

Living Biblically

Could you live your life 100 percent according to the teachings of the Bible? A.J. Jacobs set out to do that, and wrote about it in his book, "A Year of Living Biblically." Now that concept has been adapted into a television sitcom that premieres Feb. 26, 9:30 p.m., on CBS Baltimore (WJZ, channel 13).

Chip (Jay R. Ferguson) is a film reviewer for a newspaper who freaks out a little bit when he finds out his wife, Leslie (Lindsey Kraft), is pregnant. Raised Catholic, he goes to the bookstore seeking parenting advice, and realizes he might be seeking more than that.

Inspired by picking up a Bible, he decides to try to live his life completely according to the Bible. When he asks a priest – Father Gene (Ian Gomez) – about it in the confessional, the priest scoffs, noting that it would be difficult to do, since Leviticus states that you cannot wear more than one kind of fabric, which Chip is doing.

Chip decides to dive headfirst into this project, with the skepticism of his wife, and the help of his "God squad," Father Gene and Rabbi Gil (David Krumholtz). The show is not a perfect look at faith in the real world – this is a 22-minute situation comedy that plays for laughs – but at least it brings religious practice into the entertainment world, which is rare enough.

I chatted with Patrick Walsh, the showrunner and one of the executive producers, a few days before the show's premiere for an upcoming edition of the "Catholic Baltimore" radio show. I got a chance to see three episodes in advance and asked Walsh how they keep a proper perspective.

Chip's "God squad" priest and rabbi "advise him, they answer his questions, they help him and they show him, basically, in some cases you will not be able to live 100 percent by the Bible every day," Walsh said.

"it's played for comedic extremes, of course, but that's the show. Week in and week out, we focus on a different (Bible) verse and do our best to explore it from all angles and make it palatable to a modern-day audience."

Walsh, who was raised Catholic himself, said the production has a real-life priest and a real-life rabbi who read scripts and advise on whether a priest or a rabbi would actually speak and respond the way they are depicted. This helps keep the production staff accountable. Some of the live audiences have included church groups, as well as the priest and rabbi advisers, and they have responded well to the show.

“We were never mocking religion. We were never mocking those who are religious,” Walsh said.

“I think if you stick with the show, I can’t imagine anybody feeling it was flippant as a whole,” he said.

Clearly, the show is not a catechism, but it does have the opportunity to teach a little bit about faith and the Bible. Some folks might object to making light of religion, but God must have a sense of humor, or why would he have given humans one?

It should be noted that Chip’s boss, Ms. Meadows (Camryn Mannheim) refers in the pilot episode to her “girlfriend,” but that same-sex relationship has not been a story line in the first few episodes. And there’s another character who is having an affair; how Chip responds to this is played for humor and with interesting results.

Interestingly, Chip prays a lot in the show. I don’t think I have seen lately TV characters regularly praying – other than the Reagan family of “Blue Bloods,” also on CBS.

I cannot remember a lot of TV shows with faith as a central theme, other than “Nothing Sacred,” a one-hour drama that lasted for one season in 1997-98. There are others, I’m sure.

If “Living Biblically” can get people thinking and talking about living a life of faith, it might be a good thing, overall. For now, CBS has ordered 13 episodes, and the producers hope it gets picked up for a second season.

The interview with Patrick Walsh is scheduled to air on “Catholic Baltimore” March 26. In the meantime, if you see the show and want to share your reactions, you can comment below, or on our Facebook page.

