

# Rickett & Shine

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With Devotional Thoughts By Dr. Andy Smith

**W**e all fight internal struggles with temptations. As followers of Christ, we long to make healthy choices and do what is right and pleasing to God. Yet, often we choose to do the very things we know are harmful to ourselves and others. In his letter to Christians in Rome, the Apostle Paul speaks of a tug-a-war deep within his soul...

*"It happens so regularly that it's predictable. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God's commands, but it's pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge."*

*Romans 7:21-23 (The Message)*

***Rickett and Shine*** is a wonderful story about Timothy McGuire and his two dogs named – you guessed it, Rickett and Shine. Shine is a loveable Golden Retriever that will grab your heart. Rickett, on the other hand, is a mutt that will grab your wallet if you're not careful! Both of these canines live in the same yard and their story will leave you asking one of faith's greatest challenging questions...which dog do you feed?

Come along with me my friends  
For there's a tale to tell  
It's a story unfamiliar  
Yet I think you'll know it well

Our setting is a tree lined street  
And along this avenue  
People live their daily lives  
Just folks like me and you

One address in particular  
Our attention does require  
So welcome to the hearth and home  
Of Timothy McGuire

His house is freshly painted white  
The trim a forest green  
The lawn is mowed and neatly edged  
The walk spotless and clean

A picket fence, a spreading elm  
That shades Tim's perfect hedges  
And flowers for the butterflies

On all the window ledges

Yes Tim's a quiet, tidy man  
Hair combed, shoes shined, shirt pressed  
But there's more here than meets the eye  
As by now you might have guessed

And so, let's stroll around the house  
Past roses and lilacs  
Through the hedge, beyond the elm  
To circle round the back

As we step into a sunny yard  
It will be worth remarking  
That the songs of birds and hum of bees  
Are now replaced by barking

For it's time to meet the other players  
That figure in this rhyme  
So without delay I introduce  
Tim's dogs, Rickett and Shine

Shine is a retriever  
With a face that's bright and bold  
From wagging tail to glistening nose  
You'd swear he's made of gold

His portion of the sunny yard  
Neat as an Easter bonnet  
Contains his dish, a few dog toys  
And a house with his name upon it

And every day it's Tim and Shine  
In games of catch and fetch  
Then restful walks down shady streets  
To give their legs a stretch

Yes Shine is just the kind of dog  
That makes your heart beat faster  
He always seems to focus on  
How he can please the master

As we leave Shine in his sunny spot  
And move across the yard  
The shadows seem to deepen  
And the ground grows dry and hard

Here bushes feature snagging thorns  
No flowers seem to grow  
There are no neat trimmed hedges  
Nor is there grass to mow

Step carefully as you proceed  
Into this thorny thicket  
To find the leaning, peeling shed  
Where lives the dog named Rickett

What is his breed or pedigree?  
Well, no one really knows  
Those crooked ears, that stumpy tail  
Will never see dog shows

His fur's not white, I'd call it pale  
Reminds one of a ghost  
With scattered brown and blackened spots  
He looks just like burnt toast

His side of yard is filled with holes  
With bones he gnaws and chews  
There's scraps of leather that I'm sure  
Were once Tim's best dress shoes

When Tim is asked "Why keep that dog?"  
He shrugs with a sheepish stare  
I guess it's just because it seems  
He's always been back there

Besides he doesn't eat too much  
And keeps out of the way  
And after all, I've got my Shine  
When I need love or play

So every night like clockwork  
Tim feeds his hungry pets  
He's always sure to measure out  
Exactly what each gets

Shine licks Tim's hand and wags his tail  
As his bowl is filled with care  
While Rickett plans and schemes and plots  
How he can increase his share

So from his shadowy hiding place  
A little web he's spinning  
If you could see him through the murk  
You'd see that he was grinning

So as the dusk moves into night  
Attention turns to sleeping  
Shine curls up warmly in his house  
While Rickett...from the yard...is creeping

The sun comes up, the shadows fade  
And Tim awakes and yawns

Its breakfast and the paper  
Then outside to cut the lawn

As he steps out of the door  
Onto the porch in back  
He stumbles and he nearly falls  
“Now what the heck was that?”

Its then he spies upon the floor  
A pair of argyle sox?  
A radio, a rolling pin  
Three different kinds of clocks

Two snow tires and a saxophone  
A length of garden hose  
A fishing pole, a new cell phone  
(Tim really needs one of those)

A 10-speed bike, a Jello mold  
A case of motor oil  
Binoculars, a rocking chair  
Six rolls of aluminum foil

And trailing from this bounteous piles  
Past boots and baseball mitts  
A trail of paw prints in the dirt  
Lead right where Rickett sits

“You brought all this stuff up here?”  
Time said, wide eyed to learn it  
“What the heck will I do now?”  
“I suppose I should...return it?”

But Rickett knew what was to come  
He watched its slow formation  
That deceiving, selfish reasoning  
We all know as “justification”

“I suppose if folks had wanted this  
They wouldn’t just have left it  
Where anyone could come along  
Like you did and just get it”

And as Tim spoke old Rickett saw  
His plan work to perfection  
While Shine looked on in wide dismay  
Alarmed at this direction

“So”, said Tim “that settles that”  
As he approached the pile of plunder  
Holding and examining  
Each item now with wonder

That evening it was mealtime  
And Rickett laughed with sweet delight  
When his bowl held three times the food  
As Shine's did on that night

Next morning as he jumped from bed  
Tim raced out toward the back  
And wondered as he reached the door  
Would there be another stack?

Well sure enough the porch was filled  
Just like the day before  
Tim looked left...then quickly right  
As he brought things through the door

Rickett sat out by the steps  
And triumph was his mood  
You can almost feel his nasty grin  
As Tim gave the dog more food

And so the days turned into weeks  
Like fruit from ripe to rotten  
Rickett and his thieving ways  
And Shine all but forgotten

Tim's house and yard neglected  
And his hedges all a-tatter  
While Shine grew thin and wasted  
Old Rickett just got fatter

Until one day, a magic day  
A Tuesday I recall  
There came a little miracle  
Due to one red croquet ball

The ball was one of Rickett's finds  
The last one I presume  
And when Tim brought it to the house  
There simply wasn't room

Every nook and cranny filled  
Each closet, shelf and drawer  
The bedroom, hallway, kitchen, den  
From ceiling to the floor

And as Tim stood a-gaping  
At the stuff there by the ton  
He swallowed, blinked and weakly said  
"Oh Lord, what have I done?"

For as the scales fell from his eyes

His greed and pride now shrunk  
And what he'd seen as treasure  
He now knew was useless junk

The croquet ball slipped from his hand  
It landed rather hard  
It crossed the floor, then down the steps  
And rolled into the yard

T'was a good thing that Tim's hands were free  
He needed them that day  
For as he stood he wept aloud  
And they wiped his tears away

Just as he thought his heart would burst  
Came a sound from just behind  
He turned, then stopped and forced a smile  
As up the steps came Shine

The dog was thin and oh so weak  
But giving it his all  
And in his mouth what do we see?  
He holds the croquet ball

He drops it at his master's feet  
Then sits and wags his tail  
As if to say "this is love"  
And love will never fail

Tim can feel the warmth within  
Like the lifting of a fog  
And with a heart now filled with joy  
He kneels and hugs his dog

Well, he's weeks and weeks returning things  
To neighbors far and wide  
Till every item is returned  
To where it should abide

On every trip to make amends  
He's joined by his retriever  
For joy should be allowed to shine  
In that Tim's a firm believer

But what of Rickett you may ask  
And all his schemes and plots  
He's retreated to the furthest  
Darkest corner of the lot

And there he sits among the thorns  
And gnaws upon the urge  
To watch and wait and wait and watch

For the chance to re-emerge

And the moral of this little tale?  
The truth we should be heeding?  
Be mindful as you fill the bowl  
Which dog YOU may be feeding

We all struggle to control the inner impulses that tempt us to make unhealthy choices. Our inner thoughts often lead us to the unhealthy places of pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath and sloth (*The Seven Deadly Sins*). We, like Paul, cry out, *“I’ve tried everything, and nothing helps! I’m at the end of my rope! Is there no one who can do anything for me? (Romans 7:24)*

Controlling the struggle within to make healthy choices is difficult, but it is not impossible. Paul finds great comfort in knowing that Jesus Christ has set us free to choose what is healthy and good. Temptations to make unhealthy choices will always confront us. We can’t avoid them, but we can actually find victory over having them take root in our souls. As Martin Luther so famously said:

*“You cannot keep birds from flying over your head  
but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair.”*

Paul offers words of hope to all who struggle within, *“The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different.” (Romans 7:24)*

### **Questions for Thought...**

1. What can I do today to feed the healthy voice in my soul?
2. Who can I reach out to today for support?
3. Who can I support?