

Reflections Of A Turtle

A parable by Bart Larson

Let me introduce myself. My name is Hurkermer. I'm a land turtle. While my days are filled with endless wanderings through tall grass, it gives me plenty of time to think. I sometimes wonder how I got here, and what, if any, purpose there is to my life. Not that I am complaining, mind you, but sometimes I wonder if there is more to life than eating beetles, chewing on grass and sweet clover.

I've had some close calls in my life. My mother must have known what she was doing when she put this shell on me. If it weren't for my shell, I wouldn't be talking to you now. I'd be in turtle Heaven. I've outlasted foxes, coyotes, dogs, and even a bobcat. Life in the turtle world has its dangers. I was even stepped on by a cow once. Thankfully, her hoof slid off my back, like water off a duck's back. This occurred just after a rain and her stepping on me shoved me into the mud. It took me 20 minutes of squirming and hard digging to get out of that one.

Life for us turtles tends to be tedious, slow going. Have you ever tried to push your way through grass 5-10 times taller than you are? It definitely builds stamina. I rarely feel the wind, although I can see it blowing the grass above me. I seldom have a sense of direction. I could be going in circles for all I know.

Why am I talking to you? Well, something happened to me the other day that has perplexed me no end. It changed my life forever, and I thought maybe you could help me make sense of it.

It all began when I was pushing through the grass in search of food and water. It was a day, like any other day, when all of a sudden, as I went through this clump of grass, there before me was open space. I saw this thing, like the biggest rock you can imagine. It was smooth, gray in color, with white stripes down the middle of it. This flat rock went as far as I could see in either direction. It was the most spectacular thing I've ever seen. [I later heard that some call it a highway, whatever that is.]

For the first time in my entire life I could see more than a few inches in front of me. I had no idea that the world was so BIG! It was incredible. It was more exciting than accidentally bumping into my cousin Bertha near the swamp two years ago.

I just looked and looked and looked. Wow! It was great! The sun beating on this unending rock warmed my tummy. It almost made my little feet burn. I was enjoying my view so much that I decided to wander a bit further out onto this strange looking rock which went forever in either direction. Then things began to happen which scared me. I had never thought much about God until then. I had always believed in God, but I guess God seemed pretty far removed from turtle-

life—until that day.

I know you may think I'm pulling your leg in what I'm about to tell you, but I am not. I'm telling the truth.—A long ways away, on this slab of endless rock, I could see this big thing coming toward me at lightening speed [by turtle standards]. It was huge, tall, wide, and long. It was about a foot off the ground, had four black round things, sort of like legs, that were rolling on the ground, carrying this big box thing, whatever it was. Those black things were going faster than a horsefly chasing a horse. And this thing, whatever it was, made a noise unlike any animal I'd ever heard. It sounded like unending thunder, a dog growling, and a wind storm all at the same time. As it got closer, the noise got louder and louder.

I couldn't have gotten out of the way if I had tried, so I did the only thing I knew to do. I pulled my head in my shell and watched in utter terror. One of the big black rolling things was coming right toward me when, at the last minute, it swerved, and this huge long thing ran over the top of me without touching me. The wind from this creature almost blew me over. [Don't tell anyone, but I left a wet puddle right there on that highway!]

Was this a visitation from God or an angel? I still wonder. While I was mulling that thought over, more and more of these creatures kept coming toward me at lightening speed, most of them just barely missing me. Let me tell you, my world view has forever changed. I loved being out there on that slab of rock with the white stripes, but those things whizzing by my head scared me. If one of them had hit me, I bet I'd be dead. They were far bigger than a cow, and the ground vibrated when they went past.

Well, it didn't take long for me to figure out that I didn't belong there. I headed for the nearest grass and I plowed into it. I could still hear those creatures hours later, going up and down that never-ending rock.

But eventually, I was away from there with only the sound of the crickets and bull frogs.

So, where am I now? I'm in some farmer's field sitting on a dry cow patty. It doesn't smell the greatest, but at least I can see several inches in front of me. It reminds me of that day when I could see forever. Except for the stars and sun overhead, I never get to see very far.

Something changed in me that day. While I was frightened out of my wits, I long for that view again. I yearn for a life where I can see. There is an ache in my heart to be able to walk without every step being so darn hard. On that slab of rock I went faster than I'd ever gone in my entire life. It was amazing. I felt so free.

I've heard that some animals enjoy running. I understand why now. If I could have stayed on that slab, I would have taken up running too. Maybe I could get somebody to do some bodywork on my shell and streamline it. You know, "Hot Rod Turtle."

Someday, when I get the courage, I may go in search of the never-ending road again. Maybe one of those strange creatures will stop and give me a ride. I wonder if they would take me to where the road ends?

Come to think of it, I wonder if it ever ends?—Oh well. A turtle can't know everything.

I know this probably sounds far fetched, but honest, this really happened to me. I'm not lying.

Someday you too may encounter Someone, or something, unlike anything you've ever known. Will you be ready?

Love ,

Uncle Hurkmer

POSTSCRIPT

My first pet turtle as a child was named Hurkmer. In my job as a hospice chaplain, I do a lot of driving. I frequently drive past or over land turtles, always being careful not to hit them. One day driving along, I began thinking what it must be like for them, thus this short parable.

Sometimes I feel like a turtle, wandering onto the highway of life, seeing cars for the first time. When God enters our world, it is much the same way. Our lives are never quite the same. At the birth of Jesus, do you recall how the angels appeared to some shepherds in the field? I bet they felt much like Hurkmer. Do you suppose their lives were ever the same after that? No way.

Like Hurkmer, God may use the dramatic to get our attention. It may be the feeling you get as you look at the night sky and see thousands of stars, or witness the birth of a baby. Or, it may come with the death of a loved one, or being confronted with a terminal illness yourself. However it happens, we all need to be awakened to the reality of God and the brevity of life.

Being both a photographer and a hospice chaplain (working with the terminally ill), I view the world differently than most. I see both beauty and heartache almost daily. I also see how important genuine faith is in encountering the big things of life, not the least of which is facing our own death.

In one of the most powerful books I've ever read, "The Journey of Desire," John Eldredge points out that it is impossible to hope for that which we do not desire. Just as Hurkmer longed for the freedom of the highway, do you long for Heaven, or does it sound like a place of total boredom? You may rightly ask, "How can I desire a place I've never seen or been?"—Let me address this question if I may. I truly believe that if you learn to desire Heaven, then you will hope for Heaven, and it will change the course of your life; not to mention affecting how you view life itself.

To start with, visualize the most beautiful sight you've ever seen. For me it was the summer of

1978. I'd just driven across western Kansas and eastern Colorado in rain. As I approached Denver, the storm passed, and there before me were the snow-capped Colorado Rockies. It was near sunset and the air had that fresh luminous quality. The sky seemed to be filled with every shade of purple, lavender, pink, peach, and orange you can imagine, capped with a bright red sun just above the mountain peaks. And to top it off, behind me, where the storm had just passed, was a brilliant rainbow and some geese flying south. It was so incredible that I pulled off the highway and stared. But, do you know what? Within twenty-five minutes it was gone and I felt so sad.—“Oh, if it could have just lasted longer! If only I could have, somehow, entered into the beauty and stayed.”

Or, have you ever been to a music concert that is your type of music, whatever that might be, and for a brief while it seems as though you are suspended in time? But then what happens? The curtain drops, the lights come on, and it is over. If you're like me, a wave of sadness often hits.—Again I feel, “Oh, if it could have just continued and not stopped!”

Or, do you recall your first feelings of romantic love and how wonderfully exciting they were? Do you still have them?—Probably not. And while you may still deeply love whomever you're with [if you are with someone], I'm guessing those wonderful feelings of romantic love have diminished as you see the other person more realistically. They may snore, not pick up after themselves, and have some habits which can drive you up a wall.

Or, have you ever seen someone's face and been drawn like a magnet to it? You could seemingly stare into the beauty of that face, into the beauty of those eyes of love and acceptance, forever. And then what happens? The person gets up and leaves, or passes you by, and a knife pierces your soul.

Well, what would it be if you could live some place where the beauty never fades, where the music never ends, where the feelings of passionate love, excitement, and adventure never diminish, and where for all eternity you could stare into the face of perfect love; the face of God?—You have just described your desire for Heaven.

You see, ever since you were born, God has planted the longings for Heaven in your heart. The aching, the longings, the deep desires, the passions, the thirst for adventure and acceptance, your pining for the good ole' days; they all point in one direction, and it isn't toward earth, nor to the past, but toward God and Heaven. Like the warm aromas coming from your mother or grandmother's kitchen when you were a child, we only get tantalizing whiffs of Heaven now. Beauty and the glory of nature, as C.S. Lewis says, are “only the first sketch.” Paul, in I Corinthians 2:9 says, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”

Listen to your heart, and your heart will tell you that these longings are true. Whether you real-

ized it or not, you've longed for God and Heaven all your life. The God-substitutes you've turned to in order to fill these longings are nothing more than man-made idols or destructive addictions. They promise much but deliver little. They are nothing but cow patties compared to the endless highway of Heaven. There is no substitute for God, which is why, in love, God claims all. He is the only game in town. Not to choose God is to choose death.

One thousand years from now it will not matter whether you lived in a shack or a million dollar mansion, whether you drove an old used Chevy or new Porche, or if you wore the latest designer clothes, and had the best education money could buy. What will be of supreme importance is: "Did you know God?" [Matthew 7:21-23]

A person once asked, "How much money do you think Bill Gates will leave when he dies?" His friend responded, "All of it!" One of the hardest self-evident realities of life, is that we will lose everything physical at death. —We can only take with us that which is eternal in nature, the spiritual and the relational. Jim Elliot, a missionary who was martyred for his faith, may have said it best, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose,"

So, how can you be assured a spot in Heaven? Let me answer that by telling you a story about a young woman who received a phone late one night from the emergency room of a hospital. She was told that her father had a stroke and that he may only have hours to live. She threw on some clothes, jumped in her car, and began speeding the 200 miles she had to drive to see her father. As she was going through a small town in the wee hours of the morning, she looked in her rear view mirror, and there was a police car chasing her.

Because she was going so fast, the officer didn't merely give her a ticket, he arrested her. The next day she appeared before the judge who told her that for going 50 miles per hour above the speed limit, her fine would be \$300 or three days in jail.

She pleaded, "Your honor, you don't understand. My father is dying and I can't stay three days, and when I left home, I forgot my purse on the kitchen counter and I have no money. The judge said, "I'm sorry, young lady, but the law says you must pay \$300 or spend three days in jail!"

The woman began to weep and for some reason, it touched the old judge's heart. To the surprise of everyone in the court, he stood up, stepped down from the bench, took off his robe, put on his sports coat, walked around in front of the bench, pulled out his check-book, wrote a check for \$300, and laid it on the bench. Then he put back on his robe, and resumed his seat. He said, "Young lady, the law says you must pay \$300 or spend three days in jail, but I see someone has paid the fine for you. Case dismissed!"

In essence, this is what the Bible says God did for you. God took off his robe of deity, entered

this world in the person of Jesus Christ [Philippians 2:6-11], and died to pay a fine you could not pay, which was death [Romans 3:23; 5:8; 6:23]. The good news is that if you receive his gift of salvation [John 1:12], when you stand before God on the day of judgment, you will be standing before the one who died for you.—“Case dismissed!” [Romans 4:7,8; Ephesians 2:8,9; I John 4:16-18; 5:11-13] Because of the promises of God in scripture you can have the assurance that when you die you will go to Heaven [I John 5:11-13] if you have received Christ as your Lord and Savior. Further, God Himself, through His Holy Spirit will come to live within you and transform you from the inside out [Galatians 2:20, II Corinthians 5:17].

If you have never received this wonderful gift by asking God to forgive you of your sin debt, and by inviting Jesus Christ to live within your heart, may I suggest the following prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I thank You for loving me. I am sorry for the sin, and pride, and lack of trust that has kept me from You. I believe You died on the cross and rose again to pay for my sin which has separated me from You. As best as I know how, right now, I place my life in your hands. I invite You to come into my life. Forgive me of my sin and make me the person You want me to be. Calm my fears, carry my burdens, and open my heart to receive your love. Thank You for hearing this prayer. Amen.”

If you prayed this prayer, then pray and talk with the Lord often. Read and study His Word, the Bible. I suggest you start with the New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs. If your health permits, and you don’t already belong to a local church, see if you can find one where the people are genuinely loving, and where the Bible is faithfully taught. Finding the right church is sort of like trying on shoes. Keep trying until you find one that fits and feels comfortable. [Colossians 3:15-17] Once you find the right church, get baptized and become involved in reaching other lives with this good news. [Matthew 28:19,20]

Hurkmer would be proud of you!—May God’s peace and blessings be yours.