

**Youth Culture Lesson**  
**Finding Teachable Moments in Culture**  
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**Hot Jesus: What Did the Son of God Really Look Like?**

By: Paul Asay

**What Happened:**

*The Son of God* made more than \$25 million during its first weekend in theaters—not bad for an explicitly Christian movie that was almost completely recycled from a History Channel miniseries called “The Bible.”

Talk swirling around the movie didn’t center so much on the movie’s drawing power or the fact Satan—a prominent character in “The Bible” miniseries—had been scrubbed completely from *Son of God* (because, it is said, he resembled President Obama). It centered on Diogo Morgado, the man who portrayed Jesus.

“Diogo Morgado is one hot dude,” wrote CNN’s Carol Costello. “His Jesus looks more like Brad Pitt than that nice man with the beard in all those paintings.” She wasn’t the only one ogling. Morgado has inspired the Twitter hashtag #HotJesus.

Mark Burnett and Roma Downey were very deliberate in who they chose to play the Christ in “The Bible” miniseries. “Diogo is 6-foot-3 with broad shoulders,” Downey told *The New York Times*. “He has a strong presence but also a natural humility. We were really looking for someone who could portray the lion and the lamb.” Indeed, Morgado’s charisma in front of a camera was one of the reasons Burnett and Downey opted to rework the Jesus portion of “The Bible” into a big-screen motion picture.

“It’s official, I am embarrassed,” Morgado told “Good Morning America” when the hashtag first appeared in 2013. Now, nearly a year later, he’s trying to take the online hubbub in stride.

“It’s a compliment, obviously, but I don’t want that to take away from what we tried to achieve,” Morgado told *The New York Times*. “The best story is the story that gets to the most people. If the message of Jesus was love, hope and compassion, and I can bring that to more people by being a more appealing Jesus, I am happy with that.”

**Talk About It:**

The real Jesus probably didn’t look much like Diogo Morgado. Isaiah described the Messiah as having “no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him.” We often picture Jesus as a tall, gentle, European with long, flowing hair. Christ probably looked like a guy of Middle Eastern descent who would’ve kept His hair cut short. Otherwise, it would’ve gotten in the way of His carpentry work.

“Jewish actors are almost never cast to play the Son of God,” wrote Candida Moss of *The Daily Beast*. “Nor is anyone whose physical features resemble those of ancient Mediterraneans. On the basis of skeletal remains, physical anthropologists estimate the average first-century Galilean male was around 5’4” and 136 pounds.”

Perhaps it’s not surprising that believers in Medieval and Renaissance Europe would depict Jesus as European or that American filmmakers would’ve followed suit. Jesus came to be one of us. That was the point of Him coming at all. It’s natural that we

would want to see part of ourselves in Him. Indeed, people from various ethnic backgrounds often have depicted Jesus to be of kin to them.

Maybe it's not so surprising that we'd want to depict Jesus as attractive, too. However He looked, He was charismatic enough to sway people and encourage them to follow Him. For better or worse, we often associate goodness with beauty. You rarely see Brad Pitt play a bad guy.

How do you picture Jesus looking? Is there a painting or movie depiction of Him that you think best depicts what sort of person Christ was? How He spoke and how He acted?

How important is Jesus actual appearance? Is it better to see Jesus as historically accurate as possible, or does it communicate better to depict Jesus as taking on certain aspects of our background and culture? Is it good always to depict Jesus as good-looking? Why or why not?

How does God look at beauty? Would Jesus Himself approve of how He's depicted?

### **What the Bible Says:**

“For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Cor. 9:19-22).

“But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart’” (1 Sam. 16:7).

“But let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious” (1 Pet. 3:4).

“So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27).

Paul Asay has written for *The Washington Post*, *Christianity Today*, *Beliefnet.com* and *The (Colorado Springs) Gazette*. He writes about culture for *PluggedIn* and wrote the Batman book *God on the Streets of Gotham* (Tyndale). He lives in Colorado Springs with wife, Wendy, and his two children. Follow him on Twitter @AsayPaul.