

Jimmy Swaggart

Jimmy Lee Swaggart	
Born	March 15, 1935Ferriday, Louisiana, USA
Occupation	Televangelist, preacher, singer, musician, writer
Religion	Pentecostal Christianity
Website	
www.jsm.org ^[1]	

Jimmy Lee Swaggart (born March 15, 1935) is a Pentecostal American pastor, teacher, musician, television host, and televangelist. He has preached to crowds around the world through his weekly telecast. According to the official website for Jimmy Swaggart Ministries, his 1980s telecast was transmitted to over 3,000 stations and cable systems each week.^[2]

Swaggart's television ministry, which began in 1975, continues (as of May 2011) airing nationally and internationally. The weekly *Jimmy Swaggart Telecast* and *A Study in the Word* programs are seen nationwide and abroad on 78 channels in 104 countries as well as live over the Internet.

In February 1988, Swaggart stirred controversy after a private investigation found he had solicited a prostitute for sex. Initially, Swaggart denied the accusations; but, as a media investigation proceeded, he acknowledged that some allegations were true. He later apologized for the acts in a televised broadcast.

Early life

Swaggart was born on March 15, 1935, in Ferriday, Louisiana, to Willie Leon (a.k.a., "Son") and Minnie Belle (née Herron) Swaggart. He is the cousin of rock-n-roll pioneer Jerry Lee Lewis and country music star Mickey Gilley. With his parents, Swaggart attended a small, 25-member Assemblies of God congregation in Ferriday. At the age of nine, Jimmy began to preach on street corners and lead congregations in singing. On October 10, 1952, at 17 years of age, Swaggart married Frances Anderson. Their son, Donnie, was born in 1954. Swaggart worked several part-time odd jobs in order to support his young family and also began singing Southern Gospel music at various Baptist and Pentecostal churches.

According to his biography, Swaggart, along with his wife and son, lived in poverty during the 1950s as he preached throughout rural Louisiana, struggling to survive on US\$30 a week and often going to bed hungry. Being too poor to own a home, the Swaggarts lived in church basements, pastors' homes, and small motels. Sam Phillips, the record producer and recording studio owner and founder of Sun Records who discovered Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, and Charlie Rich, wanted Swaggart to take part in a gospel line of music for Sun as the label's first gospel artist. His cousin, Jerry Lee Lewis, who had previously signed with Sun Records, was reportedly making \$20,000 per week at the time. Although the offer meant a promise for significant income for his family, Swaggart turned him down, stating that he was called to preach the gospel.^[3]

Ordination and early career

Preaching from a flatbed trailer donated to him, Swaggart began full-time evangelistic work in 1955. It was then that Swaggart began developing a revival-meeting following throughout the American South. Swaggart began attending Bible college in 1957. In 1960, he began recording gospel music record albums while building up another audience via Christian radio stations. In 1961, after graduating from Bible college, Swaggart was ordained by the Assemblies of God; one year later, Swaggart began his radio ministry. By 1969, Swaggart's radio program, "The Camp Meeting

Hour,” was being aired over numerous radio stations throughout the American Bible Belt. In the late 1960s, Swaggart founded what was then a small church named the Family Worship Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; the church eventually became district-affiliated with the Assemblies of God. The Family Worship Center grew from barely 40 members in 1970 to over 500 by 1975 and over 1000 by 1980. During the 1970s the church grew from a one room church to a more modern building with new additions being built every couple years.

In the late 1960s, Swaggart began airing a weekly 30 minute telecast over various local television stations in that city and also purchased a local AM radio station WLUX in Baton Rouge (now WPMC). The station broadcast Christian features stories, preaching and teaching from various fundamentalist and Pentecostal denominations and played a blend of Black Gospel, Southern gospel, and inspirational music. As Contemporary Christian Music became more prevalent, the station avoided playing it. Swaggart would ultimately sell his radio stations gradually throughout the 1980s and early 1990s.

Shifting to television

By 1975, Swaggart's television ministry had expanded to more stations around the US; it was at this time that he decided to use television as his primary preaching venue. In 1978, Swaggart's weekly telecast was expanded to an hour.

In 1980, Swaggart began a daily weekday telecast featuring Bible study and music while the weekend, hour-long telecast would feature a sermon from either the Family Worship Center or an on-location crusade. In the early 1980s, Swaggart's crusades expanded to major cities nationwide. By 1983, Swaggart had become the most popular television preacher in the United States. with more than 250 television stations broadcasting his program.

Controversies, scandals and criticisms

In 1988, Swaggart was implicated in a sex scandal involving a prostitute that resulted initially in his suspension and ultimately Swaggart was defrocked and removed from the ministry by the Assemblies of God. Three years later, Swaggart was again implicated in a sex scandal involving a prostitute. As a result, Swaggart's current ministry is non-affiliated, non-denominational and considerably smaller than before the scandals were revealed.^[4]

1988 scandal

Background

Swaggart's exposure came as retaliation for an incident in 1986 when Swaggart exposed New Orleans-based, fellow Assemblies of God minister Marvin Gorman. Gorman had been accused of having several affairs. Once exposed, Gorman was defrocked from the Assemblies of God with his ministry all but ended.

As a retaliatory move, Marvin Gorman hired his son Randy Gorman along with his son in law Garland Bilbo, to stake out the Travel Inn on Airline Highway in New Orleans. A camera with a telephoto lens was placed in the window of the motel's Room 12 and draped with a black cloth. When Swaggart arrived, he reportedly went into Room 7. Randy Gorman and Garland Bilbo proceeded to let the air out of Swaggart's tires and called Marvin Gorman, whose church was located nearby. The two had taken photos of Swaggart outside of Room 7 with Debra Murphree, a locally-known prostitute. Gorman showed up at the Travel Inn a short while later and asked Swaggart what he was doing there.

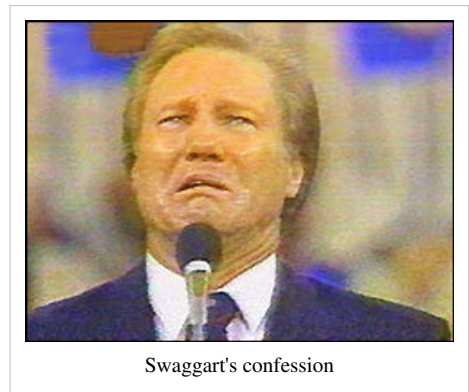
According to, "Swaggart: The Unauthorized Biography of an American Evangelist" by Ann Rowe Seaman, Gorman secured a promise from Swaggart that he would publicly apologize to Gorman and start the process of Gorman's reinstatement to the Assemblies of God. Gorman offered to remain silent if Jimmy would state publicly that he lied about Gorman's affairs. Gorman waited almost a year, then hand delivered a note to Jimmy Swaggart informing him his time was up, but Swaggart did not respond. On Tuesday February 16, 1988, Gorman contacted James Hamill, one of the 13 man Executive Presbytery of the Assemblies of God. Hamill in turn called Raymond Carlson, the

Assemblies Superintendent. He summoned Hamill and Gorman to fly to Springfield and arranged for an emergency meeting of the presbyters. Carlson was shown photos of several men coming in and going out of Room 7 at the Travel Inn Motel in New Orleans. This was done in order to establish the fact that the room was being used for prostitution. One of the men seen leaving Room 7 was Jimmy Swaggart. The presbytery leadership of the Assemblies of God decided that Swaggart should be suspended from broadcasting his television program for three months.

According to the Associated Press (as reported in the Saturday February 27, 1988 edition of the Ocala Star-Banner), the prostitute that claimed to have posed nude for Swaggart failed a lie detector test administered by a New York City Police Department polygraph expert. The test administrator concluded that the prostitute, Debra Murphree, had failed to tell the truth on all key questions concerning her statement. The test was administered after Murphree offered to sell the story to the National Enquirer for \$100,000. Paul Levy, senior editor for the National Enquirer, stated that the polygraph examiner had concluded Murphree was not truthful on six key questions - including one in which she was reportedly asked if she had fabricated the story. Levy stated that the Enquirer decided not to print her story due to the test results, her drug use, and the fact that she had arrest warrants in three states. The February 27, 1988 edition of the Toronto Star reported that Debra Murphree, 28, failed questions about whether she was paid or promised money to "set up" Swaggart, and whether she made up the story in order to make money from it. Both times she answered no; this was determined by the polygraph examiner to be a lie.

Swaggart's confession and fallout

On February 21, 1988, without giving any details regarding his transgressions, Swaggart gave his now infamous "I Have Sinned" speech as he tearfully spoke to his family, congregation and audience, saying, "I have sinned against You, my Lord, and I would ask that Your precious blood would wash and cleanse every stain until it is in the seas of God's forgiveness."^[5] On a New Orleans morning news show four days later, Murphree stated that while Swaggart was a regular customer, they had never engaged in sexual intercourse.^[6] The clip of Swaggart's confession was played repeatedly on news and tabloid television programs.



Swaggart's confession

The Louisiana presbytery of the Assemblies of God initially suspended Jimmy Swaggart from the ministry for three months. The national presbytery of the Assemblies of God soon extended the suspension to their standard two-year suspension for sexual immorality. His return to the pulpit coincided with the end of a three-month suspension originally ordered by the Assemblies. Believing that Swaggart was not genuinely repentant in not submitting to their authority, the hierarchy of the Assemblies of God immediately defrocked Swaggart, removing his credentials and ministerial license. It was then that Swaggart decided he would be an independent, non-denominational Pentecostal minister and the Family Worship Center would become non-denominational. The Jimmy Swaggart Bible College would lose many of its students by the end of May 1988.

1991 scandal

On October 11, 1991, Swaggart was found, for the second time, in the company of a prostitute, Rosemary Garcia,^[7] when he was pulled over by the California Highway Patrol in Indio, California, for driving on the wrong side of the road. According to Garcia, Swaggart stopped to proposition her on the side of the road. When the patrolman asked Garcia why she was with Swaggart, she replied, "He asked me for sex. I mean, that's why he stopped me. That's what I do. I'm a prostitute."^[8] ^[9] Rather than confessing to his congregation,^[8] Swaggart told those at Family Worship Center that "The Lord told me it's flat none of your business."^[10] ^[11] ^[12] Swaggart's son then announced to the stunned audience that his father would be temporarily stepping down as head of Jimmy Swaggart Ministries for "a

time of healing and counseling."

Criticism of Christian rock and metal music

Swaggart wrote a book criticizing the Christian rock and metal movements titled *Religious Rock n' Roll – A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing* in 1987. The book criticized the scene for using heavy metal music to preach the gospel of Christianity, calling rock music the music of the devil. Ironically, it was Swaggart who helped convert Michael Sweet and Robert Sweet, two of the founding members of the band Stryper.^[13] ^[14] Also criticized by Swaggart were Larry Norman (the "father of Christian rock"), Petra, Mylon LeFevre, Steve Taylor and other notable Christian rock and metal bands.^[15]

In 1986, Swaggart called rock music "the new pornography."^[16]

Ministries

Music Ministry

Since recording his first album, the center of Swaggart's ministry has been his music. His first album, *Some Golden Daybreak*, was created to be an album he could give people at his early revivals. Swaggart's wife began encouraging him to contact radio stations. Disc jockey Chuck Cossin (Mr Hymn Time) is credited with playing the first Jimmy Swaggart recording on WMUZ in Detroit.

In 1974 Swaggart was voted Favorite Gospel Music Artist by readers of the magazine *Singing News*. In 1977 *Record World* magazine honored him as Male Vocalist of the Year. In that same year Swaggart was a Dove Award finalist in three categories: Male Vocalist of the Year, TV Program of the Year, and Instrumentalist of the Year. Again in 1978 Swaggart became a Dove finalist as Instrumentalist of the Year. In 1980, Swaggart became a Dove Award finalist in four Categories: Children's Album of the Year for *Color Me a Story*, Instrumentalist of the Year, Year's best Traditional Album for *Homeward Bound*, and Best Gospel Album of the Year for *Worship*. The secular Grammy Awards nominated Swaggart's album *Live from Nashville* for Best Gospel Album in 1976. And again in 1980, Swaggart's album, *Worship*, became a Grammy finalist.

Radio Ministry

Swaggart originated Sonlife Radio on the noncommercial FM band. Unlike his previous stations, Sonlife was commercial free and would not sell time to outside ministries and the preaching and teaching would all be produced "in house". The music played was primarily Southern Gospel.

Television Ministry

In 1973, Swaggart wanted to create a television program which would include a fairly large music segment, a short sermon, and time for talking about current ministry projects. After two faltering attempts to tape the half-hour program in Baton Rouge and New Orleans, Louisiana, Swaggart went to television producers in Nashville, Tennessee with his proposal. They accepted and within weeks the *Jimmy Swaggart Telecast* was being broadcast into television markets around the United States.

In 1981 Jimmy Swaggart launched a daily television program titled *A Study in the Word*. In the 1980s the program was aired on over 160 channels throughout the U.S., Canada and abroad and is still seen today on over 78 stations in 104 countries. From the beginning, the primary cable channels the program was aired on were CBN Cable (now ABC Family), TBN, and PTL (now Inspiration Network).

Sonlife Broadcasting Network, can be watched 24/7 on DirecTV channel 344, Glorystar channel 125 and on IPTV Sky Angel channel 125.

World Evangelism Bible College

In the fall of 1984, Swaggart opened Jimmy Swaggart Bible College - now known as World Evangelism Bible College, or WEBC. The college began as a means of preparing young men and women for Christian ministry and is still considered by Swaggart to be a vital extension of Jimmy Swaggart's World Wide Ministry. Many students never returned for the fall semester after the scandal in 1988. Currently, WEBC offers three levels of degrees: (1) Intensive short term certificate programs, (2) Associate of Arts degree programs, and (3) a four year Bachelor's Degree program.

Print

Swaggart is the author of several Christian works offered through his ministry, as well as an autobiography *To Cross a River* and a personal account of the 1988 scandal *The Cup Which My Father Hath Given Me: A Biblical Revelation of Personal Spiritual Warfare*. He is the author of the "Expositor's Study Bible," 13 Study Guides and 30 Commentaries on the Bible.

Current ministry

Still a worldwide multi-million-dollar ministry, Jimmy Swaggart Ministries today mainly comprises the Family Worship Center, *The Jimmy Swaggart Telecast*,^[17] radio and television programs called *A Study in the Word*, (SonLife Radio Network),^[18] and a website, JSM.org. Swaggart's wife, Frances, has a radio program called "Frances and Friends" heard daily on the SonLife Radio Network.^[19] His son, Donnie Swaggart, preaches at the Family Worship Center and also preaches in churches across the US and abroad.^[20] Donnie's son and Jimmy's grandson, Gabriel, is a youth pastor who leads the Family Worship Center's youth ministry, Crossfire.^[21] Sonlife radio is heard in 22 states^[22]

The newest outreach, Sonlife Broadcasting Network, can be watched 24/7 on DirecTV channel 344 and Glorystar channel 125. Sonlife Broadcasting Network television channel is also available on IPTV Sky Angel channel 125.

Family

Swaggart is married to Frances (née Anderson) Swaggart and has one son, Donnie Swaggart. Donnie was named for Swaggart's brother who died in infancy. He has three grandchildren, Jennifer, Gabriel and Matthew Swaggart, and three great-grandchildren, Samantha, Abby and Ryder Swaggart.^[23]

In popular culture

- The Swaggart sex scandal was heavily satirized by musician Frank Zappa in a three-song medley referred to by band members as the "Texas Motel Medley", consisting of three songs by the Beatles with the lyrics changed to reflect the events. While the Texas Motel Medley itself was never released due to copyright concerns, several references to the incident can be heard on the live albums *The Best Band You Never Heard in Your Life* and *Broadway the Hard Way*. The latter album's tracks "What Kind of Girl?" and "Jesus Thinks You're A Jerk" also deal with these events.
- Swaggart was parodied on *Saturday Night Live* (Season 13, Ep. 13, February 27, 1988) by a tearful Phil Hartman in a "Church Chat" sketch, hosted by The Church Lady.
- On the American sitcom *Married... with Children*, Swaggart was parodied by Rev. Al Bundy, and his sham Church of NO MA'AM, when he was exposed to his misogynistic congregation that he had a loving relationship with his wife Peg Bundy. Al addresses the crowd with an "I have sinned against you".
- Swaggart is sampled thundering "No sex until marriage!" on the Front 242 track "Welcome to Paradise" -- released, ironically, in 1988, the year his first sex scandal broke.

- The band Electric Hellfire Club sampled Swaggart's "I have sinned against you, my Lord" in a song called "Hypochristian" released on the *Electronomicon* album.
- Swaggart is referenced in a 1988 episode of *The Golden Girls* titled "Rose's Big Adventure."
- Swaggart is referenced in a 1992 episode of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* titled "Eyes on the prize."
- Swaggart was played by actor Alec Baldwin in the 1989 Jerry Lee Lewis biopic *Great Balls of Fire!*.
- Swaggart, along with cousins Mickey Gilley and Jerry Lee Lewis, is an inductee of the Delta Music Museum Hall of Fame in Ferriday, Louisiana.
- Swaggart is referenced in The Tractors song "Baby Likes to Rock It".
- Swaggart is referenced as "Jimmy the Reptile" in the Iron Maiden song "Holy Smoke".
- Swaggart is mentioned in the Lou Reed song "Strawman", on the album *New York*.
- Swaggart is referenced in the Cinderella song "Shelter Me". In the video for the song, Swaggart is depicted bursting out of a closet surrounded by skeletons, and also sobbing behind a flaming pulpit.
- Swaggart was parodied by Jim Carrey on *In Living Color*.
- Ozzy Osbourne's song "Miracle Man", on the 1988 album *No Rest For The Wicked*, is about the Swaggart's 1988 prostitution scandal and the general hypocrisy, in Osbourne's eyes, of "televangelists". In the video for the song, Zakk Wylde wears a mask with the likeness of Swaggart and Ozzy cavorts with swine, his pants around his ankles, carrying around a large staff decorated with a dollar sign. Within the song, Jimmy Swaggart is referred as "our Jimmy Sinner" many times by Ozzy.
- Swaggart is referenced in the Dr. Dre song "Lyrical Gangbang", on the album *The Chronic*.
- Swaggart is mentioned in XTC song "Merely a Man" on their album *Oranges and Lemons*. During their U.S. acoustic radio tour for the aforementioned album in 1989, XTC altered their song "Dear God" to include Swaggart's name.
- Skinny Puppy sampled Swaggart's "I am clean" speech on the song "Hexonxonx" on their *Rabies* album.^[24]
- Christian Rock pioneer Larry Norman, who had been criticized by Swaggart, wrote a song "Selah", which he released in 1989, that refers obliquely to Swaggart.
- Swaggart was referenced in the Big L song "Danger Zone", on the album *Lifestylez Ov Da Poor & Dangerous*.

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