



# Film: *Hotel Rwanda*

## Film Data

Rated PG-13. Running time: 2 hours 1 minute. United Artists.

Directed by Terry George. Script by Keir Pearson and Terry George.

## Cast

**Paul Rusesabagina:** Don Cheadle

**Tatiana Rusesabagina:** Sophie Okonedo

**Jack Daglish:** Joaquin Phoenix

**Thomas Mirama:** Antonio David Lyons

**General Bizimungu:** Fana Mokoena

**Colonel Oliver:** Nick Nolte

## Introduction

Each week our TV newscasts and newspapers remind us that we live in a cruel world. The human heart, with its capacity for good and evil, has not changed since the psalmist wrote, "They sit in ambush in the villages; in hiding places they murder the innocent. Their eyes stealthily watch for the helpless." History and current news re-emphasize how timely the Scriptures are. American Indians, Armenians, Jews and gypsies, ethnic/religious minorities in Serbia-dominated areas of the Balkans, Tutsis, and now Christians and others in southern Sudan—all have been the target of those who hated them so much that they tried to exterminate them. During the bloody twentieth century new terms such as "the holocaust" and "ethnic cleansing" entered our vocabularies.

In virtually every instance wherein the oppressor set out to kill off those deemed undesirable, the outside world either looked the other way or looked on and did virtually

nothing to stop the killing. It was left up to courageous individuals to do what little they could, usually hiding or rescuing as many people as they were able. Such was the case of Paul Rusesabagina in this film.

Discussion questions are included in the "Engaging the Film" section of the Participant Handout because it is important for students to have all of the questions in front of them. Encourage them to take the sheet home with them so that, if they choose, they can reflect further upon the film. The latter is especially important if you do not cover all of the questions in the limited class time available. In the Leader's Guide we have provided a brief description of what takes place in the clips, rather than repeating the questions. The leader can refer to this synopsis during the discussion as a reminder of the clip or use part of it when setting up the scene.

## Preparing for the Session

- For background information, the leader can go to the History Channel's Web site, <http://www.historychannel.com>, and type in the search window "Rwanda." On the left you will see "ENCYCLOPEDIA: RWANDA." Click this link to read an entry giving all kinds of information about the country, including its history. As you will discover, there is a long history of conflict between the Tutsis and the Hutus, going back not just to the Belgian colonizers, but all the way back to the fifteenth century.
- Hang on the wall a map of Africa for students to locate the country. If you can find a video store that sells movie posters, see if they have one for the film, and hang it up also.
- You will feel more comfortable dealing with the excerpts if you watch the entire film beforehand. The DVD version also has interviews with the filmmakers

and cast and documentaries about making the film and the situation in Rwanda. View as much of this material as you can.

- Decide on whether you want to spend one session or two dealing with the film. A possible two-session series would mean covering the film scenes and material first and then going further into the Rwandan situation and its implications for today during the second class. At the end of the first class the teacher could assign class members who have computers to check out human rights organizations and report back the following week. This also would be a good time to acquaint people with the work of the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program or other denominations' programs. If you are limited to one session you may need to assign a "timer" in the group to keep the group moving along. It is easy to spend more time discussing the many issues that arise in this movie.
- Make enough copies of the Participant Handout so that every student will have one to take home.

## The DVD Equipment and the Room

The DVD for this film will not allow a user to go directly to the menu, so set up the DVD ahead of time by starting the disk to run through the preliminary material, stopping right after actor Don Cheadle speaks. Then the menu will be available: click on Scene Selection, click on Scene 3, and set the player on Pause. Otherwise, the class will have to sit through an antitheft message and other material, thus giving up valuable class time. For other tips that will help keep the presentation free of trouble, download the document "Guide for Showing Movies in a Group."

## Leading a Film Discussion

Do not feel that you have to be an expert on film in general or this one in particular in order to have a good discussion. The discussion process followed in the Thoughtful Christian film series is student- rather than teacher-oriented. Thus it is meant to help the participants get the most out of the film experience, not to provide leaders with a forum for showing off their knowledge. If a question is raised that you do not have an answer for, freely admit this and suggest that the group might try to discover it. Other helpful suggestions are on the free downloadable document "Guide for Showing Movies in a Group," which also contains the article "Leading a Film Discussion."

## Opening (5 minutes)

### 1. Prayer

Dear God, we are here again to study your word in the Scriptures, but in what will be a new way for some of us. By your Spirit open our eyes that we might see this film not just as entertainment but as a means for better understanding the Scriptures and your will for our lives. We ask this in Christ's name.  
**Amen.**

### 2. Briefly Introduce the Film

Ask if anyone knows where Rwanda is located or anything about its recent past. Why was it in the news? Bring out a few facts about the Hutu massacre of the Tutsis. Ask if anyone did anything about the killings as they took place over approximately 100 days in 1994. Say that the three film clips will show us something about one Rwandan who did do something. His name is Paul Rusesabagina (Roose-ah-bah-geen-a).

## Engaging the Film (35 minutes)

### 3. Chapter 3: "Soldiers in the Street"

*Time into film: 0:08:06 to 0:12:26 (Limit this section to 12 minutes. Note: Chapter 4 flows right from Chapter 3, so the two could be shown as one if your class time is less than one hour.)*

Paul feels secure amid the troubled times in his country. He has an important job working for Europeans, so when he is urged to leave the country, he says that the United Nations and the other nations will not allow a bloodbath in Rwanda. His son enters the room and says that there are soldiers in the street. Paul, with Tatiana following right behind, rushes to the compound gate. Opening it just a crack, they look out and see soldiers harassing and then beating Victor, their Tutsi neighbor across the street. Tatiana wants Paul to do something to help the man, but Paul says there is nothing he can do. In bed she continues to suggest that Paul can use his influence to stop such acts, but he says that he must be concerned just with his own family. He cannot be concerned about anyone else. He sternly says to "leave these things to me."

### 4. Chapter 4: "What Makes a Tutsi?"

*Time into film: 0:12:30 to 0:15:24 (Limit this section to 12 minutes.)*

After Paul welcomes two television journalists arriving at the hotel, the scene shifts to the hotel bar. One of the

new arrivals, Jack Daglish, asks a Rwandan about the background of the Hutu-Tutsi animosity. The Rwandan places much of the blame on the Belgian practice during colonial days of preferring Tutsis to Hutus, even though the latter were in the majority. When the man asks Paul if he is right, Paul, assisting behind the bar, confirms his narrative. The man leaves, and Jack turns to two Rwandan call girls sitting at the bar. He asks what tribe they are from, and one says Hutu, and the other Tutsi. Jack, surprised that the two friends are from different tribes, remarks to his associate that they look alike to him, declaring, "They could be twins."

They leave to interview General Bizimungu, and then we see them editing the tape. On the monitor the general smoothly denies that his army is arming an illegal militia group. He assures the interviewer that his army is giving the Rwandan president their full support in his peace initiative with the Tutsi rebels. The scene moves to the large hotel conference room where Colonel Oliver, head of the small band of U.N. soldiers, is telling the gathered press that peace is at hand with the signing of a concord between the governments of Rwanda, Burundi, and the rebel forces. Just outside, General Bizimungu, drinking with a group of cronies, invites Paul to have a drink with them. As Colonel Oliver inside gives what amounts to a toast to peace, the general offers his own toast, but we suspect by Paul's reluctance to join in that it is not to the same end as the colonel's.

- If your church library has a copy of Clarence Jordan's *The Cotton Patch Version of Luke and Acts*, you might look up and read for the class Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37). Tell the group that the author was a Georgia minister and Bible scholar who taught integration of the races long before the civil rights era. He founded an integrated community at Americus, Georgia, called Koinonia Farm, where members of different races came together as an example for their prejudiced neighbors. However, the neighbors reacted in fear and anger, boycotting the farm so that its members had to travel far to obtain necessities or sell their produce, and some Klansmen even shot into the farm at night.

## 5. Chapter 7: "Money for Cockroaches"

*Time into film: 0:26:45 to 0:30:48. (Limit this section to 12 minutes.)*

Paul is under pressure because a squad of soldiers has arrested him and his family and Tutsi friends who had come to Paul for help following the outbreak of killing. The lieutenant, referring to the Tutsis as "cockroaches," talks contemptuously to Paul, calling him a traitor. Pointing his pistol at Paul's head, the officer orders him, "Shoot them!" Paul pleads with the man, suggesting that he could pay for their lives. The lieutenant sets a price of 10,000 francs a head. Paul bargains with him for his own family for that amount. Using hotel funds, Paul pays the soldier and hastily loads his frightened family into the van. The others of their party remain fearfully kneeling on the ground, only briefly glancing up at the two men bargaining for their lives. Paul says that he has more money, drawing it out and then collecting what little money the prisoners have with them. Looking at the wad that Paul places in his hand, the officer says that this is only enough for one "cockroach," "Choose the one." Paul begs the man to let him go to the hotel where he has more money, that he will pay 100,000 francs for all of the men, women, and children. Reluctant at first, the suspicious officer agrees. Paul hastens to the hotel, retrieves the money, returns, and pays off the lieutenant, who keeps his word and lets the prisoners move into the van. Fedens gratefully says, "Thank you, Paul."

- If you have seen the film *Schindler's List*, you might ask if any of the students have seen it. If so, ask them to compare Paul with Oskar in regard to how they deal with evil men more powerful than they.

## Closing (5 minutes)

### 6. Summary

Allow time so that you can summarize what has gone before and call attention to the information in "What Next?" on the Participant Handout.

### 7. Prayer

Gracious and loving God, we confess that we are not so gracious and loving, especially in those times when we have known of the suffering of others and done nothing. We thank you for the film *Hotel Rwanda* and the inspiring example of a man who did see others in danger and did move to rescue them. Until that day when lions and lambs lie down together, may we be so aroused by news and film depictions of the suffering of others, no matter how far away, that we will seek to act as Paul did, extending our circle of concern so that it includes even strangers. Make us aware of the needs of those close at hand as well, that we might become worthy disciples of the

One who gave his life upon the cross for the whole world. **Amen.**

## More Than “a Word” about Staying Legal

**Caution:** To learn about obtaining a license (mainly required if you plan to show the entire film at church), see “Guide for Showing Movies in a Group,” included with this session.