

Survivor-Style Documentary Aims To Spark World Missions Interest

Travel the Road hopes to attract young adults to missionary journeys through 'reality TV with a purpose'

With the world's largest Christian TV network as their platform, two 20-something Californians are hoping to attract young adults to venture into the mission field with their "reality TV with a purpose."

Travel the Road (TTR), which premiered in May on Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), chronicles the extreme expeditions of Timothy Scott and William Decker, who backpacked for 18 months across 40,000 miles and 25 countries, including many that are hostile to the gospel, such as Cambodia, Laos, Ethiopia and China.

Billed as a pioneer of Christian programming that is "like no other show," the 12-episode series is set in exotic National Geographic locations with Survivor cinematography, combined with the drama of Fear Factor and the excitement of Amazing Race.

But unlike those reality TV programs, TTR's theme is the Great Commission, as Scott and Decker—with nothing more than their Bibles, passports, pocket money, the clothes on their backs and a video camera—sought to share Jesus with unreached people groups, despite the lack of local contacts and translators.

During their sojourn from September 2000 to February 2002, which entailed travel via trains, boat, bus and a gasoline

tanker, the pair filmed their physical and emotional trials, and logistical difficulties. But they also showed accounts of salvation, healing and deliverance from demonic spirits.

“The Scripture says, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel.’ They’ve taken that literally, showing us ministry in action by praying and laying hands on the sick, and ministering to the lost,” said Paul Crouch Jr., TBN’s vice president of program development. “They’re taking the words of Christ and so graphically illustrating it for today’s generation.”

Phil Smethurst is the founder of Overland Missions, a Port Canaveral, ministry that takes young adults on extreme expeditions. He said Scott and Decker—whom he has known for two years—have “a genuine heart for missions.”

“When ... on the mission field, they are more concerned with the souls of the people than the actual video production,” said Smethurst, 35. “Many times they lose their best footage because it’s not appropriate for the villagers. ... Our vision dovetails real well with their vision. This ministry is definitely birthed of God.”

But Scott and Decker, who live in Hermosa Beach, Calif., took contrasting paths in becoming a modern version of the apostle Paul and Barnabas.

A former intern for Paine Webber, Scott planned to become a stockbroker in 1998 after receiving degrees in biblical studies and business administration from Vision Christian Bible College in Denver. But during a weeklong mission trip to the Czech Republic, Scott—who was 19 at the time—says God

burdened him to go overseas and preach the gospel.

Scott, now 25, was good friends with Decker, 29, a professional photographer who attended a Denver art college with Scott's brother, Mike. Although he wasn't a Christian at the time, Decker, who was 24 then, accepted Scott's invitation in 1998 to travel overseas because he was "looking for a change."

As the pair made their way from New Guinea to Malaysia and other parts of Southeast Asia, Decker says he saw the Lord "undeniably" working through Scott as he prayed and witnessed to people. Scott eventually led him to the Lord in Bangkok, Thailand.

"From then on, the Lord really moved in my life," said Decker, who attends several Los Angeles-area charismatic churches with Scott.

After the two came back to the United States in 1999, Decker and Scott launched a TTR Web site to share photographs and accounts of their journey. On their next trip in 2000 they brought a video camera to record their travels.

"Our purpose or plan was never to take a camera to shoot a television series," said Scott, whose brother, Mike, serves as TTR's producer. "Our first focus was to minister the gospel."

Highlights of their adventures included camping out in Ethiopia with lions outside their tent; ministering to a family in the Himalayas; preaching to thousands in Burundi, where hundreds responded to an altar call; and praying for a Korean woman who was healed of altitude sickness in Tibet.

“We both realized that the power of the gospel is sharper than any two-edged sword,” Scott said. “The biggest thing we realized is people everywhere are looking for a union with God.”

After editing 300 hours of footage to seven hours for the series, the duo will hit the road again by September. They say they’ll be gone for at least two years, with scheduled visits to northern China, Mongolia, Siberia and eastern Russia. As with previous journeys, the pair—who receive support from donors—expect their upcoming journey to cost about \$12,000 each.

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