News 26 November 2026 | English article

Charles Esten: You Can't Inherit Faith, 'Find Your Way'

A true story of faith under pressure. Read the first half below, then continue online.

KEY SPIRITUAL TAKEAWAY

"You can't inherit a relationship with Jesus just because your family believes,"

(Transliterated from the original Hindi.)

They had gathered only to pray. When prayer itself becomes the target, faith is proved not by words but by staying.

The Story - Part One

Charles Esten, the actor millions know from Nashville and Outer Banks, has a warning for anyone who thinks faith runs in the family: it doesn't. "You can't inherit a relationship with Jesus just because your family believes," he said in a new interview. "You've got to find your way to that connection."

He grew up in church. That part is true, and he does not hide it. "From an early age, it was part of my family's week... Going to church," Esten recalled. "That was always part of it, and I had wonderful pastors growing up, and great youth involvement." But he is clear that a childhood in the pews is not the same as a faith of your own, and he says every person has to make the turn for themselves.

His image for it is simple, and it sticks. A family can walk through the big gates at Disneyland together, he said, all in one happy crowd. But a relationship with God does not work like that. "That's not how a relationship... And faith works. It's more the individual turnstile, you've got to find your way to that connection."

One person at a time. One turnstile. No group tickets.

Esten, 61, has spent decades in Hollywood, playing Deacon Claybourne on Nashville, Ward Cameron on Outer Banks, and a string of other roles, while building a parallel career as a singer-songwriter with nearly 200 Grand Ole Opry appearances and a Guinness World Record earned through a weekly songwriting challenge. Through all of it, he says, Jesus has been the foundation, and the faith his parents planted is the thing that holds when the business shakes.

Charles Esten Faith: Mother Showed The Way, Father Taught The Lessons

If faith cannot be inherited, it can still be shown. Esten gives the credit to his mother, who lived her Christianity in front of him every day. "I was blessed by a mother that showed me the way and brought me to church and is such a good, loving person and lives out her faith very well," he said. She did not just take him to church. She showed him what a life shaped by Jesus actually looks like when nobody is watching.

His father taught him from a different angle, and it may be the more honest one. His dad openly acknowledged his mistakes and encouraged his son to learn from them. "He taught me to be a better man, a better father, a better Christian," Esten said. It was not a perfect father handing down a perfect faith. It was a flawed man telling his son, here is where I got it wrong, do better than I did. Esten's father came to faith later in life, and that late conversion became part of the foundation his son still stands on.

The Turning Point - What Happens Next

The story reaches a life-changing moment that changes everything -- and what seemed like the end is only the middle. Two reports disagree on the numbers, and one question is left unanswered: will the CCTV footage ever come out? Read the full story to find out what happens next.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When gathering to pray carries a real cost, what keeps a community coming together anyway -- and what would keep you coming?

2. The pastor's sister shielded him with her own body and fainted under the blows. What does costly, self-giving love look like in your own family or church?

3. When justice is delayed and a complaint is withdrawn under threat, how do believers hold on to truth without giving in to fear -- or to hatred?

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