

REFLECTIONS OF A TURTLE

by Timothy Cross

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TURTLE THEOLOGY: 101

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 lightning 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 herd of horses. And this, 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 I can at least 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 [sheer terror], 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 before in my life. It was amazing. I felt so free.

I've heard that some animals enjoy running. I understand why now. If I could stay on that slab, I'd take 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 rock again. Maybe one of those strange creatures will stop and give me ride. I wonder if they would take me to where the slab 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 Hurkermer

POSTSCRIPT

My first turtle as a child was named Hurkermer. In my job as a hospice chaplain, I do a lot of driving. I frequently drive over top of 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 small devotional.

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 the same way as Hurkermer. Do you suppose their lives were ever the same after that? No way.

Like Hurkermer, God may use the dramatic to get our

attention. Although we hate it, and it may scare the daylights out of us, being diagnosed with a cancer or terminal illness definitely gets our attention. Just as a picture frame enhances the beauty of the painting inside, so the frame of death around each of our lives draws attention to the value and the beauty of the life we have. When we make peace with the frame of death around our lives, then, and only then, can we truly know peace. Why, because the frame of death helps bring life into focus. It draws attention to what is truly important, namely our relationship with God.

In a life-threatening crisis you discover that relationships are what is truly important: your relationship with God, with others, and with yourself. It is a wake-up call to put your house in order, to say your goodbyes, and most importantly, to be sure you are ready to meet God.

May I ask you a rather personal question? “Are you ready to meet God?”—If you were to die in the next hour, do you know that you would be with God? If you are uncertain, in love, let me share with you how you can be sure you are at peace with God.

According to scripture, “*He who has the Son, has life. He who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things have I written to those who believe in the name of the Son of God in order that you may **know** you have eternal life.*” [IJohn 5:11-13]. John tells us that it is our relationship with Jesus Christ that determines whether we have eternal life or not. If we meet God’s conditions of salvation, we can be assured [*know*] we have eternal life. God does not lie.

The story is told of a young woman who received a phone call from the emergency room of a hospital stating that her dad was deathly ill, that he may have only hours to live. Because she lived a couple hundred miles away, she got in her car and began frantically driving to see her father. As she was going through a small southern town, 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 local county 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 with the judge. *"Your honor, you don't understand. I don't have \$300 with me, and I can't spend three days in jail. I must go to see my father who is dying."* The judge said, *"I'm sorry, young lady, but the law says you must pay \$300 or spend three days in jail."*

She began to weep, and the old judge was moved with compassion. To the surprise of everyone in the court, he stood up, stepped down from the bench, walked over, took off his robe, put on his sports coat, walked around in front of the bench, pulled out his checkbook, wrote a check for \$300, and laid it on the bench. Then he walked back around, took off his sports coat, 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, that is what God did for us. The Bible says that the penalty for sin is death [Romans 6:23]. When we stood condemned, without hope, God took off his robe of deity, put on a robe of humanity, became a man in the person of Jesus Christ, and died for us. God did for us what we could never do for ourselves [Romans 5:6]. According to scripture, Jesus is both God and man. He has two natures: one human, the other divine [Philippians 2:6,7 and Romans 1:3,4]. If we accept his offer of forgiveness, when we stand before God as Judge, we will be standing before the One who loved us and paid the fine for us: *"Case dismissed!"*

According to scripture, salvation is a *gift* which must be received. John 1:12 says, *"Yet to all who **received** him, to those who **believed** in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."* Ephesians 2:8,9 says, *"For it is by grace [something undeserved] you have been saved [from hell], through faith—and*

*this not of yourselves, it is the **gift** of God—not by works, so that no one may boast.”*

Let me share a simple illustration. Would you go to a stranger’s funeral and ask the family of the deceased for a share of the inheritance? You could tell them, *“I’m a good person, and I do nice things for others.”*—Would that impress them? No. They’d say, *“I’m sorry, but the inheritance is for family members only. We don’t even know you.”*

Well, the same is true with God. You must be born into God’s family if you expect to *inherit* what is God’s. His inheritance is for his children, for those who *know* and believe in him. That is why Jesus said unless a person is *born again*, he or she will never see the Kingdom of Heaven [John 3:3-18]. You can’t work your way into God’s family. You must simply be willing to humbly receive God’s gift of salvation.

The moment you *believe* in Christ and *receive* his gift of salvation, you are legally adopted into God’s family. You inherit eternal life, and glory beyond your wildest imagination awaits you [I Corinthians 2:9; 3:21-23; Ephesians 1:3; Romans 8:31,32; John 14:1,2; Revelation 21:1-4].

If you have never made your peace with God, through Jesus Christ, may I encourage you to do so now. Pray the following prayer from your heart, or one like it. These words are not magical. The important thing is that you mean them.

“Dear Jesus, I thank you for loving me. I am sorry for the ways that I have sinned against you. I know my sin has kept me separated from you. I believe you died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sin. As best as I know how, right now, I invite you to come into my life. Forgive me, and cleanse me from all my sin. Make me the person you want me to be. I need you. I willingly yield my life to you. Thank you for hearing my prayer. Amen.”

Once you have invited Jesus Christ to be a part of your life, if you are physically well enough, I encourage you to find a loving church where the Bible is both honored and taught. Make public

your commitment to Christ by getting baptized [Matthew 28:19,20; Acts 10:47, 48a]. Visit several churches before you pick a church. Pray about it, and listen to your heart. God can lead you. It is sort of like trying on a new pair of shoes. You don't necessarily want to buy the first pair you try on.

Continue to pray, read scripture, and allow God to speak to you.

The story is told of a native witch doctor who had done much evil in his life, causing much needless suffering through his witchcraft. As a result of the love and work of some Christian missionaries, he yielded his heart to Christ. Later, he called a tribal meeting to share with his village the transformation that had occurred in his life. He said that before he came to know Christ, it was as though there was an evil dog in him that made him do cruel, hateful things. When he repented, and asked Christ into his life, he said it was as though a powerful dog of love and peace came to live in him.

As he spoke, a small lad sitting at his feet grew more and more absorbed with what he was saying. When the lad couldn't take the suspense any longer, he blurted out, "*Did the bad dog leave?*" The former witch doctor paused and said, "*No, son, he still hangs around.*" The boy asked "*How do the two dogs get along?*" The old man replied, "*They fight all the time.*" The little boy, with great concern in his voice said, "*Well, which one wins?*" The old man, with a smile and a twinkle in his eyes said, "*The one I feed the most!*"—How true.

Let me close with one last story.

A story is told about a husband and wife who were walking the streets of Heaven. The husband just couldn't get over the incredible glory and beauty which surrounded them at every turn: the choirs, the angels, being in the presence of God, the streets of gold, etc. As they walked the husband said to his wife: "*Honey, do you recall how, when we were on earth, you had me eat all that health food stuff? . . . no fried chicken . . . no gravy . .*

. *and all that green stuff?*”—The wife nodded her head. Finally the husband said, “*Do you realize we could have been here ten years sooner if you wouldn’t have done that!*”

Be assured. If you know Christ, the best is yet to come.

If Heaven and eternal life are real, as Jesus taught they are, then no sacrifice or cost is too great to attain them. Set your heart and your mind on the reality of Heaven [Colossians 3:1,2]. Let it motivate you and fill your heart with hope all the days of your life [Matthew 6:19-21].—And, keep feeding the good side. You’re not home yet.

“Joy is the serious business of Heaven.”

—*C.S. Lewis*