

Lighthouse Feature Films

A tax-exempt, non-profit film company

www.lighthousefeaturefilms.org

The Vision

*"Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it
Habakkuk 2:2*

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I. What We Are

Lighthouse Feature Films is a 501C3 non-profit film company established in 2016. Donations are tax deductible, which provides an added incentive for donors to give towards the production of our films. In addition, Lighthouse Feature Films gives a donation to the donors designated charity of choice--in their name and on their behalf--from the revenues generated from the films that is equal to the original amount given by the donor. In essence, a donation given to Lighthouse Feature Films has a two fold effect: not only does it provide the necessary funding to produce inspirational films that reflect Biblical values, but the revenues generated from the films are then given on behalf of the donor's charity of choice making their one donation go twice as far.

II. Who We Are

A. Board Members for Lighthouse Feature Films

Robert Ringham

President/Founder

Robert Ringham is a St Olaf College graduate who is an author and an independent business owner. As an author, his works include *Good News from the Bullpen Café* and *Hardware Ingenuity*--both of which are featured on Amazon. In addition, Mr. Ringham has written and produced the Christian Musical *The Pilgrimage* which was first performed in 2012 (www.thepilgrimagemusical.com). He has been a coach, principal, teacher, truck driver, carpenter, and has worked at the corporate level as well as started his own business. His various backgrounds have given him numerous experiences that have helped him in starting new ventures. His job is to facilitate and project manage all aspects of Lighthouse Feature Films: from fund raising, to story development, to graphic design, to marketing, to production and distribution.

Roland Burt

Treasurer

Roland Burt is the Pastor of Charis Christian Fellowship in Rochester, Minnesota. His long-standing history and experience in the ministry has given him the expertise needed to help advise on the various Biblical aspects of our stories. Even though Lighthouse Feature Films will hire an independent third party accounting agency to manage the books, as a Pastor, Mr. Burt has had extensive experience working with finances and will provide an excellent overseer of the finances as well.

Ryan Holmes

Secretary

As an owner of his own café in Wanamingo, Minnesota, in addition to being the mayor of Wanamingo and an advisory board member of the Minnesota Employment and Economic Development, Ryan brings with him a number of different experiences, skill sets, and expertise needed to help facilitate the direction and success of Lighthouse Feature Films.

B. Business Advisory Board Members

David Gee – Public Relations Executive
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Bill Ringham – Attorney
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David Neuger –President/CEO
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C. Film Advisory Board Members

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III. Our Mission: Is there not a cause?

1 Samuel 17:29

Our mission is to produce award-winning, inspirational feature films that reflect Biblical values, and then give to designated charities from the revenues generated from those films

We are at war...a cultural war for the mind and soul of future generations.

If you research the problems with Hollywood today, you will find an assortment of articles addressing all kinds of issues that range from the dependence on sequels in order to bolster fledgling box office revenues, to the competition from Netflix and Lulu and You Tube. The list goes on and on, but what is mysteriously absent from these articles is the issue of *content*.

As early as 1930, The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) introduced the film industry's original intent to adhere to standards of morality. It was known as the **Production Code** and consisted of moral guidelines regarding what was acceptable to include in film, and included specific examples of what could and could not be portrayed. Among other rules, the code prohibited: inclusion of 'scenes of passion' unless they were essential to a film's plot, 'pointed profanity' in either word or action, 'sexual perversion', justification or explicit coverage of adultery, sympathetic treatment of crime or criminals, dancing with 'indecent' moves—to name just a few.

But after WWII, producers began to challenge those guidelines and eventually disregard them all together. And thus began the slow, slippery slope towards a film culture that began to

abandon all forms of accountability and morality as well. In the 1950s married couples were found sleeping in two separate beds. Today any one sleeps with anyone and they say what they “damn” well please. Acts of violence are no longer “suggested” on film, but vividly portrayed. Why? Because it wasn’t enough to suggest violence... it was more powerful to show it. It wasn’t enough to suggest two people were in bed together...it was more powerful--and profitable--to show it. And as the industry kept pushing the envelope---with more exposure to anything and everything under the sun--the lines in the sand were continually being crossed as reality blurred with fantasy and innocence became a thing of the past.

Proverbs 23:7 tells us that *as a man **thinks in his heart, so is he***. In other words, what we think about is not only important--it affects us.

In the movie *Iron Lady* starring Meryl Streep as Margaret Thatcher, there is a scene when she is in the psychologist’s office and the psychologist asks her how she *feels*. She responds by saying: *“People don’t think anymore. One of the greatest problems of our age is that we are governed by people who care more about their feelings than about thoughts and ideas... Watch your thoughts for they become words. Watch you words for they become actions. Watch you actions for they become habits. Watch your habits for they become your character, and watch your character for it becomes your destiny.”*

So what are we thinking about today? What are we watching at the theater that draws our attention? What are we and our children seeing and thinking and absorbing? And what percentage of those films has some form of: profanity, promiscuity idol worship, infidelity, violence, horror, sorcery, perversion, vulgarity, mysticism, occultism, adultery, or all of the above?

Are we not in a culture war that is pulling us in all kinds of directions apart from the one that really matters? In addition, have we become so politically correct that no one dares challenge the new “Status Quo”?

When King David faced Goliath in 1 Samuel 17, all of Israel’s army was cowering in their tents when the 10 foot Philistine appeared each day to taunt them, asking for one brave man to fight him. And when David heard him defy the army of the living God, he asked his brothers: *Is there not a cause?*

Is there not a cause in which to fight this giant and the cultural war in which we are engaged? Is there not a reason to produce inspirational films that reflect Biblical values rather than those that reflect that of our current culture?

IV. What We Offer

A. Our Stories

Molly

Genre: Family

He saved her life...then she helped him find his

For her 9th birthday, little Amy McGuire received her one and only wish: a puppy. Molly is an energetic and inquisitive little golden retriever that has become the pride of her life and follows her everywhere. When the McGuires get ready for their family vacation to the Black Hills of South Dakota in their RV in August, Molly is given her own kennel; and when the McGuires stop at Wall Drug in route to the Black Hills, Molly is given her own pink collar that bears her name.

Meanwhile, Joe Watts, a 52-year-old charismatic but self-centered welder in Lincoln, Nebraska, is the head of a motorcycle gang called the Pistons that travel to Sturgis, South Dakota, every year for the annual bike rally. This trip will prove to be the most challenging, as their rival gang --the Jacks --will be out for blood having lost their fight against the Pistons last year. After arriving in Sturgis and setting up their campsite, Joe and his gang take their annual ride to the nearby Black Hills, and then decide to take a break at one of the scenic parks with a nearby fast flowing river. Meanwhile, upstream camp the McGuires; and when Molly breaks lose from her kennel, she goes exploring near the river then slips and falls and gets swept away by the current. When Joe, standing on the shores downstream, sees Molly struggling to stay alive, he risks his life to pull her from the fast flowing waters.

With only a pink collar that bears her name from Wall Drug, Molly is the belle of the ball and the main attraction among the gang, pulling out even the most gentle and child like behavior from the rough, bearded members. After their disastrous rumble with the Jacks—ruined by the sweet presence of a puppy that made it hard for even the toughest rival gang members to fight--Joe sees a little girl holding her dog on the streets of Sturgis and it reminds him of his own daughter whom he has not seen in years. As a child, she had lost her dog and had asked him to help her find it. Uncaring and too busy with his own life at the time, he had denied her request. Now, upon reflection, he decides to find Molly's owner in an attempt to do something he should have done years ago with his own daughter.

Having clues to her owner's whereabouts from the cashier at Wall Drug and with the help of his want-to-be detective-friend back home—Joe finally locates the McGuire's RV and puts the dog inside and walks away. When Amy hears Molly barking, she rushes out to find her. Seeing Joe about to leave on his motorcycle, she asks him if he is the one who found her dog. 'Yes,' he replies. After the McGuire family comes out to thank him, Joe goes on another search—only this time to find and make restitution with his daughter...Two years later, the McGuires show up at Joe's trailer home in Nebraska in their RV with one of Molly's puppies.

The Ring

Genre: Romance/Drama

Love was his only hope

The story of The Ring is inspired by the true events surrounding David Roever—a Vietnam veteran whose face was burned beyond recognition when a phosphorous hand grenade he was holding was shot by a Vietcong sniper and then exploded in his face during an attack in 1968. As David lay at the Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, TX, the fiancé of the severely burned soldier next to him arrived; and when she saw the condition of her “would-be” husband, she took off her engagement ring and placed it on his chest, telling her fiancé she could never live with a man like that. The soldier died hours later from what was believed to be a broken heart. Wondering what his own wife, Brenda, would think when she saw him, he could only wonder. When she finally did arrive—and having been convinced that it was in fact him—she bent down, kissed his face, looked at him in his one good eye and told him: “I want you to know I love you. Welcome home, Davey.”

Like the movie *Pearl Harbor*, Sonny Williams is a brash, braggadocious fighter pilot who had fought with the RAF in Europe against Hitler’s Luftwaffe until he was transferred to Pearl Harbor to help train American pilots. Severely injured from bullet wounds during the Japanese attack on December 7th 1941, he is given little chance of survival. Under the influence of morphine, he tells Sara--the charge nurse at the hospital--she is the most beautiful woman he has ever met and asks her if he’ll live. She tells him ‘yes’, but she knows he won’t. ‘Good,’ he says, ‘so when are you and I going to get married?’ Busy with other patients, she dismisses the question and moves on. Later that night, the fiancée of the sailor in the hospital bed next to Sonny comes for a visit. When she sees her fiancée scarred beyond recognition from his burns, she takes off her engagement ring and lays it on his chest and leaves after telling him she could never marry a man that looks like that. The sailor’s morale and then vitals go into a tailspin--and he dies within the hour, despite his good chances for survival.

As Sonny fades in and out of consciousness, he keeps asking Sara when they are going to get married. Having just witnessed the cruelty in the bed next to him and determined to provide any means of hope necessary to keep the young pilot alive, Sara takes the abandoned engagement ring, puts it in the palm of his hand and closes it. ‘Soon,’ she tells him, ‘real soon.’ He smiles and drifts into unconsciousness and miraculously survives.

Following his recovery, Sonny holds the ring tight to his chest in spite of Sarah’s attempts to take it away. Then after having fully recovered weeks later, Sonny is called back into action in the Pacific theater to even the score with the Japanese. Giving the ring back to Sarah, he thanks her for giving him the hope he needed to keep him alive. After his departure, Sarah suddenly finds herself feeling alone and now must decide what will become of the ring.

Once Upon a Clown

Genre: Drama

Sometimes a savior doesn’t always look like one

Rudy Bue is a high school hockey goalie for the Lincoln Academy Saints whose father was his idol and had died years earlier in a train accident. Wearing his familiar white goalie mask during the state championship game against the Bulls, Rudy suddenly loses sight of the puck during the sudden death overtime and fails to make the save when the Bulls score the game winning goal. Defeated, Rudy tries in vain to scoop out the puck as he sees the flashing red goal lights

and hears the high pitched goal siren piercing throughout the arena that suddenly brings back the vivid memory of the ambulance sirens and flashing red lights he witnessed the night of his father's tragic death.

Devastated by his past and his present, Rudy becomes a recluse and dives down into an emotional tailspin--and it is only his younger, stuttering brother, Jamie, that can reach him. Playing their usual game of flashlight tag one night, Rudy hides in the closet and when his brother finds him, he shines the flashlight into his face and yells "I f-f-found you Rudy...I f-f-found you!" And thus marks the dream like point of the story that begins where it ends—like a déjà vu where time is suspended and then stands still.

Disgusted with his own brother's failure to recite even the simplest of words--let alone his statement of faith that is required of him for his confirmation service in two weeks—and trying to reconcile his fathers death and his failure to make the game winning save--Rudy packs up and leaves home.

After hitchhiking all night, he stops at a small town and meets an old hobo and rodeo clown by the name of Methuen Theophilus Fin. Like Mr. Bo Jangles, the old man is as crazy as he is funny, but when he puts on his white face paint and steps out into the arena with his comical baggy pants to save the life of a downed bull rider during the town's annual rodeo the next day, Rudy sits up and takes notice. Intrigued by the old man, Rudy decides to stay, and in the process, the old man begins to impart more and more knowledge and wisdom and compassion and revelation from the Bible through an odd dichotomy of bumbling, childlike humor and profound insight. Slowly, Rudy's heart begins to soften and then change.

As the day of Jamie's confirmation approaches, Rudy feels the need to go home and face his past where he discovers the truth about his father and the apparent reason why Jamie stutters. The next morning in church, Jamie struggles to recite his statement of faith before a sophisticated and impatient congregation. Just when all seems lost, Rudy appears from the back of the sanctuary wearing white face paint and baggy pants, breaking the tension as he makes his way to the altar. He then stops before his weeping brother and helps him recite his statement of faith: "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever should believe on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*"

Suddenly realizing what it means to be a fool for Christ, Rudy rushes back to tell the old man. But like the hobo he is, Methuen has hopped on board the local freight train. As Rudy stands on the railroad tracks calling for the old man, the approaching train's solitary light grows brighter and brighter. Suddenly the closet door swings open and there stands Jamie shining a flashlight in Rudy's face: "I f--f-found you Rudy!...I f-f-found you!"

Good News from the Bullpen Café

Genre: Drama

Sometimes the road less traveled is the only road to travel

Deeply rooted in the traditions of law and white-collar suburbia, Charlie Finstune is bound to follow in his family's footsteps and attend Harvard Law School in the fall. But upon the death

of his Uncle Roy—a little known member of the family and the owner of a small town café in Bullpen, Minnesota, Charlie decides to take a year off and run his uncle’s café and blog about his experiences, hoping to see for himself what life is like on the other side of the tracks.

With help from the Small Business Administration, Charlie is determined to franchise the Bullpen Café into a new ‘retro’ restaurant, make millions and retire early. But he quickly comes to realize how much the small town and all its interesting characters had loved his uncle and want the same old café they have had for years.

So who was his uncle? And why had he chosen to give up on a promising law career of his own to run a small town café? Charlie Finstune, whether he knows it or not.....is about to find out.

The Ice Man

Genre: Drama

It took a child to melt his heart

Jacques Bouchard was NHL’s bad boy whose reputation for fighting on the ice was preceded only by his reputation for fighting and chasing women off the ice. Recently acquired by the Minnesota Grizzlies--the newest team in the start up professional hockey league called the FHL (Federated Hockey League), Jacques is brought in to bolster ticket sales and help spur the sluggish team on to a playoff spot in the Central Division. Voicetress, arrogant, obnoxious and sexist, Jacques finds himself in the courtroom only days after his arrival for pushing a female traffic officer with his car in the congested downtown St Paul traffic. Sentenced to community service at the Children’s Hospital, he meets Peter--an astute, four-year-old child who is dying of cancer. When he first meets Peter, the sensitive little boy points to Jacques and says “Owie?” Thinking the little boy refers to the stitches above his eye, Jacques says yes. But Peter isn’t pointing to Jacques’ eye. He is pointing to Jacques’ heart.

Over time, the vulnerable and helpless little boy begins to melt the ice-cold heart of a once abandoned orphan who has fought all his life for survival, turning him into the real man and great finesse player he really is.

In Lombardi’s Way

Genre: Drama

They needed a coach. He needed a team

Mani Wilcowski is a former Vietnam veteran with a Vietnamese wife by the name of Luon and three young boys. Owner of a very successful construction firm in Chicago, he often uses dubious means of obtaining construction contracts-- including but not limited to bribing city official under the ‘persuasion act’—his own definition for helping buyers see things his way. Although dubious in his means of obtaining such contracts, his work ethic and quality of construction is unsurpassed. It is the same excellence he demands as a coach from his son’s

football team. When his wife Luon and their three boys are killed by a gang related shooting in route to one of their practices, however, Mani is devastated and goes into seclusion

Months later, George Williams--a Black minister and long lost friend from Milwaukee, comes to pay a visit to Mani's palatial home in Chicago. Once good friends at their alma mater, Bethlehem Academy in Milwaukee, their relationship soured after the Vietnam War when Mani enlisted and George opted out of the draft due to what Mani considered a fake 'conscientious objector' status.

George, after hearing about his family's death, comes to tell Mani that their old high school football coach has passed away and that he thinks it would be good for Mani to consider that position and come back home to Milwaukee. After months of an internal debate, he moves to Milwaukee where he, with the help of George, begins coaching the Bethlehem Academy Lions in the same manner as his hero: Vince Lombardi.

What follows is a roller coaster of events with hoops to jump through, and schedules to make, and a team to form...but through it all, Mani and George not only reconcile their differences, but start to see progress in a makeshift, hybrid team that is comprised of indigenous students and local gang members that are enrolled in Bethlehem's newly commissioned night school.

As the Lions continue to progress and win, they end up playing the league champions in the final playoff game. With seconds remaining on the clock, the Lions drive down to the one-yard line just as the Green Bay Packers had done in the Ice Bowl during the 1967 NFL championship game against the Dallas Cowboys.

Mani quickly calls for a quarterback sneak just as Green Bay Packer quarterback Bart Starr had done when he scored the game-winning touchdown behind the blocks of Jerry Kramer and Jim Ringo. But the Lions have a different destiny. Fumbling on the one yard line, they lose the game...and as they get on the bus to ride home, an unexpected turn of events happens.

Texas Hold'em

Genre: Romantic Comedy

He lost his family to gambling, then gambled to win them back

Jake Long, a stubborn former quarterback for the Texas Longhorns who was injured in his last game against Auburn, is now living in Dallas in a less than luxury apartment with his wife Jenny and his 8 month old daughter, Sophie. Still reticent about his injury and his lost chances of any kind of NFL career, he has trouble resigning himself to his lifeless, risk averse job at a local insurance company where he works as a telemarketer—a job was given to him by Jenny's Aunt--the head of Human Resources Department.

Competitive and still looking for the quick strike like he did in college, Jake has squandered their savings on get-rich-quick schemes and power ball tickets as he continues to live in the past, until he discovers the poker game Texas Hold'em from a friend at work. After Jake dives into the game head first, Jenny discovers that he has squandered the rest of their credit card "credit" on his gambling, then leaves him taking Sophie with her.

Without his family and without any hope of succeeding at poker on his own, he is finally able to get ahold of the former world's poker champion Buddy Richardson, hoping that success will eventually win back his wife and child. The crotchety old veteran reluctantly takes Jake under his tutelage only because he used to bet on Jake's football games in college. But over time, their friendship grows and Buddy begins to teach Jake lesson about life as it correlates to the famous card game including the concept of commitment by going 'all in'.

When news of a new Texas Hold'em tournament in Las Vegas is announced, Buddy enrolls him for his final exam. As Jake--now known as the Pink Rose of Texas--works his way up the ladder, Buddy discovers the tournament is not all it appears to be and warns Jake about its pitfalls. But Jake--eager to exact revenge on the bad hand that has been dealt to him since his football injury and his lost opportunity in the NFL--refuses to listen. During the final game of the tournament, however, Jake must choose between his family or a life of glamour in the Las Vegas fast lane.

The Choosing

Genre: Romantic Comedy

What he saw in her was what she finally saw in him

Mickey Jacoby is a 25-year-old dock supervisor at the local transportation company called METS--short for Metropolitan Express and Transportation Systems. He found work at the company nine months ago when he and his family moved from New York to live with Mickey's uncle in one of the lower class suburbs of St Paul after the death of his father. Although rough around the edges, he has a strong sense of duty and a big heart and is one of the best managers the company has ever seen. The oldest of five siblings, Mickey lives in his own apartment with a sarcastic, fun-loving roommate by the name of Luther, but spends most of his time with his mother and younger siblings, often taking on the role of a father figure.

The story begins a week before Christmas at METS where Mickey meets Michelle; a young, newly hired office manger that has come from a French based transportation company called Martinique Logistics. The company has been under an ongoing investigation for trafficking cocaine and recently declared bankruptcy, affecting all of their worldwide offices including the one in Minneapolis where Michelle had worked. Michelle had an affair with one of the owner's sons by the name of Jacques while in France months earlier. Once Jacques learned she was pregnant, he dumped her as quickly as he had taken her under his charismatic spell--and then paid for her abortion. Now living in her own apartment in St Paul, she is being pursued by Jack--an older man in his thirties and one of her former managers at Martinique Logistics who is encouraging her to come with him to greener pastures in Seattle.

Through a series of events--starting with the company Christmas party that ends in a comical disaster in which Mickey's blind date for the night gets drunk and makes a scene--Mickey and Michelle begin to see more of each other through work related circumstances. When Mickey finally musters up enough courage to ask her out, she refuses; and when Jack finds out about Mickey's intentions, he mocks the dock supervisor's lowly position. But like a boxer in a ring, Mickey keeps coming and Michelle eventually sees a certain strength in him she has never seen before. Having grown up in private boarding schools funded her internationally renowned

parents; she begins to long for what has—a real family. In the end, she must choose between two different worlds and two different men.

The Beal Conjecture

Genre: Comedy/Drama

When the journey is worth more than the prize

Based on the actual million-dollar math prize offered by Texas Banker Andrew Beal, *The Beal Conjecture* is a fictitious story about Michael Jones who is Kellogg University's star football player. The only thing that stands between him and the math grade he needs to maintain his college scholarship and thus land a contract in the NFL is a simple, unassuming math professor by the name of Mr. Wong. Unlike all of the other teachers that have pushed Michael through school without any regard to his ability to comprehend the various subjects--Mr. Wong, a refugee from the killing fields of Cambodia--is determined to hold Michael accountable for his own learning and his own future.

Told through the narrative of Mr. Wong, the story begins on Parent's Day. As all of the football players and their parents line up along the sidelines on a beautiful autumn afternoon, it becomes readily apparent that only Michael Jones stands alone at the far end. As the names of the players and their parents are announced over the loud speaker before the sell out crowd, we see Mr. Wong hobbling across the football field with his cane like Yoda. He then stops and stands along side Michael. Soon his name and Michael's name are announced together over the loud speaker as Mr. Wong smiles and waves to the fans. Michael is clearly embarrassed. 'What'd you do that for?' Michael complains under his breath. 'No one should ever stand alone--especially on Parent's Day,' Mr. Wong replies as he continues to smile and wave to the crowd.

Early the next week, Michael receives his math grade along with all of the other students in Mr. Wong's class--and he has failed miserably. At wits end and hard pressed for anything that will boost his grade, Michael asks for extra credit and the wise old Mr. Wong thinks for a moment and then smiles. Like the protégé Mr. Miyagi in the movie *Karate Kid*, he assigns Michael a math riddle that is also made available to the rest of the class. Although unable to solve it, the journey takes Michael down a path he never expected including a face-to-face meeting with the man behind the conjecture: Mr. Beal.

B. Box Office Comparables

Comparable Movies: Revenues in Domestic Box Office Gross

Molly

Max 2015.....Budget: 20 million/Domestic Box Office Gross: 42 million

Beethoven 1992.....Budget: NA/Domestic Box Office Gross: 57 million

Once Upon a Clown

The Truman Show 1998.....Budget: NA/Domestic Box Office Gross: 125 million

In Lombardi's Way

Remember the Titans 2000...Budget: 30 million/Domestic Box Office Gross: 115 million

Facing the Giants 2007.....Budget: 100,000/Domestic Box Office Gross: 10 million

The Choosing

Hope Floats 1998.....Budget: NA/Domestic Box Office Gross: 60 million

Texas Hold'em

Rounders 1998.....Budget: NA/Domestic Box Office Gross: 22 million

21 2008.....Budget: 35 million/Domestic Box Office Gross: 81 million

The Ring

Pearl Harbor 2001.....Budget:140 million/Domestic Box Office Gross: 198 million

Good News from the Bullpen Café

Doc Hollywood 1991.....Budget: NA/Domestic Box Office Gross: 54 million

The Beal Conjecture

Beautiful Mind 2000.....Budget: 58 Million /Domestic Box Office Gross: 170 million

Good Will Hunting 1997.....Budget: NA/Domestic Box Office Gross: 138 million

The Iceman

Goon 2012.....Budget: NA/Domestic Box Office Gross: 4 million

C. Agenda Driven Stories vs. Character Driven Stories

No one can tell a story or teach a class or write an article without having a particular point of view--a premise that represents particular perspective of the world. There is no such thing as a totally neutral position for any story or article or issue because there will always be some kind of subjectivity based on the instructor's or writer's or storyteller's beliefs. In telling stories, however, when these beliefs overshadow and become more important than the story itself, the story becomes an agenda driven story rather than a character driven story.

Agenda driven stories are stories that preach to us a particular point of view or perspective and simply use characters to convey it. What is paramount is the agenda--not the story itself because the story is only a vehicle to advance the agenda. You see this type of format in propaganda films and political ad campaigns. Agenda driven stories are artificial and stilted, and most audiences can smell them a mile away because the story doesn't feel right. Why? Because the characters aren't believable and try too hard to convey the agenda rather than telling the story itself.

Most Christian movies today are agenda driven stories as well that appeal to Christian audiences. Movies like *Facing the Giants* and the *War Room* and other Kendrick Brother films are good films and are seen mostly by Christian audiences. In essence, they are sermons in a film format and there is nothing wrong with that, and I applaud them for doing so.

But those films, like the Billy Graham films of old, are agenda driven films that are designed to help people come to the knowledge of the saving grace of Jesus Christ and they all follow the same format: the hero or heroine gets in trouble and God can save them. That premise is true, and as a Christian, I understand that we need those films because they are often the only sermon a person will hear. But they are agenda driven films--and as Christians--we know that going into the theater. Most people, however, go to movies to be entertained, not lectured or preached to.

Our mission is create character driven stories that reflect Biblical values that openly indicate or at times suggest that Jesus is Lord and that the Holy Spirit is indeed working in and on peoples lives. But unlike the agenda driven stories, our goal is to reach a greater audience, people who would never step inside a theater knowing it is an agenda based Christian film. Can we produce films in which we trust the Holy Spirit to work in peoples lives that are not agenda driven sermons?...Yes. That is my belief and my passion.

One of the most powerful moments in the movie *Home Alone* is when Kevin McCallister meets up with Old Man Marley--Kevin's fearful looking neighbor who is rumored to have killed his family with a snow shovel. They meet in a church chapel--a place known for its association with spiritual strength and reconciliation. Although Christ's name is never mentioned, it is implied, and that implication results in the turning point of the character driven story. No longer is Old Man Marley Kevin's nemesis, but Kevin's ally. And it is there--in the chapel--where Kevin finds the courage to face his antagonists head on. Preachy? No...Agenda driven? No ...Powerful? Yes.

In the movie *The Boy with the Striped Pajamas*, Bruno is an eight year old son of the Nazis Commandant of the Jewish extermination camp in Poland. Having just moved to the area, he is curious about his surrounding. One day he discovers that the adjacent "farm" across the wooded terrain, is really a prison camp. It is outside the barbed wire fence where he meets another eight-year-old Jewish boy named Schmuel--who along with his family, are prisoners.

Schmuel is dressed in his prison clothes that look like pajamas and communicates with Bruno from behind the fence. The power of the story is that it the atrocity of the Jewish concentration camps and its extermination of the Jews is told through the innocence of an eight year old boy who knows nothing about the cruelty of the world in which he lives. Unlike

most stories regarding the holocaust, this story is a character driven and juxtaposes the admiring young Bruno with the brutality of what his father is really doing and what the Nazi's stand for. We become interested in the secret friendship that develops between Bruno and Schmuel and begin to care about these characters. And in the end, when Bruno wants to help look for Schmuel's father and puts on his own striped pajamas and digs under the fence to join Schmuel, we, as an audience, now feel what Bruno feels and fear for his life as he is herded unknowingly towards the gas chambers. Because we are drawn into the character of the story, we care about him and his Jewish friend. How much more powerful is it to tell that atrocity by emotionally drawing the audience in through interesting and innocent characters, than preaching about the evil Nazi regime and all of its brutality as an agenda driven story?

The movie *Hacksaw Ridge* by Mel Gibson that is based on the true story of Desmond Doss—the conscientious objector opposed to killing, but not to serving in WWII—received a ten minute standing ovation at the Venice Film Festival in Italy on September 4th 2016 . The true story of Desmond Doss and its depiction as a movie is a classic example of a character driven story that could have easily fallen victim to an agenda driven story that tried to preach against the violence of war. But it didn't. Even though Desmond was a Christian and held strong personal convictions about his personal beliefs, this movie was not about trying to impose those morals on the audience. It was about simply letting his story be told—and it caught the heart and soul of the Venice Film Festival critics so much that they stood up and applauded the man and the movie for over ten minutes. Wow. You don't get that kind of reaction from a sermon or being preached to. You don't get that kind of reaction from a lecture. You get that kind of reaction by being so drawn into the character of the story and so empathetic to his or her struggle that you lose yourself in the moment and forget that that the story is really about the power of conviction—righteous, God-fearing, conviction; that inspires us to become better people and draw strength from God.

When King David orders the death of Uriah—one of his chief military generals because David has slept with his wife Bathsheba in 2 Samuel chapter 11—he thinks he has gotten away with murder...until the prophet Nathan shows up and tells David a character driven story. Nathan, the wise man that he is, tells David a story about a lowly man with one sheep that is taken by a man who has many.

Nathan could have simply told David that he had murder Uriah --an innocent man --and that God would punish him for it and then walk away. After all, that was his mission from God. That was his agenda. But he didn't. He told a character driven story that drew David in emotionally because he was a shepherd himself when he was young; and when he heard the brutality of it all, he demanded that the antagonist be brought to justice and killed for his actions. That was the moment Nathan knew he had him. That was the moment that Nathan knew he had hit the mark, that he had drawn David so into the story that he—as king--could and would demand justice for this lowly man whose sheep had been taken from him—just as Uriah's life and wife had been taken from him by the more powerful King David. It was at that moment that Nathan pointed his finger at David and said: "You are that man".

And here in lies the power of the character driven story. When we identify so much with the main character or characters, we begin to lose sight of ourselves and forget about our own defenses, our own prejudices, our own biases and beliefs that often keep us from even considering the "truth" of the matter or the issue at large. It is here where we allow the power

of the story with the help of the Holy Spirit to penetrate our hearts and make a difference. That is the power and the beauty of a character driven story.

Do we have an agenda? Yes...it is to be a light to as many people as possible through character driven stories that reflect Biblical values in hopes that they will consider the goodness and grace of God and come to a heart felt change in their own lives. In addition, we want to be a witness to the film community at large. Like the parable of the talents in Matthew chapter 25, we can ill afford to bury our talent while the world's system continues to drag untold millions in the wrong direction. We need to be the light on the hill---the lighthouse that speaks to wayward ships in the midst of the choppy storms of life....

V. Our Goal: \$10 million per film

Our goal is to raise \$10 million per film* as indicated by the enclosed sample budget with a portion of that money going towards P&A (print and advertising) and distribution. That provides enough money to hire top-quality, above-the-line talent (those individuals who guide, influence and add to the creative direction in a film including but not limited to: the screenwriter, producer, director and actors).

Can we produce a film for less than 10 million dollars? In most cases, yes. And if we find the right above-the-line talent for less, we will move forward with production of that particular film for less with all parties privy to the revised budget and approval from the donor(s).

But if we find that the above-the-line talent costs more than what we have budgeted for a particular film, then we will negotiate as many back end deals as possible that allow us to supplement such talent's fees with revenues generated from the sales and distribution of the film. If, for example, we bring on board Bruce Willis for the film *Molly*, and his fee is 8 million dollars alone, then we can offer him 1 million dollars up front with 7 million on the back end from revenues generated from the film.

Would a person like Bruce Willis be worth it? As an "A" actor in Hollywood, his name recognition alone demands a certain marketability that other actors do not. And although his presence doesn't guarantee ticket sales at the box office, it certainly increases the chances for the film's success.

* www.the-numbers.com/movie/budgets/all is a website that lists the production budgets for over 5,000 films ranging for the most expensive film ever produced called Avatar at 425 million to My Date with D

VI. How we plan to get there: string, rope, cable

"I'd rather attempt to do something great and fail than to attempt to do nothing and succeed."

Robert Schuller

Like all risk taking adventures, it begins with an idea that must take legs in order for it to become a reality. Such was the case of the Brooklyn Bridge. Although the need to connect what was then the city of New York with the city of Brooklyn had been a long standing idea for many years, it was not until 1865 that the idea took legs when Mr. William C. Kingsley, of Brooklyn, employed an engineer to draw a plan and make estimates for a suspension bridge to connect the two cities. A few years later, a bill to build the bridge was approved by the New York Legislation and construction began in 1869. But building a bridge of that magnitude was uncharted waters for everyone, especially the architect, John Roebling....So how did they begin construction on something that large?

It began with a simple kite and a string

When John Roebling's construction crew first started to build the bridge, they flew a kite to the other side of the East River like they had done with the first suspension bridge over Niagara Falls in 1848. Once secured, they attached a rope to the kite string and pulled it across. Then with the rope in hand, they attached a cable and pulled it across the river as well. Like anything, the process started small and then grew, with each new phase of construction built upon its predecessor--line upon line, precept upon precept. What started out as an impossibility to many who doubted that a bridge of that magnitude could ever be built, grew into an improbability, then a possibility, then a probability and then 14 years later—a reality. Our process is also a step-by-step approach: (1) obtain \$200,000 in seed capital which will be used to (2) obtain the production capital of 10 million dollars per film which is (3) needed for the production and distribution of each film.

A. Seed Capital Fund Raising Goal: ...the string

1. Why not us?

William Goldman—the Academy Award winning screenwriter—states in his book *Adventures In The Screen Trade* “*the single most important fact, perhaps, of the entire movie industry is that **NOBODY KNOWS ANYTHING***”. If an Academy Award winning screenwriter says that nobody knows anything in Hollywood, then maybe the industry lends itself to an equal playing field where anyone with a good enough screenplay and enough money to produce it, can actually make it happen...and, ironically--they can.

Blockbuster movies like Rocky, American Graffiti, Star Wars, Raiders of the Lost Ark, ET, Back to the Future, Home Alone, Pulp Fiction, and The Blind Side were all screen plays that were passed over by host of Hollywood producers and major studios. Just as there is no

formula to raising money for a film, there is no formula as to what will make a film successful--structure yes, but formulas no. If there were, the major studios would never pass over potential blockbusters or produce films that fail. But the truth of the matter is that major studios do pass over block busters and produce films that fail--and that reality provides a level playing field for everyone else **because nobody really knows** what will be the next big hit. No one has a crystal ball that can predict the future and decide what will make it and what will not--including videos that go viral.

So why not us?

In the January 27th 2015 article of *Success Magazine*, author Don Yeager sites that there was one simple but profound question that was critical in the decision-making process that spurred Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson into the NFL: *Why not you?* It was the fundamental question his father had asked him time and time again. It was the one question that was more powerful than any pep talk, any advise or praise or comments. *Why not you?...Why not you, Russell? Why don't you be the one playing the NFL...someone has to do it, why not you?*

So why not us?

When President John F Kennedy addressed the Irish Parliament on June 28, 1963, he quoted George Bernard Shaw stating: "Other people see things and say 'Why?' But I dream things that never were and I say: 'Why not?' So why not us? Why can't we be the ones who dream things that never were and say 'why not'? What prohibits us from producing award-wining screenplays that make it to the big screen? Why can't we be the ones who influence society with stories that reflect Biblical values? Why can't we be the ones who shed light and hope into the dark corners of the world that surrounds us?"

Why not us?

2. The Donation Process for Seed Capital Donors

Seed Capital donors can make a tax deductible donation on our website at www.lighthousefeaturefilms.org or by contacting Sue Larson from US Bank using the donation form below. Donations to Lighthouse Feature Films are anonymous. Donors can also indicate which charity or non-profit organization they wish to designate as the recipient from revenues generated from the production and distribution of our films up to an amount equal to their donation if such revenues become available. Such revenues will be given to their charity of their choice in their name and on their behalf.

3. Allocation of Seed Capital

* Hire a Communications and Marketing firm that coordinates social media marketing and traditional media marketing that includes but is not limited to full or partial page ads in major metropolitan areas. Full page ads in the major metropolitan area where it is placed. Our goal is

to stay primarily in the Midwest: Minneapolis, St Paul, Chicago, Milwaukee, and St Louis. It also involves a strategy to target wealthy individuals over 50 whose net worth is over 10 million dollars.

* Hire a full time fund raising position for six months with incentive bonuses. Such duties and responsibilities would include but are not limited to:

- 1) Contacting Private Investors/Donors through sites like:
<https://www.carlyle.com>
- 2) Reaching out to movie specific target market audiences.
- 3) Working in tandem with the Communications and a Marketing firm to execute target market strategies
- 4) Developing Leads
- 5) Travel Expenses

4. Sample Newspaper Ad

You have lived a great story... Now tell one

Jack Canfield--the New York Times Best Selling author of the book Chicken Soup for the Soul--described in a recent interview how the stories in his book have changed the lives of its readers throughout the world--and in some cases, even saved their lives. Good stories do that. They inspire. They encourage. They motivate; and in the process, they change lives and make a difference.

We are Lighthouse Feature Films, a non profit, tax deductible organization whose mission is to create award winning, inspirational feature films--stories that reflect Biblical values, and then give to designated charities and non-profit organizations from its proceeds.

Call us today at 612.964.2544 and find out how your tax deductible donation can make a difference in the lives of not only this generation, but generations to come with messages of hope and inspiration...and leave an even greater legacy.

Lighthouse Feature Films
www.lighthousefeaturefilms.org
 612.964.2544

B. Production Capital Fund Raising Goal: \$10 million per film...the rope

1. Hollywood's approach to funding films Bottom Up vs. Top down

In the sales world, it is always preferable to start from the top and go down rather than start from the bottom and go up. Whether you are selling computers or copying machines or freight, your chances of success are far greater if you get the green light or the attention from either the owner of the company, the CEO or CFO rather than the secretary.

And yet, that is where most sales people start the process—by contacting the secretary--the gate keeper--and starting from the bottom and trying to work up to the decision maker.

Like the bottom up approach to sales, most fund raising approaches to film are no different. Raising money here is just as backwards, starting with the lowly screen writer who tries to get to the decision maker up the food chain to approve his or her script. The first stage in this arduous process begins with “minimum wage” gatekeeper at a production company that is willing to consider unsolicited scripts. This person is known as a “reader”, one who reads 10-20 screen plays a day, and this gatekeeper will either red light (thumbs down) the story in the first five minutes or will continue reading and maybe green light (thumbs up) the screen play to the next to the level based on his or her own preconceived notions of what a good screen play should look like. The irony is that there are numerous successful screen plays that were discarded by multiple gate keepers of major studios that became block buster motion pictures including: Rocky, American Graffiti, Star Wars, Raiders of the Lost Ark, ET, Back to the Future, Home Alone, Pulp Fiction, The Blind Side...just to name a few. There is no formula to raising money for a film and there is no formula as to what will make a successful movie--structure yes, but formulas no. If there were, the major studios would never produce films that fail. The truth of the matter is that some major studio films do fail--and that reality provides a level playing field for everyone else **because nobody really knows** what will be the next big hit...

*“It's there in capital letters on page 39 of William Goldman's *Adventures In The Screen Trade*: **NOBODY KNOWS ANYTHING**. It is, Goldman writes, “the single most important fact, perhaps, of the entire movie industry.”*

From the article *The Hit films Hollywood studios didn't want*

And if the production company does not take unsolicited screenplays, then the screenwriter will need to get an agent to represent him or her in order to get it in front of a reader. And if you are not a *somebody* in the industry, then finding an agent to represent you is like finding a needle in the haystack. It is a catch 22 scenario: you need success to get an agent and you need an agent to get success---to get your “solicited” screenplay in front of a “reader”

Then, if your screenplay does make it to the producers desk as a recommendation by your agent, that producer will be yet another gatekeeper to the success or failure of your screenplay.

If it is good and has potential, the producer might offer you an “option”, an agreement for a certain period of time that gives him or her sole rights to solicit your play (either for a fee or free) in hopes of raising money to produce it. The problem with options in film--like the problem with options in real estate--is that the writer, the creator, (like an owner of the real estate property) now has lost total control of his or her project and is at the mercy of the one holding the option—hoping the holder of the option is doing their due diligence to get the necessary funding for the project. But film producers, like real estate agents, have multiple projects going on at the same time and their attention will be devoted to those projects/screenplays that have the greatest chance of making them money which means that most options will fall by the wayside, creating more and more delays.

And if it does find funding? If it does ultimately get the big green light, the major studios usually change it. Why? Because it’s all about making more money and the marketability and commerciality of the product. So more often than not, these producers feel the need to add a little violence and nudity and in appropriate language to spice up the film and give it a higher rating --whether the story needs it or not.

In addition, Hollywood will doctor the film with their own concept of what they think is “marketable” often times rewriting major portions of the script to fit what they think it should look whether it is true to the story or not. We have all seen films in which too many cooks spoil the broth and too many writers detract from the “truth” of the story. We have all come out of the theaters wondering what that film was all about or trying to say. Or, we walk out of the theater thinking that the author had a blatant agenda and was trying too hard push that agenda over and above the truth of the story. Adding certain ingredients that don’t belong in the film or politically correct agendas that detract from the real message of the story.

Independent Films (Indies) by and large are no different and follow the same bottom up process to funding. Most indie film makers produce the their film out of passion and stay true to the integrity of the film, but more often than not, start out with blind passion, and then run out of money (and favors) and are then at the mercy of investor angels or crowd funding from sites like Indie Go Go or Kickstarter in order to complete it. Like the proverbial character in the Bible story who didn’t count the cost, they run out of money and time. For the most part, these film producers are not business people. They are creative people who forgot about the business end of things. Oops.... Some may finish their film, but where it ends up is any ones guess: perhaps on their basement shelf or at best an obscure film festival. But like the avalanche of baby sea turtles that are snatched up by predators after they hatch in the sand, most indie films don’t ever see the light of day—or night.

Our approach for funding films:
From the top down

Our approach is to by pass and to leap frog the traditional means of obtaining money and go straight to wealthy individuals with the story concept and the notion that they can leave behind more than money when they die. They can leave a legacy. They can make a difference, because after all, film is a powerful medium. It always has been and it always will be. If we find such individuals who are willing to give us the money we need to produce the films with the understanding that the revenue from such films will be given to

the charity of their choice on their behalf, then we are working from the top down. We are not begging for producers and actors to make our film, we are hiring them to do so.

And that position of power and control is like an insurance broker or a freight broker or any other kind of broker. We are not beholden to anyone, nor do we own our own assets. Like insurance brokers, we don't own our own insurance building. And like a freight broker, we don't own our own our own trucks or ships. CH Robinson is one of the largest freight brokers in the world making billions every year with very few of their own assets: trucks, railroad cars and ocean freighters. Why are they so successful? Because they contract with companies that have the trucks and railroads and ships —hundreds of them. And then when their customer needs to move a pallet of freight across the country or across the ocean, they dig into their vendors and vendor contracts and hire the best and most cost effective one to do the job. They don't spend time fixing trucks or repairing railroad cars or patching boats. They spend their time finding customers that are willing to pay them to move their freight. It's a brilliant concept and that's where the money is and that's where the power is: control. And that ability and flexibility to pick and chose their vendors will be the same ability and flexibility we will have to pick and chose our actors and actresses and producers and directors that best fit each individual story. With money in hand, it is a now a top down approach to producing films... and that, is why we will be successful

2. What We offer: IDEAS

Idea....

What's the big idea? It's film and because it is film, it offers high visibility and high recognition for wealthy individuals who wish to be known for their contributions. In addition, our stories are not only commercially viable, but we offer a unique, non-profit fund raising program with a charitable distribution plan that finances them.

Demand...

Is there a demand? The film industry alone in 2015 was a 29 billion dollar industry And 2016 is on track to exceed those numbers with an ever increasing demand for new products and new stories.

Expertise....

Is Lighthouse Feature Films credible? Are we capable of making this idea happen? Our core credibility lies with our board members who are leaders in the film industry and leaders in the business community. But like the freight brokerage industry that do not own their own trucks, but choose instead to hire the best possible carrier for the best possible service for their customers, we too offer a brokerage business model based on hiring the best movie directors and producers and actors and above the line talent that money can buy. In short, they become our expertise.

Appearance

Do we look and sound like we know what we are doing? Yes. From the details of our logo to the quality of our films--we choose to produce top quality material. We have all seen the effects of B and C grade movies produced by Christians who in essence give Christian movies

a bad rap. These are the people who believe that just because it is Christian movie, Christians should go and support it no matter how bad it is. That line of thinking is quality control gone amuck. Our God is a God of excellence and we are called to produce excellence and excellence is what we will produce.

Stories...

Academy award winning screen writer William Goldman states on page 39 of his book *Adventures In The Screen Trade* in big bold print: “**NOBODY KNOWS ANYTHING**”. “It is,” Goldman continues to write, “the single most important fact, perhaps, of the entire movie industry.” Proof of his statement lies in the fact that blockbusters movies like Rocky, American Graffiti, Star Wars, Raiders of the Lost Ark, ET, Back to the Future, Home Alone, Pulp Fiction, and The Blind Side were all screen plays that were passed over by host of producers and major studios. Just as there is no formula to raising money for a film, there is no formula as to what will make a successful film--structure yes, but formulas no. If there were, the major studios would never produce films that fail. The truth of the matter is that some major studio films do fail--and that reality provides a level playing field for everyone else **because nobody really knows** what will be the next big hit. No one can predict the future and decide what will make it and what will not including videos that go viral. Why did the ‘Charlie bit me’ video go viral with currently 841 million hits...a video that was not staged, not thought out, but an accident? The treatment of our stories is included and the proof is in the pudding. We offer character driven stories that reflect Biblical values and that puts us on equal footing with anyone in Hollywood, particularly in light of all the inappropriate and vulgar material that is currently being produced.

3. 11 Reasons why we believe we can raise 10 million dollars per film

1) The need for good stories that reflect Biblical values

Story telling, in all of its forms, has been with mankind since the beginning of time. Before the written word was the oral word and oral traditions that were passed down from generation to generation until the advent of the written word where the story first began to evolve into the novel with chapters published in weekly newspapers or magazines...and then into novels themselves. And then in the early 1900s something happened that changed the way the stories were told. It was called film. And since then, the technology has advanced exponentially with theatrical releases and other videos on YouTube and Cable and Netflix that have only served to fuel our insatiable appetite for more. Last year alone, the film industry revenues exceed 329 billion dollars.

But what are we watching on video and TV and in the theaters today?

In the 1950s it was considered risqué to even show a married couple sleeping in the same bed. Today it's the norm to be sleeping with anyone at any time. In the 1950s it was risqué to even say a swear word on the theater screen. Today it's the norm. In 1950s one 1 out of 20 marriages ended in divorce--5% . Today it is 11 out of 20—over 50%

Why has our society digressed to a point in which anything goes? Has that slow process been partly caused by film and TV? Does film influence society or does it merely reflect society?

That question has been the debate for years and I would argue that it does both--but more importantly, it influences.

In the 1960s our country took a drastic turn towards immorality and rebellion that was sparked by the Vietnam War and all that it entailed. In some cases it was justified, but in most cases it wasn't. In most cases, that rebellion merely opened the door for some to justify their own inherent nature to rebel against the boundaries set forth by our Creator. For the first time in American history, prayer was banned from the public schools. The message was becoming clear: We don't need God and we don't want God. We don't want prayer in our schools, we don't want the 10 commandments in our courthouses, and we don't want anyone to tell us that killing the unborn is anything other than a choice. We don't want anything to do with God, the Bible or what it represents, and we will use anything in our power to retrain the hearts and minds to that intent and use the most powerful means to do so: film

Frank Capra the director of the Classic Christmas movie: *It's a Wonderful Life*, stated that "Only the morally courageous are worthy of speaking to their fellow man for two hours in the dark and only the artistically incorrupt will earn and keep the peoples trust.

Capra understood the power of film and its effects on society back in the 1940s. He understood that films have the ability to influence lives. And he was right. Unfortunately film not only has the power to influence society for the better, but also for the worse.

Today we are in a culture war with the fabric of our society being pulled apart at the seams. We need God. We need stories that pull us back in the right direction. Like the parable of the talents in Matthew chapter 25, we can ill afford to bury our talent while the world's system continues to drag untold millions the wrong way. We need to be the light on the hill--the lighthouse that speaks to wayward ships in the midst of the choppy storms of life....

Matthew 5:16

*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works,
and glorify your Father which is in heaven*

2) An equal playing field

*"It's there in capital letters on page 39 of William Goldman's Adventures In The Screen Trade: **NOBODY KNOWS ANYTHING.** It is, Goldman writes, "the single most important fact, perhaps, of the entire movie industry."*

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predict the future and decide what will make it and what will not including videos that go viral. Why did the 'Charlie bit me' video go viral with currently 841 million hits...a video that was not staged, not thought out, but an accident?

So why not us? If companies like 3M had all the answers and all the inventions why would they consider tapping into outside resources? How did 3M become so successful? They took a look at the world and markets around them and saw entrepreneurs inventing things that they had never thought of in their laboratories. And when they saw the genius of some of those ideas, they acquired them and brought them into the fold. The point is that 3M and companies like it, don't have all the answers. Their people have not thought of all the inventions. That is why they are constantly on the lookout for those that do....and that has made them the success they are today.

So why not us...why not the new kid on the block with fresh ideas and fresh stories based on Biblical values?

3) Our stories: Character driven vs. agenda driven

No one can tell a story or teach a class or write an article without having a particular point of view--a premise that represents particular perspective of the world. There is no such thing as a totally neutral position for any story or article or issue because there will always be some kind of subjectivity based on the instructor's or writer's or storyteller's beliefs. In telling stories, however, when these beliefs overshadow and become more important than the story itself, the story becomes an agenda driven story rather than a character driven story.

Agenda driven stories are stories that preach to us a particular point of view or perspective and simply use characters to convey it. What is paramount is the agenda--not the story itself because the story is only a vehicle to advance the agenda. You see this type of format in propaganda films and political ad campaigns. Agenda driven stories are artificial and stilted, and most audiences can smell them a mile away because the story doesn't feel right. Why? Because the characters aren't believable and try too hard to convey the agenda rather than telling the story itself.

Most Christian movies today are agenda driven stories as well, and they are designed to appeal to Christian audiences. Movies like Facing the Giants and the War Room and other Kendrick Brother films are good films, but are seen mostly by Christian audiences. In essence, they are sermons in a film format and there is nothing wrong with that, and I applaud them for doing so.

But those films, like the Billy Graham films of old, are agenda driven films all follow the same format: the hero or heroine gets in trouble and only God can save them. That promise is true, and as a Christian, I understand that we need those films and I thank Billy Graham and the Kendrick Brothers for producing them because they are often the only sermon some people will hear. But they are agenda driven films and as Christians, we know that going into the theater.

Our mission is create character driven stories that reflect Biblical values that openly indicate or at times suggest that Jesus is Lord and that the Holy Spirit is indeed working in and on peoples lives. But unlike the agenda driven stories, our goal is to

reach a greater audience, people who would never step inside a theater knowing it is an agenda based Christian film. Can we produce films in which we trust the Holy Spirit to work in peoples lives that are not agenda driven sermons?...Yes. That is my belief and my passion.

One of the most powerful moments in the movie *Home Alone* is when Kevin McCallister meets up with Old Man Marley--Kevin's fearful looking neighbor who is rumored to have killed his family with a snow shovel. They meet in a church chapel--a place known for its association with spiritual strength and reconciliation. Although Christ's name is never mentioned, it is implied--and that implication results in the turning point of the character driven story. No longer is Old Man Marley Kevin's nemesis, but Kevin's ally. And it is there--in the chapel--where Kevin finds the courage to face his antagonists head on. Preachy? No...Agenda driven? No ...Powerful? Yes.

In the movie *The Boy with the Striped Pajamas*, Bruno is an eight year old son of the Nazis Commandant of the Jewish extermination camp in Poland. Having just moved to the area, he is curious about his surrounding. One day he discovers that the adjacent "farm" across the wooded terrain, is really a prison camp. It is outside the barbed wire fence where he meets another eight-year-old Jewish boy named Schmuel--who along with his family, are prisoners.

Schmuel is dressed in his prison clothes that look like pajamas and communicates with Bruno from behind the fence. The power of the story is that it the atrocity of the Jewish concentration camps and its extermination of the Jews is told through the innocence of an eight year old boy who knows nothing about the cruelty of the world in which he lives. Unlike most stories regarding the holocaust, this story is a character driven and juxtaposes the admiring young Bruno with the brutality of what his father is really doing and what the Nazi's stand for. We become interested in the secret friendship that develops between Bruno and Schmuel and begin to care about these characters. And in the end, when Bruno wants to help look for Schmuel's father and puts on his own striped pajamas and digs under the fence to join Schmuel, we--as an audience--now feel what Bruno feels and fear for his life as he is herded unknowingly towards the gas chambers. Because we are drawn into the character of the story, we care about him and his Jewish friend. How much more powerful is it to tell that atrocity by emotionally drawing the audience in through interesting and innocent characters, than preaching about the evil Nazi regime and all of its brutality as an agenda driven story?

When King David orders the death of Uriah--one of his chief military generals because David has slept with his wife Bathsheba in 2 Samuel chapter 11--he thinks he has gotten away with murder...until the prophet Nathan shows up and tells David a character driven story. Nathan, the wise man that he is, tells David a story about a lowly man with one sheep that is taken by a man who has many.

Nathan could have simply told David that he had murdered Uriah --an innocent man --and that God would punish him for it and then walk away. After all, that was his mission from God. That was his agenda. But he didn't. He told a character driven story that drew David in emotionally because David was a shepherd himself when he was young; and when he heard the brutality of it all, he demanded that the antagonist be brought to justice and killed for his actions. It was at that moment that Nathan knew he had him. It was at that moment that Nathan knew he had hit the mark, that he had drawn David so into the story, that he—as

king—could and would demand justice for this lowly man whose sheep had been taken from him—just as Uriah’s life and wife had been taken from him by the more powerful King David. In that convicting, heart felt moment, Nathan pointed his finger at David and said: “You are that man”.

And here in lies the power of the character driven story. When we identify so much with the main character or characters, we begin to lose sight of ourselves and forget about our own defenses, our own prejudices, our own biases and beliefs that often keep us from even considering the “truth” of the matter or the issue at large. It is here where we allow the power of the story to penetrate our own hearts and thus allow it to begin to make a difference.

That same notion holds true when we are made aware of a single person or a family in need. When we hear their individual story—a character driven story-- studies indicate that we are far more apt to give than if we were just invited to give to an institution like the Red Cross or the United Way.

Do we have an agenda? Yes...it is to be a light to as many people as possible through *character* driven stories that reflect Biblical values in hopes that they will consider the goodness and grace of God and come to a heart felt change in their own lives

4. Our ability to make award-winning films: Lessons from the brokerage industry:

Like an architect, We don’t want to build the building. We want to draw up the diagram and hire the construction company. These people are our credibility. Our job is to write and find great stories, (the blue prints, the plans) and let the experts build it.

Like an insurance broker or a freight broker or any other kind of broker, we are not beholden to anyone, nor do we own our own assets. Like insurance brokers, we don’t own our own insurance building, and like a freight broker, we don’t own our own trucks or ships. CH Robinson is one of the largest freight brokers in the world making billions every year with very few of their own assets: trucks, railroad cars and ocean freighters. Why are they so successful? Because they contract with companies that have the trucks and railroads and ships —hundreds of them. And then when their customer needs to move a pallet of freight across the country or across the ocean, they dig into their vendors and vendor contracts and hire the best and most cost effective one to do the job. They don’t spend time fixing trucks or repairing railroad cars or patching boats. They spend their time finding customers that are willing to pay them to move their freight. It’s a brilliant concept and that’s where the money is and that’s where the power is. And that ability and flexibility to pick and chose their vendors will be the same ability and flexibility we will have to pick and chose the best actors and actresses and producers and directors that best fit each individual story.

5. Our credibility and accountability

Such firms as Clifton Larson Allen (CLA), US Bank, and Neuger Communications along with our board members add credibility to our project. Each member, whether he or she is on the Lighthouse Feature Film board itself or the business advisory board or the film advisory board has put their name and reputation on the line. These volunteers range from various

backgrounds including leadership positions in major corporations, establishing their own charity and/or extensive experience and success in film and/or business or non-profits.

CLA is the largest accounting firm in Minnesota, and along with US Bank, they will be handling **all** financial transactions including the acceptance of each donor's donation, the distribution of each film's production and promotional funds, and the allocation of revenues to each donor's charity on their behalf. All financial records are fully transparent and copies of each film's accounting books are given to each donor after the production and distribution of the film as well as a record of the donation that is given to the charity of their choice on their behalf. All records are also made available to each donor upon request.

6. A tax-deductible donation

Lighthouse Feature Films is a non profit 501C3 organization and every donation is tax deductible.

7. A unique approach to film making: Giving back film revenues to the donor's charity of choice on their behalf

Howard Schultz was working for a Swedish-based company called Perstorp when he discovered a small retailer in Seattle called Starbucks. After trying the coffee, he was hooked and joined the company as head of marketing while accepting a huge pay cut and a small equity share. While in Italy, Schultz experienced the coffee bar atmosphere of friends sharing coffee (particularly espresso) and conversation. It was there that he had the idea of taking the relational concept of coffee and making that his core business model—not just selling beans as Starbucks had always done. The problem was that no one else in ownership saw what Starbucks could be. So he tested his idea of serving espresso in one of their stores. Interest soared, but the owners either could not or would not deviate from their original business model of selling only coffee beans. In 1987 Shultz learned that the owners of Starbucks were going to sell their stores and their name. With the help of investors, Shultz purchased the Starbucks's name and existing stores—and the rest is history. Howard Schultz took a hairline shift in his approach to coffee and it paid big dividends.

Our approach is also a hairline shift in its concept.

Not only do donors get a tax deduction, but the revenues of the film are given to the charity of choice on their behalf making their donation go twice as far. And because their initial donation has covered all of the production costs, all of the monies generated from the film are considered to be revenues/profits, that can now be given directly to the charity of their choice on their behalf with the exception of 1) the backend payments to major talent that may require more money than could be afforded on the “front end” budget and 2) other distribution costs.

8. The power of timing

Timing: The right person in the right place the right time In the business world “no” doesn't always mean forever. Any sales representative that has been successful will tell you that no doesn't to always mean no. Just because a potential client says no today doesn't mean they will say no tomorrow. Things change. In the freight world, one of the most competitive industries, approaching traffic managers and shipping managers is difficult. Since they are bombarded with sales calls –sometimes as much as three calls a day. So how does one break into any company

that is already shipping with a certain carriers? Why would they want to consider you? Why would a purchasing agent for 3M or Motorola or any company want to consider you over the competition? Sometimes it just comes down to timing. Maybe the traffic manger retired and the new person would like to interview all the new prospective shippers out there and now the door is open. Maybe someone had a bad experience with their customer service representative and they are looking for a new vendor...things change...things change with time. Perhaps a billionaire had a grandson or a grand daughter that was recently diagnosed with a certain illness...perhaps the movie *The Iceman* might suddenly be more attractive. Or perhaps the granddaughter's grandfather just passed away and he was a WWII veteran and the movie *The Ring* is back on the table. And just because a WI had said no to a movie project in the past, doesn't mean they will say no to it again. Maybe it the 10th time someone needs to say no before saying yes.

The point is we don't know. Just because a buyer or an investor or a donor says no today does not mean they will say no tomorrow...things change with time and when they do, its time to move. Just because someone who had money had said no to a move project in the past, doesn't mean they will say no to it now

We cannot dismiss that just because they are wealthy and have the ability to contact any producer they want, doesn't mean that they have done it. And even if they could do it , are thee not some that prefer to ride the coattail of the visionary? The freight business competition is fierce and those that survive are the ones who are persistence, and with enough calls, enough time, they know things will change in their favor. Why does a customer buy from one freight broker over another? Most companies get 4-5 calls a week from sales representatives like you. How do you stand out? Why even try? Why do they choose you? They are already shipping with someone. What makes you think they will ship with you? They are already a billionaire. What makes you think they will want to work with you—a nobody

9. The power of suggestion

Impulse/emotional buying (based on packaging and presentation)

Why are candy bars placed at the checkout lanes of grocery stores? Because over 90% of all sales occur there according to Lawrence Allen in his book *Chocolate Fortunes*. It is called Point of Purchase or Impulse Buying. Shoppers, who don't have a list of what to buy when they go into a store, purchase 40% more than those who do have a list according to Brandon Gaille--an independent marketing analyst. Why? Because when they see something they like--when they see the packaging they like--they buy it. It is no different than investors. Take for example the hit TV series *Shark Tank*. Why even present your vision to the investors? Because they want to see the next big thing and they don't have it. They don't have all the ideas and want to see and invest in what is interesting and functional and exciting and profitable. They are there to invest. Billionaires are there to consider what to donate to or invest in. They want to be sold like the investors of Shark Tank. They want to be sold on the next new idea. Have you ever seen the Shark Tank investor bidding against themselves for a great new product? Do you think other wealthy individuals are any different? They too have all this money and often don't know what they want to invest in or donate to until they see it. and since they know they cant take the money with them when they die, like the investors on Shark Tank, they are looking for the right projects , the right packaging, the right presentation, the right cause—something that resonates within them just like a buyer at a grocery store who buys on impulse a chocolate candy bar at the check out lane or new fangled potato chips. They are no different than

moviegoers and the investors on Shark Tank: they want to see something that moves them, which resonate within them, which catches their fancy. They want to see something they can believe in; and just like moviegoers, they want to be wowed by the story, the presentation, the idea, the cause. ‘Yes, this is something I want to get involved in’.

Yes, but isn’t the industry saturated with stories and ideas and causes? Not good ones. Why is it that people still go to movies after having seen hundreds and thousands of shows? Because they still want the storyteller to take them on a ride that they can believe in and that leaves them feeling satisfied and entertained or moved. That is why they pay good money--to feel or see something new. That is why investors consider upstarts. They want to see what is out there, and like the grocery store shopper without a list, they are impulse buyers, investing in something they have never seen before until the moment they walked in and they saw it themselves and then tried it—like pineapple salsa. They didn’t go looking for pineapple salsa that morning when they got up. They didn’t wake up and ask where can I buy pineapple salsa. No, they saw it at the store, tried a sample, liked it, and bought it. Shark Tank investors don’t wake up and say ‘I sure hope someone has an idea about X today because I think that is where the new money lies’. No, they go to the show *expecting the unexpected* and when they see what they like, it resonates within their soul and mind. And they, like the grocery store shopper, buy it. Like the grocery store shopper and the Shark Tank investors, wealthy individuals are really no different. They are human. And as humans they are subject to the same impulse buying bug as anyone else--looking for something to put their money in and having no idea what it is until it is presented to them properly. Hey.....Why not us? Why not our films? That is why we are on an even playing field with Hollywood. We have the goods. We have the stories. We have what people want.

10. The power of the invite

You are looking at this analysis because someone invited you to do it. How many things do we go to simply because we are invited to do so? And invitation makes someone feel special--that they are important enough to be asked. Inviting donors to the table to make a difference is an invitation, and in spite of all the invitations they get from various sources, it is still a compliment. It still says you are important enough to be considered. How many of us have ever had a guest list thinking that so and so will never come because the event because they were either too busy or the event didn’t fit their lifestyle---and surprise of all surprises, they came. Maybe so and so hasn’t been invited to as many invitations as we think they have.

We cannot dismiss someone that just because they are wealthy and have the ability to contact any producer they want, that doesn’t mean that they have done it. And even if they could do it or have done it, are there not some that prefer to ride the coattails of a visionary who extends to them an invitation to get involved?

11. The Power of resolve: Our commitment to Excellence

“Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection, we can catch excellence.”

Vince Lombardi

Someone has to be the best, why not us? Why can’t we hire the best talent money can buy to make quality films. Like Lombardi, excellence begins by chasing perfection, by hiring those

producers and big name actors and directors who are committed to the same goal as we are: Excellence. We want to produce award-winning films and you don't get there by producing mediocrity. You get it by expecting excellence. That what we want to be and that what we want to produce. This is our signature. We don't want to make B grade films and then ask God to bless them. We want to produce excellence because our God is a God of Excellence. God gave his best. He gave His Son--His only begotten son, not an angel, not an ambassador not a representative from heaven. No. For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son that whosoever should believe on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. God gave us His Son. God gave us His Word. God gave us His promises. He held nothing back. He gave us His best, so how can we give any less?

4. The Donation Process for Production Capital

Lighthouse Feature Films is looking for donors whose net worth is over 15 million dollars and who have a desire to make a difference and leave a legacy through film.

Jack Canfield--the New York Times Best Selling author of the book *Chicken Soup for the Soul*—described in a recent interview how the stories in his book have changed the lives of its readers throughout the world--and in some cases, even saved their lives. Good stories do that. They inspire. They encourage. They motivate; and in the process, they change lives and make a difference.

At Lighthouse Feature Films, our mission is to: 1. Create award winning, inspirational feature films—stories that reflect Biblical values, and then 2. Give to designated charities and non-profit organizations from its proceeds on behalf of each donor. In other words, the revenues generated from those films would be used to fund the charity or non-profit organizations of each donor's choice. In short, each donation has a twofold affect: not only producing inspirational films, but funding the charity, church, ministry or non-profit organization(s) of each donors choice from the revenues generated by those films on their behalf.

Donors can choose to donate to any one of our nine films or they can simply donate to Lighthouse Feature Films without any preference as to what film their donation is applied towards. Donors may also wish to bring to the table their own ideas about other stories. The cost for the production, distribution and printing and advertising (P&A) for each film is 10 million dollars and is made up of 10 blocks at one million dollars per block. Donors can give as many blocks as they desire up to 10. A donor who sponsors an entire film for 10 blocks (10 million dollars) can designate as many charities or non-profit organizations they so chose as the recipient(s) from the proceeds of that film.

For donors giving less than 10 blocks (a portion of the film's funding), all that is required is a letter of commitment that serves as an informal agreement stating that if another donor or donors provide the rest of the 10 blocks needed to complete the funding of a particular film, then they will release their donation for the number of blocks(s) they agreed to donate in order to complete the full funding of the film. The time frame to raise money for any one particular film is seven months, and if less than 10 million is raised in that seven month period, then

donors will decide if they want to apply that committed donation to another film, produce the film in questions for less than 10 million, or withdraw their commitment.

Since donors are donating money to the production of such films, all the money generated by the distribution of that film is considered **revenue** (profit) *apart* from any other additional expenses such as:

- 1) An agreement to pay for bigger name talent on the “back end” (additional compensation paid to a particular talent from the revenue generated by the film itself)
- 2) Additional costs associated with distribution and promotion of the film.

Revenues from fully funded films that generate 10 million or more will be first distributed to each charity or non profit organization(s) that are designated by the donor(s) on their behalf based on the percentage of each donors donation to the production of the film which is the amount equivalent to their donation. Revenues above 10 million dollars from such films will then be allocated towards other films that have already been partially funded by existing donors. If no existing films are partially funded, then that money will sit in escrow and will be applied to the next partially funded film until it is fully funded.

Revenues from fully funded films that generate less than 10 million dollars will be simply be given to each charity or charities or non-profit organization(s) designated by each donor(s) in the percentage amount of each of their respective donation(s) from such revenues.

Donations of less than one million dollars will also be earmarked for the donor’s charity of choice and given on their behalf from monies generated by a specific film as designated by such donor. If no specific film is designated, then aggregate revenue monies will be paid out to such donor’s charity of choice if or when such monies become available.

Financial and Transactional Transparency

Clifton Larson Allen is the largest accounting firm in Minnesota and along with US Bank, they will be handling **all** financial transactions including the acceptance of each donor’s donation, the distribution of each film’s production and promotional funds, and the allocation of revenues to each donors charity on their behalf. All financial records are fully transparent and copies of each film’s accounting books are given to each donor after the production and distribution of the film as well as a record of the donation that is given to the charity of their choice on their behalf. All records are also made available to each donor upon request.

C. Film Production and Distribution...the cable

1. 10 million dollar budget

Lighthouse Feature Films Sample Budget

ACCTS	DESCRIPTION	TOTAL
1100	Story and Screenplay	161,685
1200	Producer	242,509
1300	Director	237,392
1400	Cast	2,025,000
1500	Travel and Living	56,681
1600	Fringe Benefits	106,209
TOTAL ABOVE THE LINE		2,829,476
2000	Production Staff	419,522
2100	Extra Talent	62,377
2200	Set Design	149,632
2300	Set Construction	378,145
2500	Set Operations	283,640
2600	Special Effects	125,256
2700	Set Dressing	273,433
2800	Property	147,412
2900	Wardrobe	106,254
3100	Hair & Make-Up	92,504
3200	Electrical, Rigging, and Operations	268,764
3300	Camera Operations	332,898
3400	Sound Operations	126,474
3500	Transportation	270,201
3600	Location	268,952
3700	Pix Vehicles/Animals	33,376
3800	Film and Lab	211,430
3900	Special Effects	72,120
4000	Second Unit	51,007
4100	Test	3,800
4300	Production Fringes	323,105
TOTAL PRODUCTION		4,000,302
5000	Editing & Projection	272,455
5100	Music	153,202
5200	Post Production Sound	163,882
5300	Post Production Laboratory	71,320

5400	Official Effects	220,962
5500	Titles	29,040
5700	Post Production Fringes	58,150
TOTAL POST PRODUCTION		968,711
6500	Publicity	14,552
6700	Insurance	107,454
6800	General Expensis	79,505
TOTAL OTHER		201,511
TOTAL ABOVE THE LINE		2,829,476
TOTAL BELOW THE LINE		5,170,524
ABOVE AND BELOW THE LINE		8,000,000
TOTAL FRINGES		429,314
CONTINGENCY		1,000,000
P&A/ DISTRIBUTION		1,000,000
GRAND TOTAL		10,000,000

2. Sample Production timeline

* We are projecting a story research and development periodic of 6 weeks

* Once the script has been polished and finalized we are projecting a preproduction period of 8 weeks

* Production/ principal photography will last approximately 6 weeks

* We are projecting 18 weeks for postproduction

Research and development... 6 weeks.....week 1 through week 6

Preproduction...8 weeks.....week 6 through week 14

Production/ Principal photography...6 weeks.....week 14 through week 20

Post production and visual effects...18 weeks.....week 20 through week 38

Festival submission...4 weeks.....week 38 through week 42

Promotion/Advertising/Distribution ...4 weeks.....week 38 through week 42

3. Distribution

What good is it to have a product to sell and no means in which to sell it? That is the essence distribution. As a nation we are experts in the areas of distribution...Just look at Wall Mart and Target and every imaginable grocery store in the country. It is all about distribution--getting the product on the shelf at that store in order to sell it. It is no different in the movie industry. We have a product called a film and we need to sell it, and that is where a distributor comes in--they sell our film to various markets. And like every thing today, these markets are continually evolving and emerging with new technologies and mediums of exposure.

As an example, the old markets included:

1. Theatrical Distribution Rights: The right to exhibit films in theaters that are open to the public where admission fees are charged
2. Free Television: Distribution of the film by networks and syndicated television broadcasts
3. Home Video: Home video involves the rental or sale of tangible/physical copies of the work to viewers. Formats may include DVD and Blu-Ray that the consumer views on a DVD player or other another type of receiver at home

Today, the new markets include:

1. Video-on-Demand (VOD) and Transactional-Video-On-Demand (TVOD): This allows the viewer to request a film on a television or viewing screen that is sent via a signal directly to the consumer and not the general public at a time a place selected by the viewer. This also includes Electronic-Sell-Through (EST) which allows the consumer to permanently retain a copy of the work and Pay-Per-View(PPV) in which the consumer purchases a specific work from a pay-per-view platform for viewing at variable times and where transmission creates temporary copies of the work
2. Subscription-Video-On Demand (SVOD): The consumer pays a fee to a service that gives the consumer access to a library of works for a period of viewing time like *Netflix and Hulu*
3. Ad-Sponsored-Video-On Demand (AVOD) : This is a platform that allows the viewer access to a library of works for a period of time for viewing at a time and place selected by the viewer, but the platform inserts advertising into the works. On platforms like *Hulu* the viewer is given the choice between viewing with inserted ads or subscribing to the service access to its library
4. Semi Theatrical, Non-Theatrical, Non-traditional Theatrical: This involves the exhibition of the film to audiences by organizations who are not primarily engaged in the business of exhibiting films to the public and whose purposes are: educational, cultural, religious or charitable causes. This includes educational institutions, film societies, museums, and hospitals government agencies and churches
5. Educational A/V: this involves the sale or rental of to film to educational institutions, libraries and museums for viewing by audiences
6. Transportation: this involves inflight movies ships at sea oil rigs and the military
7. Pay Television: Distribution via pay/cable, over the air pay TV, master antenna, closed circuit, and multipoint distribution services where viewers pay for the right to see the film

And as new distribution channels develop, new distribution companies emerge. But not all distributors are effective in all markets and many have specialized in certain areas. Just as you would not expect Netflix or Vimeo to release your work theatrically (in theaters), you would not expect Gath and Tugg to broadcast or cablecast your work. As a consequence, of all these

new distribution channels and the splitting up of rights in the works among multiple distributors and the their distribution contracts have changed significantly; and it is up to us a producer of the product to negotiate the best possible agreement with each of the various distributors. That negotiating power is based on a number of factors including whether there are multiple offers on the table, the size of those offers, and the perceived marketability (value) of our work that is based upon the star power of the actors and/or directors.

The latter is where we will focus our energies. Our goal is to hire A and B actors and directors that carry considerable weight at the box office, and therefore leverage our bargaining power with any and all distributors.

VII. Live a Great Story

A ship in the harbor is safe, but that's not what ships are built for

I first saw this sticker on a railing at Minnehaha Falls in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Oddly enough, after having grown up in one of its suburbs, I had never made it to the famous landmark. But two years ago my family and I decided to take a trip there, and as we were exploring the area above the falls, we came across this sticker on one of the upper railings that over looked the site. As a writer, the phrase struck me as interesting so I took the photo with my smart phone. But it wasn't until weeks later--after having seen the photo again, that I began to realize the importance of what it meant.

Live a great story

At first glance the statement seems relatively simple and straightforward--not too much hype, not too much fanfare, just words on a sticker. In one sense, it almost appears to be an understatement in the midst of all of the other notable quotes that envelope our culture....that is until we begin to unravel the very nature and essence of its significance.

As an English major and a writer in college, I knew that every story had to contain four basic elements: 1) the main character or protagonist...the who, 2) the goal or prize...the desire, 3) the motive for obtaining the prize...the why, and 4) the adversities or adversary that stand in the way of obtaining the prize...the obstacle or problem. I also knew that every great story begins with an inciting incident—an event that marks the beginning of the story and defines what the story is about. It is a junction, a fork in the road that requires a decision on the part of the protagonist to act or not to act--to move forward or not to move forward in either pursuing or not pursuing the mystery that needs to be solved or the dream that needs to be fulfilled or the catastrophe that needs to be averted.

In the movie the *National Treasure*, the inciting incident is when Ben Franklin Gates discovers a clue in a ship trapped in ice that he believes will help him find the whereabouts of priceless artifacts. In the movie *The Rookie*, the inciting incident is when high school baseball coach Jim Morris throws a 98-mile an hour fastball and is encouraged to pursue his childhood dream of playing professional baseball in the major leagues. In the movie *It's a Wonderful Life* the inciting incident is when George Bailey's father dies and he must now decide whether to stay and take over his father's fledgling Savings and Loan Association or not; and in the movie *Sully*, it is when the US Airways Airbus malfunctions over New York City and Captain Chesley Sullenberger (Sully) is forced to land the plane on the Hudson River. Whether the inciting incident is put-upon the protagonist like the movie *Sully* or if the protagonist has time to consider the options before him or her, it is that incident that forces the hand of the protagonist to act or not...and if the protagonist decides not to act, we don't have a story.

It is the same principle found in the parable of the talents in Mathew 25. A master is going on a long journey, but before he does so, he gives talents to three of his servants according to their ability. To one he gives five talents, to another two talents and to the last, he gives one talent. Over time, the servant who was given five talents went and doubled his talents--as did the second servant. But the third servant does nothing with his talent—in short, he buries it. Like a ship that never leaves the safety of the harbor, he never ventured outside the confines of his own comfort zone, never pursued any dreams, and never took any risks, or faced any challenges. He played it safe all his life...and life was good--until that day when his master returned and asked him what he had done with his talent. Sounds like a great story doesn't it? Imagine if it was made into a movie and then imagine the conversations the next morning around the water cooler at work.

'So what did you do over the weekend, Sarah?'

'Oh, I went to this great movie about a servant who buried his talent in the ground. You got to see it.'

'Really? It's that good huh?'

The point here is that no one wants to see a movie in which the protagonist decides to do nothing. We go to the movies because we want to see the protagonist move forward and weather the storm and fight the enemy and solve the mystery. We go to the theaters to live vicariously through the protagonist because we want to feel their struggles and challenges and fears. We want to see how they face adversity and what choices they make in the midst of the conflicts that arise as they move forward in faith to pursue their goal. Every great story you have ever seen from *Rocky* to the *Iron Lady* to *The Hobbit* to *It's a Wonderful Life* begins with the protagonist moving forward...

...and so does ours.

The Bible says Hebrews 12: 2 *Looking unto Jesus the **author** and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.* Notice with word **author** here. Jesus is the author and finisher of **our faith** and the author and finisher of **our story**. And as the author, do you think Jesus will allow us to stay in the harbor or bury our talent?

I don't think so.

How would an author---a storyteller—develop our faith if it were not for problems to solve and obstacles to overcome? Just look at the movies. If there were no problem or conflicts or adversaries, who would go? Not me. So how would God get any glory if His people never had any issues that required His help? No. If Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith and we have an adversary called the devil that is out to oppose us, then it stands to reason that He is going to allow us to experience these problems and adversities that require nothing less than faith as we move forward to obtain the prize. The irony in all this, however, is that God never intended the obstacles and problems of life to put us under, but to put us over. The wilderness was never meant to destroy the children of Israel, but to bring them to a total dependence on God so they could possess the promise land. The cross was never meant to defeat Christ, but to defeat Satan when Jesus took upon him your sin and my sin and the sin of the world. In other words, what Satan meant for bad, God turned it around for good--and what looked like a total defeat at the cross, became the greatest story ever told: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the salvation of mankind.

So if you think that moving forward has too many problems to bear, think again. Think about the consequence of not moving forward and burying your talent in the ground. Think of the people you do not know and may never meet who are depending on you to fulfill your God given purpose and God given calling.

So what challenges do lie before us: health issues, an engine failure, a new business, a change of career, a battle to be fought, a mystery to be solved, a relationship to be restored, a duty to be performed, or a long lost dream to be pursued? What ever inciting incident we face, it will ultimately require a decision:

to either play it safe or to pull up anchor and set sail for shores that lay far beyond what we know to be familiar or comfortable. And like Bilbo Baggins in the movie *The Hobbit*, wouldn't we really prefer to chose an adventure and step out in faith in spite of the problems and obstacles and adversities that lie before us--and in doing so, live our own great story?