

Bubble Gum

Sally Hohnberger

Right by the counter was a rack filled to overflowing with the most luscious gum, and best of all, it was free for the taking because Grandma was treating! Andrew, age 3, didn't find all aspects of shopping exciting, but this was a special thrill. He always dug through the whole rack, making sure he picked the two very best pieces—one for him and one for his brother. It had become a part of shopping when Grandma and I went out, and Andrew looked forward to it.

The problem was that we had decided the boys didn't benefit from the sugar and had decided not to buy gum any longer. So I had to say, "Mother, we've decided that we will not buy any more bubble gum."

"What's the matter with bubble gum?" she asked.

"It's because of the sugar, their teeth, and their health."

"Can't you let it go this once?" my mother pled, seeing Andrew already had

the gum in his hands.

"No, he needs to put it back. I'm sorry I didn't tell you ahead of time, Mother. Letting it go will just make things harder the next time."

Andrew was so sweet. He struggled to obey. He held his chubby little hand above the rack, looking up at me with pleading eyes, hoping I'd relent just this time so he wouldn't have to put it back.

"Mama, I want some bubble gum," he said sweetly. I hated to do it, but I shook my head "no." As he put the gum back, he put his finger in his mouth, and the tears began to roll down his cheeks. It broke my heart.

Matthew said, "Can't we have it just one more time?"

"No," I said with more conviction than I felt.

Everyone was so quiet as we walked to the car. My mother was very sad. She doesn't agree with us, but bless her heart, she has always been

supportive of what we have decided to do; she doesn't go against our wishes even when it goes against her heart and reason.

As we were driving, Andrew slipped out of his car seat to kneel on the floor just behind my mother's seat. He began to pray earnestly out loud to God in this great trial. "Oh, dear Jesus, I want bubble gum! Help me not want bubble gum. Mama says I can't have bubble gum, but I want bubble gum. Oh, dear Jesus I want to obey mama. I want my bubble gum! I want to obey mama! I want my bubble gum!"

And so the struggle went. Andrew was sobbing as he prayed. We all witnessed his agony. Matthew is crying for his brother and himself. My mother is crying silently in the seat next to me, trying to stay out of it. I'm cut to the heart, with tears running down my cheeks. I don't know how to help my son out of this!

"Andrew, dear," I put my hand on his back, comforting him as best I could. "You need to get back into your car seat now. It will be alright, honey."

He returned to his car seat, but continued to cry for a long time. He was still sad and disappointed that evening. Nothing brought relief—except time.

Why is doing right so very hard? I had given Andrew experience in prayer and surrender. Like so many Christians, he knew what was right and wanted to obey, but his only source of power was to grit his teeth and force his unwilling flesh to obey his choice. Instinctively he knew that God was the solution. He prayed. However, at that time I didn't know myself how God removes feeling we don't want. So I was powerless to guide him through the experience of

choosing to do what is right *in Jesus' power*.

Andrew's dilemma is like an eagle exercising only one of its two wings, and this is why he could not rise above the pull of his flesh and get above his desire for the bubble gum. Exercising only the wing of surrender sends you in a circle. The second wing—cooperation—is vital for true flight above the pull of our flesh. Andrew needed to cry out to God *and* do whatever God told him to do. This is being "in Christ." In this way, God enters us to do battle in His divine power against sin and self by recreating our thoughts, feelings, and desires. God works from the inside out, not only with our surrender—the mental assent that He is right—but vitally in the cooperation of our will. God will not force us against our will. Without the exercise

of this second "wing," we are not redeemed and find that we are powerless to change ourselves.

For Andrew that would have meant putting forth the same strong effort he was making to do right, but it would also involve surrendering repeatedly and giving those desires to Jesus. Then as he cooperated with Jesus-led right thoughts to replace the desire for gum, he would have found victory. Gum was not the enemy—thoughts were. But I didn't understand this back then.

Today, I would use the "replacement principle" for Andrew's desired bubble gum. He needed to choose to be happy with an apple, or some juice, and ask God to perform this miracle to bring contentment inside him (see Hebrews 13:5). This could have made the exchange physically tangible for Andrew. When it is only abstract, it's hard

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for our little ones to understand the spiritual battle we are involved in.

How many of our children grow up sincerely trying to obey, honestly trying to be good and do what is right—but have Andrew’s experience as he prayed in the back seat of the car, struggling against self and the flesh, with no notable victory or relief? It is because their parents may know *about* God, but don’t know God *personally*, in order to tell their children how to have victory. We must come to know how to set our children free from the flesh by connecting with God. If they gain this experience, we will have living, vibrant, courageous youth.

It is so sad how many youth I talk with that have a downcast view of Christianity. The majority want nothing to do with the religion they know. Why? Because Andrew’s bubble gum struggle has been theirs—and their parents’—year after year after year, until at last they give up on religion, their church, their parents, and sometimes on themselves. These youth had “*bubble gum*” desires, but never found the power in Jesus to overcome them. We have given them a crippled religion and a powerless god of Self to worship. One teen expressed it this way: “This religion stuff may work for others, but I’ve tried and tried, and it doesn’t work for me. There must be something wrong with me. God doesn’t answer my prayers. My dad is a loser, and I’m just like him. They all tell me so. There is no hope for me. So I gave up trying to be kind and nice. I might burn one day, but there is nothing I can do about it.”

Is it any wonder they follow these lying thoughts of Satan’s when they find no personal God and no power to make

their choices real and change them? They don’t know how to connect and cooperate with God to gain His power. Our children deserve the heritage of a personal God and an empowered life. To a large degree, our actions as parents will determine whether they enter adulthood as children of the heavenly kingdom or subjects of the kingdom of darkness.

If you would like to transform your thoughts and hence your child’s, you will need to surrender your choices before the wisdom of an all-knowing God. And as you do so, you will see great transformations of character and attitude no matter what your age or that of your child. You can be the key to unlocking the treasures of heaven’s blessing upon your family.

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Power for Living

Excerpt from *Parenting by the Spirit* by Sally Hohnberger is available through this ministry or your local ABC.



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