

SOME DEER HUNT!

by
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I used to imagine the old ladies in the church back home whispering about what a good boy I was. I always stood tall and straight, and sang with the crowd. In fact, I looked real good -- most of the time. Funny though, I was more concerned about the old ladies than I was about God.

That was before the deer hunt, of course. And some deer hunt! You see, I made my real decision for Christ while hunting deer. The Bible had been part of my life as a kid. Dad and Mom had made sure of that. But it didn't stay that way. As a cocky teenager I became "sophisticated." "God business" was not my business, I concluded.

One day somebody told me, "Either the Bible is right or science is right; it has to be one or the other." I got the crazy idea that the Bible was wrong.

My public school teachers hadn't thought it was their place to point out that faith in God was neither proven nor disproved by scientific research, and that the two are not opposites. And I wasn't intelligent enough to know some things cannot be expressed as "either...or." So I just dropped God out of my thinking.

My newly discovered philosophy made life easy. Leaving God out of the picture simplified a lot of problems. Right and wrong was a matter of pleasing people and keeping myself happy.

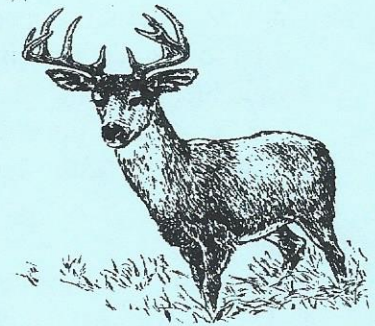
So I did about anything. I ignore morality. I violated decency. I undermined my own integrity. There was no problem with my conscience -- I had seared it into silence.

But I was lonely. Some nights I walked the streets, restless and feeling "empty." I was one of those odd fellows -- well, maybe not too odd -- who kept going to church through it all. A good front, you know. Everybody was so concerned about themselves that they didn't pay much attention to me. So I continued to go through the superficial motions of Christianity.

Deer season came around that fall, and a group of fellows from school decided to go hunting. Though I had never shot a deer, I wanted a good time, so we made plans to leave early on Monday morning and get to the mountains before daylight.

I even went to church the preceding Sunday. It was a good thing I did. The speaker was a young seminary student. He couldn't speak very forcibly, but he had a sharp mind. I listened closely, morning and evening. Amazingly to me, he seemed to be "with it." And he still was sold on the Christian church and the biblical story of Christ.

When the invitation was given, I joined the congregation with my "concerned-for-the-lost" face. It looked real good. Of course, I suspected I was about as "lost" as a fellow could be, if that meant anything.



After church, there was a lot of fellowship -- the warm, friendly type. The likableness of the speaker enthused the crowd. I mingled around, holding my head as high as the rest. Apparently few people suspected that I was a false Christian. I blended into the crowd quite nicely.

But evidently someone was more perceptive than I imagined. After the service she slipped beside me as I started down the church's front steps. She didn't say much. "Paul, I'm praying for you." Before I could answer, she was gone.

Her words shook me. We had been in the same youth group, but how did she know how I felt? And how much did she know?

I didn't sleep very well that Sunday night. I'll never know whether to blame the excitement of anticipating the next morning's hunt or the words of that girl. But when the alarm went off, I was expecting it.

In the darkness I slipped into my clothes, got my closeted gun, and headed out to the front yard. I tried to joke as we drove down the highway. My hunting partners that morning must not know my jumbled thoughts. I'm not sure they would ~~they would~~ have understood, anyway.

The car wound up Pott's mountain, one of the larger Blue Ridge peaks in southwestern Virginia. We turned off the highway and drove down the ridge, stopping occasionally to let one of us out. Each man took a "stand" along the top of the ridge, hoping to see a careless deer moving through the dawn.

By the time I left the car, deer were not on my mind. I wanted to find a place to think and to pray. Dawn was breaking over the little valley as I indian-footed through the woods. Beside a jutting boulder I laid my gun down and prayed.

My prayer was awkward. ***"God, if you are there... I don't even know if there is a God or not, but God, if there isn't there ought to be. I'm going to bet my life on you."*** I prayed longer, committing myself to Christ. Becoming a Christian would mean some real problems. I knew that. But rejecting Christ had meant more problems than being a Christian would ever mean. I had made my decision. Christ was my master.



In about 20 minutes I heard the car coming down the ridge. The hunt would continue down in the lowlands. I picked up my gun and climbed to the road. I hadn't thought about deer hunting. My search was for something more important. They called to me from the car, *"Did you see anything?"* I grinned, *"Fellows, I just became a Christian out in the woods."*

They looked at me real odd, like I was sick or something. But with Christ as my personal Redeemer I had something to tell the little old ladies back in my home church -- and a lot of other unsuspecting people too! And maybe I'd even watch for other unbelieving "Christians" and try to give them some fuller answers. Strange what a deer hunt and Christ can do.

The experience described in this article happened to me in 1946, when I was just out of High School. The decision was the most important one I made in my life, and it has been the foundation of my life to this day. Paul A. Jenkins - March 9, 1992