

'90 Minutes in Heaven' headed to big screen

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ATLANTA (BNG)—The best-selling story of a Texas Baptist minister declared dead in a car wreck who woke up 90 minutes later claiming he had been to heaven is headed to the big screen this fall.

[*90 Minutes in Heaven*](#), starring *Star Wars* actor Hayden Christensen and actress and model Kate Bosworth, wrapped up filming recently in Atlanta. The movie is adapted from a *New York Times* best-selling book written in 2004 describing the near-death experience and long road to physical recovery told by Don Piper, who believes he died and returned to life on a Texas two-lane highway Jan. 18, 1989.



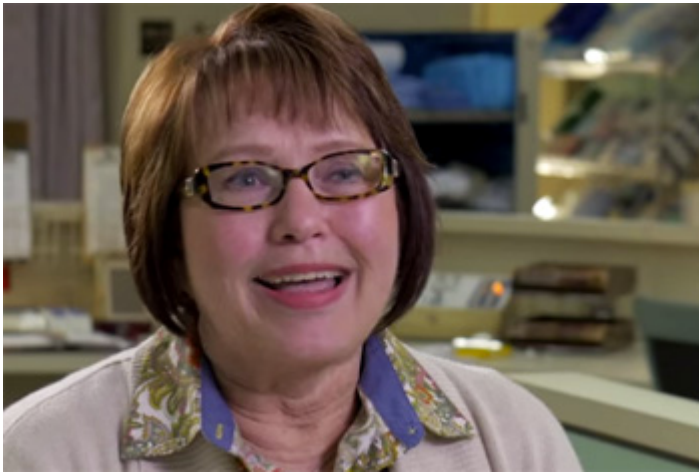
Don Piper believes he died and returned to life on a Texas two-lane highway Jan. 18, 1989.

Piper was heading home after attending a Baptist General Convention of Texas conference at [Trinity Pines Conference Center](#) on Lake Livingston, north of Houston. He made it down Texas Highway 19 as far as the Trinity

River Bridge, where his 1986 Ford Escort collided head-on with a tractor-trailer.

According to the book, Piper was killed instantly and pronounced dead by four sets of EMTs. Paramedics covered him with a tarp and waited for a medical examiner to arrive, while a fellow pastor who arrived on the scene after leaving from the same conference prayed over his body.

Piper later regained consciousness to the sound of Pastor Dick Onarecker singing the hymn “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” and started to sing along.



Piper’s wife, Eva—the hero of the story according to him—said she hopes people will walk out of theaters believing there is something beyond this world. During the intervening 90 minutes, Piper says he was greeted in heaven by people he knew who had died during his lifetime, some he hadn’t thought about for decades. Eventually, he realized they were all people who had contributed to his becoming a Christian or encouraged his growth as a believer.

It took Piper a long time to get comfortable with writing about what he at first treated as a “sacred secret,” he said, but the story has touched a lot of people. *90 Minutes in Heaven: A True Story of Death and Life* sold 6.5 million copies in 46 languages.

The film adaptation, scripted and directed by Michael Polish, who previously directed the 2006 movie *The Astronaut Farmer*, is the first project for Giving Films, a new sister company of [Family Christian Stores](#), the nation's largest Christian retail chain.

"If you loved Don's book, you'll love how this film widens his story to also show the people around him," Giving Films founder Rick Jackson said. "If you haven't read the book, you're in for a great evening at the movies."

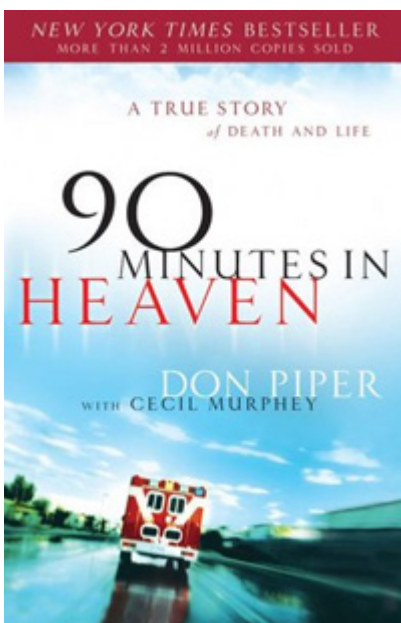


In this shot from the set of '90 Minutes in Heaven' Eva Piper, played by Kate Bosworth, meets with her lawyer, portrayed by singer, songwriter and actor Dwight Yoakam. In a movie trailer, Piper said it was hard to come to grips with an actor "being" him in a film "about something that was a dramatic part of my life, to say the very least."

"But I think the situation kind of speaks for itself," he said. "I'm here."

"I was killed in a car wreck and endured some very difficult experiences to be here today, but I think God is still in the miracle business," Piper said. "And I think he answers prayer, and I believe heaven is a real place and you can go there."

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Don Piper's book sold 6.5 million copies in 46 languages "That would be my biggest hope for this movie, but I also want people to walk out knowing that you can make it through tough times, that you don't have to go it alone—that there are people who will stand beside you and that God, if you will lean into him, he will get you through anything."

Jackson, founder and CEO of Jackson Healthcare, the nation's third-largest health care staffing company, acquired Family Christian Stores with two other investors in 2012. They reorganized the company as a nonprofit, and this year launched Giving Films to address the need for more high-quality faith-and-family films.

Beginning with *90 Minutes in Heaven*, the new entertainment company will cater specifically to Christian audiences with hopes of becoming a leading film.

"We are not on a mission to teach Hollywood a lesson. I don't care about

that,” Jackson told *The Christian Post*. “What I am interested in doing is speaking to this audience in a professional way and create a platform. We’d almost like to be the Disney of this space.”

LifeWay Christian Resources, publisher for the Southern Baptist Convention, recently stopped offering Piper’s book at LifeWay Christian Stores. In January, LifeWay withdrew a book titled *The Boy Who Came Back From Heaven* when the teenaged co-author recanted the story he told about visiting heaven when he was 6.

LifeWay spokesman Marty King said the company determined last summer that “heaven-visitation resources” would not be part of a new organizational structure and direction unveiled in February.



In a scene from the movie, first responders arrive at Don Piper’s mangled car. “We decided these experiential testimonies about heaven would not be a part of our new direction, so we stopped re-ordering them for our stores last summer,” King said. “Now that we’ve begun implementing the new direction, the remaining heaven-visitation items have been removed from our stores and website and will not be replenished.”

Last summer, the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution critical of the genre of books purporting first-hand testimonies of the afterlife affirming “the sufficiency of biblical revelation over subjective experiential

explanations to guide one's understanding of the truth about heaven and hell."