



# THE FILM ATHEIST

**Directed by:** Jay Floyd  
**Produced by:** Jay Floyd, Rob Houk  
**Written by:** Jay Floyd

**Cast:** Robertson Dean (Frank Franklin),  
Teresa Willis (Betty Franklin), Vince Pavia  
(Brian Franklin), Aviva (Caroline Franklin)  
Mari C. Blackwell (Peggy Lester)  
(2006)

**RATING:** 

## Forgiving the Franklins

*Frank, Betty, Brian, and Caroline Franklin are upstanding and uptight fundamentalist Christians. Frank is a stern father who is of no comfort to his colleagues, and Betty frets about baked goods for their church group, while Brian tries to repress his homosexuality. Caroline is a nearly normal cheerleader except for her constant fear that she's acting incorrectly in the eyes of God. But an auto accident changes everything as the three older Franklins meet Jesus, who takes time out of his labors to pluck the notion of shame from their minds and send them back. Caroline is shocked by her family's new, open behavior as well as the unfairness that she's the only one with a lasting injury. Their friend Peggy can't deal with their joy, and all of the rightwing Christians in town are upset. Unable to understand the problem, Frank and Betty find joy with each other while Brian comes out big time. This sort of behavior is not something society can allow.*

Lets get this out of the way first: this is not an atheistic film. It not only acknowledges the existence of God (well, it isn't a sure thing, but it certainly doesn't eliminate the possibility), but has the main characters meet Jesus. This is a spiritual movie that doesn't directly discount faith, so how can I give it such a high rating? Because if people took their lead from ***Forgiving the Franklins***, this would be a pretty good world for atheists (and agnostics, as well as the faithful). The spirituality advocated here is not only unrelated to life-crushing fundamentalism, but is more than the generic "big tent" religion popular on TV sitcoms. It takes the added step of accusing a major aspect of almost all religions with destroying our lives. I'd have liked to see the whole notion of religion trashed, but Jay Floyd (writer/director/producer) had his goals set higher: hypocrisy, intolerance, and above all, shame.

Things start off with a typical conservative Christian family in a typical conservative Christian town. It might look like a parody to some, but I've seen these people and I've seen their town, and they're scary. The Franklin's get little joy out of life, but achieve a level of smug satisfaction with their godliness and how it makes them superior to others. I couldn't have picked a better representation for everything that's wrong in society.

And then it all changes, and the mild humor turns into roll-on-the-floor belly laughs. The symbolism also comes hot and heavy. The Franklins die (or almost die) and find themselves on mildly sloping hills with a poorly dressed man who is decidedly not Anglo-Saxon. The man, Jesus, is busy chopping down crosses, because they represent a really bad day in his life (The implication: either Jesus didn't die for our sins or it's just a bad idea for everyone to keep dwelling on it). The surrealism ends and the meaningful farce begins as the Franklins take up their normal lives. And that is one of the more interesting things in the film—most of their behaviors don't change. They go to the office or school, do their work, and bake their cakes. It is only little things that change, but those little things make all the difference. Betty picks up the morning paper naked (it's a small thing, but huge in our society; someone, anyone, explain to me what could possibly be wrong with that), Frank enters into the sexual discussions at work (with more candor than anyone is ready for), and Brian makes his homosexuality clear. They also finally see what life can be. Sure, it is still important to them that God loves them (approves of them was really the key in the past), but now it is more important that they love each other.

The focus on pleasure is wonderful to see. So many films that indorse tolerance avoid any sign of physical pleasure, as if the human condition can be discussed without it. Here, the Franklin's openness, and the elimination of their fears and prejudices, allows them to have a good time with each other. Frank and Betty's sexual awakening couldn't be more erotic, partially because it pushes social norms, but mainly because of its innocence.

In the end, *Forgiving the Franklins* turns serious. It has suggested a meaningful and enjoyable way of life, and then shows how that isn't permissible in our culture (nor in any other I can think of). Sadly, it isn't enough that we learn, but that everyone must learn.

*Forgiving the Franklins* is a thinking persons comedy. It is a must see for free-thinkers and anyone who wants to know what life is all about. Take a look. It's right there on the screen. But as this is a small, independent film, it may be hard to find that screen.

Review by The Atheist     <http://www.filmatheist.com/reviews/franklins.htm>