



Into the Wild - A Spiritual Journey

We are surrounded by hypocrites. If we are honest with ourselves, we too are hypocritical much of the time. Yet, how do we respond to hypocrisy?

Chris McCandless responded to the hypocrisy he saw in his parents' lives by departing on a spiritual journey leaving no forwarding address. Without telling his parents, he got in his old Datsun, after graduating from Emory University, and drove west. He disappeared. "Rather than love, than money, than faith, than fame, than fairness . . . give me truth," he said and went looking for truth. "The core of man's spirit comes from new experiences" and he sought the experience of nature apart from mankind.

Based on the bestselling book of the same name by Jon Krakauer, Sean Penn directs this unusual episodic road-trip movie. Emile Hirsch stars as McCandless and plays him so well. He makes him believable, and we see him physically change through the movie just as he matures emotionally. When he leaves at the beginning he figuratively rejects society, cutting up all his credit cards then burning his Social Security card and dollar bills. In an act of cleansing, he renames himself Alexander Supertramp, figuratively putting his old self to death, and becoming a new man. As he travels west he is searching for something. Soon his quest becomes clear -- Alaska. "You don't need human relationships to be happy; God has placed it all around us."

On the way, he meets several interesting characters. Vince Vaughan shows up as a wheat harvester, and a foil for Alex. It is in their discus-

sions that we learn more about what is driving Alex away from his parents. Later, he befriends two aging hippies on their way to a trailer park in the middle of Arizona. Through his initial brief interaction with them, he helps them heal a wound in their relationship. He later reacquaints with them, at the trailer park, and spends a season with them preparing for his wilderness

adventure. Everything is pointed toward that.

It is when he eventually gets into the wild in Alaska that *Into the Wild* moves towards its climax. Beautifully filmed, the wildlife shots and stunning landscapes evoke a solitude seldom experienced though often longed for. Here Alex really begins to understand himself. He discovers an abandoned school bus which becomes his home. Through the separation from all forms of society, he finds himself and he finds a truth. As he runs out of food and must desperately rely on

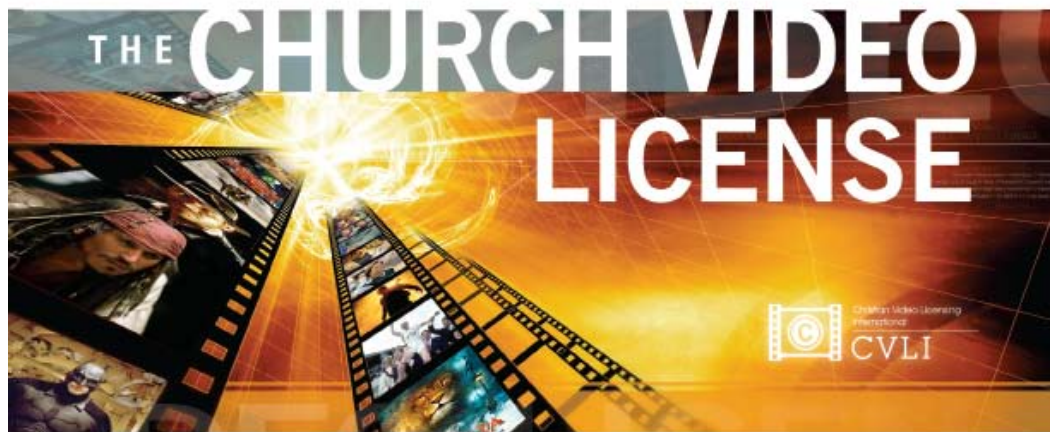
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the land, he misnames one of the plants. In so doing, he eats an inedible plant. This leads to a slow starvation. Hirsch plays out this starving, harrowing death so well we can see the pain and loss in his eyes and in his person.

At the end, realizing the importance of calling things by their rightful names, he signs his given name. No longer is he Alex Supertramp; once more he is ready to call himself Chris McCandless. And the truth he discovers he writes in his journal: "Happiness is only real when shared." Throughout his trip Alex had been bringing joy and happiness to those he met and befriended. In return he was experiencing happiness, though he did not understand this until too late. It is sad that the truth he was seeking was only found in dying, and then in the loneliness of total isolation. Not even knowing if his parents would discover his body, he died with a smile realizing his quest was fulfilled.

Into the Wild is a sad yet uplifting film. It reminds us of some key truths yet asks some important questions. True happiness, true joy cannot be found in things, in toys. All of the iPods, all of the Wiis, all of the Beamers in the world will not bring eternal joy or satisfaction. They are mo-

mentary pleasures that do not last. We were made for relationships. Even from the start, man was made for relationship with his creator (Gen. 1:27). When God saw Adam was all alone he made woman for him (Gen. 2:18). We are relational beings. We cannot run from this without denying our true nature, and that leads to inner dissonance. So, Into the Wild reminds us of the importance of



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our relationships, with our God, our spouse, our children, our friends, our acquaintances. Are we taking the time to experience the happiness that these bring? And are we bringing joy and happiness to those around us?

As Alex wandered the country, he not only brought happiness to those he encountered, they offered insight to him, though he did not always “hear” it. One character told him, “To forgive is to love.” Though seeking truth, Alex was really seeking love. We all seek love; we all want to be loved. What was hindering Alex was his unwillingness to forgive . . . he would not forgive his parents for the pain they had caused him. But if he had forgiven them, he would have found it possible to love them. Paul tells us likewise to “forgive as Christ forgave us” (Col. 3:13) and in so doing we become conduits of Jesus’ love.

Into the Wild also raises questions about society. Are things right with our society? Are we in America too tightly wrapped up in our careers? What do we want from society? Better yet, what are we giving back to society? How are we working to make it better? Human society is God-ordained, but how we choose to implement it can be good or bad, better or worse. God does call us to champion social justice in the midst of whatever society we live in. Just as the prophets in the Old Testament were voices calling for social justice, so we, too, must call for social justice and the betterment of society. We do this as we spread the love of Jesus and the good news of the gospel. We



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