

A Bundle of Choices

By Jim Hohnberger

A newly married man and his wife started it all. As they sat in the departure lounge of the Salt Lake City Airport waiting for their flight, they visited quietly over the open Bible in his lap. The man was a recently ordained evangelical minister and his earnestness and zeal were unmistakable. They were a hard couple not to notice, so obviously in love and yet it was that open Bible which set them apart from the average traveler.

Al, a devout Mormon businessman noticed it too. He sat a little across from them as he waited for the same flight. He observed the pair as discreetly as possible, averting his eyes if they glanced in his direction. Al was a very proper man and would never want to be considered so rude as to stare at someone. Too late he realized that the young couple had been aware of his interest in them for some time. Suddenly the Bible shut as the young man stood and strode purposefully to this stranger whose attention they had so clearly captivated.

Al had visited my family a few short months before. He was a successful businessman in western Montana, not terribly far from where we live. He came to our home with two young Mormon missionaries. I assume the purpose of their visit was to en-

lighten me about Mormonism, but God appeared to have other plans.

Al became so enthralled as he learned of our lifestyle, our goals for country living, and our understanding of the gospel that he and I drew close together as we visited, forming the beginnings of a lasting friendship. Meanwhile the two missionaries were quiet and uncomfortable, hardly saying a word while Al undermined the very reason for their visit with his interest in our religion. I found Al to be a fascinating man, an independent thinker who was unafraid to examine his own beliefs and values. This rare trait endeared him to me and I was determined to keep in touch with him whenever possible.

Traveling near Al's office one day, I decided to visit him. He was genuinely glad to see me and after greetings had been exchanged, he proceeded to tell me of his experience at the airport.

"Excuse me, Sir," the young minister said as he approached Al. "I couldn't help noticing your glances in our direction. May I ask you a question?"

Certainly," Al responded, while inwardly chiding himself for disturbing the quiet young couple.

"Sir, if our flight were to crash before we

reached our destination and all of us were to die would you be sure of eternal salvation?"

"I think I would," my friend replied.

"That's not good enough," said the earnest young man. "You must know! Now let me ask you again. If you were to die today would you be saved?"

"I don't know," was Al's honest response.

"Listen," said the minister as he flipped through the pages of his Bible. He read John 3:15,16: " 'That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' " John 6:47: " 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life.' " And finally, John 11:25. " 'I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.' There," he said triumphantly. "Now, if you were to die today would you be saved?"

"Yes, I believe so," Al said.

"Then," said the young minister becoming animated, "you are a Christian and you have eternal life."

"You know," Al said to the young man. "I really admire your enthusiasm. I used to have that kind of zeal when I went out on my missions."

"Missions!" the young man squawked. "You used to go out on missions! Why, are you a Mormon?" he asked distastefully.

"Yes," Al said, bewildered at the sudden change.

"Why didn't you say you were a Mormon?"

"You never asked."

"Well, I'm sorry," said the minister, "but Mormons won't be in heaven." With those parting words he turned and walked away.

As he finished his story, Al slowly turned to me and said, "Jim, I'm confused. Can you shed some light on this subject?"

"I'll try," I responded. It was clear Al wasn't concerned about the unfair and prejudiced treatment he had received. He was intelligent enough to ignore the irrelevancy of the young man's bias. Al was struggling

with the deeper issue of how to know, really know, whether he was saved or lost.

"Lord," I prayed in my thoughts, "give me the wisdom and the words to satisfy this man. Help me to reach across the barriers we place between each other because of denominational affiliation and doctrinal bias." As I turned to give Al my full attention I said, "Can I have a piece of paper so I can illustrate?" Al handed me a scrap of paper. I picked up my pen and began.

"Al, the Christian life is not made up of doctrines, creeds, reforms, or church membership. It is not even made up of beliefs, but rather the Christian life is a bundle of choices. When God brings a truth or light to our understanding, it always comes with a choice. We must choose to submit to the will of God or refuse. When God has all my known choices, then He has me.

"Let's say for purposes of illustration that the Christian life in its entirety is made up of a hundred choices", I said, placing the number on the paper. "Remember the thief on the cross?" I asked, looking at Al.

He nodded, so I continued. "Well, that thief didn't know a whole lot about the Christian life. His mind may have only been aware of a handful of the choices that compose the Christian life, let's say perhaps, ten. But for those ten choices that he knew of, he was fully submitted to God. Christ could offer him full assurance of salvation not because of his great knowledge, but because he chose to surrender to God in all his known choices. Had he lived longer, he would have had the opportunity to advance in his Christian experience and his choices would have deepened and broadened to encompass the whole gamut of the Christian life.

"Then there was Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest who wanted Jesus killed. He was aware of many truths in God's Word. He had lots of light and that gave maybe seventy choices," I said as I scribbled down the numbers. "Yet, let's say that he made a free will choice to submit to God in only fifty of those

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choices. He had more choices, was surrendered in more of his choices than the thief, yet despite his greater knowledge and more choices, he was in rebellion to God. If he had been on the cross instead of the thief, Jesus couldn't have given him full assurance of salvation. Why? He had not submitted all his known choices and surrendered his will completely to God whereas the thief had."

"Al," I said, "do you believe that Jesus came to earth and as your substitute paid the price for your sins?"

"Yes, I do."

"Do you love the Lord with all of your heart and mind and soul?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then," I said, "You have accepted Jesus as your substitute. That is good, but it is not in and of itself complete. You must have Jesus as Lord of your life. Are you, at this moment, fully in submission to Him in all your known choices? Are you at peace with God?"

"No, I'm not," Al answered quietly.

"Then you have not accepted Christ as your Lord, and without accepting Him as Lord, your desire to have Him as your Savior is not sufficient to bring you either peace with God in this present life, or salvation in the life to come. For these two are inseparably one!

"You see, Al, the Christian life is not so much a matter of how much you know or how active you are, but whether all your known choices are surrendered in the present to the will of God. All the known choices of the thief on the cross were surrendered. Therefore, he was 100 percent God's, even though there may have been areas in his life that needed correction of which he was unaware.

"But Al, let a man, any man, stubbornly and persistently resist in even just one area and this resistance will eventually lead him to join in the revolt against God started by Satan himself. No matter how much we may desire Jesus to be our Saviour, no matter how much we feel our hearts are drawn out in love towards Him, determined resistance

to His leadership will in the end destroy us, just as it did Lucifer."

"I see, Jim. I've never understood this before," Al said, obviously struggling to come to terms with this new understanding. "Thank you."

This excerpt was taken from **Escape to God** by Jim Hohnberger, copyright Pacific Press Publishing Association.

Learning to walk in God's presence and develop a willingness to obey His voice is the substance of *Escape to God*. Its chapters consist of the following:

"The Glorious Pursuit" After a client expresses hostility against God, Jim is led to reflect on his own life. In looking back one thing is clear, God is in pursuit of Jim and every human being. It is a glorious pursuit of love! A surprising end to the chapter is the rest of his client's story.

"Religion - Is it Enough?" Years after leaving the church, Jim is a successful businessman. His life takes a different turn when he is introduced to the Bible. Jim gains knowledge and zeal. He is sincere as one can be, but his life is not transformed by the simple exponent of religion. The lack in the Christian churches are explored in a gentle manner as Jim discovers that he has been offered doctrine and comfort apart from a living connection with God.

"A Life of Simplicity" We are not living simple lives and it is no accident, rather a deeply laid plot to prevent the average Christian the time needed to commune with God and his family. After more than 30 years of living life as if aboard a speeding train, God asked the Hohnberger family to jump off the train and start over. Obstacles and trials await them as they set off into the wilderness. Through adversity, they learn the first hard lesson of the Christian life.

"A Bundle of Choices" An airport encounter launches the discussion of what constitutes true religion and assurance of salvation. In the context of a story that crosses over doctrinal and denominational lines, it is

"Are you, at this moment, fully in submission to Him in all your known

demonstrated that when all else is swept aside the gospel message is about choices. It's made up of simple, practical, everyday choices. This is easily demonstrated when readers see themselves in Jim's story of plowing the driveway, which became a trial of almost monumental proportions.

"Where You Are - God Is" How do you view God? The nature of the relationship between God and man is examined through stories of wilderness adventure. Death stalks Jim while cutting firewood and Sally must deal with life long fears when she meets a bear face to face.

"Seeing Him Who is Invisible" In retrospect most of us can see what we should have done in a given situation. This chapter provides the secret to never having to look back in regret again. Jim finds employment and danger in his own grizzly encounter, as once more stories of wilderness life illustrate this important concept.

"Selective Hearing" Jesus promised that My sheep hear My voice and yet, for most claiming to be Christians this experience is foreign. Most people are aware of times they have received impressions in the mind. Where do these come from? Do they come from God, the devil, or our own flesh? With simple illustrations, this chapter removes the mystery of God's guidance in the life and warns of the dangerous counterfeits which pretend to be the voice of God.

"Our Greatest Enemy" In the wilderness the Hohnbergers must face man's greatest enemy. It's greater than adversity, sickness, or even grizzly bears. They had to come to terms with themselves. Readers discover that we are our own worst enemy and he who has conquered self, through Christ, is greater than he who conquers a nation.

"Do You Really Believe?" When your car is destroyed leaving you stranded on a wilderness road, do you really believe that God is guiding events? When a grizzly bear prepares to charge you, do you really believe that God is controlling the circumstances of your life? When you are going to miss your flight due to a flight delay, can God really bring your plane back for you? Faith filled stories from the author's own experience leave the reader astonished at the personal

intervention of a Holy God. Your faith will be strengthened and challenged to further growth as you repeatedly face the question, "Do you really believe?"

"God All in All" The author once again uses a real life experience to demonstrate the need for the Christian to grow into an experience of placing their full sufficiency in God. Without this experience is the "Christian" life of any real value?

"The Fourth Pivotal Point" Most of us want to serve God just badly enough that we hold out on truly refusing Him or truly accepting Him. This chapter reveals the crisis point that comes to all of us when we are brought to decide between our wishes and a full surrender to God.

"The Hesitant One" In this chapter Jim explores the problem of the fence sitter—those who hope and desire to be saved, but at the same time fail to decide. Discover in this chapter that not to decide is to decide.

"The Last Great Step" The author calls it "the last great step" because it seems to be the last thing that we Christians learn. Ironically, it should be the very first lesson of the Christian life. This final chapter uses personal stories to encourage the readers to take that final step into complete dependence upon God and to become true Christians, whether this is a first time commitment or even if one has claimed to be a Christian for years.

Power For Living



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