

Find Him in the Valley: A Missionary's Burden

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A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Spring 2018

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University.

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Abstract

The main portion of this thesis includes a presentation of the short film script, *Find Him in the Valley: A Missionary's Burden*. The script follows a young missionary, his older mentor, and their guide on a journey to a village where they will be witnessing to people who have never heard the Gospel. Unfortunately, the village is mostly destroyed by a mudslide before they can arrive. I also explain my creative choices as an author, discuss how transmedia can be used to further engage viewers of the film, and explain my future plans for the script, including marketing.

Find Him in the Valley: A Missionary's Burden

Summary

The script, *Find Him in the Valley: A Missionary's Burden*, follows the journey of a young missionary named Stephan Foster who goes on his first long-term missionary trip with an older, more experienced missionary, Ralph Simmons. Throughout the weeks-long hike through rain-soaked jungles and mountains, Stephan peppers their guide, Juan, with questions about the locals. Eventually, their guide announces that, after a treacherous mountain pass, they will be able to see the village. Finally, they make it through the pass and look down on the village. It is completely unreachable by any missionary. As they make their way down the side of the mountain the next day, the previous heavy rains take their toll, and lightning triggers a mudslide. Juan and Stephan take refuge, yet they are separated from Ralph. When they emerge from their shelter, they find Ralph alive as well. However, they discover that the village has not fared so well. Most of the buildings have been destroyed and many of the unreachable villagers are dead. Stephan despairs because of all the people that they were not able to reach. However, Ralph convinces Stephan that God can use tragedy for His purposes. Juan, who was an unbeliever, chooses to stay with the missionaries and help rebuild his old village. The story ends on a hopeful note as the group carefully makes its way down the mountain to begin helping the survivors in the ruined village below.

Creative Decisions of the Screenwriter

The idea for *Find Him in the Valley* has been circulating around in my head for several years. Although I no longer remember what inspired the plot of the story, I do

remember wanting to tell a realistic story about missionaries. There are dozens of modern Christian movies where everything ends well, and every protagonist gets a happy ending. However, Jesus made it clear that being a Christian was going to be frequently grounded in challenges. He tells the believer in Matthew 16:24 to “deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (English Standard Version). It’s easy to forget, in an age where Christians wear crosses around their necks without a second thought, that the cross in biblical times was a symbol of unimaginable pain and excruciating death. Essentially, Christ was telling His followers that they may have to go through pain and hardship for spreading His Word.

The missionaries in *Find Him in the Valley* do experience some physical pain, but their primary cross to bear is mental anguish. Yet, despite the emotional torture they experience, they are able to keep the faith and persevere faithfully to complete their mission. Although they break down (especially Stephan), they still rise again and keep moving. This is the kind of story that I imagined crafting when I came up with the idea for this script. I wanted to show that, although working as a missionary can be hazardous and dealing with loss can be painful, the Lord will sustain all those who seek to follow his Great Commission.

Style

Screenplays differ from novels and short stories in that they focus entirely on what the audience can hear and see. Because of that, screenplays cannot explicitly state how the characters are feeling. Emotions must be implied more subtly through visuals, dialogue, and music. My aim in this script was to authentically portray a vivid range of emotions and present a realistic story about the challenges of missionary work.

Stylistically, this script is a narrative film. This type of script is characterized by bare descriptions on the action lines that the director can pour more into during the production process. Because of this, I tried to keep action descriptions simple. I described what the audience could see without too much embellishment. However, the dialogue portion of the script is really where the personalities of the characters come through.

Since the script is so short, I did not have many pages to establish these characters' personalities and ensure that the audience becomes invested in them. For example, early in the script, the audience learns that Stephan talks excessively and is very excited for the trip. Through his dialogue, it is revealed that Stephan cares a great deal for the village to which he will be ministering. He has more lines of dialogue than any other character, and most of the other two characters' lines are delivered in response to his never-ending questions and concerns. By contrast, Ralph is a much calmer character. His minimal lines and subdued demeanor telegraph to the audience that Ralph is the more experienced missionary. Juan's character is immediately established by his relationships with the other two main characters. Juan's first action is to call out for Ralph and embrace him. It is clear they have a special ongoing relationship. On the other hand, Juan not only does not notice Stephan immediately, but his first line after shaking the younger missionary's hand is spoken to Ralph, and not Stephan.

Genre

Find Him in the Valley could be sorted into several different genres. These include Christian, adventure, and "Golden Fleece" (Snyder, 2005, p. 28) genres.

Perhaps the most obvious genre that this script falls into is the Christian film genre. This genre is extremely diverse, with films as different as *Passion of the Christ*

(2004), *Mom's Night Out* (2014), *Fireproof* (2008), and *God's Not Dead* (2014). The element that connects all of these movies is a focus on Christ and Christian principles (Malatesta, 2014). With subjects including faith and missions, *Find Him in the Valley* qualifies for this genre.

Secondly, *Find Him in the Valley* fits into the adventure genre, although more loosely. This genre is characterized by exotic locations and daring missions (Dirks, n.d.). With its rainforest paths, narrow mountain passes, and a village that few outsiders have ever visited, this screenplay certainly includes the exotic locations aspect of the adventure genre. One way *Find Him in the Valley* differs from traditional adventure stories is that, usually, adventure genre stories are more action-packed and plot-oriented (Dirks, n.d.). By contrast, this script tends to be more dialogue heavy and character-focused. However, with adventurous moments like nearly falling off of a mountain and surviving a mudslide, *Find Him in the Valley* certainly meets the criteria for inclusion in the adventure genre.

Finally, the last genre that this script falls under what Blake Snyder (2008) calls the "Golden Fleece" genre (p. 28). This is a journey-oriented genre. It is distinguished by characters traveling to a certain place, facing obstacles along the way, and in the end, learning something valuable in the end (Snyder, 2005). Like many Golden Fleece stories, what the characters set out to find is not exactly what they find (Snyder, 2005). Instead of an intact, thriving village where they can evangelize, the protagonists discover a village that has been nearly destroyed and needs both physical assistance and spiritual guidance. More than that though, Stephan's and Ralph's faith is tested and grows stronger. Juan is forced to confront the loss of his old village and in addition, chooses to follow the missionaries and help his old village. In the end, Golden Fleece stories are about journey

and what characters discover about themselves and the world, and not about the destination (Snyder, 2005).

Themes

One of the primary themes in *Find Him in the Valley* is that of loss. The first minor instance of loss occurs on the very first page. When Stephan leaves home, his mother loses her son, if only for a few years. She worries about Stephan's life, since he will not be able to contact her again for months (although this fact is not explicitly stated). In addition, Stephan talks about his father's death later. However, the most obvious moment of loss in the script occurs when the village is destroyed by the mudslide. Although all of the members of the missionary group are distressed, it is Stephan who is hit hardest by the loss of the people in the village. In this case, the feeling of loss is amplified by his relief over finding Ralph alive and the emotional whiplash of transitioning from excitement to terror to grief all in the space of a few minutes. A final instance where the theme of loss shines through is when Ralph is talking about his wife. In this case, the feeling of loss is more mature than the raw, excruciating pain that Stephan feels at the loss of the village. Ralph also has the hindsight advantage of knowing the impact that his wife's death had on his life and God's plan.

I wanted loss to be a heavy theme of the story because real missionaries experience loss. Missionary work is incredibly difficult. They go to underdeveloped parts of world, places that are filled with disease and strife. Oftentimes, loss and grief are major parts of their lives (Grant, 2014). They face a hard task in ministering to people who may or may not be hostile to them and their message. Missionaries face many obstacles, including language and culture barriers. They lose people, constantly. In fact,

as one pastor points out, missionaries and other “clergy are in the business of loss,” and they “are frequently invited to share with others their loss” (Moseley, 2001, p. 31). They can minister to someone for a someone’s entire lifetime, and that person may still die without becoming a Christian. Loss is a major theme of this script because loss is major theme in the lives of many real-life missionaries.

Loss, however, is not the only theme in this script. In contrast, faith in the face of adversity is the other major theme of the script. Whereas Stephan is the character that embodies the sense of loss, especially in the end of the script, Ralph is the one who counteracts that darkness with his wisdom and unflappable faith. This fits in with Ralph’s role as the archetypical mentor character (Vogler, 2007). From Ralph’s first scenes, it is clear that he is a man of great faith. He constantly tells Stephan to trust in God’s will and his timing. When Stephan is worried about the plane and what Juan will think of them, Ralph explains that everything happens in God’s time. No matter what happens, Ralph’s faith stands strong. When the mudslide nearly destroys the village, it is Ralph’s faith that keeps Stephan and Juan together. In fact, it is Ralph’s incredible faith that encourages Juan to stay at the end and help. This script makes the point that faith in the Lord helps us all to bear our crosses and reach others for Him. It demonstrates how clearly we need each other and how clearly we need a close relationship to God.

I decided early in the planning of this script that faith in the face of adversity had to be a major theme of this script. If loss was going to be a major theme, then I believed that faith, and the God they had faith in, was needed for the characters to be able to cope with the pain. Philippians 4:13, which reads, “I can do all things through him who gives me strength,” (ESV) is one verse that inspired me to make faith in the face of adversity a

major theme of the story. I wanted the main message of the screenplay to be that God can help believers to deal with any problem through their faith in Him. As the name of the script implies, I want the audience to know that they can find the Lord's peace even in the valley of the shadow of death.

Transmedia Approach

Creative Theory - Transmedia

I believe that *Find Him in the Valley* could greatly benefit from a modified transmedia approach. It is first important to point out that, when I say transmedia, I am using the West Coast definition of the word (Ryan, 2016). According to that definition, transmedia is the idea of telling different stories across the same story world (or universe) using different media platforms (Bernardo, 2011). There are many ways of doing this.

For instance, I could tell a story in feature length film about a certain set of characters. Then, I could move one of the characters to an all new setting that is still in the same universe and tell an entirely different story as a television show. From there, I could take an element from the television show and turn it into its own story told as a novel. These stories are not simply retelling the same narrative repeatedly like in an adaptation. Instead, they are taking one or more elements from the original source material and expanding upon it across different platforms.

The multiple platforms are a key component of successful transmedia implementation. Not everyone reads books or watches movies or listens to podcasts. Each media platform has its own user base, and they may not cross over to the other platforms. Transmedia takes advantage of this by telling stories in different media. By continuing

the story in a new medium, the story can find a new audience that may become so interested that they migrate to other platforms to continue consuming the story.

Approach for *Find Him in the Valley*

My transmedia approach for this script would be two-fold. First, I would continue the story in a series of books. In addition, I would create a website with a mini-series about the main characters and stories from real missionaries.

Since one of the key elements of transmedia is crossing media platforms, I want to engage the book-buying audience with a series of books about the main characters. In particular, I believe that Juan's character presents an excellent opportunity for expansion. Perhaps the biggest unanswered question at the end of the script, other than, "Did the village ever rebuild?" is "What happened to Juan, and did he ever become a Christian?" This expected curiosity on the part of the audience means that they would be more likely to venture into a new medium to find out more about Juan. Also, I could seed the books with references to the screenplay which would entice that audience to go find the original film and maybe even the website.

I want the website to be more than just a marketing tool. I would like it to be an opportunity to present the stories of real-life missionaries who have experienced loss. This is why I say that it is *modified* transmedia approach. Most transmedia projects revolve around a fictional story world, as I have mentioned before. However, I think the website would be more impactful if it contained stories from real life. In addition, I think it would be helpful to include a forum where missionaries can discuss the losses that they have been through and be encouraged by their peers who have been through similar situations. A more traditionally transmedia element would be a podcast style series where

the actors who play Stephan, Ralph, or Juan could take questions from real people and answer them in character. These elements would help draw more audience members in and allow them to hear the message of the film and website.

Target Audience

Before I explain what I want to achieve with this script commercially, an analysis of the target audience of the script is essential. It is important to look at the target audience of this religious script because, as Mara Einstein says, “religion *is* a product” (2008, p. 4). In a certain way, I am trying to sell the audience the faith-based message of the film and not just a good story. Knowing which kinds of audiences would be receptive to that kind of message is imperative when it comes to marketing the script.

The audience for *Find Him in the Valley* would most likely not be secular. The film is unashamedly religious, and while many modern Christian media producers worry about alienating secular audiences and so tone down the religious message, that was not something I could do with this film (Brown, 2012). This film was not made for secular audiences and they are not a good target for marketing.

Now, it would be easy enough to say that the target audience of this script would be Christian, since it does follow missionaries and emphasizes a message of faith, but that is not good enough. One thing to consider as I think about the question of the target audience is that the script does tackle some mature themes. The destruction of the village, though not shown for very long in the script, might be traumatic for younger children. Because of this, I would not want to market the finished film to anyone under the age of about fifteen. Older teens, especially those who have an interest in becoming

missionaries, could be an excellent target. Marketing the film toward youth group pastors to share with their teens would be a good way to distribute the film to that demographic.

On a more general note, women are well-known to be the most frequent purchasers of religious titles (Einstein, 2008). *Find Him in the Valley* is not an especially action-packed story, and it actually focuses a great deal on the emotions of the characters. Because of that, it is more likely to attract females than males.

The best way to market to the target audience is to market to churches, youth groups, Christian conferences (especially women's conferences), and missions organizations. These groups will have large numbers of target audience members. In addition, they have the added benefit of being able to promote the film as part of a charitable drive.

What I Hope to Achieve with *Find Him in the Valley*

Producing a film like *Find Him in the Valley* would be a challenge requiring significant funding and backing. My hope would be to secure support and funding for the film. Ideally, I would like to produce and release the film with the necessary support.

Production and Release

I have seen one of my screenplays, *Flicker – 12:47* (2017), produced before and thoroughly enjoyed both the experience of producing it and the finished product. I would like to have the same thing happen to *Find Him in the Valley*. There is nothing quite like seeing something you have written on a screen. It would also help my future career to be able to show this as an example of my work to future employers, especially if they are churches and other non-profits.

In addition to the personal interest in seeing my writing on a screen, I think this script has a great chance to bring attention to missions work and missionaries who have experienced loss in the field. As I mentioned above, I think it would work well as a part of a charitable campaign to help missionaries around the world. The story in *Find Him in the Valley* is meant to be a powerful tug on the heartstrings that uses emotions to motivate movement.

Since it is such a short film, I think the best place for it to be released would be on YouTube. YouTube is one of the most successful communication mediums in which to “express feeling, communicate with friends, and advertise business messages” (Khan & Vong, 2014, p. 630). YouTube is an excellent home for this film because from there, it could be sent anywhere. The best possible scenario for the film is that it goes viral and is shared millions of times online. I would want to put a link to the website at the end of the video. This would help direct people to a place where they can learn more about missions work in general, how loss affects missionaries in the field, and how they can help by donating to missions groups.

Funding

I would love to obtain help from missionary organizations or some other non-profit to produce *Find Him in the Valley*. The kind of Christian audience that I am targeting tends to have a rational distrust of major Hollywood studios (Russell, 2010). Because of that, I would prefer not to involve any major secular studios. I do not have the capital or connections to produce it on my own. The best option for receiving the funding I need would be a Christian studio, such as Pureflix, or even better, a large missions organization, like the International Missions Board. In addition, I lack skills in marketing

and could use the aid of a massive organization's public relations department to help me find groups to distribute the film to. In return, at the end of the video there would also be a link to their donation page for people who have been motivated by the film to give charitably.

Conclusion

Find Him in the Valley: A Missionary's Burden is a story of pain and loss, but it is also one of undeniable faith in the face of unimaginable tragedy. My hope is that the script can inspire people to pray for missionaries who face an incredibly difficult, but still fulfilling task in spreading the Word of the Lord. I hope that future transmedia projects related to the screenplay will be a foundation for a support system that helps these missionaries and other ministers who must deal with loss and grief daily. Finally, I hope that every person who reads the script or potentially sees the film will come out of it with a new appreciation for just how fragile and sweet life can be.

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FIND HIM IN THE VALLEY: A MISSIONARY'S BURDEN

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FADE IN:

EXT. AIRPORT - DAY

A car pulls into a parking space in front of the airport. Stephan Foster (25) gets out, pulling out his large hiking backpack and strapping it on.

Stephan is a somewhat pale young man with wide blue eyes and messy brown hair. He wears a button-up short sleeved shirt and heavy green cargo pants.

Patty Foster (53) leans out the window.

PATTY
Be careful, Stephan!

STEPHAN
I will.

PATTY
Goodbye! I love you!

STEPHAN
Love you too, mom!

Patty watches nervously as Stephan walks into the airport.

INT. AIRPORT GATE - DAY

RALPH SIMMONS (58) is sitting at the gate of the plane they'll be flying out on. He is bald and short, but he's also surprisingly well-muscled for someone of his age.

Ralph is dressed in short sleeves and cargo pants. He also wears a floppy fishing hat with a cross on it.

Stephan arrives and sees Ralph. He grins widely and hurries up to him. Stephan is carrying only a small drawstring bag now.

Ralph stands up and extends his hand. Stephan begins pumping Ralph's hand like a water pump.

STEPHAN
Mr. Simmons! It's so good to see you, sir. I've been looking forward to this since the convention. I can't even begin to tell you how much I appreciate you choosing to work with me.

Ralph finally extracts his hand from Stephan's grasp. He gestures at Stephan's bag. When he speaks, it's with a strong southern drawl.

RALPH

Hope that's not all you brought.

STEPHAN

Oh, no sir. But my pack wouldn't fit as a carry-on, so I had to check it.

Ralph nods slowly and sits back down. Stephan sits close to him.

STEPHAN (CONT'D)

I really have to say again, sir, how thankful I am to you that you're coming on this mission with me. It means a lot. You're practically legendary in missionary circles--

Ralph holds his hand up.

RALPH

Look son, firstly, you don't have to call me "sir." My name is Ralph.

STEPHAN

Okay, Ralph.

RALPH

And secondly, stop trying to butter me up. I'm already going on the trip with you.

Ralph leans back in his chair. Stephan mirrors him, leaning back himself. He stares out at the planes.

STEPHAN

Can you believe that in a few weeks we'll be winning souls in a village where they've never even heard about Christ?

RALPH

Maybe. But these things take time.

STEPHAN

I know. I mean, we haven't even translated the Bible into their language yet. I'm just excited, you know?

RALPH

Excitement is good. Just remember that everything's is going to happen in God's time.

A BEEP plays over the loudspeaker.

ANNOUNCER LUCY

Attention passengers at Gate 10. We regret to inform you that FlyStar Airlines Flight 2387 to Rio De Janeiro has been delayed due to weather. The new estimated time of arrival is 3:30 am. We apologize for the delay, and we will keep you informed.

Stephan, eyes wide, turns to Ralph.

STEPHAN

This isn't good. What about our guide?

RALPH

What about him?

STEPHAN

If we don't touch down on time, he could leave.

Ralph SNORTS.

RALPH

Don't worry about Juan. He's a professional. I've worked with him before.

Ralph slouches in his chair and places his floppy hat over his face.

Stephan pulls his well-thumbed Bible out of his bag. The pages are ragged on the edges and there are dozens of labels sticking out of the edge. He starts reading.

INT. AIRPORT GATE - NIGHT

The sky outside the window is black, but the tarmac is still brightly lit.

Ralph is still in the same position, hat over his eyes.

ANNOUNCER LUCY

Attention passengers at Gate 10.
Your plane has arrived and we will
begin boarding in about 5 minutes.
We apologize for the delay and wish
you a comfortable flight.

Ralph stirs and sits up, putting the hat on the top of his head. He looks around, but doesn't find Stephan.

Then, Stephan walks up with a coffee in hand and big bags under his eyes.

Ralph smiles and picks up his and Stephan's bags.

RALPH

Come on, kid. Let's get in line.

Ralph leads the way to the line and Stephan stumbles after him.

EXT. UNITED STATES AIRPORT TARMAC - NIGHT

A jumbo passenger jet takes off into the night.

EXT. SOUTH AMERICAN AIRPORT TARMAC - DAY

The sky is grey and threatening to rain. A small prop plane flies over a lush rainforest to a tiny jungle airport. The plane touches down and comes screaming to a halt.

INT. AIRPORT TERMINAL - DAY

Inside the small airport, Stephan and Ralph walk along the hallway. They already have their packs, and most of the bags under Stephan's eyes have disappeared.

Stephan takes a deep BREATH.

STEPHAN

Can you smell that?

RALPH

Jet fuel.

STEPHAN

What? Well, yes, but I mean, can you smell the anticipation?

RALPH

From you, definitely.

They walk up to JUAN ALVEREZ (42), a Latino-looking man with dark skin, a head shaved down to the scalp, and a small gray-flecked goatee. He waves at Ralph.

JUAN
Pastor Simmons!

Juan and Ralph embrace.

RALPH
(in Spanish)
How have you been, my friend?

JUAN
(in Spanish)
Busy. Very busy. But thankful to be traveling with you again.

Ralph turns around and gestures toward Stephan.

RALPH
Juan, this is my partner, Stephan.

Stephan grabs Juan's hand for one of his never-ending handshakes. Juan looks a little alarmed.

STEPHAN
(in Spanish)
It's so good to meet you, Juan. I can't wait to get going and meet the village.

Juan pulls his hand free and turns to Ralph.

JUAN
You know, his Spanish is better than yours when I first met you.

Ralph LAUGHS.

JUAN (CONT'D)
Also, do you know how late you are? I was just about to give up on you and find a new job.

STEPHAN
We're so sorry. The weather delayed our flight by over 12 hours.

RALPH
He was kidding.

STEPHAN
Oh.

RALPH

(To Juan)

Tell me, Juan. Where is our chariot?

JUAN

Right this way.

Juan gestures toward the doors. They walk that way.

EXT. AIRPORT PARKING LOT - DAY

Even the parking lot for the airport is small. Juan leads the missionaries up to a roofless Jeep.

JUAN

Our chariot.

Stephan and Ralph throw their bags in the back of the Jeep.

The sky lets loose and Stephan holds out his hand to catch the raindrops.

STEPHAN

Looks like it's starting to rain.

Juan and Ralph share a look.

JUAN

It's the rainy season. It's going to do that a lot.

RALPH

Better get used to it now. You're not going to be dry for next few weeks.

STEPHAN

I can handle it. No worries.

Ralph steps into the back of Jeep. Stephan climbs into the passenger seat next to Juan.

STEPHAN (CONT'D)

Juan, you know a little about the people of the village that we're going to?

Juan turns the ignition.

JUAN

I would hope so. I lived there till I was twenty.

STEPHAN

Oh really? Then can you tell me more about them?

JUAN

Sure. What do you want to know?

Stephan grins widely.

In the back seat, Ralph CHUCKLES and leans back in his seat.

STEPHAN

Well, to begin with, what's their diet like?

EXT. ROAD - DAY

The rumbles down the dirt road.

JUAN

Well, there's a river nearby, so they eat a lot of fish.

EXT. END OF THE ROAD - DAY

The Jeep pulls up to the end of the dirt road. The tires splash through mud.

STEPHAN

And do they speak Spanish or mainly their own language?

JUAN

One second.

The Jeep pulls to a stop and Juan steps out. The missionaries follow him. They all pick their bags from out of back of the Jeep. Juan turns to address them.

JUAN (CONT'D)

It's going to be all hiking from now.

(looks at Stephan)

It's not going to be easy. This is the last chance to turn back.

Stephan and Ralph shoulder their packs, and neither says a thing.

JUAN (CONT'D)

I thought that might be the answer. Then let's start walking.

Stephan walks next to Juan, with Ralph trailing behind them.

STEPHAN

If you don't mind, I have a few more questions.

JUAN

Somehow that doesn't surprise me.

STEPHAN

About their language...

EXT. RAINFOREST RIVER - DAY

It's two weeks later. Juan's hair has started to grow back on the top of his head. Ralph has grown a mostly white beard. Stephan has some fuzz on the bottom of his chin.

It's still raining hard, and everyone looks soaked.

STEPHAN

How many people do you think live in the village total?

JUAN

I haven't been there in a long time, so I'm not sure anymore.

STEPHAN

Oh. Then what about the last time you were there?

Ralph smiles from behind them.

EXT. THICK RAINFOREST - DAY

Days later. It's still raining.

Juan is hacking at some thick underbrush that is in their path.

STEPHAN

So why did you become a guide?

JUAN

Well, I always liked hiking and exploring...

Ralph takes off his hat and drains the rain water off of it.

EXT. RAINFOREST CAMP - EVENING

A week later. The sun is beginning to sink behind the trees. A fire blazes, despite the rain, beside two very simple tents. Juan is in the process of setting up another tent.

Stephan sits down next to Juan.

STEPHAN

Hey, I gotta question.

Juan turns around.

JUAN

Look, Stephan. Can you give me a break from the questions? For one night?

STEPHAN

Oh. Yeah. Sure. Need help with the tent?

JUAN

I got it.

Juan walks away to finish putting up his tent. Ralph comes and sits next to Stephan. Stephan smiles awkwardly.

STEPHAN

He's a bit grumpy today.

RALPH

A little.

Ralph watches Juan for a second. Then he looks back at Stephan.

RALPH (CONT'D)

He's not a believer, you know.

STEPHAN

Juan? Really?

Ralph nods.

STEPHAN (CONT'D)

Then why does he spend his time guiding missionaries?

RALPH

I don't really know.

Ralph watches as Juan finishes tying down the tent.

RALPH (CONT'D)
I wonder if he does.

STEPHAN
Are you working on him?

RALPH
Working?
(laughs)
Well, Someone is.

He glances meaningfully at the sky.

EXT. BEGINNING OF MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

It's still raining. Rain flows off of leaves in rivers. The group is getting close to a narrow pass on the side of a mountain.

Juan turns around to face Stephan and Ralph.

JUAN
Listen closely. Especially you.

Juan points at Stephan.

JUAN (CONT'D)
We need to be quiet today. The pass we are going to be walking is extremely narrow, and it's been raining for weeks. So we need to be very careful.

STEPHAN
Why?

JUAN
The rain loosens up all of the rocks and dirt. It's slippery. You could slip. Or worse.

STEPHAN
Worse?

RALPH
Mudslide.

STEPHAN
Oh. Gotcha.

JUAN
So we're going to be careful. And quiet.

Juan gives Stephan a meaningful look.

JUAN (CONT'D)

But you are allowed to be a little
excited. At the end of the day,
we'll be able to see the village.

Stephan grins at Ralph. They start walking along the pass.

Stephan's smile disappears as he takes his first few steps
out onto the pass.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

The group walks slowly across the pass. The path is barely
large enough for them to walk one by one. Juan is going
first, Ralph is next, and Stephan walks last.

Suddenly, Ralph's foot slips on slick rock. He topples toward
the edge.

Juan reaches out and grabs Ralph, forcing him back against
the side of the cliff.

STEPHAN

Ralph!

JUAN

(in Spanish)
Mr. Simmons, are you alright?

Ralph catches his breath.

RALPH

I'm fine, boys. Just a little slip.

JUAN

(in Spanish)
Don't do that to me.

Stephan clutches his chest, breathing hard. Juan is still
staring at Ralph. Ralph waves his hands to keep moving.

RALPH

Come on. Let's move. God will
protect us.

Juan turns around and keeps walking.

JUAN

(quietly, in Spanish)
Stupid missionary.

Ralph follows Juan. Stephan looks up to the sky and then keeps walking.

STEPHAN

(whispered)

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff..."

EXT. PASS CAMP - EVENING

The group arrives at a large flat area in a shallow valley between two peaks. Juan takes a deep breath and drops his pack in the middle of the clearing.

JUAN

Okay, we camp here for the night.

Stephan runs into the clearing and collapses.

STEPHAN

Thank you, Jesus.

RALPH

What he said.

Ralph starts to unpack. Stephan stands up and walks over to Juan.

STEPHAN

I don't want to sound ungrateful that we're finally on solid ground. But I thought we were supposed to be able to see the village from here.

Juan smiles.

JUAN

I did say that, didn't I?

Juan gestures for Stephan to follow him. Juan leads him to a patch of bushes, and when he pushes them aside...

EXT. ABOVE THE VILLAGE - EVENING

The village is small, nestled at the bottom of a valley. Some of the ramshackle buildings are lit from inside by what looks like candlelight.

EXT. PASS CAMP - EVENING

Stephan is in awe.

STEPHAN

Amazing.

Juan shrugs and walks away.

STEPHAN (CONT'D)

Can we go down now?

Juan LAUGHS.

JUAN

No. The path is too treacherous in the dark. But don't worry. It will still be there tomorrow.

Stephan looks back out over the village one more time.

STEPHAN

Tomorrow.

EXT. PASS CAMP - DAY

The next day, Stephan is finishing up pulling down his tent. The rain is pouring down harder than ever. He looks over to Juan and Ralph, who have already packed.

STEPHAN

It's really coming down, huh?

JUAN

I told you before. It's the rainy season. You're in a rainforest. You do the math.

Stephan turns to finish packing. But Juan shares a nervous look with Ralph.

EXT. PATH TO THE VILLAGE - DAY

As the group travels down a steep, but not too narrow path next to a cliff face, the rain soaks them. THUNDER sounds in the distance. Despite the weather, Stephan is grinning.

He turns to Ralph.

STEPHAN

Today is the day we meet the people we'll be witnessing to.

Ralph opens his mouth.

STEPHAN (CONT'D)

I know. Be patient. Everything is going to happen in God's time.

RALPH

I was just going to say that I'm excited too.

STEPHAN

Oh. Good, then.

Just then, lightning strikes on the mountain above them. They cover their heads, but nothing happens.

STEPHAN (CONT'D)

That was close.

A loud RUMBLING comes from the mountain. Small rocks begin falling from above them.

STEPHAN (CONT'D)

What's going--

Juan grabs Stephan by the arm and drags him toward a big outcropping of rock.

JUAN

Get to cover! It's a mudslide!

Dirt and rocks begins pouring over the edge of the mountain, taking trees with the flow.

Ralph trips behind them, falling to his knees.

STEPHAN

Ralph!

He tries to turn around to get to Ralph, but Juan grabs his shirt and swings him around under the outcropping.

Then, the wave of debris descends over them, blocking their vision of Ralph.

EXT. PATH TO THE VILLAGE - LATER

The outcropping is mostly covered in dirt and rocks now. But the earth has stopped moving.

A large rock moves near the outcropping. It falls down, and Juan's hand emerges. Other rocks and bits of debris shift from inside.

A hole appears and Juan and Stephan emerge, COUGHING.

JUAN
Are you okay?

Stephan nods, covering his mouth. Then he looks up.

STEPHAN
Where's Ralph?

Juan looks around. Nothing looks like it did before. The trees around the area are completely gone, and the ground is covered in a new layer of dirt.

RALPH (O.C.)
I'm here.

Stephan and Juan turn to see Ralph, bloodied and dirty, but still alive.

STEPHAN
Oh, thank God.

Stephan leans over to catch his breath. He turns away from Ralph toward the valley.

Juan runs up to Ralph and hugs him.

RALPH
Ow, ow, ow.

Juan lets go.

RALPH (CONT'D)
Careful son, I think I broke a rib.

JUAN
How did you survive?

RALPH
I don't know. The earth started coming down around me, and I didn't know where to go. Then, suddenly, I saw this opening in flow and I felt almost pushed to this hole in the cliff I saw. It kept me safe.

Juan looks around.

JUAN
(incredulous)
Your God protected you...

Ralph nods slowly.

RALPH
He protected all of us.

STEPHAN (O.C.)
Not all of us.

Ralph and Juan turn around to see Stephan looking out over the valley.

RALPH
Oh, please Lord, no.

EXT. ABOVE THE VILLAGE - DAY

The village is nearly gone. A few houses still stand, but most have been swept away in the mudslide. A few people can barely be seen milling around the broken houses.

EXT. PATH TO THE VILLAGE - DAY

Stephan sinks to his knees, crying. Ralph and Juan kneel down beside him. Ralph puts his hand on Stephan's shoulder.

RALPH
I know you don't want to hear this--

STEPHAN
We're too late.

RALPH
Stephan.

STEPHAN
No. What if we'd been here earlier?
Huh? What if the plane hadn't been
so late? What if it hadn't been
raining so hard?

Ralph and Juan say nothing. Stephan wipes tears and dirt from his cheek.

STEPHAN (CONT'D)
We could've gotten here faster,
could have preached to them. We
could have saved them. We could
have done something. Anything!

RALPH
We could have died in the mudslide.
Washed away before we even got to
share the Good News once.

STEPHAN

So what? You--you think this is God's providence? He saved us and let them die?

Ralph stands up and looks out over the village.

RALPH

Tragedy is never God's fault. But sometimes, he can use tragedy for his purposes.

Stephan looks away.

RALPH (CONT'D)

When I was 32, my wife became sick. Cancer. Stage 4. Rachel was such a godly woman, and she never once feared death. She was my light, and when she was gone, I felt like I was in darkness.

STEPHAN

Why are you telling me this?

Ralph put up his hand, silencing Stephan. Then he put it back down.

RALPH

We had always planned to travel the world. So, when she died, I did. Along the way, I saw so many broken people. People who needed the Gospel. That's when I decided to become a missionary.

Ralph looks down at Stephan.

RALPH (CONT'D)

If it weren't for the death of my wife, I would never have reached thousands of people with the Word of God. We would not be here to help these people rebuild their homes and their lives. It may hurt, but God can use our pain to reach others.

Stephan sits in silence for a few beats.

STEPHAN

When my dad passed away, I was fourteen. He was my hero. I didn't know what to do without him.

Stephan smiles sadly.

STEPHAN (CONT'D)

But then my pastor came to visit. He could see I was devastated, so he came to visit every week for a year after that. He got me interested in missionary work, and he taught me that God's plan isn't my plan.

(looking at Ralph)

And that everything in His plan happens for a reason.

(beat)

I guess I forgot that.

Stephan stands up.

JUAN

There are survivors down there.

Stephan pulls out his Bible.

STEPHAN

And they need this more than ever.

Ralph holds out his hands.

RALPH

And these.

STEPHAN

We're going to help them. Anyway we can.

JUAN

I want to help.

Ralph and Stephan turn to Juan.

JUAN (CONT'D)

Please. They're my people. I want to stay.

Ralph squeezes Juan's shoulder.

RALPH

Then, let's go get started.

Stephan clutches the Bible tightly against his chest, as they walk together down to the village.

FADE OUT.