

Aubrey Bisher  
Mark Baker  
Proclamation of the Atonement: 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft  
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### **Context/Audience**

Youth age 13-18 in a youth program setting. It would ideally be read aloud.

### **Proclamation of the Atonement**

This is the story of Hugo. He lived in a beautiful land where there was peace and prosperity among all who lived in it. The land was rich with food and all creatures lived in harmony. There was a great king of the land who was loved by all and who loved his people unconditionally. One day, the king called Hugo to his home. "Hugo," he said, "I have an important mission for you. There is a darkness in this world. People are letting the darkness control their lives, which is destroying villages and turning people against one another. They can only be cured if they agree to let go of the darkness and, instead, drink the water from the River of Life.

"I would be honored to help," replied Hugo. "But I don't understand why someone would *let* such darkness take over them. Doesn't it make their life miserable?" The king replied, "That is the most dangerous part of this darkness. It deceives people into believing it is happiness, but then slowly kills its victims once they have become dependent upon its powers." Hugo was saddened to hear about this dark power that was destroying the lives of so many. He wanted to help.

The king handed Hugo a jug filled with the water from the River of Life. He said, "This water will not run out; there is enough for everyone." Next, he handed Hugo a compass. "This compass will help guide you to wherever you need to go. Keep it close and listen to its leading. And be careful; there will be temptations around every corner. The people who are controlled by this darkness are no worse than anyone who lives in this great land. They just need their eyes opened to the truth. Never think you are above these temptations, so stay focused on the mission and trust that all I have provided will protect you."

"I understand," said Hugo somberly. "I will not let you down." "And be warned," added the king, "This darkness will not go away completely. No matter what you do, some will insist on staying with the darkness. If they reject the water, simply move on, and pray they will be willing to let go next time. This darkness is great, so it cannot be underestimated. But what you carry is greater. Go in peace."

Not wanting to waste valuable time, Hugo began his journey. Just as he left town, a hooded stranger approached him. "I hear you are going on a dangerous journey," remarked the stranger. Hugo was uneasy by the man's presence. "Yes, but the king has given me all I need," said Hugo, backing away. The stranger drew nearer. "Perhaps you *think* you have all you need, but what if the king forgot something? I have a potion here that will protect you from *all* harm. Far more than anything the king could ever give you." He began circling Hugo, and spoke quietly. "There are great storms outside of your safe little land. There are evil people who might want to kill you and wild animals who could attack you! There is starvation and sickness." As the stranger spoke, Hugo became more nervous. Perhaps he had a point. It *was* dangerous out

there. What if the king was not aware of how dangerous the darkness had become? “Okay,” said Hugo, hesitantly. I’ll take a small vial. I probably won’t need it...but just in case.”

Hugo sailed off to begin his mission. In the first town he visited, many people were eager to release the darkness and drink the water from the River of Life. Once the water passed over their lips, the darkness left them. They were filled with joy when they realized they were free, and they eagerly helped Hugo tell more people the good news. Sadly, as the king predicted, some refused to let go of the darkness. But Hugo listened to the king’s instructions and continued forward, praying they would be willing to let go next time.

The next town was not as welcoming. Only one person was willing to drink the water from the River of Life. The rest of the town made fun of Hugo and told him he was stupid for wanting to get rid of something that made them all so happy. He did not understand how everyone could think that what they had was happiness. They all yelled at each other and talked behind one other’s backs. Some people had money, but they still seemed unsatisfied. Others on the streets looked like they were starving. The air was filled with smoke and it smelled terrible because trash was piling up on the outskirts of town. “How could anyone be happy with such a life?” Hugo asked himself. “Don’t they know there is something so much better?”

Feeling defeated, Hugo returned to his boat and headed to the next town. While on his way, a great storm erupted. Hugo was terrified he was going to drown! The waves were crashing all around and the boat was beginning to fill with water. He frantically looked around the boat and saw the potion vial from the stranger. He also saw the compass from the king. He didn’t see how that would help in such a storm, so in desperation, he grabbed the vial and took a drink --- The storm stopped --- He collapsed in exhausted relief; it was a good thing he had listened to the stranger after all.

He looked up through the parting clouds to see a town in the distance, and sighed a breath of relief. He was saved! He docked his boat and began exploring the town. At first, he forgot why he is there. Wasn’t he supposed to be doing something? That’s right; The mission from the king! But he was just so tired from the storm, so he decided to relax for a day or so before talking with the people about the darkness.

Hugo looked around and realized the town didn’t look quite as dark as the others. It actually looked kind of fun! As he entered a bakery, he realized he was almost out of money. He really wanted something to eat. “Well,” he thought, “if the potion helped stop the waves then it must be able to give me money.” He took another sip from the vial and a few dollars appeared on the table. “Wonderful!” exclaimed Hugo. “This place really is great!”

Days passed as Hugo wandered through the town, enjoying himself. Aside from the poor, smelly people on the street and the slight odor from the dump, this place was pretty good. He could eat decent food, attend shows, and hang out with fun people at night. Every time he ran out of money or needed help finding something, he drank a little more of the potion. And the more he drank, the more comfortable he became with the village. Eventually, he forgot all about the king. Life was fine. Sure, he would get into fights with people from time to time and there always seemed to be tension on the streets, but that was just how life worked. Years passed by.

One day, an old man entered the village. There was something different about him so most people stayed away; he made them uncomfortable. He would walk around the streets and smile at people while he picked up trash, played with the children, and helped the sick. He also talked about a darkness that was enslaving everyone, and he was offering water to wash it away. The people thought that was ridiculous. Life was great! This darkness that the man wanted to get rid of was the only thing that made life worth living.

One morning, the man walked up to Hugo. "Good morning, sir." The man had a warm smile, and extended his hand in greeting. Hugo did not know what to do, so he backed away. Seeing that Hugo was not going to take his hand, the man let it fall to his side. He continued, "I am so sorry. Please. Take this water so you can be released from this terrible darkness. It hurts me to see you this way." The man actually looked sad as he held out a jug of water. Hugo could not fathom why. He did not know this man. Why should he care about him? And how dare he say he felt sorry for him --- He was happy!

Hugo snarled back, "just leave me alone you crazy old man! I bet you just want money or something. Here," he said thrusting a compass into his hands. "take this piece of junk. I have no use for it. Now go back to where you came from." The old man looked hurt but smiled sadly. "You are still loved," he said slowly closing his hands around the compass and turning away.

The other people in the town hated the old man as well. Some of the poor people on the streets liked him and were talking about the water he brought, but the rest of the villagers said they were crazy. He was just creating trouble.

One night, the villagers got together and decided to get rid of the old man for good. Hugo led a group that snuck into his room and tied him up. The old man did not fight back. He just looked at them sadly and said, "I forgive you." This just made the mob more furious, so they started beating him. They cursed him and kicked him. His chair fell over and the man laid quietly on the floor. He still refused to say anything except "I forgive you." The less the old man fought back, the angrier the mob became. They continued to beat him until he was finally silent. They stared down at the motionless, bloodied, broken old man and told themselves that they had taught him a lesson. They rowed him out to the middle of the water and dumped his body. As the group came back onto shore, they celebrated that they were finally rid of such a bothersome person.

As Hugo stepped out of the boat, a darkness overtook the town. It only lasted a few seconds, but as the light returned, Hugo's stomach fell. Suddenly, he realized what he had done. He had killed another man! How could this have happened? When had he become a murderer? He fell to the ground and wept. He laid there, hoping death would take him, as it had taken the old man --- but death would not come. Hugo wandered aimlessly through the town, wondering what to do next. He did not know what to do or where to go. The things he usually did no longer satisfied.

Two days later, he was sitting on the docks, contemplating jumping into the water and letting its icy depths end his misery. He felt a hand on his shoulder. "Go away," he snapped without looking up. "Hello my son," whispered a eerily familiar voice. Hugo's head shot up and he whirled around. It was the old man! But how could it be? They killed him! But it was him alright. And instead of being bloodied and broken, he looked strong and healthy.

"It must be a ghost!" thought Hugo, in fear. "Do not be afraid; I am not a ghost," said the man, knowing Hugo's thoughts. Hugo stood, taking a tentative step forward. "Who *are* you?" he asked slowly. The man touched Hugo's arm lightly. "You know me." Hugo did not know what he meant. "The vile," continued the old man. "It is keeping you in this terrible darkness. Let it go, and you will be free." Hugo pulled his precious vile from his pocket. Though he was hesitant to let it go, he handed it over the old man. The man uncorked the vile, and poured its contents into the mud. As the liquid hit the ground, Hugo's eyes were fully opened. He saw the chaos around him, smelled the stench in the air, and felt deep fear.

He stared at the old man with clear eyes. "My King!" Hugo fell into the mud, as the stranger's identity was revealed. "It can't be!" At once, he remembered his mission. "Oh no!"

wailed Hugo, kneeling on the ground before the king. “What happened to me?!” Hugo felt deep shame. Still in the mud, he stared at the ground. “I’m so sorry, King,” Hugo sobbed. “I did not recognize you! Why didn’t you stop us from hurting you!? You are so powerful. Surely you could have done something!”

“That is true,” replied the king, “but I saw how lost you were, and it was the only way. My death was worth it if it meant saving you.” “But why?” asked Hugo. The king answered, “Because this darkness you carried could only lead to death. I love you too much to let it take you, so I let it take me instead. But the darkness did not realize that I have the power to beat death. As you continue my mission, remember that love always conquers death. My life was sacrificed for all and it continues for all.”

Hugo began to cry again; his face was filled with shame. Suddenly, the king grabbed Hugo and wrapped him in a warm embrace. “It’s alright my son,” he whispered, “I forgive you.” He continued as he lifted Hugo out of the mud, “This darkness is dangerous because it makes you believe all is well, while slowly enslaving you to its powers. It masquerades brokenness and evil as happiness and success. But it only has power if you let it inside you. I am here to help. Don’t forget that I am the only one you need.”

“Yes!” exclaimed Hugo. “You still trust me? Even though I messed up so badly last time?” “Of course.” replied the king. “I still love you and want you to rejoin my mission. I am your king and you are my son. The darkness that took you is still hurting others throughout these lands. You can tell others about how you broke free!” He added, “but before you go, you’re going to want this back.” He pulled the compass from his pocket, and handed it to Hugo. “You don’t want to lose this again. It will guide you on this journey. Without it, you will give into the darkness again.”

Hugo took the compass. “Thank you. I won’t let it go this time.” He paused, just realizing something. “But wait. How was I healed from the darkness? I never drank the water. I thought you said the only way to be healed is to drink from the water from the River of Life?” The king smiled. “I said people could be healed if they drank from it. But *I am* the water. The power of the water lives in me. When you chose to trust me, and allowed me to dump out the potion, the darkness fled from you. Likewise, when anyone truly trusts in me, the darkness will be forced from them. For where there is goodness and light, darkness cannot survive.”

Hugo left the village, ready to continue with the king’s mission. The selflessness of the king taught him what it meant to love others above all else. In the name of the king, he went from village to village sharing stories of freedom and healing. Though the darkness was still there, many were healed, and joined the king’s mission to help others. All who continue to be healed today are called to join in that mission to show the world what it means to live in freedom from the darkness.

### Study Questions

- Have you been living in the darkness? Perhaps assuming your life is as good as it gets because there could never be anything better?
- What are the viles in your life? What is keeping you from fully trusting God?
- In the story, Hugo became more dependent on the darkness a little at a time. Are there areas in your life where you see yourself sacrificing God’s will in little ways that are slowly moving you further from him?
- Even if you have allowed God to take that vile from you, when do you feel tempted to take it back? Are there times when the vile just seems easier than the compass?

- If you have rejected the darkness from your own life, how do you feel God calling you to join his mission? What SPECIFIC gifts, talents, and/or opportunities has he given you to help show others that they do not need to depend on the darkness?
- How do you feel about how quickly the king forgave Hugo? Would that have been hard for you to receive?