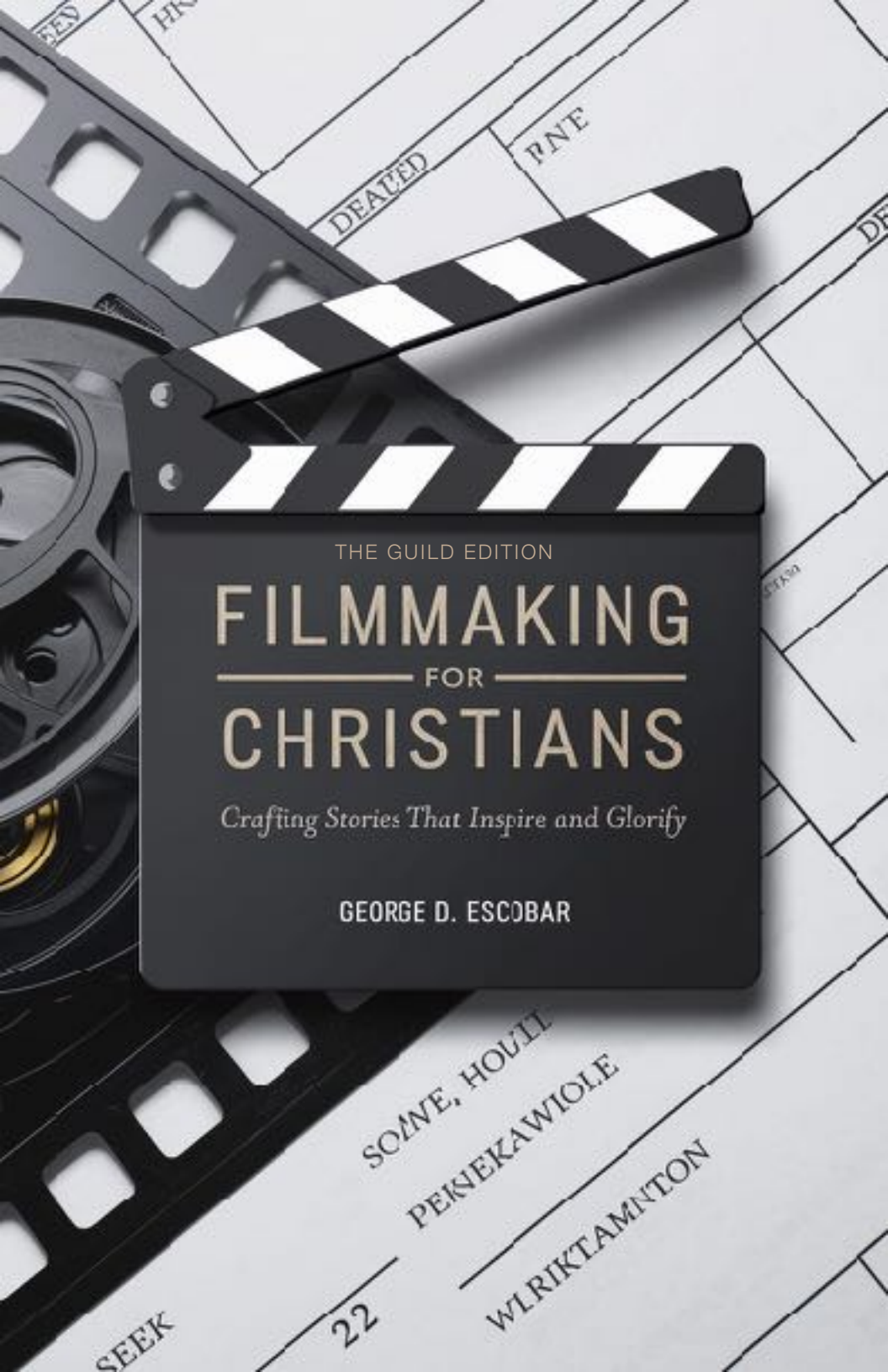

THE GUILD EDITION
FILMMAKING
FOR
CHRISTIANS
Crafting Stories That Inspire and Glorify
GEORGE D. ESCOBAR

FILMMAKING FOR CHRISTIANS

CRAFTING STORIES THAT INSPIRE AND GLORIFY

George D. Escobar

Advent Film Group Publishing

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How This Book Came To Be

PROLOGUE

Recent experiences in the filmmaking process gave birth to this book. Over the past 15 years, Advent Film Group has made four full-length feature films and trained over 3,500 aspiring filmmakers at our annual Advent Film Workshops, film festivals, colleges, various homeschooling conventions, and online webinars. We have also provided production experience to nearly 100 novice film crew members during the making of our movies, and afforded 20 full-time internships at our home offices in Purcellville, Virginia. It is the compilation of film workshop presentations, articles, interviews, and personal stories that make up the content of this book. Everything we know to date about making movies and becoming a filmmaker for Christ is presented here for your benefit.

In all that we know and do, we give all glory, honor, and credit to our Lord, Jesus Christ. He is the master storyteller.

Chapter 1

SETTING UP A FIRM FOUNDATION

THE BEGINNING

George Escobar: Michael Snyder and I have known each other for about three years. Mike is my business partner and co-founder of Advent Film Group. Mike came on board in a very unusual way. He learned about Advent Film Group through a friend, who recommended that he might be interested in investing in a movie called *Come What May*. So I met with him and his wife, made a presentation, and they decided to become one of the first investors in the movie. After about a year period, during which we developed a friendship and work relationship that really was orchestrated by the Lord concerning our skill sets, we came to a conclusion in 2009, when I told Mike, "You know, it'd be really good, in order not to keel over and die in making future films, I should bring on a partner." I had been resistant to that because I've always been warned about the dangers of going into

partnerships. But after much prayer from both Mike and me, I really felt that it was the right thing to do and that the Lord had prepared us for that.

It's worked out very well. Our skill sets and work experiences are very complimentary. They are not identical and we don't have aspirations to work on the same thing, for example, I'm centered creative and production tasks, such as screenwriting and directing, while Mike is focused on legal and business development. As Mike likes to say, "We have the framework for a true *partnership* because we're pursuing the same goal but applying two different skill sets to achieve it, versus a *battleship*, which happens when two people are trying to achieve the same goal, using very similar skills, but battling on whose skills (or vantage points) are better.

Mike can tell you more about it later, especially as we go into the business and investment side. If you want to know all about the law, Mike has been an attorney for a long time, over 25 years. He's got deep experience in mergers and acquisitions and has been immersed in the business of film and gained quite an expert in the area of distribution.

(NOTE: Since the original writing of this book, Mike Snyder, sadly, has passed away. His warm generous spirit, kind heart, and keen insights are forever a blessing on these pages.)

WELCOME

Thank you all so much for attending this workshop. I know it's taken much time and treasure for you to be here. It's been a journey that for some of you has been quickly decided and for others it has been a struggle: should I be here? Is it something I should be doing? Regardless of how you arrived, I'm grateful that you're here. Before I go any further, I'd like to go ahead and open us up in prayer, and then we'll start.

Dear heavenly Father, thank you, Lord, for bringing us together this day, Lord, for ordaining our assembly to focus not on ourselves or filmmaking, but rather on what You're doing in this medium, what You're doing with the filmmaking movement amongst Christians, Lord, and the audiences that You're preparing to receive your stories. We ask, Father, that You bless our time, that we would be knitted together in unity for Your purposes. We thank You for allowing us the resources and the facility, the traveling mercies, Lord, that You've provided, and security and safety that we could be here. I pray now that what we say, what we do, and all our communication would be clear and direct and would be guided by You, Father. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

I've already introduced you to Mike Snyder. I want to introduce you to all of our hardworking interns. Immediately to my right is David Cook. He and his sister,

Rebekah, whom you all met at the front, come from Spain. They were here where you guys are sitting in July 2009, and they made the decision to stay here. They're a missionary family from Spain; the rest of their family is back doing their mission work, and David and Rebekah have made filmmaking their mission. We'll talk more about their background and participation a little bit later when we have a panel of the interns.

Amy Jarvis has been working with Advent for about two years. Two years, but in filmmaking years, maybe fifty years; seems like it. She comes from Kansas City, and she's the one that organized this whole workshop this year, which allowed me to concentrate on other things. She was working with David Cook and with Kylene, who is in charge of all the media assets. David has been working with both the logistics of putting this together and all the technology aspects. We also have Ian Reid and Brooke Butler; both Ian and Brooke are Patrick Henry College students. My son, Gregory, is also here, in the far corner over there, auditing his father.

If you want to know more about Patrick Henry College, talk to one of those three and they'll tell you more about this school. Just off the bat, Patrick Henry College does not have a film program, but they do have a close relationship with Advent Film Group, and one of the reasons that Ian Reid in particular—and he'll tell you the story a little bit later—is here attending this school is

because he wants to be a filmmaker. It's a bit of an odd choice, but others have made the same decision. When they're right next door to us and that's their interest, we get them plugged right into what we're doing.

Kylene Arnold comes from Illinois and is a graduate of Bob Jones University. She was also here last year—I think you were sitting right up here in the front row on this side, right? She's one of ten people who were at the workshops last year who ended up working on some of our productions, primarily *HERO*. Now Kylene has also moved out here to Virginia.

So in total: Kylene, Ian, Amy, David, Rebekah, Brooke, and Peter Forbes—those are all the Advent interns and associates that have joined us over the last couple of years. The Lord has been very, very good, and we'll share more later about some of the stories of how they came and the Lord's timing in bringing them here.

You all have a schedule, right? We're going to stay close to it, but we also might be doing some jumping around as the need arises. One thing that isn't here is at four-thirty to five-thirty, where it says, "Planning your career." My wife suggested, "Why don't you have a panel of interns to talk about how they arrived here and the decisions they had to make." So we're going to do that and organize a session so that you can ask questions.

WHY START ADVENT?

The question that we at Advent Film Group were looking at, at our inception back in 2007, was: "Why is it that Advent Film Group needs to exist? Does the world really need yet another film production company?"

This was a key question to deal with, because, like yourselves, I've been interested in film for a long time and was trying to figure out what I should be doing in this realm.

It's a question I had asked myself twenty-five years before, as a young person attending the American Film Institute Conservatory. My answer back then was quite different: it centered on glamour, fame, and fortune. It was all about how short I could make my Academy Award speech and the adulation of being a filmmaker.

I grew up in Orange County, CA, only a bit further south from Los Angeles, so I grew up in the Hollywood culture. I was saved when I was sixteen, but did not really know the Lord in a personal way. I didn't walk the Christian walk or have a relationship with Him until much later in life.

I was saved because a young seventeen-year-old—I can't even remember her name: I remember her face distinctly—while I was in high school, kept inviting me to go to church with her on a Wednesday night. I thought that was the strangest thing. Who goes to church on a Wednesday? She kept asking and asking, and I finally

said, "Okay, stop asking. I'll go." That night there was an evangelist at her church—a fire and brimstone evangelist. He was exactly what I needed to get my attention. I went up during the altar call. I was fearful, but at the same time I felt that that's really what the Lord wanted me to do, and I sensed His protection and direction once I yielded to Him and recognized what a sinner I was. But again, there was no follow-through, so it was a long struggle to really understand what it means to be a Christian, to know Christ as my personal Savior and be obedient to Him.

I had another opportunity to refocus my career in my late forties, when the Lord gave me a divine appointment at the San Antonio Independent Christian Film Festival. It was October of 2006, and my son Vincent, who was ten at the time, was very interested in film, so I took him there. I was there as a tourist; I had no intention in getting involved. I was curious, but it was really for my son.

Well, God had other plans for me. He gave me an opportunity to meet Stephen Kendrick, who just a month before had released a movie called *Facing The Giants*, which was doing well at the box office. It hadn't achieved the measure of success that we all recognize now (for those of you who have followed that film) but it was enough that it created quite the buzz amongst the Christian filmmaking community. Certainly Hollywood

was shocked that a movie made for only $100,000 would earn about ten, and, eventually, twelve million dollars at the box office.

That meeting with Stephen Kendrick was a very short, hallway-type conversation. He was there with his son, but he did challenge me after we exchanged a little bit of quick background. He said, "So George, what are you going to do with all the blessings the Lord has given you, your talents and experience and interests?" I didn't have a good answer for him. It was a very penetrating, probing question, even though it's so simple that you could almost ignore it—almost a perfunctory question—but I knew it meant something coming from him, and that he meant it in asking. I couldn't answer Stephen's question at that time. It was later when I got home that I cried out to the Lord. I needed to repent, and I did. I said, "Lord, I've been useless to You. I've been selfish, self-centered, focused on what I wanted to do, and how I wanted to do it. I can't keep doing that. I don't want to do that. So if You want me to be involved in film, please use me. If not, I'm okay with that too."

Well, three months later, Advent Film Group began, in January of 2007.

OUR CHALLENGE

From the start there was a challenge that the Lord had laid in my heart to begin to probe and undertake: "Why

is it that movies that are inherently Christian-themed, Christian-authored—like *Amazing Grace*, *Chronicles of Narnia*, *Lord of the Rings*, and even *Nativity Story*—why are they all directed by secular directors?"

In another fateful meeting, a well-known Hollywood producer told me—and this is almost verbatim—"George, the reason that a movie like *Amazing Grace* [which he had produced] does not have a Christian director, is that there are no qualified Christian directors whom Hollywood could entrust with a big-budget film."

Now this does not mean that there are no qualified Christian directors, from a technical perspective, who could undertake such a project. There are dozens of them with decades of experience, but none of them had a track record that would get a return on the investment. A movie like *Amazing Grace* was a $30 million dollar movie; you need to get four times that revenue, in box office revenue, in order for it to be considered successful, and we'll go through the numbers of why that is a little bit later.

There's a sure measure, a trajectory that we're seeing that soon this challenge will be met. Now somebody always comes up and says, "Wait, what about Mel Gibson? He's a Christian, and he made and directed *The Passion of the Christ*, and that was a thirty-million dollar movie." Yeah, he did all that, but you know what? He had to use his own money, because Hollywood wouldn't

give him the money. Then he had to use his own money for distribution as well, because nobody would trust him on the distribution side, so that one doesn't count.

So there is a challenge. How do you approach this challenge? Well, many independent projects out there begin with a filmmaker's passion. Essentially, what happens is they make a movie that they really feel they've got to make. They've got the story baked in, and they've wanted to make this movie for a long, long time. I come across filmmakers with this kind of passion all the time. Almost every day I'll get a call or an email like that, and there's nothing wrong with that, except that it's not a sustainable business model for you to have this passion to make one film. To make that film requires quite a bit of effort and work on your part. Nowadays, because of the tools that are available and depending on the budget involved, you could do it. But then what? What happens next?

Some of you are thinking, "I just want to make this one movie." You'll get enough information to be able to do that, but we'd rather you think of this as a true vocational field and that you want to make multiple projects. Because when you've done it once and you've built up the infrastructure amongst your friends and family and crew and everything else that you have to do to make that one movie, it's much easier to make the next one.

To get the kind of funding that's necessary to make a good movie, you're going to need a business plan. We're going to show you how to do that. So think about it beyond that one-off project.

We also didn't want to just be a film production company making feature films. We wanted to be able to raise up dozens of Christian directors out there. Because, sadly, as I was starting Advent Film Group, I got in touch with some Christian directors and Christian production companies (that have been in business, some of them, for twenty years) and they were very closely guarded with the information they had. They really weren't willing to share it. The only people that were willing to share it were secular filmmakers whom I also contacted. That's where I had to get most of my information; the Christian filmmakers didn't want to share. It was like, "I've got mine, you go get yours. Thank you for contacting me. Contact me again when you're successful." So sad.

We endeavored to not do that. We wanted to be the model of the opposite of that. Not that the Christian filmmakers that we talked to were bad people: it's just that they didn't have that vision of sharing. There were some exceptions that had that heart for teaching, but they weren't making feature films. They were either documentary filmmakers, or they were instructors.

There's one organization in particular, ICVM (International Christian Video and Media group), that

you should join. They have an annual conference in June or July. That's a place for Christian producers and distributors (mostly professional, but you don't have to be) to come and get to meet people. It's a great place for networking and very much a Christian environment.

Another thing we wanted to do was really reach out to the homeschooling community. Because I'm a homeschooling dad, I strongly believe in the homeschooling movement as one of those organizations and movements ordained by God to lead us in many areas of life, including the media and culture. We wanted to be a haven to support the homeschooling community.

One other organization that was profoundly important and significant—and you should definitely get good grounding there theologically for why you want to be a filmmaker for Christ—and that is the San Antonio Independent Christian Film Festival (SAICFF). They have very, very strict guidelines and rules for submission of your films, and by some folks it would be considered almost extreme. When I look at it though, it's really the right environment to begin in—to have those very tight, safe boundaries—because it forces you to be very creative in your storytelling. It forces you to look outside of yourself and what the normal conventions are and focus on storytelling from God's perspective. We're going to cover that a little bit later, in the story and screenplay

development part, as far as how to identify what His stories are versus your own.

PLANNING AND BUILDING A BRAND

Our original plan was to establish a self-funding film program, meaning that we weren't always going to be relying on donors or investors. We are still on that path, the goal being that the revenues that come in would be reinvested into the program and grow that. We were going to do that by producing high quality feature films, using micro-budget filmmaking techniques, and then distributing these films through both online and offline venues. That's part of what I call the relationship-building process, where you begin to create a brand for yourself and to establish a relationship with your audience.

How many of you here have seen movies made by Pixar? Okay, many of you.

If Pixar made an announcement tomorrow, saying they've got new movie called Project X, would you go see that movie without even much thought just because it's from Pixar? Raise your hand if that's true. Okay, and half of you, maybe with a little bit more information, you'd go see it. The reason many people will go see a Pixar movie now is because they've built a relationship with their audience. They know how to tell stories for their target audience and other audiences that like those

movies, and you've come to expect and rely on good storytelling and good quality from them.

That's something we're still building with Advent Film Group. We're also doing it, not just with the audience, but with people who want to become involved in this movement. Hopefully that's the reason you're here, to learn more and to replicate what we're doing by reaching out to your own community in your sphere of influence and reaching out to other filmmakers. If we do that on a systematic, regular basis, then not only do we provide good vocational opportunities for all the young people out there, but also for those who have gone through a career shift, like myself.

I was happily working for AOL as an executive there, and then I became a happily working executive for Discovery Channel. But the Lord had other plans: to do this startup with a fledgling Christian film community in Purcellville, Virginia. Now *there's* a great business plan: a real confidence builder there when you tell that to your family and friends and, especially, your spouse. But I can also testify to the fact that if God wants something done and He has touched you to begin considering that and moving in that direction, He will open doors for you. It's up to you to walk through. If you don't, He'll go pick somebody else.

As I mentioned, Advent Film Group began in January 2007. We put together the story, the business plans, and

the private placement memorandum, working with Emerson Marks. By April 2007 (very, very aggressive schedule) we were trying to get support from Patrick Henry College and other homeschoolers.

Back then, Advent Film Group consisted of one person: me. When meeting with Patrick Henry College in late January, they supported what we wanted to do, but they said, "You're going to need to get your own funding, because we're busy trying to raise our own funds for the school." So that was a great challenge and a great leap of faith for both sides, because they were trusting that if the Lord wants this done—this is what Mike Farris told me, "There's a guy named George Mueller. Read his biography; you'll be inspired." Mueller said, "What God ordains, what God orders, He'll pay for." That's exactly what happened with George Mueller. He set up an orphanage in England, and without any formal investment, sponsorships or donors (this is in the late nineteenth century), the Lord met his needs all the time.

In April, I was able to secure from Patrick Henry College permission to film on campus for about five weeks, but we had to start on July 9. So from the beginning of April to July 9, we needed to raise $300,000: $150,000 for production, $150,000 for everything else, which is business, legal, sales, finance, marketing, and distribution.

The production part, by the way, is really a small bit of what you need to do as a filmmaker, maybe twenty-five

percent of your efforts. Yet the information and teaching that is out there spends about eighty percent of the time teaching you twenty-five percent of what you need to do. We're trying to bridge the gap of learning on the other side.

What typically happens when you must raise $300,000 in three months? You can say, "This is too much, Lord. I can't do this!" and give up. That's a nice stopping point, and everybody can appreciate the fact that "well, that's just too much money; that's not possible for you to raise $300,000 in such a short amount of time."

Well, I went out to Hollywood, talked to some of my friends there, and they looked at the business plan. They said it was not too ambitious; it was workable, it was a solid plan. They also warned me that, from their experience of raising money, I was going to need to talk to thirty accredited investors before I could find one to invest. Accredited, meaning that they are self-qualified according to the Securities Exchange Commission rules, that they have the appropriate net worth and savvy, and it isn't just your neighbor or your friends. They have to be accredited. Statistically, I need to talk to thirty of them before I'll find one to invest.

Well, I won't go into all the details, but what the Lord did was He brought twelve investors, and I told them what we're trying to do, and they all said, "Yes, they will invest." It was a hundred percent success: it was a one-to-

one ratio. For those of you who have ever done any business before, you know it's impossible. It doesn't happen in the real world. But this isn't the real world, this is God's world, and this is what He wanted to happen.

When that hurdle was overcome by the Lord, how can my wife say no? (That was the other big hurdle.) It was still difficult, because we only raised a $150,000 at the start, only enough to get production going. At the end of production, obviously the Lord knew that production had ended in August and we needed the rest of the money to continue. At that point, He brought eight more investors, and they all said, "Yes." It was as if the Lord said, "Okay, if you didn't believe that miracle, let me give you another one. I want you to keep doing this." Just in a short amount of time, He's really proven himself that this is something that He wants to bless.

Not just with us, but also with other organizations, like Sherwood Baptist in Albany, Georgia with *Facing The Giants* and then *Fireproof* and now *Courageous*. With the HeuMoore team, out in Texas, with *The Widow's Might*, made by a nineteen-year-old filmmaker. It won the $101,000 prize award at SAICFF, which is the largest cash prize for the film festival. The folks in Michigan, the Burns family with *Pendragon*, which is an epic-scale type movie on a shoestring budget. There's a whole set of stories there as well, of how the Lord made that happen,

but all of these things don't happen in a vacuum or a void without God's knowledge and provision.

So I want you to know that you're here because the Lord has brought you here. It's what you do with the knowledge that you're going to get and how well you plan and heed God's calling that will take you to the next step. I want to encourage you that the Lord is at work here, with you and each one of us, in a significant way.

Another part of our mission at Advent is we want to continue training filmmakers. We want to fund homeschooling and media communications outreach, among other things, and establish world-class filmmaking capabilities, perhaps here or at other institutions. So those are some of our future goals.

EMERGING LANDSCAPE

When *The Passion of the Christ* came out in 2004—how many of you have seen that movie? Quite a number of you. That was a huge shock to Hollywood because it went on to earn $612,000,000 at the box office; everybody was stunned. So Hollywood decided, "Hey, there's money to be made from these Christians. Let's go ahead and join in the fray." This was their immediate response.

Walden Media was already existing then, but they definitely speeded up development of other projects that would target the Christian market and very successfully

at that. *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, made $745 million.

I consider both of those as the tipping point for Hollywood to really invest in this.

20th Century Fox opened a new division, which has since scaled down quite a bit, called FoxFaith. They began it in September 2006. Their plan at the time was to make about a dozen family friendly films with budgets about five million dollars or less. For them, that's very low-budget.

Anybody care to guess what the average Hollywood studio film budget is on average? Fifty-million or so? One-fifty to two-hundred million? Not quite that high. You've seen movies made for that price point, yes, but on the average, about sixty to sixty-five million is the average Hollywood studio film. So to them, our $150,000 movie was their catering budget for a couple of days. A five million total budget is nothing.

However, they decided that they were going to make these movies. Their first one was a Ted Dekker novel about a brilliant seminary student being stalked by a serial killer. That would be really attractive to the Christians, right, because it's a seminary student. Christians love horror movies, because horror movies are really successful at the box office and a lot of Christians go to them. If you look at the statistics, seventy to eighty

percent of the population identify themselves as Christian. So just looking at the quick demographics, most of those Christians must be going to the horror movies, so let's put the two together. They decided to make a bunch of other movies that were also in the horror genre.

Dudleytown: that was from another company. That was Good News Holdings. How many here have heard of George Barna? George Barna is a researcher, a very strong influence in the Christian community because of the market research he's done over the years. It was his research about what influences culture that gave the executive pastor at Sherwood Baptist the impetus to get involved in filmmaking, when it was presented to him by Alex and Stephen Kendrick. Well, George Barna decided to launch a company called Good News Holdings.

It was launched with great fanfare. Variety and The Hollywood Reporter are the two trade publications in Hollywood. They had full page ads about the Good News Holdings launch. It had multimillion dollar investments. David Kirkpatrick, who was the former president of Paramount, was hired as the head of that organization. The first movie they were going to make was Anne Rice's extra-biblical novel. Anne Rice used to make horror movies—the vampire type movies. Then she became a Christian and stopped making those movies, and, instead of those novels, she decided to write

some historical novels, but which are not directly biblically based.

I call it extra-biblical, because the first one is *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt*, which traces the life of Christ from, I think, the time He was twelve until just before His ministry, which of course we have no accounts of, so she had to make that whole thing up. They thought Christians would love that story and want to see that made. They also want to make a set of movies called *Dudleytown*, based on a true story concerning the legendary evil that held that town in its grip for hundreds of years.

Do you see a pattern there? Horror movies.

We're going to look at a chart later on, and you'll see that the aspirations don't always meet where the audience is. That's why it's really important to know who your audience is. It's important that you understand that when you set up your production company, that you have some strategic goals. For us, it was to change and help shape the culture, provide practical hands-on training and mentorship, rally the homeschool community toward engagement in media, help establish some sort of school of cinema—television perhaps—and use the resources that we have to provide support to conservative causes, especially on the subject matter that we care about, like homeschooling and parental rights, and our support for a school like Patrick Henry College.

How many have heard of an organization called Brave New Films? Their influence has waned since the Democrats gained domination in Congress and the White House, but before that, during the Bush administration, Brave New Films had made a series of documentaries highly targeted against Christians and the conservative movement. Very successful; they're funded by Sierra Club, ACLU, and just people out there who wanted to give money so that these documentaries would get made. For example, they wanted to make a movie called *Iraq for Sale: The War Profiteers*. They didn't have enough money for it themselves, and they needed $750,000. In ten days, just from their donor base, they collected $267,892. That's called crowd-funding, by the way. It's this notion that there are people who are like-minded, who will support your movie, especially for a specific cause. Brave New Films has been the model for that.

BUDGET APPROACH

For making a feature film I would encourage you to approach it from a micro-budget perspective. Micro-budget means a movie made for less than $500,000.

You've heard of no-budget filmmaking? That's when you literally have no money. You borrow everything, and you just go out there and shoot on the weekends, and hopefully the whole thing will come together. Hundreds of films get made that way.

A step above that is the ultra-low budget world. That's when you make a movie for a $100,000 or less. Some people can do that with family and friends and their credit cards.

Or, you can begin to raise money from investors. If you're going to do that, you need to make sure that you have a plan for getting a return on that investment. For us, the indie movie, *Reversal*, was the closest thing we found that was comparable to *Come What May*, our first film, which was about a college debate team. *Reversal* is about a high school wrestling team. It was made for $300,000 and grossed about $400,000 in DVD sales, eventually selling about 55,000 DVD units.

What's notable about *Reversal* is that they had a bulls-eye on their target audience. Who would buy high school wrestling movies? Anyone care to answer that? That's right: high school wrestlers, as well as college wrestlers,

and old wrestlers. Every year, you expect that there are many new wrestlers going into different high schools, right? So every year the producers of *Reversal* have a perennial movie that people want to buy or talk about or share, so that movie continues to make money. Now, do you design a story purely on that basis? You could. From your target audience, you'll want to know: "What is it that they need? What movie hasn't been made for them?"

Usually there are stories the Lord has laid out in front of you, but you're not even looking at them because you're too busy looking over here. We had three other story ideas before the Lord helped us to finally see, "this is the story that I want you to make: *Come What May*." Even then, when we decided to make that movie, the focus of it ended up being different from what we originally started out with.

We started with the idea of depicting the courage of college students willing to lose a moot court national championship so that principle can triumph over compromise. We ended up doing that, but, equally powerful, was showcased the legal arguments for overturning the Roe versus Wade decision before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Chapter 2

WHAT IS THE NEW CHRISTIAN FILM MOVEMENT?

George Escobar: Since only half of you have seen *Come What May*, and we'll be using that as a prototype film at the micro-budget level, I think it's important for you to at least see the trailer so you can see what can be produced for $150,000 budget, working with an organization like Patrick Henry College. This movie was made primarily by homeschool students, forty home-schooled students, working with five professionals.

I want to show it to you as a good reference point for us. We also want to provide you with some new things we've

learned based on our last film, *HERO*, and a new film project coming up later this year, which is a much bigger budget. Let's go ahead and run the trailer.

[To view the official film trailer, please go to www.ComeWhatMayTheMovie.com]

Many of those interior scenes were filmed right here at the PHC campus, at people's homes, at Regent University for the college exteriors, and at Liberty University, where they providentially just happened to finish constructing a replica of the Supreme Court that we were allowed to film in—the first film company that was given that permission. We were also blessed by Liberty University to film at their huge library.

Come What May was made over a five-week period, and, except for two of the principal actors, the mom and dad in the movie, they were all novices: people that we cast because they were already similar to the role we had them play. That's called typecasting.

Before we go into how that movie was made, we want to talk a little bit more about why this new Christian film movement has emerged. It's important to know what you're getting into and all the players involved.

As I said before, George Barna conducted cultural media research, and this was the finding he gave—this was used by the Kendrick brothers to explain to their church why they needed to become involved in filmmaking—that the

leading influencers in American society are movies, television, the internet, books, and music. The church, the Christian church, is not among the top dozen influencers these days. That means reaching the American public through media has become a critical point in history.

For those of you who are consumers of media, this is probably a familiar concept, if not a validated fact by research. Who controls culture today? Francis Schaeffer says, "Art and media are the means and bridge over which the current philosophy of the philosopher reaches the general culture. Whoever controls the media, controls the culture." Would you say that Christians are in the position of controlling culture? Can anybody say that without being laughed out of the room? No. Whose fault is that? Who is responsible for that demise?

What about the population itself? Because we're consumers of media and if we vote with our dollars, that tells filmmakers in Hollywood, distributors and exhibitors, "Oh, that's what they want to see? Let's make more of that." The perennial, for low-budget, micro-budget movies—the one constant winner of the type of movies that always generates enough revenue to pay itself back and makes enough money to make another movie—is what genre?

Horror.

It's also the most dangerous and the one genre that must be avoided by Christians, because it has no redeeming value whatsoever; it really is from the dark side. There are some Christians who think they can redeem that genre. I may be proven wrong, but I don't know how that is possible.

We're not going to spend too much more time on that. Just because it's popular and lots of it gets made, doesn't mean it's something you should be looking at. There are other more valuable types of culture-changing movies.

Another important premise here is that I fundamentally believe that God owns everything, controls everything. So if we follow what He's blessing, it will give us a direction that is clearly laid out for us. Those examples that I shared earlier as far as Hollywood's response and the genesis of many of these production companies—even the ones coming from Christians—they're solely focused on: "Okay, what's succeeding? Where are consumers at? Let's make more of those, make horror movies, but put some Christian worldview behind it." I don't think the Lord wants to bless that. He wants us to go elsewhere. So that's what we're going to focus on.

Mike Snyder: This idea that Christians are not in a position to influence the media—I would say they *are* in position. The problem is that the media is filled with Christians who have no kingdom purpose in filling that position. They are functional secularists, who see this as a

really good career and a way to support their families in something they're gifted at. Generally they don't have a vision for why God has them there, and, frankly, many of them don't have the courage to speak up on behalf of our Lord and His kingdom. That won't get you very far in your career once you're there. Christians are there in great numbers, and that's a sad fact for us to recognize.

On horror films, my own pet theory on this may not be even close to right, but the reason I think they are so popular is because we live in a world where people don't really know the Lord. Somehow we know it's wired in us —the reality that there is more than we can see. They know that there is a spirit world. They know that there is something bigger and larger than life that we experience and the horror film is the safe investment to get in touch with that. It's somehow resonating with what's already written on our hearts: there's something beyond the veil, beyond what they can see.

Sadly, again, individual Christians and the body of Christ as a whole obviously aren't ministering to these people who keep trying to wake up this need they know they have and can't do anything about. I'm not suggesting that this makes horror films good things: just an explanation for why I think they're so popular.

George Escobar: There's a gentleman that I learned about through attending the San Antonio International Christian Film Festival (SAICFF). His name is Henry van

Till, and this quote is attributed to him: "Culture is religion externalized." What we believe is what we start to make. Whoever dominates the culture governs our mindset and captures the mind share of the people in the society.

As a Christian who was living in the midst of Hollywood for a number of years and, eventually, literally, physically being moved by the Lord out to the East Coast, I can tell you that you begin to see a different world.

When you live there, immersed in it, the Hollywood culture becomes normal—where you tell people whatever it is they want to hear to get the business, to get that next job. I would be in meetings with directors and producers—and I was a production assistant at that time—where I would hear somebody say something and make a commitment and promise on one phone call and dial the next one and say something exactly the opposite of what they'd just committed to on the other, just to get the two parties convinced that whoever the person that was talking was their friend and their ally in whatever business dealings. I began to realize within myself that I didn't want to go in that direction; I think that's one of the reasons the Lord pulled me out.

What we're doing for affecting culture touches the mind share of people and their mindset. I differentiate the two, because once you have somebody's mind share, then you can have them do things and say things and react and

respond. That's how their mindset becomes part of their person. Therefore cultural discernment is critical: we can't just leave it alone.

Hopefully the Christians out there who are already working in Hollywood will be a light and be the salt, which, when you read about Christian filmmakers, is historically usually the justification for being there. "Oh, I'm going to be a light, I'm going to be salt." That can be absolutely genuine and truthful and is really in their heart and that's what they're trying to do. The problem is that if that's been happening for decades, where is the fruit? We're not seeing much. We're seeing glimpses. We may see some cleaning up of certain movies or certain TV shows. Do we want to keep following that pattern, or do we want to break a new mold and enhance what I'm calling the new Christian film movement, which is still in its infancy?

You're about to become a part of it, because you're here, and hopefully you are going to be inspired to do something about it, because most Christians are not properly equipped to lead the culture in cinema. So let's stop complaining about it, let's stop talking about it: let's get equipped.

Mike Snyder: One of the Scriptures that I think talks about this is Romans 12:1-2, which says: *"Be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*

It's interesting that it doesn't say by the *renewal* of your mind, as if it's this way and then it's that way. It's by the *renewing* of your mind. It's an ongoing process that we're going to do until the day we die. Every great film that brings honor and glory to Jesus and to the kingdom, every time someone watches one of these things, that is going to aid in the renewing of that person's mind, bringing them back to the truth, back to touching utter reality. Not snacking on the bad bologna that we get fed generally in the movies. Right now, there aren't many alternatives available to other people who want to go and watch movies, and that's the problem. So this new movement is a solution to that problem.

THE SECULAR WORLDVIEW

George Escobar: One of the most popular movies over the last decade is a movie called *Gladiator*. Just a show of hands, how many people have seen it? Okay, quite a number of you. It's really a marvelously created piece of cinema. It's beautifully shot, well acted, has great production value, and it's very moving, has authority. It's also highly secular.

Gladiator, without any hesitation, pushes forth the idea that there is not only a god, but many gods. We see that with Maximus praying to multiple gods, the little figurines that he's got to pray over, for protection for his wife and child and the netherworld.

It deals with ethics and morality, but each one of those moral guidelines is really dependent on the individual situation; there is no hard truth there. It takes transcendent truth using moral relativism, which is something that permeates our culture today. You'll hear this saying all the time: "It may not be true for you, but it's true for me, and so let me do what I need to do, and express myself." It's the foundation to that position, and situational ethics is really the primary engine that drives television today. The fact that it's even called situation comedy or situation drama, comes from that fact that, you know, we'll create a situation and apply ethics that work out when it subscribes to moral relativism. Two shaky pillars trying to support a secular worldview.

Mike Snyder: And just to take a film that's doing extremely well now: *Avatar*. Now there is something that's marvelous technically, and it can be engaging, but what are you absorbing and being taught? You're being taught pantheism, that "all is one and god is all." It's just filled with that. People are absorbing it because they don't have a strong filter to figure out what's going on, and it seeps in. A picture's worth a thousand words, and with 24 pictures per second in a movie, and you get a two-hour movie going on, the amount of messaging that's coming through is massive, especially with younger people. Take your twelve-year-old, whose mind is still being formed, or ten-year-old, and this stuff, sadly, makes a difference in the wrong direction.

George Escobar: Yes, that's a great example, because on the one hand the Bible teaches us about the Holy Spirit—that we can be imbued by the Holy Spirit once we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior. In *Avatar*, however, it says that you can be plugged in to this tree—literally, physically connect to it through these tentacles—and then be filled by the life-giving force of nature.

Avatar has been seen by millions of people. It's earned, I think, two billion dollars so far. It's a very, very powerful type of messaging that's going on, and it's a battle of worldviews.

So let's take it from a filmmaking perspective. From a secular worldview we get three primary messages:

1. Individuals should conduct life as they choose, as long as it does not interfere with the lives of others. We've all heard that.

2. The Bible is not relevant to real life because it's only a set of stories based on dated moral codes or tradition, so it's almost like a book of fantasy.

3. Human nature is changing, evolving, and so must our rules for living. Values and ethics must change and adapt to our evolving human nature. And so, taking this rationale into the marketplace of ideas, even the U.S. Constitution must change to reflect new roles for our government and how we are governed.

Whereas, from a Christian worldview, we have a different message altogether. This is from Second Timothy chapter 3, verses 16 and 17: *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."*

I consider this verse central to what stories need to be about. The core of the verse is centered on what God teaches us through **Scripture**, because it's **inspired** by Him. It's **profitable** to use His words, what He's given us in Scripture, because it's going to show **correction** and **reproof** and **instruction in righteousness**, which is what we need to be a **complete man of God**. And as such, we are then **equipped for every good work**."

This is the stuff of great drama, of universal need and fulfillment. It's also incredibly difficult to achieve without God. In fact, it's impossible to accomplish in real life. When we try to do it using our own power, we will ultimately fail. Of courese there may be periods of temporary achievement or fulfillment, but it's not everlasting. Only God can grant that. Yet, what do our cinema stories show us? They generally show us the exact opposite of our need for God and the completeness He gives us. Instead, Hollywood stories are all about achieving self-actualization.

Most films that audiences respond to give us those kinds of messages, right? We're moved by characters like George Bailey in *It's Wonderful Life*, who learns that no man is an island, that he needs friends, and that his life is valuable. Through divine intervention, George Bailey is shown that because of his life and his sacrifices for others, all these other good things have happened in his family and community.

Going back to the verse from Timothy chapter 3, verses 16 and 17 (above) shows us that we can make stories that go beyond Hollywood's partial truths: not just saying, "be a good neighbor," but *why* we need to be a good neighbor. What is it? What is the foundation behind it? So that the main character in your story is a man of God or becomes a man of God, so that only then is he truly complete. That's the fulfillment of your character, completeness in God, so that he's thoroughly equipped for whatever work God wants him to do.

This goes against the secular worldview and what they teach you in film school. I'm going to repeat myself later, about what I learned in film school. The highest aspiration for your character, what they teach you in film school, is based on Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs." Has anybody every heard of that term before? It's simply this: that at the lowest level of need is food, shelter, clothing, water—otherwise you die—and at the pinnacle in the hierarchy of our needs is that of "self-actualization."

That's why most movies are geared towards that goal, not toward the knowledge of God and relationship with Him and walking in Him and being directed by Him. You don't see that in movies. Well, there's a few, but it's usually, "You need to be self-actualized, fulfill who you are, live your dreams." It's all about you: your goals and ambitions. That's what drives the dominant message from Hollywood, even a movie like *Avatar*.

Let's examine another one. What's the last movie that you saw? Let's just shout one out.

The Blind Side. Okay, let's take *The Blind Side*, because that one has become very successful. It made $265 million at the box office, has been embraced by Christians because it portrays Christians in a positive light, and it's about Christians walking the walk, which is really good. I think it has much of what we would characterize as a Christian worldview, and that's why it is powerful and it resonates. It's sort of an exception.

What are some of the problems with it that you might see? Definitely some of the language is an issue. What is it ultimately telling us? What are its core messages? How many have seen it, by the way. Wow, almost everybody. Okay, so tell us, what are your impressions of that movie. Anybody care to share?

Attendee: I think the curse words were absolutely unnecessary.

Attendee: I concur.

Attendee: To me, it wasn't Christian-based. It was in a Christian school, but it was saying that you could succeed in and of yourself. Yes, someone showed love to a destitute young man, brought him into their family, but the young man succeeded because of his skills, not by seeking the Lord.

Attendee: I thought it rambled a bit in the beginning, but I noticed that some of the aesthetics were troubling. In the beginning one of the first characters you meet is this coach, who in the board meeting makes the argument, "Are we Christian or not? We should do the right thing." Then later you realize, by what he does, he's not truly concerned by that at all.

George Escobar: He wants to win.

Attendee: One of the biggest things I saw is that the mother is portrayed as the hero, not God.

George Escobar: Yeah, it needed to take that extra step of where was she drawing her strength from, because it takes courage to do what she did and the family too, and where did that strength come from? It's just assumed that, oh, they're Christian. For a secular audience, I guess they didn't want to be too preachy, and that's where the tension lies. The Lord is eventually going to teach us how to become better and better storytellers, so that we can communicate God's work in our lives

without the world thinking that "it's too preachy, and, hands off, I don't want to see it."

It's a typical secular outlook on what was really a faith-based story. It portrayed Christians in a way most of the secular community would look at us: as good people with hypocritical tendencies.

Attendee: I read the book first before I saw the movie. One of the things I noted was the lack of the Christian reason for doing things. There's only one teacher who really seems to be teaching, "We want to lead him to Christ." But still, I really valued the secular look at the Christian. The guy who wrote the book is a secular person. He knows the Tuohys. He knows Sean Tuohy in the movie, who was the one who met him, and kind of worked with him. He was the one who was giving him money and feeding him lots of things. It was his doing it. They focused on her, and she was important—the book focused on her. I guess they picked one person to focus on to develop the characters in the book.

George Escobar: Yeah, primarily because—and this is a conjecture on my part (I have no knowledge of this)—the fact that they were able to attract Sandra Bullock in the primary role drove the story in her direction.

Attendee: I was going to say that this is another one like *Amazing Grace* or *Narnia*. The story's told, and it's better because of what we're dealing with, but I wonder how

much they can really convey who these people are, when they're not believers themselves. They don't have our insight, so it's kind of an outside look on what they think it is.

Attendee: There's a lot of people out there that say they're Christian, but are only half in. That is what Hollywood portrays. That is what they're thinking when they see a Christian: they think of the half-in folks. They don't think of the ones that are a hundred percent of the way in.

Attendee: But *The Blind Side* really did hit their target, right? They were crossing over. They were looking to draw in the Christian market, as well as the secular market.

George Escobar: Yeah, it's an artificial success, because there are no other alternatives right now, that are equally as well made. Once we're able to provide that, then I don't think a movie like *The Blind Side* would succeed as well in the Christian marketplace.

What that tells us as Christian filmmakers is that the opportunity's wide open. We just need to do the hard work of learning and educating ourselves. I think the first filmmaker—I hope one of us in the room will do this—to realize what that Scripture from Second Timothy is saying about storytelling and character development and fulfillment, is going to have a hugely successful movie.

Has anybody seen a movie that captured this? It's never been done. So come up with it. I'm working on it. This is for the Lord. It's not for me to own. It's not for any of us. This story can be told and retold in countless ways. So please, go for it.

I just want to make sure we cover these three counterpoints to the secular worldview:

1. It's not that individuals should conduct life as we choose, but, rather, that we should live our lives according to God's direction.

2. The Bible is the inspired Word of God. It isn't a fantasy story. It's a collection of books told by God to His people recounting God's involvement and work through "history," which is fundamentally about "His Story."

3. Human nature has not evolved. We are as sinful as we've ever been. The reality is that human nature is constant. Therefore, it requires correction and instruction and seeking after righteousness from a non-changing standard, which is the Word of God.

As Christians who are filmmakers, we must have a solid Christian worldview before we begin to write stories and create films that matter.

COMPROMISING THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

We believe Hollywood does compromise the Christian message. We mentioned that the Christian-authored, Christian-themed big movies are being directed by secular directors. They can't help but compromise the Christian message because they don't know what the Christian message really is.

Here's an example. You brought up *Amazing Grace*. This is a direct quote from Michael Apted—you can Google this. He said, *"A straight biopic of William Wilberforce, the central character in Amazing Grace, which probably veered more to his Christian side than to his political side. So, I thought if I could persuade them [the producers] to put the politics right more in front of the story, to make that the engine of the story, and certainly deal with his belief system and his religion and all that, then this might be something that could be really good."*

If you come at it with that perspective as director Michael Apted has said, then the main driver of the story is to show a pious man overcoming political obstacles. It ends up with what we got, which is God's "*Amazing Grace*" in title only, but not God's power and providence as the driver for Wilberforce and his Christian allies, the Clapham Circle.

[*Amazing Grace* clip: "Do you intend to use your beautiful voice to praise the Lord or change the world?"]

George Escobar: It's a good question, and one we should ask ourselves. What's very telling with *Amazing Grace* is that there are a couple of questions like this in the movie. William Pitt the Younger, who later on in the movie—this is a little bit of a spoiler for you, but I need to cover it—is on his deathbed, is concerned because he is dying and looks over at his lifelong friend saying, "I wish I had your faith." He's almost pleading for the salvation story, and William Wilberforce—this is what the director/filmmaker chose the main character to do—looks at his friend and smiles. Cut. Pitt is asking this most critical question of eternity, and does Wilberforce give him THE answer? No. We just have a brief look of sad contemplation. So there's a hugely missed opportunity there.

Mike Snyder: I don't know how much you all know about William Wilberforce, but he was part of a group called the Clapham Circle, and these were his friends. They all lived in the same community. They all went to the same church. They were very influential people in different spheres of life. A couple of them were quite wealthy, supplied money. There were others that did other things. They met all the time.

We learn from this movie, as most people think about it, that William Wilberforce was a heroic man who stood alone. He was a man cut apart from everyone else. Well, the fact is William Wilberforce was a sickly man. He was

not physically strong. William Wilberforce could have accomplished nothing without the group that he was in.

We see the Clapham Circle once around the dinner table in this movie, when a former slave is brought in to demonstrate the kinds of chains that he was in, and others are in coming across the ships in the slave trade. But the movie tells you nothing about these people. Who are they? What role do they play in his life? This is so crucial for an overall Christian message that we are all gifted differently, so we need to come together as a body.

This is where we're meant to live in community. We're meant to accomplish things, not on our own, but by coming together and bringing separate gifts together. That's how God has made us. That's His vision for kingdom living. It's so core to what it means to be a faithful Christian, and the movie didn't touch on it whatsoever.

You know, even George and I coming together is a small example of bringing different gifts and experiences and backgrounds and all that. It is true, if you have a partnership with someone and you have the same gifts or a lot of overlap, that doesn't become a partnership; that becomes a battleship. Because you all are going to have your strong opinions and feel strongly qualified to assert those opinions, which can do a lot of head-knocking. If you're bringing people together who have very different gifts and experiences and skills, and it's sort of "look, you

focus on this, I'll focus on that, and we'll make sure we're watching each other's back," then you have something that's much more powerful, that can make sense.

George Escobar: What's good about *Amazing Grace*? It did have Christians in prominent positions during production, mainly the producer. They did try to—because of that producer—try to keep as much of the Christian theme and principles in the movie. You certainly have no ambiguity that William Wilberforce was a Christian, so that was good. They marketed toward Christian and a crossover audience. They were mildly successful, when you look at the overall box office and DVD sales. I think it's one of those movies that will be around for decades and people will watch and buy the DVDs. Just from a purely monetary return, it will probably get its money back.

RECENT TRACK RECORD

So the breakthrough for modern Christian films, I repeat, was *Passion of the Christ*, made for $30 million in 2004 plus another $25 million for distribution, but earned close to $700 million box office, worldwide. It was a wake-up call that sent many of the wrong messages. To Hollywood anyway. Hopefully it sent the right message to the Christian community, especially the Christian filmmaking community, that the marketplace is huge if they would make the right kinds of films. But it's still considered an anomaly and has not been repeated.

You can't really compare *Chronicles of Narnia* because the budget there was $150,000,000, and it was made by Disney, or Walden Media and Disney. We've already talked about the fact that Hollywood's approach is flawed. What's been the result? FoxFaith is mostly making and releasing the "Love" movie series. *Love Comes Softly*, *Love's Long Journey* . . . I don't know what's all the "Love." You can almost just say, "Love IMAX," and it'll probably make money.

For Good News Holdings, they eventually lost a major project, *Christ The Lord: Out of Egypt*, with popular author, Anne Rice, because of nonpayment and just bad business dealings. This is where Christians sometimes fail, in the business side of the relationship, but also on story development. Anne Rice wrote this novel with devout sincerity and purpose as a new Christian, but perhaps it was not a project that the Lord would be able to bless. After all, *Christ The Lord: Out of Egypt* is fundamentally an extra-biblical story that is outside of the traditional canon about Jesus' young life.

Unfortunately, the project's failure created a scar in the marketplace as far as prominent Christians coming together, on the production side, creative side, and investment side, to create something good, but turned it into something really bad.

This is somewhat of an object lesson about starting small, from whatever town you're in. Purcellville, Virginia

isn't anywhere near the filmmaking nexus, and yet we're here to learn to make these films. I think the Lord likes that, because it proves Himself strong in areas that we're weak, in areas that nobody thinks would happen. I mean, how could God move there? Don't they make films in New York and Hollywood?

In contrast, Good News Holdings was a Los Angeles based company. There's a bunch of lawsuits against that company now, because of misrepresentation and millions of dollars gone to waste. It's when you're dealing with lots of money like that and you're not ready for it and you're not yet able to be responsible for it. That's why small beginnings are really, really important. I hope that's an encouragement for you young people. You are the backbone in the future of this movement, so I'm really glad you're here, and we're going to focus on you a lot in some of the sections. It's you, working with the grown-ups—it's that partnership that will really make this work. As Mike was saying, the body of Christ coming together, both in our experiences and our energy levels—that will really propel us.

Another company, Walden Media, has also lost their way. They lost a lot of money on the last *Chronicles* movie. The guy who headed up that production and the vision of Walden Media has left.

By the way, guess what his background was before coming to Walden Media? He made horror movies

called *Scream* and *Scary Movie*, and so he gets hired to head up this family-oriented movie production company that's funded by a very rich Christian businessman. His track record was very successful in the horror genre, and he felt qualified now to work in the family friendly movies. I would imagine he's an extremely professional, high integrity person. You just don't get to those positions unless you are sincere and experienced in what you're trying to do. But again, his background comes from horror movie success. I read that it was when he had kids that he came to realize, "I don't want my kids watching these horror movies that I made," which is sort of a relativistic moral perspective. It's okay for other people to watch these horror movies, but not my kids, okay? Somewhere along the line, I think he'll reconcile with that, but at least he's trying to do the right thing now.

Let's go back to the track record of films targeted to the Christian audience made between 2004 and 2009. At the top is *The Passion of the Christ* released in 2004 and made for $30 million. It earned—I'm only using the U.S. box office numbers here—$370 million. That creates a box office to budget performance return ratio of 12.36 or twelve times its production budget. In order for a movie to be successful, you need approximately a 4:1 ratio of return. In others words, your revenues must be at least four times your production budget to break-even. If you look at most of the films released theatrically following the success of *The Passion of the Christ* in 2004, well-known

movies such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The End of the Spear*, as well as lesser known films such as *Celestine Prophecy*, and *Unidentified*—they all failed at the box office according to that ratio of 4:1. Even though *The Chronicles of Narnia* earned $291 million domestically, it cost $180 million to make, which is not enough money to pay for itself. And we're not even counting the P&A (prints and advertising expenses). *The End of the Spear* made for $10 million earned only $11,960,000 box office return.

It wasn't until 2006, when *Facing The Giants* was released, that another breakthrough happened. *Facing The Giants*, made for $100,000, went on to earn $10.1 million dollars. That is an impressive 101:1 box office to production cost ratio.

Between 2006 and 2008, around 14 films targeting the Christian audience were released theatrically. Obviously, Christian filmmakers were excited about their prospects. "Hey! *Facing The Giants* was successful, let's flood the market with more Christian-friendly movies!" Here's the list of these movies, in order of their release:

1. *Love's Abiding Joy*, made for $3,000,000, earned $250,000 at the box office. It was a total flop. It's been very successful on DVD, so you are seeing the DVD releases. You can buy the box set; I think there are seven of them.

2. *One Night with the King*, made for $20 million, only earned $13 million at the box office.

3. *Color of the Cross*, *Nativity Story*, *Thr3e, The Last Sin Eater* all lost money.

4. *The Ultimate Gift*, made for $14 million, earned only $3.4 million at the box office.

5. *The List*, based on the Robert Whitlow novel, made for $2 million, had a box office return of $130,000.

6. Other films such as *Noelle*, *The Pirates Who Don't Do Anything, Me and You, Us, Forever, Expelled*, then another Narnia movie, *Prince Caspian*—they all failed at the U.S. box office.

Finally, in 2008, the creators of *Facing The Giants*, Sherwood Pictures (founded by Sherwood Baptist Church), released their next film *Fireproof* in September 2008. It had a production budget of $500,000. It earned $33 million at the box office. That's a 66:1 ratio. Another huge hit.

A month after *Fireproof* was released, a seemingly surefire winner for the Christian market hit the theaters. It was called *Billy: The Early Years*, made for $3.6 million. The movie was a biography of Billy Graham as a young man on his way to becoming an popular evangelist. Unfortunately, Billy Graham himself didn't support this

movie, his daughter did, however. Nevertheless, it earned a disappointing $347,000 at the U.S. box office.

What happened? Let's look at some of the production decisions they made on *Billy*. It was directed by a Jewish filmmaker, who, I don't know how his faith walk is, but he's a very competent director: Robbie Benson. He was an actor in the early seventies and eighties (one of my favorite actors, by the way). He was terrific in *The Chosen* and starred in the original *Ice Castles* and the basketball film, *One-On-One*, which he also co-wrote.

Despite good intentions, I'm sure, by all of the filmmakers involved in these films, following the success of *Facing The Giants*, the Christian audience didn't support them. The lesson is that just because it's a Christian movie or has Christians working in it, doesn't mean it's going to be successful.

What are the missing pieces here? Well, we had the "*Love*" romance books by Janette Oke turned into movies. A Biblical epic wannabe that doesn't really stay true to the story like *One Night with the King* or *Color of the Cross,* which is more of a racial type movie than the story of Christ. The one that had the most promise was *The Nativity Story*, a retelling of events leading to the birth of Christ's birth. Despite a lush production with a reasonable budget, a good cast, and seasoned team of Hollywood filmmakers, I think it was poorly told. They focused too much on the social and political situation

surrounding the impending birth of Christ and how it affected Mary and Joseph, all told in the style of a period melodrama. Imagine instead if the filmmakers had underpinned the story by recounting the incredible prophecies leading up to the birth of Christ, then showing all of them fulfilled miracle-after-miracle. By showing God's love, mercy, and power across time as the spine, engine, and context of the story, and designing the production around that so that by the occasion of the actual the birth of Christ, the audience would be in awe and utter reverence for God's faithfulness and how He works in everyone's life, back then and to this day.

The nativity story in the biblical narrative is really not about Mary and Joseph. It's about the Trinity (God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit) fulfilling a promise to redeem mankind through Christ. Instead, *The Nativity Story*, the movie, was told as a historical domestic drama with very little of God's majesty.

In the other films that followed, there were personal cancer stories, serial killer/quasi-religious rituals in *The Last Sin Eater*, a spiritual thriller from a bestselling book, *The List*, a Catholic redemption story in *Noelle*, and an animated movie, *The Pirates Who Don't Do Anything*. I haven't seen it yet, but I've heard it's a parable of the Christian life, with the lesson that you are never alone, God is with you. And the hero is the one who does what's right no matter how hard it is. Finally we have *Me and*

You, Us, Forever—was a personal melodrama about divorce and reconnecting with lost love.

In contrast to all these films that failed to draw audiences to the box office, what was it about *Facing The Giants* and *Fireproof* that audiences coveted?

The answer is straightforward: *Fireproof* centered on the fact that "Christ saves marriages." *Facing the Giants* focused on "praising Christ, win or lose." Very strong, unambiguous messages, where the main characters learn to *love* and *obey* Christ. Jesus Christ is at the center of these two overtly Christian films. Plain and simple. No shyness about Christianity. And the Christian audience says, "I want those films, not these other fuzzy faith-based ones."

Attendee: I think one of the problems is that, like with *The Ultimate Gift* and some of these other ones, we ran into these movies by accident, looking for Christian movies. They do not advertise well to the public or even the churches, even though these are good, Christian movies. Otherwise these numbers would be much, much higher, I think.

George Escobar: That's part of it. But in the case of *The Ultimate Gift* the filmmakers seemed to run away from its audience during the initial theatrical promotional campaign. Based on interviews I read, they didn't want *The Ultimate Gift* be identified as a Christian movie

because they thought it would limit its box office potential. They complained publicly that they were being pigeonholed as a Christian movie. I think the Christian audience responded in kind, "Okay, if you don't want us, then why should we watch it?"

Mike Snyder: We are not to be ashamed of the gospel. You have people who want to take God's word, God's stories, and use them. It's fine to update the stories and all that, but to take something they think Christians will connect with and then turn it into something completely unrelated to the point of the story or what God was trying to communicate, I think you're messing with the Lord. Did you see how much the Lord blessed all those efforts?

Attendee: You mentioned that was just the box office and not DVD sales.

George Escobar: Yes, the DVD sales for a particular film could be more successful, sometimes significantly so. I believe that's the case with *The Ultimate Gift*. The distributors (versus the filmmakers) finally embraced the Christian audience, and they responded by making the movie a DVD hit.

Attendee: I know a vast number of Christians—they don't go to the theaters. They preview it, check it online at Plugged In, and then pick up the DVD, so they can control the environment. Wouldn't the DVD sales be

more representative of possible success? If you include DVDs, won't that change the ratio?

George Escobar: Absolutely, especially for some of these films. I couldn't use DVD data because they are not as readily available online as they are for box office sales.

RELEASE WINDOWS

The release schedule for movies can be categorized into a series of traditional distribution "windows." These so-called windows are the time periods when audiences can consume a movie according to a specific viewing platform (theater, TV, PC). The release order is as follows:

1. **Theatrical Window**
   If a distributor thinks that a movie merits the risk and expense of exhibiting it at the theaters, the movie is first released to a specific number of theatrical screens and will stay there for as long as it draws an audience. The opening weekend typically portends whether the movie will still be at the theater the following week (which is usually the case). Most likely it will disappear from theaters by the 3rd or 4th week.

2. **Video On Demand (VOD) Window - 1st Run**
   After a theatrical run, the more successful movies may gain additional revenues through VOD, allowing audiences to order "on-demand" the viewing of the film at their convenience in hotels/motels or on a

premium cable service at home. This window can be anywhere from two to four months long.

3. **VOD Window - 2nd Run**
   Older movies can have a new lease on life through this window. Popularized by NetFlix, subscribers to the $8.00 a month NetFlix service can stream and watch over 17,000 movies at anytime on their PC or on TV via a web-enabled media player. This window can be short, about 2-3 months for relatively new films. Much older titles may also be avialable online for on-demand viewing as part of the subscriber's bundled package.

4. **Home Video Window - Sales and Rentals**
   For several years, until about 2007, revenues from Home Video sales and rentals exceeded those of theatrical box office receipts. The long window (from 3 to 4 months) between theatrical and home video releases allowed both windows to extract maximum revenue from audiences. However, the recent and significant drop in the home video market (up to 44% less revenues than just three years ago) has forced distributors to shorten the timing between windows to offset marketing cost and accelerate their revenues gains sooner. Why spend twice to market the same movie (once for theaters, another for DVDs)? The movie chains (the exhibitors) are naturally in an uproar. The exhibitors believe that audiences will NOT go to the theaters if they know that newly

released movies can be seen by audiences in their home theaters. There is now an open war between distributors and exhibitors surrounding the timing of release windows. The producers (those who make the movies) will be the likely victims of reduced revenues. Consumers will win with greater selection and lower prices for movie content.

5. **Cable/Satellite TV Window**
   There are sub-windows within this market. They include: Pay-Per-View (PPV), Pay Cable, Basic Cable, with each one having it's own schedule and cost structures.

   a. PPV allows viewers to purchase a movie or programming event (e.g., boxing) that will be simultaneously telecast into subscriber homes at a predefined schedule. Everyone who paid for the will be able to watch it at the designated time. (This is unlike VOD, which allows the viewer to watch their paid program whenever they want to.)

   b. The Pay Cable window opens about a year after a film is released theatrically. It is part of a paid cable TV subscription service wherein the specific airings of a film are made available from a premium network provider, such as HBO, Showtime, Encore, etc.

c. The Basic Cable window arrives about two years from a film's theatrical release. There is no additional extra charge for paid cable subscribers to see a movie during this window. The movie will be shown according to a regularly scheduled program designated by a network who purchased the basic cable rights for the film, such as Lifetime, A&E, IFC, and Sundance.

6. **Broadcast Window**

This window is the final venue for most movies. Films can be seen on broadcast television about two to three years past their theatrical release date and can continue in perpetuity.

SIMULTANEOUS RELEASE

This is the battleground between distributors and theatrical exhibitors. In the industry it's called a "Day-and-Date" release. A film is considered to be simultaneously released when it is available to consumers on multiple media outlets: theaters, DVD, and online, at the same time or with very little difference in release windows.

Consumers are the winners in this battle. They have the advantage of choosing the medium best suited to their circumstance to watch the movie and a selection of price points they can afford. Distributors also gain by

leveraging their marketing dollars and receiving revenues sooner rather than later, although that revenue may be less overall. Exhibitors, however, are crying foul. They claim that simultaneous release destroys the "magic" of moviegoing: seeing a movie on a big screen, hearing it a big sound system, and sharing the movie experience with an big audience. It destroys exhibitors potential to optimize revenue from first-run films, and it destroys the habit of "going to the movies" as something special.

STRAIGHT-TO-VIDEO

For most Christian feature films, the most realistic channel for distribution will be a "straight-to-video" release.

There are four reasons for this:

1. **Lower Entry Cost** - Filmmakers nowadays can distribute their film direct to consumers, mostly through online marketing and fulfillment efforts. To start, all one needs are the following:

    a. A website to serve as a virtual storefront.

    b. PayPal as the online transaction mechanism for payments and refunds.

    c. A DVD replicator for large order fulfillment, or a DVD duplication system at home.

d. The U.S. Postal Service for customer shipment.

2. **Christian Consumers Lag the Trend** - Even though there is a downward trend in the sales and rentals of DVDs, Christian consumer behavior typically lag behind by about two years from the mainstream consumer. This means that instead of a 44% drop-off in the home video market, compared to just a year ago, the Christian buyer still purchases more Christian DVDs, especially because that remains a primary outlet for Christian films. It's a virtuous circle for now. The Christian consumer generally cannot easily watch a Christian film through other channels outside of DVDs. Meanwhile, the Christian filmmaker generally does not have easy access to other distribution channels outside of DVDs.

3. **Generates More Profit for the Filmmaker** (when applying the self-distribution method) - In a standard distribution deal with virtually ALL distributors, the revenue split for the producer/filmmaker is typically around 20-25% of the sale price of the DVD.

   Here is a simple breakdown of revenue splits in a standard distribution deal for a DVD sold to a consumer for $20.00 at the retail online or brick-and-mortar store.

   a. 45% to the Retailer - $9.00

b. 35% to the Distributor - $7.00

c. 20% to the Producer (Filmmaker) - $4.00

Here are the splits using Online Self-Distribution:

a. 70% to the Producer (Filmmaker) - $14.00

b. 10% for Replication & Shipment - $2.00

c. 20% for Marketing & Sales - $4.00

4. **Establishes a Relationship with Audience** - Online DVD sales can yield the benefit of obtaining the buyer's email address. Knowing how to reach your audience via email allows you the opportunity to tell them about future projects or incentive sales of your product.

OTHER MICRO-BUDGET SUCCESSES

We know that *Facing The Giants* and *Fireproof* from Sherwood Pictures are major breakthroughs in the Christian film marketplace. I am pleased to say that the Sherwood folks have inspired many Christian filmmakers to emulate them, in effect creating several micro-budget offsprings. Among the early ones to succeed are *The Widows Might* (produced by HueMoore Productions) and *Come What May*.

Like Sherwood Pictures, we at Advent wanted to avoid Hollywood's Christian content censorship by producing these films ourselves, financing them independently, and then distributing it through a very strong Christian company, Provident Films, which is a unit of Sony's. Based on our observations, however, Sony appears to have a respectful policy toward these films, "Hey, these guys know what they're doing, and we'll just leave them alone for the most part."

What happened with *Amazing Grace,* for example, is the opposite. The original script, according to the producer, had a stronger Christian worldview, and the characters were more overtly Christian. Now, because it went through the Hollywood system, produced by Walden Media, distributed through Samuel Goldwyn, they witnessed the removal of Christian principles from most of the movie, and they have inspired many Christians to make similar films.

You can put some boundaries in the contracts, but ultimately you're going lose some control, unless you have a Christian directing it. When you have the director of *Shrek* making a Christian-authored story such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*, don't expect to have a strongly Christian film. If you do, then you haven't watched his other movies.

So, these are some early beginnings. With *Come What May*, we've seen the Lord's blessing on this movie. It's

won several film festival honors, including a 2008 The Redemptive Storyteller Award, held at Regent University. As of summer 2009, in the church cinema circuit, it continues to be number one for several months now. This is according to Outreach Films, which is the church sub-distributor for *Come What May*, via their distribution arrangement with Provident Films. Churches buy the movie license from Outreach Films to screen *Come What May* at their churches. As of last month (I haven't checked in about four weeks), the best selling title, as it has been for about nine months now, is *Come What May*. It's also been in the top ten of the Christian booksellers association, which is the Christian retail marketplace. It's no longer in the top ten, but it was there for several months. So this little movie, made right here where you sit, has had an impact in the marketplace, and you can read the reviews. There are some very scathing reviews out there, but I would say ninety percent of the reviews that we've had for the movie have been very positive. This little movie from a tiny college is going to continue to be an inspiration, not just for the content, but hopefully for the filmmaking venture that it was.

Chapter 3

LAUNCHING YOUR FILM COMPANY

George Escobar: We're going to assume you're here because you want to make a movie and probably more than one. To do that and to have a career in filmmaking, you really need to think about establishing a film company. How many of you are here to focus on that and learn about that part? Okay, so all the grownups and one kid. The rest, we hope that by the end of this part of the talk, you'll begin to think about doing the same thing, which is launching a film company. It's not as scary as it sounds; it's really a necessity even if you're just making one movie. Let's assume you're going to make multiple movies, and the reason that you want to do this is because you have been gifted for this task.

To start, you will need to go through a process of personal evaluation, and I suggest the following questions to ask yourself:

1. What your spiritual gifts are? What has the Lord been gifting you with? With that question and that prayer, the Lord will begin to reveal to you why you have certain gifts, or if you haven't discovered them yet, it's time to do so.

2. What are your passions for serving others? Because, ultimately, that's what it means to be a Christian filmmaker. For the most part, for myself, when I began over 25 years ago as a film school student, it was for a very self-serving motive, meaning that I wanted to tell my stories because I thought I had something important to say, and that's how most filmmakers are. They think they've got some kernel of truth, and they want to show and share that with people. So in the secular world, they are in essence wanting to serve other people, by the fact that they have something they want to share.

   You do need to have the passion of serving others in the realm of media. It's really the core of what Christ taught his disciples, and we are to become disciples in using this medium as a platform for that.

I'd never thought of being a teacher or an instructor, but I knew that I had to change my focus and have that desire because the Lord is blessing me with so much information, and I need to be able to share it and impart it. That's the reason that I'm here, because I do want to serve in that capacity. Just three years ago it was really difficult to share this information. We can't let that go on: we have to stop that. So as you get this information, I hope you take that charge, that this information should be shared with others, even if it's outside your comfort zone.

3. What are your God-given abilities? Some of you are musicians and artists, dressmakers, whatever. You've been given key abilities: find out what they are. Make a list of them, or list things that you have not developed or not really honored God with. For me, it was art, drawing. I'll show more about that tomorrow, during the storytelling session.

4. How are you wired? How do you operate?How do you think? You want to take advantage of those abilities too. Filmmakers usually fall into three categories.

a. The hyper-creative: they want to work with the actors, the camera, and they want to work on the image. It's all about the art.

b. There are those who just fall in love with the technology, the camera, the process, all the neat tools. They care about the story and all that, but really what they're focused on is the technology.

c. Then there are those who like to organize, like to learn about the business side, like to learn about the marketing and distribution.

As a filmmaker, you need to embrace all three to start with. That doesn't mean you have to do them all moving forward, but you'll find that nobody will take the mantle on all those areas, except you. You'll find people who will do these jobs over time, but you'll probably need to start them yourself and then be able to recognize ability in others and delegate appropriately.

Leverage what you've learned from previous work experiences. For those of you who are really young and don't have much of that, you can leverage the previous experiences of the adults around you. If you ask them for help, they're more than likely to give it to you, because you're asking earnestly and honestly

and with humility, and adults love to help young people who have that kind of attitude.

5. What's the CONTEXT of your COMPANY? That point is in bold, in big letters. Why do you need to exist? Why should your company be around? For what purpose? You'd say, "Well, to make movies." Well, yeah, that's really obvious, but why do you need to make movies? What is the real context behind it?

   For Advent Film Group, it was to answer a challenge, which is: "Why is it that Christian-authored, Christian-themed movies are directed by secular directors?" We wanted to provide a mechanism to begin answering that question. Part of that is to make movies. Part of that is training and having the interns really know hands-on what it takes to make movies from start to finish, everything in between, not just the production, which is what you get in film school. Finally, to be able to harness the infrastructure that's going to start building around that and be able to support other filmmakers in a significant way.

   We're not there yet, but that's really part of our DNA and what we want to do. We may not be able to realize all three of those, maybe the Lord says, "That's too much, I'm going to assign this to some other organization," but at least we want to get started and inspire other people. It's not a monopoly

by any means. There are a lot of people out there, billions of people, that need to be reached through this medium. So you're more than welcome to pick up the mantle and duplicate this or an aspect of it and really grow the idea.

6. What are your resources? When I say, "don't think too small or too big," don't be drawn to either extremes. Your ideas may be too big, but it could be an aspiration that we all collectively can work together to achieve. On the other hand, don't think too small—that your film is not worthy of being made. Talk to people about it. Don't sell yourself too short either.

Mike Snyder: Dream big, aim small: you want to do both. That big vision of where you think God is taking you is going to carry you through a lot of rough times. You don't start out big though. Find out what God's put in front of you, keep your focus on it, and be faithful. Do the best you can and move ahead one small target at a time. Then, as those targets get bigger and further away and you've got to bring in the big guns, all of a sudden there are people who want to come alongside and help as well.

George Escobar: Because they see you being faithful in the little things, and you've taken care of the things you've been entrusted with with diligence and effort.

REACHING OTHER FILMMAKERS

Mike Snyder: Back to context as well. You mentioned that there are millions of people waiting to be reached with this medium. There are also, I don't know how many, hundreds of thousands, who need to be reached, who are spending all day long in this medium. There are people who are already there, and we need to be aware of them as well. It's not us against them: it's us presenting a positive picture of who Jesus is and what He's doing in this world. Certainly, presenting something different from what they are, but we need to have a compassion and a heart for the lost in this filmmaking world. So you say, "What, God, are you asking us to do?"

When we went down and shot in Winston-Salem, we didn't have an all-Christian crew: it was about half and half. We didn't build this wall around us, "Everybody has to be Christian." I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that; some people will be called to do that. We weren't. Through the course of the weeks that we were there, these folks who were incredibly skeptical—when we would have prayer in the morning they'd be turning their heads the other way, staying at their little desks in the production office—but you could see things change over time.

Several of our young people befriended some of our crew who were struggling with really difficult, personal problems. They came alongside them and were praying for them. They would take them aside for conversation. By the time the shoot was over, you could see heads turning to hear us pray. Maybe still not joining us, although we had maybe two or three people by the end who chose to physically be among us, even if they weren't participating.

So without that being especially on our radar screen, it just happened. We suddenly realized that there's an amazing opportunity here. We don't have to create a whole army of newly made filmmakers for Christ. There are many filmmakers who need to just *find* Christ. We need to keep that in mind, because it's really easy to rail against Hollywood all day long, for good reason, but there are really needy people.

George Escobar: So the final question to ask yourself as you begin your film career and company: "What legacy about God will you pass on?" That's an important question to have an answer for, because ultimately that's what you leave behind. These films last for generations, way beyond your lifetime. You want to make sure that if your name is attached to it, it's going to leave a good legacy about what God is doing or what He has done. In the context of the storytelling, what God has done in the past, because you've told His story. You reveal that. As

you progress through your career, that's a story you yourself tell to other filmmakers.

When you're starting your film company, what we've shared isn't the normal things that you would typically expect to draw from for business planning. We're going to talk a little bit about those things, but again I want to make sure it's grounded on service and what God wants to get done and what He wants to accomplish through you.

FOUR THINGS TO DO

The four things I want to talk about now really have to do with the practical aspects of creating a film company. If you're going to create this new film company in your "backyard," and you've never done it before, there's always some fear to overcome.

Generally, to get past your fear, you'll want to know, what to do first. Well, because your film company has no intrinsic value in itself, my first suggestion is:

1. Align or partner with an established organization with whom you're like-minded in mission and purpose.

   For Advent Film Group, it was partnering with Patrick Henry College. I'm a home schooling dad, and I strongly support the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), which helped to

> launch the college. When Patrick Henry College was being built in 2000, my son Gregory, who was ten years old at the time, actually attended the groundbreaking ceremony. He's now a sophomore at Patrick Henry College, so he has a long history with this school. We've been supporters of the school, so it's natural for us and for me, personally, to approach them first about this vision and ask, "Is there an opportunity for us to work together? Are there stories that need to be told about this school that would reach beyond the walls here, beyond the normal mechanisms that a college would be involved in?"

Sure enough, there was a story about the Patrick Henry College moot court team back in 2001. PHC had a top caliber team at the national championship. They made it to the final rounds, but to win they would have to defend gay rights in one of their arguments. Their convictions wouldn't allow them to do that, hence, they knowingly lost the round and came in third. That team was so strong, they went on to win two back-to-back national championships in subsequent years. That was a powerful story to tell: doing what's right, *Come What May*.

We wanted to go beyond the reality of that situation and go into the family life of a prospective student who comes from a secular background, who, in our story is fighting for life of the unborn. So it evolved into a pro-life movie,

but the firm stand taken by the PHC moot court team was the inspiration for it.

I'm sure wherever you're from, stories like that exist, and organizations that you're already supporting or affiliating with have similarly powerful stories, which they might not have even thought about. You need to approach them prayerfully and with great consideration and begin, if you haven't already, to have that relationship, not to leverage that relationship for filmmaking, but to open your heart up to that possibility. It may take years before you are able to realize that opportunity to make a feature film. I didn't start until I was 47, and I just turned 50, and there's a lot of wasted years there, but it's not too late. So you need to begin sooner than later, especially if you're a young person, to pursue the most meaningful aspect of your career planning, which is to answer the question of: "How can I serve others?"

Attendee: If you align yourself with an organization with a cause-focus, does that mean you're limiting the scope of your film company to that organization's causes?

George Escobar: Initially, absolutely! That doesn't mean you're going to stay there. Our second film, *HERO*, has nothing to do with PHC. Our third film, a period piece, has nothing to do with PHC. However, we're partners now in terms of their students wanting to be involved in film. You'll find in any organization, that they

always have a media need and the Lord will reveal that. If you're truly sincere about it, He'll open those doors of service.

There's another reason you want to align and partner. Three years ago, Advent Film Group had no value whatsoever. Who could care less about another film production company? Whereas PHC had an established reputation, so that our mutual relationship opened up a lot of doors for this little film company working with PHC. That was our introduction to our supporters, to investors, to the community, "Hey, here's a story about this top college that's based on a true story." People like that.

2. The second practical thing to do as part of starting up a film company is to work with other larger organizations who have pre-existing communications and sales channels to their constituents. That way you don't have to build out your own sales and marketing distribution channel. For us, that was the homeschooling community, through the speech and debate league. Many of the young people who worked with us were recruited from the NCFCA league, so it became a natural venue.

   Notice that it's communications, too, not just specifically sales. You know, NCFCA has no sales channel, but they talk to thousands of parents and

students across the country in the speech and debate movement. Because of the content of our movie, folks who are homeschooling through different sales channels like American Family Association are natural supporters of homeschooling, and so we were able to use their sales channel. We'll talk more about that later, because it was significant and it's really important to have those kinds of relationships.

3. The third practical step is to make sure you write a story that your audience is hungry for and are going to rally around, because it reinforces their core values. If you give them stories that they're already engaged in, whether spiritually, mentally, financially, or whatever, it's very natural for them to rally around what you're doing. Does that limit the number of stories you can tell? Absolutely: this is not an exercise of open, big sky brainstorming.

   The Lord will narrow down these choices, which He is readily presenting in your life. It's in those stories that you can really begin to capture what *God* is doing, not what *you* want to do. Because God is working through these organizations, these communities, these stories, you must give them serious consideration. You have to give up *your* stories. Your stories are worthless: they mean nothing. Pursue God's stories always, then He will give you your stories back through Him.

Mike Snyder: Yeah, when you form your company, remember that it's God's company, not yours. If you're forming *your* company, good luck.

George Escobar: You might find a measure of success. I mean, it's happened countless times. However, the enemy likes to use this field as well, so you're not alone out there on the battlefield.

The movie itself, when viewed from the aspect of sales and marketing, begs another set of questions, which is: *What are the movie's natural ancillary products or spin-offs? Beyond its intrinsic value as a movie, how can it support other materials or services that could be a blessing to others?* With *Come What May*, the answer to this question is the potential for the movie to inspire the creation of speech and debate materials, worldview courses, pro-life/pro-family documentaries, and Film-School-In-A-Box, which we're now doing through this film workshop. We've only been able to fulfill a little bit of this. But this was the goal: to see how much of this we could execute based on the film.

If you do these three things, you're going to come up with a powerful story and plan, because it's already centered on what God is already doing in your midst, rather than you trying to force it.

HOW GOD GIVES YOU STORIES

Let me give you a really quick example of this. A year ago there was a gentleman whom I met, who had financed a feature film on his credit card and his mortgage, which really fractured his marriage. It's been ten years since he made that movie. Now he wanted to make another one, but he still had this wrong-headed way of thinking about stories around him. I said, "So what are you doing now? Tell me about some of the stories that you're working on." He said he had nothing at the moment, except a documentary project to pay the bills. He wanted to make a movie, but he didn't have a story that really grabbed him. So I pushed him a little harder, that there must be something God is showing him. He said, "I have nothing. I'm just working on this documentary about this business guy who's buying up foreclosed homes and selling them at a discount back to his community."

My jaw just dropped, and I said, "That is an incredible story the Lord has given you. Talk about a powerful story! Is this businessman Christian?" He said yes. And I learned that the businessman was hiring people who were foreclosed on to rebuild their own house and then selling it back at cost to them again, as they now have jobs to buy the homes. It's a "rebuilding America" story from the ground up, without government intervention and help. I said, "What more powerful story do you

want? You're already working on this documentary." The light bulb just turned on, and he could not believe what the Lord had given him. I said, "Look, if you're not working on this story in two weeks, I'm coming after it. Because if you're not interested, I'm interested." Because that's a story that needs to be told nowadays, especially in today's economic conditions.

I would venture to say that you have one, two, or three of those kinds of stories available to you right now. The Lord has presented it right here, and you're going over here or everywhere else except what He's got in front of you. Start looking for what He's got in front of you!

PLAN FOR MULTIPLE PROJECTS

When we were beginning our projects, we wanted to present it as a series of projects to PHC as well as to our investors, that if this relationship with PHC grew and continued, that there are many other films we can make together. You need to be doing the same thing. Always be planning two or three films, all at the same time, because one of them may be the one the Lord is wanting you to make at that time.

From the start we had very ambitious plans, but still realistic ones. In year one, we would make this first movie for $300,000 that included production and marketing. The second year, we would make our second and third

movie around the same range of cost. In year three, we'd refine that model, maybe have four or five other feature films.

I'm happy to say that, as of 2010, we will have one film completed, *Come What May*, while another film, *HERO*, in post-production, and finally, *Alone Yet Not Alone*, which we have in pre-production for Mission City Productions. [An update: by the end of 2011, Advent launched the Advent Associates Film Program, which is producing its inaugural movie, *Writers' Block* in October 2011.]

Now that we achieved somewhat of a track record, we have companies contacting us, bringing some funding with them, wanting us to make movies for them or partner with them. In addition, we currently we have four other feature films under development: *Red September*, *The Face of the Enemy*, *The Cat of Bubastes*, and an *Untitled Musical*.

Of our films in current production, one is financed by a single investor, who has hired Advent on a (work-for-hire) production services agreement basis. Mike Snyder and I are co-producing and I will also be a co-writer and co-director. For this project over the past two years, unbeknownst to us, we were in what I call a "bake-off" with other film organizations. We all had to submit a screenplay based on the manuscript that we were given. With God's blessing and providence and just allowing us to have enough experience and qualification, Advent

Film Group came out on top, and so now we're negotiating the production services agreement with the investor. We hope to begin filming in September of 2010.

We've gone from a $150,000 production budget three years ago to potentially a multi-million dollar movie. We feel we're ready: we know how to make that movie. We have partnerships and resources across the country now, mainly because we were helping other people get started and get their movies made, and they have been making their movies. We have a pool of resources that we can put on to this larger movie. We can all work together. If we had just kept it to ourselves, the old way, "I got mine, go get yours," we wouldn't be in a position that we're in and the Lord wouldn't be able to bless us.

If you're not able to get money from accredited investors, there are other vehicles. From donors, sponsors, pre-sale advances. The pre-sale advances are really contingent on your other experiences. If you've already been in production in some respect, then you can get that. Otherwise, it's out of reach for most of us.

APPROACHING AN INVESTOR

Let's assume you do have access to accredited investors. When you make a presentation to them, your main job is to let them know precisely what they're investing in, using the best information you currently possess. For example,

it could be that a theatrical release is not realistic for your first movie. You need to tell them that theatrical releases are typically a loss-leader, so they shouldn't expect it. Just take that notion off the table right from the beginning. An investor is going to be looking for a long-term significant return on their investment. If they are investing in your first movie, you should allow them the option of having a priority slot in investing in your next films. And you should give them some idea of what your next films will be about. The investors knows they're taking a big risk in you, but if they believe in your plan, they're going to look at it from a long-term point of view. If you were them, would you invest in a one-movie project if somebody brought it to you? Probably not. If you won't invest in yourself, don't expect anyone else to.

That's another thing, by the way. We did have some savings ourselves, and we were able to invest in our first movie. If you're not able to do that, it makes it really difficult to raise money from other people, because you're not risking your own money. It could even be investment "in-kind" such as equipment that you've already accumulated. As long as they see that you have some significant resources in play, they are more apt to believe that you'll execute on the plan with everything you've got to make it succeed.

We needed to let our potential investors know who we are, why we are, and how we will execute the film

project. That means having a business plan and an operating agreement that will explain everything you will be doing to run the film company and make and sell the movie they are investing in.

While you're raising funds, you need to update your scheduling, financing plan, and revenue assumptions constantly as the market shifts around you. There might be a competing movie that appears on the radar all of a sudden. Or the name you chose for your film is being used by another film, and they are bigger than you. You may find that the cast or crew member you were counting on is suddenly unavailable. Planning for changes, flexibility, and the rapid response will be new skill sets you will need to adopt and master.

You need to let investors know how you're going to allocate the funds you are raising. This means identifying the percentage of money that goes into items such as development, story, production, promotion, distribution, and corporate expenses.

LEGAL STEPS

So what does it mean from a legal and organizational perspective to establish a film company? What are the actual steps? Well, it means establishing a limited liability corporation, an LLC. Which is not the only way to do it, but it is the industry standard practice. In practical terms,

that means going online to your state, in our case Virginia, filling out a form, and paying your fees. It's only about ten minutes of labor to create this legal entity. You can pay a service to do that for you, and they'll probably charge you from a hundred to two hundred dollars for those ten to fifteen minutes you could have spent yourself. If you feel uncomfortable doing that, then you can go through those services.

Now that you've filed an LLC, a legal entity according to government rules and statutes, other business entities can formally recognize you, such as banks, production insurance companies, vendors, and suppliers. From a potential investor's perspective, they will feel more comfortable about your film project knowing that your company is a legally recognized organization as defined by the Securities and Exchange Commission (the SEC).

I'm staying strictly on the investor fundraising side during most of our talk, because this is the most successful and easiest path to raising funding, outside of pulling out your credit card and going into debt.

Other company instruments you must create as part of your investor offering package, besides setting up an LLC, is a "Private Placement Memorandum" document, PPM for short. In your presentation package, there's an example of that, and Mike Snyder will be covering it in detail in the next session.

Young people, you need to understand that this legal organization stuff is really something that you need to pay attention to. You're probably thinking that is also not something practical for you to do on your own. However, there are grown-ups in this room and in your neighborhood or town that may be doing this or should be doing this. Find them by talking to people at church, your homeschool coop, film groups, etc. So pay attention. Acquire this critical information with purpose and share it with them. Perhaps lead them down this path and be helpful in shaping their plans. By being knowledgeable and helpful, the chances increase greatly that you could be part of their workforce to execute on this plan.

Chapter 4

INVESTOR PRESENTATION PART 1

Mike Snyder: I will do my best to not be arcane, obtuse, or abstruse! So we've told you about an LLC. Simply put, it's a legal mechanism for creating a recognizable entity. The law treats entities as persons. An LLC has all the rights of personhood under the U.S. Constitution, so you need to look at any legal entity as a person.

So this "person" is going to have a name. That's a good thing, and you can incorporate your corporation, limited partnership, or limited liability company—there are various kinds of entities that you can choose to house your business. This entity, depending on the type of entity it is, has its various rules and regulations that must follow state statutes. These are all creatures of state

legislation. Those rules and regulations are brought to you by your state where you created this entity.

One great advantage of using a limited liability company instead of a corporation is there is great flexibility in how you run it. With a corporation, you have to have a board of directors, have certain officer positions, keep accurate minutes, and have an annual meeting. These are minimum things you have to do to be accorded the protection that the state gives you because you have this entity, primarily that you will not have personal liability arising out of any of the activities of the entity. When you create that corporation that insulates you from getting sued personally from something that goes wrong. Only the corporation can be sued, and only the assets that the corporation has could be subject to collection on a judgment, if there were judgment against the entity.

The LLC gets the same advantage of giving you protection from liability, but gives total flexibility in how you organize the government and the ongoing affairs inside that limited liability company.

There's no requirement that you have to meet or even keep books and records. You don't even have to have bylaws, especially if it's a single member LLC, meaning you are the only member (a limited liability company has "members," corporations have "shareholders," and partnerships, whether general or limited partnerships, have "partners"). Here you could have one member, and

you don't have to have any other agreements or records about how you're going to operate the business. The statute will just lay out the things that are assumed, unless you change them by operational documents that you create.

Now, as soon as you get another member that comes in there, you've got to start worrying about how this thing is going to operate. When you create a bunch of rules among you about how you operate, that typically gets placed in what's called an "operating agreement." Limited liability companies have operating agreements. In forming that operating agreement, you have abundant flexibility (subject to only a couple of very minor exceptions) to create your arrangements about how decisions are going to be made, how profits are going to be split, and who has to pony up money when you're desperately in need of it by making an additional capital contribution—or whatever it may be.

This operating agreement becomes crucial when you're bringing investors into the picture. They'll definitely want to know all about the way this thing is arranged, regarding profit shares, management, whether there's special situations that may arise where they actually get to have a vote, or how many investors it takes to approve a change in the deal—you know, does it have to be a hundred percent, or do you want to set it up to be two thirds or just more than fifty percent? That is how all that

is arranged. You definitely are going to need some legal help to get these documents put together in a way that matters. Your structure becomes a big deal when you're bringing outsiders in to help finance.

How do we get these investors? How do we do it legally? We're going to have a session about this shortly, so I'm just giving you a tiny intro here.

When these investors put money into this company, they are putting it in with a profit motive. Once you sell someone an interest in a company, you are selling them a security and are now faced with an incredible swath of securities laws. I can't use any other word. It sounds a little awkward to use the term "security," but that's what it is. The basic rule of securities laws is, you can't sell a security, except in an extremely small set of exceptions, without "registration." To register a security to sell it, if you do it right, you're talking a minimum of seventy-five grand by the time you pay the lawyers and accountants to do everything else. So obviously, for the most part it's totally impractical.

It's any kind of security, but it's like a public offering. It's the same kind of disclosure requirements and other things, if you haven't found some exception. There are what's called "private placements" or private offerings, and that is what we, as filmmakers, have to rely on. There are special rules and regulations, that if you conduct your security offering under those rules and

regulations in order to comply with certain requirements to certain kinds of people, people who have a fair amount of wealth and experience, then you don't have to register. One thing you *do* need to do is you need to disclose all material facts.

Let's look at an example. You've heard of companies like Apple and Microsoft. You and I can go down to a brokerage or online and buy stock in those companies. It's perfectly legal for us to do and perfectly legal for them to take our money. That's because they've gone through a rigorous, expensive process to qualify themselves as organizations that are respected and have assets stated in their offering. That way you and I can then invest in their company and have a measure of safety for our money.

How's that working out for everybody? Yeah, we're supposed to put our trust in people we don't know at all, because they've been involved in paying a lot of people a lot of money to create piles of documents that nobody ever sees or looks at. What we're talking about as far as investor funding is NOT a public offering; we're talking to private individuals.

George Escobar: This is an early part of a process that will take months and maybe years for you to start and then complete. This part of filmmaking is a lot less fun, unless you really like infrastructure, but don't be intimidated by it. There are experts in the field, like

Emerson Marks, who helped us with *Come What May*. So don't be discouraged.

Attendee: I notice that when some filmmakers make movies, they form an LLC that's basically Whatever's-the-title-of-the-movie, LLC. Did you guys do yours as Advent Film Group, LLC only, or do you form an LLC for each movie that you do?

Mike Snyder: We do an LLC for every movie. You definitely want to create a separate entity for each film, because you may have different investors in that entity. You may have some overlap between people who invested in the first one, but the second may be different. Besides you want to keep all the potential liabilities where they could chew up only the assets in that particular entity. You don't want a judgment against this entity to also have access to satisfy judgment against assets from this other movie or assets from your production company.

So we have Advent Film Group, LLC, but that's not a movie entity. That is our production company. Then we have Advent Film Group Movie One, LLC. That was the name of the entity of that was created for *Come What May*. The next one, we cut to make it a little shorter, so instead of spelling out Advent Film Group, we named it AFG Movie Two, LLC. For the next one, there will be another name.

Attendee: When you're forming an LLC, would you also, at this time get your Federal ID and State ID tax numbers? Do you get a Federal and State ID for each one of those?

Mike Snyder: Yes, you have to. The entity is considered a taxpayer. You're going to have to file tax returns for the entity. You're going to have separate accounting for it. Yeah, this stuff may sound artificial and in a certain way is it, but not really. As far as the world's concerned, these are different persons. Every person has his own activity, these legal persons, so you've got to take care of those. Remember, everyone is different. They may have different operating agreements. Each movie may have a different deal structure and different problems that confront it.

Attendee: Do you renew those LLCs every year equally or only during the time of the production and distribution of the film?

Mike Snyder: There is an annual filing fee you have to pay to keep it going and alive, and you definitely want to do that. The question of how long you keep it alive is based on whether there is any activity, and you're still collecting revenue. If you have your movie out there and it's been distributed, there's still sales going on a little bit every year: you'll need to maintain the LLC. At some point you may just want to sell every asset in it. You could sell the entity to somebody else who wants it, who

makes a lot of money on paying very little on an asset that's a dwindling asset, but being able to milk it to get the max out of it, that you couldn't do. Maybe you couldn't spend the time and attention doing it, so you sell the entity to them so you don't have to worry about it. Or you may just end up selling all the assets to them, and if you do that, you just have an empty shell. There's no point in renewing that, so in that case you wouldn't.

Attendee: For us, when we went through that process, that was the reality check for us on the significance of the project and the value of the story. That was a wake-up call to us.

Attendee: If you want to sell your movie, could you sell a small percentage of it or would you have to sell the whole thing?

Mike Snyder: The second is probably what you'll have to do, because I can't imagine somebody buying some small interest in it. That's sort of like saying, "I'll keep my tires, but you can have the car." I don't think people will buy it. You've got to let your baby go, if you want the money to flow.

Attendee: How does that work in the U.S.? Many films are filmed in Canada…

George Escobar: Some movies are, yes. That's taking advantage of certain tax incentives and exchange ratios, but it doesn't preclude you from having to do any of this.

We won't address the details of that here, however. I want us to stay focused on the minimum, immediate things that you will need to focus on if you are to start a film production company. There are so many variations on this: you could spend hours, even days on it.

SECURITIES AND THE LAW

Mike Snyder: Emerson Marks is a practicing attorney from Charlottesville, Virginia. He has served as our counsel with Advent Film Group Movie One (*Come What May*), AFG Movie Two (*HERO*), and *Red September*. He helped guide us through the process of the securities offerings to get those funded.

George Escobar: Emerson, let me explain a little bit about the audience you are addressing. As you can see, we have some very young people who are in their teen years. They probably will not be doing a private placement memorandum tomorrow, but I encourage them to pay attention and learn because they are going to be helping people who will be doing this and should be doing this before they sign up to their projects, because it tells them the level of sophistication and their level of commitment to get that film done. We have some folks here who already own production companies, who want to venture into feature filmmaking. Their companies may have made corporate or industrial videos, maybe documentaries, or have maybe been working in their

church media programs. Now they need to get specific education about branching out into feature films.

We don't need to dive extremely deeply, but not surface level either. Just enough substance that they know, "These are the pieces that I need to understand and how they need to fit together, to be able to create a package."

Emerson Marks: Mike will talk something about approaching investors. The spirit of that and how that's done is a practical matter. What I'm going to tell you mostly about are the securities laws and how they have an impact on your business.

My work is, I handle securities matters for small business companies. I was privileged to meet George Escobar and Advent Film Group in 2007, and I was all excited about the church getting back into the arts from where we've had an almost self-imposed exile for a while. Our first conversation was really about the arts and inspiration and so forth.

My role is to help you prepare an offering to attract investors. That's a highly regulated business with many rules, many cautions, and many people looking over your shoulder. My job is like the lawyer in the movie, *The Firm*, the enforcement guy, the security guy who represents the mob and controls the firm. He says, "My job is to be suspicious when there's nothing to be suspicious about." Part of what I and folks like me try to do is to keep us on

track and think about what we are saying to people, especially investors, how that is being said and what expectations we are creating. Are they fair expectations, or are we misleading people, perhaps unintentionally?

It's a question of holding ourselves to high ethical standards. Ethics is different from mere honesty; ethics has to do with fitting norms in the business world. Our goal is to create an entire industry and not just a single movie. You're not just a charitable mission. At least when I get involved to do it, your business is to operate as an operating company that makes money, sustains itself, and, most importantly, pays artists and writers and cinematographers so they can have a career without beholding to the establishment that exists today. The only way they can do that is to succeed as a profit-making industry.

Here's a comment I wrote a while ago about investing in films, because it's a process that's fraught with imponderables and risks. My thought is this: producing films is inherently risky, and the risk begins before you start operations. It begins when you raise capital.

Producing films requires capital, not only for the adventure at hand, not just for a single film, but also to nurture a continued stream of capital for future projects. Your capital has to come from somewhere, and that might be yourself, if you can generate your own capital, or your family. For most of us that's a very shallow

resource that will be rapidly depleted. Down the road a bit, other venues are:

1. Large distributors, if they're interested in you (which they probably are not) and you can accept their terms (which may or may not be the case).

2. Pre-sale distribution contracts, if you have those (and starting out you probably do not), or

3. Outside equity investors—and that's what we're talking about here.

If you raise money from outside investors, you have to comply with the securities laws, which gets us to the point. What is a security? My definition is "a financial instrument or interest in a business venture, which an investor acquires in exchange for investing in your venture." Examples of securities are "stocks, limited partnership interests, limited liability company interest, investment contract, and all kind of arrangements," the point of which is to induce an investor to put money in your venture.

There are some elements that go into that. That definition was developed specifically in cases having to do with investment contracts: things like selling interest in small businesses or pay phone operations or other types of things in which, although nominally you are a business owner, what you really are doing is handing capital off to someone else who will be making money for you. So a

person invests money or something of that in a common enterprise, either common with you and some other people or perhaps common between the promoter and you. The expectation of profits is derived from the efforts of others, meaning you. When your investor comes to you, they're relying on you to make the money.

Now, there's a gray area there. You may bring in people who are executive producers or other sort of folk, who do an awful lot of work for the film itself. Maybe so far they're not a passive investor. But we try to stay on the line of saying that's a security.

George Escobar: You may be in a position that part of the offering, the amount of money that you're raising, will include hiring the expertise for marketing and distribution. If you don't have that expertise, you admit that, you tell the investor you don't, and so you're going to hire somebody for that function. That's perfectly legitimate. That's part of your plan, and you explain that to your investor, and if they like that and you've identified who those persons are, that you maybe talked to.... You know, you're not going to say, "I'm going to hire 20th Century Fox to distribute my film." That's a little bit unrealistic. It could be Mr. Jones who had done some films that have been very successful, similar to the kind of movie that you're going to make. And you had a conversation with Mr. Jones, and he's willing to come on board and help you for "X" amount of dollars. You don't

have to be an expert at every single aspect in the business.

Emerson Marks: The point of these securities laws is to protect the public. We've been raising capital in this country ever since the start of our country, and there have been all sorts of scams, watered stock, and other sort of things. People got stolen from by small companies and large companies. That led to these securities laws. However you feel about government regulation, the point was to protect the public from having their money taken away from them. The first impetus from that came from state statutes in various in places, Kansas being an early example of that, and moved on to statutes that are designed to protect the public, usually in three ways.

First, we're concerned about fraud: taking money based on misrepresentations. Fraud means fraud in the traditional sense of deliberately deceiving someone in the attempt to take their money, but it also means making misrepresentations that are perhaps not intentionally made, but are considered fraud for securities purposes. It's a very broad test. My test for securities fraud, meaning any kind of problems that come up later at the behest of an investor, is defeated investor expectations. If you have a venture going and you haven't explained it correctly, you haven't fought for the deal or described it in the kind of elaborate documents that we use to do this, that's a recipe for disaster.

Let's say you put together a film, and down the road there are problems: there's an interruption in your production schedule that runs your cost way up or something else happens. Your investors will tend to forgive you if they understand and were told ahead of time the type of things that could happen down the road. It's a question of the communications, considering the law and the business realities of the venture you're doing. That's what securities fraud is, and it is a big deal.

It's a way of us also to keep ourselves honest. When we're describing our deal, we're enthusiastic. We want to tell them how great it is, how much money we're going to make, and how we believe in what we're doing, which is part of our communication, and I put that on my legal documents. However, we also have to think through the risks: what could go wrong and how it's going to work, who the people are that are key to the deal, and why and how they relate to it.

It's not just a question of producing disclosures. I run into various kinds of rubber-stamped documents all the time, where people simply copied people's documents and said, "Well, so there's these risks in the movie industry." Unless you're describing all of this for specific film deal, what you're doing is simply covering yourself. It looks very shabby and cheap, and if there is trouble later on, it will not help you.

So far that's one concern. The other concern is disclosure. The Federal Securities Act goes on that philosophy. Their concern is that you describe the venture that you're asking people to invest in. The feds decided that there are two things we want: we want you to write up very elaborate legal accounting studies, and we want you to file those with us to register that securities offering. It's a complicated, labor-intensive, and very expensive process.

If you have to go the full registration route, the solution is to find something else to do for a living, because you cannot do it. A small business cannot afford it. So what we looked for instead is exemptions from that registration requirement. We do file documents. We do draw up very elaborate documents that describe the ventures, and we call that a private placement memorandum, but it's a lot less complicated than the registration route that you have to go to for a public offering. The difference we're talking about is six figures versus five figures.

At the state level, you run into another phenomenon, in which state regulators like to look at your deal and decide whether it is fair or not, and if they don't like it, they block it. One of the many reasons why I have to work to make sure your deal is exempt from those requirements is to prevent that kind of inquiry from going on, because you'll be in the hands of people who do not understand your venture and have no way of knowing whether it's

something others shouldn't invest in. My experience with state regulators is mixed: some of them know what they're doing, and some of them don't. So meeting the qualifications for exemption, which will be primary to keeping your offering private as opposed to public, is a big part of what we do, which is why we don't simply advertise that we're selling pieces of your movie. We have to do it one on one, carefully making sure the investors we approach are reasonably qualified, who should be taking on these risks. If we don't, the authorities may very well decide, "You have a public offering: we want you to fully register it." Which, again, means you're out of business.

Films are not just financially risky: they are emotionally risky. They invoke strong, ego-manic responses, the magic of fantasy, the thrill of association with honest and artistic expression, controversial topics, wildly optimistic profit expectations, and sometimes very disappointing results. They are ideal candidates for hostile after the fact scrutiny. "How could Uncle George been talked into this nonsense by that slick movie operator?" If the law is available as a means of attack, it may very well be used. Remember that, down the road, you may be arguing the point with, not just the investor, but maybe an heir of the investor or perhaps a regulator in Richmond who has been asked to look into this, wondering what is this questionable movie thing you're doing.

So we need to have all of that setup, and we need to have all of it followed through, so that I or you or both can explain to whoever is asking why there is no claim here. What we want to do is avoid claims, not win claims.

Let's take a quick look at some of the laws that are out there.

The Federal Securities Act of 1933 requires registration and disclosure unless we can be exempt, in which case we have more simplified disclosure and a lot more leeway about how we do it. But for all the reasons that I said, we still have to do it, because if we do it without disclosure and written documents, the investors don't understand what we're doing, and that's the recipe for disaster.

At the state level we have roughly the same thing. Virginia's Uniform Securities Act will apply, which has very similar requirements. It gives a nice right of action for investors, including attorney's fees, so we do not want to run afoul of it. Now the federal law provides a preemption. If I can be exempt on the state and the federal law of what I want to be, I can usually preempt myself out of regulation at the state level. Only that's not really true, because it's not preempted in the way that we usually mean it in the law. It's rather a quasi-preemption in which the states still get a following from me. I still have to give them three hundred dollars out of your pocket, and I still have to satisfy them.

I find that the states are increasingly pushing back in this area, so I worry about state regulation, even though I am supposed to be preemptive on the federal level. Right now there's a bill in front of Congress that will disastrously change some of these rules and make it harder to raise capital. We and others in the industry are trying to fight that, but while I think we are going to succeed in at least amending what's being done right now, we have to be very careful about our compliance.

Now the other thing to think about is federal statutes in all the other states. Wherever you raise capital, wherever you approach an investor, if they live in another state, that state's statutes have to be complied with. So let's say you're raising money: "Hey, we just had three people who are in Tennessee who are interested." Let me know right away, because I have a very short deadline for complying. I'll look into the statutory regulations, think it through, and call the regulators to get the tribal law, to get the sense of the deal we're doing. I never disclose who that is, but I tell them about the deal, "Here are the rules that you have that I believe that we're complying with. What else do you want from me in whatever it is we do?" We have to do that for every state, because any or all state securities laws can come in and apply, some of them simultaneously. It's a moviemaker's nightmare and a lawyer's dream.

George Escobar: Emerson, do you ever find yourself on the other side of the phone call, having to educate them on what's involved in the laws for your own filing?

Emerson Marks: Yes, I do. My experience with state regulators is mixed. I firmly believe that the states do a good job of anti-fraud enforcement activities, probably better than the federal in many cases. When it comes to registration and disclosure and filings, frankly, the stories are very mixed. I find they do not understand investments or finance or securities or markets or business. I have to sort of educate them. We have been in situations where I am told something completely nonsensical, and I smile and agree and hang up, and we just do it anyway, because I know I am right, but you don't want to have to live with that. On occasion, we simply conclude it isn't worth it to raise money in such and such a state, because they don't understand their own law, and there is not much you can do with that. When I have to deal with the feds, usually it's just straightforward filing. You get good people on the other end. It's part of my job to insulate you, to the extent I can, from the inanities of that process.

Okay, we'll look quickly at these statutes—this is edge of the seat stuff, folks. There's going to be a movie about this: "The Adventures of Securities Law!" Now realize that you don't have to remember all of this. I don't expect you to remember it. But when you hear it the next

time, it may click, and when you talk to whoever you're talking to when you get to this point, the fact that you've at least heard this stuff before will help.

Raising money in the last movie we did. Mike ran into some fairly good reactions from investors, because we had our documents together. We looked like we knew what we were talking about.

If you have to register your offering, that's very expensive with the government: major stuff. We don't want to have to do it, so we look for an exemption, which means I still write a very extensive document for you about your movie that we present to investors. It's cheaper than otherwise, but there's still a right to sue us if we mess up.

The state statutes are very similar to the Federal Securities Act. In registration, you have to do the same thing over with the states, which is why exemption is so important. It gets me out of having to do much organized work at the state level. I've done that occasionally for clients, and it is very involved, very nit-picky. You're trying to put together a merit review for folks, as we said, who do not understand what you're doing. So we try to avoid that. The other point to remember is that some form of that statute exists in most states. There are a few exceptions—New York doesn't have one for example—but usually we have to worry about the regulatory situation in every state. I find that that means a certain amount investigation by me,

because the state's requirements are changing all the time. They aren't uniform, and they can come up with whatever they want to come up with.

Here's some of the folks that you don't want to meet, but I'll get to meet. Securities and Exchange Commission is the federal agency which overlooks securities and markets, and registers brokers and dealers. It registers securities offerings, exchanges, stock exchanges, over-the-counter marketers, and so forth.

When you hear the term registration, it will mean different things depending on the context. The state government will have some kind of securities division. Those are the folks I'll talk to when I qualify the offering at the state level. In Virginia, it's the State Corporations Commission, and they have a securities division that's part of it. Same thing with the other states, so you have to stay friendly with them.

We don't like to think about it, but if we have problems, a court judge will be looking over our shoulders to make decisions about the offering if somebody sues us. So that's another whole part of the audience that I write for when I do our documents for you. We have a multifaceted audience here. We're writing for investors, and we're writing for people who may be looking at us further down the road, including these folks.

Of course, regarding your investors, Mike can point out that investor communication is something that goes on long after your offering. We want to keep them happy, believing in the mission we're doing. They are part your team and your stream of capital for future projects, which you will build on.

Okay, these are my two goals. I have to avoid registration, which means I have to put together this offering in a way that qualifies as a private offering, as opposed to a public offering. That is done primarily by avoiding large numbers of people, but it also depends on a number of other factors that have been developed over the years.

A big one is sophistication. If you're raising money and you're having somebody who is enthusiastic about your mission—they don't even care if they get their money back, and they want you to take their ten thousand dollars (which is all they have), or they're just simple people and they just don't understand this stuff, unless they have somebody they can talk to, an advisor or somebody—you probably don't want that investor. Business realities being what they are, I realize you will probably find a way to get that investor. That's my concern: you have people who are just too over their heads. It's not that they'll understand all of this stuff, but they need to understand your venture. They need to have somebody explain to them the mechanics and what the risks are, because movies are risky.

We don't know exactly how risky, by the way. I've looked into this idea of measuring returns on small films. I have a feeling we may make better money on average than Hollywood, but I can't prove it, and I won't say that in a document, because we don't know.

George Escobar: We've had the experience—I would consider it an unhappy one—of having to turn people away. They wanted to invest, but we didn't feel that they were qualified. That ten thousand that they wanted to invest wholeheartedly—they knew all the risks—wasn't something we were willing to risk for them, because they might not see the return on that money for several months or years or ever. We didn't want to have them suffer through that, so we said no.

Emerson Marks: Exactly. Sometimes you do have to make that decision, and I think we owe it to them to do so. It's hard for the investor, when they're excited, to understand that there's a down side to this. That ten thousand dollars may be gone, and you'll have nothing to show for it, and if that's something you have reason to believe that they shouldn't be taking on, do them the favor of saying so. Let their investment be the price of a DVD.

It helps if you have a relationship with people already or at least that you've been introduced so that it's not publicly soliciting people. If I get a hundred investors, and I get them by putting an advertisement in the local

paper or from a public seminar, that's a public offering. I'm going to lose my exemption and be in a heap of trouble. If I get the same hundred people because I contact them or I get to some of them through Mike Snyder who knows them—some kind of preexisting relationship—that helps to make it more of a private kind of offering. The regulators are likely going to say, "Okay, that's probably private; we won't require registration."

In your materials is a little piece by me talking about the solicitation process. The way you can use that is by working your numbers near your email list and everything else you have to develop those relationships, so that, down the road from your next venture, you're already set up with some of these people. So keeping it private is very important.

Attendee: Is there is a magic number of people that, when you rolled over that number, you went from private to public?

Emerson Marks: It really depends on the circumstances. We're probably looking at a maximum of a hundred. Now if you get that number of people, particularly from different areas of the country, I sweat through those details. So I try to think of what the other factors are that determine this and make sure we're good on those. If we're raising money from five people, then

I'm not too worried. If it's a hundred, then I'm going to be worried about suitability.

George Escobar: Just to be clear on those numbers, we haven't talked to a hundred people, but that was the number of units that we were seeking for funding. Did I get that right?

Mike Snyder: Yeah, we didn't say this is an offering to no more than a hundred people. What we said is that we have a hundred units available for purchase, so, if they all got sold, and if each person bought only one unit, then we would have had a hundred investors. Of course, some investors bought multiple units.

George Escobar: So let's put this in context, because it's really confusing right now. Let's assume that you're doing all the right legal filings, okay? Let's put that aside. To what purpose are you doing it for? Make sure you understand the purpose of your mission. If you don't, no one else will.

So you define all the parameters of your movie project based on your key mission or message. Okay, so you're going to make a movie and it's going to cost $300,000. Into how many units do you divide up this pie? Emerson was talking about a $10,000 investment for one unit. Meaning that, in essence, (30 units times $10,000) equals $300,000.

Now, that doesn't mean that somebody couldn't buy more than one unit. Some of our investors bought five units.

Emerson Marks: We do put in the PPM, very carefully, that we reserve the right to refuse somebody. We reserve the right to decide, "We can't offer you as many as we thought, so we're going to reduce it," maybe across the board. You want to have all of those hedges in there, to make sure that you're covered on that.

Mike Snyder: And the idea of ten-thousand-dollar units is completely arbitrary. We could have taken three units, a hundred thousand dollars each, and said that's what we're offering. That didn't seem very practical though. It would be really hard to find three people who each are going to invest one hundred thousand dollars for a first-time filmmaker, as it was for *Come What May*. We could have also put it at two thousand dollars a unit, but you have to consider the implications of having that many investors involved. You've got paperwork and follow up and filings with the state where they live to perfect your exemption, so how many do you want to manage? At thirty units, this probably represents nineteen or twenty investors.

Staying in touch with those investors, even though we have email and we can send something to twenty people at the same time, takes time. These are people that matter to you, that are part of your team. You want them

to know what's going on. You want them to be happy. You're building personal relationships with them. What happens when you have a hundred and fifty investors? That gets extremely difficult to manage. These are the kinds of factors you think about when you're making that decision of how many units to divide your budget into.

George Escobar: Before you even arrive at the budget number, you have to be very careful. Where did this number "$300,000" come from? It came from you really understanding your story. Can you make the movie that you say you're going to make for the amount that you're asking for? You better be really sure, because you have to deliver on that promise, on that assumption, because that's what you're telling the investors. You've said that for their collective investment of $300,000 you're going to deliver them a movie of "X" quality, size, and scale.

So, you have to do extensive homework before you come up with this number, based on consultation with other people and maybe your own experience. Just do the homework to make sure that you can deliver the movie. Some of the costs you want to build in are your living expenses, legal fees, sales and marketing, and all the other costs involved.

Attendee: So on the PPM, how many investors would you probably want to control or document who you reveal to?

Emerson Marks: That's a very good point. It's a good idea to keep a record of your communications with people. Set up a spreadsheet of what you learn about that person; that will help you. If down the road somebody should really have not been involved in this—for example, if they are not an accredited investor, which means certain income levels—it can cause you troubles, and you sort of have to be right on that. If somebody comes in, and they sign documents saying, "I meet these qualifications. I have money," you can only rely on that so much. You have to make your own investigation, so you have reason to believe what you believe at the time.

So I totally agree with you, sir, that you need to document what these things are. I'd like to see it documented as the offerees, at least people that look like they are close prospects but perhaps at the end didn't invest, because it helps to show that the solicitation process is confined to the people you really should be talking to.

Mike Snyder: We keep talking about "producing" a movie, but in this offering $150,000 was allocated to *delivering* the movie. Your investor isn't particularly interested in you creating a movie so that they have a keepsake to take home and show to their family. They want to know that it will get out there and be distributed. So much of that piece is tied up to what we call "distribution development." There's a lot of work, travel,

and meeting with people. It gets expensive traveling around for meetings, to build those necessary relationships to that point where people are willing to help get the movie out.

George Escobar: Key takeaways: be legal, seek professional counsel from someone like Emerson, and don't be afraid. This is standard industry practice. If you're not prepared to undertake this exercise, this rigorous examination of the viability of your project, you are not ready to make a movie. If you can't even do this, and this is the easy part of filmmaking, you're not ready. Stop. Reexamine yourself or your priorities, and get educated.

That's why so many people fail: they don't even go through this exercise. They don't know that they need to do this. Because once you go through this, you'll have the confidence to complete your movie. Not only the confidence, but now you've got the spur on your back prodding you to complete, because now you've got commitments.

You don't want to contact just a generic lawyer. Find somebody like Emerson. Talk to somebody who knows somebody else and who knows whether they know what they're talking about. They don't have to live in your town either.

Emerson Marks: I have clients I do business for in New Mexico, Washington State, different places, and I met them in places like film festivals and other places. The bar rules permit me to do transactional business in most states, even though I'm not admitted to practice there.

You do need to get somebody who is knowledgeable. The other question is: what other areas of law are there? There are intellectual property concerns and property concerns and labor concerns and entertainment law, and so I will draw on other folks who know more about this to the extent I need to. Frequently we have to have a basic knowledge of this, because realistically you can't afford the lawyers you would use to make a movie.

George Escobar: Entertainment law is not entertaining lawyers. It's lawyers who are experts in the entertainment field, usually in areas of distribution, deal negotiations for certain distribution arrangements, marketing, or casting. There's also securities law or foreign co-production deals that an entertainment lawyer may not be familiar with.

Emerson Marks: That's a great example. Part of it, when you do this kind of work, is knowing who you can bring in on pieces of this; it can get very arcane. Somebody today was bringing up architectural waivers and how you have to do that. There's this woman who has a practice in San Francisco, who is the expert, and

most of the time I can't afford to bring her in, but when we have a movie that requires it and can pay for it, that's the person I'll go to to get counsel on how we approach the whole problem of architectural waivers, permissions, consents, and so forth.

George Escobar: If you're a young person interested in law and you're a Christian, there's not many Christian lawyers out there, so there's a huge need. Emerson is the nearly the only Christian attorney that I know, and I know lots of attorneys.

Mike Snyder: There was a question earlier asking if there is a limit on the number of investors you can have. I think it's important that, for rule 506 purposes, you distinguish the idea of having accredited and unaccredited investors. Let's touch on what the limits are and aren't, just so that distinction is made.

Emerson Marks: The regulation we usually use at the federal level, which helps to secure preemption of other levels, requires that we only approach "accredited investors." All that is is a financial test. You have to have one million dollars net worth, and/or income of two or three hundred thousand joint: that's an accredited investor. You can have as many accredited people as you want.

You may approach unaccredited investors, but the rule is only thirty-five can end up investing—up to thirty-five—

but it is something. When you have non-accredited people, you have to work out a more formal system of disclosures, mirroring off documents of other types of securities regulations.

If you can stay away from non-accredited people, it helps. Now, realistically, you may not be able to, there are sometimes other ways that do an exemption. Sometimes I will avoid federal registration or exemption entirely and do a purely private offering. It's a structure you probably will not see in this business very much, but I've done it for certain kind of deals, particularly if they're intrastate deals. Ordinarily, non-accredited people are trouble for you.

The other thing we look at is financial suitability. A person's credit is only a small part of that, which is why people who are not sophisticated or at least can't be made sophisticated by having an advisor, are a problem. Not only for the question about accreditation, but for the purposes of showing that your deal is really one that should be exempt from most of the filing requirements.

We went into a national video presentation by a lawyer, doing what I'm doing right now, who said some sheer nonsense about securities law and what you have to do and don't have to do. All I was thinking was, I just hope they don't listen to this guy, because they are looking for trouble. There's some oversimplification about this stuff that will get you in trouble.

Now, some securities laws will focus on the number of offerings rather than sales people. It really depends on what it says. I usually try to work around those requirements, but on this point it's thirty-five that you sale to.

Attendee: Say you turn somebody down that's a friend of yours from your church. You know they have ten thousand, but that's all they've got, and you hit a home run like Mel Gibson. Can they come back and say, "Hey, I wanted to invest with you, but you turned me down"?

George Escobar: Just tell them why you turned them down. They'll recognize that you tried to do the right thing for them.

Emerson Marks: You will get people who say that. They have no legal claim whatsoever, but you might need to tell their lawyer why they don't have a claim. You can say, "Look, it's not only legal, but my lawyer wouldn't do it." You can also say, "Yes, we made a lot of money, but there was a really good chance you would've lost everything you had, and, as a Christian brother, I owe it to you not to get you involved in a venture that you shouldn't have been in."

George Escobar: On the other hand, I've also had very rich relatives who I know are accredited, and I'll email them in advance, saying, "I don't want you to invest. This is not a solicitation. I am sending this to you

merely to let you know that this is available, so you don't come back later and say, "Why didn't I know about this?" Because they are highly qualified, so conversely, it works the other way, too.

Chapter 5

INVESTOR PRESENTATION PART 2

SECURITIES PROCESS

Emerson Marks: Okay, let's look at these securities offerings process a bit. Let's say you've approached people, you've done your communication, you've kept that sufficiently private so that you don't run into registration problems, and you're now at the point that people are interested enough to give you a check. What we'd like to do now is give them some documents. The challenge for you (financially, among other things) is that before you even have investors, you need to have all this stuff worked up, and it is a very labor intensive process. We'll take a look at a little bit of it, because you really don't want to take their money until you've given them disclosure documents.

At the registered level, where I used to work, it was very, very strict about what you could do and you practically had to give prospectuses out before you took any money,

although the finals would come out later. Even at this level, however, we have to be careful that people have written disclosures so that you can document that you told them the story of the deal in some detail before you have their money. The documents you are going to be giving them will be a subscription agreement, which is the contract between them and you, saying, "We're giving you this money, we're becoming investors, we are acquiring investment units, this security,"—in this case it's units in a limited liability company—"and we promise to give you the money, and here it is."

You will then have some other documents I draw up (usually a questionnaire) in which we ask them to give us information. I ask them to document that they understand that the offering they're involved in is a very restricted thing. This is an investment they cannot sell tomorrow. They're going to be locking their money up for a long period of time, and there are business reasons but also legal reasons for that.

What we want to avoid is someone who buys your unit and then sells it next week to somebody else, because if you do enough of that you are, in effect, underwriting an offering of securities that is becoming public. This sounds nit-picky, but if enough of it is done, it's something we worry about when making offerings. Even on the public level we try to avoid people who buy and flip your investment. So we want commitments from

them that they understand they can't do that and they promise not to do that.

We'll also have the corporate documents. A limited liability company has a structure that's defined by the operating agreement. An operating agreement is kind of like the equivalent of by-laws in a corporation. People will come to me when their limited liability companies are set up. That's very simple to-do: you can file "articles of organization," a single-sheeted piece of paper that you send into Richmond. I like to put two or three things on there that you don't see, to confirm that limited liability is really limited, and I'll usually amend it, but the more involved documents are going to be the operating agreement. If you have that done already, I promise you I'll rewrite it, because it's got to be done to reflect the deal that you're really doing, and it's got to be done by carefully thinking through structure and power and who controls the company, how things are distributed and shared, and so forth.

The other big thing of course is the dreaded private placement memorandum. This is usually thirty to thirty-five pages of stuff, and we'll go into detail about the deal and the risks and other elements. In your handout, you have something that looks like this: it says, "Private Placement Memorandum." Look at this just briefly enough to get your eyes glazed over before I say a few things about it.

Attendee: In the definition of investor, is there a difference between an individual and corporate investor in these circumstances?

Emerson Marks: No. You can take investment in dollars from a number of entities. If, however, it is a corporation, then I need to look into who owns the corporations, who are the parties. Because usually (there are a few some exceptions) we have to assure that the people who own the company are themselves accredited investors, depending on the structure and such. If there's a trust, we usually have a separate agreement that looks into some of those other things. We need to know the trustee, and we need to assure ourselves that the trust is making an investment that is suitable and prudent from the point of view of the trustee. You would think investing in film wouldn't be prudent, but it really depends on the terms of the trust. So there's a little bit more homework to do with an entity investor, but we are able to accept investment money from them, for the most part.

Okay, private placement memoranda. You'll notice the first page of this has got a lot of boilerplate. People will buy hundred dollar kits. They see these paragraphs, they'll stamp them all over the place, and it's not consistent with what they're doing.

However, there are a few things to notice about this. First, it says, "Confidential." That is not just a word. This

is a document where you're going to be talking in detail about this deal with your investors. Telling them confidential means that you expect them not to share this with everybody. It is a private deal; it's supposed to stay that way. Do not hand these things out until you're handing it out to somebody who's going to be giving you money. If you're going to a meeting and you have a stack of these things here, that certainly looks like you're making a public solicitation of investment dollars, and you are in trouble.

This is not something to share with anybody else. There may be private information here about certain key people who are going to be with your company, perhaps people who will consult with their company who may not necessarily want to have their names out for anybody to look at as a law school exercise. So keep this confidential, now and later. If you let it fall into somebody else's hands, that can be construed as an offering of that security.

So this means, among other things, that we have the person who is taking this agreement that they will not show it to anyone but their advisors. We don't want them sharing it. The nightmare's to get somebody who copies this thing fifty times and hands it around his neighborhood because it looks cool. You can get blamed for that. These are the kinds of nightmares that guys like me worry about, and why you pay me.

We've put some other things in here to make it very clear that these securities have not been registered under the federal securities act and the state act, and you understand that. It also means that unless you were to get these units registered, you can't sell them to anybody else under the securities laws unless that sell is exempt. Standard stuff in securities law. Some of this language is in here because state regulations and federal regulations for registered deals require it. It doesn't really have to be there, but we say it because we're superstitious. We point out that the attorney general or the SEC has not approved this deal, hasn't looked at it, nobody says that it's a fair deal, and there's not government approval here.

We also say that it's available only to accredited investors. If that's not the case, then I word that differently. It's not just a rubber stamp. We like to keep it accredited only, but it's a question about what is true. We make sure in a hundred different ways that this is confidential and it is an illiquid investment that they're not going to sell to anybody else.

Now, let's take a look at the next page, which is the table of contents, just to look at the kind of things that we think about when going into this. There's no set rule about how we make these disclosures, unlike registered deals and, to some extent, unlike deals that don't have accredited investors. I like to set out the basic notion of the company, then often we'll talk about the company:

how it's formed, its business, what its mission is. We described the units; they are usually priced as fungible units, rather than as percentages of ownership. They are not assessable, which means that once we take your money, we can't come back and demand more money, as in certain kinds of deals—details like that.

We then have a description of the offering and the use of the offering proceeds (what we are going to use the money for). We'll put a certain amount of detail in there. You've probably already been given some examples of this. Some of this is going to go for production, cinema, cinematography. Some of it's going to go for actors or other things. When I'm writing all of this, the details that go in there are coming from you. My job is to take your information and rewrite it in a compelling way.

One of my personal talents is writing. I do a lot of that in doing this, because this is a story we try to tell in a compelling way. To some extent it's a selling document. We try to think through the deal, its risks and rewards, why we think it's a good deal, and how that relates. All of this comes from you, and I take it and make it as cogent a deal as we can. The numbers come from you too. I have no idea where you get them from, but you *do* have to know.

There are some technical things about dissolution and forward information that you don't have to know a whole lot about. We put them in there to try to make people

understand that what we're doing is a prediction, and it cannot be guaranteed. We say, "Here's what we think, here's the kind of sales and units, here's the prospects, here's where we fit in the market, but it's a future prediction." We have to make sure everybody understands that as long as you have an honest basis for your prediction, even if they want some wildly promising things, that's about all we can do.

We'll talk about operations, and here's where we really tell the story of the movie. What's the concept of the movie? What excites us? This is where we can put some really interesting information. Here are the people involved. Here's the story. Give some information on the story! We can really touch on the mission of the film. Particularly when you're in this kind of industry, when you have a mission with a capital M, that's very important to do. Usually we'll bring in something about the film industry and how it works, some background about the Christian film industry, specifically.

When I have a client with the depth of experience of somebody like George Escobar, I can bring in more of that, because that's where I get the stuff from. I have these things written down for a few deals, but I realize it's always dated information. I really depend on you to tell me those things and help us to think through how your movie fits into the overall scheme of the Christian movie market. What do you think the trends are? How do they

help us and how do they hurt us, with what this thing is going to look like as an investment?

We'll talk about marketing distribution, what our plans are, how we hope to distribute it, and perhaps the types of companies that we might be doing business with. We have to be very clear when we're talking about speculative facts. We don't want to imply that we've got a deal lined up with "X" distribution company if that's not the case.

There's an area where we can inadvertently mislead people, and I try to be very alert to it. People like to say things like, "Oh, we're going to be doing business with this distribution company, and they have to make these movies when we put them out there." I don't want people to walk away thinking, "Are these people doing a coproduction with the other people who made *Fireproof*?" If they get that impression, I've misled them, and that's the kind of thing we want to protect against. We will put in a certain amount of saying what our hopes are, the kind of prospects we have, and so forth.

George Escobar: Here's an example. What you can say that's true, in our case, with *Come What May*, we could say, "Our previous film, *Come What May*, is being distributed by Provident Films, a unit of Sony, which also successfully distributed *Facing The Giants* and *Fireproof*." That's a factual statement.

Emerson Marks: Yeah, and that's a really exciting part of your story. Once you've got one film locked, and you start making some success, which in the case of *Come What May*, Advent could do, I mean, they did very well starting out. I think you returned some money to investors, which shocked me: I didn't think it was going to happen.

George Escobar: Emerson didn't tell me that before.

Emerson Marks: The only person who's supposed to make money are the lawyers, the accountants, and maybe the screenwriter. (*smile*)

Allocation of distribution and profits is very important; it's going to be at the heart of the operating agreement. We need to make sure we've thought that through very carefully and made our private placement memorandum dovetail with that.

So we're going to think about what the priorities are and what kind of return you'll make. A typical model in the film industry is to (hopefully) start making enough money that you break even, and then your first distributions will be, depending on the deals you've made, back to the investors as a form of recoupment. Usually our goal is to have recoupment plus a certain premium, maybe ten percent, at which point we'll start sharing distributions with other folks.

A typical arrangement will be sharing with talent, deferred compensation, and such. At some point, other distributions will come out to profit-sharing plans, and then other things. The net profits will usually be distributed between your company and the investors; a fifty-fifty split is fairly common. All of this needs to go in there and, again, this comes from you. I have some experience with this. I have a notion what the patterns frequently are, but I will look to you, the filmmaker, to tell me, "Here's what the deal is, and here's why we're going to do it this way." My job is to tell it cogently, in a way that it helps people understand what they're getting into.

Management—the other big seller. When you have people that are good, this is where we will talk about your accounts, your abilities, and your experience, and how it's a selling point to the deal. This is so people really have an idea of who they're doing business with. That's very important. I like to have at least the mention of the key people involved, simply because if we leave information out, it's possible that somebody might consider that to be material.

The "bad actor" issue is something you have to worry about. If you have people who have regulatory history or criminal history or whatever, you don't want them in your company. It can be a real death, and that has to be disclosed. Ordinarily that's not a problem with

companies like Advent Film Group, but it's something that people like me need to worry about.

Risk factors is a big one. It's easy to make a laundry list of these things, but I try to think them through and describe them considering this particular industry and in this particular film company. Just to give you an idea, when we talked about pricing, we said, "What was it?" Ten thousand dollars a unit. "What is that worth?" Well, we don't really know: we just made it up. We said, "Here's the amount of capital we need for the movie, and we've gone through many budget processes on coming up with that number, so let's divide it up." If you were to put ten thousand dollars into a movie company and then asked somebody the next day what the investment is worth, the answer is, "Who knows?" There's no way of valuing that. So the pricing is arbitrary; we tell them that. We tell them we need to worry about compliance with the securities laws, which is why we depend on them to make sure they're behaving themselves, that they don't sell the stuff tomorrow, because it can justify the entire deal; we tell them that. We point out that we don't have underwriters. There's a risk that we may not have enough money.

There are also risks that you may get too much money. One sign of inexperience is not knowing what your numbers should be and what those are based on. A story was told me the other day on the web: somebody was

looking for half a million dollars, and they went to a funding store and were told that they don't fund something for less than two million dollars. Their response was, "Oh, we could do a movie for two million!" Right away, they have been written off from the industry, because they can see these people don't know what they are doing. They don't understand to assess how much capital you'll need and to not ask for too much, because too much capital means you cannot make a return for your investors.

So, all this goes in here. We talk about dilution. Dilution is where we give a position to somebody in the company who may not be paying for it on the same basis as the investors: people who may be contributing sweat equity —sometimes we have sweat equity units. Sweat equity, by the way, is literally the sweat of your brow as you work unpaid on a project with the goal that your work adds measurable and significant value to the project. In other words, in exchange for cash up front going into the investment pool, you are contributing your hard work, your sweat for an equity position in the project. Sweat equity is treated as cash and hence it is a diluting factor that will dilute the investor's interest by a certain percentage, and we disclose this. These are companies that are brand new. We usually don't have corporate insiders who own cheap stock, so that's not usually an issue, but it has to be mentioned.

Attendee: If you have somebody who contributes sweat equity for a position, do they have to be accredited?

Emerson Marks: No, we're not usually worried about them, as a practical matter. Something to think about for a law school exercise, but it's not a concern.

We put in a risk about borrowing, although we're probably not borrowing money. If we had to, that would affect our concerns.

We point out that these are investments in people. Usually, a producer or a director may be key to the entire deal, which means if that person is not available, your investment may be in trouble. The investors need to know that. They are frequently investing based on that. If we invest in a film by Advent Film Group, we're going to be saying, "We want it because George Escobar is in it," or "We want it because Manny Edwards is the director." That's a major part of our investment.

Very frequently, that's how we raise funds in the movie industry: we package things together. It may be a director, a story, a script, a producer, and sometimes an actor, of course; that's very common in the Hollywood world. That package is what we use to get funding from various people, studios, or banks, or private investors. In the smaller movie companies, usually the names aren't as well-known, but as you get a track record, it's going to be more important. So we need to point out that that is part

of the investment. It's also a risk, in the sense that you need to have that person there for it to work.

There are some specific risks about the motion picture industry, and some of those are listed there. We worry about crossover runs, technological change—all kinds of things enter into this. We discuss these so people have some notion about what their risks are and what they're getting into.

Okay, the birds-eye view of corporate law, very quickly. As I said, you will have your own company. Your film company may be a limited liability company, it may be a corporation, whatever it is, but when you are raising investment dollars, you are not selling interest in your companies. You do not sell your company away, because when you allow investment in the company itself, you're giving your company away. Investment dollars means ownership: that's what equity means.

So we form a venture for that film. Usually you form a new company for each film you do. That's the typical model. We used to use limited partnerships for a variety of reasons having to do with tax law. When limited liability came in, it gave us more flexibility, so that's the entity structure we like to use. We make a different one for every movie. Sometimes you'll have one that's going to do a slate of movies.

There are some technical things about how we set them up. We want them to be what's called a manager-managed limited liability company. If you suddenly set up a generic LLC, it's viewed by the law as a partnership, which means every person in it can speak for that company. You don't want that. So we make sure on the article level and the structural level that that's not the case.

The other reason is that you want the investors in there. They're going to own your movie, they're going to own the company, they're going to own the movie. You do not. You may have a minority position in there, but your control is going to arise from the management structure. You will be the manager, or typically your company is the manager. You might even, as we've sometimes done, create a separate little company that's the manager whose job is to run the company; it doesn't have to be an investor. You want to make sure it's very clear what those powers are, and what the members—whom we call the ordinary investors—what they get to do. They probably get to have meetings, and they may even have a right to replace the manager. We don't like that, but I think most investors want to have some ability to step in if things really go awry and say, "We just decided Mr. So-and-so is no longer the man to run the job."

We'll talk about capital contributions and how we set that up, how interests are transferred. The ordinary rule on

limited liability companies is like the rule on partnerships, meaning that you cannot transfer your interests to somebody else. Now we've already said that there are securities laws reasons why we don't want that going on (although we typically allow interfamily). If you're going to do it, ordinarily the legal rule says that what you've transferred is not membership in the full-partnership law sense, but merely an assignment of interests. He's an assignee, which means that person gets to have whatever money they're entitled to, but they don't go to meetings, and they don't have any votes or anything else.

We'll have some restrictions on transfer. Frequently I have a buy-out provision, meaning, if you want to sell your interest, the other members of the company have a right to bid for that on equal terms. Because we want to encourage the investors, and the investors want to know that this is their deal and if there's a chance they want to invest more, there's a chance to say, "I'm in here; I want to be the first in line to acquire that interest."

I have standard language regarding privileges of management: "We allow management to have other contracts and work for other companies, including companies that compete with us." That's standard fare in these kinds of deals.

We'll talk about compensation. This one really depends. Starting out you may only make money if it makes

money down the road, and that's when you'll get allocations of the profits. As you get more established, you may be able to hire yourself or your production company as the manager. You may be directing the movie. At some point we'd like you to be sufficiently well-developed as a business organization that you could manage this thing and pay your management fees or director's fees or whatever else you're earning.

We'll have some things on accounting, profits and losses, and distribution, and the usual things you'll have on corporate structure. The thing to emphasize is that we *will* have to redesign this if you bring a deal that's already set up. We redo it to make sure it fits the particular deal, fits the film industry, and fits what you're doing for raising capital.

Attendee: Could you give a unit in exchange for product placement? Like, we have an Atlantic Bottling company where we are that distributes Coca-Cola products. Could they buy a unit in exchange for us using their soda pop when the characters drink soda?

George Escobar: Yes, if you feel that their contribution is valued properly at that, you can write an instrument documenting that amount. That could be admitted as capital because that's money that you would have spent otherwise for your production. That could happen, let's say, with a post-production house. This is very common in the industry. Where they really like your

movie, and you strike a deal with them, "Look, I can't pay thirty thousand to edit and do color correction and all this stuff, but if you're willing to convert that into equity, because otherwise it's debt," then that's proper, sure.

Attendee: And then they would get a normal distribution.

George Escobar: Yeah, just like any other investor.

Emerson Marks: Right. I suppose you could vary the terms according to the deal. It's not clear to me whether it would be part of this offering; it might be considered a separate transaction.

Mike Snyder: I think it definitely would, unless, in the private placement memorandum (PPM), you said the offering is also for in-kind services, something other than cash, to be part of the offering. As the PPM is currently drafted, it's only for cash.

Attendee: Wouldn't that be a dilution, though?

Emerson Marks: No, a company is always free to raise additional capital down the road. In the documents and the structure here, we will have that privilege stated. That way if, for whatever reason we decide, we could use more money and we think the prospects are there, we're free to go out and make another offering. Ordinarily we

don't, because we have that number set, but it could be done.

Attendee: So if you want to deal with, like, in our area, U-Haul, Coke, that could be something separate from this altogether. But you show up with U-Haul and Tractors, and boom!

George Escobar: Well, that's a product placement. That's generally a separate deal. We have several corporate sponsors in *HERO* who gave us food or drinks or other in-kind services that, for the most part, were donations. Their logo appears in the baseball field in the background in exchange for free soda, for example.

Emerson Marks: It's a funny two-edged sword. Sometimes you're going to a company to request permission because you want to have a coke can there, and they can say yes or no. But, if you've got enough exposure, you may be able to say, "Actually, we're looking for money because we're going to use your coke can."

George Escobar: I want to leave Mike enough time, but please stay here, Emerson, because we're going to help him in his presentation as well.

Emerson Marks: Thank you, for what I have to know is one of the most thrilling aspects of filmmaking.

FINANCIAL and/or KINGDOM RETURNS

Mike Snyder: We're now moving into the session that was labeled "The Investor Presentation and Relationship." There's an outline in your packet there that has some practical things about when you get a chance to talk to an investor.

First, I want to talk about how you think about money. What's your relationship with money and the way you think about it?

Attendee: I prefer to not ask or think about it.

Mike Snyder: Touché.

Attendee: It's a tool. You can use it, or you can just let it sit there and not do anything.

Attendee: It's, unfortunately, tied up in self-worth.

Attendee: It's something we're supposed to manage. Understanding Who it ultimately belongs to.

Attendee: Time.

Emerson Marks: Freedom: it gives you the power to do things that you otherwise can't.

Attendee: It's the driving force of the economy. You have to have the resources to procure or do what you need to do.

Mike Snyder: I guess we all agree that it's important. Every one of these answers suggests that money is important in some way. Do we ever think that money is bad? Anybody ever drift there?

George Escobar: It's sometimes personified as the cause of all evil.

Mike Snyder: Ah, almost. Money is not the root of all evil; it's the *love* of money that's the root of all evil.

George Escobar: Right.

Mike Snyder: Well, we're talking about asking people to invest in our company. Presumably we're all starting companies and dedicating them to the Lord, recognizing that these are His companies, not ours.

Based on all the securities laws stuff you've heard about, the people that we're going to approach to invest in our company are going to be accredited investors. At a minimum they have a net worth of a million dollars or an annual salary of at least two hundred and fifty thousand or a household income of at least three hundred thousand. Any one of those three tests, recall, makes them an accredited investor. These are folks who have a fair amount of money compared to most people in America. They're millionaires, although what a millionaire is is certainly cheapened today compared to what it meant forty years ago. Nonetheless, they have significant assets.

I'd like to suggest that they think about money a lot. As you said, it's something they have to manage. It's something to think about and ponder whose it really is. It's really crucial. You have to come to grips with your own relationship with money.

What is it and whose is it? I think we all have had enough teaching and learning to know that, biblically, it's not ours. It's God's money. This is all His. We may know that biblically, but do we live it? Do we believe it? Do we take it to heart? Is it at the core of who we are? So I leave that to each of you, as a personal challenge. I hope that that is the case or will become the case, for each of you, because it certainly changes everything in the way you live your life.

These folks who've been blessed with these resources, they live with a burden. They really do. They know they have a stewardship obligation. They want to fulfill that obligation, but they also have the same relationship difficulties with money that most of us do. How many opportunities do they get to use that money in a way that's really going to serve the kingdom and glorify God?

That's where you enter in. You now have a potential ministry to people with money, because you're going to be approaching them with a proposition that is fairly unique in the investment world. Why do I say that? Most people, when they invest, they've got one thing in mind: am I going to make money and how much am I going to

make on this investment? That becomes the primary filter. The reasoning is: "I'm a steward. I need to maximize the return on this, because then I can give some money away to Christian charities and to my church and to other good things."

The problem is, if that's your sole filter and you like movies, you might be investing in movies, but, for the most part, the ones that you can reasonably anticipate having a decent chance of making money are movies that come out of Hollywood. So, because you're interested in the field, you invest in it. But what kinds of messages are you supporting? You're helping Hollywood do its Hollywood thing, and you're taking the proceeds of all that if you do make some good profits, and you're doing some good things with it. You might have something good going on for you there. I'm wondering, though, if there's something that might be wrong with that picture.

Now, let's say there's an investor who appreciates how powerful this medium is and understands how critically this affects the way people think in our culture and helps shape our culture, this whole medium called film. You come along and you say, "You know what? I have something a little different. I think you might be interested in the proposition I'm going to show you right now."

That's where you come in. If you've done your job and you have a great story, you've budgeted it properly, you have a business plan for distribution, and you have a reasonable opportunity for profit that's all on you—and I'm assuming that's what you're going to do—then they now have an opportunity for profit. However, they also have an opportunity for a kingdom return on investment because of the outcome of what you're doing. This is ministry. This is shaping minds for Christ and ultimately shaping the culture, because we transform culture one person at a time. You get to show this person a way to make money so they can give money to other charities, as they've always been aiming at, but also to get a great kingdom outcome directly on the money they've already invested. For total outcome, as they try to steward their money, so much more is on the table for them to gain in this particular investment opportunity. I want you to recognize that this is very different from what most of the world can offer.

Because this is an investment that's intended to be profit, even if the whole thing fell flat on its face and they never got a dollar back, they now have a write-off for tax purposes on their investment. If their investment is a total loss, that becomes a deduction on their tax return, which puts them in—while not in an identical position—not much worse of a position than had they just made a charitable donation to any charity.

So here's somebody who's trying to make an investment, whose best case is their getting a double return, a financial return and a kingdom return, and whose worst case is they still get a kingdom return. Because someone's going to see this movie. I'm assuming it's going to get made; it just may not be financially profitable. It still may affect people's hearts, and it may change people, even if it's not a lot of people, so that's a kingdom return. Plus, they're no worse off than if they had donated it. It's not a precise correlation, because of the way the tax laws work, but they get that deduction for having done so.

It's a unique investment proposition for a follower of Jesus Christ, and it's really, really important to be able to communicate this story to investors. People don't realize that it is so different. You want to focus a kingdom return. You want to focus on outcomes. I mean, yes, you've got a great story. Yes, you're going to get it into many people's hands. Yes, there's going to be a financial return, and yes, there's lots of people who are going to see it. But what if there was no financial return? Is that victory?

What do you think? Is that victory? Is that success?

George Escobar: Yeah, I think so.

Attendee: You want your film to achieve its goal, its message. So whatever message you're putting in your

film, you want people's hearts and minds to be impacted by it.

Mike Snyder: Okay, yeah, exactly. That's what I would seek to drive you at. Ultimately, this is the endgame. Are we doing it just to make something good and get it into a lot of hands, to have lots of people see it and have money come back so you can do it again with another story? Or are we doing this because God has given us a vision for how people might be moved to change in some way?

Now, I'm sort of slipping over into the whole question of story development here. I don't want to go too far down that road and the whole question of what kind of stories you are going to make and why are you going to make them. It's critical, though, if that's the dream—the kingdom dream, anyway—that I would challenge you: what is the outcome?

Let's take *HERO* right now, our next movie. It's a story of three father-son relationships interwoven in the context of little league baseball, and we see transformation in each of these father-son relationships, where they grow together, and in all the fathers' desires and abilities to be better dads. There's also the whole question of us coming into a closer relationship with our heavenly Father. So, is there an outcome for us? Sure! We want to be better dads. We also want to be better sons and daughters to our Father. That's an outcome that can change lives, change relationships; it will stir and stimulate people.

In our first movie, *Come What May*, what are our outcomes there? First, it was a big education project in terms of the law and the pro-life movement, so people get educated. More importantly, it is to raise a greater awareness and desire to stand for life. That's what these young folks were doing in this moot court context. It calls us to stand for life, not just understand it and agree with when one life begins, but to stand and to fight.

We also model modesty and chastity in a budding love relationship between a guy and a girl who are moot court partners. We were making a pro-life movie, with a little modesty and purity theme thrown in there—that's what we thought. And, while it certainly is that, thousands of emails—thousands!—came back from parents and teenage girls (no teenage boys), all essentially saying, "Thank you, thank you, thank you for the things you've portrayed here, because you can't find them anywhere else and it's so encouraging ... and more than that you've given us a family movie that has really been a great vehicle for us to engage on these things as a family, to talk them through."

So, wow, we've got a tremendous outcome in—who knows how many families that will become over time—but the outcome there was that they're engaging on this. It's part of the fabric of their family and starts them talking about this, and figuring out: who are we going to be? Especially these teenagers. Yeah, the whole modest

and purity theme I don't think was a home run with the teenage guys. I'm sorry, but they'll get to it.

Outcome, outcome, outcome! If the only thing you remember from me during these two days, it's the word, OUTCOME. Because, it's our human nature to focus on input, input, input. What am I going to do? When am I going to do it? What has to be done? It's all, what, what, what, what, what? It's activity, it's accomplishment, it's achievement, it's production—all of those things. That's all really important, but to me, that's all just a big long hard preface to get to the real story, which is outcome.

So why am I talking to you about this in the middle of talking about an investor presentation? Because this is where you go to that person's heart. You've got to find their passion. Most people, if they're passionate about what you care about and want this message to get out there, they're much more likely to want to sign on. They'll say, "Yeah, I want to be part of that. I want to see that happen!" You're painting a vision for them, "Do you want this? Here's what we're aiming for." Not: "What can I hand you."

All the activity in the world is worth nothing (when we're talking in the context of the kingdom), unless it's God's. It came from God. It's His message: it's His story. We are serving Him, and it's all about others, not about ourselves. It's not about what acclaim we might receive or how great a financial return we might get. Those are

blessings that God in His grace may choose to shower on any one of us at any time, and those are great, but I hope you aren't doing it for the blessing, because then it's not a blessing anymore. It's not grace if you're earning it, if you're chasing after it and throwing yourself in every way to get it.

People need to hear this story, and investors need to hear this as much as anyone else does. They have a chance for financial return (with the downside protection of a deduction if there is none), a kingdom return, and a vision of feeling like, "Wow, if we can accomplish that, if the message of this movie can get out there and start to affect people in that way, that's something I can be really pleased with, really proud of, and I'll want to tell all of my friends who also belong to the country club (or whatever)." You know, it's all God's money. There's piles of money out there that belong to Christians—Christians who are serious about being stewards of money. They only have so many opportunities and passions to invest, and this is coming along. This whole movement is God's movement, and it's only at the beginning.

That's a completely additional reason: it's not just about this film and this message. It's also about contributing to the growth of the overall movement. I don't how long it's going to take, but let's say fifteen years from now—if we have a thousand good-quality films that portray gospel values in stories of every kind that can touch every kind

of heart—the world is really going to start to change. It'll begin to change because there are real alternatives.

Now for us, I use three talking points as an outline to talk to investors. I want to talk to you about movies, mentoring, and the movement: a simple proposition. You won't all have the same talking points, but you can certainly talk about movies, and if you really do care about the movement, you can talk about the movement.

The first is really simple: we want to make movies that we feel God is calling us to make, that have transformative outcomes, and that resonate with gospel values.

On the mentoring piece, we really care about helping to raise up the next generation of filmmakers for Christ. We want to mentor them in craft and to help disciple them in heart and mind as much as we're able to, so that they become fully prepared to enter into this field. Part of that mentoring is that we can be around some young people for limited periods of time. When you all enter this field and you get out there, you need to have a mentor, someone who is twenty or thirty years down the road. So we need to help identify, recruit, and train those people to be mentors to you younger ones.

Then lastly, we care about the movement. We want the whole movement to succeed. If only Advent Film Group succeeds, very little is going to happen. That's why we're

doing this, why we spend time with other people who were making their first film and help go over what they're doing, critiquing, and giving ideas and suggestions. We sit down and do that half day here, half day there, with different people. Why do we do it? Because we care about the movement. So that's part of the story when we talk to investors.

Don't get all caught up in the nuts and the bolts and the dollars. That's your work, but that's not what you're talking to an investor about. They can study the PPM and all that kind of stuff, and you will give them a big summary just to cover all the bases. Some of that is in my outline. Go to the heart: your heart to their heart.

We have to come at this through the cross. If we don't go through the cross every day, again and again and again, it's going to be very tempting to get all full of yourself. We'll start to think, "Wow, look at this great work I'm doing." It's so easy to get the "me" back in there. You have to go through the cross, so that everything we do will bear fruit that comes out of laying down our life again and again and again, daily. I remind myself that another word for the cross is "Holy Wood." We're making Holy Wood messages as an alternative to Hollywood messages.

Attendee: You were talking earlier about someone going to film schools in the U.S. and how you will get tainted being in that realm. I think the artsy world as a

whole is a very liberal group. You get a big group of those people together, and it gets saturated. What we don't have on the conservative side is the arts brought into that. I think the money is out there for these type of projects, but the only ones doing it are on the liberal side: look at the money that's being poured into politics and everything.

George Escobar: We meet investors who say, "The quality of Christian films is just so poor, why would I want to invest in it?" The counter point to that is, the quality of Christian films is so poor because we don't find you guys to invest in it to raise the level. So it's the chicken and the egg thing. That is slowly changing because of the successes we've talked about already, even the ones Hollywood is making occasionally, like *The Blind Side*. It begins to attract the attention of investors, Christian investors, and they say, "Oh, can you make a movie like that?" "Certainly; better, actually." Then you explain how.

So the dialogue is beginning to start, but we still have much work to do. We're at the very cusp of this movement. You should have great hope for the opportunity ahead of you. We're starting now. It's a very encouraging sign that the movement is growing, not retreating. It's growing and expanding.

Mike Snyder: One more slide here. Anybody know what this is a picture of? The Dead Sea, absolutely.

Capernaum's up here, and here's the Dead Sea, and down here, the Jordan River. All kinds of minerals and other things filling this place, but almost zero biological life in the Dead Sea. We're going to get a metaphor here. There's no outlet from the Dead Sea; it's all acquisition. It takes and receives from the Jordan, keeps pouring in, and then a lot disappears. It's not given, it's not passed on. The water eventually evaporates, so they're losing it anyway, and there's no life. There's no giving.



Next picture. Anybody know what this is? The Hoover Dam. There's a whole lot of work that went into building that dam, all right. Years of hard work. What happened as a result of that? Massive life-giving assets were accumulated in the water built up in the monstrous lake behind that dam. Life-giving water: great assets to have.

What's the dam do? It just controls the flow. So those assets, the water behind the dam, are never really depleting. Part of the reason is because there's always new coming into it.

At the same time, it's always giving off water on a controlled basis. Decisions are made: when should I let this go? How much flow should there be? There's always giving going on in a thoughtful way, regarding how much water is going to be released. That's the picture of the real, giving Christian. That's the picture of the kinds of investors that you would like.



George Escobar: Also, electricity being generated.

Mike Snyder: There's power out of that as well. Many life-giving things. What's interesting is that this Colorado River, do you know where this goes? This goes all the way into California, all the way to Los Angeles. That money, those assets back there, being let go, where's it going right now? It's feeding LA. It's feeding Hollywood. There's our investors' problem: they've got the assets, but they're putting them in the wrong place. Now they have a solution to their problem: you are that solution.

Chapter 6

THE EMERGING LANDSCAPE OF CHRISTIAN FILMMAKING

George Escobar: The way films are made, marketed, and consumed has changed more in the past decade than in the previous fifty years combined. As Christian filmmakers, it's critical to understand these shifts not only to keep up but to lead. We are uniquely positioned to use these changes to spread stories that uplift, inspire, and glorify God. This chapter dives into the modern filmmaking landscape, providing specific examples, case studies, and step-by-step plans to navigate the world of streaming platforms, hybrid distribution models, and audience-driven storytelling..

STREAMING: A GAME CHANGER

Streaming platforms have upended the traditional Hollywood distribution model, putting more power into the hands of independent filmmakers. For faith-based storytellers, this is a moment of tremendous opportunity.

WHAT STREAMING OFFERS:

1. Global Access: Films are no longer confined to specific regions or theaters. A streaming release means that someone in Brazil, South Korea, or South Africa can watch your film the same day it becomes available in the U.S.

2. Audience Segmentation: Streaming platforms cater to niche markets, making them an ideal fit for faith-based films that might not resonate with mainstream audiences but have a loyal core following.

3. Lower Distribution Costs: Unlike traditional theatrical releases, streaming eliminates the need for expensive prints, advertising (P&A) budgets, and exhibition fees.

FAITH-BASED EXAMPLES:

THE CHOSEN: This crowdfunded series leveraged its own app to stream directly to its audience, bypassing traditional distributors entirely. The result? Over 400 million views and a deeply invested global fanbase.

A WEEK AWAY: Netflix's acquisition of this Christian musical demonstrated how faith-based content can find a home on mainstream platforms while reaching beyond church audiences.

RISE OF STREAMING PLATFORMS

Christian streaming services like Pure Flix, Minno, and Angel Studios are becoming hubs for faith-based films. These platforms cater specifically to families and believers, offering curated content that aligns with their values.

CASE STUDY: PURE FLIX

- Mission: Pure Flix aims to provide "safe and uplifting" entertainment for families. Acquired by Sony in 2020, the platform has expanded its reach while maintaining its Christian foundation.
- Notable Projects: Films like God's Not Dead and Unplanned found homes on Pure Flix after their theatrical runs, sustaining their impact long after leaving theaters.

Step-by-Step Plan to Get on Pure Flix:

1. Produce Aligned Content: Ensure your film fits Pure Flix's focus on family-friendly, faith-driven narratives.

2. Build Relationships: Attend Christian film festivals like ICVM or NRB (National Religious Broadcasters) to connect with Pure Flix representatives.

3. Pitch Your Film: Submit your completed project with clear marketing materials, including trailers, posters, and audience data to show demand.

Angel Studios' Pay-It-Forward Model Angel Studios combines crowdfunding with direct-to-consumer distribution. Films like His Only Son and The Wingfeather Saga were fully funded by audience members who became their champions. By empowering viewers to "own" part of the process, Angel Studios has created a sustainable model for faith-based projects.

How to Follow Angel Studios' Model:

1. Create a Campaign: Use platforms like Angel Studios' crowdfunding tool to raise money directly from your audience.

2. Engage Supporters: Offer backers unique perks, such as exclusive updates, early access, or recognition in the credits.

3. Distribute Directly: Leverage Angel Studios' platform to stream your film, allowing supporters to share it with others.

Day-and-Date Releases

One of the most effective strategies in today's market is the day-and-date release, where films debut simultaneously in theaters and on streaming platforms. This approach maximizes both reach and revenue, allowing filmmakers to cater to diverse audience preferences.

Why It Works:

- Convenience: Streaming gives viewers the option to watch from home, while theaters provide a communal experience for those who prefer it.
- Flexibility: A day-and-date release ensures that viewers who can't attend a theatrical screening don't miss out entirely.
- Momentum: Coordinated marketing across both formats creates buzz and urgency.

Case Study: *I Can Only Imagine*

This faith-based biopic was a box office hit, grossing over $83 million. Its success in theaters was amplified by its

subsequent streaming release, which brought the story to millions more viewers worldwide.

Step-by-Step Plan for Day-and-Date Success:

1. Partner with Fathom Events: Use Fathom to organize a limited theatrical run, especially for church and community screenings.
2. Simultaneous Streaming Release: Work with platforms like Pure Flix or Amazon Prime to ensure your film is available online on the same day.
3. Leverage Social Media: Create urgency with countdown posts, exclusive clips, and testimonials to drive audiences to both theaters and streaming platforms.

Streaming Exclusives: The New Frontier

While hybrid releases are powerful, some filmmakers are choosing to skip theaters entirely in favor of streaming exclusives. This approach works well for smaller films targeting specific audiences.

Benefits of Streaming Exclusives:

- Immediate Audience Connection: Platforms like Netflix, Hulu, and Disney+ have millions of active users, giving your film instant visibility.

- Cost Efficiency: Without the expenses of theatrical distribution, more of your budget can go toward production and marketing.

Faith-Based Example:

- Resurrection (2021): This faith-based drama premiered as an exclusive on Discovery+, bringing a biblical story to a global audience during the Easter season.

Steps to Pitch a Streaming Exclusive:

1. Research Platforms: Identify platforms that align with your film's themes and audience.
2. Prepare a Professional Pitch: Include a polished trailer, audience demographics, and a summary of why your film fits their catalog.
3. Negotiate Rights: Retain as many rights as possible to allow for future releases on other platforms or DVD.

Navigating the Emerging Landscape

1. Start Planning Early:

- Distribution isn't something you consider after the film is complete—it begins during pre-production. Decide whether your film will follow a theatrical, streaming, or

hybrid release model and plan your marketing strategy accordingly.

2. Know Your Audience:

- Use tools like Google Trends, Facebook Audience Insights, and YouTube Analytics to identify your target demographic. Understanding your audience's preferences will guide every aspect of your project, from the script to the distribution plan.

3. Build Community Support:

- Involve churches, homeschool co-ops, and Christian organizations in your release strategy. Host pre-screenings to gather feedback and generate buzz.

4. Leverage Social Media:

- Platforms like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts are invaluable for building anticipation. Share behind-the-scenes clips, character introductions, and countdown posts leading up to your release.

The Role of Faith in the Emerging Landscape

As we embrace these new opportunities, it's essential to remain grounded in our mission. Technology and distribution models are tools—but it's the message that matters most. Let's not lose sight of why we're here: to

share stories that glorify God and bring hope to a broken world.

The emerging landscape of Christian filmmaking is vast, and it's growing every day. Whether through streaming platforms, hybrid models, or community screenings, the possibilities are endless. But the question remains: how will you use these tools to tell the stories God has placed on your heart?

The field is ripe for harvest—let's get to work.

Chapter 7

THE MODERN BUDGET APPROACH FOR FAITH-BASED FILMMAKING

George Escobar: Budgeting is often one of the most intimidating aspects of filmmaking, especially for independent filmmakers working on faith-based projects. But it doesn't have to be. With the right approach and tools, you can secure funding and manage your budget effectively to bring your vision to life. This chapter explores modern methods for financing films, including crowdfunding, community-based models, and risky albeit

innovative approaches like NFTs, while staying faithful to your mission and message.

THE POWER OF CROWDFUNDING

Crowdfunding has revolutionized independent filmmaking, allowing creators to connect directly with their audiences and raise money before the first frame is even shot. For faith-based filmmakers, this approach is especially effective, as it allows you to build a community around your film and give supporters a sense of ownership in the project.

How Crowdfunding Works: Crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter, Indiegogo, and Angel Studios allow filmmakers to create campaigns where supporters can pledge money in exchange for rewards. These rewards can range from early access to the film to on-screen credits, merchandise, or even involvement in the creative process.

Faith-Based Success Stories:

Faith-based filmmakers have increasingly turned to crowdfunding to bring their projects to life, engaging communities and fostering a sense of shared purpose. Notable successes in this arena include "The Chosen" and its precursor, "The Shepherd," both of which exemplify the power of collective support in faith-based media

The Chosen: A Crowdfunding Milestone

"The Chosen" stands as a testament to the potential of community-backed filmmaking. Launched in 2017, it became the largest crowdfunded media project to date, raising over $10 million from more than 16,000 investors for its first season. This unprecedented support not only funded the production but also created a dedicated global audience. The series has since been translated into over 50 languages and viewed hundreds of millions of times worldwide. Its success underscores the viability of crowdfunding in producing high-quality, faith-based content that resonates with diverse audiences.

The Shepherd: Laying the Foundation

Before "The Chosen," there was "The Shepherd," a short film directed by Dallas Jenkins. Initially created for a Christmas Eve service, the film garnered significant attention online, leading to the concept of a multi-season series about the life of Jesus. The positive reception of "The Shepherd" demonstrated the audience's appetite for authentic, faith-based storytelling and set the stage for the crowdfunding success of "The Chosen."

Key Takeaways

These examples highlight several critical aspects of successful crowdfunding in faith-based filmmaking:

- Community Engagement: Building a supportive and invested community is essential. By sharing the project's vision and mission, filmmakers can inspire audiences to contribute financially and become advocates for the film.
- Transparency and Trust: Open communication about the project's progress, challenges, and successes fosters trust and encourages continued support.
- Quality Content: Delivering high-quality, authentic storytelling that resonates with audiences is crucial for both initial funding and sustained success.

By embracing these principles, faith-based filmmakers can harness the power of crowdfunding to bring meaningful stories to the screen, engaging audiences and creating content that reflects their values and beliefs.

Exploring Regular vs. Investor Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding has revolutionized the way filmmakers finance their projects, offering faith-based creators the opportunity to bypass traditional gatekeepers and engage directly with their audience. However, not all crowdfunding models are created equal. Understanding the unique aspects, benefits, and pitfalls of donation-based crowdfunding and investor crowdfunding is crucial for choosing the best approach for your film.

This chapter provides a comprehensive guide to both models, helping faith-based filmmakers navigate their options while staying true to their mission.

I. Overview of Crowdfunding Models

A. Regular Crowdfunding (Donation-Based)

Definition:
Donation-based crowdfunding relies on contributions from individuals who believe in your project. In return, backers often receive perks, such as merchandise, early access to the film, or acknowledgment in the credits. Importantly, backers do not receive any financial stake or profit-sharing from the project.

Key Platforms:

- Kickstarter: All-or-nothing funding model; if you don't reach your goal, you receive nothing.
- Indiegogo: Flexible funding; you can keep the funds even if you don't meet your goal.

B. Investor Crowdfunding

Definition:
Investor crowdfunding allows supporters to contribute money in exchange for equity or profit-sharing. Essentially, they become partial owners or stakeholders in

the project, with the potential for financial returns if the film succeeds.

Key Platforms:

- Angel Studios Crowdfunding Platform: Specializes in faith-based and family-friendly projects.
- Wefunder and StartEngine: Open to a variety of projects, including media and entertainment.
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II. Benefits and Pitfalls of Regular Crowdfunding

A. Benefits

1. Direct Audience Engagement:

- Crowdfunding builds a passionate community around your project.
- Example: The Chosen raised over $10 million by fostering a sense of ownership and mission among its backers.

2. Creative Control:

- Backers donate because they believe in your vision, not because they expect to influence creative decisions.

3. Flexibility in Use of Funds:

- You decide how to allocate the funds without needing to justify returns to investors.

4. Marketing Boost:

- Crowdfunding campaigns double as promotional tools, generating awareness and excitement about your project.

B. Pitfalls

1. No Guaranteed Funding:

Many campaigns fail to meet their goals. Platforms like Kickstarter are all-or-nothing, which can result in zero funding despite effort.

2. Perk Fulfillment Costs:

Offering physical rewards can eat into your budget, especially if not planned carefully.

3. Limited Financial Upside:

Backers don't expect financial returns, which can make large contributions less likely compared to investor models.

3. Saturation of Campaigns:

The market is crowded, and standing out requires significant marketing effort and resources.

III. Benefits and Pitfalls of Investor Crowdfunding

A. Benefits

1. Larger Potential Contributions:

- Investors are often willing to contribute more substantial amounts because they expect a return on their investment.
- Example: Angel Studios raised millions for His Only Son, offering investors a share in the film's profits.

2. Broader Reach:

- Platforms like Angel Studios combine traditional crowdfunding with investor models, reaching audiences who are motivated both by mission and profit potential.

3. Long-Term Relationships:

- Investors who believe in your project may fund future productions or recommend your work to others.

4. Legitimacy and Accountability:

- Investor crowdfunding requires detailed financial and business planning, lending credibility to your project.

B. Pitfalls

1. Increased Legal and Financial Complexity:

- You must comply with securities regulations, such as those under Regulation CF or Regulation A+ in the U.S.
- Example: Filing with the SEC, preparing financial disclosures, and maintaining investor relations can be costly and time-intensive.

2. Loss of Some Creative Control:

- Investors may have input into decisions, especially if they hold equity or profit-sharing stakes.

3. Pressure for Financial Returns:

- Faith-based films often prioritize spiritual impact over financial success, which can create tension with investor expectations.

4. Potential for Legal Disputes:

- Failure to deliver returns or adhere to investor agreements can lead to legal challenges.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT CROWDFUNDING PLATFORM

Each platform has its strengths, and choosing the right one depends on your goals and audience.

Questions to Consider:

1. What is Your Project's Mission?

- A spiritually driven project may benefit more from donation-based crowdfunding, where supporters share your vision without expecting financial returns.

2. How Much Funding Do You Need?

- Smaller budgets may be more suited to donation-based crowdfunding, while larger productions may require the financial power of investors.

3. Prepared for Legal and Financial Complexity?

- Investor crowdfunding demands rigorous planning and compliance with regulations.

4. What Level of Control Do You Want?

- If creative independence is a priority, donation-based crowdfunding may be the better fit.

Scripture for Guidance:

On Community and Support:

- Galatians 6:2: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."
- Crowdfunding embodies this principle by rallying believers around a shared mission.

On Stewardship:

- 1 Peter 4:10: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace."
- Use funds wisely and transparently, whether donated or invested.

Both donation-based and investor crowdfunding offer unique opportunities for faith-based filmmakers to bring their stories to life. Each model has its strengths and challenges, but with careful planning, transparency, and alignment with your mission, either can be a powerful tool for advancing God's kingdom through storytelling.

By choosing the approach that best suits your project's needs and purpose, you can harness the power of community and stewardship to create films that inspire, challenge, and transform lives.

Here are three major crowdfunding platforms:

Kickstarter:

- Best For: All-or-nothing campaigns (if you don't reach your goal, you don't receive funding).
- Example: A filmmaker raised $300,000 for a faith-based documentary by setting a clear funding target and leveraging social media.
- Key Tip: Offer tiered rewards, such as digital downloads for small contributions and behind-the-scenes access for larger ones.

Indiegogo:

- Best For: Flexible funding campaigns (you keep whatever funds you raise, even if you don't hit your target).
- Example: A faith-driven short film used Indiegogo to raise $50,000 for production costs, focusing on early trailers to attract backers.
- Key Tip: Use "InDemand" to keep raising funds after your campaign ends.

Angel Studios:

- Best For: Pre-selling content to audiences who align with your faith-based mission.
- Example: Angel Studios' "Pay-It-Forward" model allowed **His Only Son** to be fully funded and distributed through its audience network.
- Key Tip: Offer opportunities for backers to promote the film within their communities, creating a ripple effect of support.

RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL CROWDFUNDING CAMPAIGN

1. Build a Community Before You Launch:

- Use social media, newsletters, and church partnerships to build awareness of your project. Engage potential supporters by sharing your vision and inviting them to be part of it.
- Example: **The Wingfeather Saga** started building its audience through blogs and social media months before launching its campaign.

2. Tell a Compelling Story:

- Your crowdfunding page should be as engaging as the film you want to make. Use videos, concept art, and

testimonials to connect emotionally with potential backers.

- Example: **The Chosen's** campaign video focused on the transformative impact of its story, making supporters feel like they were part of something bigger.

3. Offer Meaningful Rewards:

- Think beyond standard perks. Consider rewards like personalized thank-you notes, signed scripts, or invitations to behind-the-scenes events.
- Example: **His Only Son** offered premiere tickets and exclusive Q&A sessions with the filmmakers.

4. Leverage Social Media:

- Crowdfunding campaigns thrive on visibility. Create a content calendar with daily updates, countdown posts, and live Q&A sessions to keep momentum high.
- Example: A small faith-based production used Instagram Reels to show progress, boosting its Indiegogo campaign by 25% in the final week.

ALTERNATIVE FINANCING METHODS

While crowdfunding is a powerful tool, it's not the only way to finance a film. Here are some innovative methods to consider:

Community-Based Funding:

- How It Works: Partner with local churches, businesses, and organizations to secure sponsorships or donations. In return, offer recognition in the film's credits or host exclusive screenings.
- Example: A micro-budget Christian drama raised $75,000 by securing contributions from local church congregations, who were credited as "Community Producers."

Investor Funding (Regulation Crowdfunding):

- How It Works: Platforms like Wefunder and StartEngine allow filmmakers to raise money by offering equity in their projects.
- Example: A small production raised $500,000 through equity crowdfunding, allowing investors to share in the film's financial success.

NFT-Backed Funding:

- What Are NFTs? Non-fungible tokens (NFTs) are unique digital assets that can represent ownership of artwork, merchandise, or even exclusive film-related content.
- How It Works: Offer NFTs tied to your film, such as exclusive concept art or limited-edition posters.

Supporters purchase these NFTs, providing immediate funding.

- Example: A sci-fi film raised $2 million by selling NFTs that gave buyers access to exclusive content and early screenings.

Step-by-Step Plan for NFT Funding:

1. Create Exclusive Assets: Work with a designer to create unique digital artwork or behind-the-scenes footage.
2. Partner with NFT Platforms: Platforms like OpenSea or Rarible are great for launching NFT campaigns.
3. Market Your NFTs: Use your film's website and social media to promote these one-of-a-kind assets.

Chapter 8

CAREER PLANNING & INTERNS PANEL

George Escobar: The original plan for this session, until my wife suggested we hold a panel discussion with interns, was to do a whiteboard exercise to talk about career planning. If you're a young person, fifteen or sixteen years old -- what should you be doing and how should you be investing your time in pursuit of your passion for film? I was then going to chart film career planning for young adults, followed by those who are middle age.

In each of these phases, there are certain things that you may want to consider doing to be part of this new Christian film movement, from a strategic perspective.

We're still going to discuss these phases, but now we have the benefit of some of the young people who have been involved in this for a while and who, for all practical purposes, were sitting where you are now last year. Now they have at least one feature film under their belt or are about to make one or have been involved in preproduction. Some are on their second feature film, and they never even went to film school. Yet here they are, and they're being used because they stepped forward in faith. I hope you ask them good questions, some tough questions. If they can't handle it, I'll try to handle it for them, but these young people are really very articulate.

I'm going to tell you a story about the emails that I frequently get from young men. When I say young men, I mean the ages of fifteen to eighteen years old. This is why it's a little bit dismaying: these come from Christian young men, typically, and I don't know if this is typical of Christian homeschooling young men or not. There are a couple of exceptions, but for the most part, the email begins like this: "Dude." I kid you not. A handful start out with "Dude" or "Hey," never any respect, no "Dear Mr. Escobar." Unlike the ladies, who are very respectful, very polite, very proper. The guys will have run-on sentences, completely inarticulate. I don't even reply to them. It's not worth my while to try to teach them. It's not my job to teach them manners. Once in a while, they get downright offensive, because they're asking questions that are so full of themselves. They've done this, they've

done that, and "Oh, by the way, I'm sixteen years old. And I think I can run General Motors." What do you say to that young person? I would rather invest time and energy into a young person who is humble and a servant. That's the heart that I'm really looking for, and I think that's very well represented by the young people in front of you here.

My wife has been very instrumental in helping me to focus on the things that are real, penetrating needs for homeschooling mothers, especially from a vocational perspective. I've made sure that we support homeschooling moms and dads. One of the things that we've done most recently was to provide a free webinar, an hour long, during this time when their kids are making some major decisions as far as whether to go to film school or not, or if not, how to approach filmmaking. They're not getting the depth of information you're getting here; it was about vocational requirements and pitfalls in some of the decisions they're making. We held two sessions. They were attended by about a hundred families across the country, and that's from a very small targeted email. We'll probably expand that next year. We just wanted to give it a trial to make sure we're saying the right things and meeting people's needs.

So, I'm going to talk about the ideal case study, because this is the one that you should aspire to as a young

person. For those of you who are older, this is somebody who you should be looking for to join your production.

FAULTY APPROACH

This first is the typical case study, and then we'll talk about the ideal. The typical case study is a young person, usually male—a lot more males are interested in filmmaking than females—who is sixteen, seventeen years old. They've made a lot of short films with family and friends—it's fun to make these films. Then they turn eighteen, and they want to go to film school. They're really committed to doing that.

I've met young people that I couldn't talk out of this. This is what they wanted: to attend film school at the most prestigious film school that would accept them. There's NYU (New York University), USC, which has the oldest film school program, UCLA, the American Film Institute, and Full Sail Academy down in Florida—they have an outstanding program out of Florida. All of those are great schools for learning the mechanics and production of filmmaking, but they're also very dangerous grounds for trying to get a Christian worldview as a filmmaker. It doesn't happen. It will never happen, because these schools are completely secular.

So this young person goes to film school, spending an average of twenty thousand per year. If you went to NYU back in 2004, it was forty thousand a year to go,

plus you have to pay for your own films that you want to make, anywhere from five to fifteen thousand on top of that. It's a huge monetary commitment. You have to find work in the summer to even pay for your books, and eventually you're going to be in debt to the tune of one hundred thousand or one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, at the age of twenty-one or twenty-three.

So what do you do? You're desperate to find a job—and this has happened repeatedly through the generations so far, which is, "I've got to find a job. Working at Starbucks or as a temp pays the bills, but I'd rather work in film." Then you get an invitation, "Hey, you're a NYU grad, a UCLA grad, why don't you work on this little old sexploitation movie or horror movie?" You convince yourself, as a Christian, "Okay, I'll do it. I know I shouldn't. I don't like to do it, but I'll get experience. The more experience I get the more I can mature in this. Later on I'll leave that genre or I won't do those kinds of films." You're going to get some experience working part-time on some of these film sets, but by the time you're twenty-four, twenty-five years old you're thinking of settling down.

Now, you may get a big break, but it's usually going to be along the lines of what you've made before, so if most of the openings are these raunchy movies, those are the kind of film offers you're going to get. Not all the time, but generally, because those are the connections you've

made. You keep promising yourself that you'll return to your Christian roots.

Sometimes you even get a different kind of break in the business and work for a televangelist network, local news station, or online media. Maybe even the indie film world, which is almost as dangerous as the film schools, because the indie film world is really populated by film school graduates. It's the same environment, very familiar grounds for all of those people working together.

By your mid to late twenties you may get married and have a family. Now you have to pay more bills, but you're also very much consumed by your outstanding student debt and compromising film experiences. Essentially, the enemy has put you right where he wants you, which is ineffective, unavailable, and certainly discouraged from ever coming back into your original Christian goals and roots.

This happens thousands of times every year and for several generations now. That's one of the reasons there are very few or almost no qualified Christian filmmakers whom Hollywood could entrust with big budget Christian-themed movies. We just haven't equipped ourselves to break through the ranks, even though there's more and more experienced filmmakers available.

A BETTER APPROACH TO TRAINING

I think there's a better model than the status quo. It's an alternative that's beginning to work, and it's this: imagine being that fifteen or sixteen-year-old, and instead of focusing on those short amusing films for family or friends, you volunteer your services to your local media ministry or at your church. You're serving them instead of yourself. You get to work with adults. You get to work with people of like-mindedness. You may not like it to begin with, maybe you're doing it almost out of a sense of duty or because that's what you think you should do because I'm telling you that. That's okay: just get started. Move in that direction, because it begins to put the focus away from you and into service orientation.

When you're eighteen, I recommend, instead of going to film school, get a real education. Film school is not a real education: it's fun school. You barely learn anything, really, that you couldn't get anywhere else. Instead, attend a Christian liberal arts college like Patrick Henry College. Master literature, so you know all the great stories that are out there. English, so you can express yourself and understand how stories work. Study history, so you know the historical context for all the great stories there, and art history, so you know the visual manifestations for all these great stories. Then work on full length feature films in the summer with Advent Film Group or other similar organizations.

Right now, as we speak, there are three feature films being made. One in western Tennessee by HeuMoore Productions called *Ace Wonder*, directed by—I think he's now twenty years old—John Moore. We spent some time with them when they made their first movie, *The Widow's Might*. We shared our whole business plan, our model, everything that we were doing, so that they could equip themselves and raise money through investors to make *The Widow's Might*.

Right here in Virginia, shooting right now, is a movie called *For the Glory*, made by a company called CDR Communications. They've been around for about twenty years, run by Chris Rogers. He's the producer, and they made industrial videos and government corporate videos. I've known him for a number of years now. When he saw that this company, Advent Film Group, came out of nowhere to make, right off the bat, a full-length feature film, which has been his heart's desire for twenty years, he realized that there's really no one stopping him except himself. If we can do it, he can do it. Which is great! That's the right attitude. This is somebody who's run a successful business and maintained it for twenty years. For those of you in business, you know that's quite an accomplishment.

Then Sherwood's *Courageous*, of course, shooting in Albany, Georgia.

Three years ago, we couldn't even name a movie being made by a Christian film production company; at least now we have three. Maybe two or three years from now, there'll be five or six and then ten that you can go to to work on and volunteer and serve. Then, when you're twenty-one or twenty-three years old, you'll have become a really valuable part of a feature film production company, a Christian one.

So when you're twenty-four, twenty-five years old—imagine this, okay—you keep going back to your church whenever you can to serve or maybe the local ministry. Now you have maybe three or four full-length feature films under your belt. You have a great network of film colleagues who are also believers who have the same passion as you do in Christian filmmaking, and you've been serving your community. If you turn to them now, at twenty-four, twenty-five years old, with a story that the Lord has given you to make—and He'll make it very evident, because He'll open doors and He'll give you some early sources of funding—you go back to these people and say, "Will you sponsor me? Will you donate, will you invest?" When you've been giving for years and years now and they see you as an upstanding young person, will they invest in this guy who has served or this guy who has served mostly himself? Ask yourself, who would you invest in? The first case or the second?

The career approach I've just described is new, but it's already bearing fruit. I just got an email from a family that was here last year, who live down in Florida. They have two daughters, one is now going into college. They began to apply this, and they started serving. Through their service, they won a cash award too, that they were able to use to buy equipment. They used that money to serve some more. I believe that the girl in college was able to get accepted to her school because, again, when you're trying to get scholarships, the main thing that they look for is service. So, there's a sort of a double-whammy. Not only are you serving your community, but you're also potentially going to get scholarships. The other daughter who's still in high school now knows that this model works, and she is a big fan of what we're doing and has started to talk to other people about it.

For a young person, go to your pastor and say, "I would like to serve in a media ministry." If the pastor says, "I'm sorry, we don't have one," then offer to help start one. That's a huge project in itself. There's always some people interested in that area in church, so rally yourselves and begin to serve the needs of your local church community.

The most important aspect of this approach is taking the focus away from yourself. Instead you're focusing on serving others. Meeting their needs, not yours. That's the

key. That's critical to transformation for Christians in this predominantly self-centered business.

I served at Cornerstone Chapel here for six years. My ten-year-old son was seven when he started. We did camera, every Sunday, doing the live camera switching. One day the pastor came in while he was doing this—at that point I think Vincent was about ten—and said, "What is he doing here?" We told him, "Well, he's been doing this for the last three or four years, doing the live camera switching that shows up on the internet and in the congregation." He almost said, "He shouldn't be doing this," but he had the foresight to say, "Well, he's been doing this for a while now. I can't tell the difference between what he does and what you do. Let him keep doing it."

So here's a kid, who at that time was ten years old, and now he's fourteen and has been involved in two feature film productions. He's about to go into our third one. Imagine a kid like that, being ten years old, ten years from now, with maybe ten feature films under his belt, and he's 21 years old. Those are the kinds of Christian filmmakers that we want and we need. They'll undeniably have the skills, and then, when we need to show a track record of success, Hollywood can say, "Hey, here's a young person who knows how to direct: not only is the movie good, but look at the box-office returns."

Not that we care about that in the same way, but it's a measure that allows us to do bigger things. I think the Lord wants us to grow and mature so that we can be responsible when those things happen and not be caught up and consumed by Hollywood's measure of success.

ADVENT INTERNS and ASSOCIATES

I want to introduce you to the five Advent Film Group Interns and Associates that are here. This is Amy Jarvis, Rebekah Cook, David Cook, Ian Reid, and Brooke Butler. I'm going to ask Amy to share first. Amy, tell us a little bit about where you're from. What led you to make the journey from wherever you're from to here?

Amy Jarvis: Well, I'm from Kansas, a little tiny town called Lindon. When I was about thirteen years old, I wasn't sure what I wanted to be when I grew up. It really bothered me, because my friends were saying, "I'm going to go to this college and be a veterinarian," or "I'm going to be a nurse," and things like that. It bugged me because I wanted to do so many things. I couldn't just quite get how I could do all of them. Should I do all of them? I had so many interests, interests in writing, acting—I liked theater, comedy, music.

I remember walking in my house one afternoon, and light was coming through my window from outside, and I just spoke up a little prayer to God and said, "What do

you want me to do? I'll do it." It was almost as if an audible voice was in the room. "Amy, I want you to be a director, and I want you to make films for me." It struck me—fwoosh!—and it all made sense—God makes sense. So when He reveals something to do, you really have this "Aha!" moment.

So after that, I was still in school. I did two short films for the church to help with the ministry that my dad was working with, with young boys. Those were amazing, because it was a mini film-set and the whole church got involved. I had about a hundred people in my church. We had the elders in my church be the villains, and some people did the cooking. It's a legend when you go to my church, the movies. Such a great experience to help the church in that way.

You know what? At first, I didn't want to do it. My dad had bought some nice editing equipment, and he got my camera, my software, everything, and I wanted to do my thing. So when my dad said, "Amy, can you please help me with this, with these videos for this ministry?" I said, "Okay, yeah, all right. I don't really want to walk around the woods with a camera filming boys in camo, but I guess I'll do it."

I don't think it was until a little while after that I realized what an amazing opportunity it was. So when we did the next one, I understood, and I wanted to do this. It seems like sometimes we put down our personal aspirations,

acting as if God's work is going to be drudgery. I'm not saying it's going to be easy, that you just whiz by and there's not any sweat. It's hard for me to communicate this, unless you've experienced it. When you're doing God's work, there is a joy. Even when you're tired, haven't had enough sleep, and your mind has been working twenty-four/seven. When you can see your Father smiling at you, your heavenly Father, the joy that will come from that is amazing.

When I got older, eighteen, I started thinking about college. You probably should start thinking about that maybe a little sooner, before you graduate, but I guess I was a busy girl. I was going to community college, and while I was doing that, I was looking for some way to jump into film. The first thought that came to mind was college. Okay, yeah, people go to college. I'll go to a film college, a Christian film college.

So I took a look at a particular university. I was with my father, and we just took a look around campus. Got to sit in on some classes and things. But there was something about it that really troubled me. They had lots of Bible classes, but it was almost like there was something dying. I could see the scars, the fingerprints of the world all over the place, and it shocked me. Because I went to this college thinking, "Okay, this is going to be a safe place. I'm not going to see the world here." I remember one day I just sat down and cried, because it was

heartbreaking. This is a Christian college, but their attitude was, "We will let the students decide what is right; we're not going to point them in the right direction," as if that's going to somehow make them stupid or something.

When I got back home, I found this verse or, really, it's more of a passage here. We've talked about the San Antonio Christian Film Festival; they use a piece of this passage a lot. They modify it. It's 2 Corinthians 10:3-5: "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." At the San Antonio Film Festival, they say we "take captive every *frame*." It was so encouraging to read that, because after coming back, I started second-guessing: maybe I'm being too conservative here, maybe I'm taking the wrong approach, maybe the way I always thought God operated, maybe I am flawed or something. Then I saw in Scripture that we don't have to have the things the world has.

We don't have to put a sex scene in our movie to make it realistic, to show that people are in love. We don't have to take these shortcuts. That's going to be one of the things

that you guys are going to struggle with. I struggle with it too. Because the temptation's out there, and especially in this kind of field, where you're dealing with some gray areas. You've got a lot of different people, Christians, who have different opinions on what is acceptable, what's not. You have to always come back to the Word and remind yourself that even if there's a standard of today or even a standard of the past, it doesn't matter. God's Word is the standard; that's it.

That encouragement led me to look in different areas, and I started looking into actual companies. I really wasn't too shy in just calling people up and saying, "Hey, you need some help? I'll do it for free." But the only things that were around me were little companies making horror films. They were all over the place. I'd look at the website and think, "There's no way; this is not happening." I thought, "Well, I guess I won't try to search for places close to my area. I'll just search for Christian. I'll just cut to the chase here, and God will make it happen."

Then I came across Advent Film Group. At the time, Mr. Escobar's number was right on the website. It was before *HERO*; they had just started doing the church screenings of *Come What May*. Anyway, I called him up. We talked; it was great. He wanted to speak with my father and just connect with our family. I remember when I read the description of what they're about on the website, it was

another "Aha!" moment. It was like, "Okay, this is like a film company/college hybrid. This is cool. I want to be in on this.

God told me to come here. I didn't have a car, I didn't have a job, but He led me to everything I needed. Through it all, He's been taking off things that I've been holding on to, whether it would be fear of inadequate finances or bad relationships that I was involved in. Whatever it is, He has to strip that away, because you're just going to be carrying it around. It's just going to slow you down. You think you need it, whatever it may be. I had to go through a process; I'm still going through it. When you're where God wants you, you're going to experience major changes, because when you're just sitting back and you're afraid, there's not going to be any sculpting. The Creator isn't going to be able to, because you've said, "No. Hands off of me, God."

I've been working here about a year now. The amazing thing is so many different things have happened that aren't involved directly with film. I've been able to minister to young people in this community who are suffering so deeply—so much darkness going on in this community. I was able to get to know my housemate, a woman who has her own ministry, and is suffering so much; I was able to comfort her. So when God brings you somewhere, don't be shortsighted and say, "I'm just going to do *this*, God." He's going to open up so many

more doors than you even thought were there. So many things that you never even saw are going to be opened up to you if you're able to see them. It takes a willing heart, and God can work from there. He'll keep crafting you more and more beautifully.

George Escobar: Amy, thank you for sharing so candidly.

When she came out here, I told her, "We don't have a job for you, per se. We could use you in different tasks, but we can't pay you: we don't have the funds." She came anyway, knowing that the Lord would provide. She was willing to work hard, get a part time job, and then come to our home office whenever she could. Because of her diligent work, it allowed other interns to do that, because it gave us the capacity to do certain work that we couldn't do for our second film, *HERO*. It allowed us to accept more help. She's a real pioneer, and we're learning as much from her as hopefully she is from us. It's been a real, real blessing to our team.

Amy Jarvis: I might add that my first job was cleaning the supply room. Do not shun these, you know, these mundane jobs. God will give you a little, see how you do, and then you'll get to do more.

George Escobar: Yeah, it's become almost a rite of passage, where if you join Advent, you'll literally be sent to the basement to clean where the previous film had

wreaked havoc. We're always cleaning up after ourselves because there's so much going on all at the same time.

Now, I want to give an opportunity to Rebekah first, and then David, who came here from Spain as I mentioned before. They have a unique background that is quite inspiring also.

Rebekah Cook: Well, I can testify to that last anecdote. My first job was cleaning up the basement too! My name is Rebekah. I'm twenty-one years old, and I grew up in Spain: got there when I was a one year old and so spent about twenty years there. My parents are missionaries. I hear it was a lot different growing up there than it would be here, but it was really great: I loved it. Even though I may not have had the same opportunities as I would've had here, God gave me plenty of different opportunities that were really fundamental to my personal growth and my spiritual growth. I really thank Him for that.

I am interested in acting, and I got interested at a fairly young age. My mom did a home-video musical with us when I was nine, and I was the lead. That was really fun. Ever since then, I've been interested in drama, theater, and acting, and loved watching Christian movies, even if they were of poor production quality, because I loved the stories and I loved imagining myself being in them. It wasn't until I was fifteen that I thought of that seriously, because it was just this notion, almost a pretend game.

Then one day I was watching one again, and it was like God was saying to me, "Well you could do that; I've equipped you." I thought, "Really? Wow!" So, I started praying about that, "God, please make this desire grow if it's really from You. If it's not, I've always wanted to do what *You* want me to do, so just show me." The desire began to grow. Then I went through a season of impatience: "Well, when?" At that age everything seems very big, as if you are wasting your life if you aren't doing it right then.

God was so wonderful, though. About that time I got involved with some Christian summer camps for youth and kids that had some workshops. I helped teach in the mime and drama workshops. There was also one on telecommunications. It was a great experience being able to help there and minister to those kids and youth and help teach them how to communicate God's truth to their peers and even beyond that. It's such a powerful medium.

When I was getting older, toward the age that most people graduate and go on, I prayed, "Well, God, where do you want me to go?" Did a lot of research, internet and otherwise, about colleges or even touring with a drama group. I was even accepted to one touring group. I was about to go, but then I didn't feel it was right. So, I didn't. If there's anything you remember, it's to follow God and do what He's asked you to do. I prayed about it,

spoke with my parents a long time, and they confirmed that it probably wasn't the right direction to go.

So I was just staying and helping in the ministry, being a light in our town there. I was in the choir for five years and really enjoyed that. Many of the relationships there are still bearing fruit. Our family is still there in Spain, working there. Music school: I started learning an instrument at the age of eighteen, when all the kids were six years younger. I felt out of place, but I knew God had me where He wanted me to be and that was the most important thing.

Then the Sherwood movies started coming out: we saw the first one over satellite, and that was *Flywheel*. I immediately felt this big jump of joy in my spirit. I felt like, "Wow, now those people are doing something that I would love to do." Because their stories have this integrity and purity to them and they were seeking God with all their heart. Then we saw *Come What May* over the internet and saw it was made by homeschoolers. I'd been home schooled all my life, so that was even more exciting! Then I thought, "How am I going to get over there? I'm in Spain." Never been to Virginia, really. Moving across the ocean to do something was out of my comfort zone.

But God was preparing me. That was a word He gave me: "These are years of preparation." It kind of helped with my impatience a bit, because here I was, twenty

years old. What am I going to do now? What am I supposed to be spending my time on? Because it's a time to invest your time, not just live without a purpose. I prayed about it and felt that it was time to stay on this side of the pond after our last furlough, which was this last year, but didn't know what I was supposed to be doing when I stayed. So I was still seeking God on that. Everybody would ask me, "So, what are you doing? Where are you going to college? Where are you going to be staying?" I would say, "Well, still seeking God on that. This may be what I do, or this other may be what I do, but I'm still waiting to hear. Don't want to make plans that aren't God's plans."

Less than a month later we got an email invitation to this workshop, like you all are at here today. Our whole family, family of seven, came to last year's workshop; it was awesome. We felt God confirming everything that we had been having a vision for: to impact our culture and families and our world with the message of Christ. It was really great to see it put into practical terms. Yes, this is feasible. This is something that we can do.

Then we kept traveling with our family, thinking maybe it will work out to be with Advent or maybe not, and still praying about it. We even went down to Georgia, my brother and I, to Albany, and visited the church there. We were there when they announced their next film, *Courageous*. Since we knew a family in the area, we were

able to stay with them for a couple of weeks. I was thinking I might even stay there to volunteer and be in the next movie, but it didn't feel quite right for some reason. Even though you want something to work, you want the *right* thing, the right place. There's that tension there. You have to be careful—I have to be careful—to wait for God's timing on the right thing to come. We also spent a couple of months with family, serving them.

Then we prayed and felt that the time was right, so we contacted Advent Film Group and said, "Would it work if we came to you?" We weren't sure how it would work out, but we figured we could move up, get jobs, and volunteer. We knew that some people had done that, like Amy. So that'll do, you know, we're willing to go that route and to serve. We came here, and I got a part-time job—actually a couple of them—and I work with Advent the rest of the time. It's been great. My brother has a lot more experience applicable to filmmaking, but I do what I can to grow and learn—and "the willing and obedient shall eat the good of the land," so there you go.

George Escobar: Rebekah has been responsible for much of the communication you've had with us. It's been her writing, and she's also done a lot of script reviews for us. She's a good writer in her own right, and for our last two film projects she's definitely had a hand in the writing part, as has Kylene Arnold.

Yeah, they just showed up one day. I got a call from a neighbor, Anne Bittner, who they were staying with. Anne was here at the workshop serving last year. She said, "You know, the Cooks are coming up." I said, "The Cooks? Who are the Cooks?" I just couldn't' remember, even though I got their emails. Then she described them. "Oh, the family from Spain." I said, "Yes, I remember! Yes, have them stop by so we can chat and be up front with what we have available."

At the moment we're not able to pay our interns the kind of remuneration they deserve, but what's happening now is that the Lord is beginning to meet those needs in a very powerful way. We're praying for this next film, and the financing for that looks really, really good. Maybe you could even quit your two part-time jobs in this next round. But it's that heart of willingness, to just do whatever it takes to serve.

Rebekah Cook: Sometimes opportunities will come along that aren't the right ones.

Once I was invited to join a theater group in our town in Spain, and I went to the first couple of meetings after I was invited. They had really good technique, it was good theater skills, but it was all toward mounting a play, a classical European play, that I did not feel comfortable with—the morals of it or lack thereof—so I declined and said, "I can't be a part of a play that is not honoring God." It was a let-down, a disappointment that I wasn't

going to be learning from these free instructional lessons. However, it turned out to be a great testimony to the lady that had invited me. She said, "So, you aren't going to be doing stuff unless it glorifies God?..." She was a pious Catholic woman, yet this was a novel idea to her. "Oh, wow. Her faith spills over into other areas of life." I was like, "Yes."

College the same way. I looked into several acting courses, but I did not feel comfortable with going into an environment that would compromise integrity and purity, so I decided, "Well, that's not the route to go." Then, when we came here in late January to Virginia, and we were at the Bittners, she mentioned she was starting a drama class just that next week, and she invited me to come. Right off the bat, God provided another opportunity. Kind of like Amy was saying, don't close yourself off. Look what God has put in front of you, where He places you, and bloom where you're planted.

David Cook: Well, where to start? As Rebekah mentioned, we first saw *Come What May* out on the internet. I want to clarify that we did see that *legally* on the internet: they were streaming it out.

George Escobar: We're going to talk a little bit about that, but that was through the American Family Association. We did send it out there for free, which is completely counter-intuitive to what you should be doing in filmmaking for distribution. Tomorrow I'll share about

the blessing that's been for us, because we listened and were obedient to God's distribution plan, not ours.

David Cook: Mr. Escobar was sharing about how you cannot follow the normal, traditional, typical route and expect to not be affected by it. Well, you can't follow the route he was proposing and not be affected by it either, but in a positive way.

I'm twenty-six and just started working with the Advent Film Group this year. If Rebekah felt like she was sort of stopped and not getting anywhere, well, I sort of did too at that point in my life. I came to realize a few things, things that you don't see until afterwards. One of those is that you can't share something that you haven't experienced or had or learned. That's part of what you get when you're just serving, when you're doing what God has placed in front of you and has asked you to do at that particular point. It may seem like it's not taking you anywhere, but then later on you'll get into a situation and it helps you in ways that you wouldn't have expected, you couldn't have planned for and, in fact, you couldn't have learned in a regular system. So there is so much value in so many different ways to what Mr. Escobar was saying. I highly recommend it.

I was interested from way back in the media and that whole area of work. I worked in radio, helped with Christian TV programs. I liked photography. All these different areas, but it seemed sort of scattered, like a

whole general umbrella. On the other side, I always liked business. I liked thinking numbers: it was like a big strategy game. You know, "young guy + strategy game." It went well together. I was also on the mission field, so I had this combination. I was trying to figure out how I could serve God, how I could be involved in all the media stuff and yet not commit financial suicide. Because I looked at TV models, and I was thinking, "How can I make a self-supporting TV station?" You can't, really. Once I came to that realization, it was a letdown. I wanted to do something that would be sustainable, that would be something that someone else could reproduce, not just get into debt for "a good reason."

So I put that on hold and was involved helping with my parents, doing different things. Roundabout when the Sherwood films starting coming out, as she mentioned, we saw *Flywheel* and the ones after that. Then we saw *Come What May*. I don't want to say it exactly dawned on me, because it was a process, but I started to realize that film was a way that I could take on a project that had a clear start and finish, unlike radio and TV that I had been involved in. That consumes you, eats you permanently the rest of your life, if you want it to continue. I realized that films also had the potential to spread into so many more areas. If you have a TV program, it's localized to wherever that TV program is shown. Even if you get it shown on lots of different

networks, it's still usually a one-time thirty-minute showing, and it's gone. The film medium has a lasting affect: it can be shown over and over. People will watch it in illegal ways and legal ways, but it'll get out there. That was very attractive to me.

I started researching, trying to figure out how I could learn more. Being a practical kind of guy, I thought, "Okay, I want to learn how to do this, so I'll go get involved." When we started reading up on the Advent website and saw that that was actually what they recommended, I thought, "Great! This works." Then I saw that they had made the film with a large participation from several homeschooling students. Well, I've been home schooled half my life. So then I looked at the contact information, "How can I get involved?" and it says, "We're not taking applications, and we don't have any options right now for that." I thought, "Okay, look somewhere else." That was my initial reaction. I knew that we were coming back to the U.S. for a while, so I said, "God, I'm just going to trust you on it. You'll open the doors."

As she said, people were asking her—they were asking me as well—"What you going to do?" "Well, I'm going to be learning how to make Christian films." "Great! Where?" "Working on that." That was sort of how it went.

Then we got the invitation and came to the film workshop. It was while we were here, hearing this "boring" business part, that the lights came on for me, and I thought, "Wow, now it all comes together." The mission part, working, sharing the messages that God wants to share, and the whole media side of it: the still photography, developing an eye—I would take forty to sixty thousand pictures a year; you just start to learn how to frame things. The complex aspect of organizing a film from preproduction, production, post, all those small details are like a big strategy game. Then you've got the business side added in, and it was that last component that I felt God had led me to and hopefully gifted me in: we'll see. It all came together in one package. It was a real blessing to me, even wading through all the financial side and legal side of a film company. Though I wasn't able to assimilate all of it, we did have the DVD, so I was able to go over it afterwards. That was a real blessing to me, just seeing how God had pulled all the pieces together, and I hadn't even seen it or understood it beforehand. Now, though, because I'd kept taking the opportunities that had presented themselves, I had that much more experience and opportunities to be able to put it into practice in the field.

George Escobar: I just learned something I didn't know: that he was really interested in business. We're going to get him immersed.

David Cook: Yes, when we came up here, as he mentioned, we got in contact with Mrs. Bittner. She had been at the workshop when we came: that's where my mom had met her. I hadn't ever talked with her, but I was having difficulty getting in touch with Advent. Things weren't really working out, but I still felt that God was telling me to come here. It was deductive logic, combined with knowing that I was trying to hear God and do what He wanted me to do. Their vision lined up with what I was seeking to do, and I agreed with their way of approaching things. I thought, "There may not be a system. There may not be an easy way to work this." However, it's been my experience that if I show up somewhere, am not a liability in any way, and I volunteer, "I want to help any way I need to, even if it's organizing the basement or sweeping or taking out the trash," it really didn't matter. I wanted to be where it was happening and gain the experience from helping out. So, I thought, "I'll get a job part-time, enough to cover expenses, rent a room, and then I'll show up. I'll volunteer and see what comes of it."

God always surpasses what we expect. He arranged everything within two days after we got up here. We got in Saturday night. Mrs. Bittner had already talked with him and said, "We're going over there at noon on Monday, if that works for you." I was like, "Hey, that's great." My plan for the first week was to find a place to stay. Next I needed to find a job, and then we'd get in

touch with them. But how do you turn down a meeting, when you've been trying to figure all the logistics out? So we went there. We got there about twelve-noon—and left at about nine p.m.!

George Escobar: I put them to work that afternoon.

David Cook: I got to do some editing and some learning right off. We've been sort of doing nine-to-nine hours every day, except when we have other activities: Bible studies and all. It's like jumping in a deep pool: there you are, and you just start kicking to stay above water. But it's been a real blessing.

There's a verse in Psalms most of you are probably familiar with. It says he's "a lamp unto our feet, a light unto our path." The people who we are staying with, who opened up their home—we didn't even know them, friend of a friend: you know how that goes—anyway, they have a Bible study in their home that we've been going to. He pointed out to me once when we were sharing our story, he said, "You know that verse that talks about 'a lamp unto our feet?' You'll notice a lamp never gives light very far ahead." I thought that was a good point.

It's hard sometimes to trust God, because we want to see far ahead. He's a lamp unto our feet. If we'll just keep following His light and where He's leading us, there's enough light to take those next steps. We just have to look

and say, "Okay, God, what have you given me the opportunity to do right now? What are the doors you've opened where I am?" In Amy's case, he's opening the door and it's not where you are, but you're following His leading, and you don't know very far ahead. So I would encourage you: if you're trying to figure it out, if you're not sure exactly where to go from where you are now, look at what He's already shown you, what you already know, what you can do where you are. Trust Him to go showing you step by step. He will open the doors.

Rebekah Cook: Do the next right thing.

Amy Jarvis: Tell them about the free cars.

David Cook: Well, it's a sideline, but God did bless us with cars as well. We needed cars, and I was going to do my thing. I had saved up some money to buy a car, because you've got to have wheels. God gave us cars instead.

Rebekah Cook: Each of us.

David Cook: That's cool too. He will provide. You don't always have much extra, but He will take care of your needs.

Oh, and there's a 172,800 frames in a two-hour film, if you're at 24 frames per second. Just so you can know how much impact you can have.

George Escobar: Hopefully this is sort of jogging some ideas for you, providing some encouragement. It also tells you how we generally work. The Lord will bring us the folks that He wants us to minister to, mentor, or work with. Not just here, but remotely. We are working with a team out in Washington State and in St. Louis. One of our top interns, Brooke Martin, is based in Minnesota, where she's doing work with us there. So it's not that you have to "pull a Jarvis," which is to show up, "Here I am! Put me to work." Which is great, but that's not demanded. Hopefully you can see, especially if you are a person who already owns a company or wants to establish your organization, that you need to be open to setting up a structure for mentorship and serving the young people as well. They want to serve your organization through God's leading.

Ian Reid I've known longer than anybody here. Ian was a high school student—I think at the time you were a senior—at a homeschool conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I was invited by the Home School Legal Defense Association to do a presentation there about filmmaking when *Come What May* was still in pre-production. It hadn't even come out yet. We had a teaser trailer that I showed there. Ian was all set to go in one direction that he thought was the right one for him, so I'm going to let him explain what that was and how it happened that he ended up here.

Ian Reid: Dude! Man, thank you. So righteous.

George Escobar: Yeah, yeah.

Ian Reid: Anyway, I'll keep it low. My name is Ian Reid, as Mr. Escobar said.

I guess the biggest thing that I was thinking a minute ago was why anyone would want to hear my story. Why do any of you care where this kid came from? Why is he at Advent? Why are we even listening to him talk? I was thinking, "Lord, what do you want me to say?" I feel if there is one thing to take away from what I'm about to say, it is: "Don't worry about tomorrow. Tomorrow has enough worries of its own." Another similar passage from Scripture: "Why are you worrying about what you are going to eat, and what you are going to drink, and what you are going to wear?" The Lord has adorned the flowers, the birds, all of His creation with marvelous splendid adornments, yet we're worrying about what we're going to wear and eat the next day. Let me tell you a little about my story and how that ties into those two passages of Scripture.

As Mr. Escobar said, I was certain I knew where I wanted to go and what I wanted to do. I was one of the twelve or thirteen or fourteen-year-old boys in the former of the two examples, who made tons of short films with his friends and loved doing these ridiculously stupid movies. My first film wasn't even a film: it was a video.

The first video I made was probably like ten minutes long. If you can think Pink Panther combined with Jason Bourne and Spy Game or something like that: it was completely—just ridiculousness. I loved making films with my friends, and I had this passion for making, if not movies, at least videos.

That passion started when I was about eleven years old, then carried through junior high and high school. By that time I was pretty certain that what I wanted to do was filmmaking. I wanted to be a director and producer and make my own films that would honor and glorify the Lord. I loved the creative aspect of it, but I thought, "Hey! If the Lord put this desire in my heart to make films, why not use that desire to shape the culture with the films that he's giving me to make? Well, that's what I'm going to do then." Then I thought, "What's the best way to do that? Oh, I know: go to film school."

So throughout high school I planned to go to the best film school possible and train to be the best filmmaker that America's ever seen, so I could be better than Steven Spielberg and make the next blockbusters. Ones that don't degrade the audience that's watching them, but instead encourage them to live a life that's—I guess holier isn't the right word—more noble. I wanted to make films that would reach the culture and wouldn't be preachy, but would cause both general and Christian

audiences to come in droves and leave uplifted rather than degraded.

That was the goal. I started looking at film schools in my sophomore year of high school. I'm now a junior here at Patrick Henry College, which is not a film school, by the way. The way everything went, it looked like I was going to go to either USC or Biola University. I was looking at the two schools and wondering what I should do. Should I go with the Christian school that doesn't have quite as good a film school or the secular school that everyone wants to go to and everyone says is one of the best film schools in the world? I really kind of wanted to go to USC, but I thought, "Eh, I feel like the Lord is leading me more towards Biola." So I researched Biola a ton and applied there.

During this whole process, I was in the middle of moving from Idaho down to Texas. My dad had to move because of work. This ties back into the whole, "Don't worry about tomorrow," because God is working through every aspect of your life, not just one small part of your life.

Because my dad was moving down to Texas, I moved down early, before my mom and sister went down, to live with my dad. We were setting up and finding a house so that my family could come down later. In the process of that, there was the HSLDA conference in New Mexico that Mr. Escobar talked about. It was a perfect opportunity to see my mom and sister whom I hadn't

seen for a couple months, because they were going to be at the conference. I was enrolled at a junior college at the time, but I thought, "Oh, I'll take off a couple days, and I'll go to the conference to spend some time with them," which I probably wouldn't have done unless I had moved down to Texas earlier with my dad.

At this conference, as Mr. Escobar said, I met him, and we talked for probably three and a half hours. I explained to him, "I'm going to film school, to Biola University, and I'm going to be the next great filmmaker." "Well," he said, "have you thought about other avenues?" I said, "Yeah, I know the whole independent route, but I really want to go the more traditional route, because that's how I think I'll make the best and biggest impact."

Over the course of three and a half hours, he showed me the other side of the story, the part that the film schools in Hollywood don't tell you. Tens of thousands of kids go to film school every year. Tens of thousands of kids graduate from film school every year, and there are five famous directors in Hollywood. Each of the ten thousand kids that graduate each year from school want to be one of those five directors. "How likely is it that by going through the traditional route you are going to gain anything from wasting those four years and a hundred grand in film school? How likely is that to take you to the place that God is going to use you in Hollywood, to

shape the culture with filmmaking?" It was a poignant question. I didn't know exactly how to respond, and after the conference I thought more about it.

George Escobar: Your mom was there too.

Ian Reid: My mom was there too, yeah. As I'm telling this story, I'm realizing I'm kind of gung-ho when making a decision. Because after making the decision that I wasn't going to film school, I was gung-ho about going to PHC. That was where I felt the Lord was saying I would get the best liberal arts education. I have to go back a little bit: it's not like I didn't know about PHC or that I thought that Biola was necessarily truly the best place for me to go. I guess I had really been saying, "I know PHC is the better school for me, and I feel like that's where the Lord is leading me, but I'd rather go to Biola, because that's where you have to go to get a film education."

But after talking with Mr. Escobar and finding out that there really was more of a chance that you could actually get into filmmaking by finding good internships and training yourself in liberal arts, in history, in literature, in philosophy, in theology—in areas that actually matter and teach you how to tell a good story—after thinking about those issues, I really realized where the Lord had been leading me all along. PHC was really the place that I needed to go.

So thanks to Mr. Escobar, guidance from my parents, and much prayer, I was led to Patrick Henry College, and over the last couple of summers I've been working with Advent Film Group. I got to work on pre-production for *HERO*, and I'm now working on pre-production for another project.

Just to sum everything up, I had no idea where everything was going to end up. I was going through year by year, a little kid up in Idaho who liked to make films. I had no idea where anything was leading. I mean, we're all just sheep in a flock. We're God's children. We don't know necessarily where we're going or where he's leading us. We only know that we're called to obey Him every step of our lives. Again, don't worry about tomorrow. Every step that you're taking, if you're truly trying to follow Christ and live your life for the Lord, will ultimately lead you to where He has for you to be. He will be the one that sets up your path and makes your path straight, so don't worry about tomorrow. Don't worry about what you're going to eat and drink. Follow Christ, and He'll make your path straight.

George Escobar: But you have to be moving, not just sitting down. You need that quiet time to listen to the Lord's voice, but at the same time, He wants us to be about the business that He has for us.

Attendee: Ian mentioned that the ideal was a Christian liberal arts college. I've listened to Doug Phillips on

higher education, and he downplayed the need for a liberal arts education at Christian colleges. What's your take? What's your counterpoint? How would you testify to the difference? Have you heard?

George Escobar: Yeah, I have. I think it's a very viable alternative. The reason I'm very supportive of what Patrick Henry College is doing and encourage my oldest son, Gregory, to attend here (he had that desire to begin with) is because of their philosophy. It isn't just about education, but it's training you to be a responsible leader. It's not that you can't get that through some other instruction or self-training. I'm less familiar with what Doug Phillips has been talking about, but I know he does mention other alternatives.

Amy Jarvis: Could I add something? About liberal arts and literature and history, I'm right now trying to do the self-training because I really haven't had much of a liberal arts education at all. Whatever you do, get it down. When you go to a school, I think the good thing about is it's an intense, concentrated time. Right now I'm struggling with identifying with many filmmakers and people in general because I don't know what they're talking about. It's hard when you're already busy. I'm very busy; it's hard to squeeze in time to read books, watch movies, and things like that. Just speaking from personal experience.

George Escobar: I don't know if that answered your question specifically. What's the heart of your question?

Attendee: I just find that many things that you talk about echoes the heart of the SAICFF and the Vision Forum group, yet there are some obvious contradictions. Like the college thing. Doug Phillips is fairly strong in saying, unless you need a certification to be a doctor, engineer, something like that, he really emphasizes the other route. And, well, I'm sitting right here in PHC.

David Cook: Well, my approach was the same. I approached it primarily from a financial perspective. I felt that if I was diligent in studying and learning all I could all the time, that my time was well spent. When I would take different jobs, I chose the jobs that I would take to making ends meet more for what I could learn than for what it paid.

I think that the key, more than how and where you choose to learn, is to develop a habit and keep that habit of learning and know what areas it is most profitable to learn about. If you're wanting to develop the good storytelling techniques, understand history and how that is applied to filmmaking, I think that is one of the major reasons that college is being suggested. It might depend a lot on what area of filmmaking you're more interested in as well. If you're interested in the storytelling, then I think it is important, whether you do it at college or not, to definitely learn a lot more and educate yourself in that

area. If you're interested more in using the camera, then hands-on learning is going to be much more helpful.

George Escobar: In the world of filmmaking, no matter what degree you have, it is completely worthless. What they care about is seeing your reel. You could be working at Blockbuster. If you make a great film, you go right to the top of the line; they don't care what school you go to. It might open doors initially, but if you don't have actual talent or the ability to make good films or be a storyteller, it really doesn't matter. I know many people who have multiple degrees in cinema and different aspects of it, and they don't even work in the industry because they can't get a job.

Ian Reid: Just in response to the whole "Why go to an institution of higher education for a liberal arts degree?" —I don't think it's necessary to do that. We have people sitting here who are working their way into making full feature-length films without getting the degree. I think something that everyone up here has talked about is the necessity of continuing your learning and the necessity of training yourself in literature and history and communication, in theology and philosophy. Then you'll know how to tell those stories.

The reason I've chosen to go to a place like PHC is because it gives me an intensive four-year period, where all I'm doing exclusively is studying the great movements of human thoughts, the great movements of history. I'm

studying art, culture, and everything that has transpired up to the point that we're at right now, so that I even know what to say when I'm making a movie.

While the degree in liberal arts itself isn't necessary, the thing that most of us who are pursuing the liberal arts degree are seeking is the education, the training, and the knowledge of how to tell a great story. That is something that everyone who wants to be a great filmmaker, regardless of whether they're seeking a degree, should be pursuing.

What is the liberal arts education anyway? It's the education in how to be free. Liberal doesn't mean the modern idea of liberal: it means free thinking. It means someone is able to think for themselves and knows about what has transpired prior to their short life on earth. All the great thinkers and the great philosophers throughout human history have been building into this idea. What does it mean to be a free person, to think well, to be good, to be moral, and to be a human being? I think that's what we would all say is important to study.

George Escobar: The pursuit of that for its *own* end is the fault of many liberal arts education programs. I think there are a lot of guards to have against the kind of liberalism that imbues that kind of education.

Let's hear from Brooke now.

Brooke Butler: My story's probably going to be a little bit different from these guys. I may not know that much about filmmaking, but I do know one thing and that is that Jesus Christ is beautiful. That is the passion that God has put into my heart to share with my life.

I was born a ham. When I was a little girl, all I did was make little movies all the time at my house and little plays. When I was eleven, I sent a resume to my local news channel. They didn't accept me unfortunately; I was pretty crushed. I used to lay in my bed at night because I didn't live in Hollywood where I could audition for a movie. That's okay though, because God knew what He was doing. As they were saying, I was very frustrated because I felt as if I was not making an impact, and I knew that God wanted me to. That's where He stepped in, and He told me, "Brooke, the purpose of your life is to let the world know Who I Am. I am your adventure."

I went to public high school. I was very frustrated, because I felt like, you know, I live in inward West Virginia; my high school mascot is an apple! I am just not making a difference here. You might not guess it but I was literally depressed for years to the point that I was incapacitated. I'm in high school and just wondering how I am not pleasing the world, I'm not pleasing you, God, I'm not doing anything with my life. Then suddenly realizing that, "It's about relationship. I want you to love Me." He just gave me these three words that I said

earlier, "Jesus is beautiful." I know the purpose of my life is to make that known. I had no idea how that was going to happen, but I knew that He was going to guide me day by day.

I got the idea to get into media, because that's what I knew I wanted to do. I was totally set to go to Liberty University. I'd never heard of PHC. The end of my senior year in high school, and I only live forty-five minutes from here. I was at Liberty University—I don't know if I've ever really told anyone this story—I was going to major in leading worship, because I love to sing. I was headed down to the worship building in the morning, and I wanted to meet with the leader of that particular building, and I said, "Lord, you know what, if you don't want him to be here, then don't let him be here." I knocked on his door; it was locked. I said, "Lord, if You want me to talk to him, and I trust You, You're going to let me talk to him." We went to a football game that day, Liberty University, big school. I sat down to the football game and a person said, "Look! There's Dr. Wheelan." He was sitting right in front of me. So I sat down and had a long talk with him at halftime. He said, "Brooke, follow the Lord. Just follow the Lord." Because I just did not feel at peace about going to Liberty, even though everything seemed perfect, like Rebekah was saying.

That's when I started hearing about Patrick Henry. I was like, "What? What's that? I never heard of that before." I ordered the video, and I started crying, "Lord, this is where you want me to be!" When I got here—I believe it was one of the very first chapel messages—Mr. Escobar came and spoke. I was like, "Christian filmmaking, here? Oh my goodness, I need to talk to this guy." I thought it was amazing. One day I was walking down the hallway, and I saw Mr. Escobar, and I was like, "That was Mr. Escobar, wasn't it?" He kept walking and I thought, "Man! I missed him." I went into a side room, and I was like, "Lord, you've done this before. If I need to talk to him, I trust you. Lord, I need to talk to Mr. Escobar, okay?" So I walked out and thought, "I'm just going to get some coffee and go to class." I walked in, went to the coffee machine, and there he was getting coffee beside me! So I don't know if you even remember this, but I shook your hand, "Mr. Escobar, I'm so excited to meet you!"

We talked and emailed sporadically ever since then. I needed to do an internship as a journalism major, so I talked to him earlier this spring, This semester I've been putting together some podcasts for some promotional material for *HERO*. It's been great, and I'll just keep seeing what God has me do with them. Lord willing, it would be amazing to keep going.

George Escobar: We've been stuck in our post-production process, because we have a story that we feel is God-honoring and it's a story that has power. We know that this story has come from the Lord, but we also realize we've deviated a bit, and we're not telling just the right tone, just the right message. I believe that the podcasts that Brooke has made for us really unlocked what we need to do. She's made four of them. Maybe we can sample one tomorrow, if she'll allow us, because you need to hear it. It's very good. I'm trying to encourage a number of our senior team who are making the story to listen to these podcasts. We need to honor what God is telling us, and I think this is the message, during our pickups and reshoots, that we need to carry forth. We don't have all the answers, as adult supervision, and we certainly need to listen to everybody.

Chapter 9

CRAFTSMANSHIP

THE POWER OF VISION

Mike Snyder: Good morning, everyone. I'm a surprise speaker this morning. I'm also a *surprised* speaker, since George asked me merely ten minutes ago to do this. I'm taking something I did almost a year ago and cutting it in half on the fly. So please pray for me as we go through this.

I want to talk about the power and importance of vision. You are here dealing with an incredibly powerful medium, visual media, and a particular element within that, the feature film.

God gave us a vision. Take the very end of the Bible, where we have the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation is a continuing word picture. It is so full of vivid images, every one of which is constructed with words. The best that John had to offer us was words. He's painting a vision, and those are visions that are intended to completely draw us in and engage us. The body of Christ will wrestle with them forever. I don't think you

can find any part of Scripture that brings out more varied views from people than the book of Revelation.

Why is it that we have that vision, that word-picture, sitting at the end of Scripture? Because we need vision to carry us through. We need to know what the end game, the end picture, looks like. As we travel through life, as we face all the challenges and all the difficulties, we need to be able to call up a reminder of where we're heading. What's it going to be like? We get to the very last chapter of the book of Revelation, and the picture is just incredible. The curse is reversed. There is no more sin. We're in our resurrection bodies, we're in this new creation that's now perfect. We have hope because we have vision. It's not just a made up vision either: this is God's revelation. This is the real deal, which makes our hope all the stronger in affecting our lives.

God has constructed for us a vision. Isaiah says at one point that the people perish for lack of vision. We have two sides of the vision equation here. Isaiah 30:10 says, "They say to the seers, 'See no more visions!' and to the prophets, 'Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions.' " This is about people who don't want to hear the truth. How many people out there are naysayers about films in which Christ is portrayed in some way, whether directly or indirectly? Jeremiah presents the other side. Jeremiah 23:16, "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Do not

listen to what prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord.' " That's the other side. There are plenty of people who are presenting images to us that are utterly false, utterly made up, utterly coming out of self.

This relates to what kind of stories we want to tell. Are we going to tell our own stories, or are we going to wait for God to give us His story, specifically, uniquely given to you or you or you or you or George or me? A God-given story: that's the vision that we want to be presenting to people.

There is a pulpit in my old church in Pittsburgh that had a Scripture verse, in brass, that only the preacher could see when he stood up. It was a great verse out of John chapter 12. This was on Palm Sunday. John 12:20-22, "Now, there were some Greeks among those who went to worship at the feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. 'Sir,' they said, 'we would like to see Jesus.' Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus." What instruction is there for us? That this is what the audience craves for. This is what the people need: *they need to see Jesus*.

My question to you is, is that what you're going to show them? Is that why God has given you all your gifts and talents and abilities, and given you a story? Do you want to help people see Jesus?

Now, what does that mean? Does it have to be *The Passion of the Christ*? Of course not. Sometimes the body of Christ is pretty hard on its people, one versus another. We get into this whole idea of Christian filmmaking, and sometimes people have very strong and strident views about what kind of story is appropriate and what isn't and all that. I would just offer up: look, there's a wide, wide spectrum of how one can help people see Jesus.

You can have a Sherwood Pictures film; they're a church, and it's a media ministry. Every time they make a movie, they are going to have a presentation of the gospel in that movie. People will see Jesus, the plan of salvation, and God's grace in a Sherwood Pictures movie.

Over here, we can even use secular language. The Greek philosophers talked about the good, the true, and the beautiful. Well, God is good, right? I am the Truth, says Jesus. Beauty is part of who God is and what God has put on display for us in this vast and incredible creation. More than that, the picture of God's love for us and Christ coming and what He's done for us, is so poignant and overwhelming that it's another kind of beauty that is almost unimaginable.

There are plenty of ways, without ever saying the name of Jesus, without getting preachy in any way, to connect with somebody. To have them begin to just apprehend a little bit that there's something incredible beyond what I see here and my small vision of what the reality of life is.

You're helping to transcend where they are, which is the beginning of a journey of finding Jesus.

So there's a wide range. Don't let anyone ever get you to sign up for some particular camp: that this is the way that it has to be, this is the only part of the spectrum that matters and a good Christian would only do *this*. No. God will show you where you need to be when He gives you the story and the means to tell the story.

WE BECOME WHAT WE BEHOLD

I'd like to make the point that *we become what we behold*. This is a fact of life. It's true psychologically. Did you ever hear the saying about friends? "You will be the average of your five best friends." It's a great truism. People rub off on one another. The people you spend time with, looking at, observing, you end up picking up their mannerisms, some of their manner of speech. They may have one little thing they say that's suddenly in your vocabulary; you don't even know it's happened. This is the way people rub off on one another. The people you spend time in the presence of are going to shape you.

My question, then, is how much time are you spending in the presence of Jesus? How much time? Because that's going to be shaping time. In the presence of Jesus in His Word. In the presence of Jesus in prayer. In the presence of Jesus in meditating. In the presence of Jesus in

intentionally trying to see Jesus in another person, especially people that are rubbing you the wrong way. How much time are you willing to devote to that, so that you will be someone who will become what you're beholding?

If you are beholding Him, you will be changed. That's an investment I challenge you to make. That's where you're going to find the story as well. That's where it's going to start to come, in those times with the Lord. So, I would just leave you with the encouragement that you do spend more time with our Lord. One day it's going to happen anyway. You might as well start now, because Scripture tells us that one day when we see Him, when we're in His presence in our resurrection bodies, we will be like Him. We won't *be* Him, we'll be *like* Him. We'll have bodies like His. He's the firstborn of the resurrected. We will be like Him. If that's where we're headed, wow! Why aren't we aiming for it right now? It's part of our call as Christians, so we can wake up others.

The last piece of Scripture I have here is John 11:11. This is when Lazarus has died and messengers have come to Jesus, but He's not responding too quickly. Then He finally says, "Well, let's get up and go," and they say, "Where are we going?" He said, "I am going to wake him up." *I am going to wake him up.* How many people are spiritually dead who need to be awakened? You have the most powerful medium that exists that you can use to

wake people up. Wake them up so they come fully alive to become part of the body and experience life, abundant life. Life to the full! Wake them up.

George Escobar: Mike just said about this medium being a vehicle to wake people up, but it's also a way to counter the messages that are out there. We talked a little bit about *Avatar*. It behooves us also to serve, to oppose and awaken.

A study was done in Chicago some twenty, thirty years ago. There was a school in the inner city, and some psychologists wanted to understand about boundaries. What Mike was talking about with that spectrum, that doesn't mean there aren't any boundaries that you shouldn't cross; we'll talk about what some of those are a little bit later. Anyway, this school in the inner city had kids, obviously, in the playground during recess, and there was a fence around the school, as most schools have. They noticed that the kids would always be at the edge of the fences, sort of trying to break the boundaries, trying to get to the edge and see what's out there.

As part of their observation into human behavior, they did something very simple: they took the fences away. Now, this is the inner city, mind you. There are homes, storefront, cars, traffic around them: the street meets right up to the school yard. What they found was, now, instead of going to the edge where the fence was and beyond like they did, all these kids clustered around close,

in the middle of the field, away from the edge, because now they felt unsafe there. Those fences were the boundaries that provided the source of freedom and safety for the kids. They knew they could go to the edge and not get hurt. There was some protection. I think that's one of the great things that boundaries afford us, rather than this unbounded openness, this so called freedom of expression.

For a long time in Hollywood, there were some very strict boundaries. If you study the history of cinema, you'll learn that the church was very much involved working with the "Hays Commission." Anybody hear of that? It was removed in the 1960s, largely because the church lost its own impetus to be involved. For some reason they thought that Hollywood could be left alone and be responsible to its audience. That's when the rating system came to replace the Hays code. That's when we had the ratings G, PG, PG-13, and it evolved to include R, and then X. It was assumed that the industry itself would be self-policing. Of course, that removed a fence, leaving no protection. Some filmmakers, unbounded, crossed the street. To do damage. As Christians who make films, we need to understand that there are some boundaries, and we need to adhere to them.

FUNDAMENTALS OF FILM PRODUCTION

Craftsmanship in filmmaking involves mastering the fundamentals of film production: cinematography, lighting, and sound.

Cinematography: you've probably all heard that term before. That's the job of the cinematographer or director of photography. It's his or her responsibility to take the production from the page to the screen as instructed by the director. Another way to put it is that cinematography is the visual manifestation of what's written on the page. The DP (short for director of photography) does not accomplish his work in complete isolation. He or she works with the production design team, the art director, wardrobe, the gaffer (the chief lighting technician), and, of course, the director, and they come up with a plan on how to shoot the film.

Once that plan is defined, then all these other things come into play. For example, choosing what cameras and lenses are needed to be able to achieve particular shots. Then the lighting package, how the grip and electric departments will organize themselves to execute on the lighting plan. Because setting up the lights, as you'll find on any production, is the most time-consuming and most burdensome process. It takes advanced and careful planning to be efficient on the day of the shoot. Fortunately, with modern lighting equipment and more

sensitive digital cameras and film stock, it's getting easier and easier all the time to set up your lights.

If you're a low budget filmmaker, you end up going on location to film your scenes, whereas, if you have the money, you can replicate things on a soundstage and have more control. Using a soundstage, you can leave your equipment and tools behind, go home, come back, and it's all still there.

If we'd had that luxury during the production of *Come What May*, then the Nash auditorium setting would have been replicated on a soundstage, versus having to come at the actual location every day for about a week to film Dr. Mike Farris when he was available. Typically that was during a time when no other cast members or extras were available. He was just here with the film crew. He had to perform as though he was actually interacting with his non-existent debate team. When you watch *Come What May*, you'll see in the scenes with the students that there's only one shot you see Dr. Farris with the students. It's a dolly shot from behind the students and he's talking to them from the lectern. I think he did a fine job talking to nonexistent students.

Getting back to cinematography, why is it important? Because it tells the story through each frame. We've been saying the phrase, "Take every frame captive." We're serious about that.

In *Come What May*, there's a scene of Judith, the lawyer, the mother of Caleb, going up the steps to the Supreme Court. When we first edited that, myself, Manny, and our editor didn't notice anything wrong with that shot. We were so focused on the fact that we were on the Supreme Court and the scene was working. One of the moms who was reviewing the footage with us took me aside very gently and said, "George, I think you need to revisit that scene. Take a look at it again and see if you see what I see." I finally noticed what she was talking about. The hemline went above the actress's knee just a little bit more revealing than it needed to be. So we made sure we cut just before it got to that point. There's a boundary right there.

We are sometimes called to reexamine another scene in the movie, where the two leads have been studying and they're exhausted. It's late, it's gotten dark, and they've fallen asleep on the sofa. Some people say, "Well, that's too much. They're spending time together alone on the sofa."

We wrestled with that as well and decided to leave that scene intact. We wanted to show that, yes, Caleb and Rachel made a mistake that could lead to temptation. So, as a filmmaker, do you decide to leave it there and just get out of that scene? No, we had the father come in, tell his son, Caleb, "You shouldn't be doing this: move off the couch." Caleb does. Now we can exit that scene.

If you show certain moral errors made by your characters, you shouldn't leave it hanging. You must show it being corrected on the screen. It would be much easier for us to just remove that scene and not cause any controversy whatsoever, but we wanted to have that as a point of thoughtful discussion.

There are a couple of other scenes we should have removed because they were bad artistically, but that's a different kind of boundary.

So, the cinematography in your movie not only tells the story, but it also directs the audience to what's important. Your shot selection, the sequences, and the lenses that you use all play into that. So cinematography involves the camera, the support equipment, and, obviously, the operators of that gear.

THE BASICS OF CINEMATOGRAPHY

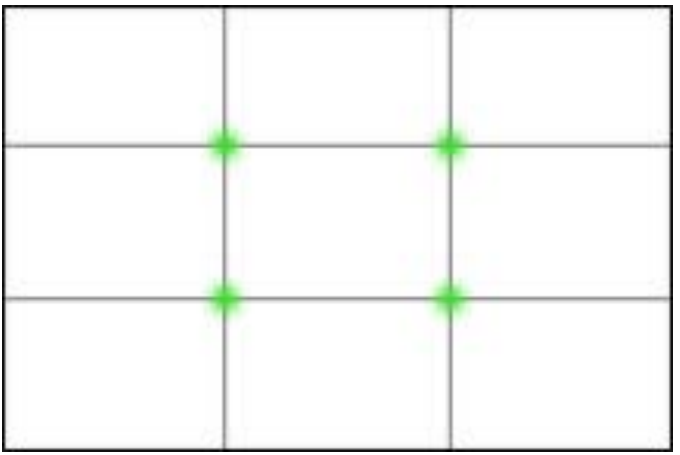
Establishing your shot: how do you achieve the shot that works best for the scene?

You have to block it. Anybody heard that term before, 'blocking your scene'? It's how you place and move your actors and camera(s) within the scene. You imagine that in your head, and then you go to the location and face the reality of your actual set. There will be some differences between what you planned and what you get

"on the day," so you have to be flexible in how you move your people and assets around.

("On the day" refers to the elements that are actually available to the filmmakers on the day a scene is being filmed.)

Another basic of cinematography is composition. Properly framing the visual elements using "the rule of thirds." Draw a rectangular box, representing the frame of your shot. Now lightly draw two vertical lines within the rectangle, dividing the rectangle evenly into a set of vertical thirds. Now draw two more horizontal lines across the rectangle. Again, these two horizontal lines should be evenly spaced within the frame to create another set of horizontal thirds. Your rectangular frame should now have 9 small boxes of roughly the same size within the rectangle.



Most people, when they are framing a shot of a person will place the subject's head at the center of the frame. Looking at such a composition it reveals immediately that it was shot by amateur. There is all this headroom around the subject's head. It's a serviceable shot, but it's not an artistic one. It's really a mug shot. You see this often at the post office, so you don't want to have your movie look like it was shot by an employee at the post office.

What you want is to use the time-tested "rule of thirds," which is to place your character so that their eye-line is right about at the intersection of the upper third line, their head is centered on one side of the vertical lines, usually opposite to where they are looking off in the shot. They shouldn't be looking at the camera directly unless that's really part of the storytelling. Following the rule of thirds gives you room to design something around your subject, if you need to, otherwise it just makes a more interesting shot. You can also put your secondary character at the other side, so they're looking at each other.



One other very, very basic technique is to turn the body of the subject about 45 degrees. If you're taking a picture of someone and they are looking at the camera and it's straight on, that's a mug shot. All you have to do is turn the person's body by 45 degrees. Now it's a portrait. Same shot, but the body orientation is different.

Another common mistake you see in films by amateurs, is that they put the horizon line right in the middle of the frame, splitting the frame in two. Imagine a sunset at the horizon with trees in the foreground and then a path leading from the trees disappearing into a dense forest at the horizon. If you put the horizon in the middle of the frame, what happens is that your audience's eyes are bouncing up and down within the frame. It doesn't know where to focus. "Should I focus here near the top? No, I should focus here at the bottom." The eyeballs maybe not be moving up and down physically, but it's happening mentally.

Instead, place the horizon line to the service of the emotion you're trying to evoke. If it's grandeur, you may put your horizon line down low, because then those foreground trees can really emerge or it accentuates the big sky. If you're conveying tension, that something could possibly break into the foreground, then place the horizon line at the top, crowding out the sun and sky. Then suddenly, from the bottom of the frame, your protagonist runs down the path toward the horizon, being chased by his antagonist.

If you can, avoid panning the camera from a pivot point on your tripod. Instead, physically move the entire camera from one side to another via a dolly, rather than doing this "whipping" movement.

Doing a dolly move versus a pan conveys a sense of production value. You as an audience have been trained by Hollywood, having watched dozens if not hundreds of movies, that a dolly move is how a professional production looks. You may not know the term "dolly" as a moviegoer, but you subtilely know that a pan looks closer to a home video style filming.

There are some really cheap tools you can get at Best Buy or a camera store to make those kinds of dolly shots. One of the best methods, especially with more lightweight cameras, is to get two identical tripods. They have these plates that you can rest something on, or mount a narrow strip of plywood, each end resting on a

tripod. This creates a portable dolly platform that you can slide a skateboard onto. Mounted on that skateboard is a camera. Because you can use your tripod to level the two sides, your portable dolly is adjustable to the terrain. Most dolly shots are only about four feet, as far as the side-to-side motion, unless it's a walking shot. If you lay down tracks for a dolly cart, it will usually take about an hour to set up, because they lay it down and put these shimmies in to level the tracks. Or you could do the tripod method, but you can only do the tripod method if you have very lightweight cameras, like the new DSLRs, and we'll talk about those cameras in a moment.

THE POWER of DEPTH OF FIELD

The other component to achieving great production value is the power of "depth of field." How many are familiar with that term? Whether you know it or not, you're all experts on this: every one of you is an absolute expert on depth of field. Right now you're looking at me, now look at each other across the room. Everybody is in focus, right? Those of you who need glasses, you know what I mean. That's because our eyes automatically have this great capacity to focus the foreground and the background at the same time in clear, sharp images, with the right corrective lenses. You've been trained as an audience, when you see that, when everything is in sharp focus all the time, especially if the movie is running at 30

fps, that that's video. It's more like television or home movies; it's not cinematic. In a professional film, you're used to seeing something focused in the foreground, on the main action or characters, while the rest of the background is a little bit blurry. The director focuses your attention using a shallow depth of field, visually saying to you, "This is what's important, look at this."

AFFORDABLE DIGITAL "FILM" GEAR

Until recently, most digital video cameras affordable to indie filmmakers, such as the Canon XH-A1 HDV camera we used for *Come What May*, couldn't achieve a depth of field look unless you put some other lens in front of it. There were optical add-ons created for those cheaper cameras to achieve depth of field. They cost about two thousand dollars, which is probably the price of a good Digital SLR camera (DSLR). So those optical tricks, applied to early high-definition camcorders, are no longer a cost-effective option. Rather, you should go straight to using DSLRs or more recently and even better, use HD camcorders with Super 35 CMOS imagers.

DSLRs were developed for still photography, but were given additional, but limited, capability to support motion video at 24 frames per second, capturing images at a maximum resolution of 1920 pixels horizontally x 1080 pixels vertically, sufficient for high-definition digital

video projection at your local cinema or HD home theater.

There are some problems in using DSLRs. They can overheat if you capture video continuously for 10 minutes or longer. They create imaging artifacts in moving shots. They don't support audio well. The videos look good, but are highly compressed and start to breakdown when additional digital processes are applied, such as effects shots or color-grading.

The two biggest advantages in using DSLRs are:

1. They are relatively cheap at less than $1,000.

2. They achieve great depth of field capability without resorting to optical trickery.

The reason we're spending so much time on digital gear is because it's your best tool for filmmaking. If all you can gather is the DSLR camera, then use that. If you want a more complete system, then you'll need the following items to assemble:

   a. A camera focus device attached to the camera lens. This allows a dedicated camera operator, known as a "focus-puller" to turn the wheel that is attached to the lens and keep the subject in focus as they movie about the scene. Another camera operator, the "shooter," points the camera to the action,

keeping things properly composed in the frame. This device cost from $400 to $1,000 dollars.

b. The matte box is a boxy-looking apparatus that is affixed to the front of the camera lens. It has barn doors at the top and/or at the sides to prevent unwanted light to leak into the lens, causing lens flares. There are also slots for inserting filters in front of the lens that affect how much light and what color temperature of light enters the camera lens. From a "coolness" factor and production value perception, attaching this imposing-looking device automatically signals and elevates your production into the professional ranks. If you want to impress visitors to your set, be sure you have a matte box mounted in front of your camera. This device costs about $500 to $2,000 dollars depending on size, number of slots, and materials used. Filters will cost $100 or more per filter.

c. Stainless steel or aluminum rods that provide structural support for the various items affixed to the camera such as the focus-pulling device, matte box, tripod plates, an external monitor. Rods cost about $100 for a minimum set of two, depending on their length, from 2 to 4 feet long, and diameter.

d. Small external HD LCD monitor, typically 7 inches diagonally, attached to the rod or camera body. This monitor allows the camera operator and

focus puller to do their job much faster and easier. A monitor costs between $400 to $1,000, depending on size, pixel resolution, and signal interfaces.

This whole rig, including a DSLR camera, can be purchased for probably less than $6,000. For this amount you'll have a camera system capable of creating an image that previously cost—let's see: the same capability that they used for *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*, about ten years ago, cost close to a million dollars, so that's the equivalent that we're talking about. Of course, at that time, they were still inventing the technology with Sony, so Lucas Films had to pay a premium for that, but you now have that capability of shooting that kind of quality.



Redrock Micro DSLR Cinema Bundle - $2,412
(Camera not included)

So, if you're going to buy any gear, invest in a digital SLR. Not only can you use it when you're not shooting a movie, for still photography and just general use, but when you're ready to go, just put the gear around it and you can go shoot your movie.

Before you make that final purchase decision toward a DSLR, however, let's go into detail about their drawbacks.

The DSLR cameras made by Canon and Nikon, were developed by the still photography division of those companies. The video side of their organization (I can imagine) probably hate the still photo guys, because they are cannibalizing sales from the video division, so they struck a compromise. I think it's a temporary compromise. The compromise is this, "Look, we'll let you take video images from that camera, except you have to process it through a common compression format." In this case most of them chose the H.264 format, AVC, or some offshoot of H.264, which is ultimately MPEG 4 compression. This means that DSLRs can capture a big, beautiful high definition image, but they are required to compress the image to a much reduced file size, while retaining the overall resolution dimension of 1920 x 1080 pixels. You can project it beautifully, but the moment you start playing around with that image in

color correction or compositing or anything else in editing, it begins to degrade, because it's highly compressed to begin with.

Compression means identifying redundant image information as much as possible per frame, discarding that data so it is hardly noticeable to the human eye, especially if the image is moving, but ultimately removing the original information.

In other words, if the original RAW image was, say 100% of the pure image, then you apply H.264 compression, you would be left with maybe about 80% less information about that image than what you started with. That's data that's just thrown out: it's gone permanently. The naked human eye cannot discern that there is less information in that image, so compression is a viable image compromise on that first-generation image.

By comparison, a more expensive digital film camera, such as the RED, captures and retains images in the raw form as it's default setting. You end up with very large file sizes under the RAW capture setting. From that RAW image, it's up to the filmmaker to apply the compression to it as they desire. With DSLR cameras, you don't (yet) have the option of saving your video image files as RAW images. You're stuck with the compressed image as your final resolution. Everything you do to that image just degrades from that starting point.

However, there is a company who invented a solution to this DSLR image shortfall. The company is called CineForm, and they developed a method that takes that H.264 compression file and makes it *nearly* RAW. Using their tool, they create a new image file that is nearly RAW in image quality. Basically, CineForm restores much of the lost data by guessing what's missing and adding it back to the image. Through a set of very good algorithms, they are able to put back the pixels that were taken out, but it's all guessing, "I think there's a pixel missing here, I'll put it in." It's really incredible technology. After running your footage through CineForm you can manipulate the new image output without degrading it as much.

You'll want to leave your original DSLR master files alone; you can always go back to them if needed.

I think in the next year or two, the writing is on the wall for the video guys. Their old business is gone; they either embrace this or the RED guys are going to eat their lunch. Especially because the guys who have been making the RED camera are not standing still. They're answering this challenge from the DSLR camp too, by making lower-budget RED cameras. If the Canons and the Nikons don't respond, they're out of business. So they will respond. If you can wait another year, then you'll be able to use DSLR cameras that captures RAW images.

Attendee: File size: is there a difference there?

George Escobar: Yeah, there are major file size differences. Right now, what we do for our images for editing is we create what's called proxy files. We down convert the raw images from the RED camera. It takes us four terabytes of hard drive space to store the movie for *HERO*. So that we can work with it more easily and economically, we use 1k proxies on a single hard drive. Computers, even fast ones, can't readily handle gigabyte-sized video files, so transcoding them to a lower resolution is a necessity for us.

Using digital film technology requires considerably higher hard drive storage requirements, but it's still much cheaper than using physical film or negatives. Terabyte hard drives are fairly cheap now. So for about $600 worth of storage, you can keep your images in the raw form.

SHOOTING RATIO

Digital film technology improves your overall shooting ratio. In the past, as an independent filmmaker, you were bound by how much film you could afford to buy and process. Shooting ratios were sometimes 1:1, meaning, you got one take for that one shot and you're done because you can't afford another take. You've got a hundred other takes for a hundred other scenes. Or 2:1. Hollywood would normally shoot something at 20 to 30:1 ratio, because they had the budgets to do that. Now, with digital stuff, there are no boundaries except the physical limitations involved in that shot.

The better your actors, as we had in *HERO*, the better you can manage your shooting ratio. We worked with all professional actors—it was a union shoot, and boy that was a deal in itself; I never want to repeat that again if I can help it. The actors were so good, though, that they did save us money in their performance. They could do things in two takes that us amateurs would take maybe twenty takes to get that one good take, whereas they can give you good take after good take. "You want a different style? Okay!" That's just their craft, and they love it. If you can hire a professional actor to work for non-union wages, then you've got the best of both worlds for a producer, but that's really difficult to do. Unless you find really good actors maybe from the theater who are on the cusp of becoming signatory to the Screen Actors Guild,

then you're in a really good spot or you can recruit a good actor who doesn't care about his or her membership with SAG and will work against union rules. There's ways around it, but it gets difficult.

MOTIVATED MOVEMENT

Don't move the camera in the scene unless there is good motivation for that movement.

There is a new generation of cinematographers and directors who are very self-conscious and just want the audience to know that they exist, that they are directing the movie you're watching. They make camera movements that are self-indulgent, just for the sake of "hey, I'm really cool: isn't this shot cool? I'm doing something cool with my camera."

Try not to be like that. Respect your audience; let the movement in front of the camera tell the story, instead of the camera moving all the time, making you aware of the person behind the camera.

It's important to move the camera only when it's motivated. Why are you moving that? Well, for many directors it's, "Because I'm bored" or they think that they need the shaky-camera technique to add energy to the scene, because they haven't done their job to block it and stage it properly, so they'll let the camera do the labor there. If you've ever seen the second *Bourne* movie, there it's all shaky camera. *John Adams*, too: what a beautiful

piece of work that was ruined by the camera work. It's really a shame.

Attendee: Kind of funny, because most of that was influenced by young cinematographers. Was it the *Blair Witch Project*, where they did that?

George Escobar: Yes. Music videos are also an influence. Again, they grew up with that, so that's what their self-referential methodology has become. It'll feel very dated: you'll say, "That shaky-cam look was from that era."

LIGHTING

Lighting is important because it's the best way that we create the mood and atmosphere of a shot. Along with the lens and the depth of field, it allows you to focus attention to a particular part of the scene. It's one of the best ways to convey emotion in a shot. For example, two people having a romantic dinner together, if you have fluorescent lights blaring in their face and then you add loud music, it's not really very romantic. If you put a candle in front of them, and they're only lit by candlelight, which, by the way, those DSLR cameras can easily handle. They are supersensitive, so you could light your scene without any other light and it will look good. That candlelit approach makes for a very romantic scene, because it has all sorts of connotations. We've been

trained to recognize that candles are used on special occasions, so this must be a special anniversary occasion, by the little prop that you have and the two people in the scene.

I think half of you have seen *Come What May*, right? Those of you who have seen it, you may remember the big finale, the debate scene with Caleb and the national moot court championship. That was actually shot on three different occasions. There was a large audience and judges, that was shot at Cornerstone Chapel in Leesburg: we staged the competition on their platform. Five months later we had to do pickups because the judges we had the first time just didn't look right—not good performances—so we put in new judges. That was shot at Town Hall over at Patrick Henry College with just the three new judges. Finally, we needed to have some reaction shots between Caleb and Rachel during the competition, which we couldn't get at Cornerstone because it would have required us to reset lights and placement of the cameras and everything, so we did it in a small part of my living room. We intercut all of those scenes, and nobody has ever said, "That looks a little strange." Everything worked smoothly. If you plan your shots, even for pickups, and you storyboard it and make sure you've chosen the right angles, it should work and be unnoticeable to the audience.



You can see even for this very simple shot we got during pickups in my living room that there are various lighting setups. There is a Kino Flo very similar to the original lights we used during principal photography at Cornerstone Chapel. There are lights at the top of Caleb's hair: they are called kickers. They give the edge lighting on the top of his head and on the shoulder to separate him from the background. We chose the black background even though on some shots during principal photography, you'll see an audience behind him. In this shot we're shooting with the cameras low and looking up. You just assume that there is still a crowd behind Caleb. At the ceiling you see this blackness. What we did was we took a digital still picture of the lights that were at Cornerstone, and we just pasted it on this video image so that when you're looking at it you think, "Oh, those were the lights from Cornerstone," even though they don't exist in this shot. I think there was one more bounce light to act as a filler.

This is the basic light kit that you need: two lights and something for overhead to achieve your three-point lighting.

They call it three point lighting, but it's really four. There's one light for the subject's head. It's positioned slightly above the subject and 45% from the center line of the subject. This is called the key light: it throws the brightest light onto your subject and will cast a strong shadow if left by itself. You want to soften that shadow, but not eliminate it by placing an opposite "fill" light farther back. You want to make sure that you create shadows, not just have one dimensional flat lighting, because flat lighting looks like a mug shot or a snapshot.

If you study Hollywood lighting, especially old Hollywood movies, they were always going for what was called V-light, especially on the actresses. Do that: watch an old movie from the 40s or 50s, and pause it whenever they do a close up of the actress, and you'll notice on one side of their face there's a V-shaped light on one of her cheeks. The gaffer molded the shape of the lights, setting up the lights to create a sculptured shadow. It's not a sharp V: it's soft, but it's there. If you can achieve that, then you've equaled the Hollywood studio lighting setup.

So, there are your three lights. Then you add a fourth light, because you'll really want your background to be illuminated as well. The way you place this is really depending on how the actor is moving or sitting. For the

camera, you need sufficient light so you can begin to control that lens, how wide to open it, how small, and to get rid of digital noise in the image, which happens when there's not enough light and things get really junky on your frame.

The way that you need to set up your lighting is first you almost over light it. Just get the lights up so you can get a reading. Then you can add more or less and begin to finesse it. Just make sure you can get an exposure, as that's the main requirement. As a director, you may have to be your own lighting director and your DP, your everything. You need to know a little bit so that you can do it yourself, but also when you begin to work with other people, to be able to speak their language and know what they're trying to achieve and how hard it is to do it. Most lights will also allow you to have this silk in front of the light package, so it's less harsh: it diffuses the light a bit more. You also need some lights that are very bright and intense that you can focus. Those are anywhere from a hundred to two or three hundred dollars.



Here's an example of a well-lit, natural-looking scene from *Come What May*. The background is diffused to keep the focus on Victoria Emmons, who plays Rachel. To achieve this we were using an optical trick on the camera lens with a depth of field device from a company called Redrock Micro. Notice the highlights on the edge of her hair. This type of hair lighting is done on almost every Hollywood movie. When that hair light is missing from the shot, you as the audience may not know why, but you're think, "Oh, that looks amateur; it's a cheap movie. I don't know why, but it doesn't look right."

Attendee: You said that light on her hair is coming from behind her?

George Escobar: That's right: it's just above and behind her. Sometimes it's just that little light trick that will distinguish your production from everyone else's.

Attendee: It also gives the actor a three-dimensional fill as opposed to a flat two-dimensions, because, if you don't see the back of the head lit up like that, it all blends in.

George Escobar: That's exactly right. It really molds and pushes that character forward, and it's just pretty. It's warm and soft. So don't forget that light; that's one of your more important lights.

There are different manufacturers of lights. The popular ones are Lowel and ARRI. There's a type of light, called Fresnels, that's a very small light with a big back. There's a way to focus it, usually with either a ring or some dial, and there is some glass in front of that light that allows you to narrow that beam, or sometimes it's in the back, where a reflector is moving back and forth from the light source. It gives you that ability to say, "Okay, I just want that light beam to focus on that particular part of the scene or actor."

They are generally hot lights. They are not like fluorescents. Although advancements on cooler fresnels are coming along very quickly, they are not quite there yet. You'll have to deal with those lights that are very hot. They are usually 500 watts or above, so they draw quite a bit of power. In the old days, when I went to film school, they didn't have any LEDs, so when we would light a set we would typically have to bring breaker fuses, because we would blow fuses all day long. You'd do your tech scout and find out what fuse box they have, and you'd

buy a set of those fuses for that house, because you're going to blow them.

Attendee: Are any of your lights on faders, or are they all on all the time?

George Escobar: They are all on or off. The faders were just more expensive, and I just didn't want to incur that additional expense, although they are becoming more standard. It's usually fifty to hundred dollars for that control.

[*Come What May* clip: "Marry me" scene]

Attendee: Did he have backlighting? She had obvious backlighting.

George Escobar: Yeah, he had one too. Did you notice it?

Attendee: To the left? Cause the right fades out.

George Escobar: Yeah, to the left. The way that shot is set up, some of the fill light or the backlighting for her is spilling into him. So if the light's coming here, it's coming this way. That's correct. By the way, that scene, from a cinematography perspective, is really gorgeously lit and shot: you can see the richness of the colors there that the projector isn't giving us. Do people get paid for this? Yes.

George Escobar: What I've got up on the screen now is a sample budget, which we included in your DVD package. I think this is a budget for a union shoot for 24 days. It's a $4 million movie, but the reason we included this is for you to see some of the general costs associated with a movie of that budget. Of course, you can always scale back. I would encourage you to really study it, because it outlines all the positions according to the different departments and how they're organized. It's a great educational tool just so you understand why movies cost so much.

Attendee: How much buffer do you put in a budget?

George Escobar: Every budget is different, but I generally like to have a ten or twenty percent contingency. As you refine that budget, that number should drop, because you're getting more accurate figures, but when you start off on your rough budget, you automatically assume that you're off plus or minus twenty to twenty-five percent.

Attendee: How long do you take insurance on the film?

George Escobar: If you're renting equipment, they will require that you have production insurance. Even if you own all the equipment and you're going out and using different locations, it's always good to get production insurance to protect yourself. That's generally about ten percent of your budget amount.

Attendee: Can you stop then, once you're done…

George Escobar: Yeah, the more days you add, the more it costs, because you're exposing yourself, but generally it's once you wrap. Everybody's heard of pre-production, production, and post-production. What people don't generally add is called a wrap period. That's not the song and dance, it's W-R-A-P: that's when you're winding down your production. Either you're returning all the gear or you're tearing down a set, returning all the things that you borrowed and the associated costs to that. The people who have to carry that work usually get paid during that period of time.

Someone asked me, "Why is it that when they're watching TV or especially soap operas, it has this look to it, that is distinctly television or soap opera?" Some of that is a function of the way it's lit and the blocking, the tightness of the shots and the actors.

You'd be amazed how close the actors really need to be to stay in frame, because even though we have wider screens now, the rule of thumb is you still want your actors to be within the standard 4x3 television frame. The camera is a little bit tricky on this just because of the way it behaves. Mike, if you could come here for a second. When we are talking to each other, most of us are usually a little bit more than three feet from each other. That would look like about six or seven feet on camera, very unnatural, so we would have to talk like

this, to make it look like "so now I'm invading his space, and he mine." Actors need to get used to this, but for them it's very natural.

The other thing is the frame rate. You've probably heard of frames per second used as a term? That's literally how many frames are being shot by the camera per second. The movie standard rate is 24 frames per second, while television is at 30 frames per second. You've been trained to look at a movie at this frame rate, and when you see something that isn't this, then your mind automatically says, "Oh, it's got to be television." It's just a subconscious thing.

Why the difference? Would anybody like to share, or should I just spell it out?

Attendee: You said that TV is 30 frames per second?

George Escobar: Yeah, or 29.97, but rounded up to thirty.

Attendee: Does it stay at 60hz?

George Escobar: Yeah, it's an artifact from black and white television. If you go to IMAX or some other large format film, they will run the frame rate up to 60 frames per second or 70 frames per second. They shoot it at that frame rate, but they also run it in that rate, and it's hyper-real. If you shoot something at 48 frames per second and play it back at 24 frames per second, you will have slow

motion since the image is moving twice as slow as the playback. If you shoot at 12 frames per second and play it back at 24 frames per second, you'll have fast action, but slightly jerky action because everything is moving twice as fast.

Most cameras now have a setting that allows you to choose what frame rate you want. Make sure that you're at 24 frames per second. It used to be you had to choose between interlaced or progressive, but nowadays, it's all sort of automatic progressive. You don't even want to know what that means; just trust that 24 frames "p" or progressive is what you want.

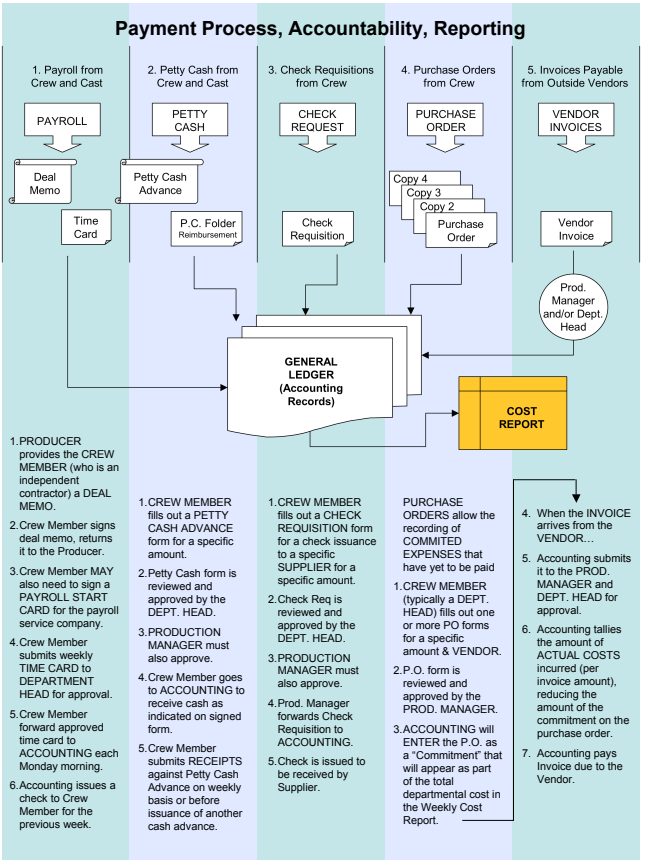
Why 24 frames? How did that happen? Well, that was a compromise between the theater exhibitors, the guys who owned the theaters and the projectors, and the moviemakers. They determined that 24 frames per second is the minimum number of frames that can go through a projector and the image would still look good. Because, the more footage you run through a camera, the more expensive it is. So, the producers, they come from the non-talking picture days, where they didn't have motorized cameras. Someone would literally hand crank that film going through the cameras, and it was never constant; it depended on how tired they were and how good they were. When they became motorized, it was much better, but they weren't shooting at 24 frames, and that's why, when you see talkies and some of those old

movies, it's sort of jerky movement, because they were shooting at less than 24. Sometimes things were slow because they were over cranking, going faster. So it was driven by economics and what the eye could perceive as motion.

There's an optical illusion they are taking advantage of, which is called "persistence of motion." One image is followed by another image, your mind and your eye records that for a split second, sufficiently that, if you replace it with another image and another image after that, it looks like smooth motion. If we didn't have that persistence of vision, it would be these images just shocking our eyeballs. The Lord knew we would be watching movies sometime in the future, I guess, so He gave us persistence of vision.

What happens if you shoot your movie, and you make a mistake, and you shot it at 30 frames, and now you've got this TV look? *Come What May* was shot at 30 frames per second, 30 frames progressive. We had a choice to go to 24, but I purposely chose to go 30 frames per second, because when that camera came out, there was substantial controversy over whether it was a true 24 frames per second system. They called their system 24 f, but they were doing some tricks in the algorithms to achieve this, and they were also losing resolution. So I decided to go with the safest route and shoot at 30 frames per second, then essentially down convert it to this.

That's a very tricky process, and you need to have special tools to be able to do that. CineForm makes those conversion tools. Know this company; this is a great, great company. They provide many great tools for filmmakers at very, very affordable cost. So, if you end up doing this, filming at 30 frames per second, you can always fix it using CineForm.



This is a brand new chart I've added here. It's one we've been working on most recently for our latest film, and I got it from a production manager named John Gaskins, online, and I compiled it from what he was teaching. He contends that if you master this chart, meaning if you know how to take pay roll, the deal memo, convert it to a

time card, put it into a general ledger or the petty cash system, check request system, purchase order—really mundane accounting stuff, and it only takes about two or three days to really master this—you will become instantly employable with any production anywhere in the world. This is more valuable to a filmmaking production company than a film degree, and it only takes you two or three days to learn it.

Is that true or false? I contend that it is absolutely true. If an intern came to me and says I can handle all of this for you, they would be hired just like that. It's mundane: there's a lot of paperwork involved, but from that you become the focal point of the entire production. The money flows through your hands: you're processing all of this paperwork, and you get to know everybody. It's a great job. Nobody wants to do it, because it's mundane, but it's one of the most critical jobs in production. If you want a guaranteed job, anytime, anywhere, in the film industry, there's the key. It really is true, but very few people do it.

John Gaskins has a production management course online that's really incredibly valuable. I think his website is called filmtalk.biz. The smaller the production, the less you have a need of this, but if you want to work in a production that requires this, that's great, because that means they have a budget and people are getting paid. That's the kind of set you want to be on to begin with.

You may not get paid a lot doing this, or as an intern you may not get paid at all, but you become a valuable member of the production team right away. You get to meet everybody, know everyone, and then you can move up from there. If you really like it, you can become production accountant. In this case, you'll probably be a production accountant assistant at best, or junior assistant.



This is a key slide in your presentation deck, not just for yourself, but also for your investors and your team. It shows what are you doing month by month. By creating a project list like this, everyone begins to understand the scale and scope of your production and develop a schedule on a timeline. This was the one that we used for *Come What May*. We have a different one for our newest production, and it won't fit in one page. It has a list of about 300 tasks that we have to do between now and

when we deliver the movie for distribution, and, within each of those lists, is another dozen subtasks, at least for each one.

When you show this to your investor, they can better comprehend why your movie cost as much as it does, and demonstrates your readiness to undertake the project.

For our current project for Mission City Productions, *Alone Yet Not Alone*, we have to do several hundred things in order for us to deliver a movie that looks like *The Last of the Mohicans* or *The Patriot*. *The Last of the Mohicans* had a budget of $40 million back in 1991; that would be about $65-75 million in today's dollars. *The Patriot* had a budget of $110 million in 2000. What we're trying to do is to make a movie that looks like *The Last of the Mohicans* for about $5-6 million.

Can we do it? I contend that we can because of three reasons. One is we're going non-union; that automatically doubles the buying power of your budget, than if you had gone union across all the disciplines. Secondly, we're using a combination of professional department heads and then the homeschooling community. We have enough experience with crew we've worked with over the last two or three movies, ourselves and others that we've come to know, that we can pull together a very highly trained crew from within the homeschooling ranks. Finally, we are taking advantage of digital cinema technology and techniques that have only

gotten better, certainly to the point that the shots that they struggled and had to pay lots of money for in 1991 have scaled down quite a bit in cost.

We're not trying to compete with *Transformers* in the kinds of special effects. These will be very old-fashioned techniques, like matte paintings—except now we're going to do them digitally—very discreet use of blue screen, and using locations in multiple ways, instead of Hollywood, where you go to one location, then you move to another one and another one. We're going to do a location hubbing, where you create a central hub and you shoot most of your scenes from that one location and just move elements around. I think we can achieve a very cinematic look.

It's critical that the heart of the cast and crew are united. That they have a common vision, a common goal. We've not always been faithful in doing this, in capturing the heart of our cast and crew and turning them towards God and His direction. It begins by making sure that you're walking in the Lord today, obedient to the small things He's asked us to do, and I think you've done that by being here.

What is your passion for filmmaking? Is it for your own sake, or is it to use it with the fidelity of adhering to God's truth? As filmmakers, we are creating a pulpit onscreen that transcends time and place. It's going to live way beyond our borders and our lifetimes. It's a huge

responsibility. Every one of you who aspires to be a filmmaker, what you're really signing up for is to be a preacher, and you're going to be accountable to the Lord with that calling. If you're not willing to undertake that responsibility, then don't be a filmmaker; you can do something else.

Attendee: Concerning your Christian beliefs, when you are in production, do you shoot straight through, or when it comes to time for the Sabbath or your Sunday service, do you say, "We're going to church, we'll shoot later," or "We won't shoot that day"?

George Escobar: That's correct. We do not shoot on Sunday.

Attendee: Being obedient in the small things.

George Escobar: That's right, yep. We've instituted daily prayer for our team. We have a conference call number so wherever you are, you can call in starting at 9:15, and then we have a leader each day assigned for that day. For example, I have Tuesdays, Mike has Mondays, David has Thursdays. We start our day in prayer, and we continue that through our productions as well. Prayer begins to transform you, and your cast and crew as well.

TOP TEN PRODUCTION TIPS

I want to share with you the top ten production tips that you should consider when making your own films.

1. *Daily devotions are critical.* We have occasionally missed some days when we skipped devotions, and usually those are our toughest days, because our heart is not correctly oriented. It it affects our attitude with cast and crew and perspective on what to do with difficulties arise.

2. *Do not buy your cameras.* Borrow or rent them. One of you has already been able to apply that. I learned about your project last night, and you were thinking, "Okay, I have to raise money to do this documentary." The fact that you live in Virginia makes it easier, and I said, "Why don't you use our equipment, our cameras, our lights and our sound gear, to make your documentary about parental rights." There is always someone in your circle of friends or connections who cannot resist buying the latest, greatest gear. It's usually a guy. Find them and borrow their equipment, or barter for its use, or let them be the camera operator if it's their camera.

3. *Sound recording is as important as image capture.* Your movie is experienced through light (absorbed by the camera) and sound. I would contend that you could make a movie with just sound if you had too, or at least big

chunks of a scene. I learned this from a friend of mine who was making one of his early feature films. They had lost their generator. It just shut down, and it was night. They were supposed to have a little campfire scene of these kids telling scary stories. What do you in that situation? They could have just used the light from the actual physical fire. But film stocks back then where not sensitive enough, and they didn't have a fast lens. (That's a lens with a big aperture opening to let in as much light as possible to expose the film.) In this situation they decided to keep shooting, and just have the kids talk in the dark, telling their scary stories. Boy, was it a scary opening; people thought it was brilliant. It was a horror movie. It was the most brilliant horror movie that had come to that time, and that's because they just used what they had, then they added more creepy sounds, because they are outdoors. In that case, sound saved them.

Attendee: What's a wild line?

George Escobar: It's when you're on location and your actor has a scene that's going on and somehow it's not recorded properly, but you're still at the location. Maybe they've even torn everything down. Just have your actor say those lines. Here's the microphone, just record it, and hopefully it's something you can use, because the sound guy—the sound report tells you it was bad because there was an airplane flying overhead. While you're still in the

environment where you were shooting originally you get that sound, that take. Then you don't have to get the actor back and things like that. Or you might have them say things that you may want to add into the story, where you just have a reaction shot of your actor, and it's more of an impromptu type thing.

Foley, or sound effects, are named after a gentleman named Foley back in the 1920s or 30s. Movies that are amateurish don't have good Foley. That means when the door shuts, it doesn't sound like the door just shut. When the footsteps crunch on gravel, it doesn't sound like gravel; that has to be added. It's done in a small studio with specially trained people who create those sounds. Recording sound for movies is strange: you go on location, and the primary objective there is to remove as much as the sound as possible, except the dialogue. Later, you've got to put all those sound elements back in during your sound mix and sound design phase. The difference is that during post-production, you have more control over the individual sound elements.

ADR is automatic dialogue replacement, which is a complete misnomer, as it is not automatic at all: it's a highly mechanical process. Except now they've got great software to assist the sound editor. Before this software, an actor had to match their lines precisely to fit a particular time frame. Now they can be a little bit more sloppy, and the software makes the needed adjustment so

it's synched up. I mean, if you talk ten seconds and you push it back to a three-second line, that's not going to work, but if you are at three and a half seconds, the software will work to fit it into that three second slot.

Attendee: What software is that?

George Escobar: It's either something from Digidesign or Pro-tools. I think all the professional audio software has that capability now.

Attendee: You use clip art when you're doing something in word-processing, but are there sound clips like birds in the background and things like that that you can get online?

George Escobar: Yeah, there are sound effects that are available for purchase just like clip art. You could use those for your final product if they're good enough and match your other production sounds. For example, rather than going out to record people at a stadium, there are pre-recorded sound libraries of multiple crowd sounds, of various qualities.

What you want to do, though, when you are on location, is make sure you have a sound plan. Just like a shot list, you have a sound list, so make sure your sound team captures things that are really difficult to replicate in Foley or give a reference for the Foley artist later on.

Yeah, certainly use pre-existing sound effects. There are literally tens of thousands of sound clips of practically anything you can think of available for download. If you are a Macintosh user and you buy Final Cut Express, and I think iMovie comes with a group of sound effects already, I think they ship with two or three thousand audio files that you can use right away.

4. *Test your digital workflow.* Even for what we we're doing here for this workshop, videotaping it, our crew came in and tested the day before. We had problems the first day and struggled through it, and I think today everything is running smoothly. You have to do that repeatedly. I can't emphasize that enough. Otherwise, if you don't do any testing in advance, you'll be winging it. You'll get testy, things will start to fall apart the first day, and it takes a lot of effort to recover. All you needed to do is to make sure everything worked the day before. If you didn't do that, you're in for a disaster. People lose confidence in the production, thinking, "This is a mess, you guys don't know what you're doing," especially when you're working with professional people. They have higher expectations, and we as Christian filmmakers need to be as good as our secular counterparts.

5. *Have a production office.* One area that most people neglect—and it's going to kill you and shut your production down in no time—is not having a

production office. That's the place where you can make plans for disaster and plan the next day before you start, where people can go to do rehearsals, or just a place that represents the production. It's all of those things. We were fortunate enough that when we shot here, PHC gave us two production offices, two classrooms that we used for a production office and storage area, another one we used for wardrobe.

If you're on location, you need a portable production office. It could be a tent, or it could be an RV. I prefer the RV. If you're on location, you're going to need tents, because it's really difficult to ask everybody to be under a hot sun or try to find some shade and the sun is always moving. We ended up buying fourteen tents for *HERO*, and so we had a tent city. Fourteen tents, and each one was ten feet by ten feet, so it was a small house, and we were able to use it for different functions. Video village had two or three tents. The catering had the lion's share of it; the makeup and wardrobe had some more. Right now those tents are being used for the feature film I mentioned yesterday, *For the Glory*. It's a soccer movie, so they're out there all the time. The first day of the production, it rained. Guessed what they used? Those tents. So it also protects you from the weather.

6. *Storyboards will save your production.* Without them you will FAIL as a first-time director. Storyboards force

you to define your storytelling approach. It's best if you do the storyboarding yourself, because if you assign your storyboarding to someone else, effectively you're abdicating the responsibility of how the movie will be shot.

I elected to have a storyboard artist do the storyboarding for our next film, only because I wrote the screenplay and I know every single line in it and how it should be shot and I described it that way already in the script. So with the boards that he's giving me, I know when he's hitting the mark and I know when he's not. I have to divide my time to other tasks, so I have him do most of the storyboards, and then I come back and do the cleanup.

You have to know every shot, and then within that storyboard, there are multiple minor shots in there also. So you create a shot list, you've got your storyboards, and you've got your script. You have a script supervisor, who also understands the story you're trying to tell. The script supervisor or continuity person makes sure that if I'm wearing this tie today and there's continuity to this scene in tomorrow's shooting schedule, I've got to wear this tie again, or exactly how I move and where I placed my drink. You've seen movies where the drink's over here and then it's over there. A little ping pong: that's part

of continuity. Many times though, it's just the lines, making sure you say the same lines, if it matters.

7. *Craft services and catering.* You need to feed everybody well, all the time, because you're usually paying them with food for their services

Attendee: What percentage of the budget does that tend to be?

George Escobar: For *Come What May*, for example, it was $20,000 worth of food. For *HERO*, it was over $50,000, probably closer to $75,000.

Attendee: So, somewhere in that 10-15% range.

George Escobar: Well, that's because we have students, and we have to feed them. You know how hungry they get, lunch, breakfast, and dinner. Usually on a professional shoot, you just pay for lunch, unless you shoot over certain hours, then you have to pay what's called a second meal, usually dinner. We provided breakfast, lunch, and dinner, because they had no other way to eat. Otherwise you give them per diem money, and that's even more costly, so it's better to feed them on the set.

Attendee: In *Facing The Giants*, we watched the credits: the number one credit was all the people who provided the food. It just goes on and on and on!

George Escobar: We saved some money by having donations from local vendors. Krispy Kreme Donuts would give us donuts all the time, so that was great.

8. *M-I-C-I every scene (Master, Isolation, Cutaways, Inserts).* For every major scene you want to make sure you've got your master shot, so that if everything else fails in your edit, you know that you've got that scene, that confrontation, or whatever it is. In the master shot you see everything. Then you can get isolation shots of just different actors; sometimes that's one or two interacting together. Then get your cutaways and inserts. In a baseball movie, for example, you always get that shot of the guy holding the bat or the tight shot of their hand or their feet, getting into the ground before they swing the bat.

   One of the things we need to do for pickups is we don't have sufficient coverage of some of those inserts. We just didn't have time. The original schedule for *HERO* was thirty days. Because of union rules, which we didn't know about until too late, we didn't have sufficient funds to film a movie for thirty days. We had enough money to shoot a movie for fifteen days, so everything got collapsed. Instead of a comfortable three or four page shoot a day, it became eight pages a day. We knew that we would likely miss filming some things, which we'd need to get during pickups.

9. *The set is not a democracy*. You don't put it to a vote for each scene and have everybody say, "Yeah, we should do it this or that way." As a director, you have to lead with proper authority, and that means by serving others as much as you can, in various capacities, and respect what other people are doing. They will give you their opinion about certain issues, and you need to consider their point of view. Sometimes they'll give you great suggestions, though not all the time; you still respect that. The more open you are to taking people's suggestions, the more they'll give it to you, so it's going to be a balancing act. Set up some ground rules, that up to a certain point we're shooting what we're shooting, and we're not going to make that many more changes. Unless the director opens up, like, "I don't know exactly how we need to shoot this scene, because the elements have changed. Does anyone have a good suggestion? This is what we need to accomplish in this scene. We can't execute on that right now because we've lost that location." Then you get a small group of people that you know are good at helping you.

10. Lastly, *write everything down*. Get everything in writing, because if you have a movie that turns out beautifully, and you're getting ready to give it to a distributor, and they love it, you may get stuck with the fact that your movie cannot be delivered because you don't have the permits or you don't have the

permissions of the people. Verbal agreements don't count. The distributor needs to have proof that you had permission to do what you did, because they'll end up being liable if anybody sues your production.

Attendee: Is that property permits, as well as extras permission?

George Escobar: Exactly. Permits, permissions—even for your crew. They may appear in a shot, either on the film itself or in the behind-the-scenes footage, and so they need to relinquish the right as part of their deal memo, giving you the permission and the right to use their likeness, in perpetuity, for all purposes.

Attendee: Any suggestion that happens on the set—do they sign a release of that for creative license?

George Escobar: Yes, that's usually part of the deal memo: anything that you suggest belongs to the production.

Attendee: Some things aren't as easy to get permission to do, like if you're shooting a scene on state or federal land, it takes time to get the permit.

George Escobar: Yeah, some state parks, you need to give them ninety days notice, and then it has to go through their bureaucracy.

Attendee: And some federal lands you can't even shoot on at all.

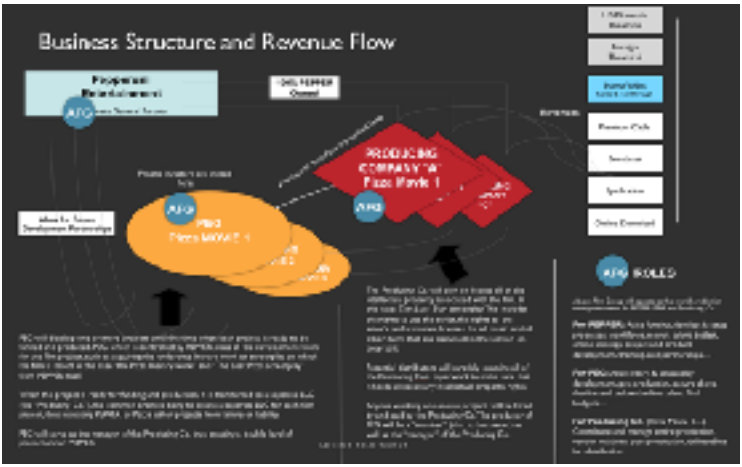
George Escobar: Right, right, and that's where the film commissions usually come in and become very helpful. They know how to push your paperwork through, and that's their job; they have an incentive to do that. If they don't do that, they lose their job.

Attendee: I just got finished reading a book called The Big Picture, by a director who used to work with Woody Allen. He suggested that there are ways of getting around shooting certain locations without getting licenses to steal a scene. Setting up a camera in an undisclosed way, where no one can see it, and just have the actors walk past saying their lines: they call it stealing a scene. What do you think about that?

George Escobar: Well, we did that. The Supreme Court scene where Judith is walking up the steps of the Supreme Court, we could have gotten permission from the Washington, DC area film commission. In Washington, though, as long as you don't set your sticks down, your tripod down on the sidewalk, and you're just holding your camera, they'll let you shoot. We made sure that we weren't interfering with anything else. If you noticed, that shot is pretty sparse, because we shot it at a time of day that we knew there wouldn't be that many crowds. The authorities eventually came, asking, "So, what are you guys doing?" We just explained, "We're making a low-budget film with students." They said, "Oh, okay, go ahead."

Attendee: And capturing bystanders—that's okay?

George Escobar: Well, if they're recognizable, then you need to get their permission, but if they're thirty feet away and they're walking away, they won't recognize themselves. That's fine, passersby. The bigger your budget is, and the more exposure you have for your film, then go ahead and get those permissions, just in case. It isn't really anything to worry about with small films.



I'm going to review quickly this slide for a major project to show you how complex film projects can sometimes get.

We had an opportunity to develop a project for an animated feature about a year ago. The project didn't happen, as we couldn't get the funding, and I changed the title on the slide for confidentiality reasons, but it's a major piece of property. Most in the homeschooling

community would know this book series, but we ended up not making it. However, I want to show you how the scale jumps dramatically as far as the project description, the number of days, and the structuring of the business. We had to set up three production companies: the producing company, development company, and production company, because this was going to be a franchise film, so we needed to figure out what the business structure was, the processes: how the revenue would flow, how we would work with the studios, the bargaining chip of the project, and historical returns for a movie.

FINANCIAL PROJECTIONS

When you talk to investors, they are going to ask two basic questions:

1. How much will the movie COST to make?

2. How much revenue will the movie EARN?

The accuracy of your answer to the second question is based on your financial projection models.

Remember *The Chronicles of Narnia*? It was made for a hundred and eighty million dollars. It earned about $275 million in U.S. domestic box office receipts. Let's just round it off to $300 million, and let's round off the production cost to $200 million.

Here's how the revenue pie is split amongst all the players involved: the exhibitors, they are the theater owners, get 50% of the box office. The other 50% gets divided up further. The biggest slice of the revenue pie will go to the distributor of the movie. They want to be reimbursed for all the services they're providing, typically prints and materials, advertising, publicity, re-editing the movie (if needed), foreign dub versions (that means they have to hire new actors to actually say the lines), the taxes they have to pay, currency conversion, trade association fees, residuals (what actors will get paid once the movie is out and other platforms or other countries), shipping, delivery, and there's probably a couple more dozen items that they could add. They'll charge all those expenses, plus their 30-35% distributor fee against gross revenues or earnings. So you end up, as a producer, with somewhere between five to fifteen percent of the gross revenue pie.

Let's look at the math. It cost the producers of the first Narnia movie $200 million to make the film. It then earns $300 million in box office revenue. 50% ($150 million) of that revenue will go to the exhibitor. The other 40% percent ($120 million) goes to the distributor. The producer gets 10% of the pie and is left with $30 million. Everybody has made good money except the producer. He's still out $170 million because he's only earned back $30 million, while his production cost was $200 million. How do you recover from that loss? Well,

this is only domestic revenues. The producer could recover the rest of it through international sales and then DVDs and various other release windows. Hopefully, eventually, the movie breaks even over time. Not very much, but enough that they had incentive to make the next Narnia movie. But then, sadly, that second Narnia movie lost money, and so Disney says, "This is a ruined franchise; we don't want anything to do with this anymore." They had to shop the project around, and Fox said, "We'll take the risk for this one," so now the third movie is distributed by Fox.

This is a standard distribution deal. It's like if you go buy a car. If you pay the retail price, get the standard suggested retail price deal, you walk away feeling like you've just been robbed or mugged. That's what this scenario depicts. You can get a better deal than this, and we'll talk about that later when we talk about distribution, marketing, and promotion. You can get a better deal than the standard, don't worry.

Chapter 10

DEVELOPING YOUR STORY AND SCREENPLAY

George Escobar: There is a screenwriting tool I would recommend to start with, because it's free and it accomplishes everything that you need to be able to do as a beginning screenwriter. You'll need to graduate from this tool to MovieMagic. It's really an excellent piece of software. I've never had it crash, which is amazing for a free piece of software, and it's becoming an industry standard. It's available for both PC and Mac, and they're identical in the way they work. The name of it is Celtx. You can download it online at www.celtx.com.

Attendee: A friend of mine just recently introduced me to Celtx. How secure is their software? Are they saving it to their network?

George Escobar: No, they're saving it locally. The reason they invented Celtx was because they wanted it to be a collaboration tool with writers wherever you are in the world, and for that you have to subscribe; that's how they get their money. That part used to be free, but once they got enough people using it, then they started adding charges, which they deserve. They need to make a living.

Celtx supports the standard formatting needed for screenplays, such as: Scene Heading, Action, Character, Dialogue. With these formatting selections you'll be able to ensure that your screenplays are properly formatted and look professional. There are other things you can do with Celtx, so it's up to you discover it.

SCREENWRITING EXERCISE

Let's write a scene that takes place right here in this auditorium. Obviously this is an interior, right? So, to identify that in a script, you express this as "INT." When I started typing the letters I and then N, the software knows that I must be writing an interior scene, so it fills in the rest for me. So I just have to press the return key.

I'm going to be verbose here: "Patrick Henry College"—so we know we're at a college—"Nash Auditorium - Day." Next, I write the description of this scene. When you're writing scene descriptions, you want to be descriptive enough that everybody gets a sense of the space, where you are, and give the production designer

enough information without having to, you know, describe the color of the carpet, unless that's really important to the scene. Maybe the windows: how many windows, or how many people. The way I'm going to do that here is I'm going to describe it as a "Modern classroom." The typical modern classroom has whiteboards, projectors, all the accoutrements of a modern classroom. Without me having to detail it, the production designer will know that, versus a classroom from the eighteenth century. If it's from the eighteenth century, I would write that.

Attendee: You have Patrick Henry College and so forth, literally where we're at. If you were going to represent this as another college, would you put it literally where you were or what you wanted it to represent?

George Escobar: You could do both. If Patrick Henry College didn't exist anywhere in the world, and I was going to shoot it at Liberty University, and I want to make sure that the audience knows that there's this institution called Patrick Henry College in my movie, then I would go ahead and say, "Patrick Henry College." So, modern classroom. What do you think we should say next about you guys?

Attendee: Filled with students.

George Escobar: Okay, "Modern classroom, filled with students." Okay, is that true? Because all of a

sudden, the production designer has the idea of young college students in the room. Isn't it more accurate to say the room is "filled with a mixed crowd of young students and adults?"

There is a stylistic approach to screenwriting that I want to tell you about. It was popularized by Shane Black. He is often referred to as the guy who brought screenwriting to the modern era. In the mid 80's, he was a young screenwriter in his early twenties, a UCLA graduate who wrote a screenplay called *Lethal Weapon*. In previous generations, screenplays were more verbose, but with him, it became one line descriptions sometimes.

Instead of saying it like this:

```
INT. PATRICK HENRY COLLEGE - NASH AUDITORIUM - DAY

Modern classroom filled with a mixed crowd of young students and adults.
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The Shane Black style would be:

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Classroom. Mixed crowd. Students.
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Black would be able to convey the proper intent, but he also tried to convey speed and snap.

If I was Shane Black, this is the way I would describe it —and please don't be offended:

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Mixed crowd of filmmaker wannabes.
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Automatically, the production designer, the set designer, the costume designer mostly, will visualize the scene and the people in it. We could describe it in more detail to explain what this particular crowd represents, because this description alone could be misconstrued as to who you are. If this was read by Hollywood, you guys would be imagined as having spiked hair, tattoos, and a few body piercings—all the characteristics of edgy students you might see at NYU film school

Attendee: So describe it as Christian filmmakers.

George Escobar: There you go, and you'd be a little more kind than Shane Black. You'd say, "Mixed crowd of filmmakers, conservatively dressed." The Christian part I would hold back and have it come out of dialogue. That's probably the first indicator for this scene. So, I'm going to go ahead and remove this up here, and we'll stay with this:

```
Mixed crowd of aspiring filmmakers,
conservatively dressed.
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Let's give a character here. Who would like to be in the screenplay? Any volunteers? Jeffrey? Okay. The first time we see our actor or the main cast member, you capitalize his entire name. So we write it as, "JEFFREY HOOVER," and usually you want to give it a little bit of an age range, so, forty-four?

JEFFREY HOOVER, 44, sits in front, earnest, fastidiously taking notes.

Because you want your actors to be active instead of passive, we add these action descriptions:

He suddenly looks up, raises his hand. The instructor, GEORGE ESCOBAR, takes notice.

I hit the return key and Celtx automatically gives me a different column setting here for dialogue, and I say:

GEORGE
(exasperated)

Yes, Jeff?

Now we want to make sure that the audience knows that this is a Christian crowd, right? What should Jeff say? Maybe something like:

JEFF

I don't think that point is appropriate for a Christian film.

You can have confrontation right here, because George could say, "I disagree," and you've got conflict. You want conflict in almost every scene, every dialogue. Not that they're arguing, but they're fighting for their point of

view. Sometimes it's done in jest, but there's always this tension. Sometimes the conflict is environmental: you know, it's hot, and everybody's having to struggle through that, and so their tempers flare because of the environment that they're in.

Let's say that George has a sarcastic response. In this case, I'm going to do a parenthetical to convey the emotional and physical reaction to Jeff.

George
(glaring)

You don't agree. That's news.

Jeffrey

You're plain wrong, sir.

Then George could continue on with this dialogue depending on what you want the scene to lead to.

As the writer, you need to know what that scene is all about. If Jeff is in a classroom at a secular university, and he's always bringing up the fact that the teacher is not upholding a Christian worldview, you will have a history of confrontation behind their dialogue. The best moments in a movie is when there is context behind what's being said. You can establish that right off the bat, with the very first words of the screenplay, especially if you know the back story of your characters, so that they

don't just come out and say things without having existed before.

So we have to know that Jeffrey is a lifelong Christian. You need to do a biographical history of your main characters, and even your minor characters, as part of your preparation in writing the script. If you know exactly what Jeff's point of view is, and you do the same thing for the George character, then put them in this room with all the baggage of their history together, you will have context in their dialogue.

How long has Jeff been in this class when he says,"You're plain wrong, sir."

George can explode to reveal this: "I've had enough! You've been here eight weeks in my class." Right there you've established their history, and George is making a point. We don't know what the point is, but we want to know what the point is now, because he's upset.

That's another part of screenwriting—is this unfolding story. You don't want to give everything away at once: you want to let the audience have a mystery that they have to solve. That's what allows them to want to watch the next moment and the next moment and for the reader to turn the next page and the next page. The moment your audience catches up to what you're trying to do, the movie's over, they've checked out, because they know exactly what's going to go on. You've watched

movies like that, where you know exactly what's going to happen, and so you watch other aspects of the production rather than the story you're watching.

Now, to make this scene really come alive, you really need good actors. Maybe the lighting needs to be darker. Maybe they're watching something. So you could write something in the description up front that makes it even more dramatic. Let's say this is taking place where a screening was happening. George was showing a movie, and Jeff turns the light on and make his point. Boy, the whole class is going to be upset! You've just raised the stakes.

You've got all of that going for you as a screenwriter. You can control all of that. As you add more of those elements, the harder it is to film, and the more expensive it will be. The size of the classroom, all of those things. You have control over that when you shoot it. Have backup plans in case you're not able to shoot exactly what's on the page, because you know what the point of the page is.

Attendee: Do you do an in-depth character description of all the characters in the movie before you start, or do you write each one as you come to that character?

George Escobar: I like to do my backstory character descriptions before I write the script. Then you can change it, change their history to fit where your story is

going. One of the neatest things is—and this happens not just with me, but I've talked with other writers—you get so much into your story, your characters really begin to talk to you. They tell you what they want to say, and you're just writing down what they telling you.

Attendee: I've read a lot of plays, and many of them don't have all these notes: it's just dialogue. It gets to be where you quit reading who the titles are and read really fast, and in your imagination you're picturing their relationships with each other, what they're doing.

George Escobar: Plays are completely different animals; a screenplay needs more information. You have to write your screenplay in this format. Otherwise, if you're submitting it to anybody or you want somebody in the business to respect what you've done and it doesn't look like a screenplay, that means that you've just disrespected their profession, because you didn't even take the time to understand that screenplays in this business operate by professional standards. It would be like you submitting a legal brief to the Supreme Court and it's written with crayons. Seriously, it's an insult, and it goes to the trash immediately. Because you haven't taken the time to learn the craft, why should I take the time to read something that is disrespectful?

Also, it doesn't allow anybody in the industry to be able to use what you've written to do their job. It's not properly formatted, so they can't time it properly, they

can't budget it properly, they can't read it so that they know what is needed for this scene as a production designer, budget designer, or casting director. You can't break it down into the elements you need to make a movie. The industry will not conform to your style. I'll have people say, "Well, that's my way of writing." Fine, you just keep going your way, and hopefully you'll come to the conclusion that that's not going to work.

Attendee: Where is the copyright done in your model of this? Is that under the LLC?

George Escobar: Well, you write your screenplay. The moment that you've finished it or even while you're in process, you own the copyright to that, you just have to put the little C on it, but then you have to do the filing. You could file it with the Writer's Guild (east or west) and then with the copyright office. You could even submit that online. You definitely want to file it, though. You don't have to, but then you have some measure of protection.

Attendee: In the computer business, if you write software, it's yours, until you have to start proving it.

George Escobar: If you have to start dealing with other people in the industry, they want to know a chain of title. What you're creating is like a house. If you want your house to be occupied and purchased and sold by anybody else, you have to have the title to it. If not, I'd

just move in. If you want some measure of protection, you need to register and copyright it.

Attendee: Would you suggest that we join external organizations like the Screenwriters Guild?

George Escobar: To join those unions you're giving up certain rights and privileges, some freedom, in exchange for some security. It's a judgment you have to make. However, it's not just automatic. You don't wake up someday and say, "I want to join the writer's guild." You have to get invited. You have to qualify. You have to have a certain number of scripts which have been professionally produced within the professionally produced guidelines; they'll tell you what qualifies.

Attendee: Do they have any organizations like that on the Christian side?

George Escobar: There is a professional organization called ICVM (International Christian Visual Media), but there's no organization that says, "You are a screenwriter." You are a screenwriter if you write screenplays and you do a good job. If people want to make your screenplay because it's so good, you're a professional screenwriter. Nobody has to confer any honorary title to you: it's something that you earn by the virtue of your work.

Okay, so does that give you enough to want to use the software? Before, in the old days, you had to do this in Microsoft Word, and it was really difficult.

Attendee: How do you do a title page?

George Escobar: There's a part here where you can do a title page. You click this tab right here. Title, Author, Based on. . . . You can put your stuff in here.

You need to read lots of screenplays to be really good at it. Just search for "free screenplays." It's a very dangerous field, because there's so much garbage out there, but what you want to do is read screenplays that have been professionally produced. That means they are worth making, and people have invested millions of dollars getting that movie made.

Attendee: The index cards tab: how can that be useful?

George Escobar: There's all sorts of tools in here. We won't have time to cover them, but there are examples in the software. The index cards—some people write with 3x5 cards first. A screenplay is typically 90 pages to 120 pages. One page of screenplay is roughly equivalent to one minute of screen time, properly formatted. That's the key word. If your screenplay is not properly formatted, nobody can measure it properly and budget it properly. I said that before, and I can't say it enough.

Attendee: You said one minute per page?

George Escobar: Approximately, yes. Anybody you give your screenplay to in the industry, the first thing they'll do is look at the back. How many pages is this? You're a fresh, young screenwriter, never written a screenplay before, and you submit a screenplay that's 150 pages. Where will that screenplay go? The trash. Won't even read it. Won't even touch it, because you don't know the parameters, which is that most movies, especially when you're starting out, have to be less than two hours. That's because of budget, not just the physical budget of making it, but the exhibition budget.

People will tolerate watching *Avatar* from James Cameron when they've already enjoyed watching his previous films, and the theater owners will tolerate a three and a half hour movie in this case because they know the theaters will be full. They will not tolerate a movie that exceeds two hours because that reduces the number of times they can show your movie, hence reducing the income potential for the theater.

Nowadays, most people in the business want a screenplay that hovers around 110 pages. At 120, you're at the edge. Around 110 is really good because you can go up a little or you can go down to about 90 pages. They'll want you to cut down your screenplay to about 90 pages.

Attendee: But don't make it short.

George Escobar: If it's too short, that's another danger: it's just like going over. If it's not at least 90 pages, where does it go? The garbage, exactly, because you don't know the rules. If you don't know the rules and you don't respect the industry, they don't respect you.

A screenplay, if you look at it in a linear form, has three parts: Act One, obviously, Act Two, and then Three. It consists of setting up your story, the confrontation and conflict, then resolution. There are markers in your screenplay. The two main ones are typically called Plot Point 1 and Plot Point 2. There are other ways to structure a screenplay; this is the basic way.

The story is headed in a certain direction, but then it's redirected by what's called an "inciting incident." Something happens to the character's life: they lose their job, they lose their health, they're given an opportunity to pursue gold—something. They're heading in this direction, when suddenly they hit Plot Point 1 at about minute 20 to 24 into the movie, and it spins it in a different direction. Sorry to ruin things for you, but from now on, you can watch a movie with your watch and you can see these things happening. Then there are midpoints and minor plotting. Plot Point 2, the same thing happens. Your story is going a different direction, then something happens here, which will lead us into the resolution.

You will need to spend days and months learning the craft of screenwriting to be really, really good at this. I'm going to talk a little bit about developing the story that can then compel you to write the screenplay of that story and what you should be looking for.

One of the best ways to study screenplays is to have the screenplay in front of you and to have the movie that was made from it. You can see how they did the plotting by the way that the movie is broken down into the sequences. You've seen those scene selections, "Scenes 1-4" and so on. Usually they do a good job of bunching together the sequences that belong together. Movies are made out of sequences, like "an escape" from prison sequence.

Let's write one right now. How many scenes, at a minimum, do you need to escape from prison? I contend three. One is showing you in prison, and you, in essence, plotting your escape, really briefly. Two, the actual escape —you know, just broken through. Then three, the aftermath, how you ended up in the escape. Of course, it could be a lot lengthier.

So sequences are made out of scenes, as many scenes as you need to tell your sequence. Let's say a sequence is usually three to four minutes, and then the scenes themselves are anywhere from thirty seconds to about one or two minutes. It gets to a point sometimes that it seems pretty mechanical. I will actually do a spreadsheet.

Somebody will give me a manuscript or a novel, so I'll start on my spreadsheet, and I'll have numbers here that indicate my running time of the movie, so by that a certain amount of time, I'll only have fifteen minutes left to get the guy out of jail.

How do I divide that up? It's a matter of budgeting. "Okay, I'll spend thirty seconds doing this, and then two minutes doing that." I know it doesn't sound very artistic, but if you do that, it gives you a sense of pacing in your screenplay, and then you can maximize that thirty seconds. It'd better be a really dynamic scene if I only spend thirty seconds to get the guy out of jail. If I want to make it more languid, slower, I'll give the luxury of three minutes for that particular scene. That means a different kind of pacing, a different kind of style for shooting that particular scene, rather than this really intense thirty seconds. You're in control. There's no rule that it has to be thirty seconds or three or five minutes. It's what you're trying to accomplish during that sequence for the movie that you're trying to create.

Attendee: How long would you shoot for one sequence? If it was three to four minutes, how much would you shoot for that, just in case?

George Escobar: If your page count says that your scene is three minutes long, that means you have three pages that you need to shoot that day. If it all happens in one location, you could probably shoot that in a day, and

you'll probably have ten to fifteen takes of each shot on your shot list, comfortably. If it's in multiple locations, then you've got to do what's called a "company move," and move everybody to another location. You might only be able to shoot one page, because you're losing so much time in setting up, tearing down, traveling, setting up, tearing down.

THE FIVE ESSENTIAL "P's"

The essential P's for filmmakers. This is something you're NOT going to get in any of the screenwriting books. It's something I've been thinking about and I want you to consider these essentials:

1. ***Predesign***: What I mean by that, though, is that God knows who you are and He designed you, so He knows what you are going to be capable of doing. Relish that thought, that He's gifted you with ideas and stories! If you have been blessed with the ability to tell stories or at least appreciate them, that's a gift. You have been predesigned to do that, and you need to embrace it.

2. ***Providence***: God has allowed things to happen in your life. Your experiences are unique to yourself, for you to recognize that you need Him, a relationship with Him. Again, draw upon that. Make sure that you begin to reflect not just on

how God designed you and made you, but how He's already worked in your life, because that's the kind of story that begins to resonate and becomes real within your characters.

3. ***Prayer***... for you, your family, your customers, your audience. Because one of the best ways to connect with people other than yourself, is to pray for them.

4. ***Patience***: Sometimes we want to accomplish so much today that we shortchange the way we do it, not realizing that if we'll just be patient we will have the full maturity of God's providence, His answer to prayer, and the fullness of the way He's designed us. What you create will live way beyond your own lifespan, so just be a little bit patient and don't rush things.

5. ***Perseverance***: You need to have the will to finish the job once you've started.

Hopefully, one of the lessons you'll take away from here is that it's not only a business, but it's got all these pieces: I need to work with people, I need to rely upon God and look at the economy He's built around me and around my community. Then take it one step at a time. It could so overwhelm you that you are frozen from doing anything, but if you take it a step at a time, people begin to recognize that, and they'll begin to help you.

In filmmaking, it all begins right here, developing the ideas that God wants you to have. The best stories come when you're praying and open to God's ideas. If you're not praying for that, then you sort of have to invent these things. People usually tell me that it's a vision that they've had. I can't judge—nobody can and they shouldn't—whether that's true or not. Only you can know for sure, and that's going to require earnest prayer. You need knowledge and wisdom, you can even have the mechanics—you may know everything about filmmaking—but undertaking this out of reverence and the fear of the Lord is crucial.

We were talking about responsibility earlier: how what you're doing is really the same work as a preacher or teacher. You're going to take somebody down the wrong path or the right path with your movies. There are only two kinds of movies. Did you know that? There are multiple genres out there. There are romantic comedies, thrillers, adventure stories. However, there are only two kinds of movies: one kind of movie draws people away from Christ, away from who God is, and the other draws them to the Lord.

There's only a miniscule amount of those movies, because we haven't done our job as Christians. We haven't feared God enough to do what He wants us to do. Hey, it is hard work. But those people who don't believe in Him, they're willing to do it, and yet we're the

one's afraid. We're afraid of the hard work and the sacrifice. So, have a reverent fear of God to not go beyond what He wants you to do, but also to do what He wants you to do.

DEVELOPING STORY IDEAS

A great way of developing story ideas is just to look around you. Whom can you serve? Whom do you know that is already serving others? You can tell their stories. Just begin with that, and you'll find that it becomes a story beyond yourself.

I recently watched a documentary that my wife got for me from the public library, called *Film School*. It's about four NYU film students, and all of them, except for one, were what I call personal angst stories. Something has hurt them in the past, and now they think they have a profound truth about the human condition that they have to tell everybody else, because nobody else has ever gone through it before in their entire life and now they have a universal truth that has to be told. It could be absolutely true, but the fact is, usually nobody cares. Most film students, that's the movies they make: the personal angst story. Try to get beyond that and see who can be served by the story you're about to tell.

I gave you an example yesterday of that gentleman who was doing a documentary in Michigan and what a great

story it would be to tell of the businessman who was taking these foreclosed homes, rebuilding them with the labor of the people who lost their homes, and being able to give it back to them with the right financing. Another true part of that story is that the city had their own redevelopment program that was just floundering, and this Christian businessman was putting them to shame, so they didn't want him to succeed. They put up roadblocks, and permits were not being issued. So it became this true battle of bureaucracies that had gone astray from serving the needs of its community. What a great story, a great platform.

By developing and focusing on His stories, it takes you away from falling in love with your one idea. Usually people get involved in filmmaking because they have this dream, this one story they want to make. It could be brilliant, but generally it isn't. You have to really test it by allowing others to critique it properly. You need to create a scoring mechanism for your work, an objective one, and measure it against other films, other movies, and other opinions.

You should be working on multiple story ideas anyway. That means you have to pray a lot to get those multiple stories. People will bring them to you too if they know you're open to other stories than the one you have hung onto all your life. Ask yourself: what are the unmet needs of the audience? Look for problems that you have. How

will you solve your problems? Who's already solving your problems? Yet make sure that it's not one of those personal angst stories and that it's more universal.

For example, in *Come What May*, there were multiple needs in that story. Caleb wanted to succeed because he's smart, and he wanted to win the national championship, but his real motives started out more selfish than how he ended up at the end. For his mom, it was the same thing. He was sort of a reflection of her, a byproduct of her. Her real motive was to make sure others didn't go through the same experience that she did. I won't give away that plot point, but you'll know why she's been motivated all along. For the husband, he's just trying to keep the marriage together and be a good example for his son, because they're both Christians. For Rachel, she's trying to hang onto the teachings of her father, struggling with whether what she's been taught is what she believes herself. She ultimately makes a decision in a very, very subtle way at the end of the movie. We know she's competent, but, at the end, she's not doing a legal brief on her laptop: instead she's doing "Rachel's Recipes." She's drawing back to what we know she really likes: she loves to bake. That she's going to be a happy homemaker is not the point, but rather that she's now embracing her gifts and interests in a new way.

I draw those examples because all of us have a sense of those needs, but those stories were not driven because I

personally had those experiences. I knew in talking to people that those were unmet needs in storytelling. People don't see those stories all the time, about courtship in particular.

Ask this question: what is the value that you will give in your stories? Is this something that God would bless? Is He blessing it upon others already?

Look for sloppy solutions. Maybe that movie that you want to make has already been done before, but not done very well. So fix it! How can it be retold and told better? What are the trends affecting your audience: cultural, political, educational trends?Because I'm a homeschooling dad, I could draw from that. A trend that we wanted to show that is normative within the homeschooling environment is that courtship is being recognized as maybe a better way than traditional dating patterns. Hollywood is never going to make that movie—or maybe they have, but not in the way we want to show it. So that's another way to develop stories.

This is an interesting phrase, the "pipeline of promotion." Meaning that you've got this story, but will anybody want to see it? So you begin to develop your target audiences. Later I want to show you some charts and how to realize that. We'll help you to understand who you need to partner with, so that your story gets seen out there. That way it'll make money and get a return for yourself and your investors and the people

who help you, so you can make another one and then another one. If you make this movie, who's going to buy it?

We'll talk about growing audience profiles, developing relationships with your audience as well as with your supporters. You know, you need to check in with your constituency every few months, otherwise you lose touch with them and you don't know what their needs are. The good news is that if you begin now, a year from now you'll be a much better writer. God will mature your storytelling abilities, if you're earnestly seeking His stories.

Chapter 11

CREATING DIGITAL WORKFLOWS

George Escobar: The mechanics of modern feature film production nowadays must be centered around a digital workflow system. We can't show you in one hour precisely how to make a movie using digital film technology, but we can do an overview of all the pieces that are involved. Everything that we'll be talking about here is being used at the highest level of filmmaking.

We're going to be talking about *Lord of the Rings* as the pinnacle of that digital workflow. The same workflow and many of the technologies used in that movie are now available to you at home. The tools are smaller scale, it may take you a lot more rendering time, but it's all there for you to use.

The barriers of entry have dropped dramatically, so there is no excuse for not being able to make a good

quality feature film from a production perspective. It all boils down to story and your tenacity to get good casting and all the other attributes.

Let's take a look at this clip.

[*Lord of the Rings* clip—"Even the smallest person can change the course of the future."]

There's a big theme there: "Even the smallest person can change the course of the future." You can paraphrase and say, "Even the smallest Christian filmmaker can change the face of culture." That's one of the core messages we want to leave you with.

In making these big budget movies—and we all love them, and we consume them—every one of them started with a filmmaker who made smaller films. It's not uncommon that most of these guys got their start making what kind of movies? Horror movies. Including Peter Jackson. The scale of production for *Lord of the Rings* definitely set the bar very high for what can be achieved when a company like New Line believes in a filmmaker like Peter Jackson and a whole country is available to him like New Zealand, and they have eight years to make their film.

Peter Jackson was definitely an inspirational leader who had a big vision and was able to sell his vision for *Lord of the Rings* to New Line Cinema, who believed in him, allowing him to make three films simultaneously.

Imagine undertaking a project that would take eight years! From when John F. Kennedy announced the Apollo program in the early sixties to when man landed on the moon was about a decade. This is not quite as big an undertaking as that, but from a filmmaking perspective, this hadn't been done before: eight years being spent on one single project by a single production company—and at that time the overall budget of $280 million in the late 1990s, early 2000s was astronomical. That's a huge budget, but the movie went on to gross $6 billion.

The reason I am talking about this particular film is to look at it in the realm of possibility for us as Christian filmmakers. Some Christian director will emerge, with the skill and talent of Peter Jackson, that can be underwritten by maybe a coalition of exhibitors who believe Christians do have a place in the marketplace. Maybe it is a distributor who finally comes alongside and says, "Okay, I believe in what you guys are doing, and we'll finance it. If you want to tell the entire depth and breadth of the Bible and it's going to take fifteen years to make those films, we'll give you the five hundred million you're asking for or even a billion dollars, to make those movies."

It's not unrealistic for us to think in those terms. Again, it starts small, by simply learning the craft of filmmaking. I present this as an aspirational goal because it's being

done and has been done in the secular marketplace and we shouldn't think that that's closed to us, as if that's a door that won't ever be opened.

The danger is that we bite off more than we can chew immediately. There is a company here in the northern Virginia area, who for the last two years has been trying to make a movie called *The Flood*. I haven't read the screenplay; I've only looked at what they've tried to do on the internet. I had the chance to talk to the gentleman who's spearheading that, a couple of years ago. They want to make a $100 million movie financed through crowd-funding, through memberships and sponsorships —and they've never made a feature film before in their entire life. Now they want to make this $100 million movie to compete with Hollywood. I think that's a little bit overreaching and unrealistic. Your vision might be grand, and your goal might be noble, and certainly the Lord has in His economy the money to produce any-sized film that we care to imagine, as long as it's ordained by Him. I point that out to say, yeah, there are filmmakers who have those grandiose ambitions. He might well succeed because he's able to persuade enough people, but you know, after spending two years on it, there's still no product and no production going on. That time could be better spent making smaller films, proving yourself in the marketplace, proving your craft.

I get email from people—not a lot, but they come often enough that I just want to warn you—somebody says, they'll start off with these words: "The Lord has given me a vision. The Lord has laid upon my heart to make a $100 million movie about this or that." It's hard to get them to see that that's an incredible vision. Having never done any movies before, they just woke up one day with this idea or passion in their heart, inspired by maybe seeing *Lord of the Rings* or some other venture.

I'm not trying to bash your dreams or hopes or aspirations, but you need to be level-set.

FILM STOCK OR DIGITAL BITS?

There's been contention between making a movie with film or digital. I don't want to spend much time on this, especially if it's a subject that you don't care about. So let's just take a quick poll here. Does anybody care whether they're shooting a movie in 35mm or with digital cinematography? Okay, yes, tell me what your concern is there.

Attendee: I'd just like to know the production quality is equivalent.

George Escobar: That's an excellent question. Can current digital film technology match 35mm film? The answer is absolutely, and it even exceeds 35mm film when you get down to the actual exhibition of the movie.

When you capture a pristine image on a 35mm negative —properly lit, balanced, everything—it's a gorgeous, gorgeous picture that's almost unequaled in quality. The problem is you're not ever showing your negative print to anybody. Even what's called the positive print from that negative is not what ends up at the theater: it goes through various stages of degradation. So what you end up with on the screen or on your DVD from that 35mm film, is really inferior to digital film.

Attendee: An example of that is a cassette or an eight-track tape; the hundredth replay is pretty sad.

George Escobar: But it's only been recently that that statement's been true, because we now have imaging capture mechanisms that are of the right size and scale and resolution that now match 35mm film, and we have the processors from a digital workflow all the way through that can maintain the integrity of that image.

Some people say, "Well, all we need to do is to take a 35mm, transfer it over to digital, and you'll have an equivalent." That's absolutely true. You can make a direct transfer to a digital positive image of that film negative and work from there. You'll get equal quality, but you've also just have spent thousands, if not tens of thousands of dollars for negative film that you put in an archive somewhere; that money could have been spent on other aspects of your production.

For the purposes of our exercise and moving forward, we're only going to talk about digital film technology and techniques. That's what's available to you and what's available to all of us.

The leading purveyor of digital technology is George Lucas and his productions. They've been pioneering this and pushing the envelope since the late '90's, and Sony was very much behind the digital film technology process, except they've been eclipsed by a little company called RED. How many of you here have read about it or know about the RED camera? We'll be talking about that camera extensively later on, because that's the camera of choice for us and that's what we used in our second film. Yes, Ian?

Ian Reid: Peter Jackson was one of the filmmakers who's used the RED camera.

George Escobar: Yes, in his recent films. A lot more movies are being made with the RED camera, and there's a really good reason why. We're also going to talk about a good alternative to the RED, which is the DSLR cameras, which are very, very cost-effective.

By the way, the last item on that slide, *Slumdog Millionaire*, was made with a digital camera, and it won Academy Awards for both best picture and cinematography. There's no longer any bias or stigma against using digital film in the business at all. I'm not going to get into all of

it: just know that it's a lot more expensive to work with film. Not just the actual cost of the film itself, but the costly workflow is just ridiculous, especially when you have really good alternatives. You can easily save fifty thousand, if not hundreds of thousands of dollars by avoiding film, and invest that in other areas of your production.

DIGITAL WORKFLOW

How do we produce a movie using digital workflow? The process is similar to traditional film. You have to have a project development cycle. You have to understand your project and then come up with a plan to execute on that. There's preproduction, production, post-production, marketing and distribution. We'll look at each of those phases in the workflow in bite-sized chunks to give you a comprehensive look at the filmmaking workflow.

As you're planning your project, you need to look at both story development and product planning as two approaches to get the same job done. Story development can come before product planning, or sometimes product planning comes first so you know the scale of the story you can tell.

The product planning approach is simply identifying what resources you have available for your movie project. It could be meager, as in "I have myself and my brother

and sister to work on a project," or "I've got my whole church," or "I've got four months of my life to be able to dedicate to the production side, so what story can we tell successfully?"

The other approach is, "I've got this story. I just got the rights to this book: it takes place during World War II. So what project planning infrastructure do I need to secure in order to successfully tell this story?

In either approach, it will all boil down to knowing and securing the resources you'll need for the story.

This means figuring out the budget: how much money you need to raise, or how much money you've got in your bank account to finance it. If it's not enough, how are you going to finance it?

Budgeting and financing are two different exercises. One, budgeting, is the allocation of funds across the activities which you are going to be undertaking. The other one, financing, is really about securing the source of the money and how and when that money should be spent effectively for the project. It's cash-flow management: "When do you need to spend the money on and how does it get paid out?"

Your budget will determine the technical parameters of the movie across the board, not just whether it will be shot on film or digital. Even in the digital world, there are now so many options. You need to really understand the

implication of shooting between a RED camera, an HD camera, a DSLR, or your phone. You could make a movie with your iPhone if you wanted to.

You need to know what your final format is: how is your product going to be shown? It's an easy question to answer for us, as micro-budget filmmakers: it's going to end up on DVD. Then, hopefully, it'll be picked up and shown on cable or online, so those are important considerations, too—Blu-Ray, as well. Blu-Ray and DVD are your main platforms for delivery. DVD still dominates Blu-Ray, but that's fast changing.

The camera in front of you is a Canon XLR-1S. An Academy Award-winning director, Steven Soderbergh, shot a feature film using that camera. It was considered state of the art almost seven years ago; now it's almost an antique. You can certainly use that camera to shoot a feature film, if you know that your movie is just going to end up on DVD, it's not going to go to Blu-Ray, or it's going to go online—as long as it isn't high-definition, because it only shoots at standard definition. There's nothing that camera can't do for you to be able to tell your story. Six or seven years ago, everybody was using that camera to make their low-budget movie. Good for them then, it's good for you now, assuming you know your final format output.

That means you need to know your audience a little bit. We've talked about audiences from a story development

perspective, but in this case, what do consumers need in order to *watch* your movie? That's the kind of audience question that's being asked here.

Finally, the type of equipment you're going to use is going to be a function of cost (how much money you have), availability, and ease of use (both your own skill set, and that of the people you are working with).

Okay, so we have a bunch of cameras. Again, final output: internet, short run DVDs, full-length theatrical, M&D-style DVD.

Just to give you a sense of the relative sizes and scale of the image, right now if you go home and turn on your TV, more than likely that image is at 480p or progressive. It's a clean, robust picture, better than any picture that had appeared for the last fifty years until very recently. Now they've got 720p and 1080p hi-definition screens.

When you go to the theater, you'll get a 2k image, predominantly, if it's projected digitally and most 35mm film are really 2k, in terms of image. That means 2000 pixels of resolution going across horizontally on the frame.

The RED ONE camera shoots at 4k. There's a new Mysterium chip that they just upgraded in the RED camera that will shoot in 5k. So you can shoot something that you can't even project, because most projectors max

out at 4k, which that 5k already exceeds 35mm boundaries, and it's just going to keep going up.

So, is 35mm film stock, finally and definitively, dead? No, not really; there are old adherents to it, and the only way it's going to die is if Fuji and Kodak stop making it. Then it will definitely be dead.

As the video format grows, the requirements to move those massive files through your digital workflow increases, like your hard drive space or the processor that you need in your computer.

Right now we're able to take a direct feed from a Panasonic SD camera that Kylene is working right into that iMac. It's recording me in real time. The other camera there is the Canon; it's an HD Canon XHA1, that's the camera we used to film *Come What May*. By the way, even though we have these cameras available to us and they're not officially "owned" by Advent Film Group, I'm going to say that, essentially, I've already broken the "rule," which is to never buy a camera unless you can absolutely justify it. There's always somebody else who cannot resist buying a camera that you want to use that you can borrow.

That camera that we used for making *Come What May* was lent to us on a nearly-permanent basis because we did a documentary for an organization. They asked us what camera we needed to use, because we didn't even

have the gear. We told them we wanted that camera. They told us that as part of our deal we could have it for as long as we needed, and they use it too, whenever they need it.

Through the Lord's providence, there were two other people, unbeknownst to me, who bought the exact same camera. So I borrowed their cameras, and we had a three-camera shoot on our first feature film. The "A" camera for primary action, the "B" camera, not just as a secondary camera, but filming the same action at the same time. Because we were working with actors who were not professional, if they had a good take, it was great to have another angle on it, as they'd never be able to do it again. The third camera was mostly doing some isolation shots and inserts and was operated by students. That way, if they got a great shot, perfect: we could use it, but there was no heavy dependence on that camera. It was a good teaching tool, as it got students right on the set doing something critical, which in most productions never happens. You don't have students filming on the set. We believe that we need to train by doing it hands-on. That's why I would encourage you to do that in your own productions.

I never did buy a new camera. That Panasonic AG-DVX100 and this Canon XL1S camera, retailed for about three thousand, maybe thirty-five hundred dollars each. Our church used these for a number of years, and

they were getting rid of them. I bought them for five hundred dollars. They still have a really good market value, and they're still very useful for most shoots.

By the way, two Academy Award winning directors, Steven Soderbergh and Danny Boyle, used those old Panasonic and Canon cameras to make major feature films in 2002 and 2003, respectively. So if that's all you can afford to rent or find to borrow, use them.

I want to repeat a camera rule you should follow: never buy a camera. I would discourage you from doing so, because you can always borrow somebody else's camera. If you're going to spend any money, buy lights and tripods and things that don't really change. Cameras change so often now that it's really not practical, especially since you're only going to use it—if your going to be making feature films—maybe five or six weeks out of the year and otherwise it sits on your shelf. Now, if you're doing weddings and other type of work with that camera, then of course you should buy it, because it will pay for itself very quickly.

I want to amend this rule just a bit: if the cost of renting the camera is equal to the cost of buying it, then buy it. As soon as you are done filming, SELL it.

For example, the latest, greatest camera for low budget indie films is the Sony NEX FS100.

It has a Super35mm imager. It supports interchangeable lenses. It beats every DSLR in the market in terms of performance, image quality, support for sound, every metric you can think of. It cost $6,500 to buy with a lens package. You can also rent it for about $400 a day. The math is simple. If your film shoot is over 16 days, then buying the camera makes sense. Does it still make sense to buy if you only need it for 8 days? The answer is yes.

Here's why:

1. Purchase price: $6,500
2. Resell price for lightly used camera - $5,700
3. $6,500 - $5,700 = $800 (loss)
4. Your "virtual" rental rate for 8 Days is $100/day

For a 16 day shoot, your rental rate to yourself drops to $50 a day. That's much better than $400 per day.

But you must do one thing: sell your gear as soon as possible. Don't fall in love with it.





The Sony NEX FS100 Camera Package - $6,550

Chapter 12

FILMS BY ADVENT

George Escobar: Our distributor for *Come What May* is Provident Films, the same distributor for *Facing the Giants* and *Fireproof*. Securing Provident Films as a distributor is a miraculous story. In the realm of filmmaking you'll find that—these are just statistical numbers, nice to have and hopefully it's not discouraging—out of the three or four thousand films made year in and year out, of which you're about to join that fray, maybe five percent of them get some sort of distribution offer from somebody saying, "Hey, I like your film, and I want to distribute it." We received ten distribution offers for *Come What May*, among them Provident Films.

Because of my background of having worked with some folks in Hollywood, including Howard Stringer, who became the CEO of Sony, I was prepared, and I had written a letter to him, saying, "Dear Howard, I hope you remember me from Tele TV. We have this little

movie—I would love for you to take just ten seconds to ask the head of Provident Films to at least take a meeting with us." Knowing the kind of gentleman he is, you know, with prior relationships you do that out of courtesy, and they'll make the call. There's not a promise there or anything; it's just opening the door.

That would have been the logical and wise thing to do from an industry standard, wouldn't you say? I didn't do that, because I felt like I was forcing the issue. I said, "Lord, if you want Provident Films to be our distributor, I'm going to leave it up to you."

So what the Lord did is He had three people, separately from each other, send a copy of *Come What May* to the head of Provident Film's acquisitions and development. One of them was his former college roommate! I would never ever know who his college roommate was, nor could I ask his college roommate to send a copy of *Come What May*, but the Lord knew who this guy was, and God prompted him to do it. So when he got a package from his college roommate, saying, "You've got to watch this movie, and you should really distribute this one," he really paid attention to it, and we started a dialogue.

I share this with you, again, because I cannot say it enough: God is at work. He is at work in this medium, in this movement, and in each one of us. Allow Him to work: don't always take the reins and forge ahead and think you've got the answers. Always be listening to His

voice. Because it's there, and He's not working independently from you, but in concert with you.

I want to show you this trailer of *HERO*, so you can see the scale of this production.

[To view the *HERO* movie trailer, please visit www.HeroFamilyMovie.com]

Now I want to show you the teaser trailer that Ian Reid did for us right before he went to school, because it became a really good tool for raising funds. How do you convey what kind of movie you're trying to make when you don't have footage, you don't have a cast, and you don't have a crew—when all you have is one AFG intern?

[Plays *HERO* teaser trailer]

At that time, the title of the movie was called *One Good Man*. That teaser trailer effectively raised probably $500,000. Because you get the heart of what the movie is all about, people got excited and wanted to support this. If you want to work on a movie, make sure you develop a good teaser trailer.

We like to identify three audiences for each of our films:

1. **The core target audience** - The people who have the greatest need and interest in seeing your movie constitutes your core target audience. This is a smaller group in overall population size relative to the affinity

and affiliate audiences, but they will be the most vocal and supportive audience you can find. If you make a movie for a core target audience, for example: *homeschool moms and their teen daughters interested in the purity movement*, then they will find your movie. And if it is good, they will spread its merits like wildfire within this audience network. Core audiences generally belong to a club, group, organization, or association that supports their core beliefs.

2. **The affinity audience** - A wider audience circle outside your core target will be made up of people who are sympathetic to your story or the message of the film. Instead of primarily homeschool moms and their teen daughters from the core target audience example, the affinity audience will include moms and daughters outside of homeschooling and those interested in the *genre* of your film, such as young adult drama or comedy. They may not be belong to a group or organization related to the subject matter of your film, but they may subscribe to publications and/or be members of an organization that promotes the values identified in your film, such as the American Family Association, or they listen regularly to Focus On The Family radio.

3. **The affiliate audiences.** Enlarging the circle even wider, the affiliate audience is those who like family-oriented movies, who attend church regularly, just like

those in the core and affinity audiences, but do not belong to any organization in a formal sense.

It's good to know up front the realities of where the market is for your story or your movie, because you're about to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars, maybe even millions of dollars, plus a couple of years of your life on it.

EXERCISE: AUDIENCE REACH AND PENETRATION

Our current film project takes places during the French and Indian War era. How do you develop a target audience for that? One of the exercises that we have to go through to show the investor why we need to spend what we propose to, the justification for it, is to create a potential audience spreadsheet.

If we believe that the movie we're about to make is going to resonate well with the hard-core Christian audience, who are they? They are the ones who have self-selected themselves by going to see *Facing The Giants* and *Fireproof*. Let's take the best success of that audience and quantify that. First, we add the box office revenues of $10.1 million for *Facing The Giants* and $33.4 million for *Fireproof* and average it out to $21.8 million. Then we take the most recent film that was created for that audience, *Letters to God*, and look at the box office return there: it's $2.6

million. Clearly not at the same level, but you want to be fair to that target audience; they'll accept one set of movies and reject another. That $2.6 million represents 12% of the $21.8 million average of the other successful ones. We're going to use that percentage to estimate what the box office return will be from the audience of our next film.

Let's look at the formula here. I'm using the 12% derived from the core target audience, multiplying it against the average box office results of these three films (FTG, Fireproof, LTG), which is $15 million. (12% x $15 million = $1.8 million). So if we make this movie, the estimated return is only $1.8 million in theatrical box office from the core target audience. That doesn't look that appealing: it means we're going to need to make a movie that will appeal to a wider audience, because right now the current budget we're looking at is somewhere between five and six million, so we know we're going to lose money instantly if we proceed without finding a bigger audience.

It turns out that the next set of moviegoing audience has a great affinity toward period movies. *The Last of the Mohicans* made $75 million at the box office, *The Patriot*, $113 million. and *Dances with Wolves*, $184 million. The lowest earner is *The New World*, which grossed only $12 million. We think the folks who saw these movies will be interested in what we have to bring. Following the same

formula as before, we estimate a potential revenue of $13 million from this audience.

Then we look at the affiliate audience. This audience isn't necessarily attracted to period movies. When you go to Box Office Mojo, The Numbers, or Amazon and select a movie title, there is usually a recommendation list of other movies, stating, "People who watch these movies also watched these other movies." That's where we can get these affiliate audience selections. They're self-identifying themselves, "I like these movies, but I also like this." It ranges from *Australia* to *Kingdom of Heaven*, *The Blind Side*, and *The Ultimate Gift*. You go through the same equation, and adding all this up gives you an aggregate potential return across the three audience groups.

Since our movie is designed to be of similar scope and scale as *The Last of the Mohicans*, we think there's a potential, not a guarantee, but a potential to earn $23.4 million at the box office. That's not completely out of reach, considering that *Fireproof*, with much less production value and perhaps less notoriety than this new film will have, was able to earn $33 million.

I think our next film will generate enough buzz, because it's a historical film made by Christian filmmakers about a true story during an important period in America's birth as a nation. We think that not only the homeschooling community would rally, but also the

churches and Focus On The Family, because it's about God's sovereignty and faithfulness.

The story is about two young girls in an immigrant family from Germany—true story—who immigrate during the 1750s and settle on the western frontier in Pennsylvania. The start of the French and Indian War causes conflict in the frontiers, and the two young daughters are taken captive by the Indians. One of them, the older one, manages to escape with some other captives, journeying across two hundred miles of terrain while being chased by Indians, and manages to get back to civilization. The younger sister—they were separated early on in their captivity—doesn't come back until ten years later from when she was taken captive.

So you've got this powerful true story that takes place in a real environment, not just with this family, but also the geopolitics of its time: General Washington (a young colonel at the time) interacting with the British, William Pitt the Elder making key decisions about how to handle this war, eventually causing Britain to win, which then affects the way the war is paid for and in turn leads to the American Revolution, the Quakers, who through their inaction and pacifism cause the exacerbation of the war. We're dealing with all of that, and at the same time we're dealing with this on a very personal level, so we think it's going to be a very, very powerful story that many people are going to be talking about.

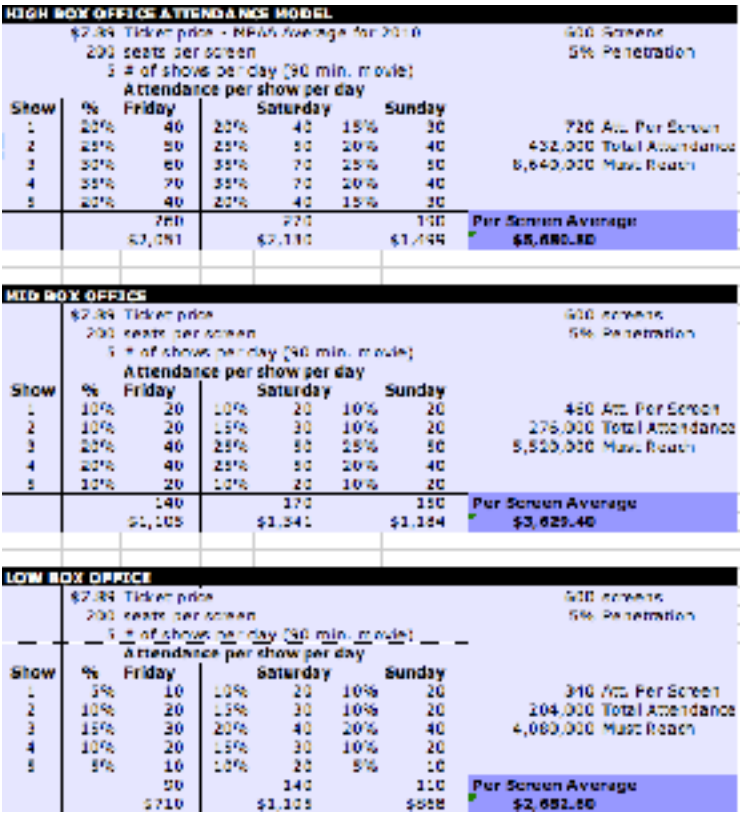
This number here is not unrealistic. It's not guaranteed, but we think we could get there.

Attendee: Does it account for inflation as well? *Last of the Mohicans* is an older movie, so what that means is that it might be more.

George Escobar: As far as inflation, I think we factored that in for that one, because it was so far back.

THEATRICAL ATTENDANCE MODEL

We developed a spreadsheet that models the potential theatrical attendance for each of our films.



HIGH BOX OFFICE ATTENDANCE MODEL

$7.89 Ticket price - MPAA Average for 2010
200 seats per screen
5 # of shows per day (90 min. movie)
Attendance per show per day

Show	%	Friday	%	Saturday	%	Sunday	
1	20%	40	20%	40	15%	30	720 Avg. Per Screen
2	25%	50	25%	50	20%	40	432,000 Total Attendance
3	30%	60	35%	70	25%	50	8,640,000 Max. Reach
4	35%	70	35%	70	20%	40	
5	20%	40	20%	40	15%	30	
		260		270		190	Per Screen Average
		$2,051		$2,130		$1,499	$5,680.80

600 Screens
5% Penetration

MID BOX OFFICE

$7.89 Ticket price
200 seats per screen
5 # of shows per day (90 min. movie)
Attendance per show per day

Show	%	Friday	%	Saturday	%	Sunday	
1	10%	20	10%	20	10%	20	460 Avg. Per Screen
2	10%	20	15%	30	10%	20	276,000 Total Attendance
3	20%	40	25%	50	25%	50	5,520,000 Max. Reach
4	20%	40	25%	50	20%	40	
5	10%	20	10%	20	10%	20	
		140		170		150	Per Screen Average
		$1,105		$1,341		$1,184	$3,629.40

600 screens
5% Penetration

LOW BOX OFFICE

$7.89 Ticket price
200 seats per screen
5 # of shows per day (90 min. movie)
Attendance per show per day

Show	%	Friday	%	Saturday	%	Sunday	
1	5%	10	10%	20	10%	20	310 Avg. Per Screen
2	10%	20	15%	30	10%	20	204,000 Total Attendance
3	15%	30	20%	40	20%	40	4,080,000 Max. Reach
4	10%	20	15%	30	10%	20	
5	5%	10	10%	20	5%	10	
		90		140		110	Per Screen Average
		$710		$1,105		$868	$2,682.60

The model assumes an the average ticket price of $7.89 and that the average theater seats about two hundred people. With a 90 minute movie, you can probably have 5 shows a day for that screen, starting at 12:30 in the afternoon and ending around 10:30 at night, with half an hour in between shows. We'll use the MID BOX OFFICE chart for our analysis. Let's say that on the very opening weekend, on Friday, you anticipate only 10% of people will show up to fill those seats: so 20 people, then another 20 for the second show, 40 for each of the third

and fourth show (since these are prime time hours), and finally back to 20 for the fifth and final show. So, if you get 140 people to show up for that screen on opening day, you'll earn $1,050. On Saturday, more people have time in the afternoons and they have the day off, so you increase your attendance percentage to 10%, 15%, 25%, 25%, then back down to 10% respectively for each show. We'll calculate Sunday's attendance to be about the same as Friday's, with maybe a little bit more in the afternoon because, again, people are off work. So the weekend's total per screen average is $3,629.

We want to open this movie to at least 600 screens. If we make a two hour movie, the maximum we can show it everyday is four shows a day. If we make it into a ninety-minute movie, maybe at the sacrifice of the storytelling, we can show it five times a day and generate more revenue. Instead of just above $3,000 per screen average, it's now $3,600, because we have that one extra show to generate revenue. So now you know why those 90 minutes to 120 minutes is very contentious in the industry. Theater owners always want shorter movies, while the filmmakers always want something a little bit longer to better tell the story (they hope).

Attendee: Who makes the final determination on how long the movie is going to be? Can the distributor can force you to cut your movie?

George Escobar: Absolutely, happens all the time.

Attendee: By how much?

George Escobar: Sometimes a full half hour. It depends on how long your original version was. Almost every movie faces that contention. There are ways to mitigate that, and we're going to talk about that when we go into distribution. I just wanted to give you guys a sense that this is not rocket science. You can do this modeling yourself.

Attendee: Those numbers could be a little worse than what you projected, because they show over twenty minutes of advertisements and previews at most theaters. So what you're really looking at, if you have a two hour movie, can only be shown every two and a half hours.

George Escobar: That's correct.

Attendee: So what do we say about *Avatar*: James Cameron wanting to shoot a three hour movie?

George Escobar: He can because he has the clout based on his previous success with *Titanic*. He was proven right with Avatar, earning $2 billion in box office worldwide revenue. For the next movie, if he demands a five hour time-slot, they'll probably give it to him, because he has proven he can make money for them.

Attendee: I live in the D.C. area, and tickets are about ten or eleven dollars.

George Escobar: $7.89 is the average ticket price across the country as of 2010. You can get current data from the MPAA, the Motion Pictures Association of America, of which the studios are members.

To mitigate control by distributors and to avoid their excess profit-taking, our plan for this movie is to do what's called a "service deal." We will take the financial risk of bringing the movie out to theaters by raising the money for the Prints and Advertising (P&A) and hiring a distributor to book the theaters and collect the box office receipts. Because the distributor is not risking their own money, the producer will get a bigger share of the revenue pie. We will need to pay the distributor a fee and/or a smaller percentage of the box office.

Paying for P&A means that the producer pays for the expenses to strike the 35mm prints that get projected or the hard drives containing the digital files that then get projected. The producer also pays for the advertising to promote the movie through a combination of media outlets: radio, print, online, or maybe television. Repeated exposure of the movie to its intended audience is essential to ensure that they show up at the theater.

Attendee: You're going to pay to put it in theaters.

George Escobar: Not quite: that's called four-walling, where you rent the entire theater out and keep the box office receipts for your movie. In addition to paying for

P&A, four-walling adds the risk of paying upfront money to the theater.

A service deal, coupled with bringing your own P&A, entails convincing the theater exhibitors that you've got the clout to move people to the seats without paying any money up front to rent the theater. We're not renting it: you're splitting the box office revenue. The exhibitor still gets their 50% share of the revenue. In the case of the four-walling, you may pay $2,500 upfront to show your movie that night and you collect all the box office receipts, but you may not get $2,500 worth of box office that night. It's a big risk. This other way, you're both sharing the risk to get 50%.

We're going to try to raise the money so that we have a 1500 screen release for this project. That means we're going to need to spend probably $1,700 per screen, which equals to $2.5 million of P&A money.

Let's say our budget to make the movie is $6 million and, out of that, $4.5 million can qualify for a tax incentive program. There are two types of tax incentives. There's the tax *refunds*, essentially a rebate, where you spend money and at the end of a period of time, you get money back; they write you a check. There are also tax *credits*, which you can apply as a tax deduction to your business or you can sell on the open market. There are tax credit brokerages that will buy your tax credit and will sell it to a business or a corporation that needs the tax write-off,

and they'll buy it at a discount. Meaning that for every dollar that it's worth they'll pay eighty cents. You might take it, because it's still relatively free money.

Out of that six million, our qualifying tax incentive is an estimated $900,000, so the adjusted budget, the real true cost of the movie for us is $5.1 million. When we add the $2.5 million for prints and advertising, the total monetary risk is $7.6 million.

So on opening weekend, based on our calculations for those four shows, using conservative figures, we're going to generate revenue of $4.6 million. The second weekend, you expect a drop-off of about thirty-five percent, meaning we're down to $3 million for that weekend. We can add to that $1.6 million and then $980,000, for subsequent weekends. So, a total box office return of just over $10 million. You give up fifty percent of that to the exhibitor, so they take $5 million, and that leaves us with net distribution of $5 million.

Now you bring in your DVD revenues. The rough estimate for DVD sales used to be 1.3 times your box office, but that's gone down. It's now about 80% of your box office, and it's probably trending downwards. I'm estimating that the cost of sales per unit, to get you to buy that DVD, is going to be 70%. I estimated really high. It's going to be much less than that, but I wanted to be super-conservative. So, the projected DVD net revenue is $2.7 million.

Five million plus the $2.7 million, plus other platforms like television, online, everything else, is another $610,000. The total expected net profit under this scenario? Net revenue is 8.4, you take out the combined costs of the production and P & A of 7.6, and it leaves you with a net profit of $801,000 or a return on your investment of 10%.

Now, most investors are not happy with a 10% return on investment. They want at least 30%. What does that mean? Does it mean we need to go to five shows? Because at that point, using the same numbers, yeah, we are at 30%. But wait: we haven't even looked at the international market. If you factor in the international, then we are able to get that 30% return on investment, as far as projection. The other way we could achieve that is if we just lower the cost of production. Can we make the movie cheaper?

Attendee: That scenario includes doing a portion of the distribution yourself, right? The prints and advertising.

George Escobar: Exactly, it's called P&A, but it could includes all the other promotional stuff you're doing, not just direct print ads and things like that. You will spend more if you do lots of radio and television advertising.

Attendee: What did you call this?

George Escobar: A "service deal." What you do is go to a distributor and say, "Look, we don't have the

mechanism and we don't want to build a mechanism for booking and collecting fifteen hundred screens across the country."

As an independent filmmaker, you'll have a struggle reaching all of those theater owners and the markets that you want to reach, unless you want to do that full-time or have a staff of people. Not only reaching them, but getting money back from them. It's a bit of a shady business. When cash is exchanging hands, you're not going to get the most accurate reports. Sometimes the theater owners say, "Hey, nobody showed up." You may say, "That's impossible!" Well, prove it.

The distributor has the clout to get more accurate reports and better accounting than you can, because they have a preexisting relationship with the exhibitor. Not only that, but if that exhibitor expects more products from that distributor, they better be honest with each other. The history of exhibition— gangs, thugs, criminals, and the mafia—is a pretty shady business. It's a lot more cleaned up now, but there are still some vestiges of that.

Attendee: Is there a possibility, if it does exceedingly well, that they could want to open it up to more theaters?

George Escobar: Absolutely, but we're trying to be conservative here, even this is not a guarantee. If the movie opens up, we have a break even scenario here also. The movie has to become a four-million-dollar movie on

opening night. Otherwise you lose money, because you're in the red. You could still recover with the foreign box office sales, but usually your success in the foreign market is predicated by your success in the domestic one. Not all the time, but usually.

Attendee: Do you have to go to a sales agent at that point to go forward, or are you still going to self-distribute?

George Escobar: That's a good point. Not knowing the international markets ourselves, we'll probably work with a sales agent and carve up the different territories, rather than sell wholesale.

Attendee: How much of a drop-off did *Fireproof* have in the second week?

George Escobar: I don't think it had a drop-off; I think it went up.

Attendee: So word-of-mouth can move it up the charts?

George Escobar: Sure, but any rosier scenario I put in here is just gravy. I'd rather just look at the worst-case scenarios, because we could play with the numbers all day long and make it look better. It's better to make it look worse.

Attendee: Do you have to go through somebody to do a service deal like this?

George Escobar: You can just pay them up front, saying, "Look, I've got the money for P & A." They might think your movie stinks, but they don't care. If you give them $50,000, plus whatever, they'll take your movie to the theaters. They know it will be gone in a week. Didn't cost them very much, and they got their upfront fees. They might also want to earn some revenues, but will make sure that none of their name appears on your movie because they don't want to associate with it. If you get a deal like that—if nobody believes in it—somebody's telling you something. Don't spend the money to be in the theaters. It's not worth it.

On the other hand, if everybody wants your movie, you're in the driver's seat. That's what happened with *Fireproof* and *Facing The Giants*. They were able to go from two hundred theaters, initially, to four hundred and keep growing it. You can plow that money back in your box office revenues, even though you don't have the money in hand. You can take it to the bank and say, "These are the box office returns that we're anticipating will come," and they'll give you a loan against that. They have ways to mitigate the risk, and banks do that all the time.

Michael Snyder: George already said this, but to get this kind of deal, you have to be able to show that you can deliver not just a movie, but also deliver movie-goers. Part of the whole pitch in getting the deal is being able to show all the hard groundwork that you've been doing

since the moment that you've started working on the movie and building relationships with various channels that are going to get excited about the movie and want to talk it up and point it out to their constituencies. We'll get into this more when we get into the marketing and distribution segment, but that's really an important piece of your ability to get the deal.

Attendee: Would your model lose money with the traditional distributor, and so you're forced into self-distribution at this point?

George Escobar: This model favors us. Otherwise, all of that money gets transferred to them. It's not worth it for us to do it any other way. On this project we've budgeted for the P & A, so it's not an issue.

Attendee: Where does the advertisement in the movies come from, when you're seeing previews of movies to come six months to a year out?

George Escobar: That comes out of the prints and advertising budget, whether the producers paid for that or the distributor did. The exhibitors, they make money hand over fist. They're always complaining that they don't make enough money, yet they keep building theaters. Where is that money coming from?

Attendee: They only display what they're going to potentially have at their theater.

George Escobar: They are taking risks, because many times when you go to the theater, it's empty. You're usually the only person there. So there's a lot of wasted real estate, and they're always looking for good products.

The real win is for us to be a network of providers of good content that distributors can then rely on, and then we can bypass the studio system and the Hollywood distribution pipeline that demands so much money from the revenue flow. I think that can happen if we get some serious investors who will finance the kinds of films that we say we can produce. That's going to take time, because we have to prove ourselves first in the normal market right now. We need to have a few more hits like *Facing The Giants* and *Fireproof*. Hopefully this new project will be one of those. *Courageous* is also coming. Then *HERO* we hope will have the same measure of success as *Facing The Giants* at the very least, and maybe *Fireproof*. Then there's this consistency, this pattern that's created, and we can go directly to the exhibitors, bypassing the distributors altogether.

Attendee: When you say you want to target 1500 screens, do you contact each of the exhibitors directly?

George Escobar: No, we would do a service deal. We would negotiate a deal with the studio or distributor, who already has those relationships to book and collect. Instead of paying them or giving them their standard fee of forty percent box office, we're going to reverse that

role, because they're not taking any risk by bringing the movie out when we're paying for the prints and advertising. On that one component, we're taking most of the risk for them. They're still going to get their distributor fee. They'll probably want to get somewhere between fifteen to twenty percent of the pie, but that still leaves the producers with more money than they started with.

Attendee: What you're saying then is: "We don't want all your services, but we'll pay you this much for this part of your service."

George Escobar: That's correct.

Chapter 13

CASTING, REHEARSALS AND ON-SET DIRECTING

The Problem with: "A FILM BY..."

George Escobar: For those of you who've seen the *HERO* trailer, you might have noticed a company name appearing above "Advent Film Group," which is Brightline Pictures. Brightline Pictures is a production company that was begun by Manny Edwards, who was my key collaborator for *Come What May*.

It was our hope and plan to create an impetus, for the people that work with us, that they also begin their own production companies. In this case, Manny was inspired to start his own production company, again, to be an example to other folks. His talents, his directing ability,

and his company were showcased on our next film, *HERO*, which Manny wrote and directed. Mr. Snyder did the fundraising, and Mr. Snyder and I were the producers. If you look at the credits to the films we've been blessed to make, you won't see "A Film By..." title card that appears in so many films nowadays, even by Christian filmmakers.

This might be too late already for a film submission you've handed to us, to a festival, or it's already in distribution, but think long and hard whether or not you should use the "A Film By..." moniker. Really give this some thought and check your heart and attitude next time you make a film or a short film or a documentary. Our society right now is so self-centered that the attitude of self-acknowledgement and praise permeates all through the arts, especially in film. How many films have you seen with an opening title sequence that starts with "A Film By..." and then the director's name? You won't see that in any of Advent Film Group's productions—not if I have anything to do with it—because it's undeserved. The director is not the main person in the movie; he's one of many key collaborators.

I often get a five minute documentary from a young person or a short movie that they have, and the first thing that you see is "A Film By..." Please, get that out of your system. Some of the greatest directors, Frank Capra, John Ford, who are leaps and bounds beyond our

abilities, they never had "A Film By..." title card. That's a modern invention, a very nihilistic one. So, please don't do that, especially if you represent yourself as a Christian filmmaker. It's appropriate to have credits, but let's not cross the boundaries of shining bright lights on our names. It's a pet peeve of mine, as you can probably tell.

GOALS FOR ADVENT INTERNS

One of our goals for the films God allows us to make is that they will achieve a measure of success that enables us to finance many more micro-budget films. I pray that every one of our interns will be directing and producing their own films. We will help them get financing and all the resources to get them made within, I would say, three to five years, maybe even sooner. Some of them are proving themselves worthy of being entrusted with a small budget movie; they've earned that start. They've worked hard. They know the information needed to mount a production, and they have heart and the right attitude.

I think there'll be an article in the future telling of the three, four, or five feature films directed by these young people who never went to film school. Hopefully they'll be successful in the industry, so the industry begins to turn around and the whole film school industry begins to reform itself.

I don't have anything against film schools, except that for the most part they're not set up for Christians. The only film school that I would even recommend to anyone is the one Kylene went to, Bob Jones University. There you learn the craft of it, but you learn it from a Christian perspective.

THE FILM SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

I'd like for Kylene to talk a bit about her experiences in film school, because she didn't get a chance yesterday to tell you about that very positive experience. Kylene, if you wouldn't mind, do you want to take a few minutes now? That'd be great. Then you can see both spectrums. All the schools that I've told you about, they're all secular schools. There are some good film schools there for Christians.

Kylene Arnold: Well, like Mr. Escobar said, I went to film school at Bob Jones University. I graduated last May with my Bachelor's in cinema and video production. I was very happy with the education because it did differ so much from a traditional film school.

I learned film, but they also strongly emphasized the liberal arts. I had all the classes that Mr. Escobar said are so important for filmmakers: I took literature, English, public speaking, and lots and lots of Bible. Not only did we learn about the fine arts, but we had required sessions

that we were expected to go to where their theatre production company would put on pieces for us to see. Very high quality; they had their own crew to do that. They also had a museum of the fine arts for us to see and enjoy. So I got that liberal arts part of it.

Then, I was able to do a film degree that put me twenty-nine hours a week doing film, fifteen of which were spent in the classroom. I learned theory: all the stuff about depth of field and the rule of thirds and many practical things from people who had been in the industry for forty, fifty years.

Everything was taught in a very, very compressed manner. They were careful to take as much as could possibly fit in our minds—about two or three times as much as *we* thought we could fit in our minds!—and pour it into us in the most intense and compressed manner possible so that we could come out as the most confident film majors they could make us. Make-up and wardrobe is about the only thing I wasn't trained in: that was optional, and I chose to opt out of that. There were two camera classes: one for traditional film camera and one in video. I took lighting and rigging, plus a little bit of electrical work to learn how to hook up the generators and run the breakout boxes. Several sound courses, photography, editing, set design, construction—all sorts of things.

We learned how to do it from a technical standpoint, but also from a very hands-on approach, because they have their own film company, and the materials and equipment for you to work with. Part of our training (that other fourteen hours minimum of the twenty-nine we had to spend a week) was to be in the lab, hands-on, doing something. It could be for our class or for helping classmates. All the sophomores, all the seniors, and all the grad students have to do a film. So I was able to do a lot of hands-on things and learn from their experiences by working with the older students, not only what it's like to direct, but a few other things that you need to think about so, hopefully, when you're the senior or grad student, you've learned from some of their mistakes.

Also, the core dynamics of what makes a crew member great. Union rules and the typical film school perspective says, "This is your job. You're only responsible for this, and once you're done with this, you can check off your list. You've done everything you're supposed to do." We learned it from quite a different approach, where we were expected to act as a family and as a brotherhood of Christians. We were all taught to pull together and do whatever you could possibly do to make this film come together.

Many times you'd hear us addressed as the brethren. We had one class every week where the entire student body of filmmakers, freshmen through the grad class, would all

come together and have one class together. They would take prayer requests and say, "You are a family. Pray for one another, help one another, volunteer for people's crews." We worked in very close quarters, so that did happen.

There were a couple of grad students who really mentored me. Once I got to be a senior, there were sophomores and below whom I got to mentor and say, "Hey, let me show you how this works for your sophomore platform. Let me take the time to pull you aside and tell you what I've learned, like how to deal with personal problems, or just how on earth am I going to get this work done."

In addition, I was very pleased to learn, like Mr. Escobar was saying, the Christian aspect of every arena of art. It was a big part in all of your writing classes, all of your art classes, all of your film classes: what does God have to say about the proper way to use this art? Here's what the world has to say about how you use it, here's what they do in practice (which was sometimes even worse), and here's what the Bible has to say about your role as an artist. Even the definition of art and beauty is much different from what the world says that it is. God is the creator of all beauty, and God is beauty, and the purpose of beauty and the purpose of art is to reflect upon truth and beauty, which is ultimately found in Jesus Christ.

That was my film experience, and from there, as I was getting ready for graduation and starting to go out into the workforce, my parents were saying, "Well, where are you going to go work?" I was like, "I'm working on that...." They said, "We found this little company called Advent Film Group, just randomly on the Internet. They have a statement of faith that sounds exactly like what you've been telling us and goals like you've been telling us you want to do. You should go check them out." So I checked them out, and said, "They sound really neat, and they're having a film workshop soon."

So, during the summer last year, I came up and was sitting right where Mr. Hickock is now. It wasn't purely for the film education, I will admit, although I got a great education, especially about the business end. I wanted a job, and I got one. I was a PA (production assistant) on *HERO*, and that was a fantastic experience.

After I was done with *HERO*, I checked back in a few months later, saying, "I see you have some other films in development." They said, "Yeah, actually, could you be one of our assistant editors for editing *HERO*?" So I got to do that. From there it went into pre-production, script development, budgeting, scheduling and business things, and all sorts of stuff, so I consider this my grad degree. I'm getting to learn all of these wonderful things besides what I learned in film school.

The reason that I went to Bob Jones is the same reason that Mr. Escobar is espousing not going to a secular film school. At almost every one of the other film schools, you have to compromise. I started out going to another Christian school—in name—that had a film program. As part of their film program you were required to go to Los Angeles, to Hollywood, and do an internship. They gave me a list of the companies that their interns work on, and I looked down that list and said, "No, I know these companies, and I know the stuff that they make. I'm not going to participate in any film, ever, that dishonors the Lord."

At that point, I started looking into other things. Every reputable person from every school was telling me, "This is just the nature of the industry. You have to get your hands dirty. You have to compromise, or you won't eat." Well, I'll find another way to eat; it doesn't take much to feed me. So I began a search. I fully believed from the bottom of my heart that what God commands never requires compromise to God's other commands. God will never contradict himself. I thought, "I know God is calling me to do this. I have a passion for this like I've never had a passion for anything else. So no matter how long it takes, how many years it takes me to get there, and what else I have to do in the process, I plan on doing God's films God's way. I will not compromise, and I won't go to any school that does."

They're rare; it's very, very sad. I ended up with two that I looked into attending. There was The Master's College, John MacArthur's college in California, but God closed the door on that one, and there was Bob Jones University. I ended up going to Bob Jones. It was difficult, but I definitely think that that was the place God wanted me to be. I got a fantastic education, a very good starting point, and a well-rounded basis for what I'm doing now.

George Escobar: Thank you, Kylene. Yeah, it was very easy for her to join us because we have the same values, and she's definitely proven herself one of our most valuable members. Every one of our interns has been a blessing and a pure joy for Mike and I to work with, to be part of their lives, and we think that's going to continue for the rest of our lives. It's so wonderful to be brothers and sisters in Christ. Creating a new industry is really fun. It's a lot of work, but it's exciting.

BASIC ELEMENTS: Establishing A Shot

Let's talk about some of the basic elements of a film. I'm going back to a slide that we touched on before. We're going to go into a little bit of detail on it, because it does go into casting, rehearsing, and on-set directing. It begins with a shot.

Imagine yourself entrusted with, let's say a $200k movie. You have a crew of about thirty people. This is your very

first day of production, and all eyes and all technology are pointed towards this moment when you're supposed to know what you're doing as a director, as a filmmaker. You say that famous word, "Action!", and then everybody does what you tell them to do. It's quite a daunting moment, and undoubtedly you get very nervous, but the more preparation you have the better the outcome.

Understanding a shot, a single shot, is the foundation for all the other shots. You get one shot, which creates a scene, a series of scenes becomes a sequence, a group of sequences creates an act, three acts and you've got a movie.

"Establishing a shot" provides context for a scene for the viewer. What's really going on in that scene? It could be two people fighting over an apple. Why are they fighting over that apple? Because it's the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil—or something else. When you begin to plan what that shot looks like, you need to go backwards, starting with the screenplay, which is the basis for all your decisions.

For example, how do you cast your actors? By understanding the story and the context for those scenes and those shots written on the page. Every actor is important in that shot, whether it's your principal actor who appears in multiple scenes and shots or whether you may be casting a day player, where they may only appear in that one scene or that one shot or for one day or for a

few hours during your production, but they're critical to that scene where they're fighting for that apple.

Maybe that apple looks beautiful on the outside and it's a beautiful, golden, delicious-looking apple, but the person knows that it's rotten inside. There's poison in there. So, here's a scene: your hero character missed lunch, and the person that you cast as this evil person knows it's poison and maybe even caused the hero to miss lunch, and now he lays down that apple. Maybe he's the teacher. You're developing this tension. Will the hero pick up that apple? After seeing the teacher lay down that apple, the hero now asks permission, "May I have your apple?" By establishing context, that becomes a very powerful scene.

When you're in the casting process, you can focus in on those scenes, those critical moments in the screenplay. You pull those scenes aside from the script, and they literally become called "sides." For the audition, it's these sides that you give to the actor, and you explain to them what the scene is all about. If they're really good and they're professional, they can get into that character right away. But *you* need to know why you're shooting that particular scene, because otherwise that performance has no meaning to you. They may say it well, may have memorized the lines instantaneously, but it's still not right unless you know the context behind it.

So each shot is important: it's a building block.

The angle of view also gives us an interpretation of the story. The point of view of the camera representing me as the character—how do you establish that in a shot? Well, usually with the eyes of the actor. The camera all of a sudden focuses on my face, especially on my eyes, and then on the very next shot the camera is focusing on what my eyes are seeing. That's the "character's POV" (point of view) or first-person. That can transfer around to different characters: you just focus in on somebody's eyes, and then, all of a sudden, the next shot, especially if it's moving, becomes the point of view of that actor. If it's "over the shoulder," with two people talking, then it's a second-person perspective. If it's a "master shot," with the two of us here and the camera there, then it's this imaginary third person observing that scene. The audience has been trained to know, "Okay, I'm watching a movie; I'm literally peering into the lives of these people as a third person."

You can break this wall between the scene and the so-called third person. It's a very dangerous thing to do, but some filmmakers do it as part of the plot. The way you do that is when one of the actors looks straight at the camera, looking at you as the audience. Now you're in the movie yourself. You had better know why you're doing that.

Let's watch this clip from *Gladiator* here.

[Early scene from *Gladiator*]

George Escobar: What I've been talking about is all evident from this short clip that we just saw.

Here, we're seeing something very interesting, a close-up of this hand, very intimate with nature. Who is this guy? Did you notice the colors there? All gold and warm, then all of a sudden we get this cold look. We know it's the same guy. He's just taken a pause with what he's doing: he's reflecting back on his life as a farmer. You don't know that quite yet, but that's revealed later on. What they're doing is adding context to what's about to happen in the scene and who this character is, by showing that. It's a mysterious scene and powerful enough that you'll remember it.

Then notice that he has this long look. It's a very intimate look, because it's such a tight shot. Imagine this being a big screen and you're seeing Russell Crowe's face, I don't know about you, but I have this tension with that character because he's looking almost at me, but slightly off. He's not looking at the camera, breaking that third-person, but he's contemplating, and he's definitely—yeah, go ahead and play it again.

[Replays *Gladiator* clip, in slow motion]

George Escobar: He's about to break that barrier to look at me, but he doesn't. It takes courage to hold that shot. You have this tension that he might look at you and break that line, and of course he doesn't. When he turns

again, there's another moment to do that. Then we have the POV of his perspective, he's seeing this bird in the midst of this blue, this golden bird, and it gives him a sense of pleasure because it reminds him of home. Watch his face: great acting there.

From this tranquil place, we have a sense of who this character is already, just in this opening sequence of *Gladiator*. This very tranquil-looking man is going to turn violent on us, but we like him already, because of those few moments. If we opened up with him in battle and anger and everything, we're never going to get that attachment. We won't have that context. It's one of the best opening scenes of a movie, and it's so simply done. It's the simple, simple shots that aren't very complicated to make.

By knowing those things, when you go into casting and rehearsing your actors, if you've done your storyboards and you've pre-planned these things, it gives you confidence that you hired the right actor. You can cast them properly, rehearse them properly.

When you're directing that scene, you're telling your actor, "This is what you're trying to achieve in this scene. We're setting up your character. Look, these are the shots," and they can see it on the storyboard. You're equipping them with the tools that they need for their performance.

For Russell Crowe, you're telling him, "We need to like you initially, and we want to root for you the entire movie, but here you need to have this transformation." First we see this peaceful man, with a final symbol of this bird flying off, but notice the transition on his face from a contemplative smile to sudden seriousness. He's about to slaughter an entire race, and he doesn't want to do it. You learn that he's a warrior, but that's his job, not his heart. His heart is touching the wheat on the field and looking at birds. If not, he wouldn't even pay attention to that bird. He wouldn't be recollecting the fact that he had a farm and that at one time he was able to touch the stalks of wheat.

Attendee: Bonnie and Clyde made everyone laugh at violence. How do you contrast that with *Gladiator*?

George Escobar: You definitely don't laugh at violence in *Gladiator*. You're somewhat repulsed by it, because our main character is. They don't glorify it. He wants to avoid it: he wants to go home, home to his farm.

Attendee: So the establishing shot they did there was so you would like his character, not so much that you would be rooting for him killing people.

George Escobar: Yeah. He's a general in this movie, and so he has to lead his men into warfare. He wants to be the best general he possibly can be. He's doing this job that he's been tasked with, but when he's done, he just

wants to go home. They want to make him beyond the rank of general—for those of you who haven't seen it, I won't say exactly what—but he doesn't want it.

Attendee: You have to care about every act of the hero or the villain.

George Escobar: When you care about them, you understand better who they are and why, but you're not necessarily condoning what they are or what they're doing.

That's where it becomes hard work as a director. You have to know every one of those moments and why those scenes need to be the way they are, building one upon the other. Myself and other Christian filmmakers—we're not that good yet. We're not Ridley Scott. We can learn from what he's doing here and hope that it becomes part of us as we begin to craft our movies, but I know enough of what I don't know.

For the planning of the French and Indian War movie, I'm applying much of what Ridley Scott has taught through what he's created. Same thing with what Michael Mann has done with *Last of the Mohicans* or the director of *The Patriot*. I'm reviewing those films with that intent in mind.

If you haven't seen *Gladiator*, you need to see it, because it's a modern masterpiece—but very carefully, especially if you're a young person. Another that's exceptional, that

I think is the perfect movie—Rebekah probably knows what I'm about to say. *Master and Commander*, right. Watch that movie and find a mistake. You won't find it: it's perfect, it has no flaws. *Gladiator* has some flaws, but *Master and Commander* does not.

Attendee: What about *The Princess Bride*?

George Escobar: *Princess Bride* is good, but it's got some major cinematic flaws. If you want to watch a perfect movie, *Master and Commander* is the one.

Attendee: John Ford…

George Escobar: John Ford has inspired a lot of directors. He's really good, one of my favorites. We're studying a film of his right now, *Drums Along the Mohawk*, his first Technicolor movie, taking place just before the American Revolution. If you look at *Drums Along the Mohawk* and then at *Last of the Mohicans*, you can see where Michael Mann borrowed a few scenes from John Ford. He did it even better than John Ford, because he had the fortune of being able to leverage off of other filmmakers.

When you're directing on the set, you as the director are establishing more than just the shot. You're not just getting something on the page, especially for your very first few days. You'll want to make your first day a day that everybody feels really good about, that they've accomplished something really well done. Schedule it

with that in mind, with the simplest, easiest shots possible. If there's a lot of tension already, that tension dissipates and it becomes fun and easy. The rest of it is going to be a grind and hard. It'll still be fun, but increasingly difficult. So for your first, maybe even your second day, take that luxury. Go for all the easy shots. Be relaxed, be gentle, be kind, and it will set the tone for the rest of the production. If it's chaotic the first day, that's exactly what it's going to be like for most of your shoot. The only way you can avoid the chaos is to anticipate the moments of failure and mitigate against the plan by having back-ups. Do everything possible to make the first and second days a really, really positive experience for everyone. It'll make your on-set directing really easy.

What do you need to do to direct even the most difficult days? You go back to the script. Go back to the Bible: just spend a few minutes and read Psalms, something to calm yourself, and pray. Get a group of people and start praying. There are going to be those moments where it becomes really difficult.

Attendee: Do you feel yourself going beyond your storyboards?

George Escobar: Do allow yourself that room, but know that you can fall into the trap of spending unnecessary energy trying to explore a better way, when you could just go for the sure thing.

Remember, for low budget indies, not every scene in the movie needs to be perfectly shot or lit. It *does* need to have as good a sound as possible. If you can have three or four really good scenes in the movie and some of those scenes you bunch up together, especially earlier on in the movie, the audience will forgive you for failings that are going to come, because they're still imagining your movie looking as good as the earlier scenes. Unless the movie itself is dramatically bad, they'll just get carried away with the story and think the rest of the movie looked as good as what you showed at the first. Then you surprise them by giving them something really beautiful halfway and then maybe one more really beautiful shot and well acted, at the end, and you're good.

Don't sweat it so much that every detail needs to be absolutely perfect. You strive for that, but you just don't have the time or budget or the talent. Take it easy on yourself and just do the best you can. Now the higher the budget, you don't have permission to do that anymore. Every scene and every shot has to be as good as you possibly can make it, and you have to budget and schedule for that.

I do want to talk about casting actors who are not professional actors.

For *Come What May*, the only professional actors we had were Karen and Kenny Jezek. They were actors in soap

operas during the 80s, until they became Christians and realized they could not do the soap opera type of acting anymore. They left Hollywood and began a family in Arizona, but they always wanted to be in theater and film. When I heard about them and saw a clip, I contacted them.

We had originally done casting in the wrong manner, and I want to explain what that means. We did an open casting call online. I got flooded with headshots, resumes, and reels from people, and they were not altogether savory. I'd get some pictures that were fine, and then the next one is like a lingerie type ad, and it's just wrong. I said, "Lord, we cannot cast this way, and so you're going to have to help us. We need at least two professional actors in this movie to make this work."

We prayed very specifically. I called Manny and we prayed on the phone, "Please, Lord, allow us to have to actors who are professionals who have a heart for teaching other young actors, who know about homeschooling, and who have these five weeks to commit to on very short notice." In about a month they would need to remove themselves from whatever they're doing. That's a tough call, isn't it? An hour after that prayer, Manny gets an email from a friend who just happened on a movie that Karen and Kenny had done. He sent me the clip, and I really liked their performance.

I called Kenny. He's on the phone heading to the swimming pool to pick up his wife, Karen, and their two daughters. I'm telling him about this movie, that I'm a graduate from AFI (something that he could recognize) and some other background, and he was very polite, "Yeah, uh-huh, sure. Okay, well, we'll get back to you." He gets to the pool and says, "There's this guy who called me, who wants to do a movie in Purcellville, VA. I can't even remember the title, but it's with Patrick Henry College." Their friend who is sitting next to Karen says, "Patrick Henry College? I know about that college. I've got a really good friend who is making a movie there. His name is Ben Adams. He's a student there." Ben Adams was one of our young interns at the time working on this movie. So how can they say no? They vetted us, and they called and said, "Yeah, we'd love to work on the film."

They happened to be homeschooling parents who love to teach acting. If you don't ask, you don't get. So pray: be very specific. They were able to help the younger actors' performances, mainly Victoria Emmons and Austin Kearney, neither of whom had ever acted before.

When you're auditioning actors, make sure you're looking at the monitor. I auditioned about thirty young girls for the part of Rachel and only a handful of guys, of which Austin Kearney was clearly the best one, a very good actor for never having done it before.

For *Come What May*, we had to typecast most of the other roles, using people from the community. One of our actors, David Halbrook, is the guy responsible for getting us this room all the times that we've been here. He's the director of communications here at Patrick Henry College. And Dr. Farris, of course. We knew we needed somebody who was convincing, who would know the law, and he made himself available to us, was very generous with his time. The scenes where he is in his living room, that was his living room. We took the whole crew down there, did a company move. He gave us two or three hours, and we shot his scenes there.

How do you work with non-actors? Very carefully. You have to give them all the comfort they need to be able to do their role. In the case of Dr. Farris, we didn't want to impose the demand that he know his lines, so we had cue cards for him. David memorized his lines, because he had the time and committed to do that. Scott Woodruff, who played the sheriff's deputy in one of the key scenes (he's just a natural ham), is one of the lawyers here at HSLDA and one of the homeschooling parents in our co-op, so we had a good relationship with him.

Cast your friends and neighbors. Let them know exactly what they're getting into and typecast. Make them comfortable to be themselves, and you should be good.

If you need more professional actors, you can get them through NCFCA, if you need young people. That is the

speech and debate league for homeschoolers, and they're very, very talented. They have a whole program for performances and speeches, and so these kids are very naturally gifted already in front of an audience. For adults, contact your local theater, drama clubs from church, and do a casting call through some very safe channels. You can also talk to casting directors and say, "Look, this is a Christian film, and we need to cast very carefully."

We had one cast member for *HERO*, that we found out later what his background was. Some of the things he'd done that had appeared on the internet had shocked us, and we had to tell him we couldn't bring him on board. We had cast him in one of the lead roles, so we paid him anyway, because we had already done the deal and we didn't want to renege on that even though he didn't spend one minute of work in rehearsal or on the screen. However, we didn't want that controversy, because you have to be careful. He took it hard, but he was respectful and professional about it and wished us well.

Chapter 14

POST-PRODUCTION WORKFLOW

George Escobar: I want to go deeper into some topics we've touched on earlier. These elements here: editing, sound design, sound mix, and color correction, really bring a professional polish to your projects. They are tools and processes that allow us to raise the bar on the quality of the movies that get introduced to the public.

ELEMENTS OF SOUND

We'll talk about sound recording first. Remember that story I told you about the horror movie where the opening scene was literally shot in black? Sound is truly half the movie. There is a gentleman that I was talking to yesterday about screenwriting, and we shared some comments just a few minutes ago. It became clear to him

today about what I was talking about in story and screenwriting, because he had understood it as primarily dialogue. A screenplay does usually have dialogue, but you can shoot a whole movie without a word spoken and still be understood. Dialogue is a convention that we like as an audience, especially snappy comedic dialogue or when it really resonates with a historical period and they talk a certain way, but it's not necessary.

Sound *does* matter. Even in the silent era, movies were not so silent at all. They had a piano-player on stage creating the mood by what they were playing. A movie that is missing sound elements will fail. I cannot say it simply enough. If you do not have the proper sound elements, no matter how good it looks, how good the acting is, if the sound is bad your movie will suffer, and it'll be considered a failure.

How do you get good sound? Well, it begins by getting good recorded sound on set. Sometimes you just can't do it because there's just too much environmental noise, and so you go ahead and record what becomes a temporary track that you know you'll be replacing in the studio through ADR[1].

Another part of sound to create the mood and the tenor is really the music. I like to have the music established before I even begin to make the film, even through music

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[1] *ADR: Automatic Dialogue Replacement. See Chapter 7, page 238.*

that I've already heard that I really like. I start listening to it and getting into the mood of what the film needs to be. It also gives you an effective way to talk to composers. I am musically challenged. I do love music: I know when I hear good music, and I love movie soundtracks. I think I have a good way of communicating to a composer what I'm after without having to know the notes and the actual mechanical phrasings of it. If you are musically challenged, as I am, then you use words to describe it or you borrow pieces of music from other movies that you've already heard.

Ambient sounds: whenever you are on the set and you've just taken your last takes for a particular scene, you'll find someone saying some words like "room tone." Anybody want to tell me what that might be?

Attendee: The ambient sound of the room when nothing else is moving.

George Escobar: Right. While everybody is on the set standing where they are, the sound recordist or the boom operator says, "Room tone!" Everybody knows what that means: stay in your spot and be quiet for twenty or thirty seconds while they record the sound of that room in silence. The point is, it's not completely silent. You're recording everyone's heartbeat, combined with just the atmosphere of that room: the way the sounds echo in the room, how it holds sound.

The reason you need that is because when you are doing your sound mix in a sound studio, you have to rebuild that environment in an artificial setting. You need that twenty or thirty seconds of that to be able to recreate that environment as necessary during your edit. If you don't have room tone or ambient noise in a movie, it sounds dead. It will be like, "There's something wrong with this movie. I don't know what it is, but it doesn't feel alive." It doesn't feel alive because you don't have the ambient noise that you as a person hear all the time. You've heard it in the movies without knowing that you're hearing room noise, because it's tucked in to all the other prominent sounds. If it's missing, your ears will automatically notice that.

Again, the foley—we've talked about that before—sometimes a foley sound is all you need to achieve communication to your audience.

If the camera is pointed at me right now and it just stays on me—you're watching this movie, and all of a sudden, you hear the door open or slam shut. We don't need to get a shot of that door opening when somebody comes in. You know somebody opened the door and they came in; you heard that. If all of a sudden that person starts coming into frame without having this sound introducing him, it's still acceptable, but it feels weird. "Where did that guy come from?" Whereas if we hear the door

opening, we think, "Oh, that guy came into the room," and you don't have to explain it visually to the audience.

Somebody who is running on the grass or on the ground, you normally don't hear any sound as that's happening. You never notice those footsteps being heard in real life unless you're really up close, but if you see it on the screen and you don't hear footsteps, it's distracting. Again, anything that will disrupt and take the audience away from your story because you're missing something, you've got to put it in.

Sometimes you have to take it out. In *Come What May* there is a scene with Caleb and his father in front of Patrick Henry College. That footage was shot right in front of the Barbara Hodel Center, as there were men working there with massive power tools. If you watch the movie, you don't hear any of that. We were successfully able to use a tool called iZotope to isolate these sounds that have regular constant frequencies, like a motor. It just sees those sine waves and says, "Oh, you want to get rid of this? Okay!", and it gets rid of it for the rest of the track.

We knew that that tool existed and had that capability, so we weren't worried about if we could hear the actors talking, as we knew that we could remove that sound. It's the sounds that are natural but *aren't* repetitive that are a bear to take out.

If I had a choice between shooting in a completely silent room, where we had to turn the air-conditioner off and make the rest of the cast and crew uncomfortable—which was true in the old days—I won't put my cast and crew members through that suffering when it takes about ten seconds to remove that in software. You don't have to do that anymore. Now, some sound recordists and mixers are purists, and they'll insist on doing that. If you're the director, you just say, "No, we're not doing that, because we'll get a bad performance and everyone will be grumpy, and I'll be grumpy because I'm so hot." It's better to just live with it and remove it later.

David, you have anything to say about that? You deal a lot with audio. How did you like using iZotope?

David Cook: It's good, especially if the sound is constant. It gets much more frustrating if it's not a constant sound. If it's a repetitive sound that is not constant, it gets more difficult. So do try to get the best audio you can from the source the first time, but you always have to balance the ideal situation with what will work.

George Escobar: Like the fan from that projector, for example. If it's essential for it to be on, you leave it on, because we can remove that easily.

Your soundtrack can get more complicated than this. You can have dozens or even hundreds of tracks. One of the

three essential tracks is the clear vocal track of dialogue: that's one track. Sometimes it's in the left and right channels, so it's stereo channel there, but typically not. Usually, you just take a mono-feed from the microphone. The ambient noise and environmental effects track. This will include your foleys, every one of your sound effects, condensed down to one track. Then, finally, your music track.

You want to keep all of those tracks separated. Never combine them until your final mix. Even then, you're going to have multiple outputs, depending on the platform that you're sending it to. If you know that you're strictly going to DVD, then you don't have to go to the fanciest post-sound house in town where it's going to cost you two thousand dollars a day to be there versus five hundred dollars a day for some guy's home-studio setup, which has the same equipment without the overhead.

Where you must spend money, if you go for a theatrical release, is for a physical sound-design and sound-mix room where they have a theatre-size projection screen and space, because it has to mimic a sound-mix for a theatrical release. There is a delay from the sound that you hear from the projector from that screen to the audience, and they have to tweak and build that into the soundtrack. They have to compensate for that, and they can only do that in a special room. You only worry about

it if you're sure that you're going to get a theatrical release, because it's a few extra thousand dollars to do that. If you know you're only going to end up on DVD, then don't bother.

Let's watch this clip here a moment.

[Clip from *King Henry V*, St. Crispin's Day]

I love that speech: it's poetry and so well acted and delivered. I don't know if you're so enraptured with the words, but that combines the best elements of clean audio, brilliant performance, and a beautiful dolly shot. Notice the artistic framing of him around that tree, the first time he stopped, almost like a crescent, and then when he stepped onto that rough-looking wagon, you could hear his footsteps. In real life, you wouldn't hear that, but this isn't real life, so you have to add it for that sense of hyper-reality.

If you've not seen that movie, it's really well made. That speech is, I think, one of the best speeches in terms of performance given by any actor. Kenneth Branagh is a British actor of great renown, and maybe more talented than Orson Wells. When he was rising through the ranks he was a writer-director-actor, just like Orson Wells was, the "triple threat." This is probably one of the pinnacles of his career.

We don't have a Christian counterpart to Kenneth Branagh. We don't have a triple threat yet—someone

who can write, direct, and act with equal skill. He directed that film too, by the way. Of course he didn't write it—that was William Shakespeare—but he made it his own. If you hear the same exact speech done by the great Laurence Olivier, who is considered the best actor of his generation, maybe it's a matter of aesthetic taste or modern ears or something, but Branagh's rings true. I would rally and die for this guy, but I wouldn't for Laurence Olivier giving the same speech that he recorded in the 1940s. If you can achieve, not just the performance, but that kind of sound track, then wow! Did you hear the music, too? Everything worked.

There's an opportunity for us as Christians to take properties like Shakespeare and remake them. Not for the sole purpose of viewing them from a Christian worldview, if they're bereft of that, as some of William Shakespeare's work is. There are other works of classic literature by Christian artists and writers who are long past, that have to be resurrected, lost literature that hasn't seen the light of day for decades. I don't know where they all are; I am beginning to discover them. That's another source of story for us. Hollywood won't make those movies because they talk about God working. I'm sure there are hundreds, if not thousands, of works of lost literature written by Christian authors out there waiting for us to discover them—for us to make them into films as powerful as that. So, I hope you use that as another source of inspiration. Even just developing them

as a screenplay would be a great exercise. I would challenge you, the screenwriter, to really look at that as a source of material, because you would be pioneering a new type of filmmaking.

Mike Snyder: And it's all free: no copyrights. It's just sitting there, waiting for you to pick it up, to shape it, to make it.

EDITING AND EFFECTS

George Escobar: Okay, editing and effects. How many here have used a software editing tool? Everybody? Most of you have. They're called NLE's, Non-Linear Editing systems. They are no longer the breakthrough that they once were about twenty years ago, when Avid took the market by storm. Their tools allowed you to, for the first time, be able to convert your assets into a form that allows you to edit them without having to do it sequentially.

Before NLE's, you had to edit scene A and scene B and C, and if you made a mistake, you had to start over. Now, if you make a mistake, you just select scene B, delete, bring the two together on a timeline, and you're done. Back then you'd have to literally start over with scene A. It was a nightmare.

With much power comes greater responsibility, because now you can sort of go crazy with all this. Sometimes

you get pieces of work that are hyper-edited. Before, editors had to be more thoughtful, because it was so painful if you made a mistake that they couldn't afford it. They couldn't risk it. Now you slapdash, put something together, with very little thought. So that's the other end of the spectrum.

You need to take care how you edit things. That means—and I've emphasized this over and over and we're going to do it one more time—you need to be a really good storyteller. You need to know how to do scriptwriting, because what you're really editing is that third movie we talked about. The first movie is the movie that got written, the screenplay. The second movie is what got shot. Now, if you're the editor, you're making the third movie.

Hopefully what got shot is what is on the page. If it isn't, then you're going to have to invent it, because it's missing on one of those two parts. You as the editor need to be the storyteller now. The responsibility has been shifted on your shoulders. That's why I cannot emphasize enough the task before us as Christian filmmakers: if we don't master storytelling, we're not going to be as good as our secular counterparts. That would be a shame, as there's no excuse not to be, except that it's hard work.

As an editor, you're organizing all your assets according to the script and the storyboards: you're selecting the best take. The best take, for me, is always looking at the

performance. If the camera's a little shaky, or it's not as well-lit, but the power of the performance is there, figure out ways to isolate that scene. Maybe you crop it because there's something ugly at the top or you blow it up so you're only seeing the face. If it's shaky, there's now software tools to remove that shake. Go for the performance take. Sometimes the performance take is only audio: the line was delivered wonderfully, but something in their face or their eyes or something happened to the visual. So you hear it and put in a reaction shot as that line is being said.

You always want to remove any bad performances. In the case of *Come What May*, the scene of Dr. Farris in his room, in his living room, when Caleb comes to visit and tries to get a reprieve on having to do the right thing, was twice as long as what it ended up. We had to shorten it, because we only took what was working. The final debate scene was almost a twenty-minute ordeal, which was intolerable. We shot it anyway, because I knew that we needed that material to then cut it down to six minutes. You have to do that and still have it be coherent. Know that ahead of time, so that you can plan to overshoot to give the editor more choices in the storytelling.

Because you don't have the limitation of using film, you can take that liberty. If you know ahead of time that this particular scene is going to need more time in achieving a performance, then plan for it. The lighting guys, they

get caught up in beautifully lit scenes, and you love them for it because you love those gorgeous scenes, but if they tell you, "It's gonna take us two hours for that lighting setup," tell them, "I'm giving you one hour. The best of what you can come up with in one hour, and we're shooting no matter what." You have to put your foot down, because you need that extra hour for performance: that's really what matters most. As long as you can get an exposure, you start shooting. You just tell the DP, "Okay, that's enough," and the gaffer too. They'll fight you. They'll be mad at you. From their perspective, you're ruining their craft.

ART AND CRAFT: THE DIFFERENCE

Before I forget, let's talk about the difference between art and craft: there is a huge difference. That wasn't always the case.

You've probably heard of the expression "art for art's sake," rather than what Kylene was saying, "Art for truth, beauty, and goodness," God's truth, the beauty that He's created for us to see and the representation of those things expressed visually or through music, through drama. Modern art has really affected the way that the modern filmmaker absorbs or imparts truth and beauty.

It boils down to this: in modern art, for example, if you go to a modern art museum, most of what you're seeing you have no idea what you're looking at. It's so abstract

that you need some instructions to understand it. The artist has decided, "I'm so gifted with these beautiful visions in my head, and I'm such an artistic genius. Can't you see that this circle represents ..." whatever. To you it looks like a bowling ball, and to him it's the birth of a planet, and he extrapolates on that. It's all so self-indulgent. It really means, "You're too stupid to understand what I'm trying to do. You need instructions? Go talk to the curator; I'm not responsible to communicate what I think or what I'm representing." That happens in films too; that's not how it should be.

Contrast that with a craftsman. This comes more from the physical world: we associate craftsmanship with the making of this chair, for example. I can make the most beautiful chair in the world, but if you sit down on it and it collapses, it's not pretty; now it's a mess. It may have looked really good, but it's not functional. Just like art or film, it could look great, but if it's a mess aesthetically and emotionally and in the message that it conveys, it's not being responsible.

Think of yourself as a craftsman: you're creating this chair and you're responsible when someone sits down on it for it to hold them up. You understand who your customer is so that when you build that chair, you know it's got to support a human being, perhaps an adult versus a child. The functionality of it: is it a rocking chair? Because that has to convey some motion behind it.

If it's one for therapeutic means, that's got to have these certain cushions for massaging: some physical need that needs to be met.

The kind of craftsmanship that is now taught is really that of artistic expression, rather than responsibility for what you're trying to express: that's the key distinction I want you to make.

Think of yourself as a craftsman who has to be responsible for your work, who has an exchange of currency between you and the audience. In most cases, it isn't just a financial exchange. You're saying to somebody, "I need two hours of your time that you'll never ever get back, ever, no matter how much you pay for it. In exchange for that I'm going to show you something truthful and beautiful and will reveal God and his relationship with us and how He loves you and cares for you." You've collectively taken millions of hours of people's lives with your film, so don't be self indulgent. It happens all the time, but don't you do it.

A DIRECTOR'S ROLE IN POST

Attendee: Do you work in this process of post-production personally, as the director, with the director of editing? Do you just review occasionally?

George Escobar: It's a matter of budget. If you are a low-budget filmmaker, guess who the editor is? You. Exactly. So you're in it a hundred percent.

If you're on to your next project and you only supervise it once and a while, you get an editor that you trust and that you know is a good storyteller. Why would you want to give your project to somebody who isn't a storyteller, who's never read a screenplay? I love editors who write screenplays, because they know how to construct a story. You can give that to them and say, "Okay, give me a rough cut." They assemble all the footage and make some editorial choices. Then you see it and begin to work with them: "I like this, I like that," or "This scene is all wrong because you forgot about these takes."

You go back to the script notes from the script supervisor and the sound department or some photos that might have been taken as reference files. You would have told the script supervisor while the movie was being made, "Okay, that's the best take of this scene." So they'll note that down, and when the editor takes a look at that, he'll take what the director said that he wanted, and they'll put that in the movie as they are editing it.

Some directors will make the fine cut or the final cut themselves. For *Come What May*, because I needed to concentrate on the marketing, promotion, and distribution side, the editing was done by Manny Edwards and Luke Becker, his assistant.

Luke contacted us one day and said he wanted to be an intern, and we told him, "We can only pay you ____"—I can't remember the amount now, but it was very low—"over three months, and you have to live at Manny's house because you need to work together." So he did. He's worked on two films with us now.

They assembled the rough cut; it was really rough. As I've said before, everybody goes in despair in the rough cut. Don't worry: it'll come out okay. It'll be fixed. When they gave me their last, sort of their final cut, Manny was going on vacation with his family, and I had two weeks in his house with Luke. Luke and I took that two hour movie and cut it down to ninety minutes. We lopped off thirty minutes. I didn't tell Manny about this until about a week before he was coming back. I said, "We took this off, this off, and this off, for various reasons." I know he had fallen in love with certain shots, especially some of the shots that he had directed.

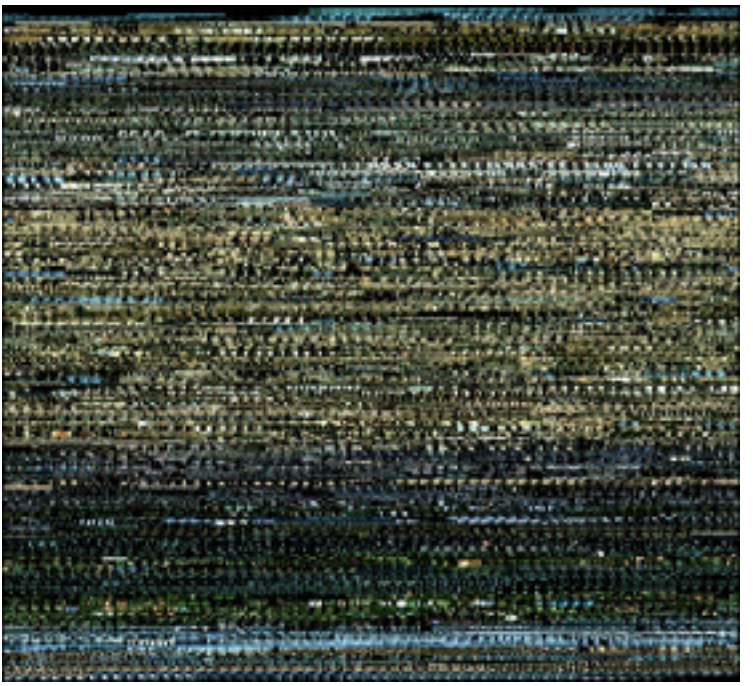
I had wanted to know whether he could direct, so I gave him scenes to direct. This prepared him to be able to direct *HERO*. Don't be selfish about that chore or that role, I should say. Manny even directed the pickups, because I was still working on the marketing and distribution. That's how Manny ended up with a co-director credit. He didn't ask for it—in fact, he didn't want it. I insisted that he take it, because I said, "This way, when we do the next movie and you direct it, you've

got a credit to show that you know how to direct a movie. Otherwise we can't have you direct the next film in front of investors or other people."

Now that's not typical. But whose movie is it, really? Your movie? If it starts becoming your movie, then there's something wrong. So be generous, especially if you want to build relationships and careers.

COLOR GRADING

Take a look at this image: do you know what this is? Is this a test pattern from a bad horror film? Can anybody tell me what image might be?



Attendee: Frequency.

Attendee: Infrared.

Attendee: How the color changes throughout the movie.

George Escobar: That's right: it's the color palette for the entire movie. Every one of those tiny squares represents a set of frames in the movie.

You can see how the color changes over time; that's not accidental. In fact, that's one of the things that I've challenged Ian Reid and Brooke Martin to look into.

What is the color palette for our next film? What color spectrum do we want to take our audience through? Which leads us into: how do you achieve those colors?

The main thing you want to do on the set is get good exposure, get good modeling of the lights for your actors. Because of the power of color-correction tools now, you really don't need to spend much time on it. The problem is many DPs don't know the power of these newer tools anymore. So even if you tell them, "I can fix your shot in post," they usually don't believe you. But you can. You can change the whole tone and nature of a shot in post-production. You can't change it if it's not well exposed. If there's no image there, you can't change that. If it's well exposed, you can change practically everything in it if you want to.

Color grading is an art. As much as you can learn from a scientific perspective, it really is an artistic endeavor, for the more you know about art and especially art that's based on realism, the better you are at becoming a color grader. The reason for this is that most films that are well made, sophisticated, and conform to Hollywood production standards base their films on successful models.

How many here have seen the movie *John Adams* or *Gladiator* or *Lawrence of Arabia*? All of those movies are based on artwork that were done by classic artists, usually in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.

Also the Renaissance, with Caravaggio and his use of light. What you try to do in the color grading process is really mimic great artwork, because if you go purely by the capabilities of technology, we always want more clarity in the image both in its lighting and its sharpness, when the artistic side tends to lean more towards focusing your attention on certain areas. That's what color grading really represents, is a narrowing of the color palette, narrowing the choices that you allow the audience to see in an image.

The more successful you are in understanding the flow of your story in relation to color, then you can use that as a tool, versus just a movie that is really well-lit, high production value, looks beautiful, looks gorgeous, but leaves you aesthetically empty because they didn't apply these principles. Sometimes you can't afford it or you don't have the knowledge or training, but I encourage you to begin by studying art history. It will really help your color grading process.

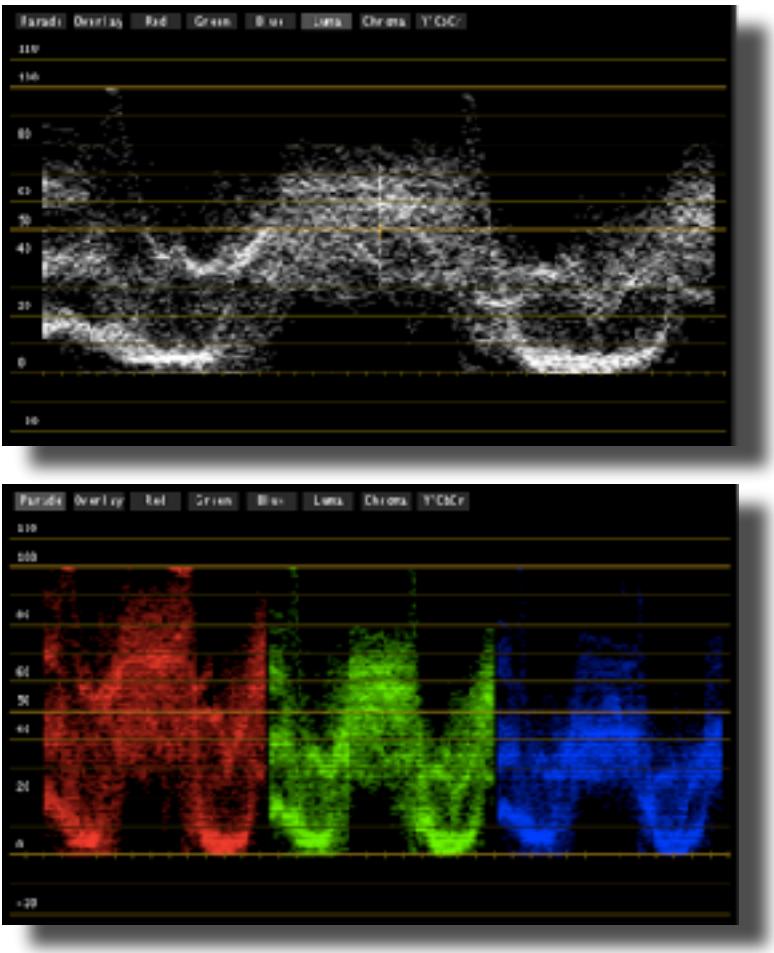
Until very recently, most color graders were artists, painters, graphic design, some visual media that allowed them to extend that experience into the world of cinema. The tools they used were very costly, in the tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of dollars.

What's remarkable is those folks who did color timing before the era of digital technology. They literally were alchemists: they knew the temperature of certain

solutions and chemicals, how long to leave the negative or inter-positive or inter-negatives which would dictate the amount of color saturation, and they had formulas they would follow. They would literally time the color, the time by which they would render the colors to come out of those chemical base solutions. Nowadays you turn a dial. It's much easier, but it's also prone to more abuse, so you really need to know what you're doing.

The process begins by understanding contrast and color, balancing the luminance between shots. Given our lighting situation, ironically, we can't easily see the color correction examples that we have here. We may need to turn some lights down for that.

In all of your modern, nonlinear editing tools, in this case Final Cut Pro, you can use a tool called *Color* that comes as part of the Final Cut Pro package. I'm sure there's something correspondingly sophisticated on the Adobe side with the Premiere Suite. You run a pass of the image through this luminance tool, and it tells you the brightness of your image. You want to keep it within this zone, which is 0 and 100. You've got luminance, which is the brightness, and then chrominance, the amount of color saturation within an image. You can manipulate this with the dials in your software.



When we shot these two pieces of footage for *Come What May*, the sun was setting very, very quickly. This image here was shot first. By the time we got to the reverse, the sun was lower and the photographer forgot to make the proper color adjustments, because we were shooting very rapidly; we only had fifteen minutes to shoot this scene before it got too dark. You can see that the color

difference between the two is rather extreme. Even though it's the same two scenes, you can see the values here, the levels are lower. This is obviously much lighter, while this is much more on the orange side and darker. So you want to adjust these and begin to match them up. After resetting the levels, you get something that's closer to each other. The final rendering of this was more of the golden color because of the sunset.

So, you have these primary and secondary colors that you can control. The masking and keying part on the secondary color adjustment, you can take some tools available to you on the software to isolate different spots. You can simply select his outline and apply the adjustment only to his image: that's how sophisticated they've become. In the past, you've either had to do all of it or none of it, because you'd affect the whole image. There was no way you could say, "This chemical only touch this part." Well, you could, it was just very laborious: you'd have to mask that image out, then create a new negative, then adjust that, then composite it back. It was not done well or often.

In some films they take these color effects to an extreme. In the case of a movie like *Saving Private Ryan*, they used a couple of techniques there where they desaturated the color. Desaturation means pulling the colors out of the image, almost so that it becomes sepia tone, meaning one color, on whatever spectrum you want, bleaching it so

that it has this rough, worn look to it. They wanted it to feel gritty during that battle sequence, and the rest of the movie had this really gritty look to it.

They also changed the frame rate by which they were filming this shot. It had this very staccato feel when it played back at the normal 24 frames per second. They probably did what's called *under-cranking*, which is shooting at less than 24 frames and then running it. They under crank it just a little bit, not very much, so you get this jumpy feeling behind it. Again, because of your imagination, if you're in the midst of battle like that, that's probably how the world looks to you: a very disjointed, very shattered feeling. They wanted to convey that emotionally on film.

You've probably seen the vignetting affect. That's sometimes done as a convention where you have the full image and you want a dissolve to just one part, like a map or something. It narrows down and then dissolves into whatever the next image needs to be.

Obviously, for *Come What May*, we didn't use bleaching, we didn't use vignettes, because they were not appropriate, and we certainly didn't do an edge detector technique. The edge detector you would really use only if you were doing a very avant-garde artsy film or you wanted to know what those edges were, because you want to trace over certain edges for maybe an animated look to your movie. You can pull the frames out and then

be able to trace it because you know where all the edges are.

The color grading process happens once you have *picture lock*, meaning that you're not making any more changes to the movie. Picture lock means that everybody who has to touch that movie again can rely on the fact that that's it: there's no more editing.

There's lots of information about color-grading online. It becomes a discipline if you really love that work. There's a need for it. But again, it's so much fun that people like to do it on their own. Now that the tools are there, you can fall into the trap of being a color grader or color timer or color correction artist. I call it a trap because I fell into that trap, and it takes a lot of effort to get out of it. I'm a recovering color artist, so I just caution you that it's very captivating, because it gives you this sense of control and artistry and it's fun.

Okay, some effects. This isn't something to worry about, but it's something that you need to know that you can do, even in a small film.

For example, *Come What May*—you wouldn't think that that was a special effects movie, right? However, there were some things there that we needed to do to be in compliance with some laws. When Caleb is sitting on a bucket asking his dad about "when does life begin," he's sitting on a a bucket that has the Major League logo

painted on the bucket. It was the only prop that we had on location, so we went ahead and shot it, knowing that we could mask that out. It's easy to do when he's sitting down. Then all of a sudden, he stands up and takes it with him. So that has to be a moving mask. We had an intern learn to do that by using the tools in Apple Motion.

I told you about the lights in that one scene, that were not really there but we put in there, to indicate that we were still at a certain auditorium. That was easy: it's a still photograph that was mapped onto the video image.

No matter what your story is, you're going to need some sort of special effect, and the neighborhood whiz-kid on computers would love to help you. That would be a great challenge for them, because all the instructions for doing it are online. They don't have to go to school for it, they can just read about it and see how it's done.

Let's watch this clip right here.

[Starts the trailer for *Gods and Generals*]

Special effects going on right here as far as the compositing of the images, and right there—that sword going through. That too is a digital effect. Obviously, that is animation.

[*Gods and Generals* trailer ends]

That's how you make a special effects-heavy Civil War movie for, I think it was thirty million dollars. Normally Hollywood would spend ninety million dollars to make that. Well, they had some very inexpensive well-designed special effects that just sold you enough of the period. Harpers Ferry, for example, had to double for Fredricksburg, and whatever they were missing they added digitally: buildings, for example. They tried to do things as much on location as possible, of course. But, when they were crossing that bridge briefly and then you see all the battlements on the other side, that's all FX of course.

We've all gotten used to it now. You can almost tell that it's effects. At least I can. Which is sad, as it gives me less enjoyment.

Other departments: you need to have a makeup department. It could be your wife, or it could be you if you know how to do makeup. Again, the fundamentals are online. Just go to YouTube and say, "How do you do film makeup?", and there's a bunch of instructions there.

Wardrobe department: if it's a contemporary piece, you just need somebody who understands the story you're trying to tell. It's less critical, because you're usually having to depend on what people have in their closet if you don't have a big wardrobe budget. The actress portraying Judith, in *Come What May*, didn't have suit-type clothes. So we gave her fifty dollars: "This is all we

can afford: go get a suit." She had to go to secondhand thrift stores to find one.

Craft services, catering: you need to make sure that there's one person responsible for that. It's a critical job. Then they'll recruit other people and other families to help them.

This is a quote that Stephen Pappas put in this slide: "A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart." That's found in the book of Proverbs, and it's a warning. We've been talking about art and craftsmanship. A fool doesn't want any understanding. They just want to express their own heart. So don't be foolish as a filmmaker.

Chapter 15

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

George Escobar: We've talked already about target audiences, affinity, and affiliate audiences. I want to do it again here in a graphical sense, just so it becomes part of your instinct. Whenever you're thinking about story or about promoting and marketing your movie, you really need to understand and identify, not just your target audience, but your core audience within your target audience.

If our target audience for *Come What May* was the homeschooling market, the core audience has to be a subset of that. Who might that be? Well, a really hardcore audience is those who are already participating in moot court or speech and debate in the NCFCA league; that's a small number. However, they exert great influence because, although that segment is small, they

are communicators: that's what they do. So if they get excited about your project, they tell other people, and that group begins to expand.

More importantly, because of the subject matter of the film, it was purposely designed and meant for an audience of moms and their daughters. Even though the central character was a young man, we knew that we weren't going to get dads and guys to see this movie and it would be foolish to assume that they would and spend a lot of money trying to get them to see it. It just wasn't going to happen. That doesn't mean that the characters in the movie need to be just women: obviously we had both. We had a good, balanced combination. When you're thinking about core audiences, it's critical to know who you're making this movie for.

Michael Snyder: It's really important that you spend time planning and thinking and identifying who these audiences may be. That will even potentially shape your story a little bit, and there's nothing wrong with that: it's not selling out. It's trying to be able to communicate with your audience in a way they understand. You may take a little turn in the story you're going to tell so that it will draw more people in or make it more interesting in some way. There's nothing wrong with doing that.

Also, don't expect that you're going to figure this out one hundred percent perfectly. Okay? You may find some surprises. Certain audiences that you really anticipated

were going to get behind the story might not be as strong as you thought. On the other hand, there may be audiences that you hadn't considered.

In *Come What May*, the modesty and purity issue was definitely part of the movie—very much so—but it wasn't the way we were thinking of the movie, as far as it's primary theme. We got great feedback on that part of the movie, but we still weren't thinking strongly about what that meant in terms of reach. After the movie was out, we learned that there are a number of ministries that are focused on modesty and chastity. We always knew there were chastity ministries, but weren't aware of modesty ones. For example, there is a ministry called Pure Fashion which does conferences especially for preteens and teen girls, where they have fashion shows, showing them, "You can dress and look really sharp and still be modest." Along with that element, they're bringing talks on relevant matters of sexuality and things like that. Those folks definitely got behind the movie. In fact, Victoria Emmons, who was a lead in *Come What May* —she went to one of these conferences to promote *Come What May*, and they ended up wanting to make her a spokesperson within this movement for Pure Fashion, so she began to do other conferences for them. All of that was completely off our radar screen, yet there it was.

George Escobar: Yeah, we didn't realize you could Google "modesty movement" and there would be

thousands of sites and blogs out there. One of our leading distributors for *Come What May* is an organization called Generations of Virtue, and they sell products that promote purity. This is one of their perennial bestsellers, and they go to all the homeschool conferences.

So right off the bat we don't have to worry about if we have a presence in the homeschool conference market, because we have Generations of Virtue representing us, as well as other people who are influential spokespersons within that movement. One of them is Tracy Klicka, who is one of the most popular speakers in homeschooling. She's become, not just a fan, but a member of our team for all of our future films and part of our prayer network as well.

Okay, in your plan, if you can budget it properly and you know you can make a good movie for a certain budget that allows you to break even just by reaching your target audience or your core audience, then all the other audiences that you can put on top of that—your affinity audiences and affiliate audiences—are just gravy.

The core audience groupings here are organizational names versus what I showed you before, as far as audiences for movies that are of similar nature. That's because these are the communication channels by which you reach your audiences. The other chart showed what those audiences have spent their money on, saying, "I like these movies." Now we ask, "How do I reach those

audiences? What's the cost-effective method by which I can reach them?"

What we have here is HSLDA (eighty thousand homeschool members), PHC of course, the Madison Project (a political action committee), Generation Joshua, and the NCFCA (five thousand families there). That organization's been around for ten years now, so there may be up to sixty thousand families that have been involved in NCFCA, which means that they're interested in speech and debate.

Going in the wider circle here, local churches, of course, and vendors: in this case, Generations of Virtue, Pure Fashion, civic clubs, Concerned Women of America, Family Research Council, Focus on the Family (we were on their radio program several times), as well as Plugged In. Our movie came out the same weekend as Will Smith's movie called *Seven Pounds*. They gave a full review for Will Smith's movie, and they said, "This is a horrible movie: you shouldn't see this. If you want to see a good movie instead, go see *Come What May*." Then they gave us a bit of description. Not a full blown endorsement, but it was nice of them to at least make that comparison.

With Prison Fellowship, we were hoping that we could reach them through *Come What May*, but there was not a natural enough fit. It did, however, establish a relationship, especially with Mike being a senior vice-president there formerly. So they began to support us for

HERO. We've even had some early input from them on a rough cut screening. Anyway, that's just starting.

Beyond that, if you get into the general audience or breakout audience, then you've got a big hit. What you need to do is identify what's in your circle.

Michael Snyder: Then there's the ultimate audience, which is international. Not that that's going to drive whether you make your movie or not, but you might want to give it a little bit of thought as you shape the story. If you make it America-centric, if it's filled with cultural references that you have to understand to really get the story, it's not going to be quite as interesting to people from other countries and other cultures. If you're dealing with the human condition and the classic, deep, real stories, and you do it well, you're going to have the opportunity for that to get some traction around the globe.

George Escobar: Even within your target or your core audience, you need to know who the actual buyer is, who is going to spend that money. We were fairly accurate in our estimation: it was moms and daughters. How do we know? Because they're the ones that make comments on Christian Cinema or Christian Books or Lifeway. The email we get is from moms and daughters and those who have been students in speech and debate. Also from students interested in film, drama, and a media career. We wanted to extend the movie experience and make it

part of our mission and training also. That's probably one of the reasons you're here.

I'd love to hear how you heard about Advent Film Group, how you learned about us. Anybody care to share anything? Yes, Tim, go ahead.

Tim: Myself, I started out just trying to understand what I wanted to do as a filmmaker. I realized that I wanted to do film and do films for the kingdom. When I was looking for someone to mentor me or some place to go, I couldn't find it off hand, so I started doing research on the internet. I was getting support from my wife in this. Then one day, I just said, "Lord, you gave me this gift. You gave me the passion and desire to do it. I do it in the church, I do it for myself, but now I realize that I can't rely on other people in my circle to get me to where I need to go." I realized I needed to branch out. Sometimes you have to operate on blind faith to find where the Lord is leading you.

One day as I was sitting at my desk in my office, a word popped in my head from out of nowhere, so I plugged that word in and started going through the search results: film schools and churches that were involved. Sherwood was one; I started looking at all the films that they did. I think it was their website that led me to Advent, somehow, and I sat there and looked at the website. Then I disregarded it altogether. I came back a couple of days later to look at it again and saw that you had some

training. I was interested in what kind of training you guys were opening to the public, but at the time it just said, "Coming soon." So once a month I would come back and see what was there.

Then last year I saw that you were having the workshop, and I tried to come. When I couldn't, I was kind of depressed about it. This year, when I got the email for it, I asked my wife to pray about it. I don't know where the Lord is leading me in this area, but this is where I am today. What I was led to do was to start my own company. My pastor acknowledged what I was doing, and he supported it. On your website, you said something about micro-budgeting. I realized that that's the area that I needed to go, that I need to understand more about it, and how to get people in that field who were like-minded to be a part of what I wanted to do for the Lord. So I came out here to be a part of this circle.

George Escobar: Well, thank you, I'm glad you're here. Anyone else? Yes, Jeff.

Jeff: My story's similar in that I was looking for a way to do family films, especially Christian films, because it seemed as though there was nobody out there really doing that. You only see a couple here and there, like the folks down in Georgia. So I was emailing people and I was praying about it.

I've been a subscriber for quite a long time to ChristianCinema.com. Sometimes I take the time to read the thing, but most of the time I quickly glance at the new movies coming out and I go on. One day though, I got a email from them, and I was sitting there reading all the way down, and at the bottom left-hand corner they talked about a new and upcoming company called Advent Film Group. They had your picture on there, and they talked about it. I was like, "Wow, this is a company that's doing what I want to do, and they're wanting to help people." The problem I've found is it seems like the people out there doing it: it's all top secret. "We can't tell you how we're doing it. If you want to come here we might help you, but we may not."

So then I emailed y'all, and I got an email back that said, "Right now there's no internships available, but we'll keep you on the list." So it was almost a year later—I'd really been praying, "God, if you want me to move forward with this, You gotta show me where to go and how to do this." It was funny, I was telling somebody here how I re-watched the movie Flywheel, and there's a portion of the movie where the guy says, "You just gotta do it. You've got to stop sitting back and you've gotta do it." I was watching it by myself and getting a bit emotional. I was like, "Okay, God, I hear you. I hear you." Two weeks later I got an email from you saying that this class was opening up and inviting me to come. I told my wife, "I really think we should go to this class. I

think God is telling us this is the direction we need to go." She said, "Hm, I don't know." But we did it anyway.

George Escobar: What do you think now, Susan?

Susan: Oh, I think it's wonderful for what we've been praying about together about our future, being empty-nesters now and more active. We want to really make a difference, a positive one, and have it be an eternal difference.

George Escobar: Good! Thanks for sharing.

Okay, let's take a look at these: these are the marketing materials that were prepared for us by Provident Films. Do any of you have your preview edition DVDs here? They have the artwork that was done by a very inexpensive graphic designer that we brought on board for the preview edition: that was me. I could afford me. It turned out that I had selected enough of the design elements that they also found attractive. So they reused it, but they did a much better job at organizing it to emphasize who people would really want to see in this movie, which was Victoria Emmons. That's why she is profiled there, why she's got a larger picture on the main poster, and why she's first on the left to right orientation of *Come What May*. They've done a really good job of creating a package of marketing materiel for the web and for a movie package that you would receive if you

ordered the movie through Outreach Films. There's a picture of it right there.



You are going to need marketing material at the very early stages if possible: logo designs, posters—and we even talked about the teaser trailer. What happens is it really becomes real, not just to yourself, but to everybody that you're talking to. If you show them something in print or on the web, it's no longer a concept, but a real project.

So I would encourage you to network amongst yourselves. There is at least one graphic designer here, if she's willing to raise her hand. There she is. You can talk to her. I've already made an appointment to figure out

how we can work together. I'm going to take a look at what she can do, because Ian Reid goes back to school in two months and we lose most of our graphic support when he leaves.

Actually, Ian, could we bring up that concept art that you've created? Okay, here is a shipyard or a busy seaport scene, which is the reference image that Ian worked with, and this is a composite image of a ship and people at the dock, with some artifacts here and a building. We're not going to film this exactly, but it gives us an idea of what that scene might look like. It also allows the location manager to look for things that can deliver us this particular shot. If Ian is able to create something that becomes iconic for us, we'll use it just like we did for *HERO*. See the poster image that you have on your bookmark? That was created by Ian last summer, and we still use it, because it's such a powerful image.

This one here: our location manager took this photo for us, saying that this might be a good place to create the farm. Look at what Ian did with it: added the cow here, a little stream, the clouds, and this whole cabin. He changed the color here to make it more golden, so that's potentially what that set could look like. It gives us an idea of what the movie can be, so that the project is becoming increasingly mature and more real, especially for an investor: he sees progress being made in designing the movie.

This last one here is depicting Fort Duquesne, with the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers converging into the Ohio River. This setting doesn't exist anymore: it's now Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. What would it have looked like in 1755? That's what this shot is supposed to reveal.

Attendee: At what point did you connect with Provident for distribution? Because they are helping with distributing, right?

George Escobar: That's correct: they are our distributor for *Come What May*. We cannot sell the movie. In fact, I have to buy the movie from them if I want a copy.

Attendee: Okay, so they're an exclusive distributor. At what point do you make that connection? Is it after the movie is shot?

George Escobar: You develop a relationship with a distributor as early as you possibly can and have them be attracted to your project sooner rather than later. They prefer that. They want to know who you are and what you represent and the quality that you can bring to the table. They'll track your progress, and if it meets with their expectations and what you said you were going to deliver, the interest just heightens over time. But they won't commit until they see the actual footage, either the rough cut or the final product.

Mike, did you want to give any insights on the distributor relationship?

Michael Snyder: Yeah, I mean, it took a while until Provident came on board. You heard about the internet screening by American Family Association. In one sense that's counterintuitive, on the other hand, that created some strength and buzz around the film, so after that any distributor could know that there was a really good reaction to the film. We had ten offers on the table within a couple of months.

George Escobar: It was October of 2008 when we had the movie finished, and we were getting offers already. At least half a dozen distributors had very good offers, including Provident Films. We prayed, "What should we do with this movie? Should we go ahead and sign? Lord, what do you want us to do?" The Lord laid it upon our heart to give it away for free. "Really, Lord? Is this what you want? Well, it's your money, so you do whatever you want with it." So we chose to give it away for free, so that perhaps even a handful of voters per precinct, especially those who are nonbelievers, might see this movie and be touched by it and want to elect leadership that will promote life.

Literally the very next day after we prayed about that, AFA called again, saying, "We heard about you guys. We love what you're doing. We'd like to support you. What can we do?" We said, "We have this really crazy idea of

having this movie on the internet, to break it up into five segments and show it for free for two or three weeks right before the elections." They told us, "Well, we happen to have just built a network for that type of thing, but we've never done a feature film like that before. You guys can be the first test case."

It was hugely successful: it's become one of their primary vehicles for promotion. Our company, with *Come What May*, was the first one that they reached three million people with. It was like getting a virtual theatrical release! We'd told our investors, "This is what we're planning to do. If you have any objections, please let us know." They said, "No: if this is what the Lord says to do, then do it." We talked to Provident Films and told them, "This is what we're going to do. Do you have any problems with it?" They took about two seconds and said, "No, you should do it. We want to see what happens. It's a risk, but if this is what the Lord is saying, go for it."

The Lord really blessed us because we were willing to do what He wanted done and do it the counter-intuitive way. Usually you do something like that at the very end of the life-cycle of a product, not the beginning. The Lord likes to confound the wise and the world, so that's one way he did it. By the time we released the movie for public sale on DVD, millions of people knew about it through that broadcast. In fact, that's how David and Rebekah's family found out about it, in Spain, right?

David: Yeah, and we got two preview copies when you released those.

George Escobar: Right. That's right, we were selling the preview edition because we needed to get some money to finance our distribution efforts.

Oh, one other part of that story: we prayed, "Lord, how do you want us to get this out for free?" We had to figure that out, so we contacted some companies who said they would help us do it. How much will it cost? They said, based on traffic estimates, probably thirty thousand dollars. Well, we didn't have thirty thousand dollars. That's when AFA called, saying, "Hey, we'll do it for free." Again, that was the Lord blessing that venture. Then, when we launched in March, it shot to the top of the charts in Christian DVD sales. Right at the top, even knocked off *Fireproof* momentarily—for maybe two minutes.

You have with you the first storyline of *Come What May*, right there. I would encourage you to read it. It's not quite the same movie that we shot, so it shows you the evolution. We didn't have a screenplay when we were raising money for *Come What May*, but we had everything else. The fact that we had everything else, I think, was proof to our investors that we could do everything else that we said we were going to do. We had done our homework, and the screenplay was almost negligible.

Attendee: Is it an issue if you sell a story that's different from the outcome? Did you get any response from that, like, "This is a different movie than the movie that we invested in"?

George Escobar: No, because the core of the story is still intact. Did you know that Caleb had a roommate named David and Caleb lived in the dorms at Patrick Henry College and that he liked to fly remote-controlled airplanes? That thirty minutes in the movie is gone, because that subplot didn't make sense. Every time we came to that subplot, the movie would stop: it wasn't germane to the story. Things that were not going to help the movie got dropped.

Develop a marketing strategy for how to raise awareness for your film. That's your number one goal. You have this chart now: you can copy this. 1) Develop what's called "marketing evangelists." They talk about and sell your ideas and your stories for you. 2) Provide leadership in helping launch other film companies, which is what we're doing here. 3) Establish an affiliate sales program. We tried this, but this does not prove successful at all. It was much more difficult than we thought it was going to be. 4) Launch a line of ancillary products. We're working on the *Come What May* novelization to kick off the relaunch of *Come What May*.

We're preparing for when *HERO* comes out, just like when *Facing The Giants* came out at the theaters the sales

for *Flywheel* took off. It took them three years to sell twenty-five thousand units of *Flywheel*. When *Facing The Giants* came out, in three months they sold two hundred and twenty thousand copies of *Flywheel*, and it continues to sell. So we're thinking that *HERO* will be the driver that will lift *Come What May* out of obscurity and more into the mainstream.

Attendee: Is the preview edition the final version?

George Escobar: It's close to final: after that were only some minor edits and color-correction cleanups. We had two different types of preview editions, one that had more direct cuts between scenes and one that had a lot more fade to black, fade up from black. We were experimenting and testing different editing methods. I don't know which ones you got, but I consider them priceless, because that's it. You have all our inventory of preview editions.

Michael Snyder: Don't tell George, but I have a box of them in my garage.

George Escobar: Oh, good! I'm glad, because I want to hang on to a few of those. That way in my old age, I can say, "Aw, look at this!"

So, we were able to carry out our ten-point marketing plan almost line by line. Make sure you have something similar, because if you don't have a plan, you're not going to be able to execute on it.

What are some of the ingredients for connecting with your core audience?

Load the cast with well-known real-life practitioners, the screen characters who are teaching what you're doing. We auditioned both Victoria Emmons and Austin Kearney at the National Championships for Speech and Debate. They were national-class speech and debate guys, so they already had a constituency—a small one, but very vocal. Mike Farris and PHC, and many HSLDA folks were also part of the movie.

Tell a story that raises or promotes issues that your audience is already passionate about. Then they can't help but talk about your movie.

Allow the audience to participate in key aspects of the production. When we announced we were doing pickups, we invited all the supporters that had given us their email addresses to come out for a day to be our special guests. We had thirty or forty people from all over the country who came that day and became extras. Those folks who were going into Founders Hall at the beginning of the movie were our supporters who came to join us. We extend that invitation to you now: if you want to be an extra for our pickups in late July in Winston-Salem, you're welcome to show up and we'll put you on camera. Bring your glove if you're a dad, and bring your son: we'll film you playing catch and put you in the movie.

Michael Snyder: Issue movies are tricky: on the one hand, you know you're going to have some group that's going to be really passionate about it. On the other hand, the narrower the issue, the smaller the group that's going to be passionate about it, and the likelihood that the more general audience will not necessarily come alongside.

Now *Come What May* was an issue movie. The pro-life issue is so massive that it could go on and on for decades, sadly, so that's not a limiting issue. But let's say your issue is school vouchers. It's a great issue, and God may put it on your heart to make that film, but realize your audience may not be that big.

George Escobar: You have to look at the time-frame and life-cycle of your movie and whether it's a perennial movie that can come out on an annual basis. With the anniversary, sadly, of Roe v. Wade on January 22, *Come What May* can get reissued every year. It's the plan of Provident Films to promote the movie as a counter to that anniversary. Hopefully though, over time, the need for *Come What May* will diminish in that regard.

Michael Snyder: You heard yesterday about the wrestling movie. There's always going to be new kids coming into wrestling every year, another set of junior high kids or even eight-year-olds starting to wrestle. The same thing with the modesty and chastity part of *Come What May*: there's always going to be new children that

are coming of age, and families are going to find this to be a very valuable tool to engage their child on some of these questions. So you have an evergreen, in that sense.

REAL-TIME MARKETING CASE STUDY

George Escobar: I want to try a little bit of an experiment, because I think it might help Tim in particular. I want to see if we can come up with a real time distribution and marketing strategy for your film, Tim. You have two of them. Which film do you want us to work on? Tell me what you see as the toughest challenge on that.

Tim: I guess we could work on the latest feature, the one that you read. I'll tell them the log-line, and then you can kind of fill the details in. Our log-line is: "A small child trying to change the world changes the one who can."

It's about a ten-year-old boy, Billy, who has a rough childhood. His parents both died in an accident, so he's living with his aunt and her boyfriend. He's sort of struggling with his faith. He's been a Christian for two years, has been working closely with the youth pastor, and really been impacted by some of the community work that the church he attends is doing.

Chad, the youth pastor, challenges him to make a difference. Chad doesn't really expect him to do much,

but Billy decides to raise money for a school. He starts doing odd jobs, trying to raise money idealistically, but somewhat naively, for what he can do. He meets a wealthy individual, Ted, who's alone in his mansion and owns a large corporation.

As Billy works for Ted, he really starts to affect Ted's life. In the end, Ted is moved by Billy's diligence and passion, has his own conversion, and starts a foundation for Billy to work out of to build the school that he intended to at the beginning.

George Escobar: So it's a highly personal tale of mentorship on both ends, because Billy, a young person, leads Ted, an older gentleman, who is very successful materially, but a miserable failure in his relationship with God—Billy leads him to that relationship. Whether it's cleaning the yard or mowing the lawn, every job He's given also shows the efforts of a diligent work ethic.

For a child to see this and the parents who will be watching it with their children, it's a great fable. You were telling me yesterday that you were starting to talk to some mentorship organizations about it too.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. The older man tries to convert Billy away from this charitable mindset, yet Billy's passion and childlike faith changes this older gentleman's life instead.

George Escobar: It's a well-written screenplay and can be made well because it lives within the boundaries of what's affordable for a micro-budget or low-budget movie.

Tim: Our target is trying to hit that $150-250 thousand range. Part of the reason we came is to connect with people who have more experience at that, and learn some more. We're trying to hit that micro budget range, and know that that's achievable. We didn't write the story with the mindset of keeping it small, but we did start to craft the story, at the end, to keep it within that micro-budget range while not compromising the story.

George Escobar: The marketing challenge is to identify the core audience. Let's begin with that: do you have a clue yet of who that might be?

Tim: Looking at who would watch this film, we were thinking of a parent and child relationship as well a grandparent and grandchild relationship. The mid-teen, not so much: I don't see them as our core audience at this point. It would be more of a family film, with multiple people watching it. If it had the potential of going theatrical, it's not just going to be a husband and wife going to see it; it would probably be an entire family going to see this film. Those were some of the thoughts behind that.

Michael Snyder: How much of Christianity is portrayed in this film?

Tim: It's quite evident: we reference scripture. There's scenes in a church, though not in the sanctuary of the church. It's a youth pastor connecting to a kid who is in his youth group, though that relationship is begun more out of the convenience for the aunt and the live-in boyfriend; it's free babysitting. So a neighbor had taken advantage of this opportunity to bring the child to church. The conversion moment happens before our movie takes place, but we see him reading his Bible every night. We see this ten-year-old developing his own relationship with God and growing to understand a work ethic and commitment to self-sacrificing and giving to others. I would say the Christian component is very strong through that.

We learned, through the first script that we had, where we had begun to compromise the Christian message, that it really took away from our ability to connect with the investor on a heart level. We had to hit them on the investment level and convince them of that. That was a tough, tough sell, and we realized that that was our downfall.

Michael Snyder: It reminds me of *The Ultimate Gift* in reverse. There you have, from the grave, the grandfather who is mentoring the grandson and we see him transformed; it's built around money as the vehicle for

showing transformation. Here you have the same thing. You have the young and the old, but the young mentoring the older one to change by having a different relationship with money.

You're definitely going to hit the Christian audience. I don't know if there's a possibility for a little crossover, but that's up to the Lord.

George Escobar: I mentioned to you yesterday that there's an organization in Washington, DC called Mentors Inc. They've been around since 1987. What they do is the businessmen mentor young high school students so that they have a source of hope, somebody that can come alongside and make sure they finish school and then get a job beyond school.

I would venture that every major city has a similar type of organization. I think they're going to say, "Wow, you guys made a movie for us." You may even want to have another character in there that's more at the high school age, that also gets mentored through this process. Maybe Ted undertakes that mission, or maybe Ted already has that, but not in the same way that he's getting mentored by this ten-year-old kid. He's mentoring this other young man to be driven by money, to be his protégé, so to speak, and realizes, "Wow, what am I doing? I'm having my same mistakes duplicated." I think you're going to get good support, perhaps financially, but certainly as a sales communication channel.

Michael Snyder: On crossover, the relationship between Billy and his aunt has potential, where his aunt is trying to take on this mother role, but is somewhat inhibited by her relational situation. At first she's a little flippant with Billy, but as the movie progresses this relationship grows stronger. That resonates with someone who comes from a broken home and becomes a universal thing.

George Escobar: If you're able to add that extra ingredient, and establish relationships with these organizations now before you even start the movie, that'll give them the opportunity to partner up and feel like they're helping develop the story. You bring that to someone like Provident Films, and they love it.

Michael Snyder: Demographically, you have the whole baby boom generation, seventy-seven million strong, who are moving into an entire change of life and trying to figure out, "What do I do with all this money I have?" You can easily tap into that if you don't make your older guy too old: say early sixties.

Also, I think your idea was great to have another character in there, a teen, who's also getting transformed, initially for the worse. Here's the deal: you've got parents all over who would love for the Lord to bless them with a child like Billy, okay? But every parent's always going to have those teen years, where you're not sure where your kid is headed. Even if we know they began in the Lord,

now it's this whole identity crisis and searching for "Who am I" and "What am I." It's important to be able to offer hope to parents by seeing a teen, their teen now, on screen, being transformed. Again, it doesn't matter by whom. In this case it's going to be Billy, because here's somebody who's so pure and childlike in their faith, picturing for all of us how we're supposed to be in our own faith. You could draw in so many more families that way than if you've only got an off-the-charts ten-year-old, right?

George Escobar: Yeah, there's no balance.

Michael Snyder: Dealing with this much older person, those two things are not connecting in a strong way. I mean, in a way it connects: it's a great story. But viscerally, you need that seventeen-year-old or that nineteen-year-old son or daughter.

Tim: And that's what we found missing.

George Escobar: The other thing you want to do, after the rewrite, is get this to some casting directors. Look at the kind of movies that you like and see who the casting director is, contact them and say, "We're working on this movie; we're looking for actors with name recognition with our target audience." Hopefully your film is the kind of project that a *name actor* would want to do for minimum rates, because it's something they can believe in, something they're giving back to. All of a sudden,

with a name actor on your project, your low-budget movie has real marketing legs.

Tim: Yeah, and it brings a new demographic into the mix, which makes sense. I'd like to mention one of the other components we've been exploring.

When Billy is raising money for a school, everybody, including the people at his church, is watching him dream big. They want to believe in it, you know, but they're still treating him like a little boy. At the end of the film, he's raised about three thousand dollars. For a little boy to do that, by having ambition to even go to the pawn shop and sell his autographed baseball and sacrificially doing what he can to get this amount, is huge. Then to be crushed by someone who is saying, "Yeah, go buy yourself a bike," or, "You poor kid; you live in a dump of a home." Then he reveals at the end, "I'm wanting to build a school for kids in Africa who are orphans and don't have any."

Maybe there's a potential for connecting with Compassion on a national level. Should we explore that for revenue, for somehow promoting them or doing a product placement or just as a possible vehicle to help us with the marketing?

George Escobar: I don't know if you've talked to those organizations. You should have those conversations; they may even be able to lead you to a true story. If you can

link it to a real live event like we were able to do with *Come What May*, which we based on a true event at PHC, it gives it that much more power with the audience. We haven't sold it that way in the marketplace, because it would have been competing with the other messages that we had. Maybe in a re-release we might do that and say, "Inspired by a true story."

I think you certainly have a strong story though. I remember reading it on the plane, and I had to look up at my watch and at the page count because it went so fast. It was a really fast read, and I felt like it was worth my while reading it. That's the first screenplay that I've received in three years that felt good.

Tim: Well, thanks for that.

George Escobar: That's why I called you right away to say, "Keep working on this."

Tim: The first lesson I learned is don't put down a number that you can't be contacted at twenty-four hours a day.

George Escobar: Yeah, this is something that I try to instill in all of our folks, though they don't always do it. You will either get a job or lose a job because of one little silly thing, which is if you can be contacted. Every time you end an email, even if you've sent that contact information to them already, put it on. If they need to get a hold of you, if they've got a job that they need filled

right away and they have to look for their contact list, they're going to go to the next guy that they already have right in front of them, and you've just lost a job. I can't tell you how many countless stories there are of people I know that didn't get contacted; all you need to do is put your cell phone or your office number there.

Tim: We put the office number, but I should have put the cell, because he tried calling us after hours.

George Escobar: How many of you guys do that? Okay, good. The rest of you just put your first and last name and then that's it: very, very foolish in this business. In this industry, that means you're not interested in getting called or getting a job. It's true: if I can't get in touch with you, then you're gone. I never want to get an email from you guys without your contact information underneath your name.

Amy: I would suggest, if you have a personal demo reel, to include that link as well.

George Escobar: Well, maybe: only if it's professional. Don't just slap on a link to some quirky YouTube video you did with your friends.

Tim: You mentioned that this film has potential to have a name attached to it, and we would love for that to happen. That will require partnering with experienced people, right? Exploring a relationship with Provident or

with producers who have experience in marketing and distribution and relationships that they bring in?

George Escobar: Not really. I mean, I haven't seen your reel, and you don't have one for future films, but if you can prove to them that you can deliver a quality product by the people you bring on board, maybe a producer or a director who's got a little bit of a track record, that helps. When we presented *Come What May*, the fact that I did come from film school and had experience with AOL and Discovery, that told the investors, "Okay, this guy knows what he's doing." So you just need to have that; you don't need to have made a feature film.

Chapter 16

THE DISTRIBUTION ROADSHOW

George Escobar: We've talked a little bit about distribution already, but I want to cover a few more things. This is a little beyond the micro-budget world, but I want to mention it.

A studio release, because it's a studio release, is always going to favor the studio. So don't be enamored by that: "Oh yeah, our movie is being distributed by Warner Brothers or Twentieth Century Fox." It's not an honor. They're about to pillage you. You're really not going after that; you're going for a fair deal. The best way to do that is to develop a business plan to support a service deal, where you hire those distributors. Again, that's so the equation doesn't go upside down for you. The term "service deal" needs to be part of your language.

My Big Fat Greek Wedding is one of the most recent low-budget successes. It was made for $5 million and earned $368 million worldwide through a service deal. The initial advertising budget was around a million dollars. The distributor, IFC Films, was given a flat fee of three hundred thousand dollars, and they took it up into the market place.

It had one huge advantage that most of us won't have for our films: this movie was made because the wife of Tom Hanks, Rita Wilson, loved the story. So she promoted it and pushed it through; they had all the contacts. That's not typical, but it's not beyond our reach to do something smaller scale than this, and we'll be able to do it.

The Lord has been opening doors, and He controls all the doors and windows out there. I think He's waiting for us to be ready to be recipients of those blessings, to have a real heart for serving other filmmakers and for putting the fruits of those revenues back into the Kingdom, rather than Hollywood. None of those things are completely there yet, and that's why I think we haven't seen any major breakthroughs, except with what Sherwood Pictures has done: they're a great model and inspiration for all of us. If you don't already know that story behind them, I suggest you do some research online. Advent Film Group would not have existed without Sherwood Pictures and the time that Stephen Kendrick took in that initial meeting to talk to me and

follow up with subsequent emails of support and little words of encouragement.

One final story about how generous those guys are: when we were doing the distribution deal for *Come What May* with Provident Films, *Fireproof* had just broken through the market place; it was a huge hit. Every filmmaker in the Christian world wanted to be one of the trailers that would end up on the *Fireproof* DVD. Everybody was clamoring to be in that, except us. We had a preexisting relationship with Stephen. I could have picked up the phone, but I thought better of it and said, "Lord, I'm going to leave it up to you." We had a preexisting relationship with Provident Films, and we could have pushed it, but we didn't. As they were evaluating which trailers to put in there, the only one that they said they felt God calling them to do was *Come What May*. So *Come What May* is the only other movie outside of Sherwood's movies that is in the *Fireproof* Special Edition DVD. Again, the Lord was at work there.

That's how many people have discovered our film. In fact, it's been so popular in Brazil that they had to remaster the DVD, removing our film, because they couldn't fulfill the demand. We've since been pushing Provident to get our movie in Portuguese so it can make it to Brazil.

So the distribution value chain for micro-budget films, from best case to worst, is: 1) DVD self-distribution,

because you own most of the revenue. 2) DVD wholesale distribution: you attract the big wholesalers. On the secular mainstream side, it's Ingram, Baker & Taylor, and Video Products. In the Christian world, it's Christian Cinema, Provident Films, Pureflix, Bridgestone Multimedia. There's only a handful, and if you make a movie they'll all call you. They'll want to take a look at your movie, and if it's any good then they'll bid for it. 3) Netflix: I guess we finally made it to Netflix. 4) Theatrical: we've talked about four-walling, which is really putting all the risk on your side of the table, because you have to put the money up front to rent that screen. 5) The service deal. Then 6), the standard studio standard deal. It's standard for the studio to get all the money: that's what's standard about it.

You need to have something distinctive about yourself and your products. When we were releasing *Come What May*, we wanted people to come away knowing that our releases will create a want-to-see desire from the core audience that'll generate considerable newspaper and television publicity. If you google "Advent Film Group" or "AFG" or "Come What May" or "Christian films," we're always at the top of those search results returns. We've done dozens of interviews on radio, newspapers, online articles, and they continue to come just on *Come What May*. We haven't even really done any work yet on *HERO*, except for one. Mike, do you want to talk about the ISI deal?

Michael Snyder: Sure. In connection with *HERO*, there is a ministry called Iron Sharpens Iron. It's a conference ministry based in Hartford, Connecticut, that'll have fifty men's ministry conferences around the country this year. The people who attend these conferences are pastors and church leaders, as well as regular guys from the pews, that are really strong in wanting to be the men God made them to be. Fathering is obviously a big part of that.

We worked a deal with them where we get exposure at every one of those conferences during the year. We put together a four-minute video promotion for it. You've seen part of it, the trailer, but there's a lead-in piece, then the trailer, and then an exit piece. In these other pieces we're talking a little more about the purpose of the movie, about who we are and what the message is and that kind of thing. So we get exposure there. Somebody who's running the conference will introduce it, and there are also sign-up cards in the takeaway bag that everybody gets when they come to the conference. Those sign-up cards are for a church to host a preview screening of the movie when it comes time for it.

The first conference was February 20, and we now have over a hundred churches that are signed up to do preview screenings. So we're beginning to build what I call "distribution allies." You want to build as many of these relationships as you can. We have reached out to and

begun to build a great relationship with some really big national fathering ministries. The National Center for Fathering is one of them, also the National Fatherhood Initiative. They're eager to get the message out when it's time to pull the trigger.

We're working to get our pickups and another cut done so that we can start handing it to some of these folks. At that point they're going to see it and feel it and really start to build the energy. Then we'll have to refine what the overall marketing plan is and what they're going to do with what we're coordinating. There are many kinds of ministries that we have on our radar: Focus on the Family, Family Life Today—we haven't gone there yet, but they're obvious constituencies. The American Family Association has a list of three million people who have signed up for weekly letters from Don Wildmon or his son Tim, who is now running that ministry.

Those are the kinds of relationships you want to build as part of your distribution development. Then when you sit down with whomever you're going to cut your service deal with to do distribution and they say, "Why do you think that people are going to come and watch this?", you say, "Well, here are lists of millions of consumers who are going to be messaged again and again and again by people they listen to, telling them that this is something they really ought to go and see." That's an incredibly different position to be in than walking in and

saying, "We have a great movie. Why don't you take this on? Take a look and then sign this." It's so important: from day one, you've got to be thinking about that.

It goes back to the question of: "Who is your audience?" We have to allow that to shape our story. We just went through that exercise, right? We've got a whole character coming in because it's going to increase whole demographics that you're going to be able to reach in a stronger way. Then you have to think even more specifically, like where the channels are within this demographic that are going to speak out on your behalf. Identify and start building those relationships, even from the first day after you write your first draft of the screenplay. That is, if you're really committed to doing it.

It's a very different thing when you're talking to your investors and saying, "I've identified all of these ministries and not-for-profits that are probably going to be really interested in getting this message out." How about if I've talked to fifteen or twenty different organizations, and three of them have already told me they're strongly interested in this, they're loving it, and they can't wait till we get it done and I've got another bunch that are expressing some good interest but want to see something more before they commit. Do you see the difference?

Attendee: What are the chances of having a web-based organization that's specifically set up to reach out to

churches who want to see more Christian media put out there, where they take in movies from Christian filmmakers, review the content, and then spread it out to their church network? They could even endorse it in their bulletins or play the trailer of the film on Sunday morning.

George Escobar: Outreach Films does that, and Pureflix Entertainment. CloudTen also. There are at least four church cinema circuit companies out there.

Michael Snyder: There's a difference, though, in that those organizations are push, not pull. They have a film they've been hired to promote, and they have relationships with churches, but they're going in on their own saying, "Hey, we've got another one we would like you to be interested in." Versus having a place where churches sign up because they're really proactive about it and they're saying, "I don't want people coming to sell me something. I want to come to a place where I trust you to be the filter to look at all this stuff and then make recommendations among all the things that out there being sold."

Attendee: ChristianCinema.com does that: they have that rating system.

Attendee: But it's saturated: there's so many movies on their website you don't know where to start.

Attendee: Well, but if you want to get family ratings, then you click on that link and it gives you a description of the movie and stuff like that.

Michael Snyder: These are valuable, but they're primarily designed for the individual. A church may have leadership that's trying to figure out, "Okay, this year we want to promote four solid movies in our church. I want somebody to be sorting all this stuff out for me, not just telling me about the story, but why it's so important for me to have my congregation watch this movie."

George Escobar: I don't know of any organization like that. It sounds like a wide open business opportunity.

Attendee: Everyone is motivated to sell their movies, but a site that's designed for click-throughs and directions, not primarily focused on selling you that product, that's what makes sense.

Attendee: Even if there's no financial affiliation for that organization to the movie itself, it becomes a huge distribution point for those movies.

Michael Snyder: I think it's a great idea.

George Escobar: Are we ready for that clip, David? Okay. It will be important for you to see this, because this was produced by interns and an adult volunteer who's retired from the military. His mission in life right now is to promote Christian films by going on set with his

camera, his gear, his wife, and his RV, to produce behind-the-scenes material. Because he's already getting paid by the government through his pension, he does it for free. We want to continue to work with him. He's very good, and he's also mentoring young people. This particular piece was collaboratively edited by Amy Jarvis, Kylene Arnold, and David Cook.

[*HERO* Movie Introduction, Trailer, and Call to Action (http://vimeo.com/9208172)]

George Escobar: For the additional resources mentioned, the sermon clips have been edited by Kylene and David, and Rebekah has written the study guide. It'll become a package that churches will be able to get for free. Usually they have to buy these things, but we want to serve them. We hope they'll like the material and want to promote the movie.

Okay, now this is the premiere of a podcast that was written and produced by Brooke Butler as a part of her formal internship with Advent; she is receiving credits at Patrick Henry College for this. She created four of them. I want you to listen to the first one.

[*HERO* Podcast - Episode 1: "Child of Your Father" (you can listen to all four episodes for free at: http://herofamilymovie.com/HERO_Official_Movie_Site/HERO_-_Resources.html)]

George Escobar: There are four episodes, and each one gets even better and better. This is the kind of talent that's out there amongst our young people. We can't move forward just between Mike and myself. As you set up your organizations, think about how you want to serve. Create a new way of working, a new pattern. Let's not keep doing the same thing that's been ineffective for generations. Let's join what God is working out amongst us. Let's be partners in that and serve one another, love one another. The results are going to be incredible, but it's going to need foot soldiers. It is a scary proposition: I kid you not, it will demand effort and work. However the fruits and the benefits and the blessings are beyond what we can measure in time and place.

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING

Thank you very much for being here. I enjoyed meeting all of you, although I didn't get a chance to talk to all of you yet. Those of you who haven't come up and talked to me, do feel free to do that; I would love to get to know you.

Michael Snyder: I agree there, George, and I feel it as well. God has made each of us for a purpose, and if He has purposed you for this field, He will see you through. He's not promising an easy journey, but He's promised us the most thrilling and fulfilling ride if we're going where

He wants us to, when He wants us to. It's an opportunity to live the abundant life He came to give us. Yeah, it's risky, but who else are you going to trust? Are you going to trust Him, or are you going to trust yourself? It's easy for me to figure out who I ought to be trusting. I imagine it might be the same for you.

This medium is incredibly powerful. That's part of why we feel called to it, because there is so much evil being done through this medium. People think you're some kind of screwball if you start using terms like evil or wickedness, but those are biblical terms; it's just the way it is. In Scripture we're told to hate evil, to hate wickedness. It's everywhere, and it comes in such a sweet, bright, lovely package. Remember, the evil one loves to masquerade as an angel of light and with this medium you can create and package anything to make it look tasty and wonderful, no matter how much sin, no matter how much evil.

Most people don't even know it's happening. As the decades have progressed, each decade younger someone is than me, they've proportionately spent more time in front of a screen. The average twenty-year-old today: it's incredible the number of hours they've spent in front of a screen. In many ways it's a screened-in generation. You're in front of your computer, your handheld device, a television, a movie screen. Screen after screen after screen. It is literally screening out reality, because you are

looking at a different reality that's been packaged for you, and so your attention is not focused on the real thing going on all around you. Your focus has been intermediated by someone else: that's why it's called "media."

Remember, we become what we behold. What is it that we and the rising generations are beholding constantly? We're allowing it to flood in, to overtake and shape who we are, how we think, and what we see as true, good, as beautiful, or what we see as evil.

We have an opportunity here to make a difference by presenting alternatives, all of us, to be salt and light. It's the easy thing to sit back and curse the darkness and avoid being the light. Let's stop cursing the darkness. Fine, Hollywood's going to do what Hollywood's going to do. The question is: what are WE going to do? Are we going to present the alternatives that are good, true, and beautiful, that will ultimately resonate with people and wake them up? It will shake them out of this unreality that they've been bound and chained and shackled to by everything that they've been exposed to so powerfully and beautifully packaged. This is spiritual warfare right at the very front lines, coming into this field.

That's the other thing: prayer. There will probably be an unusual amount of resistance: things that seem to go wrong or don't work out because you've dared to step into a field of battle that has been controlled by the

prince of the power of the air, and he does not want to give up territory. There's going to be resistance: that means prayer is key. Your own prayer time, but also others praying for you. If you have started or are going to start a company, please get yourself covered in prayer. Find a prayer team to come around you: people outside your company, even. We have enough people we can pray among ourselves, but we have some people outside our company that come along and pray as well.

George Escobar: Why don't you close us in prayer?

Michael Snyder: Yeah, let's do that.

Father, we thank you so much for the gifts you have poured into us, for the yearnings that you have placed into us, the yearnings for outcomes, for transformation of individuals and even our culture itself. We thank You for choosing us to serve you in this field. We thank You and trust You for Your protection, for Your provision. We thank You for Your love and for the privilege to serve You.

Lord, I ask for travel mercies for everyone who is here and must return home. I pray that their travels would be filled with times of reflection on what they've experienced here yesterday and today, and that they would be listening to Your voice for further clarification of exactly what it is You would have each of them do. Lord, give them the courage to say "yes" to whatever it is you're asking them to do and provide them with prayer warriors to come around them to support them in it.

Father, I thank you for being present yesterday and today in all we've been doing. We just want to say thank you. We lift all this up to You in the name of Jesus, our Lord, our Saviour, and our King. Amen.

Chapter 17

INTERVIEW: CHRISTIAN CINEMA.COM

Angela Walker of Christian Cinema interviews George Escobar one week before the official DVD release of *Come What May* — March 11, 2009

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Angela Walker: It's a big career change to go from working with some of the top entertainment and communication companies in the world to creating films with home schooled students. What prompted that transition for you?

George Escobar: The move from a Hollywood-run industry to the Christian filmmaking side was a mutual one. The inspiration for that really came from Sherwood Pictures. I had an opportunity to speak directly

with Stephen Kendrick at the San Antonio Independent Film Festival back in 2006, and he challenged me to consider the fact that I had been given opportunities from the Lord and what was I going to do with them? Who was I working for?

That was a great conviction, so I got down on my knees and cried out to the Lord, saying, "Lord, this is all Yours. I don't want to do this any more for myself." Three months later Advent Film Group began. When the Lord wants something done, He brings people and circumstances to make it happen.

Angela Walker: When you started Advent, what did you have in mind as the future of the group?

George Escobar: Because of my background with Discovery and AOL, I learned to think strategically. With those organizations, I was responsible for advanced products, so I looked through the same lens at the Christian marketplace.

I asked two fundamental questions: 1) *Where are Christians involved and most effective?*, and 2) *Where is the Lord leading, what is he blessing?* Putting those two things together resulted in the business plan and mission of Advent Film

Group: to raise up and train the next generation of Christian filmmakers.

Because I felt if my generation was doing an effective job over the last twenty years, then we really should have been the ones qualified to direct the big-budget Christian-themed, Christian-authored movies like *Amazing Grace* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. We're not, and there's a problem with that. We can't keep doing the same things over and over and expect different results, so let's turn the whole film school model upside down. We also want to work with Christians that are already hard at work in the industry. How can we utilize their talents and become mentors to the next generation?

Then I looked at the track record of films that were made after *The Passion of the Christ*, and obviously the most successful ones were *Facing The Giants* and *Fireproof*, from a budget to box office performance ratio. So I wanted to adopt that model. It really comes down to a simple concept: make movies that serve people and serve organizations that the Lord is already working through and blessing. It seems to be really effective.

Angela Walker: It does seem to be an effective model, but where does that leave the film as art or

entertainment? If the primary purpose of a film is to serve a specific group, doesn't that make it a tool?

George Escobar: Fundamentally, every movie has to serve its audience, and that is done by the mindset or worldview that's been imbued in that particular film. The classic Hollywood training for screenwriters and filmmakers adopts a very secular worldview right from the start. They use Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs for character development, which ultimately culminates in self-actualization. Is that what the Bible teaches? Absolutely not. Instead of our characters adapting to the secular worldview, their development needs to be centered on our relationship in Christ and the struggles and triumphs around that. So we begin to craft stories in a different direction that can still have the same drama and entertainment, but the heart of it begins to change.

Angela Walker: You mentioned earlier that you're turning the film school model upside down. What does that mean, and how did it affect *Come What May*?

George Escobar: I myself am a product of the American Film Institute in Los Angeles as a producing fellow, so I know from the inside what that feels like and what it does to someone who's a Christian. It comes

down to understanding your worldview and what kinds of films you need to make.

When you go to a university or a film school, they really have to tailor the teaching and approach to the lowest common denominator, because they want everybody in the class to succeed. Fork over $20,000 or $30,000 for that one year of film school, multiply that by three or four years, and you're in it for a lot of money. I've met a lot of film school students, and they really don't have a clue, outside of production, what it means to be a filmmaker.

We thought we could certainly teach production while our films are in production, but we'll also take in those interns to teach them everything else hands-on. Business, legal, finance, sales, marketing, and distribution are things you don't get in film school.

Angela Walker: Why pick *Come What May* as the first project for Advent?

George Escobar: We followed that model of deciding who we can serve and what issues are critical. We teach our film students that being a filmmaker is an act of rebellion. It's built into your heart that you have something important to say; that's why you want it up on

the big screen. We try to teach them to put aside their ego and to take that passion and use it to serve someone else.

We asked God what story He wanted us to tell to the audience He was going to prepare and for the time He was going to have this movie out in the marketplace. Who would have known the whole pro-life and abortion issue would be so critical for such a time as this? Unless you're looking for what the Lord wants to do, you're not going to find it.

Angela Walker: Why did you align with Patrick Henry College?

George Escobar: That choice was driven by practicality and like-mindedness. I already lived in the same town where Patrick Henry College is located, and we've been supporters of the college even before it started because we're a homeschooling family. They knew us, and we had a great working relationship already on some projects, so they were a natural partner. Plus we believe very much in their mission and vision, which is to shape culture and create leaders.

Angela Walker: You wrote the first outline and story treatment, then brought Manny Edwards in to write the first draft of the screenplay. Why not do it all yourself?

George Escobar: That was another of those miracles. I had pitched the whole approach to the school back in 2007 and had a very successful meeting. Afterward, I went to our local library to see what I could pick up on DVD, and there was a movie Manny had made called *Mysterious Ways*. I pulled it out because I knew he was a homeschooling dad. I watched it and saw all the flaws and mistakes, then I also saw his commentary where he revealed all the problems and mistakes and how he would fix them. I thought, "This guy is great, because he's teachable and he's humble." So that's how we began.

Angela Walker: You're in Virginia, but the two leads in the film are from Oregon. What was the audition process for them and the rest of the cast?

George Escobar: It's what I'm telling people is the "secret sauce." There's great talent in the speech and debate league for homeschoolers (the NCFCA). They are training young men and women to become communicators for Christ, teaching them to prepare for speeches and debating issues relevant to today.

At the national tournament in 2007, I posted an audition notice. I auditioned 30 young ladies and half a dozen young men, and Victoria (Emmons) and Austin (Kearney), who were qualifiers for nationals that year, gave the best performances.

The most difficult casting was really the Don and Judith Hogan roles, the parents of Caleb. This was a very specific prayer that Manny and I had. We wanted professional actors, we liked the idea of them being married because we wanted them to kiss in the movie, and we wanted them to know about homeschooling or, better yet, to be homeschooling parents themselves. We wanted them to have a passion for teaching actors, especially novices, and they needed to have five weeks available to do the film with us. The Lord filled every one of those requests with Ken and Karen Jezek.

Angela Walker: How did you prepare them for that kind of role in your production? Usually the cast is on much more even ground.

George Escobar: They came prepared themselves. We worked through the script and had some rehearsal periods before we began filming. I had plenty of confidence in them because they knew the mindset

homeschoolers have because they're homeschooling parents themselves. So they knew the approach to teaching homeschoolers. All of that culminated, not just in great performances for themselves, but also in how they were able to help our young actors.

Angela Walker: How did the first few days of production go?

George Escobar: Originally, we scheduled two weeks of rehearsals and technical training, but our schedules got turned upside down. Victoria Emmons had a conflict with a band she's in with her sisters (Emmons Sisters) in Grants Pass, Oregon. Then Kenny and Karen couldn't come out until a week before. So everything got changed.

Instead, we stretched the training period out over a longer time. For the first couple of weeks, we trained the students for the first two or three hours of the day, then we would film what we had just trained on in the afternoon. Another approach we took was using three cameras: A, B, and C. Typically, in a production, you only use an A camera, and if you're lucky, a B camera. We decided we needed a C camera that was always going to be operated by a student, so they'd always be right in the mix.

It's costlier for lighting setup. Sometimes you'll get amazing footage from the C camera, and other times it's not that good. At least it's a real training opportunity, because it's the students doing it hands-on.

Angela Walker: How did you select the crew? Did they audition as well or did you do a general call-out?

George Escobar: We did a general call-out, but weren't able to accept all the applicants. Again, it was just prayer to the Lord. We said, "You know our situation, and we cry out to You to bring the people that You want to work on this." Every step of the way, we followed the Sherwood Pictures model: pray and the Lord will answer. If He wants this film done, then He'll do it, and He definitely did.

The biggest miracle was in our funding. We started Advent Film Group in January of 2007. April 2007 is when we really needed things to kick in after doing all this paperwork with the SEC. Our shooting date was July 9, and it was a hard starting date because that's when the facilities at Patrick Henry College were available to us. That's not much time to raise $300,000. Even though that's considered a micro-budget movie by Hollywood standards, it's still a very daunting task.

I went out to Hollywood with my business plan and talked with some friends. They thought it was very doable, but said I'd need to hire a sales force to call people, especially investors. They said I'd need to talk with thirty people before I'd find one investor.

Well, the Lord wasn't interested in a 30:1 ratio or even a 10:1 ratio. He gave us 1:1. I got home, and the Lord literally brought twelve investors one after the other. I talked with all of them, and they invested 100%. After we finished principal photography five weeks later, the Lord brought eight more investors our way. Again, I didn't call them, they all called me, and it was 100% with them.

George Mueller, who had an orphanage back in the 1800s, said that what the Lord orders He'll pay for. That extended even to distribution. We had excellent offers, and ended up with one of the most successful Christian distributors right now, Provident Films.

Angela Walker: You had an interesting "virtual release" with the American Family Association and GodTube. How did that happen?

George Escobar: It all boils down to the original premise we had of asking how to use this film to serve

God's people. The movie was just about ready in October, and as we prayed, the answer, "Show it for free during the election cycle," came. Maybe it would change the minds of people to vote for pro-life candidates.

I started looking into how much it would cost us, and I got bids of $35,000 to $100,000 to screen the movie. We couldn't pay that. Then suddenly I got calls from GodTube and the American Family Association asking what they could do to help promote the movie. I gave them this crazy idea of showing it for free, and they loved it.

They showed it for free, which effectively does a couple of things. It's like a theatrical release in that you're raising awareness about the movie in a big way, yet you don't have to spend all that money to get it known out there. If you did a theatrical release for this kind of movie, only two people make money: the theater owners and the distributor. The producers get very little, if any at all. So we were able to generate huge awareness, and hopefully that will pay off when the DVD releases on March 17.

It also allows us to retain the theatrical and non-theatrical rights for the movie. By retaining those rights,

we can use the movie to help raise funds for pro-life groups and Christian ministries who want to underwrite theatrical screenings or show it at churches. They can sell DVDs and do all the fundraising they want with the movie.

Angela Walker: What's next for Advent Film Group?

George Escobar: We have a slate of films in place, and it's the same investor story. We haven't released our private offering yet, and we've already received seven investor offers, one of which happened this morning. It's amazing, especially in today's economy.

Angela Walker: What encouragement do you have for other filmmakers?

George Escobar: The Lord is moving big time in this area, but the fundamental premise is: how can you serve His kingdom? If that's not your heart, how can he bless it? It's that simple. The Lord is confounding the wise and the world by having these films come out of these obscure little towns: Purcellville, Virginia and Albany, Georgia.

Chapter 18

INTERVIEW: CHRISTIAN MOVIE.COM

George Escobar interviewed about *Come What May* on Christian-Movie.com — 2009

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Christian-Movie.com: The intercut between Caleb Hogan presenting in the final round of Moot Court Nationals and Judith Hogan presenting before the Supreme Court is masterfully done. What are you trying to accomplish with this sequence in *Come What May*, as it pertains to mood and emotion? How can other filmmakers properly interweave scenes or plot lines together to accomplish an overall goal?

George Escobar: There is a progression in the movie, starting from home to school to the public square, which

we designed to climax at the U.S. Supreme Court and the National Moot Court Championship. Intercutting between the two venues was the best way to present the confrontation of arguments for and against abortion. The facts are presented evenly and with equal passion on both sides. The audience has to believe the veracity of each character's argumentation, otherwise this scene doesn't work. We also had to establish that both Caleb and his mom were skillful debaters.

That process of educating the audience while entertaining them and portraying familial confrontation began at the very first Hogan family scene when Caleb wrote the theme of the movie on the chalkboard. In Latin, no less: *Fiat justitia et pereat mundus*. Colloquially translated to mean: do the right thing, come what may. This process of "leading the audience" continued progressively and subtly all the way to the end of the movie.

We had to carefully measure out the mood (of the scenes) and emotion (of the characters) in the story. Our movie doesn't have fight scenes, car-chases, or violent sports action. We have a legal battle of minds and conscience, culminating in the pursuit of truth. In the realm of

filmmaking, especially for first-time filmmakers, this is a difficult task to undertake. Most first-timers resort to action-driven scenes involving guns, fist-fights, and shockingly horrific mayhem to liven up their story. We didn't have that luxury.

"Leading the audience" means never letting them catch up to the direction of the story. You have to stay one or more steps ahead of the audience. They are always working to figure out what happens next. If they catch up to your story, the movie's over; they've checked out. I'm not saying to *mis*direct your audience: that's equally galling to the audience and they will punish you if you misdirect them.

There's a secret to how you do this successfully. It's in the special features commentary of the *Come What May* DVD. (See, I've done it to you just now. I've led you down a path and now you have to get the DVD to find out the secret.)

Christian-Movie.com: The musical score of *Come What May* is at times both beautiful and stirring. How did you come to partner with composer David Gilchrist? As a producer, how do you balance giving direction to your composer and still allowing him or her creative license?

George Escobar: I met the wonderfully talented composer David Gilchrist at the San Antonio Independent Christian Film Festival in October 2006. I was a tourist there with my then-10-year-old son. I watched a documentary scored by David, and I liked his style. I could tell right away that he had talent. So we struck up a conversation at the festival that continued through email and phone calls.

I hired him to score *Come What May* because I knew he could do a great job. I never had any doubt about that. David sometimes doubted himself, but I never did. I was also a tough customer because I wouldn't settle for just a "pretty" score: it had to be the right score.

The director must know what he wants musically as soon as possible and convey that to the composer. If the director is not a musician himself, he must know how to use words, language, poetry, and gestures to get his point across to the composer. You can also employ temp tracks (previously completed musical scores done by other composers) as a guide to the mood and tone you want the composer to emulate.

Here's the music direction I gave David for *Come What May*: the score had to be orchestral, melodic, but not

syrupy or sweet. It had to convey confidence of conviction, but not arrogance. A sense of majesty had to envelope the main melody. It had to be a signature piece that was fondly memorable, that you didn't get tired of hearing, but looked forward to hearing expressed in different ways throughout the movie. We also needed to build effective sub-themes from the main theme. Easy stuff, right?

David kept at it for about fourteen months. He ended up giving me a half-dozen excellent themes, but I had to reject them because the melody or the cadence was a bit off. It wasn't until we got to locking the picture that David finally got it. What he gave us was perfect. There was no compromise in it. It was worth the wait. I had tears the first time I heard it synced to the opening title sequence.

Christian-Movie.com: Did you know of the Emmons sisters' musical talents when you brought Victoria on as lead actress in *Come What May*?

George Escobar: I knew they were musically gifted. I had listened to their CD online and especially liked their original song, "Lullaby." I knew I wanted that in the movie. I was also looking for opportunities to use

Victoria's musical talent on the mandolin. What surprised me was Austin Kearney: I didn't know he could play the guitar. Once I found that out, I gave Austin and Victoria a piece of a theme that David Gilchrist had written. I couldn't use it as the main theme, but I knew it would be perfect for a romance theme. I asked Austin and Victoria to improvise on David's piano rendition. The next day, we filmed the scene in two takes—about 15 minutes—because we were running out of sunset light. They did a beautiful job, and it's always an audience favorite in the movie.

Christian-Movie.com: What audience(s) is *Come What May* intended for?

George Escobar: In a movie, the filmmaker has to understand that he must talk to two levels of an audience (the individual watching the movie). Level one is the tonal quality of your film: this will speak to the heart of the person. Level two is the message(s) in your film: this will speak to the mind of the person watching the movie.

Next, you go for demographics. This is the self-identified, self-selection category of your audience. In other words, where would the person watching your movie put himself in categorically? Our target audience was the

evangelical Christian audience, which we narrowed down to homeschooling families, which we further narrowed to a "core" audience of moms and their teen daughters.

That seems backwards, and it is. Everyone else typically tells you to go for a wide audience or a general market breakout audience. You can afford that if you're making a big-budget movie. For micro-budget movies, that's very risky because you will be competing against the big-budget movie. Another problem with the big audience tactic is that you are immediately forced to dilute the tone and message of the movie.

If you can first fully satisfy your core audience, then they will be excited about it. On their own they will expand your movie to the target audience by word-of-mouth. Once it gets to the target audience and the tone and message is still resonating, then you have a good shot at the wider audience.

Christian-Movie.com: Miraculously, you were able to fully fund the making of *Come What May* within three months and 100% of the investors approached agreed to help. What advice can you give to independent Christian filmmakers who are trying to successfully navigate

through the financing stage of their film project? How did knowing your targeted audience affect the fundraising process?

George Escobar: There are three main types of investors: a) a cultural investor who wants to affect or shape culture, b) a social investor who wants to correct/fix/amend a social and moral injustice, and c) an economic investor who just wants a good return on investment and couldn't care less if you make a pornographic movie or a G-rated family film. Knowing your target audience for the story you are telling will determine which kind of investor will be attracted to finance your film.

There's an even bigger element at play here for Christian filmmakers. We must have a higher standard, a better foundation for being a filmmaker. We have to stop telling stories we want to tell. Say that again? How are we supposed to tell stories that we're not supposed to tell? How's that work?

It's like this: filmmakers gravitate towards this powerful medium because they think they have something important to say. I'm not minimizing or ignoring that at all; that's what drives most of the films that get made.

Ultimately, though, that's an act of pride and rebellion. Deep down, the filmmaker is really saying, "I'm an artist. I may even be an artistic genius (as some have told me). I have a new truth or incredible new insight I must share with people. I have been gifted with this talent, plus I even have the passion for this wonderful new insight. I must rally, marshal forces, and incite excitement in others to get my vision out to a waiting world!"

I believe that Christian filmmakers must tell stories that God wants told, to an audience He has prepared, for a time that He has designated. By telling God's stories, that removes your ego in having to find and tell the story. By targeting an audience that God has selected, that narrows (or widens) the scope of his story and determines the budget God will give you to tell His story to reach His audience. Finally, letting God decide the timing of His movie, removes anxiety as to the eventual success of his film.

Do you see the difference? It's all about God, not you, the filmmaker. He may want to use you, but you must want to be an able and willing vessel so God can use you: able, meaning you are prepared to do the work, willing,

meaning you are teachable and humble before God in doing the work.

How do you know what stories God wants told? It's not hard. Answer these questions: What is the Lord blessing? Where is He directing work to be done by His people? How and where is his Word being upheld or not, and who are the people involved? What resources has He made available to you or others you already know or are yet to meet? Who is He reaching through you, and what message do they need to hear?

The point is this: take your eyes off of yourself, your wants and desires. Offer them up to God, and He will return to you blessings beyond measure. I'm old enough to have made the mistake of the former. I pray I will always choose the latter and pursue God's vision from now on.

I know that I have delved into theology here, but if you truly believe that God created everything and hence owns all of it, then what I've said above is my best advice for navigating through the financing of your project.

Christian-Movie.com: In your interview for the "Making of Advent Film Group" featurette on the *Come What May* DVD, you said, "Moving forward without a

good script, you won't be able to tell a good story and the production will fail." It seems that many filmmakers rush to the production stage without a refined or even finished script. Is writing a good script during preproduction really as important as you say? Why?

George Escobar: There is an adage that says, "You cannot make a good movie from a bad script, but you can make plenty of bad movies from perfectly good scripts." Of course a good script is everyone's innate goal, but how do you know that you've got a good script? There are two sets of answers to that question.

The first deals with the marketability of your script:

1. Everyone wants your script: actors, directors, producers, production companies.

2. You attract investors, especially the cultural and social investor.

3. There are lots of people who would be served by the story and message in your script.

4. There are lots of preexisting organizations and groups who are already engaged in the important issues or topics of your script.

The second deals with the craftsmanship of it:

1. Your story is easy to visualize. It jumps off the page and is up on the screen in your mind's eye as you read it.

2. Your story is well-matched to your passions, what you believe in yourself. It is truthful to you.

3. The two most professional screenwriters you know both like your script.

4. You are willing to rewrite your script at least 6 or 7 more times to polish it.

Christian-Movie.com: You've written extensively about your distribution philosophy on your blog, but may you please summarize your plan for *Come What May*'s distribution?

George Escobar: Our plan always included a combination of self-distribution and working with a third-party distributor, if it made sense to do so. Filmmakers who are producing micro-budget movies should never make plans to rely solely on a third-party distributor to get your return on investment (ROI). Take responsibility for your distribution! It's hard work, but it's the only way you will fully understand the market and

your audience. Develop relationships with those people and organizations. Nurturing those relationships is necessary to the success of your next movie.

Here's the strategic distribution and implementation plan for *Come What May*:

Leverage pre-existing sales and communication networks of people and organizations already engaged in the activities or issues that your movie addresses to raise awareness. Your movie is helping them, so they will want to help you. This enables you to establish immediate credibility and create a powerful network of supporters, all on a very cost-efficient basis. For *Come What May*, this included pro-life and pro-family groups, homeschoolers, worldview groups, the modesty movement, and speech and debate leagues and organizations.

Serve others through your film and your film company. It would be too costly for you to have to start doing what these groups and organizations are already doing, so leverage their relationships. But first, you must have credibility yourself as a servant to others. Better yet, you should have been serving these organizations beforehand, otherwise you are just an opportunist.

Christian-Movie.com: The mission of Advent Film Group is to train up the next generation of Christian filmmakers. How can aspiring filmmakers get involved with Advent?

George Escobar: Acceptance to our program requires exceptional commitment. Here are the steps:

1. You must pass the interview process, which will include your parents and references.

2. You must pay for your own travel to the production or program location(s).

3. You must commit to learning *all aspects* of filmmaking: business, legal, finance, sales, marketing, distribution—not just film production or performance.

4. You must be a storyteller for Christ, telling the stories He wants told, not your own.

Passion is not enough. You must pass the following criteria:

1. *Your obedience to God*

Are you walking with the Lord in areas that He has already commissioned you to? If not, it will be very

difficult to ascertain what the Lord has in store for you in the dangerous, difficult realm of filmmaking. Until you are wholeheartedly engaged in the small things He's already asked you to do, your "passion" for filmmaking will only draw you away from Him.

2. *Your worldview*

Have you only read books on moviemaking, or have you also studied history, art, literature, and English? Mastering these subjects is the secret toward becoming a great filmmaker. Feature film production is easy in comparison to the entire filmmaking process. Production is something we can teach you in just a few weeks. The most important thing is studying the Bible. It will help you develop a strong and true foundation for the stories entrusted to you by the Lord.

3. *Your accountability*

Do you recognize and accept the responsibility that you will be held accountable for your work as a filmmaker, in equal measure to those who are teachers and preachers? You will be leading others toward Christ or away from Him. Either way, you will be held accountable.

Christian-Movie.com: What was the biggest hurdle that you faced during the filmmaking process, and how did you overcome it?

George Escobar: Getting to the rough cut of the movie, seeing all the good stuff, as well as reviewing all the not-so-good footage, is a tough hurdle to go over. You're excited about what's been accomplished, but you're also having to face a new round of logistical and creative challenges. As a professional filmmaker, you have to recognize that this moment will make or break your movie. You don't want to run out of steam financially, emotionally, physically, or spiritually. You have to plan for the rough cut and the subsequent activities you must undertake to deliver the movie to the final cut, which could still be several months away.

Christian-Movie.com: What's the most significant lesson that God taught you, from a personal standpoint, during the making of *Come What May*?

George Escobar: To rely completely upon Him. Time after time, God proved to me and the entire production that He is faithful to those who call upon Him. I'm not talking about just calling upon the Lord to meet our needs, but praying about how He can use us to serve

Him and His people. When you are praying about that, He is faithful to answer. Then you must be ready to act upon hearing from Him.

Christian-Movie.com: In one of *Come What May*'s behind-the-scenes interviews, you stated that your goal is to create five feature films within the next three years. Do you plan to be directly involved in each of those films as producer and director, or might you delegate one or both of these roles?

George Escobar: I will be involved as a producer and co-director in these films. We are actively grooming a couple of our Advent interns to direct one or more feature films in the very near future. Our very next film, *One Good Man* (now titled "*HERO*"), will be directed by Manny Edwards, who was my terrific collaborator on *Come What May*.

Christian-Movie.com: Now that *Come What May*'s initial DVD release is past, what is Advent Film Group's immediate focus?

George Escobar: The initial release of a movie is just the start. There are many more release events planned for *Come What May*, including a 100-screen theatrical release.

I know, it sounds backwards: first we went online, then DVD, then theatrical. But that's how we see the marketplace working for this film. You don't have to use a traditional release schedule nowadays if it doesn't make sense for your movie. *Come What May* is really an evergreen title because of its pro-life message.

Concurrent with marketing and distributing *Come What May*, we are in investor fund-raising and story development mode for our next two films. We are doing a two-slate film offering and going into production back-to-back. We are extremely excited about this slate. We have investors knocking at the door, which is another of God's miracles given today's tough economic climate.

Christian-Movie.com: How may *Come What May* be purchased?

George Escobar: *Come What May* is available at all the major Christian bookstores and online retailers in the country for under $15. We want everyone to be able to afford it. It's also available from our website (www.AdventFilmGroup.com). We have special offers on the Advent website, and that's where you can get the best value for *Come What May*.

Chapter 19

INTERVIEW: GENERATIONS RADIO

Kevin Swanson interviews George Escobar on the Generations radio broadcast — March 23, 2009

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Kevin Swanson: Welcome to the Generations Radio broadcast. This is Kevin Swanson. I'm executive director for Christian Home Educators of Colorado, but also a pastor and a father of five. Folks, we're trying to find good, solid entertainment for our children as we try to rebuild a biblical way of thinking and life in the twenty-first century.

One of the resources we've enjoyed recently is a new motion picture out on DVD called *Come What May*. You'll want to check this one out. In the vein of the highly

successful *Fireproof*, *Come What May* is another grassroots Christian film produced with a volunteer cast. It's a story of a couple of debaters from Patrick Henry College who take on the Roe v. Wade issue in moot court.

The script was put together by students and faculty from Patrick Henry College, and the core team of film crew consisted of forty home schooled students from sixteen states. As far as I'm concerned, it's the story of a rising generation of young people who are ready to engage in the war of worldviews.

The producer and director for that film is George Escobar of Advent Film Group. He's with me right now on the broadcast. Welcome, George!

George Escobar: Great to be here.

Kevin Swanson: George, this is an amazing new film with a pro-life theme. How did you get the vision for this film? You're pretty much the guy behind it.

George Escobar: The vision really came from the Lord. We started working with Patrick Henry College, wanting to create feature films that would help train and raise up the next generation of Christian filmmakers. Their vision was to shape culture, and we undertook that

mission too, concerning filmmaking. We had three stories that we were developing, and we just prayed, "Lord, which one should we tell, that really is Your story, that You want to reach a particular audience when You want to get the movie out there." He's orchestrated everything amazingly, in perfect order. There's no way we could have scripted it ourselves.

Kevin Swanson: Yeah, and the visual medium is such a powerful, powerful way to communicate. I've experienced personally just how impacting it can be.

Twenty-five years ago, I'm a twenty-year-old college student at a secular university. I walk into a classroom where there's a pro-life club playing a movie called *The Silent Scream*. It was a powerful documentary, featuring Bernard Nathanson, and it depicted an abortion happening right there on the screen. I was instantly transformed. I became this visionary activist: I got into student politics, I was selected student body president of a major west coast university, I eventually ran for governor of Colorado, I wrote books and took a lot of leadership positions in different areas. Much of this really came out of that incredibly powerful visual presentation that I saw when I was twenty years old. People really

need to understand that you form culture largely by means of the visual medium.

George Escobar: That's so true. You can test this with your own children or young people. If you ask them what the pastor preached on last Sunday, they are hard-pressed to tell you, yet they can tell you about a movie they saw two years ago in great detail.

Kevin Swanson: Stories told through the visual medium have an incredible ability to evoke very deep-seated emotions in all of us. If we can use that medium rightly, I think we can make a significant impact on the way that people think and live.

George Escobar: It really engages the heart and mind, especially movies with a strong worldview represented. Unfortunately, most of the worldviews depicted are secular ones. Christians aren't well-trained in expressing their worldview in cinema, but we're starting. That was one of the exercises that we had to undertake ourselves with *Come What May*.

Kevin Swanson: Why did you pick the pro-life theme?

George Escobar: Again, that was the Lord picking. We wanted to show a movie that would depict steadfast

Christian principles, where the main characters would not compromise. Patrick Henry College had a true-to-life event that happened to their moot court team at the national championship back in 2002. This particular team was so good that they went on to win the national championship in subsequent years, but that year they chose to lose because they wouldn't defend gay rights. We wanted to do a similar story, where students undertake a strong commitment to God's truth and living by Christian principles.

Kevin Swanson: This is the story of some young people who have an interest in salvaging the absolute principles of God's law, including the principle of life, in a very stark, postmodern, relativistic age. It's incredibly refreshing to see this happening. Do you see this as a rising trend among young people?

George Escobar: Definitely. Especially with organizations within the homeschooling community, like the national speech and debate league, NCFCA, where they're training young people to become communicators for Christ. There's a large, growing number of them that want to be filmmakers for Christ as well. We're praying

that *Come What May* heralds an opportunity for them so they can look at this as a real vocational opportunity.

Kevin Swanson: How's the reception been for the movie since it's been out on DVD?

George Escobar: It's been tremendous. We've screened it all over the country to preview audiences, initially in Harrisonburg, VA. It was very friendly there; homeschooling town. In Portland, Oregon—not exactly the bastion of conservativism—we had 2000 people show up for a single screening. It was extremely well-received. We've also shown it to smaller audiences coming from an opposite perspective. One couple told us upfront that they weren't interested in seeing the movie, but had been invited by a friend. At the end of the screening, the gentleman told us, "I wish I hadn't seen this movie, because it's causing me to reconsider my position." That was one of the best testimonies we've had.

Of course, we've had many supporters within the homeschooling community. Other aspects of the story have to do with purity, modesty, and chastity, and that is resonating extremely well. Someone pointed out to us, "You've provided a solution to the entire abortion issue,"

and I said, "Whoa, what do you mean?" "Well, you're promoting abstinence."

Kevin Swanson: Right, right. Because abortion is largely linked to loose living.

George Escobar: That's right.

Kevin Swanson: As a director, how do you deal with the challenge of getting your cast to really understand what they're trying to communicate? Because this is a powerful message: you're talking about the issues of life and death, about the murder of the unborn, and you've got to somehow develop an emotional feel for that that the cast and the crew will present. How do you do that as a director?

George Escobar: It becomes easier for the director when the cast believes what they're saying. For us, we were fortunate, because we were all pro-life. In particular, Victoria Emmons had qualified for the national NCFCA championship with a speech that she gave and prepared in 2006 about abortion and the sanctity of life. It's a very powerful video. We acquired it, and we're using it as part of a promotional campaign for *Come What May*.

Kevin Swanson: I remember reading, I think it was Martin Lloyd-Jones, on preaching, and he said that before you get behind the pulpit, you have to feel the message deeply yourself. If you don't profoundly experience the message yourself, nobody else is going to get anything out of it. I think the same thing applies here. You have to have lived through and felt the issue yourself before anyone else will identify with the feeling that you're presenting on the silver screen.

George Escobar: People ask us why we're doing this now, because this is such an old subject. What's the point? The point is that there's a new generation of students who haven't been engaged, who haven't been informed. We were fortunate that our cast and crew were informed and wanted to express themselves this way to help other young people and reach out to a new generation who will fight for life.

Kevin Swanson: Are you seeing that films like yours are starting to encourage other young people to be involved in things like this, whether it be in law or motion picture production or what have you?

George Escobar: It's been quite a confirmation of some of the fundamental beliefs that we had going into

establishing Advent Film Group, that there would be a way that we could help inspire this next generation. We've been inundated with requests for training and speaking engagements, as well as parents encouraging us to keep at it and not be discouraged, especially as the enemy begins to fight back.

Kevin Swanson: What's your favorite part of producing films, George?

George Escobar: My favorite part has to do with the collaboration between the key department heads. Everybody's got a vision for the movie. They've read the screenplay. Then you come together in a room and figure out, "Okay, how can we all add value to this project?" That is so much fun. It's also a great way to check your ego. You pray a lot and bring it up to the Lord and say, "Please help us. Give us direction and guidance."

Kevin Swanson: Everybody gets to express their gifts, and nobody gets to be the god of the whole project. Without one of those team members, the whole thing flops. So it really is a team effort, isn't it, pulling a motion picture together like this?

George Escobar: It's truly a collaborative effort. Typically the director is the one that's put forward as the author of the movie, and that's so untrue.

Kevin Swanson: Well, you're the coordinator, bringing all the pieces together.

George Escobar: Well, the producer does that overall on the production end, and the director has to be the general in charge during the actual making of the movie. I had the dual role, but I also had a great collaborator in Manny Edwards, who was my co-producer, co-director, and co-writer. We worked extremely well together.

Kevin Swanson: Now, with Advent Film Group, I'd guess that your intention is to put together many, many motion pictures. What is the goal and vision?

George Escobar: The goal is to raise up and train the next generation of Christian filmmakers who will one day be qualified to direct big-budget films. Because when we started, we looked at the landscape and saw that *Amazing Grace* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, big-budget Christian-themed, Christian-authored movies, were all directed by secular directors. If we're not qualified after all these years, after all those people who are Christians working in the industry, there's something wrong. When

we investigated what was going on, we discovered that, yeah, we've been captured by the film school system that really doesn't work well for Christians. I went to film school, so I know exactly what that feels like.

Kevin Swanson: What's wrong with Christians in the filmmaking business? I mean, you're saying that the major directors of the really good films are non-Christians for the most part. What happened to the Christians? Did they just abandon this area of cultural expression?

George Escobar: There are three basic approaches that Christians take in the industry. One is: "I'm just going to do my job and be a light in the darkness within the production." The second approach is: "I'm going to sort of trim at the edges and make sure that there're as few bad things as possible." That ultimately doesn't succeed because there's just too many people against you. When we do make feature films, especially after *The Passion of the Christ*, if you look at the track record, Christians were making Christian-based horror movies or Christian-based romance movies, and I don't think that's what the Lord wants to bless. The ones that He has blessed are the few like *Facing The Giants* and *Fireproof*, out

of two or three dozen so-called faith-based Christian films that we've made since *Passion of the Christ*.

Kevin Swanson: Why were those movies, *Fireproof* and *Facing The Giants*, so incredibly successful?

George Escobar: I think it's because they serve people's needs. *Come What May* uses the same approach, which is asking, "What is the Lord already blessing, regarding organizations that are in service for his name?" That gives you a natural ally in the story that's you're trying to tell, as well as the way that story needs to reach people. So that's one aspect. The other is that we all have this need to have a relationship with God the Father, and so He wants stories that can develop that.

Kevin Swanson: I.e., fatherhood, honor, purity in these sorts of things, are really critical.

George Escobar: Absolutely, because there's so much material on the opposite side of those values. We've been criticized, saying, "This is so saccharine," and yet I say, "Yeah, well, if you want something else, you have three dozen other movies to choose from." Why can't we express in a movie how other people live? This is a lifestyle that's true, so let's model it. Let's model righteousness; there's nothing wrong with that.

Kevin Swanson: I think that contrast is always very helpful, because we see throughout history this cosmic battle between good and evil. Ultimately it's Christ that redeems us from evil, and hopefully that message is there in our films at some level. The world is pretty much all in one ditch, so I think they have a hard time presenting any interesting contrast.

Here's a question for you: how do you present evil? You contrast a pro-abortion, materialistic kind of an ethic with a biblical ethic of self-sacrifice and true love and compassion for the helpless. Now that's a tremendous contrast, but how do you present evil? I've grappled with this myself for the radio program, but I'm sure filmmakers do too. Presenting evil in contrast with good has got to be a challenge.

George Escobar: Yes, it's a tremendous challenge. I think one of the most successful filmmakers who has been able to do that is Frank Capra. In the classic film *It's a Wonderful Life*, as well as *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, he shows where the evil characters are consumed by their need to control people, by their need to have wealth and power. Just a total lack of any conviction whatsoever: they will say anything and do anything that they need to

to get their way. They are opposed by the people of virtue.

Back then, virtue won: nowadays virtue gets trampled over. So we need to create equally powerful dramas. We're just starting, we're learning, so we see a lot of work ahead of us. But I think with *Fireproof* and *Facing The Giants* and hopefully *Come What May* joining those ranks of movies that people will really embrace, that will give us permission to make more of these movies.

Kevin Swanson: I don't think you have to be explicit in the portrayal of evil. Alfred Hitchcock is well known as a man who was able to cloak things, make evil a little more implicit, while making it more powerful, really, in its import. I'm not sure you have to be very explicit with the portrayal of evil in films.

George Escobar: For the individual watching the movie, if you provide enough information, they can fill in the gaps. They have sensed evil themselves in their interactions with people or done things that are borderline. They know what evil looks like and feels like, so you don't need to graphically show it.

Kevin Swanson: This is really the essence of a family friendly film that you want to present. You don't want to

be sitting around watching "Hannibal the cannibal" consume his victims and so on. Who needs that? Let's implicitly provide the idea of evil, but how good ultimately overcomes in the end.

George Escobar: Absolutely. One of the things we're always fighting against, as filmmakers, is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. When you go to film school or you take a meeting with executives in Hollywood, that's one of the first things that always comes up: "So, what is the hierarchy of needs here?" It culminates in this idea of self-actualization. That's the mantra in Hollywood, is to push your characters in that direction. Of course, that's completely false, because it removes God working in anyone's life. That to me is one of the greatest evils perpetrated by Hollywood on the audience that's out there.

Kevin Swanson: It's unadulterated humanism, a man-centered way of thinking about life and reality.

George, you're kind of outside Hollywood. What's your take on that? Should guys be working within Hollywood or outside of Hollywood? Where do you go on that one?

George Escobar: I really like what Doug Phillips and Geoff Botkin have done at the San Antonio Independent

Christian Film Festival. When my then ten-year-old son and I attended back in October 2006 and met Geoff and Mr. Phillips and Stephen Kendrick, their words challenged my faith on how I was carrying on as a filmmaker, and they drove me to my knees in repentance.

Really it has to do with the filmmaker giving up their ego and what they want to accomplish. When a filmmaker is in pursuit of his vision, what he thinks is creative and artistic genius, and they're going to film school or they have a measure of success, it's a slippery slope and a downward spiral. As Christian filmmakers, we constantly need to make sure that we're telling God's stories for his audiences.

Kevin Swanson: I worked in secular radio and television markets in California for a number of years. It's egocentric, man-centric—it's one big pride-fest. If we're going to use media, let's use it for the glory of God. I mean, forget this glory for ourselves from man. Let's glorify God in what we're doing, and let's bring back His Word as the source of truth in it.

George Escobar: Second Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in

righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." That is what we need to communicate.

Kevin Swanson: What's next, George? More projects ahead?

George Escobar: We have three projects ahead, and the Lord is performing another miracle in our fundraising. We already have more than half a dozen investors for our next movie, which is going to be a father and son story. We also have a family musical coming up, and another story about immigration.

Kevin Swanson: Tremendous. Well, we look forward to it. I'm sure God is going to bless your ministry, as you put Him first and give Him the glory in all that you do.

Again, I want to recommend *Come What May*, a pro-life movie out right now on DVD, available at www.ComeWhatMaytheMovie.com. You can also visit the production company's website at www.AdventFilmGroup.com. Check out their online training program for young filmmakers.

Hey George, thanks for joining us at Generations. We appreciate your vision, your mission, and all that you've accomplished to this point.

George Escobar: It's been an honor being with you, Kevin. Thank you.

Chapter 20

INTERVIEW: PAJAMA SCHOOL

From the Pajama School Blog (Natalie Wickham), an interview of George Escobar — March 18, 2009

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Natalie Wickham: I am pleased to welcome Mr. George Escobar, homeschool dad and Founder/Executive Director of Advent Film Group to the Pajama School Blog to talk about Advent's newly released movie, *Come What May*. Mr. Escobar led the way into the production of this movie, and I'm sure you'll find yourself getting more and more excited, not only about this film, but also about the potential for homeschoolers to be involved in the Christian film industry, as you catch a glimpse into the people and vision behind *Come What May*.

Pajama School: What is your vision for *Come What May*?

George Escobar: Making this movie available for "such a time as this" is truly providential. None of us working on this movie had a vision clear or wide enough to see the reasons for *Come What May* being made and distributed at this time. Only God's vision is good enough and trustworthy. Wherever we see Him leading, we should follow and obey, even if we don't fully understand. Back in mid-2007 when we began production, then later by mid-2008 when we had our final cut edited, we didn't fully comprehend God's vision for CWM. Now we know.

The political climate has changed dramatically. Barriers to abortion are being torn down piece by piece by a President and Congressional leaders who do not understand the sanctity of life. *Come What May* was made as one of the tools to educate people about when life really begins and the legal arguments necessary to overturn Roe versus Wade.

We also model an answer to preventing unwanted pregnancy by abstinence through purity, modesty, and chastity.

Pajama School: How did you go about recruiting the cast and crew that were a part of *Come What May*?

George Escobar: Finding our adult cast for "Don and Judith Hogan," we didn't want to cast the normal way (an open casting call over the internet or open auditions) because when we did that, we got a lot of unsavory submissions. We just didn't know the true character of the actor. We could see what they did before, but there's no telling what projects they would do next.

So we prayed a very specific prayer: Lord, please bring us: a) professional actors, b) that they would be married, c) they would be Christian, d) they would know about homeschooling or are homeschooling parents, e) they love teaching acting to young actors, f) they would have five weeks to work with us, g) that we could afford them. The Lord answered every one of those very specific prayers and brought us Karen and Kenny Jezek; that's a miracle. Stop to think about this: God knew we were going to need the Jezeks, so He began preparing them to be all of these things fifteen years ago when they began their own walk in Christ.

We also tapped into a source of great talent for homeschoolers, the National Christian Forensics and

Communications Association (NCFCA), which is the speech and debate league for home schooled students. We held auditions at the NCFCA National Championship where I auditioned thirty young ladies for the role of "Rachel" and six young men for "Caleb."

Victoria had answered an online request for people to audition for roles in *Come What May*. She contacted me and realized we would both be at the NCFCA championship in Texas, since my son, Gregory, was also competing. We decided that she should audition there. The audition took a little twist: the person who was to read with Victoria was called away, so she had to find someone else. She raced across campus during a thunderstorm to the dormitory of an acquaintance, Austin Kearney, and asked him to read with her for her audition. Austin said yes, and both Austin and Victoria ended up receiving leading roles.

Pajama School: When did you begin to homeschool your sons, and what led you to that decision?

George Escobar: We began homeschooling our three sons before they were born. The Lord led us to have lunch with Mike and Elizabeth Smith and their two kids, Erin and Andrew, over twenty years ago, before my wife

and I even had children. We were so impressed by Andrew (12) and Erin (9), who were so articulate and engaging, that we asked, "How do you raise kids like them?" That innocent question opened a discussion about homeschooling. It turned out that Mike was Vice President of the Home School Legal Defense Association (he is now the president). Right then we committed to be homeschooling parents. It's the best decision we've ever made for our family. We also began a lifelong friendship with the Smiths.

Pajama School: Why do you think it's important for homeschoolers to be involved in the film industry?

George Escobar: The Lord has already blessed the homeschooling movement immensely, allowing it to succeed way beyond what government schools could achieve in educating our children. Homeschoolers have turned the public school monopoly upside down. Who but homeschoolers are better qualified to now turn the Hollywood monopoly right side up?

It's not really a battle against Hollywood we are fighting. It's much bigger than Hollywood: we're fighting against a humanist secular worldview that denies God, His truth, and His sovereignty. It permeates everything now. It's a

cosmic battle. On our own, there is no way we can win this fight. All we can do is stand firm, to take a stand and let God fight the battle.

Pajama School: What qualities and skills should homeschool students focus on developing if they are interested in pursuing filmmaking?

George Escobar: Every student who contacts us says they are "passionate" about filmmaking. That's nice, but frankly that's not good enough; that's a given. What we look for is teachability, humility, and a servant attitude. We look for students who are serving their local church in a media ministry, for example, or are volunteering to do media work for charitable organizations.

Filmmakers are rebellious by nature. They think they have something important to say. They want that godlike power of creating something for the world to witness up on the big screen. The world nurtures that attitude by heralding the filmmaker as an artistic icon or genius. Christian filmmakers are not immune to this adulation. I see it all the time when a young filmmaker who's never made a movie before will put "A film by ..." at the beginning of their five-minute short. Even the great filmmakers of the past never had the audacity to do that.

Christian filmmakers need to be the opposite of their secular counterpart. We need to be as good in our filmmaking skills and craftsmanship, but our heart must be one of servanthood not rebellion. We should not seek fame for ourselves but glory for Christ alone. Soli Deo Gloria!

Pajama School: If a homeschool student is seriously interested in getting into the film industry, what steps should they take to make that a reality?

George Escobar: Get an education in literature (so you know all the great stories), in English (so you can write or recognize good stories), in history (so you know the historical context for the great stories), in art history (so you can see the visual manifestations of classic literature done by the great masters). Go to a Christian college that will teach these subjects from a Biblical worldview. Patrick Henry College (PHC) is a great school for filmmakers because they focus on the classics, storytelling skills, and leadership training. Then you need to take basic courses in accounting, marketing, and business finance. To be clear, PHC does not have a film school program. Their mandate is to shape culture and train leaders: that's why PHC has the perfect

environment for filmmakers. Look at your film training from God's perspective, not the world's point-of-view.

Another significant consideration is that film school training does not provide sufficient value for what you pay for, which could be $10,000 to $30,000 per year. All you do at film school is practice making short films or student films, which have no market value except for film festival recognition. You can get the same production training as you would get in film school by working on several feature films as a volunteer or intern. Save your film school money over a four-year period and apply it to making your first full-length feature film. No one really cares whether you went to film school or not, anyway. Employers will want to see your reel: that's the proof of your competence.

Pajama School: Can you tell us about any future film projects that are in the works?

G**eorge Escobar:** We are focusing on three subjects for our next three films:

1. The importance of fatherhood (addressing the problem of absent dads: dad may be at home, but his heart and mind is somewhere else).

2. Knitting families together (promoting family unity by showing a "great" accomplishment that only a family can achieve if they work together for kingdom purposes).

3. Loving our neighbor (tackling immigration).

Pajama School: Any additional thoughts or comments you'd like to share?

George Escobar: Advent Film Group has an integrated, dual mission: being and growing great filmmakers for Christ. Advent aims to make solid, entertaining films that are good for families and affirm biblical values and principles. Making good films is not a mere end in itself; it is also Advent's means for giving high school and college-age young people hands-on exposure to the craft of filmmaking. In this way, Advent seeks to inspire them and help them discern whether God has sent them to serve in this critical message-making and culture shaping field of endeavor. Forty young people participated in the making of *Come What May*!

If Advent's vision is fully realized, God will have used Advent to:

1. Germinate the seeds of filmmaking vocations He has sown in the hearts of many young people.

2. Through long term relationship with these chosen seed bearers, nurture, train, and encourage them to grow in skill and God-ward vision for their work.

3. Help establish them in the field of filmmaking so that, within two generations, the field will be overtaken with faithful, fruitful, gospel-affirming storytellers for Christ.

Chapter 21

INTERVIEW: QUEST FOR CHARACTER

Mike Dunn interviews George Escobar and Victoria Emmons on the Quest for Character radio show — March 24, 2009

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Mike Dunn: George, welcome to St. Louis.

George Escobar: Thanks for having me on your program; it's really an honor.

Mike Dunn: Your film tackles a tough subject. It's a subject that's important because we're losing so many precious children to abortion. As much as I've gotten involved and done research, this movie educated me. The young people in this movie helped me to understand

more about why Roe v. Wade should be overturned. As you say on the back of the DVD, "What you believe determines what you will do."

The movie is titled *Come What May*, and, ladies and gentlemen, we have the director/producer with us now. We're going to have another special guest in just a few minutes, one of the stars of the movie. She's a beautiful young actress, and boy, what a job she does.

Mr. George Escobar, tell us a little bit about you first. You're a producer. From what we hear about Hollywood and producers and directors, these films seem to be a little unusual for coming from that supposedly liberal side of the world. Tell us how you got involved with this and why the subject in this film became important to you.

George Escobar: It really is the work of the Lord in bringing this movie together and allowing me to be a part of it. Until about three years ago I was an ineffective filmmaker for Christ. I had sought to be involved in the entertainment industry and gone to film school. When I started over twenty years ago, it was really for my own glory and vanity.

I had an opportunity to meet the producer of *Facing The Giants* and *Fireproof* at the San Antonio Independent

Christian Film Festival in 2006. I was there with my ten-year-old son, who had expressed interest in filmmaking. We went there as tourists. One of the few people who stopped and talked to us, that I now recognize as a divine appointment, was Stephen Kendrick. He challenged me to find out why the Lord had given me this interest and talent and opportunity; He really convicted me. Coming home, I got down on my knees and cried out to the Lord about what a mess I'd made of the gifts He'd given me, how I wanted to repent, and if I never made a movie, I would be happy, but if I could be of use somehow, Lord, please use me.

Three months later, Advent Film Group began, and it's been a miraculous beginning. The story of *Come What May* itself is a complete miracle.

Mike Dunn: Ladies and gentlemen, you know about *Facing The Giants* and *Flywheel* already. The gentleman he just talked about was the producer, along with his brother, for *Fireproof*. We were blessed to have Stephen on our program the same week that *Fireproof* came out. Of course, we didn't realize how big it would be, but it was God's doing. When you talk to Stephen, you see that he

relies on God for everything, he and his brother Alex. He's such a genuine person.

I want you to talk a little bit about how you got your cast. When I saw this movie, I was convinced that the Supreme Court justices were real. Tell us a little bit about the cast in this movie.

George Escobar: Most of the actors in the movie are complete amateurs. We prayed for the Lord to bring us a cast that can really be engaged in this fight for life. Our mission as a company is to train up and raise up the next generation of Christian filmmakers. At the same time, through this film, we hoped to reach young people so they could understand how valuable life is.

Victoria Emmons had sent me an email from a posting that I had put on the speech and debate site for homeschoolers (www.ncfca.org). She sent me a very humble note, and I asked her if she was going to be at the national championship. It turned out she was going to give a speech there. In a previous year, she qualified for the championship level with a speech she gave against abortion, so she really is very much a fighter for this cause.

Karen and Kenny Jezek are professional actors who, because of the conviction of becoming Christians, had left Hollywood. They left their careers in soap operas for episodic television to become homeschooling parents in Arizona. They joined us for five weeks. That was a real answer to prayer.

We were very specific in our prayer request to the Lord. We prayed for a couple who were professionals, and who were married, so that we could have this brief moment in the movie where they would kiss. We prayed that they'd also have an affinity toward homeschoolers, be willing to teach young, inexperienced actors, and would have the five weeks available to film. The Lord met every one of those requirements in Karen and Kenny Jezek, and they delivered wonderful performances. Also, they were really helpful in training Austin Kearney, who played the lead role of Caleb, and then Victoria Emmons.

Mike Dunn: So Caleb's mother in the movie is married to the gentleman who played her husband?

George Escobar: That's correct.

Mike Dunn: Oh, I didn't know that.

George Escobar: They are a married couple; otherwise we wouldn't have had that moment where they kiss at the end.

Mike Dunn: That is so classy the way this movie is handled. Well, we need to tell people what this movie is all about. We need to explain what moot court is and some things like that. George, tell us about this phenomenal movie. What's it all about?

George Escobar: First, I want to let people know that I'm a co-director, producer, and co-writer, along with my tremendous collaborator Manny Edwards. He doesn't get enough credit for that, so I always want to bring up his name.

The story is about two Patrick Henry College students who end up battling to overturn Roe v. Wade at the national moot court championship. Moot court is the collegiate-level competition that mimics the U.S. Supreme Court. It's the story of how they arrived there and the battle of worldviews for our main character, Caleb.

His father is a new Christian who has led his son to Christ, and the mom is a feminist constitutional attorney who has taught her son to think like her. He's a new

Christian going to a very conservative college populated by homeschoolers, whereas he's a product of the public and private school system. He's having to live out his Christian walk at school, at the workplace, where he has a part-time job at his mother's law firm, and eventually in the public square, because his mother ends up going before the U.S. Supreme Court, essentially to oppose all of his arguments. We see both of them on the same day, when she goes before the Supreme Court and he's at the national moot court. We intercut between them.

Mike Dunn: It's so incredible to see these young people sticking up for what's right. In many ways, I think that our young people are going to have to change the parents, because the parents are not being very successful in changing the young people. In my own life I see young people I know having such a great affect on their own parents.

The stats are that if you're a woman over the age of forty, there's a 40% chance you've had at least one abortion. I guess it's understandable why people don't want to change the laws, because they don't want to say, "Now the law says that I'm a murderer," yet something has to be done. There's some twists and turns in the

movie, which we're not going to spoil for people, but that really caught me off guard.

George Escobar: People have asked me, "Why do you want to make this movie? It's such an old subject that nobody cares." That's precisely the point. We started crafting the story in April 2007, and began production in July 2007. We'd asked the Lord to give us a timely story for the audience that He wanted us to reach. Who would have thought that we would be under such assault in this country with all the current administration and Congress are doing to overturn what has been so hard-fought over the last thirty-five years to slow down abortion? It's really providential that the Lord got this movie done.

Mike Dunn: How did this story first start out?

George Escobar: Well, the genesis for the story came from Patrick Henry College. It's a true-to-life school, but more than that, they're a true-to-life champion in moot court competition at the collegiate level. Back in 2002, their moot court team had an opportunity to win the championship, but they chose instead to lose because they wouldn't defend gay rights. We asked them if we could use that as an inspiration for a story about standing up for principles, especially biblical values, rather than

compromising. Then we prayed, "Lord, what's the story we should tell to convey that theme?" This is what the Lord gave us.

After looking at the kinds of stories that He's blessing through Sherwood Baptist—stories that really serve people as the audience and organizations that were already undertaking great work in service—I think that's the new model for what we're calling the new Christian film movement. Rather than just having stories that are powerful or entertaining, they really need to touch the hearts and minds of people in a powerful way that hasn't been done before.

Fireproof helped strengthen marriages. *Facing The Giants* speaks to those teens who are struggling with their faith in school, as well as couples who may have difficulty having children. For us, it's young people who may be struggling with the issues of purity and modesty and chastity, as well as having them believe in the fact that so many babies are being killed and we need to fight to protect them.

Mike Dunn: Wow, that is so true.

Well, when I watched this movie, there was a young actress in there that was simply incredible. After doing

research, I found out that this was her first time acting. I think the reason that I enjoyed her so much was because of her heart. You could see that was the way she really was in real life. Why don't you introduce her right now?

George Escobar: Yes, I'd like to introduce to you a fine actress—she's also a singer, plays the mandolin, and is, in fact, a pro-life speaker who has competed at speech and debate for homeschoolers—Victoria Emmons.

Mike Dunn: Hi, Victoria.

Victoria Emmons: Hey, thank you!

Mike Dunn: Victoria, what a great job you did in that movie. It's an amazing piece of work, and I enjoyed it so much. Tell us a little bit about yourself. I understand you've got a group with your sisters: tell us about that.

Victoria Emmons: Well, my three sisters and myself have a gospel/bluegrass band called "The Emmons Sisters." You can listen to us online at www.theemmonssisters.com. We've been singing together our whole lives, but our band started about seven years ago. We've been singing, writing music, and recording ever since then.

Mike Dunn: Well, this movie was just incredible, and I want people to see it, especially because of your acting. Tell us about how you got involved with this movie and what this movie meant to you.

Victoria Emmons: When I first learned about the movie, I was reading on a homeschool debate board online. Mr. Escobar had posted an audition notice—only I didn't think about that part, I was thinking more on the music side. I talked to my older sister Christina, and said, "This looks really good. They look like a great company, and the film looks great. Let's send them an email just letting them know about us, and maybe we can help them in some way with the music or just let them know that we support them and encourage them." Mr. Escobar got right back to me and said, "Hey, if you could, I'd like for you to audition," and we found out we were going to be at the same place at a national speech and debate tournament, so it was perfect timing.

So I went there and I did audition. But I needed someone to read across from me, and I didn't really know a whole lot of guys there. My mom didn't really want to read the guy part, because we'd start laughing the whole time. So I said, "Well, what about Austin? I kind of know

Austin, and he kind of knows me, and I think he'd be cool with that." When I found him, he was like, "Wait, what?", then, "Yeah, yeah, I can do that." So he came and he read for me, and then he's like, "Wait, can I audition, too?" Mr. Escobar said, "Yeah, why don't you audition." So I read for him so Austin could audition. It turned out that we both got the parts, so it was neat how that worked out, because it was good to act with someone I already knew a little bit.

George Escobar: That was actually her second audition for the role. The first time she was a little nervous, so I asked her to come back.

Mike Dunn: Really?

George Escobar: And she did a fine job: she essentially beat out thirty aspiring actresses.

Mike Dunn: That was good discernment on your part, because she's sure doesn't look nervous in the movie. She looks like she's done a ton of movies, the way she acts.

George Escobar: I knew right away that she could play the role of Rachel remarkably, because, as she said, she's very much like the character.

Mike Dunn: Victoria, how much is Victoria in real life like the character you played, Rachel Morton?

Victoria Emmons: I'm a lot like her in many ways. We both did speech, we both had that background. We're both very pro-life, and my heart has always been for speaking out for the unborn, in high school and now as well. When there were a lot of lines that Rachel had to say that I've already said before, it was really weird to say them and know that someone else wrote it, but I've already been saying it. So that came really easily for me. Then we are different too. Some of the things she did, I thought, "Whoa, that's not how I speak." So that's where the acting part came in. It was a good mix of being very similar—Mr. Escobar did a good job casting that, cause it was natural for me—but then being different enough that I did have to act and stretch myself some as well.

Mike Dunn: Tell us about your testimony, and what the Lord means in your life.

Victoria Emmons: That's a great subject, so cut me off before I start going too long. I've known the Lord my whole life, and He has been my center in everything I do. When I look at things, what I want to do with my life, it all seems to come back to the Lord. Even taking the

movie, for example. When I got the part, we all sat down as a family, and we were like, "This is a great opportunity, and a great way for you to speak out for the unborn and speak out for what the Lord's done in your life. It needs to be about that and not about you. As long as that's going to happen, as long as you can give all the glory to God, then this is a really great thing."

I've grown so much, in the past couple of years especially, in my relationship with the Lord. The Lord has done so much in my life and has done such a good work in me, building trust in Him. Life is hard, and since that time that I was in the movie many hard things have happened in my life, but I wouldn't trade any of it, because of my relationship with the Lord and how that's growing and my trust in Him. I can't fix things in this world. There is sin, and there are problems, and that's the way it's going to be, but if our trust is in the Lord, then He will sustain us and bring us through that. We have heaven to look forward to, and that's really what we're living for, so anything else is just like an extra bonus.

George Escobar: Just over the last couple years since I've known her, she really follows through with the Lord's calling in her life. She's had opportunities to be in other

films now, and she really seeks godly counsel with her parents or contacts me on occasion, and she seeks good advice. She listens to it too. Her heart is after the Lord, and those are the kinds of filmmakers that we want to nurture.

Mike Dunn: I have a question for you as a producer and director. We had on Gavin MacLeod recently and Rich Christiano, talking about *The Secrets of Jonathan Sperry*. Gavin MacLeod is a tremendous actor, and he sees Christian actors and actresses come to Hollywood, but he says unfortunately there are no jobs for them because of their morals, what they will and will not do. We're seeing movies now like your movie, like *Fireproof*, like *The Secrets of Jonathan Sperry*, and *Bella*. Are there more jobs for people like Victoria coming up?

George Escobar: There will be. There is a growing legion of Christians who are turning their hearts to what the Lord wants to do in cinema, rather than trying to remake or remold Hollywood. We don't need to do that. The Lord has already provided the technology and the resources and the financing. What He's looking for are people who will trust Him and tell the stories that He

wants told, not the stories that the filmmaker wants to express.

Unfortunately, most filmmakers, both Christian and secular, are rebellious by nature. The reason they want to get into film is they feel they have something important to say. Hollywood nurtures that, what I consider a false streak of thinking of yourself as a creative genius. What we need to be communicating is God's truth, and yet that's very hard to do in the secular film business. You can look at the track record: the movies that are successful are the ones that are turned toward the Lord and telling His story.

Mike Dunn: You had forty homeschoolers, I understand, working on this film?

George Escobar: In the final tally, we probably had over a hundred and fifty homeschoolers over the course of the making of the movie, but yeah, forty homeschoolers across sixteen different states represented the core team.

Mike Dunn: Ladies and gentlemen, if you don't believe in homeschooling, take a look at these kids: they've got it together.

We do have some people here who want to get a question in. Who's first? Dan Crain. Dan Crain is a one of the producers in the background here.

Dan Crain: Good evening to both of you.

George Escobar: Good evening.

Victoria Emmons: Hi.

Dan Crain: My question is for either one of you, George or Victoria, whoever wants to jump in. What is one thing that you want people to get out of this movie? I know it's pro-life, but it goes deeper. George, you were sharing, "It's not about me, but it's about the Lord." If you had one thing to say to the audience, who most of them have never seen this movie, what would you tell them about why they need to see this movie?

George Escobar: They need to see this movie for two reasons. One is, once they've seen it, they will absolutely know and be able to explain when life really begins and put up a really good explanation for that. The other is that it would give them hope that bad laws like Roe v. Wade can be overturned, just like slavery was overturned. We can do that with this bad law, and we show you how to do that. Maybe the third reason is that the way young

people have relationships nowadays is not the way that God ordained it. I think there is a better way, and we model that in this movie. Victoria, I'm sure you have other perspectives.

Victoria Emmons: One thing I really want people to grasp is that no matter where they are, how old they are, or who they are, everyone can walk away with this message and be challenged by it—the message of doing what's right no matter what. It comes across in so many different ways in the movie. It's challenged me personally in things in my life to "Do what's right, come what may." Everyone needs that message, and it'll come out in different ways, with being pro-life or in relationships or just how you're going to live your life.

Mike Dunn: Ron Badolato is here with a question.

Ron Badolato: Hi, Victoria. After I watched this movie, the scene that sticks in my mind is when you are in Judith's office and she tried to argue with you and you were arguing back and forth. She was arguing for pro-choice, and in your response, you did not back down and you even talked about the baby being torn apart. Would you talk about that scene? It really meant a lot to me.

Victoria Emmons: Yeah, for those of you who haven't seen the movie, he described it really well. I was in the law office with this other female character who was on the other side of the pro-life issue. She was asking me to help her do some research so that she could turn that against a pro-life person and use it for the pro-choice argument that she needed to make for a case. She was asking me to do that, and I—Rachel—was not going to do that, so Rachel has to turn that down respectfully, and she still wants to work for her, just not doing those issues.

Some of the lines that I had to say, like the line about the baby being torn apart, you know, I wrote a speech about that. I have said that before. So I was literally crying, and that was really the first scene she and I did together. We had a good connection there, so that was powerful for me, too.

Mike Dunn: George, if people would like to see *Come What May* in a group setting at a church or something like that, how could they do that?

George Escobar: They can get a movie screening license from Outreach Films at www.outreach.com.

Mike Dunn: And they can buy the DVD at your website?

George Escobar: AdventFilmGroup.com. Also, all the major Christian stores in the country are now carrying it, as well as online. Just go to Family Christian store, Lifeway, or ChristianCinema.com. For the official movie website, you can visit www.ComeWhatMayTheMovie.com.

Thank you all so much for helping us get the word out about the movie and supporting Christian filmmakers. It's really tremendous.

Mike Dunn: Well, we appreciate you and what you're doing. Victoria, want to get your autograph when you come into town. Would you do that?

Victoria Emmons: Okay, if I can get yours.

George Escobar: I just want to encourage all the students and their parents out there to not turn their back away from filmmaking. There is a rising tide of companies like Advent Film Group that want to make this a vocational reality for you.

Mike Dunn: That's right. Again, I want to thank our special guest, Mr. George Escobar, and star actress, Victoria Emmons, for being with us tonight. The movie is *Come What May*, and it is just phenomenal. Miss

Victoria Emmons, would you please close our program in prayer?

Victoria Emmons: Dear heavenly Father, we all come before you today with humble hearts and open spirits, just crying out to You. Crying out to You that the unborn would be saved and that all those people out there who don't have a passion for the unborn and don't care, that they would stand up and fight. Help them realize that a person is a person, born or unborn, and that they are of You. Keep us all focused on You and what is important and what life is and what You've ordained it to be.

Lord, please help those people who have aborted their babies in the past or are thinking about it right now. Please let them know that in You they have forgiveness and a new life. Please be with those babies right now who are in the balance, and please change their mothers' minds right now. Please motivate us all to live for you. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Mike Dunn: Amen. Ladies and gentlemen, the title of the movie is *Come What May*. For my special guests, Mr. George Escobar and Miss Victoria Emmons and everyone here at Quest for Character, God bless you and good night.

Chapter 22

AI & FAITH-BASED FILMMAKING

Filmmaking has always been an art of both creativity and innovation, a delicate balance between storytelling and technology. The camera obscura gave way to celluloid, which yielded to digital, and now we stand on the precipice of another evolution: the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI). For many filmmakers, this moment feels both thrilling and daunting, as machines step into roles that were once firmly in human hands. Faith-based filmmakers, in particular, face unique challenges and opportunities in this AI revolution. Their stories, deeply rooted in human experiences and spiritual truths, are profoundly personal, and the idea of introducing a machine into such sacred work requires careful reflection.

AI's arrival is not something to fear, but it is something to approach with wisdom. It offers tools to enhance creativity, streamline production, and expand audience engagement. Yet, it also raises questions about authenticity, ethics, and the sanctity of storytelling. For faith-based filmmakers, the task is clear: to master this technology while ensuring that it serves their mission to glorify God, uplift audiences, and remain faithful to the truth.

The integration of AI into filmmaking is not merely about efficiency—it's about transformation. AI touches every corner of the creative process, from script development and visual effects to marketing and distribution. For independent filmmakers with limited budgets and resources, this represents an unprecedented opportunity to level the playing field. Yet, as AI becomes more powerful, we must wrestle with a central question: how do we balance innovation with the human connection that lies at the heart of storytelling?

To answer this, we must begin by understanding what AI truly offers.

How AI is Transforming Filmmaking

Artificial Intelligence in filmmaking is not some distant vision of the future; it is here now, reshaping how films are conceived, created, and shared. From tools that analyze story structures to algorithms that predict audience reactions, AI is everywhere, quietly working behind the scenes. For faith-based filmmakers, this means access to tools that can enhance storytelling without compromising authenticity.

Consider the early stages of filmmaking: the spark of an idea, the crafting of a narrative, the delicate dance of characters and plot lines. This is where AI has begun to make its mark. Scriptwriting tools such as ChatGPT can generate dialogue, suggest plot twists, and even help refine character arcs. Imagine a filmmaker working on a story of redemption and grace, inspired by the parable of the Prodigal Son. AI could generate variations on the central theme, offering fresh perspectives that the filmmaker can shape and refine. This doesn't mean handing over the creative reins to a machine; it means allowing AI to act as a sounding board, a collaborator that sparks ideas while leaving the final decisions firmly in human hands.

The influence of AI extends far beyond the script. In pre-production, tools like Runway ML and MidJourney can generate storyboards and concept art, bringing a director's vision to life with stunning speed and accuracy. This is particularly valuable for faith-based filmmakers, who often operate with tight budgets. Instead of hiring a team of artists or spending weeks creating mockups, they can use AI to visualize scenes quickly and allocate more time to refining their narrative and themes. For a faith-based filmmaker developing a story about redemption or forgiveness, this means spending less time on logistics and more time refining the spiritual and emotional core of the narrative. Similarly, AI-assisted scriptwriting tools can generate dialogue or plot suggestions, helping filmmakers overcome creative roadblocks without compromising their vision.

Post-production, traditionally the most time-intensive part of filmmaking, has been revolutionized by AI as well. Color grading, sound design, and visual effects, once the domain of large teams and specialized software, can now be achieved with AI-powered tools that automate repetitive tasks. A documentary team working on a film about missionary work in remote regions, for instance, might use AI to clean up audio recordings,

stabilize shaky footage, and enhance lighting in scenes filmed under challenging conditions. The result is a polished film that retains its authenticity while meeting professional standards. This kind of technological accessibility ensures that the spiritual power of a story is not overshadowed by technical limitations.

The benefits of AI in filmmaking are undeniable, but they also come with challenges—especially for those who approach storytelling as a spiritual calling.

The Ethical Crossroads of AI in Storytelling

While AI offers remarkable tools for filmmakers, it also raises profound ethical questions. For faith-based creators, these questions cut to the heart of their work. How do we ensure that the stories we tell remain authentic when machines are involved? How do we avoid the biases inherent in AI algorithms? How do we maintain the sanctity of the creative process while embracing technological innovation?

One of the most pressing concerns is the issue of authenticity. Faith-based stories are deeply personal, often drawn from lived experiences or scriptural truths.

They resonate because they speak to universal themes—redemption, hope, grace—through a lens that is uniquely human. AI, for all its capabilities, lacks this human touch. It can analyze patterns in storytelling, predict audience preferences, and even generate plausible narratives, but it cannot replicate the spiritual depth that comes from a filmmaker's connection to their faith.

There is also the question of bias. AI systems are trained on vast datasets, many of which reflect the cultural, social, and moral perspectives of their creators. These biases can manifest in ways that conflict with Christian values, from subtle shifts in tone to outright misrepresentations of faith-based themes. A filmmaker using AI to develop a script for a biblical epic, for example, might find that the AI introduces elements that are inconsistent with Scripture. This is not a reason to reject AI outright, but it is a reminder of the responsibility filmmakers bear to guide the technology rather than be guided by it.

Intellectual property is another critical consideration. AI often relies on existing works to generate new content, which can blur the lines of originality and ownership. Faith-based filmmakers must be vigilant in ensuring that

their use of AI does not infringe on copyrights or plagiarize existing material. This requires not only legal expertise but also a commitment to ethical storytelling that respects the work of others.

Finally, there is the human cost of AI. As machines take on roles that were once performed by people, there is a risk of job displacement, particularly in areas like editing, sound design, and visual effects. For faith-based filmmakers, who often work in tight-knit teams, this is not just an economic issue but a relational one. Ensuring that AI complements rather than replaces human creativity is essential to maintaining the collaborative spirit that defines filmmaking.

AI as a Servant, Not a Master

For faith-based filmmakers, the key to integrating AI is to approach it as a servant rather than a master. AI is a tool —powerful, yes, but ultimately subordinate to the vision, creativity, and values of the filmmaker. This perspective is not only practical but deeply spiritual, reflecting the biblical principle that technology, like all creation, is meant to serve God's purposes.

As faith-based filmmakers contemplate integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into their creative processes, it's imperative to evaluate this technology through a lens that aligns with their spiritual and ethical values. To ensure that AI serves as a tool that enhances rather than detracts from their mission, filmmakers should consider three foundational questions:

1. Does this tool honor God?

Incorporating AI into filmmaking should be done in a manner that reflects and upholds the filmmaker's faith and commitment to glorifying God. This involves assessing whether the AI applications align with biblical principles and contribute positively to the film's spiritual message. For instance, using AI to create realistic visual effects that bring biblical stories to life can deepen viewers' understanding and connection to the narrative. However, it's crucial to avoid AI-generated content that might misrepresent or trivialize sacred themes.

Theologian Dr. John Lennox emphasizes the importance of aligning technological advancements with Christian values:

"As Christians, we need to engage with technology, including AI, in a way that reflects our commitment to

truth and the well-being of humanity. This means critically assessing how these tools are used and ensuring they serve purposes that honor God."

2. Does it support the creative process?

AI has the potential to enhance various aspects of filmmaking, from scriptwriting assistance to post-production editing. However, it's essential to ensure that AI serves as a complement to human creativity rather than a replacement. The creative process is deeply personal and often inspired by one's faith and experiences. AI should be utilized to streamline workflows and handle repetitive tasks, allowing filmmakers to focus more on the artistic and narrative elements that require human intuition and emotional intelligence.

Filmmaker and AI researcher Oscar Sharp, who co-created the AI-written short film "Sunspring," reflects on the role of AI in creativity:

"AI can be a fascinating collaborator, offering unexpected ideas and perspectives. However, it lacks the emotional depth and lived experience that human creators bring to storytelling. It's a tool that, when used thoughtfully, can enhance the creative process without overshadowing it."

3. Does it promote ethical practices?

The use of AI in filmmaking raises several ethical considerations, including issues of intellectual property, bias, and the potential displacement of human jobs. Filmmakers must ensure that their use of AI respects the rights of content creators, avoids perpetuating harmful stereotypes, and does not contribute to the erosion of employment opportunities within the industry. Implementing AI responsibly involves transparency about its use, obtaining necessary permissions, and being mindful of its broader societal impact.

The European Commission's guidelines on ethical AI stress the importance of accountability and fairness:

"AI systems should be developed and used in a manner that is transparent, accountable, and fair, ensuring that they do not perpetuate discrimination or infringe upon fundamental rights."

By thoughtfully considering these questions, faith-based filmmakers can navigate the integration of AI into their work in a way that honors their spiritual commitments, supports their creative endeavors, and upholds ethical standards. This approach ensures that technology serves

as a means to enrich storytelling without compromising the core values that define their mission.

These questions provide a framework for discerning whether AI has a place in a particular project and, if so, how it can be used responsibly.

Honoring God means ensuring that AI serves the spiritual mission of the film. A story about forgiveness, for instance, might use AI to enhance its emotional impact through music and visual effects, but the core message must remain rooted in Scripture and prayerful reflection. Supporting the creative process involves using AI to amplify, not overshadow, the filmmaker's God-given gifts. Promoting ethical practices requires transparency, respect for intellectual property, and a commitment to collaboration over competition.

A New Era of Audience Engagement

AI's influence doesn't end with production—it extends to how films are marketed and distributed. For faith-based filmmakers, reaching the right audience is as important as crafting the story itself. AI-powered analytics platforms

have made it possible to identify and engage with specific demographics, ensuring that films resonate with viewers who share the filmmaker's values and interests.

For instance, platforms like Mailchimp and HubSpot use AI to analyze audience data and tailor marketing campaigns. A Christian drama about the power of prayer could use AI-driven insights to target churchgoing families, homeschool groups, or small group ministries on social media. This kind of precision maximizes the impact of marketing budgets while building a community around the film.

One of the most inspiring examples of faithful integration is **The Chosen**. The creators of this groundbreaking series used AI for marketing analytics and audience engagement, but the heart of the story remained firmly in human hands. By combining technological innovation with spiritual conviction, they created not just a series but a global movement, reaching millions with the message of Christ. The result was not just a successful series but a global movement, with viewers actively participating in its growth and distribution.

AI also streamlines distribution by optimizing platforms and formats. Faith-based filmmakers can use AI to determine whether a project will perform better in theaters, on streaming platforms, or through direct digital downloads. For films with international appeal, AI-powered translation tools can create subtitles and dubbing, expanding their reach to global audiences. This is particularly significant for faith-based projects, as the message of hope, redemption, and salvation knows no borders.

Future of Filmmaking In the Age of AI

As we look to the future, it is clear that AI will continue to shape the filmmaking landscape. For faith-based creators, this is both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge lies in navigating a rapidly evolving technological landscape while staying true to their calling. The opportunity lies in using AI to tell stories that glorify God, inspire audiences, and transform lives.

The key to success is preparation. Filmmakers must educate themselves about AI, learning its capabilities and limitations. They must collaborate with experts who can help them integrate technology responsibly. And they

must remain engaged in ongoing ethical discussions, addressing new challenges as they arise.

Above all, faith-based filmmakers must remember their purpose. Technology may change, but the mission of storytelling remains the same: to reflect God's truth, love, and grace in a broken world. AI is a powerful tool, but it is the human heart—and the divine inspiration behind it—that gives stories their power to heal, inspire, and transform.

As we stand on the threshold of this new frontier, let us embrace it with wisdom, courage, and faith. With God as our guide and AI as our servant, the possibilities are as limitless as His grace.

The Road Ahead

As AI continues to evolve, its role in filmmaking will only grow. For faith-based filmmakers, this is both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge lies in navigating a rapidly changing technological landscape while staying grounded in faith and purpose. The opportunity lies in using AI to tell stories that glorify God, inspire audiences, and reach corners of the world that might otherwise remain untouched.

The future of faith-based filmmaking will not be defined by technology itself but by how we choose to use it. AI is a tool—a powerful one—but the heart of storytelling remains in the hands of the creator. By approaching AI with wisdom, humility, and a commitment to our mission, we can harness its potential to create films that resonate deeply and transform lives.

As we stand on the threshold of this new era, let us remember the words of Proverbs 16:3: "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans." With God as our guide and AI as our servant, the possibilities are as limitless as His grace.