

Borrowed Bibles: A Memoir

Jim Good

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Borrowed Bibles draws from a past era, and a specific life, yet speaks to the broader issues of America today.

Borrowed Bibles: A Memoir, by Jim Good, is a story of faith and culture and forging your own path. Good grew up in a confusing mix of faith and culture. His father was a preacher and the family moved frequently in and out of segregated environments, including Oregon and Arkansas. To young Good, the use of Christian beliefs to argue both for and against segregation and other issues (like drinking) was bewildering. Instead of responding by shutting out faith and letting animosity grow, Good sought answers. His young adulthood was full of seeking through science, philosophy, and spirituality—and he eventually came to a faith and purpose of his own.

The book focuses mostly on several faith-defining and faith-challenging incidents in his preteen years—those oh-so-formative years where ideas are tried and tested and identities grow. A much shorter portion of the book deals with his process of making peace with belief and choosing his own purpose as an adult. This noncomprehensive memoir approach keeps the book focused and demonstrates Good's wise self-selection and deep understanding of his own life story—and what that story means to others.

The heart of the book is about ideas, but Good conveys his thoughts (past and present) through stories. He aptly sets scenes and allows his thoughts to speak through his and others' actions and reactions. This demonstrates narrative skill and a trust in his audience to understand his thoughts without being directly told.

Good's voice is clear and warm, demonstrating who he is as a person and his skill as a writer. As both a child and an adult, he is open and curious, and his childhood sensitivity to big ideas and emotions is engaging and powerful. Much of Good's internal and external conflict comes from his parents, and while his path to faith and the tone of his faith are different from theirs, he has grace and care for them, even while highlighting the hurt and contrast.

While Good's childhood was many years ago, his lessons and struggles are highly relevant today. The struggle with race and the questioning and evolution of faith's role on a personal and collective level are incredibly applicable to the challenges currently facing American society. Young adults will see themselves in Good and will be encouraged by his openness and the generosity of his insights. People from Good's generation can see and process their own growing-up stories through Good's narrative.

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MELISSA WUSKE (August 11, 2015)

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