

FILM FOCUS



EVOKING AN ERA: Get On Up tells the story of James Brown, 1933-2006

Get On Up

By **HOLLY PRICE**

Director: Tate Taylor
Starring: Chadwick Boseman, Nelsan Ellis, Dan Aykroyd
Certificate: 12A
DVD & BluRay: 30 March

HE is remembered as 'Mr Dynamite' and 'The Godfather of Soul', the musical icon who brought us 'Papa's Got A Brand New Bag', 'It's a Man's Man's Man's World' and 'Please Please Please'. Everybody knows James Brown's name. Get On Up shows us the man behind the legend.

Growing up in South Carolina in the middle of the Great Depression, James Brown (portrayed by Chadwick Boseman) is dirt-poor, beaten and abandoned. It's up to him to overcome his background and make something of his life. His journey takes him from an abusive home to reform school to jail, until at last he hits the stage.

With a little encouragement from his aunt Honey (Octavia Spencer), Brown comes to believe that he is special. This belief transforms him, giving him the inner strength he will need to become one of the most important performers of all time.

Actor Nelsan Ellis (who plays Brown's best friend and business partner, Bobby Byrd) says of Get On Up, "You're going to see the good, the bad and the nasty. And most people don't see that because peo-

ple don't know him intimately." This dynamic film allows us to peek behind the curtain of celebrity, and reminds us that all people suffer, struggle and sometimes fail. It also inspires us by showing that even the worst experiences can make us stronger people.

As Brown puts it: "You ain't never been down, how you gonna get on up?" The Bible does not present a perfect, glossy view of people either. It tells us that God reaches into the messiness of life and offers to pull us up, because he sees us as special. The joy of its message is in how far he is willing to go in order to rescue us – even giving his own life to save ours, in the death of Jesus on the cross.

One of the great musicians of the Bible, David, wrote that God "redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion" (Psalm 103:1,4).

James Brown is proud of being a self-made man who doesn't need anybody's help – but will he be able to enjoy his success alone? His astonishing story reveals that self-belief can only take us so far. Only God can meet our deepest needs.

● **Holly Price is a writer with Damaris. Free official resources for Get On Up are available at www.damaris.org/getonup. See also damaris.org/filmclubs and damaris.org/filmblog**

Dr Klaus-Dieter John had no money or equipment yet his multi-million pound hospital for the poor has become a reality

By **IAN WHITE**

THE media don't usually 'do God' – it's not a sensational seller. Yet it was the press that christened a remote hospital in Peru as El Hospital de la Fe, 'The Hospital of Faith', because of the remarkable way it has been built on answers to prayer.

One South American journalist wrote: "If faith can move mountains... it can also shake wallets, transform hearts and persuade authorities.

"This faith has overcome the mire of bureaucracy, deep-rooted scepticism and even blunt rejection. It has circumvented blocked roads, blown mathematical arguments out of the water, and united Catholic and Protestant Christians in one love for God and fellow man."

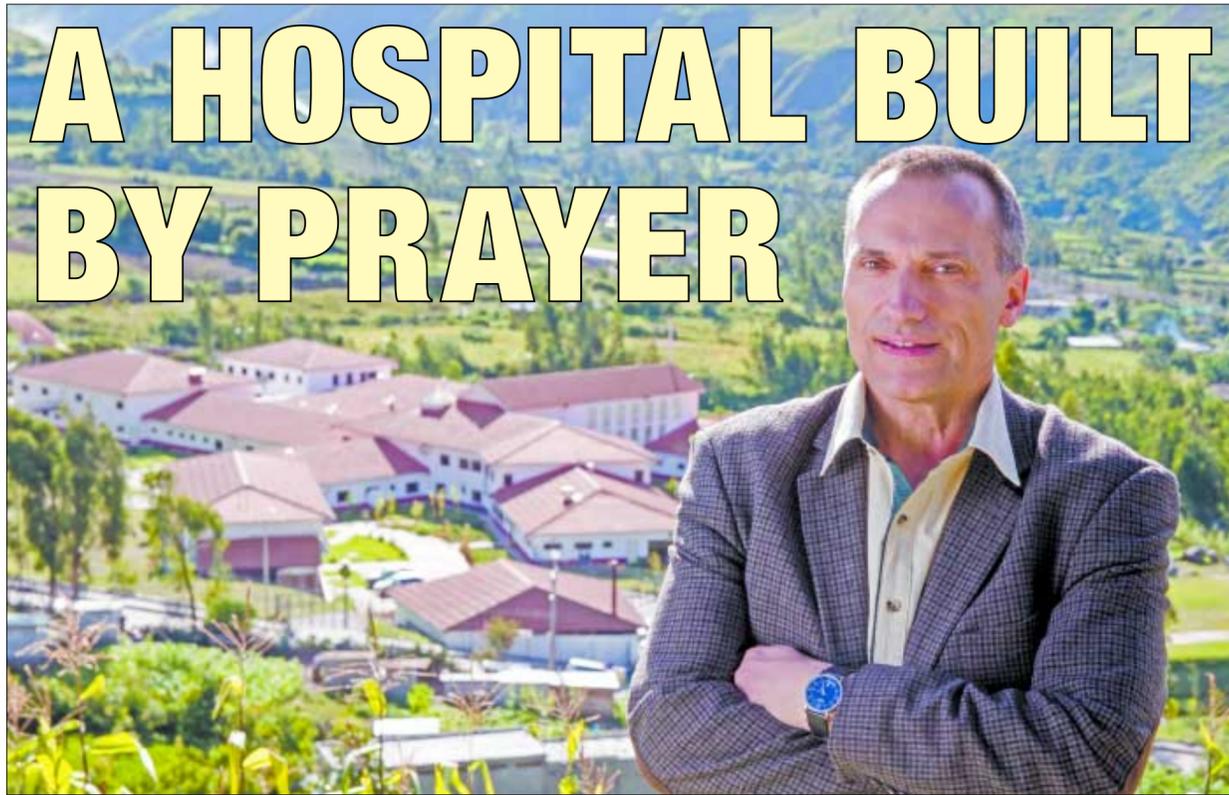
She was reporting on the work of German surgeon Klaus-Dieter John and his wife Martina who defied the odds to open the Diospi Suyana ('We Trust in God') Hospital to rescue the forgotten people of the Peruvian Andes.

Dreamed

The childhood sweethearts and talented doctors had always dreamed of making a positive difference to the world.

Klaus-Dieter studied and trained for a medical career in Germany, England, South Africa and America, including Yale University. He had just been offered a professorship in Germany when an urgent plea came from Peru, begging him to become the only surgeon at a hospital on the edge of the Ecuadorian jungle.

It would mean massive upheaval, including leaving their comfortable home, their family and friends, and lucrative academic careers in Germany. It also meant relocating



VISION REALISED: Dr John with Diospi Suyana Hospital in the distance. This is one doctor who believes in miracles because his life is a story of God's answers to prayer

themselves and their young children to a dangerous and poverty-stricken region, and a massive drop in salary and continuous uncertainty about funding, as well as Klaus-Dieter performing numerous operations which he'd never attempted before.

But they flew out to Ecuador in 1998, to live in a mud hut and eat guinea pig.

They witnessed how the neglected Indians suffered appallingly from the diseases of poverty. Despite representing 40 per cent of the population, they are simply ignored by the authorities.

Immediately Klaus-Dieter and Martina were thrown into a chaotic pace of life, with huge responsibilities and limited medical supplies and assistance.

By September 2000, Klaus-Dieter developed an overwhelming passion for building a mission hospital, but would need millions of pounds and lots of volunteers!

He travelled 200,000 long miles around South America, Europe and the US to take

the vision of Diospi Suyana into businesses, government organisations, churches, clubs and homes, raising awareness, commitment and much needed funds.

His relentless campaign paid dividends as high profile supporters now include the wife of the Peruvian president and the First Lady of Germany!

Transformed

Against all the odds, the hospital was completed and dedicated in 2007. Since then, they have truly transformed the forgotten Quechua community for ever.

The story and vision of Klaus-Dieter and Martina has captured attention around the world and today they have the backing of 180 corporations and 50,000 private supporters.

The incredible faith journey has also helped settle nagging issues in the mind of 'Doubting Thomas' Klaus-Dieter. Although raised in the Christian faith, he began to question God's existence after talking to an old school friend in New York in the 1980s.



VITAL SERVICE: Long lines of people queue outside the hospital

He admits: "Although I cannot remember the finer details of the conversation, a shadow of doubt was cast over the next 13 years of my life. In my quiet moments, I was tormented by the fear that God was nothing more than a pious hope."

He also had a great fear of death and needed to 'see' God. Escaping death in an accident just before Christmas 2008, 11,000 feet up on the fog-shrouded hairpin bends of the Peruvian mountains, reminded him of the fragile nature of life.

Intervention

Yet now the father of three writes: "I don't know why God has chosen to show himself so often and so clearly in our lives. Although his hand is in all things, sometimes his intervention is a bit more subtle, almost as if he wishes to remain anonymous.

"Maybe he took a different approach with me because I had doubted him for so many years. He always seems to have a special plan for the doubters, the broken, and the desperate. I did always have an unrestrained desire to see and experience God.

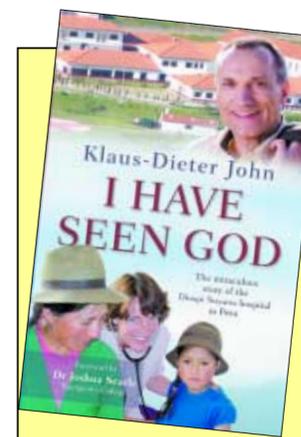
"Everything I have, everything I am, has been given to me: a precious gift from God's almighty hand."

A German press article headlined 'The doctor with a direct line to God' even featured on the official Peruvian government website.

"It sounds pretty extraordinary – a direct line to God. But it is in fact open

to all who will let go and fall into his arms.

"It is not the bureaucrats and technocrats who have the last word – it is God."



You can read more in Klaus-Dieter's book, I Have Seen God (Monarch, £8.99) and hear him in the UK at the Spring Harvest conference next month. Oxford professor John Lennox says of the book: "The story of Diospi Suyana hospital is a remarkable example of what happens when people take God seriously. I heartily recommend this account as compelling evidence that there is a God who cares."

THE MIRACLE WOMAN

Life of illness, tragic loss and abuse changed by God's love and healing

WHEN Jean Neil came face to face with the 'carers' who beat her as a child, she instantly grabbed them by the neck and wanted to take her revenge on them.

By **IAN WHITE**

The only problem was, she was the speaker at a Christian convention and they were members of the congregation! Memories came flooding back of the ice cold baths she was subjected to, and of her bare skin being beaten with stinging nettles.

Jean, 80 this year, was back on the island of Jersey – literally the last place on earth she wanted to be, because it was the place where life had started very badly.

She was supposed to be telling the packed crowd about her miraculous healing from being wheelchair-bound after a road accident. But this was momentarily overshadowed as two old ladies identified themselves as Jean's former brutal punishers for 'crimes' such as bed-wetting.

Forgiveness

It was the turn of the former girls' home workers to cry, when they spoke to Jean: "They told me they would understand if there was no forgiveness from me. There was none. I said, 'I can't forgive you. As I look at you I can recall the pain.'"

They stood together for a while (still surrounded by a church full of unaware people), before Jean was challenged by God about forgiveness. He reminded her that the innocent Jesus had suffered an agonising death on a cross to bring her God's forgiveness, so she surely couldn't withhold forgiveness from these two women.

"With that I dropped on my knees and cried to God to forgive me for what I wanted to do to those ladies. Then I stood up and faced them, and gave them a big hug and forgave them."

She even prayed with them, as they themselves became Christians.

"They were released from guilt, so was I," says Jean.

Thrashed

Yet her own early church experience on that very island was a far cry from love and forgiveness. She used to be chased by an angry vicar for stealing apples from his garden, and was among a group of kids thrashed for laughing at him during his Sunday sermon.

So it's amazing that Jean ever found herself back in church, let alone as a globetrotting speaker, and never did she imagine who she would meet again!

Jean finally 'escaped' the care home at 15 to live with a farming family before entering nursing. However, after just nine months, she collapsed with a burst appendix and peritonitis – a consequence of constant beatings.

Later, when she went to work at

the crèche where she had been as a baby, "The sister in charge would tell me all the time that I needed Jesus in my life, but I wanted nothing to do with church as an adult."

Even when Jean took nine other nurses along to a Good Friday service it was only with a view to getting thrown out. The intention was to sing pop instead of hymns, tell jokes, and blow bubble gum.

Jean says: "I soon found out that doing things against God doesn't work."

She couldn't remember any songs or jokes; even the bubble gum burst over their mouths! And the message of the sermon stuck in her heart, stronger than the gum stuck on her face.

Dedicated

"I was feeling full of shame and remorse. It was as if a great load had been lifted as I dedicated my life to Jesus. My heart changed from hatred to one of love and compassion."

But that wasn't the end of her suffering.

Whilst furnishing her new marital home in England, she fell and broke her coccyx bone, leaving her walking with a gait.

She twice gave birth to twins, but on each occasion only one survived, and had a string of surgery and illnesses, including three heart attacks.

But worse was to come whilst a passenger in a car driven by her eldest daughter.

"I thought we are all going to die, and remember calling aloud to God to help and save us."

A telegraph pole broke through the windscreen, pinning Jean to her seat.

"I couldn't move my legs as they were crushed in the mangled front part of the car."

Jean was confined to a wheelchair, apparently for life.

But a couple of years later, in 1988, Jean dreamt that a tall man would pray for her, and that she would get out of her wheelchair.

Jean says: "The



HEALING: Jean's ability to stand today is testament to her miraculous release from a wheelchair-bound life in the 1980s

dream was most vivid, and I was convinced it was a message from God."

Though in her 50s, Jean seized the opportunity to attend a Christian 'youth' rally in Birmingham, keen to hear the German speaker, and soon realised this was her dream unfolding.

"When the day came it was almost beyond belief, as everything began to happen just as I'd dreamed."

As the preacher prayed for another woman who stood from her wheelchair, it was again just as she'd dreamt.

When prayed for, Jean too got out of her chair, and began running around the room!

"God certainly has a sense of humour, because we hated the Germans during the occupation in Jersey," Jean smiles.

But it's to God she gives the ultimate praise: "I thank God that he has had his hand upon my life right from my mother's womb. He was with me, I am sure, even though I didn't realise it. Life is like going through a dark tunnel with struggles and strife, yet as we are going through it we are learning."



STORY OF ABUSE: A report in the Rugby Advertiser last October on Jean's memories of abuse given to an inquiry. She says: "I was able to forgive them because of the love of God in my heart."

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COMBINING PRAYER AND SCIENCE: Klaus-Dieter's wife Martina examines a Quechua child in the hospital