rare footage, an amazing soundtrack and more revelations than you can fit in, well, the Book of Revelations—to set the record straight. Frisbee should be remembered not as the ultimate sinner, the filmmaker believes, but rather the modern-day equivalent of flawed biblical figures such as Samson, King David or John the Baptist. Or Robert Duvall's preacher in *The Apostle*.

Frisbee: The Life and Death of a Hippie Preacher shows a nationally recognized theologian admitting that—without a doubt—Frisbee was at the root of the mammoth growth of two of the largest evangelical Christian denominations to emerge in the past 30 years. Gulliksen, the Vineyard co-founder, and other insiders appear onscreen to confirm that Frisbee has been unjustly written out of Calvary's and Vineyard's church histories.

"I think when we go to heaven, Lonnie won't be the one who was held to account," says David Owen, pastor of Malibu Christian Center. "We are going to be held to account for the way we treated a brother."

But the unlikeliest hero to emerge in the film is Chuck Smith Jr.

"Lonnie's misfortune is he got caught," says Junior, Capo Beach Calvary Church's pastor, "because there are a lot of charismatic homosexual ministers—right now. We need to find a way in the body of Christ to find and love these people and minister."

And on Frisbee's bitterness: "I think he was entitled to it. I think my dad and John [Wimber] were like father figures, but fathers who rejected him. That had to be very painful for him, and I think it is part of the tragedy of his life. . . . My dad says these hippies had nowhere to go. You can say that about drug-dealing, free-sex, rock-&-roll hippies but not say that about homosexuals? If the church says to anyone, 'You can't come here,' where are they supposed to go to find Jesus?"

Smith Jr.'s frankness did not surprise Di Sabatino. "He is one of the bright lights of that movement," he said. "He knows his dad is a good man who has done a lot of good things. In this instance, he knows his dad has to come to the fore and say, 'I failed Lonnie in some respects.' So does Greg Laurie. So do they all."

Matt Coker, The First Jesus Freak, Orange County Weekly, Mar. 4-10, 2005. Subtitled, "A pot-smokin', LSD-droppin' seeker turned Calvary Chapel into a household name. So why is Lonnie

Frisbee missing from church history?”

Trailer for Frisbee, The Life and Death of a Hippie Preacher

The critically acclaimed documentary about the life of evangelist Lonnie Frisbee is now available to rent or buy.

Imagine if John the Baptist came of age during the 1960s counter culture, the charisma of Jim Morrison flowing from the mantle of an Old Testament prophet. Meet Lonnie Frisbee, a seeker turned Jesus freak evangelist who compelled thousands towards a profession of Christian faith. It was during a trip into a canyon that Frisbee claimed that God gave him a vision of his future as an influential evangelist to the hippie generation.

Four years later the vision would be fulfilled as pictures of Lonnie baptizing teenage converts were splashed across the pages of Time and Life magazines forever celebrating him as an icon of the Jesus movement. Despite the stories of spiritual prowess that surround his life, his enduring struggles overwhelmed him. And even though he was the charismatic sparkplug igniting the rise of two worldwide denominations (Calvary Chapel & Vineyard), his name has all but been removed from their histories.

Frisbee: The Life and Death of a Hippie Preacher is the powerful story revealing the risk-taking nature of God, aligning himself with the most unlikely of characters as if to send out the message (yet again) that everyone is invited to participate.

“Frisbee” recounts the life of a radical hippie turned Christian evangelist whose call into the ministry came while involved in the Laguna Beach homosexual scene. Even though he was the spark who propelled two of the largest evangelical denominations in the last thirty years into existence, he was treated with contempt throughout his career because of his sexuality. What do you do when the Jesus freak who starts your church dies from AIDS? Simple. Erase him from history.

About the Film

Lonnie Frisbee Unscripted: Good friend John Ruttkay’s Insights

Lonnie Frisbee Unscripted, by John Ruttkay

John Ruttkay, who was a good friend of Lonnie Frisbee, gives a first hand account and testimony regarding Lonnie Frisbee and the Jesus Movement.

In the video, Ruttkay also reads some portions from Lonnie’s third book, “Set Free.”

Rent or Buy: Frisbee, the Life and Death of a Hippie Preacher, at Amazon.com

A Personal Reflection on Lonnie Frisbee

Recently we received, via our [Apologetics Index Contact Form](#), a message from someone who said he visited this website to, in his words, “*get the dirt on Lonnie Frisbee.*”

What a terrible attitude — and that from someone who claims to be a Christian!

I met Lonnie Frisbee the few times he spoke and ministered at the *Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Pacific Beach* (San Diego).

I remember at the time everyone had an opinion or two about the man. Those opinions ranged from, let’s say, over-the-top positive to over-the-top negative. There were those who were in awe of Lonnie to the point of infatuation. There were others seemingly more familiar with his sins than with their own. (And doesn’t the Bible have something to say about those whose sins are forgiven, but who in turn refuse to forgive others?)

There was a definite buzz of excitement when Lonnie came to speak. To hear people talk it seemed many simply showed up in the hopes of catching Lonnie doing or saying something sensational. Others were there with the clear intention to gather evidence against him. But yes, there appeared to be a majority who just expected to to see and hear the Lord minister.

I will not recount details of what I heard and saw Lonnie say and do while he ministered. But I will say that I saw a loving, compassionate man who passionately and powerfully ministered while God’s Holy Spirit showed up to minister in various ways to various people.

Was it good? Yes, most of the time.

Was it messy? Yes, at times.

Regardless, ministry took place and countless lives were positively affected.

Listen, John Wimber knew what he was talking about when he said, “Church isn’t about being neat and tidy; that’s what the graveyard is for. Life is oftentimes found in mess. The nursery is messy and noisy but that’s where all the life is!”

There were those who, at the time or later, felt it necessary to let me know why they thought Lonnie should not have been allowed to minister. I just asked whether they were not familiar enough with their Bibles to know that God has a long track record of using flawed men and women to deliver his perfect words and gifts.

Yes, there is a time and a place to evaluate preachers, teachers, denominations, ministries, and organizations. That is what we, among others, do here at *Apologetics Index*.

In fact, we teach Christians to learn how to discern the good from the bad. But discernment includes knowing that you don’t throw out the baby with the bath water.

Another thing that comes to mind when I hear people talk about Lonnie (and boy, do we get mail on this subject), is that many Christians are not at all familiar with Grace and Mercy. I think that goes a long way to explaining why so many Christians whinge so much when it comes to evaluating others, while their own lives are so dreadfully free of powerful ministry in word and deed.

That said, I believe that when Lonnie died he heard the Lord tell him, Well done, good and faithful servant!

Research Resources on Lonnie Frisbee

Read about our approach to research resources

Our color code key

Articles about Lonnie Frisbee

The First Jesus Freak: A pot-smokin', LSD-droppin' seeker turned Calvary Chapel into a household name. So why is Lonnie Frisbee missing from church history? By Matt Coker, Orange County Weekly, Vol. 10 No. 26 March 4 – 10, 2005

Ears on Their Heads, But They Don't Hear: Spreading the real message of Frisbee. By Matt Coker, Orange County Weekly, Vol. 10 No. 32 April 15 – 21, 2005 – A follow-up to the above story.

After publishing the March 4 cover story “The Passion of the Hippie: Remember the first Jesus freak because Calvary Chapel won't,” which was based on Lake Forest historian David Di Sabatino's documentary Frisbee: The Life and Death of a Hippie Preacher, one of the film's heroes contacted the Weekly. Late minister Lonnie Frisbee's former wife, Connie Bremer-Murray, initially wanted nothing more than extra copies of the article, but that led to an e-mail conversation, which soon included Di Sabatino, about her true feelings about the film, the cover story and Frisbee's legend.

The Long Strange Trip of Lonnie Frisbee, by Greg Laurie

The Alternative Jesus: Psychedelic Christ, [Also at Archive.Today] TIME Magazine, June 21, 1971. Not about Lonnie Frisbee — and does not even mention him. But this is the infamous TIME Magazine cover story about the Jesus People movement. Great for context. View the cover.

Books

Not By Might Nor By Power: The Jesus Revolution, by Lonnie Frisbee.

In the last few years of his life, Lonnie became involved with Freedom Crusade, ministering at home church meetings alongside Jill Austin and continuing to spread the gospel through international missions.

Prior to his death in 1993, Lonnie asked Roger Sachs, founder of Freedom Crusade and a close friend, to ghostwrite his life story. Together they recorded hundreds of hours of audio and video testimonies to ensure that the stories of God's working would be preserved for generations to come. The *Not by Might, Nor by Power* book series is the personal, compelling result of their collaboration, covering the life of this powerful minister of the gospel.

"This book is essential to understanding what we know as the Jesus movement." Kenn Gulliksen, Founder of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship.

Listen to John Ruttkay, one of Lonnie's best friends, talk about Lonnie, and read portions from Book Three: Set Free

In Book One, *The Jesus Revolution*, Lonnie opens up about the brokenness that marked his early life, his experimentation with drugs and different forms of spirituality, and his radical conversion to Christianity. After beginning his groundbreaking ministry amid the craziness of the Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco, Lonnie heads south to minister alongside Chuck Smith at a small church called Calvary Chapel. A major revival occurs among the youth in Southern California, resulting in thousands of salvations around the world during this cultural phenomenon known as the Jesus People movement.

In Book Two, *The Great Commission*, Lonnie embarks on a mission trip to Central and South America, Israel, Europe, and Africa, experiencing a new level of the Holy Spirit's power and anointing. In 1980 Lonnie then dramatically shakes things up back home in America and helps ignite what is known today as the Vineyard Movement. Through interviews with first-hand witnesses, close friends, and the words of Lonnie himself, readers can follow Lonnie around the world as he goes to the nations for Jesus.

In Book Three, *Set Free*, Lonnie continues his story after the dramatic events in *The Great Commission*, transparently describing the breakthroughs and setbacks of the last ten years of his life and ultimately his journey from brokenness to restoration. Over twenty-five years after his death, Lonnie has left us with a powerful legacy that continues to impact the world, and this closing volume is a testament to the mercy and grace of God that marked his life and is available to everyone.

As Lonnie put it, "My story has really become a roadmap to healing, not only for me, but for all who would open their hearts and souls to a mighty, loving touch of God."

Book descriptions at Amazon.com

[The Jesus People Movement: An Annotated Bibliography and General Resource](#), By David Di Sabatino. Note that Sabatino himself recommends [God's Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America](#), by Larry Eskridge, as a more readable resource (as opposed to his own bibliography).

Videos about Lonnie Frisbee

[Lonnie Frisbee & Birth of Calvary Chapel and Vineyard Churches](#). Robert Ricciardelli interviews Chuck Smith Jr. Part 1/2. [Part 2](#).

About this Post

This post about Lonnie Frisbee was first published in 2005. It is maintained by [Anton Hein](#), who [met and saw Lonnie Frisbee minister](#) at the Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Pacific Beach. The post was last updated on Sunday, February 26, 2023 – 11:39 PM CET.

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