

# But Lord

By: Jim Hohnberger

If you're like me you've often wondered if you're the **only** one who offers excuses to the Lord for your inadequacies, your trepidation and resistance. Have you been tempted to think that life is just a bed of roses for others, that others never face trials, perplexities or make excuses to the Lord? I'd like to share a few of the typical excuses I hear in my travels.

"But Lord, it's **so** hard to get out of bed in the morning."

"But Lord, my business demands all my time and complete attention."

"But Lord, the "others" had more money than us."

"But Lord, I married the wrong person."

"But Lord, you just don't understand."

"But Lord, if only my husband would ..."

"But Lord, I wasn't raised right."

"But Lord, it was just too hard."

"But Lord...But Lord...But Lord."

I wonder what God thinks of all our "buts." I mean really thinks? I believe that if you and I could have a personal interview with Jesus, just like Nicodemus did so many years ago, He would tell us that all our excuses are valueless. Now don't take me wrong. I'm not without sympathy, compassion and understanding. I've had my share of

excuses over the years. Mine went something like this.

"But Lord, you want me to leave my homeland? But, this is where I was born. I was raised here. I'm comfortable here. You want *me* to move to the wilderness of Montana and leave my prospering business? This is my livelihood. It's all I know. What will I do? How will I support my family? It seems so presumptuous. What about my family and friends? How can I leave them? But Lord...it doesn't make any sense."

His response was a quiet simple statement. "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go. I will guide thee with mine eyes." Psalms 32:8. It was a call to live a life of faith, ever dependent upon the **One** above...even when it didn't make any sense.

Many have presumed that our move to the mountains was like a storybook adventure, idealistic, plenty of money and no hardships, trials or perplexities. It's easy to look back at what we gained in the wilderness and to say it was worth it and hardly mention the troubles, just like a mother hardly remembers the labor pains after the baby is born. At the time, it was anything but pleasant. After we got settled in Montana, I had to continue traveling back and forth biweekly to Wisconsin for three months in order to wrap up the sale of my business. I came

home the last time to find Sally washed out with double pneumonia and my boys in the care of neighbors. The long grueling trips to Wisconsin took their toll. My health crashed and I too, came down with double pneumonia. We learned a lot about natural remedies that winter and crying out to God for wisdom, under these trying conditions.

As if sickness wasn't enough to cope with, the creek that supplied water froze up. Without water we were unable to use the toilet or do laundry. This caused our septic tank to freeze up. Now we had to melt snow for general use, drive to get drinking water, use an outhouse, and travel 50 miles to town to do our laundry. A kind neighbor offered to let us use her old fashioned, wringer washing machine in her garage. She only lived six miles away and that seemed like a real blessing compared to driving the 50 miles into town. One day Sally had a particularly heavy wash with lots of muddy snow clothes and as she was feeding the thick clothes through the wringer, her hand got caught with the clothes and was pulled right in through the wringers. She pounded on all the releases, but they failed to work and the determined rollers continued to pull her arm in as if it was just a piece of sodden clothing. In desperation, Sally wrenched her arm and hand free, dislocating her finger in the process. All these inconveniences and trouble drove us to God, so He could teach us His way of facing our special trials.

The pneumonia left us weak and tired. It took months to regain our strength. With spring approaching, I decided to try and do some yard clean up. Sally gallantly offered to help me. We were trying to move some hundred pound log slabs by balancing them in a wheelbarrow, when the wheel hit an obstruction and a slab slammed to the ground smashing Sally's foot and breaking it in three places. Six months later she fell and broke her other foot. All these medical needs called upon my wife's general knowledge as a nurse and drove her to learn more of God's health message. Why didn't we just go the

traditional route and see a doctor? We were unable to afford health insurance, especially since we were living on a mere \$6,000 a year those first three years.

The same winter our five hundred gallon propane tank blew a valve, just after we had filled it. The snowblower broke down and our used Dodge truck went out. It seemed like it was one thing after another. You can imagine the thoughts that flooded our mind.

"But Lord...we don't like this. It's too hard. It seems like you've deserted us. Perhaps we made a wrong decision? Everyone said we were crazy to make this move. Seeking God seemed like such a crazy focus to everyone else, but we didn't think so. Were we wrong?"

Then the Lord would whisper in our ears. "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the earth." Matthew 28:20. That's just where we were, the end of the earth in the wilderness of Polebridge, Montana. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," Hebrews 13:5.

"Really Lord...even if we are fifty miles up a gravel road, fifty miles from the nearest stoplight, and fifty miles from pavement and power?" His assurances were loud and clear. So we moved ahead in faith, trusting not in our emotions but in His presence and His promise to teach us the way we should go.

In three years time everything had calmed down. We learned to cry out to God in the common, everyday trials and to give thanks that Jesus was with us. We learned to face self, admit wrongs, and seek God, so He could teach us new ways of reacting and responding to one another. We settled into a routine, established a daily schedule, found a daily walk with God that enabled our marriage to be transformed. Our two boys were being nurtured in the ways of God.

We discovered that our "in church" experience had been a substitute for being "in Christ." Our religion wasn't enough, we needed a vital connection with a living God and those trial filled years did just that for us. They opened our eyes, developed our faith and set us to God's first work, which is caring for the marriage

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and the family.

With the development of a wilderness real-estate practice, finances were no longer a problem. Improvements were made as we established a gravity flow water system, a better septic, a new vehicle that wouldn't break down and numerous improvements in our little log cabin. Our greenhouse went up, along with two outside gardens. We were experiencing the life we had come in search of, the life God had called us out to find and we were growing in it day by day.

God does not give blessings so that we may keep them to ourselves. A call came to present our lifestyle to a gathering of hundreds of searching Christians at the Methodist University in Portland, Oregon and I had a new set of "buts."

"But Lord, I'm not a speaker! In fact, it's my weakest talent! I have a stammering tongue and stumbling lips. No Lord, send someone else - not me, Lord!" One thing I have come to understand is that God always blesses a weakness if it's surrendered to Him. "For when I am weak, then am I strong." II Corinthians 12:10. When a man is strong and talented in an area, the world exalts him and he becomes prideful, arrogant, and self-sufficient. God prefers to take weak, incapable men and by His grace and through His strength make them strong. So, I went with weak knees and you know what? The speaking prospered, the real estate prospered, our marriage and Christian walk prospered. We were living and experiencing our dream and desire. Then at the moment of success, the Lord said, "Jim, I want you to lay down the real estate. I want you to work for Me in a full time ministry. The focus of that ministry will be restoring lives, restoring marriages and restoring families."

I remember saying to God, "But Lord, I can't. I have life made. How will I support myself?"

"Jim, I will take care of all your needs."

"But how, Lord?"

"Jim, that is not for you to know - just trust me."

"No Lord, I can't do it. No more changes...You just ask too much. Send

someone else. I'm not qualified. I just want to live a quiet, simple life until You return. Besides where will the calls come from?"

That evening a lady I knew called to invite me to speak at her church. "Jim," she said apologetically, "We really want you to come...but because of the fourth of July Holiday, there probably won't be 20 people attending."

As she spoke, I said in my mind, "Lord, if you've really called me to minister to people full time, then send fifty people there. That will be my fleece."

I was the first person at the church that day. I was motivated. I wanted to see how the Lord was going to answer my fleece. Had the Lord really called me into the ministry? Sally and I sat near the front as the people came in and by the time I got up to speak there were eight people in the church. "Well Lord," I said to myself, "I guess I got my answer." The door opened just then and a family of four came in. "That's still only twelve Lord." Another three came in. "That's fifteen." Then two more

and a family of four came in. That brought the number to twenty-one. Soon it was twenty-eight, then thirty-four and forty and forty-three. I was trying to preach, but inside my emotions were in turmoil. I tried to follow my sermon notes, but it isn't easy to count and preach at the same time. "This can't be happening," I thought and yet it was! The numbers continued to climb. It was forty-eight, then fifty-one and then sixty. It wouldn't stop. The next thing I knew it was seventy-three and still the people came. I gave up counting. I had my answer! I knew God was calling me to bring to His people the practical gospel of how to walk by faith, how to abide in Jesus, how to live by grace, and how to apply that in their daily life, to their marriages, to their families, to their churches and to their contacts with the world.

I went to bed that night, knowing the Lord was asking me to forsake the lucrative real estate practice with which He had so blessed me. However, when I awoke

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the next morning at 4:30am, I sat there in bed with my Bible on my lap, shaking. The wonderful emotional experience of my answered prayer was over and now I was dealing with reality. Would I actually do it?

Finally I said, "Lord, Gideon had a second fleece. And I too Lord, if I am to never look back at this moment, if I am never going to regret this decision, I need a second fleece. You must confirm this call to ministry in Your word. Lord, I know I said I would work for You if You sent the people, but Gideon said he would go with the first fleece too and still he asked for a second sign of confirmation. Lord, this is a tough call for me. I mean, this is a no looking back decision. This is the rest of my life. To never do another thing for myself and only work for Your people...I've never done anything like this before," I told Him. "I want You to confirm in Your word, my calling to the gospel ministry." Now, that is a hard thing to ask because there is no place in the Bible that says, "Jim Hohnberger, you are to become a minister of the gospel."

There I sat with my Bible. I prayed and searched my heart to make sure there was nothing between myself and God. Having done that, I started leafing through the Bible page by page for almost an hour until I came to the book of Ephesians, chapter three. It was like the Holy Spirit shook me and said, "This is the right place."

"Lord I feel impressed I should read here."

"Start on the right column, Jim."

My eyes fell onto verse seven, "Wherefore I am made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given me by the effectual working of His Power." I had shivers from my head to my toes! Wow! Talk about confirmation! Now I knew God had called me and that His grace would sustain me. I sat there in bed with the tears running down my face until Sally woke up. I told her all that had happened and how she had been a part of it, even though she had no idea at the time.

The call of God upon the heart is often unknown to those about you. You may be the only one who knows what God is asking of you at this moment. Even your spouse may not know what the "But Lord" in your life is. Whatever it is must be

dealt with. Today as you read these lines you are choosing, even if your choice is simply to try and put off that choice. All of us need to understand that when we decide not to make a choice, in essence our choice has been to reject that which God is asking us to do.

There have been other "buts" that God has seen me through. The question now is what about you? Is there something in your life right now that God is asking you to surrender to Him, some "but Lord" where you are holding out on God? So, what hinders you? Is it giving up the city life with all its trappings? Are you afraid of structure or the discipline of daily regularity? Perhaps it's old habits or diet? These inherited weaknesses and cultivated tendencies need not enslave us. For some it may be peer pressure and social acceptance. What is it for you?

Dear friends, the gospel is not a creed or a church, but a living, vital connection with the God of all flesh. He will take possession of the entire being if we are willing to surrender to Him. Then, and only then can God restore the individual into His image. That's true Christianity! Oh that we might experience its daily operation in our lives! Oh that we might grasp the enabling grace within our reach and not merely hope...but decide!

## Power for Living



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### Empowered Living Ministries

9550 High Mesa Road, Olathe, CO 81425

970-615-0046

Email: [office@empoweredlivingministries.org](mailto:office@empoweredlivingministries.org)

Web: [www.EmpoweredLivingMinistries.org](http://www.EmpoweredLivingMinistries.org)