



About The Novelist

An interview with Angela Hunt

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Q: Inquiring minds want to know—how much of yourself did you put in Jordan Casey?

A: I'll admit that we're both writers and we drive the same model car. I also hate tomatoes and once I did paint around my sleeping husband because I can't stand to leave a project half-finished. Jordan and I are both married to wonderful men. On the other hand, she is much more successful, wealthy, and better looking than me.

Q: This is really two books in one. Why did you choose this format and the unusual setting of a casino?

A: Writing is what I do all day, so novelists tend to enjoy reading and writing about writers. One day I was thinking about how God orders our lives and realized that we are a little like characters in the Creator's novel.

I chose the casino setting because it *is* unusual and I found the psychology behind slot machine design fascinating. Those machines are designed to be enticing, addictive, and dangerous—almost like chocolate! The more I thought about them, the more eager I was to use them as symbols in this story.

Q: So you decided to write a novel about a man who runs a casino—

A: Actually, I set out to write a novel about the sovereignty of God. The Bible is filled with passages where God is depicted as a potter and people as clay pots (Ps. 31:12, Is. 29:16, 45:9, Jer. 18:4-6, 22:28; Ro. 9:21, Rev. 2:27). We have no problem with the idea that our Potter loves and cherishes us, but we are reluctant to accept that our Potter might want to crack and break us even for our own eternal good.

When I first began studying God's sovereignty, I told a friend that God was bigger than I had previously thought. Then I realized I'd misspoken, because I've always believed God was infinitely powerful. What God's sovereignty teaches is that I'm *smaller* than I thought.

The more I study God's Word, the more clearly I see that God has ordered our lives. Every event—good, bad, and indifferent—has been planned for God's eternal purposes and our eternal good. I began to talk to people about this doctrine and was surprised to discover that some believers attribute the bad things in our lives to evil, Satan, or our own mistakes. That is a partial truth, but God is still in ultimate control.

Q: Wait a minute—Satan can still cause damage. The Bible says he is like a roaring lion, looking for people to devour.

A: Yes, but God is omnipotent, so all power in the universe flows from him and is subordinate to him. Satan may be like a lion, but he's a *leashed* lion, fully controlled by God. I love the fact that even his machinations against God's people result in blessings. He's like Balaam, who was sent to curse the children of God and found that every time he opened his mouth, a blessing poured out instead.

Satan is a bit like the magician in the machine. He's part of the story, part of God's "plot." Yes, the magician caused problems for William, but those problems resulted from William's free choice, not anything the magician forced him to do. Those problems were also necessary for William's maturation and growth.

Q: Reminds me of that verse: "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them."

A: Exactly! That's Romans 8:28. Sometimes we glibly cite that verse without realizing how deep that promise is—it goes all the way to the bone!

It's hard for us to believe a loving God could allow us to suffer pain, but pain is often part of his plan. Over and over Scripture tells us that suffering deepens our character and grants us an eternal perspective (see Romans 8:17-18, 2 Cor. 1:7, Phil. 1:29, 3:10, Col. 1:24, 2 Thess. 1:4, 2 Tim. 2:12, James 5:10, 1 Peter 4:13, 5:10). Some difficult events prepare us for our future service. Others deepen our character. Others serve purposes we will only understand in heaven.

Q: So . . . are you saying God manipulates us like puppets?

A: We're not puppets, but neither are we autonomous and able to do whatever we please. We make our own decisions, but we make decisions according to the blueprint, as it were, of God's sovereignty.

Q: At one point John tells William that he is a character in Casey's story. Is that how you see mankind? As characters?

A: Actually, I think the theological term is *creature*. Not that we are animals, but we *are* created beings and distinct from our Creator. I think a lot of people are like William—we tend to think of ourselves as in control when we're not. No matter how

we try to delude ourselves, we cannot completely control our circumstances, our destinies, or our lives. You can't will yourself into becoming the next American Idol. Nor could you stop an out of control car that's careening toward you. But God controls everything.

Q: Don't you believe in free will?

A: We have the freedom to make choices and we make them every day. But our freedom to choose operates beneath the umbrella of God's plan.

When my daughter was four or five, we began to experience a battle of wills every time she needed to get dressed. I quickly learned that the getting-dressed ritual went more smoothly if I pulled out two or three appropriate outfits and let her choose one of them instead of letting her select from everything in her closet.

That's a highly simplified example, but I think the principle is sound. Being finite beings, we determine our course by circumstances, but God authors those circumstances.

Q: So—since Jordan Casey outlined the plot and decided William would fall to temptation, can we blame God when we choose to do wrong?

A: Absolutely not. I know there's a bit of a paradox here, but Scripture is clear that though all things are planned by God, he never does evil, nor are we ever to blame him for evil. We freely choose to sin, but God uses our failures to suit his purposes. God planned the crucifixion, but the man who betrayed Jesus was not guiltless (see Luke 22:22, Matt. 26:24, Mark 14:21). Joseph's brothers chose to sell Joseph into slavery, but God, who had planned every moment of that scenario, used their evil to save a nation (see Genesis 45:5, 50:20).

Q: Okay, I've got to ask—William Case is tempted by—and surrenders to—a slot machine. Why in the world would you choose something so . . . unexpected?

A: The idea of using slots came to me in the beginning. The more I played with the notion, the more apt it seemed.

Some people would say slot machines are innocuous—after all, you don't always risk a great deal of money and in states where they're legal you can find them almost anywhere. But, like sin, slot machines are anything *but* innocent. They have been described as the "crack cocaine" of gambling. Social workers have found that it usually takes twenty years for someone to develop a serious gambling problem, but the cycle of addiction is much faster for those who play the slots.

Did you know that every day players in the United States wager an average of one *billion* dollars in slot machines? The games' annual gross is more than McDonald's, Wendy's, Burger King, and Starbucks combined. Slots take in more than three times

as much money as movie theaters. And while Americans spend nearly ten billion dollars a year on pornography, they spent *thirty* billion on slots in 2003. That's a lot of money we could invest in families, children, and education.

Q: I almost expected you to include some of the next Rex Tower novel.

A: I had a lot of fun with Rex, and I meant for his titles to be on the corny side. I was going to call one *Cleaning Tower* (Rex goes undercover as a custodian in Pisa), but that would be over the top.

Q: Anything else you want to add?

A: I owe a debt to Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* and R.C. Sproul's *Chosen by God*, for clarifying my ideas about God's sovereignty. Grudem's discussion of Shakespeare and Macbeth led me to the idea of God-as-novelist.

I also owe a huge "thank you" to my editors, Ami McConnell and Dave Lambert, who are completely responsible for the Jordan/Zack storyline. My first draft was something Jordan might have produced—a story without a beating heart. Ami and Dave urged me to take another crack at the manuscript.

Finally, I thank God for deliberately walking me through some trials I didn't choose... because He knows what's best.



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