

UNDER GOD'S SKY

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Reflections for Christian Men

John R. Hardison

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This book is dedicated to the memory of my son,

Gregory Lloyd Hardison,

who helped teach me that

“Jesus is the key to life”

and to my wonderful wife,

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who with the Lord's help has stood

by me when I had no right to expect it!

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To all of these, I am very grateful.

INTRODUCTION

The following pages offer a variety of thought-provoking anecdotes about life as a Christian in today's world. If you are looking for a book on theology, you have the wrong book. However, if you are seeking a full meal of food for Christian thought, you will find it included in these pages. Some of the stories were fun to relive and write about. Others were emotionally draining. Even now, I have difficulty reading some sections without choking up because they stir up memories of emotionally charged events from my past and they speak of people who are special to me. All the events I've included in these pages really happened, either to me or to those I have known during my 60-plus years on earth. And all point to insights I have gained about my relationship with God.

These pages were written at all hours of the day and night over a period of about five years. Sometimes the thoughts came so easily I almost felt as if I were merely an instrument writing down words and phrases. At other times the page remained stubbornly empty. Only after hours of blood, sweat, tears, and prayer would someone do or say something that sparked an idea. To those people who helped get me started again, I am grateful.

While most of the material in this book is new, several of the stories appeared in another version in my first book, *The President's Corner*. Even if you have read that book, I

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believe you will find those selections worth another look. While my first book was written primarily for members of my home church, Redeemer Evangelical Lutheran Church in Yakima, Washington, this book is aimed at a much broader audience. In this new collection, I have tried to reach out to Christians everywhere with positive, practical anecdotes that might give them reason to meditate on their daily lives under Christ. I pray that you will join this former school teacher and part-time cowboy for a short trail ride through the mountains of life and that God will bless us as we reflect on his handiwork in our lives.

If this book causes you to rethink or reexamine your life as a follower of Christ, then I have accomplished my purpose. If, in fact, the Holy Spirit uses this book to draw you closer to himself so that your life may bear the imprint of Christ, my prayers have been answered in full.

John R. Hardison

LONELY

The fog ebbed and flowed along the ridges in front of me, while a cold wind soughed through the scrub trees behind my makeshift bench. I leaned against an old, dead snag and glassed the ridges for signs of elk. From the valley below, the forlorn howl of a lone coyote rose until it seemed that there were ten coyotes rather than one. On the hill across from me, an elk cow moved out into the open, browsing on buck brush. Standing out clearly against the early morning's skiff of snow, she regularly checked for danger as she pursued her quest for food. An occasional falling rock punctuated the sounds of the wild. Loosened by the action of freezing water and released by the warmth of the morning sun, these pieces of shale found a resting place farther down a talus slope.

It was a cool fall morning in the William O. Douglas Wilderness Area. Snow-covered mountain peaks towered above the blankets of fog. The morning sun gave them a surrealistic glow, which I knew from experience would fade as the morning became midday. Though I had dressed for the weather, my body was chilled after sitting still for a couple of hours. My toes and fingers were beginning to stiffen, and my face was cold. But it wasn't the cold that occupied my thoughts.

On this particular morning I was thinking, *Lonely*. Intellectually I knew that my hunting partner would soon

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be coming back from his morning hunt. I knew that the horses were only a half-mile away, and our camp, only a couple of miles farther. I also knew that my wife and home were not all that far away. But I began to think, *Lonely*.

A question about God came to my mind: *Is he here with me?* I looked around at his handiwork: the majesty of the snow-capped mountains, the gentleness of the feeding elk, the beauty of the fresh snow, and the wonder of the drifting fog. I was struck by the irony. God's handiwork is everywhere, yet so often we forget his presence. He is seen, but unseen; heard, but unheard.

Then it came to me. God was there when I started thinking, *Lonely*. He had been there all the time. My question should not have been, *Is God here?* but rather, *Why don't I recognize God's presence?*

Next time you find yourself thinking *lonely*, remember the words of the psalmist, "In my anguish I cried to the LORD, and he answered by setting me free. The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid" (Psalm 118:5,6). What a wonderful reassuring promise.

