

Into the Wild

Certificate 15

Advisory: some nudity, some swearing

Starring:

Emile Hirsch

Marcia Gay Harden

William Hurt

Vince Vaughan

Into the Wild is based on the true story of Christopher McCandless, a young man who turns his back on the American Dream for a life of survival in the wilds of America.

In the beginning of the film we see Chris with his family. He has excellent grades from school and is likely to be accepted into Harvard Law. His parents are delighted and offer to buy him a new car as a present. Chris reacts badly, claiming he does not want material things. It is clear that he has difficulties with his parents and with the world of consumerism and wealth. He wants something different, something more.

Chris sets off into the wilds of America, having given all his money to charity and abandoned his car. He has nothing but the clothes on his back and some outdoor equipment and a couple of books. He renames himself Alexander Supertramp, hitching his way across the US to increasingly beautiful but deserted and desolate places. The film is separated into sections which detail his 'rebirth' from the time he sets out as Alex, to his 'adolescence', 'adulthood' 'family' and finally death. We see him towards the end, surviving in Alaska, the end point of his quest; we see him in his various journeys and we are not allowed to forget his family, who cannot understand what has happened and who are desperately searching for him.

As the story unfolds, we find out that what has driven Chris into the wild is his dysfunctional family and unhappy childhood. His parents have lied to him and their arguments and teetering on the edge of divorce, with Chris and his sister hanging in between have made him doubt both the nature of happiness and of truth. As he journeys about the US he meets a number of other people, mainly on the edge of society, who offer him family: 'insane Wayne', in trouble with the police, but always looking out for Alex; a peace-loving dropped out hippie couple, one of whom has not seen her son in a long time and sees him in Alex; a young girl who would love him; a pair of European nature lovers who share his sense of adventure and, perhaps most poignantly, a lonely elderly man called Ron, who has lost his own family and offers to adopt Alex.

It is Ron who suggests that Alex is actually on a spiritual journey. Alex talks about finding truth, but Ron tells Alex that he has to learn to forgive. If he manages that he will learn to love and then he won't have any choice but to recognise God's love for him.

In Alaska, Alex finds shelter in an abandoned bus but finding food is another matter. He slaughters a moose but it still goes rotten faster than he can smoke the meat. Wolves and vultures end up eating it. He resorts to living on berries but makes a fatal mistake eating poisonous fruits. He survives but ends up too weakened to look for food and gradually starves. Yet in the last things he writes he speaks of happiness and of realising that true happiness has to be shared. His final words are that he has had a happy life, bids goodbye and says 'God bless all'. He signs it with his 'right name' Christopher Johnson McCandless, not Alex. As he dies, staring up at the sky and blinding light, there is a vision of him running into his parents' arms in forgiveness and reconciliation.

Excerpts to watch:

The dinner scene when Chris rejects the offer of a new car
Alex goes to Salvation Mountain
Alex persuades Ron to climb up to the top of the rocks
Ron talks to Alex about his spiritual quest
Alex/Chris dies

Some questions:

This film is noted for its breathtaking cinematography. What does the film tell us about human beings in relation to the Creation?

What do the actions and attitudes of Chris' parents tell us about their relationship with their son?

What does this film tell us about pilgrimage or the spiritual journey?

What do you think Chris/Alex is really searching for?

Although Chris/Alex dies out in the wild, several reviewers have commented on the uplifting and inspiring nature of this film. Why might they find inspiring about it?

Suggested bible passages to look at in connection with this film

Luke 12.19-33

Luke 15.11-32

Revelation 21.4-7