



Bracy V. Hill II and John B. White, editors

# GOD, NIMROD, AND THE WORLD

Exploring Christian  
Perspectives on  
Sport Hunting

8: Hunting Boots on the Ground: Case Studies of Hunting Ministries Dale Connally	143
9: A Dying Legacy?: A Century of Hunting in the Stories of Texas Families Bracy V. Hill II	161
10: In Their Own Words: On Hunting, By Hunters	197
<i>Being a Hunter Has Its Benefits</i> , by Steve Chapman	198
<i>Predation &amp; The Way of All Things</i> , by B. Jill Carroll	202
<i>Perspectives of a Bipedal Predator</i> , by Ralph Cianciarulo	204
<i>A Christian Professional Hunter</i> , by Tammy Koenig	206
<i>Seeing Things More Clearly</i> , by Michel DeJean (as told to Bracy V. Hill II)	210
<i>A Father's Influence</i> , by Walter A. Abercrombie	214
<i>In Dad's Footsteps</i> , by Daniel Witt	217
<i>Just a Good, Christian Man</i> , by Dennis Staffelbach	221
<i>In That Ancient Valley</i> , by Joshua P. Foster	224
<i>Musings of an Occasional Hunter: Food, Friends, Family, and         Faith</i> , by Jeremy S. Stirm	228
<i>A Recipe for a Healthy Life and a Healthy World</i> , by Jase Robertson (as told to Bracy V. Hill II)	235
 Section Two: <i>The Prescriptive—Academic Musings</i>	241
11: This Present Age: Perspectives from Concerned Citizens in Ivory Towers Bracy V. Hill II	243
12: Killing and the Kingdom: A Case Against Sport Hunting Shawn Graves	253
13: Muscular Christianity and Sport Hunting: Missing the Target? John B. White	284

## A Christian Professional Hunter

*Tammy Koenig*

I wasn't always a hunter. I wasn't always a Christian, either.

I was nine years old when I was given a Daisy BB gun for Christmas by my grandfather. My job was to help eradicate the farm of mice and sparrows, thereby assisting in the control of disease and the saving of the valuable grain intended for the dairy cows.

Although I could be seen daily toting my BB gun, that didn't make me a hunter. I also attended church on a regular basis but that didn't make me a Christian, either. It wasn't until much later in life that I realized the true meaning of what it took to be a hunter and what it means to be a Christian. Together the two identities would form the lens through which I would view nearly every aspect of my entire life. These passions intertwined to form the core of my very being—but it wasn't always that way.

As a young girl I was swayed by the anti-hunting propaganda in the magazines that graced the racks of my grade school library. Not being much of a reader and being a lover of nature from birth, I looked for any reading material that had pictures of animals. Unfortunately, the magazines available to me typically portrayed the hunter as a cruel, uncompassionate killer who hated animals. I first was enraged at what I saw as violence against animals and then I became involved in writing the state capitol to display my anger with the sport. I was under the impression that hunters would walk into the woods and simply pick out the deer that they wanted to shoot. Later, I would discover how difficult it is to outwit a wily whitetail and how much self-control it takes to keep your head about you and execute a perfect shot when a whitetail is only a stone's throw away.

It was for my sixteenth birthday that I was once again gifted with a weapon. This time it was a bow given to me by my boyfriend. He was a bowhunter and had recently taken me along on a deer drive where I was nearly run over by a doe. Although it sounds scary, I found it strangely exhilarating. Being the animal lover that I was it was exciting to have a wild animal within grasp one second and gone in the next.

I left the woods that day wanting more. Although my intention was only to shoot targets, I soon became proficient with my archery equipment. It wasn't long before a fellow shooter goaded me, saying, "Sure you can hit the mark on a target, but women can't hunt." I took the challenge seriously. I read everything

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS: ON HUNTING, BY HUNTERS

thing that I could get my hands on and spent nearly every day during bow season hunting in the woods. Since this was before the common use of elevated tree stands, I spent all my time on the ground learning through trial and error how to hunt. Bow hunting is a solitary sport and very few people were willing to share their secrets. If I wanted to learn, I was on my own. It took six years of hands-on experience to claim my first whitetail, a one-and-a-half year old spike buck. I felt like I won the lottery. I have never looked back.

In the fourty years that have passed since I made my first trek into the woods with bow in hand, I have learned to hone my skills, calm my nerves, and master the hunt. This journey has led me to harvest nearly one hundred deer, eleven black bear, several wild hogs, several turkeys, an elk and even an alligator with my archery equipment.

During these years, I have learned that you can shoot a bow or gun at an animal—and even put a tag on one—without being a hunter. The years have taught me that a real hunter is one who respects her game above everything, one who can restrain herself from taking a questionable shot because she is not 100% sure she will make the shot humanely. The refining achieved over the years goes even deeper as the meaning of the hunt has evolved for me. To take the life of an animal I hold in such high regard is not a deed to be taken lightly.

It wasn't until I became a Christian however, that I felt I needed to justify my actions.

The Church for me was a building that I frequented once a week. It was a place where I tried to stay awake in the pew and went home to spend another week living as I wished: one hour of good behavior in trade for a week of bad. God was a big, white-bearded guy in the sky that waited with a God-sized fly swatter to "whack" me if I took a wrong step.

I was told that I was a Christian but I spent most of my time saying and doing very ungodly things. Still, I thought that if my good deeds outweighed my bad, in the end, maybe I could sneak in the back door of Heaven when this life was over. Christianity was a straitjacket worn to restrict me of all the "do's and don'ts" that I did behind closed doors. Yet, I became convinced that a holy God on His heavenly throne had no use for me. I was overwhelmed with the guilt and shame earned from years of falling short of expectations and running hard from His "restrictive" rules. Deep inside I knew that I would be in trouble if I didn't give Jesus Christ my whole life before I died, but I was just having too much "fun" living my life to adhere to all His rules. I am living proof that you can spend every Sunday in church and still not have a clue about the true definition of a Christian. This definition would elude me until I surrendered my life to

## GOD, NIMROD, AND THE WORLD

Jesus at the age of thirty. Realizing that I was a sinner in need of a savior was not a surprise. What followed was.

Discovering the real meaning of life in Christ has been a journey. I realized that I could never be "good" enough to get to heaven. God is perfect and holy and therefore no imperfection can be in His presence. Even *one* sin is unacceptable, making it impossible to share heaven with Him. For that reason, He gave us His Son Jesus to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. The fact is that Jesus died as the perfect, sinless sacrifice in *my* place to pay for *my* sins. If I wanted to be freed from my sinful self and be with Christ after I died, I needed to repent of my sins and accept the free gift of salvation He had for me. I needed to believe that even as sinful as I was that He still loved me just as I was. Furthermore, I would have to give Him control of my life—giving up the way I wanted to live and taking up the way He wanted me to live. Finally, after a particularly tough time in my life, I admitted that His way was the *only* way. I dropped to my knees and gave Him my life.

In the many years since this event in my life, my eyes have been opened to a God that is personal. Instead of a disciplinary figure in the clouds, He has proven to me that He is alive and with me on a personal basis every single day. My entire life has been reformed. Surprisingly instead of feeling restricted in my actions, I am freed from condemnation and spared the heartache of being the person I once was. I am forgiven. I am free.

Jesus Christ is my life now. He is with me in the morning, in the early sunrise through the trees, and he walks beside me in the darkness after my hunt. When I am scared He is my comfort. When I fall, He picks me up. When I fail in this fleshly life, He understands. He forgives me and strengthens me for the next trial. And when I find my deer, He rejoices with me. It was He who put the passion for hunting in my heart. The Bible testifies that God gave animals to man for food (e.g., Genesis 1:26, Genesis 27:3, Acts 10:10, and 1 Kings 4:22.) I fully believe that we are accountable for the life of every animal we take.

It is what we do with our passion that counts. I choose to do my best to demonstrate His goodness and mercy in my life by testifying to what Jesus has done in my life. I am blessed with opportunities to speak at wild game dinners across the country telling others of His goodness and through my national television show "LEADING LADIES OUTDOORS."

As long as there is life in this body and mud on my boots I will enjoy hunting in His Creation. I will praise Him and thank Him for the life He gave me here and for the eternal life He promises in heaven to come. I am pleased and

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: ON HUNTING, BY HUNTERS

will be forever grateful that He has shown me the real meaning of being both a Christian and Hunter.

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