

Evangelists offer series through Netflix service

by [Katherine Davis-Young](#) in the [March 2, 2016](#) issue

Alongside its popular television shows, Netflix recently began offering series by four pastors.

“I believe if Jesus were on planet Earth today in the flesh, he’d be on Netflix,” said Ed Young, one of the pastors, who spearheaded the effort to get Christian talks into the online video streaming service. “We’re always working to try to market to the people who normally would not go to church.”

Stewart M. Hoover, director of the Center for Media, Religion and Culture at the University of Colorado, Boulder, predicts that the new sermon series are more likely to attract Christian customers to Netflix than to convert Netflix users to Christianity.

“Evangelicals tend to think that because they are in the public media they’re going to cross over to more mainstream audiences, but evidence shows that they’re mostly just preaching to the choir,” Hoover said.

Young, of the Dallas area-based Fellowship Church, has had television programs on cable channels; he hosts iTunes podcasts and offers video content on YouTube and Roku.

His *Fifty Shades of They* Netflix series features a pastor pacing a colorfully lit stage, offering jocular interpretations of Christian teachings. The other three series have similar formats.

In *#DeathToSelfie*, young, T-shirt-clad pastor Steven Furtick talks identity. Georgia pastor Andy Stanley addresses working through challenges in *Starting Over*. And in *Winning Life’s Battles*, evangelical icon Joyce Meyer preaches to a massive auditorium.

David Clark, executive media director for Fellowship Church, said it has a two-year contract in which Netflix pays the churches for the shows. He declined to specify the amount, except that it was “nothing astronomical.” Still, he said that the arrangement is preferable to the cable TV model, which usually requires large costs

for the church.

Paul Huse, executive director of marketing for Joyce Meyer Ministries, said Netflix did not provide many guidelines in terms of content for the episodes but did ask that the programs avoid product promotion or invitations for viewers to make donations.

“Even though we’re on six or seven cable networks, more people are moving away from that, and we want to be where they can still access us,” Huse said.

The move to Netflix made sense for the pastors, but it’s a logical fit for Netflix too, said Tom Nunan, lecturer at UCLA’s School of Theater, Film and Television and longtime Hollywood producer.

“Most people perceive Netflix as a competitor to HBO or Showtime,” Nunan said, pointing to the original content that has earned industrywide recognition. But in many ways, Netflix is the opposite of traditional networks, which target niche audiences, Nunan said. “Netflix is trying to be all things to all people.”

Representatives from Netflix issued a statement in response to an inquiry about the new series, saying, “Titles are continuously being added to the service to meet the diverse tastes of our more than 75 million members around the world.” —Religion News Service

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