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INTRODUCTION

# There's a Guy Sitting in the Rain With a Laptop

It's an office only a guy could understand. The smell of musty canvas and the sound of grape-sized water pellets dripping from massive fir trees onto the roof bring comfort only to certain people. At least the heater still works, and the old canvas keeps out *most* of the rain.

I'm sitting in my twenty-something-year-old tent trailer parked alongside the picturesque ripples and waterfalls of Brice Creek, at the southern end of Oregon's Willamette Valley. This campground is little more than a wide spot in the road, the remnant of an old mining town now known simply as Hobo Camp. Every now and then, an explorer can find a rusty chunk of machinery jutting out of the bank, a crusty reminder that this was once a thriving gold-rush community. I'm currently the only hobo in Hobo Camp.

What is it that draws a guy like me, equipped with a Bible and a laptop, to a place called Hobo Camp? Is it the peace and solitude? Is it the rugged setting, miles from the nearest electric outlet? Is it the need to prove to myself that I can still survive as the miners did in days of old (though their cabins were certainly less watertight than my metal and canvas

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cocoon)? Is it the fact that this primitive campground is still free and I am notoriously cheap? Well, that helps.

I've come in order to reflect on what it means to be a Seventh-day Adventist guy—as in simultaneously a Seventh-day Adventist and a guy. My question is, Are these two cultures truly compatible? Is it possible to be a definitely dedicated Seventh-day Adventist disciple of Christ and still maintain that integral part of your identity—being a guy—that makes you comfortable in your own skin?

What exactly is spirituality like for a guy—especially a Seventh-day Adventist Christian guy? I believe that the Bible gives insights into personal spirituality that even includes the sometimes gruff and often misunderstood world of guys.

So, what qualifies me to write on the spiritual issues that face Seventh-day Adventist guys? I don't have a master's degree in guyology. I'm not a psychologist, sociologist, anthropologist, or even an archaeologist. I can only draw on my personal experience as a guy.

I started young. I was a Cub Scout and then a Boy Scout. My mom is an honorary guy, since she was our den mother. She did all the little things to make our Cub Scout den a great haven of boyhood activities. And she cleaned up the mess after we were done each week.

I've been on a snipe hunt (I held the bag), and I have conducted snipe hunts without feeling a twinge of guilt. I played basketball in junior high, and I went out for track and cross-country in high school, where I earned the big letter C (for Cottage Grove High) that adorns the long-neglected school jacket in my closet. (It occasionally still fits.) I have worked in a lumber mill and on a fishing boat. I've been a plumber, a painter, and a general-construction handyman. I've been a gandy dancer (a railroad-track repairman) and a welder in a boxcar repair shop. In my previous life, I led a garage band

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named Redline—that line on your tachometer that warns you when your hot rod's engine is about to blow. (Our claim to fame was that we were the house band for a bar called the Suds Factory, and we were the favorite group of the local Free Souls motorcycle gang.)

I can shop for hours at G. I. Joes, “the Sports and Auto Store,” but ten minutes in a shopping mall and my eyes glaze over, my ears begin ringing, and I'm looking for a sturdy bench to sit down on. I change the oil in our cars every three thousand miles, I do my own tune-ups, and last winter I replaced the transmission in my SUV all by myself. And I enjoy four-wheeling, especially with a winch on the front of the Jeep, a hi-lift jack, a shovel, and a chainsaw for those times when I drive farther than the road allows.

You've probably guessed by now that I haven't been a Seventh-day Adventist all my life. That came later and is another story. I have, however, been a Seventh-day Adventist pastor for nineteen years now, and a lot of my church members are guys. I've spoken to men's groups, which also include a lot of guys. I think I have the guy thing down!

I pray that this discussion will lead you into a deeper understanding of who you are in God's eyes. I hope you find this book to be a valuable tool for that exploration. I know that since guys are guys, group discussions are usually pretty short and often don't include any actual discussion, but I have included some personal reflection questions for you to consider, just between you and God. I assume that since you're reading this book, you do actually talk to God. If you don't, you should.

So, welcome to Hobo Camp. Join me as my beard grows, my neighborhood gathering of forest creatures grows (a skunk visited my camp on my first night), and our understanding of God's love for each of His children grows too.

# Why It's Normal to Be Crazy



It's October. Daylight hours are shrinking away as the sun heads south for the winter. The rains have come, and my lawn is golden with damp, shiny leaves. This is our third autumn at Walla Walla College, so I know it's the time of year to begin battening down the hatches against the cold winter blasts that are gathering to launch their yearly offensive on us. It means that someone from the college grounds crew will eventually come and rake up all these beautiful, golden leaves.

It also means that I should begin putting plastic sheets on the windows to help blunt the effects of the shrill eastern Washington winds. How well I remember our first winter here, when it snowed eighteen inches and the temperature dropped to fifteen degrees below zero for a week. "This is really unusual," the locals said. Ha! I don't believe them anymore. And since I'm a student, it means spending my Sundays holed up in the corner of my bedroom that I euphemistically call my "study"—which my family, however, refers to as my "cave."

But studying and taping shrink-wrap to the windowsills are the last things I want to do on this particular fall weekend.

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Now, don't get me wrong; I'm not afraid of work. And I do understand that we need those "storm windows" to help keep our winter heat bill somewhere down in the range of orthodontia payments. I also know that if I get behind in my schoolwork, I'll be digging myself out of the hole for weeks.

But I have the urge to do something totally irrational and irresponsible. I want to go out and drive through miles of sloppy mud on bumpy forest roads and then walk through the cold, wet brush. The pull is so strong that I can't concentrate on my studies. And I know it isn't going to happen—my little Mazda GLC wagon can barely negotiate the speed bumps in the local K-Mart parking lot, let alone plow through the mucky ruts I'm being drawn to. I know that the best way to get sick and miss a ton of school is to leave my warm, dry, cozy bungalow and get cold and wet from head to toe. Yes, my mind is clear on the subject, but my heart doesn't care.

Where has this nutty notion come from? I'm on track to graduate *cum laude*, so obviously, I'm smart enough to know better. Then it hits me. I want to get outdoors, but I don't want to go on a stroll down a hiking trail. I want to tromp in the brush. I want to find a deer path—the kind where apparently very short, scrawny deer squeeze through the scrubby vine maple (which we affectionately call "greasewood," among other, unprintable adjectives) in some sort of maze that baby fawns use to play hide-and-go-seek with their frantic mothers. I want to have someone drop me off on the bottom of a draw so I can trudge up it (as stealthily as a Nez Perce brave, of course) to the road at the top. It's what I did every October during my formative years.

I am crazy.



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At least, that's what I thought when the urge first hit me. "Why should I want to do that?" I wondered. I didn't even really like it when I did it.

### **Better than a dog**

You see, in my family I was the "dog" when hunting season came around. My older brothers (whom I idolized) were happy to drag me along on their hunting excursions. They would drop me off at the bottom of a draw and tell me to wait five minutes for them to drive to the top of the ravine. Then I would plod up through the woods, chasing any unsuspecting deer toward them.

I was, in fact, better than a dog. A dog couldn't read a watch to know when the five minutes were up and enter the draw at the exact moment when my brothers were in place on the other side. And a dog wouldn't intentionally drive the deer toward my waiting brothers with their 30-06 rifles and their high-power scopes. A dumb dog would just chase the deer all over creation.

I was a smart dog!

Or so I thought. When my wife learned about this, she said, "I can't believe you went through that brush where your brothers could have shot you!" I guess a woman could never understand how wonderful it is for a young boy to be with his big brothers, even when they are taking full advantage of that blind devotion.

Now that I think about it, while I didn't particularly enjoy being my brothers' hunting dog, doing it became a part of me. After a few years, I really looked forward to getting outdoors from late September to mid-November.

Until the opening day of hunting season right after my fourteenth birthday I hadn't known what it was like to get up at four o'clock in the morning. But that day a skinny teen-



### *Why It's Normal to Be Crazy*

ager traveled down that rite of passage toward adulthood. I was to kill something and eat it!

Oh, how I didn't want to get out of my warm bed that morning. Was it really time to get up? I thought I'd just gone to sleep about fifteen minutes before. I guess what got me up was the notion that my brothers were taking me with them. I was now included in their world. I had graduated to a higher level of maturity. I was a regular guy.

I pulled on my new, freshly oiled hunting boots. I took off the hanger my red plaid hunting jacket that was never quite warm enough but was the right color to keep other hunters from shooting me instead of the deer I was chasing. At least *my mom* considered my safety; she bought that jacket for me.

And there in the kitchen was the smell of four in the morning—coffee! Mom and Dad had never let me drink real black coffee before. This was the sign of adulthood. There's something about drinking steaming black sludge with your older brothers before daylight that makes a boy feel like a man! I even got to pour some in my shiny new, metal (not plastic) thermos jug to take along for the trip.

We arrived at the gated entrance to the timber-company land before sunrise, the second vehicle in the line. A couple of the others in our group took the time till the gate opened to catch up on a bit of the sleep they'd missed the night before. Not me. My nerves allowed me no rest—just more time to fidget and to wonder if I'd remembered everything. Had I packed my ammo? Yes, it's still where it was two minutes ago. Hunting knife? Check. Deer tag? Check. Safety engaged on the gun? Check—but if I don't quit fiddling with it, I'm liable to blow a hole in the roof of the old station wagon. At least, that's what my brother keeps telling me.

## **We open fire**

The caretaker appeared at the crack of dawn and opened the gate. In a cloud of exhaust and dust, dozens of truckloads of hunters raced up the road, each with a particular destination and plan of attack in mind. By the time the sun rose over the Calapooya Mountains in the east, gunfire roared through the clear-cut canyons of the Mosby Creek drainage. An hour or two later, we spotted a half-dozen deer walking along an open path a hundred yards above the road. Even before we were all out of the wagon, someone had opened fire. In a matter of seconds, everyone was firing up the hill. I was the last one out. I pulled the rifle to my shoulder and eyeballed the front sight. Lowering the pin of the front sight into the notch of the rear sight I saw, not the deer I was looking for, but the hunters in my group moving up the hill to find their prey. Having graduated from the hunter's safety course that summer, I decided not to shoot.

In fact, I never fired a shot that day. One member of our group bagged a forked horn in that first onslaught of bullets. I remember seeing how small the animal really was, about the size of a large dog. I mentally measured the tiny antlers and thought, *He must be a teenage deer. Would his mother miss him?*

Out came the knives, and the victorious hunter prepared the deer for the trip home. The sight and smell of deer blood and entrails imprinted itself in my mind. I think it was then I realized that I liked hunting but not killing. I certainly wasn't enamored with the gutting and butchering part!

What an exhilarating feeling to come home with a deer strapped onto the car's hood. Townspeople stopped and pointed as we drove by. Of course, we took the long way through town, with a few extra detours thrown in for good measure.

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Then came the best part: We hung our wet clothes around the woodstove to dry and enjoyed hot drinks while we talked about the ones that got away. “There was that four-point I saw right before he ducked into the brush—though I’m sure he had five spikes on one side.”

Yes, we could relive a successful expedition. I was now a hunter, a real man, on par with my older brothers and their friends. I was one of the guys!

Hunting became a yearly autumn ritual for me. Whether I went with my brothers or my dad or my own friends or even by myself, that crisp, damp fall air invigorated my lungs. And the fiery red leaves of the vine maples standing out against the green fir backdrop reminded me every year that this is where I belong; this is where I became one of the guys.

Even after I grew up and quit being my brothers’ hunting dog, every fall, rain or shine, I tromped through the brush. Though I eventually became accustomed to the killing and butchering part of the ritual, I was never a very good hunter. But come October, I felt drawn to become one with the mud and the rain and the vine-maple jungles.

Then something changed all that. Or so I thought.

I became a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. A vegetarian Seventh-day Adventist Christian. A Seventh-day Adventist Christian who exchanged the word *Sabbath* for *Saturday*. (Opening day of hunting season, by the way, is always on a Saturday.) I became a totally-trusting-in-the-angels-of-God-so-I-don’t-even-need-a-gun-for-protection-anymore Seventh-day Adventist Christian. I didn’t eat Bambi’s mother anymore, and I had no other use for guns. Deer hunting and all the emotional trappings that the ritual entailed were no longer a part of my life. I moved on to an even higher level of maturity—until that urge came on that Sunday in October at

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Walla Walla College. What could I do about that urge? Would it go away if I just ignored it? And then I wondered, did becoming a Seventh-day Adventist Christian mean that I was no longer one of the guys? Was the twenty-eighth fundamental belief of Seventh-day Adventism to which I agreed on my baptism day that I must discard all vestiges of “guyness”?

And so I came face to face with an unexpected identity crisis. I don’t hunt—but I want to hunt because it’s what I’ve always done—but I don’t want to hunt because I don’t need to since I now only eat things that never had a mother and senseless killing actually conflicts with my newfound belief system. How can I satisfy this urge and remain true to my faith?

I am a Seventh-day Adventist, a card-carrying member of God’s remnant church. I am one of the angels who proclaim the last three messages of warning to a dying world. But I’m also still just a guy from a little town in Oregon. Can I be a Seventh-day Adventist and still be a regular guy? And if so, what does it mean to be a Seventh-day Adventist Christian guy?

### For Personal Reflection



- What’s your story? Think back on when and how you met Jesus and began following Him.
- What was your life like before you followed Jesus?
- What is life like now that you are a part of His family?