

Some thoughts on watching films

Stories are the stuff of life. They allow us to reflect on all sorts of issues at a safe distance as we engage with the characters, cry with them, laugh with them, get cross with them and generally share their experience. How they deal with the issues they come across may frustrate us, or give us new insights; cause us to laugh or cry; result in us hurling abuse at the screen or willing there to be a happy ending. And through it all we can encounter God in all sorts of unexpected places if we only take time to look.

Questions to ask yourself

What did you think of the film? What do you like most? Least?

Which incidents made you *think* or *feel* most strongly? How well did you think the film treated those incidents?

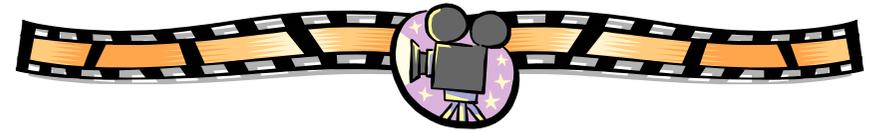
What issues did the film raise for you?

What character(s) do you most identify with and why?

Does the film have any echoes of Christian beliefs or stories from the Bible? Does it support or challenge Christian values?

Some facts about the film

- The film is based on a book of the same name, written in 1996 by Jon Krakauer.
- Sean Penn patiently waited ten years to make the film before the family felt ready to go ahead.
- Emile Hirsch lost 40 pounds to play his role.
- No stuntmen or doubles were used for Emile Hirsch, including the scenes where Chris goes through river rapids, confronts a grizzly bear or rock climbs.
- Brian H. Dierker was originally hired as the technical consultant for the white-water rafting scenes. Sean Penn cast him as Rainey after Emile Hirsch suggested him for the role.
- The film was nominated for two Oscars in 2008 (Hal Holbrook (Ron) as Best Supporting Actor and Best Editing). It also won a Golden Globe for Best Original Song (*Guaranteed* by Eddie Vedder).
- The "Magic Bus" where Chris ends up in Alaska can be clearly seen on Google Earth, though not on Google Maps where it is obscured by clouds.
- The Alaska scenes depicting the area around the abandoned bus on the Stampede Trail were filmed 50 miles south of the actual position of the bus, in the tiny town of Cantwell. Filming at the actual bus would have been too remote for the technical demands of a movie shoot. The production made four separate trips to Alaska to film during different seasons.
- Salvation Mountain is a real site which Leonard Knight, who appears as himself in the film, has made his life's work. It is about an hour and a half from Palm Springs in Southern California and is Leonard's tribute to God and his gift to the world with its simple yet powerful message: "God is Love".



**A chance to watch films together.
An opportunity to discuss the issues raised.
A time of friendship, food and fun.**

5th Apr Son of Man
3rd May WALL-E
14th Jun Into the Wild
2nd Aug Slumdog Millionaire
6th Sep The Boy in Striped Pyjamas

**Films start at 5:30pm
Followed by food, coffee and conversation**

**10 Bletchingdon Road
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Into the Wild

Into the Wild, a film made in 2007, tells the story of a young graduate who leaves his middle class existence in pursuit of freedom from relationships and obligation. Giving up his home, family, all possessions but the few he carried on his back, and donating all his \$24,000 savings to charity, Christopher McCandless embarks on a journey throughout America. His eventual aim is to travel into Alaska, into the wild, to spend time with nature, with “real” existence, away from the trappings of the modern world. In the 20 months leading up to his Great Alaskan Adventure his travels lead him on a path of self-discovery in which he comes to examine and appreciate the world around him and to reflect on his troubled childhood and parents' sordid and abusive relationship. Throughout his epic journey the people he meets both influence and are influenced by the person he is and bring him to the eventual and tragic realisation that “Happiness is only real when shared”.

Freedom and identity

Having fulfilled some of his parents’ expectations by graduating, Chris rips up the career map and settles on a life on the road. His ultimate goal is to survive in the wilderness away from the “poison of civilisation”. He rebels against rules, society’s materialism and what he sees as his parents’ hypocrisy, seeing real freedom in the natural world. How do you respond to this? Is civilisation potentially poisonous and, if so, in what ways? And how can we combat it?

Materialism

The desire for material comforts and possessions seems hard-wired to most of us and undergirds modern economies. How healthy is this if it drives us to prioritise wealth over people or over God, or if it leaves us worn out or compromising our integrity? What alternatives might there be?

Truth

Chris is deeply shaken because he feels his parents have lied to him. As he travels, he values meeting people who are honest about their hopes and struggles. How important is truth in our lives and relationships? Are there times when the truth is too painful? How honest are we with those around us? How do we create church communities which are both honest and supportive?

Family and relationships

How important is family in this film? What examples of family do we see? What struggles do they have and what attempts do they make to restore the broken relationships that exist?

Going into the wild

What would constitute “the wild” for you? Somewhere off the beaten path? Or maybe a frenetic city? Or some daring adrenalin-inducing experience? Is it something you long to do, or something that fills you with horror? How might that relate to the way we sometimes need to push our own boundaries if we are to grow and develop into the people God wants us to be? And how do we balance that sense of journey and trust in God alongside recklessness, selfishness and being irresponsible?

Happiness

What is your idea of happiness? Can you be happy on your own, or does it need somebody else to share it with? In what ways does Chris touch the people he meets?

Salvation Mountain

Salvation Mountain is Leonard’s monument to love. Which of the characters in the film do you think would be most “staggered” to think “God loves them a whole lot”? How do you feel about Leonard’s way of demonstrating his faith? Are there any religious sites you have visited that have stood out for you? In what ways was faith expressed there?

Memorable Quotes

Opening Titles There is a pleasure in the pathless woods;
There is a rapture on the lonely shore;
There is society, where none intrudes,
By the deep sea, and music in its roar;
I love not man the less, but Nature more. *Lord Byron*

Chris Mr Franz I think careers are a 20th century invention and I don't want one.

Chris It should not be denied that being footloose has always exhilarated us. It is associated in our minds with escape from history and oppression and law and irksome obligations. Absolute freedom. And the road has always led west.

Rainey Children can be pretty harsh with their parents.

Chris The sea's only gifts are harsh blows, and occasionally the chance to feel strong. Now I don't know much about the sea, but I do know that that's the way it is here. And I also know how important it is in life not necessarily to be strong but to feel strong. To measure yourself at least once. To find yourself at least once in the most ancient of human conditions. Facing the blind death stone alone, with nothing to help you but your hands and your own head.

Chris The core of mans' spirit comes from new experiences.

Chris If we admit that human life can be ruled by reason, then all possibility of life is destroyed.

Ron I'm going to miss you when you go.

Chris I will miss you too, but you are wrong if you think that the joy of life comes principally from the joy of human relationships. God's place is all around us, it is in everything and in anything we can experience. People just need to change the way they look at things.

Ron Yeah. I am going to take stock of that. You know I am. I want to tell you something. From bits and pieces of what you have told me about your family, your mother and your dad... And I know you have problems with the church too... But there is some kind of bigger thing that we can all appreciate and it sounds to me you don't mind calling it God. But when you forgive, you love. And when you love, God's light shines through you.

Chris Some people feel like they don't deserve love. They walk away quietly into empty spaces, trying to close the gaps of the past.

Chris I'm going to paraphrase Thoreau here... rather than love, than money, than faith, than fame, than fairness... give me truth.

Chris [*written into book*] Happiness is only real when shared.

Chris [*last lines*] What if I were smiling and running into your arms? Would you see then what I see now?

Relating it to scripture

Hosea 3:1 & John 3:16—Leonard reminds us of God’s staggering love, and the way God goes on reaching out to people, however unfaithful they may have been.

Genesis 50:15-21 & Luke 15:11-32—The Bible has many stories of dysfunctional families and the journeys of forgiveness and reconciliation that are needed for healing to take place.

Exodus 3:7-8; Matt 11:28-30; Gal 1:4 & 5:1—Freedom is God’s gift but one we often abuse.