

**“Soul Surfer” starring AnnaSophia Robb, Helen Hunt, Dennis Quaid, Carrie Underwood, 2011, PG, 106 minutes**

### **Major themes:**

- Faith
- Family
- Overcoming
- Perseverance
- Courage
- Risk
- Kindness

### **Background info:**

The 1960s term "soul surfer" has been used to describe everyone from die-hard boarders who quit their day jobs, to beach bums who only *think* they can handle a wave.

The movie is set shortly after the Dec 26<sup>th</sup>, 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake, the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest ever recorded on a seismograph and longest in duration (just under 10 minutes). The earthquake triggered a series of devastating tsunamis along the coasts of most landmasses bordering the Indian Ocean, killing over 230,000 people in 14 countries, one of the deadliest natural disasters in recorded history. Indonesia was the hardest-hit country, followed by Sri Lanka, India, and Thailand.

The movie was filmed on the Hawaiian island of Kauai. One possible meaning of this word is “place around the neck,” referring to how a father would carry a favorite child.

The shark that attacked Bethany Hamilton was a 14ft tiger shark, which is a solitary, mostly nocturnal hunter. Its diet includes a wide variety of prey:

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crustaceans, fish, seals, birds, squid, turtles, sea snakes, dolphins and other smaller sharks. The tiger shark is considered a near threatened species due to finning and fishing by humans.

Bethany Hamilton and some of her family members had cameos in the movie. In the church scene her parents are behind Dennis Quaid and Helen Hunt and her sister in law sings in the worship band. In Thailand while the mission crew are serving food, Bethany walks across the screen holding a large box. The dog in the movie is actually Bethany Hamilton's own dog, Hana.

AnnaSophia Robb and Dennis Quaid had to learn to surf for the movie, but Helen Hunt was already an amateur surfer. AnnaSophia trained with Bethany Hamilton's actual coach. The real Bethany Hamilton provided most of the surf double work for her character.

Bethany Hamilton's father said that a movie executive lobbied to reduce the movie's Christian elements so the film could appeal more to non-Christian audiences. Edits were made to have the words "Holy Bible" digitally erased off the cover of a Bible that Dennis Quaid reads from; and a scripture verse quoted by Carrie Underwood was edited to obscure its Biblical origin. After strong objections from the Hamilton family, these edits were restored.

### **Major characters:**

- Bethany Hamilton
- Tom & Cheri Hamilton, Noah, Timmy
- Sarah Hill
- Alana Blanchard
- Malina Birch

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### Scriptures:

Job 1:21 (GWT) – “. . . the LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.”

Jeremiah 29:11 (NLT) – “For I know the plans I have for you,” says the LORD. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”

Philippians 4:13 (GWT) – “I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me.”

1 Timothy 1:19 (NLT) – “Cling to your faith in Christ, and keep your conscience clear.”

1 John 5:4 (NASB) – “whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith.”

Romans 5:2 – 4 (NIV) – “. . . we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

1 Corinthians 16:13 – 14 (NLT) – “Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong. And do everything with love.”

2 Peter 1:5 – 7 (NIV) – “. . . make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.”

2 Corinthians 12:9 (NLT) – “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.”

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### Discussion points:

1. What do you think most helped Bethany overcome the obstacles in her life?
2. Consider ways we can respond to major life difficulties – self-pity, fear, doubt, blame, grief, questioning, etc. How can we, like Sarah (Bethany's youth leader), help one another to trust God to bring good out of hard situations?
3. Discuss how coming to terms with weakness in our lives can be a pathway for God's power to work through us.
4. Bethany's brother Noah said this in a television interview, *"It was hard at first; I think that was a natural feeling. And there was definitely some questioning: 'God, why Bethany? She had such an amazing future. Why?' But in the hospital, when we saw that joy of the Lord in Bethany, with no self-pity and grateful to be alive, that really pulled me out of despair."* Discuss how both positive and negative attitudes and emotions can be contagious.
5. Why does God allow tragedy?
6. Describe a time when a Scripture verse became an anchor for your soul in a difficult part of your life's journey.
7. How can a change in perspective help us to see things more clearly?
8. How can we best allow compassion to move us to do amazing things?