

SERMON Illustrations

A

ABIDING

A DINNER plate left out overnight will be hard to clean in the morning. An alternative to scrubbing is soaking the dish in hot water and dishwashing liquid. Letting a dish abide in the solution will allow a hard cleaning job to become a lot easier. This is what abiding does for Christians. We are much easier to clean up when we've been hanging out in the right environment.

Religion says "Scrape off the dirt." It tells us to apply elbow grease to fix a problem. Relationship says "Soak." Just sit in the hot water for a while. Abiding will set you free.¹

Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Cor. 11:3

SADLY, these days there are many young ladies who are being coerced indirectly into bad situations because they meet somebody over the Internet. Even thirteen-year-old girls can be lured to a location to meet somebody they don't know because they "fell in love" over the Internet. Their initial relationship with this stranger is only by reading. Both parties sit at the computer and read each other's words, but after awhile, the words take on life because behind the word is a real, living person. Those words for a young girl grow into emotions and then turn into actions as she figures out how to sneak out to meet him. Those words take on life because the girl spent time abiding in the

presence of someone she couldn't now see.

You can't see the Living God. He's a spirit, but He's written to you and wants to have an eternal love affair with you. If you hang out there with His words, next thing you know you'll be packing your bags to meet Him. You'll have fallen in love with Him and have become transformed by abiding in His presence.²

[Transformation; God's Presence]

John 3:16; 15:3-5; Rom. 12:2

THE PLANET Mercury is hot. Pluto is cold. Why is Pluto cold and Mercury hot? Mercury is really close to the sun and Pluto is a long way off. The farther you get away, the colder things become, but the closer you get, the hotter things are. You may say that you are not a Pluto Christian or a Mercury Christian. Maybe you are an Earth Christian where things get hot and cold. You may be a seasonal Christian who has changes depending on whether it is wintertime, summertime, springtime, or fall.

God is looking for some Mercury Christians. He is looking for some folks who want to get close and stay hot all the time because they stay close to the S-o-n.³

[Discipleship]

James 1:8; Rev. 3:16

I WAS talking on my phone one day and it began going "beep, beep, beep." The beeping noise indicated that the battery was low. After a couple of minutes,

I heard a clicking noise. The battery had died because it had been off its charger too long. In other words, it was putting out with no refill and so it lost its power. It lost its “anointing.” It lost its ability to function at the level it was designed to function at because it had stayed away from its source too long.

We can’t keep running on spiritual empty and wonder why we’re only limping along in the Christian life. We are regularly caught unexpectedly on empty because we don’t stay close to our source of strength on a regular basis.⁴

Phil. 4:13

A LOT OF people talk about how hot it is in Texas. The heat doesn’t really bother me, though, because everything is air-conditioned in Texas. Your car is air-conditioned. Your house is air-conditioned. Every building you go in is air-conditioned. So while you do sometimes have to be under the sun, and while you’re in it, it’s hot, most people here just don’t hang out in the sun.

Actually, I’m a hot-weather person. The hotter it is, the nicer it is for me. Where some people like air conditioners blasting in their cars, I prefer to roll down the windows. I’d rather have hot air than cold air-conditioning. It’s just my particular temperament, and I know something is wrong with me, but that’s just the way it is. I don’t mind hanging out in the sun.

That said, most people I know don’t want to hang out in the sun. They just want to *pass through* the sun. What a lot of people want to do with the s-u-n they want to do with the S-o-n. They just want to pass through.

When you hang out in the sun, you’re going to sweat. Why? Because you can’t be under that much power and it not affect you. If you hang out under the S-o-n, you’re also going to sweat. You’re going to sweat His commandments. You’re going to sweat pleasing Him. You’re going to sweat His Word because you can’t hang in His presence without Him rubbing off on you.

The way you know He’s rubbing off on you is that you begin to walk as He walks. You begin to pick up some of His habits. You begin to pick up some of His direction. You begin to pick up some of His influence.⁵

[Discipleship]

Luke 6:40

I HAVE abided over the last twenty years with American Airlines. They have been my airline of choice, and as a result I have been awarded a level of intimacy. That level of intimacy is called Platinum. They have awarded my consistency with them. That Platinum card affords me various privileges that come simply because I have the card. I can ride first class if the first class seats haven’t been purchased. I can get bumped up simply because I have this Platinum card and I’ve flown two million miles with American over the years. They’ve given me a card that says I’m a preferred customer. They send things to my house because they appreciate the fact that I have abided with them. They like the fact that they can pretty much count on me to fly American when I travel.

When I walk up to a booth, if people are ahead of me, and first class is full, they have a waiting list. If they

tell me they have Gold members in front of me, I pull out my Platinum card. My status bumps me to the top of the list. I take precedence because I have a deeper, longer, and more regular relationship with American than the Gold members do.

However, once a man behind me asked the clerk if there were any first class seats. The clerk told him there were, but then added that the first person was a Platinum member and would be awarded the upgrade first. The man reached into his pocket and pulled out an Executive Platinum card. I felt like slapping him. To remain Platinum you have to fly fifty thousand miles a year. To be Executive Platinum you fly one hundred thousand miles a year. When I walked up to the counter, they let me know they liked me by putting me first. When he came up they let me know they *loved* him. His level of abiding was deeper.

Some Christians are satisfied with Gold status, others are happy with Platinum, and yet others are after Executive Platinum. What kind of Christian are you? We need to know that until we are ready to make the commitment of abiding, we will never get all the benefits that occur with ongoing intimacy.⁶

[Commitment; Intimacy, with God]

SUNFLOWERS are beautiful flowers that start off as tiny sprouts. The reason sunflowers are called sunflowers is because they follow the sun. The sun rises in the east, the sunflower will point east. The sun sets to the west, and the flowers will point west. These flowers throw off a lot of seeds. They are pro-

ductive because they are always looking for the sun. They always locate the s-u-n, and because they always are looking for the s-u-n, they're always growing.

When you and I look for the S-o-n, like the sunflower looks for the s-u-n, then we will find the effects of His rays softening our hearts so we can throw off new seed, new life. It is our response to the Word that determines our productivity. Abiding in our relationship with the S-o-n will result in the transformation and growth that many Christians are looking for.⁷

[Transformation; Spiritual Maturity, Growth]

Rom. 6:4

THERE ARE two ways to drink tea. Some people are dippers. They dip their tea bag up and down in the mug. A lot of Christians are like that. They dip in on Sunday morning then dip back out. They dip back in on Wednesday night then they dip back out. But there's another way to drink tea and that's to be an abider. It involves the act of just dropping the tea bag in the water and letting it stay there. Without touching the bag an amazing thing will happen. The color of the water begins to change as the influence of the bag in the hot water effects change in the cup. A person can just sit and watch the transformation take place because of the act of abiding.

When you are a dipper you've got to make things happen by your own effort. You've got to move the bag up and down, dip a spoon in and out of the cup, wrap the string around the spoon, jerk, and then pull. It can require a lot of human effort. But when

you are abiding, the water changes all by itself.

Once I was meeting with a guy and we were both drinking tea. He was dipping and pulling away. I just let my tea bag sit. He told me that he couldn't let his tea bag sit in the bag like that because his tea would get too strong. That's exactly what happens when you abide. The depth of your abiding will determine the rate of your progress in the spiritual life. Jesus wants you to stay there and experience the full strength of His presence.⁸

[God's Presence]

ABUNDANT LIFE

A WHILE back I went to McDonald's and ordered a value meal. The cashier asked me if I wanted to supersize my order. He wanted to know if I wanted my order to be bigger. I told him no; I just wanted my regular-sized order. He asked me again to make sure I didn't want my order supersized. I told him no thank you, got my regular-sized order, and drove off.

If you're tired of regular or ordinary living, God is offering you super-size.⁹

ADDICTION

A POW IS a prisoner of war. He or she is a person who has been captured by the enemy and is held hostage in the context of a conflict. The situation is where the opposition or the enemy now controls the movements, the actions, or the reactions of the person who has been captured.

Many Christians are POWs, prisoners of spiritual warfare. The Enemy has captured them, and there appears to be no way of escape. They feel

trapped by situations and circumstances that the world calls "addictions." Whether it's drugs, sex, pornography, alcohol, codependency, gambling, or food, they feel trapped, and there seems to be no way out.¹⁰

ADVERSITY

IN ORDER for God to bring out the best in His children, He brings about scenarios in our lives to build strength and character.

When building our physical bodies, development takes on the form of pumping weights, running on a treadmill, and participating in activities that require tennis shoes. Workouts involve some sweat, heavy breathing, and perspiration because something is being developed. God allows trials and adversity to put us in gymnasium situations. Just like the Father did with His Son Jesus, He creates a workout scenario that includes a difficulty that we must work through.

A lady came to work out at the gym. Everything about what she had on said she was going to go for a killer workout. She wore the typical attire, the headband around her head, wristbands around her wrists, and had a water bottle on her side. She stepped into a clear area and bent down to touch her toes in order to stretch. This woman looked very serious about working out. She grabbed some dumbbells, walked over to a bench, and sat down. Lifting the weights, she did a couple of bicep curls, put the weights down, and wiped herself off with a towel. In an exasperated voice she said, "Whoof! That's enough for today!" This lady looked the part but she had

not truly come to the gym for a workout.

Many Christians come to church every Sunday looking like they are ready for a workout. We wear the right clothes, sing the right songs, and talk the right talk, but building real strength requires real effort and a little sweat.

God figures that we will not voluntarily go to a spiritual gym so He brings the gym to us. Adverse circumstances, cross-bearing situations, difficult scenarios, and problematic encounters all serve as opportunities for Christian growth.¹¹

[Trials; Tests; Character,
Importance of]

Prov. 3:11; Phil. 2:12; Heb. 12:6;
James 1:2; 1 Peter 1:6–8

A CATERPILLAR is ugly, slow, slimy, and it takes all day to go two feet, but when it undergoes the process of metamorphosis and the caterpillar becomes a butterfly, something beautiful is born. Metamorphosis is the process of something at work on the inside trying to show up on the outside.

There's only one reason a butterfly can fly: its wings are strengthened by the work it does to break through the cocoon. If a bystander were to slit open a cocoon prior to the butterfly breaking itself loose from the cocoon, it wouldn't fly. Its wings are developed through the struggle. No struggle, no flight.

Every Christian is a butterfly waiting to happen. A saint may feel like a caterpillar or even think they look like a caterpillar, but the idea is to work out their salvation in the midst of adversity because God is at work within them to do His good pleasure.¹²

[Transformation; Trials; Tests;
Spiritual Maturity, Growth]
Phil. 2:12–13

ALIENS

AMERICA has ambassadors. Ambassadors are in a foreign land that is not their own. They go away temporarily to a foreign land to spend time away from home. Ambassadors have to learn the language and learn the customs, but they're never to belong there. They are just to live there in order to carry out their mission.

In order to carry it out, they've got to live there. In order to carry it out, they've got to talk the language. To carry it out, they've got to function in the context of the people, but they are to never forget it's not where they belong. The Bible says your citizenship is in heaven.

What good is an ambassador who doesn't represent the homeland? The problem is that today we've got a generation of ambassadors who like the foreign country. In fact, they have fallen in love with the foreign country.¹³

[Ambassadors, for Christ]
Phil. 3:17–21; 1 Peter 2:11

WHEN HURRICANE Katrina hit New Orleans, thousands of people were displaced. Thousands of people had to leave their homes and move to other places. Some moved to other cities in Louisiana, others moved to Houston, other people moved to Dallas, not knowing when they could return home.

Months later, many people could still not return home and they were frustrated. Although they had places

to sleep, food to eat, and clothes on their backs, they were not happy. Although they had opportunities for new lives, new jobs, and a new start, they were not excited. Although the victims of Katrina had the ability to send their kids to new schools, to see new places, and to do new things, they were not thrilled. No matter how great the new places were, many Americans displaced from New Orleans were frustrated. Why? Because they were not home. It didn't matter how wonderful Dallas or Houston could be, these cities were not New Orleans.

As Christians, we should never be satisfied with the things that this world holds. We should never be thrilled with the things this world has to offer. No matter how wonderful this world is, for the Christian, it will never be home. We are aliens in this world.¹⁴

[Ambassadors for Christ]

Heb. 11:12–14

AMBASSADORS, FOR CHRIST

I USED TO love the television show *Charlie's Angels*. First there was a TV show, and then there were the *Charlie's Angels* movies. These three young ladies would go in harm's way for Charlie. What's interesting is, they had never seen Charlie. Charlie was invisible to them, yet they were willing to do his bidding. They would get a call and receive information about what Charlie wanted them to do. They would go out to represent Charlie's interests, even though it meant difficult times for them. They were Charlie's Angels.

The word *angel* in the Bible means *messenger*. The original Greek

word is *angelos*. It means to be a messenger for someone else. Now if invisible Charlie could get three ladies to go in harm's way for a man they had never seen, how much more should Jesus' angels, messengers for Jesus Christ, be willing to go in harm's way to represent somebody they've never seen? Even though we haven't seen Him, we should be ready to fulfill His mission and share His love with others.¹⁵

[Witnessing]

2 Cor. 5:20; 1 Peter 1:8–9

ANGER

A MAN said, "My wife and I promised that we would never go to bed angry. We haven't slept together in seven years."¹⁶

[Marriage]

B

BAPTISM

WHEN a lady gets married, she puts on a ring. That ring does not make her married. She could be married without a ring, just like you could be saved without being baptized. But what the ring does do is serve as a sign that she is married.

Many times when you see a guy talking to a girl, you will see his eyes go south as he is looking at the left hand to see whether or not she has already been spoken for and belongs to another.

I am certain that a wife who refused to wear her ring would insult any man. He would probably take that as a rejection of him. The ring is more than a piece of jewelry. The piece of

jewelry represents an institution and a covenant. Like a ring is symbolic for marriage, baptism is a sign of our covenant with God.¹⁷

[Salvation; Marriage; Spiritual Identity, in Christ]

Acts 2:38; 8:13; Matt. 28:19

THE IDEA OF A baptized believer is that they have gone public in declaring that they are wedded to another—to Jesus Christ.

We would think it odd if a husband never wanted to go out in public with his wife. He might say, “I’ll eat dinner with you as long as it’s at home,” or “I’ll watch a movie with you as long as it’s at home,” or “I’ll talk to you as long as it’s at home.” That kind of behavior would be an insult. Jesus Christ is insulted regularly by His children because in private they will identify with Him, but in public they don’t want folks to know that they are associated with Him.¹⁸

[Witnessing; Spiritual Identity, in Christ]

Luke 9:26; Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 1:8

BIBLE

FOR MANY people, the Bible is like the Queen of England. She holds the top position, but has no real power.¹⁹

RECENTLY, I decided to do something I never do. I took out my car manual and read it. I’m a real simple guy. I get in a car, get behind the wheel, turn it on, and roll. That’s it. But one day I was just fooling around, opened my glove compartment, and there was my car manual. Now this manual has been in this car for three years. As far as I’m concerned, this is unnecessary reading.

I see a steering wheel, I see brakes, I see an accelerator, a radio, heat, and air-conditioning. Good to go.

But on this particular day, I decided to flip through my manual. I was shocked at some of the stuff I read in there. There is so much stuff in this car that has never been used! I realized that I’d been doing things manually that the car was set up to do automatically. I realized that I’d not been taking advantage of all that the manufacturer had provided.

On one particularly rainy day, I was trying to look out of my rear window and couldn’t see anything. After three years of having this car, I had no idea there was a windshield wiper back there. It wasn’t that it was not provided, it’s that I was ignorant of the provision. I didn’t know what was provided and I certainly didn’t know how to take advantage of it.

What the Bible, the grace manual, is designed to do is show you all the provisions that God has provided for every believer. The problem is I not only need to know that the manual is there, but I also need to know what it tells me I can do and how things work.²⁰

[God’s Will; Scripture, Importance of]

Josh. 1:8; Ps. 119; 2 Tim. 2:15

WHEN MY oldest son was small, I bought him a bicycle for Christmas. It came with a manual that explained how to put it together. I did not intend on using the manual. After all, I was finishing my doctorate degree. After studying for twelve years post high school, I considered myself to be a smart brother. The bicycle that I had bought for my son had

all these nuts and bolts and various parts, but I had decided that I didn't need this manual. I'd had too much education. I decided to depend on my own human intelligence.

Eight hours later and with just the handlebars on, my wife, Sister Evans, came to the door and said, "Why don't you read the manual?" Could it be, just maybe, that the bicycle maker knew more about bicycle fixing than I did? Could it be that the Life Maker knows more about life living than you do?²¹

[God's Will; Scripture,
Importance of]
Prov. 3:5–6; Mark 12:24;
2 Tim. 3:14–17

BIBLE, APPLICATION OF

MY WIFE at various times over the years wanted to take classes at Dallas Seminary. She didn't want to take the class in the traditional way. She wanted to audit the class. You see, when you audit the class, you can go and sit and get the information but there are no outside requirements. You don't have to study. You don't have to take any tests. You get the information but you don't have the burden of the class.

Many Christians come to church on Sunday mornings and audit the sermon. They go to class, have textbook in hand, sit in their regular seat, and listen to the professor. But all they want to do is audit the class. They don't want to be expected to do any homework. They don't want to pass any tests that God sends their way to check their understanding. These Christians will pay the money to take the class but they don't want to have to meet any requirements. They also don't expect to receive a de-

gree and diploma from the school.

As long as my wife audits her seminary class, she will have no credit on her transcript. There will be no graduation ceremony and nobody will ever hand her a degree. As long as you audit your Christian life, there will be no passing grades, there will be no divine recognition, and there will be no experience of your calling.²²

[Church; Commitment]

1 Sam. 15:22; James 1:23–24;

1 Cor. 9:23–25

A COUPLE decided that they should do something together to strengthen their marriage. They decided to go duck hunting together. They'd heard of other people going duck hunting with dogs, so they figured they needed to buy a good hunting dog and buy the dog they did. They got all of their equipment and their dog and took off to go duck hunting for the day. They tried getting some ducks, but they came to the end of the day and hadn't gotten one. The husband looked at the wife and said, "Honey, we've got to be doing something wrong here. We haven't caught a duck yet."

The wife said, "Well, maybe, if we throw the dog up a little higher, he can catch a duck this time."

That's what a lot of us are doing. We're trying to get a dog to do what a gun was meant to do. We're trying to accomplish things in our lives with tools that don't work or don't make sense. A dog is not the right weapon to get ducks. You need firepower to bring a duck down.

A lot of us have "hound dogs" trying to fix our marriage. We're on the phone with "hound dog" girlfriends or

guy friends. All they're doing is barking us up into more mess. We're doing everything but using firepower from heaven. It's not that we're not trying. The question is, *what* are we trying.

The Word of Christ must dwell in us richly. It has to be the basis of our decisions.²³

[Marriage; Scripture]

Josh. 1:8; Col. 3:16; 1 Peter 2:1–3

BIBLE, AUTHORITY OF

A NAVY captain was sailing and came upon a big light. He thought it was a ship coming toward him. He was the highest-ranking officer in the U.S. Navy at this particular time. So he got on a big bullhorn and said to the ship behind the light, "Move ten degrees south or we're going to crash!"

It said, "I shall not move! You move ten degrees north so you don't crash!"

The captain was getting irritated. He said, "Don't you know who I am? I am a captain in the United States Navy. I say, 'You move ten degrees south so we do not crash!'"

The voice came back, "I shall not move! You move ten degrees north so that you don't crash!"

The captain got back on the speaker and said, "Did you hear me say that I am a captain in the United States Navy?"

The voice came back, "Yes, but I am the lighthouse!"

The Word of God must be the authority for the life of the disciple who is living with a kingdom perspective.²⁴

BIBLE, CENTRALITY OF

IN THE game of football, there is no game without the ball. Players can put on the gear, wear the helmets, and walk in the cleats, but there is no game without the pigskin. Nothing really matters much in football if you don't have the ball.

When you think about it, that little piece of pigskin controls a lot. A touchdown is only a touchdown measured by where the ball is. A first down is only a first down measured by where the ball is. You're on-side or offside in relationship to the ball. Whether it's a catch or an incomplete pass depends on control of the ball. Everything has to do with the ball. Three points or a lack of three points has to do with where the ball went. Isn't it amazing? You can have all the other stuff right, but if there is no football, you just wasted your Saturday afternoon.

In the Christian faith it is possible to have a bunch of stuff right. You can go to the right church, carry the right Bible, and use the right "Christian-ese." You can have all the accessories of Christianity and still not have the main thing. If you don't have the main thing, everything else is a waste of time. Just like we can't play football without a football, we can't be effective Christians without the gospel.²⁵

[Gospel; Scripture]

Rom. 1:16–17; 1 Cor. 9:23

BIBLE, GUIDANCE OF

I HAD a speaking engagement once that required about a forty-five-minute drive. So I got my directions. It was a men's breakfast at a church, so I left my house with plenty of time to spare, put

the directions beside me in the seat, glanced at them, and then got on the freeway headed to the breakfast. After driving for about forty minutes, I glanced at the directions to double-check my exit. I made sure it was the right one, then I exited and made a left. I began driving past the mall, past the light, past another light, and I wasn't seeing anything I thought I was supposed to see. I figured I hadn't gone far enough, so I kept driving.

Things were getting worse, not better. I figured that I ought to pull over and ask somebody. So I pulled over to a convenience store, thinking that I could trust the people who worked there to give me directions. A clerk told me that I hadn't gone far enough. Now, I thought that the church was supposed to be not too far off the freeway, but I figured I had missed something and assumed that the clerk knew what he was talking about. After all, he was from the area. He told me to just keep going and that I'd run right into it. I get in the car and I keep going.

I started seeing cows and realized that I was now in the country. Something about this didn't feel right. I wasn't arriving at where I thought I was supposed to be. So I figured I'd asked the wrong person. I needed to talk to somebody else, get somebody else's opinion. So I asked another guy.

Time was getting late. I was supposed to start speaking at 7:30 a.m. I'd given myself plenty of time, but now it was 7:15 and I didn't know where I was. I was in a bad situation. So, I did ask somebody else. They said they'd never heard of the church. It was now 7:20 and I was getting a little nervous

because I hate being late to anything. I started winding down my window at stoplights, asking random people to help me find my way. It was 7:25 p.m., then 7:30.

I had gone to five different people to tell me where I was supposed to be. Everybody meant well, but nobody could tell me where I needed to go. I decided to read the directions one more time. I picked it up and looked at it closely. Originally, I had only glanced at it. Then I let well-meaning people try to help me. Now, I decided to look closely at the directions. When I exited the freeway, I should have turned RIGHT!

First of all, I listened to myself and turned left. Then I listened to everybody else and really went farther out of the way. But the instructions said turn right. Because I did not pay attention to the instructions but listened to my own understanding and listened to everybody else's understanding, I went left when I should have gone right. So I had to backtrack, and when I backtracked and went two blocks to the right of the freeway, I found the church.

I had lost time; I had lost patience. I was sweating, frustrated, mad, and irritated because I had gone the wrong direction.

Some of us have gone left. "There is a way that seems right to a man" (Proverbs 14:12). Where I wound up was wrong. A lot of us have spent five, ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty years going left and you're running out of time; the hour is late. It's time to backtrack because where God wants to take you is really not that far away.²⁶

[Repentance; God's Will]

Prov. 3:5–6; Ezek. 18:29–31; Acts
17:30–31

THERE was a show I used to watch a couple of years ago called *Early Edition*. The host of the show would get the next day's newspaper, read it, and then do a show about the upcoming news. He'd read a newspaper about the morrow and related it to his viewers today. Because he had tomorrow's newspaper today, he had information nobody else did.

Most of our coworkers don't have the information. Most of our neighbors don't have the information. But as Christians, we've got an Early Edition. God has given us the Early Edition. We can function today in light of what we know about God's plan for the future.²⁷

[Providence]

1 Thess. 4:13–18; Titus 2:11–13

WHEN you are on the highway, you are expected to choose one lane to drive in, though there may be lanes to your left and right. You are expected to stay in your lane and not to swerve into the other lanes, because if you start to swerve to the left or to the right, you're an accident waiting to happen. There's a time and an appropriate way to change lanes.

God's Word gives you a lane to stay in. That lane is based on the written Word and then affirmed by the work of the Spirit in terms of specific application. Stay in that lane and do everything He tells you to do and He will make your way prosperous.²⁸

[Bible, Centrality of; Bible,

Sufficiency of; Blessing; Focus]

Josh. 1:7–9; Ps. 1; John 13:17; James
1:22–25

BIBLE, NEGLECT OF

THE PREACHER came to have dinner with one of the families in his congregation. The woman of the house was very pleased to have the minister in her home and wanted to impress him. She wanted the preacher to read something to the family after dinner. She asked one of her daughters, "Darling, please go and get the good book. Go and get the book we love. Go get the book we read every day."

The girl came back with the Sears catalog.²⁹

Josh. 1:8; Acts 17:11

BIBLE, PROVISION OF

A MAN was in prison and was in need of some money. He wrote his mother and asked her to send five hundred dollars immediately. Soon after, he got a package in the mail. It was a Bible. On the top of the Bible, there was a letter that said, "Son, I love you. Pray and read your Bible."

The man was ticked off. He got on the phone and called his mother. "Mama, I appreciate the Bible, but what I need right now is five hundred dollars."

She told him over the phone, "Son, pray and read your Bible." He got more ticked off and hung up on his mother.

He then wrote a letter. "Mother, I know you believe in God, but that's the problem with you Christians. You are so heavenly minded that you don't know how to function in the real world. When I need five hundred dollars, I don't need a Bible. I need a check or five greenbacks! If I need money, don't send me a Bible and tell me to pray!"

He got a letter back that said, "Son, pray and read your Bible."

He was so irritated at his mother, that for the six months he was in jail that Bible stayed in the corner.

After a long while, he finally got out. His mother was there to meet him. He could hardly speak to her. "Mama, you let me down. I needed you as my mother and you let me down."

She said, "What do you mean, son?"

"I wrote you. I called you. I begged you for five hundred dollars and every time you gave me this same old line to pray and read my Bible."

"Well, son, did you pray and read your Bible?"

"Yeah, I prayed and read my Bible, and I'm still as broke now as I was when you told me the first time to pray and read my Bible."

"Son, do you have your Bible?"

He reached in his bag and he handed her the book.

"Son, let me ask you one more time. Did you pray and read your Bible?"

"Yes, Mama. I told you I prayed and read my Bible."

"Son, you neither prayed nor read your Bible."

She opened up the Bible and at every major divisional section within the text, there was a hundred-dollar bill taped inside of it. If the boy would have just read his Bible he would have understood that the thing he was looking for was in the text. Because he didn't take seriously the Word of God, what the Word of God had to offer he never received.³⁰

BIBLE, SUFFICIENCY OF

THERE WAS a commercial not too long ago for Prego spaghetti sauce. A mother is cooking the spaghetti and the pot is full of what looks like a vibrant, red spaghetti sauce. The aroma appears to be filling the house. The son comes up and looks at his mother cooking the sauce and asks, "Mom, where are the mushrooms?"

She says, "It's in there."

"But what about the sausage?"

"Why, it's in there."

"What about the ripe tomatoes?"

"It's in there."

Prego's spaghetti sauce had kick and flavor, because of what was inside. Every time the boy looked for something to explain what he smelled, his mother would reply, "It's in there."

If you are looking for victory, it's in the Bible. If you're looking for transformation, it's already in there. If you're looking for power, it's in there. If you're looking for deliverance, it's in there. If you're looking for a brand-new you, it's already there. The divine nature has given you everything you need and you can learn about what's available to you by studying the Word of God.³¹

2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Peter 1:3

I AM SURE many of you have mothers like I do. My mother thought castor oil was the medicine for everything.

"Ma, I got a stomachache."

"Bring the castor oil."

"Ma, I got a headache."

"Bring the castor oil."

"Ma, I got a hangnail."

"Bring the castor oil."

My mother had a view that castor oil could fix anything. Now, let me

explain something about castor oil. I didn't prefer castor oil. I didn't like the way castor oil tasted. It didn't matter. I grew up hearing my mother say, "Boy, put this castor oil in your mouth, because it's good for you." She believed that castor oil could fix anything and that it was sufficient for whatever ailed me.³²

BIBLE, USE OF

A PREACHER was late for his appointment and pulled into a parking lot. He went around the parking lot ten times looking for an empty space. The only spot he could find was one where a sign said No Parking. He put a note on his window: "Late for my appointment." Then he wrote underneath, "Tried ten times. Forgive our trespasses."³³

He came back to his car an hour later. There was a note next to his note from the policeman. It read, "Been riding in this neighborhood for ten years. Will lose my job if I don't ticket you. Lead us not into temptation."³³

[Temptation]

THE WORD, like medicine, is designed to address the comprehensive issues of life. A Bible that is falling apart usually belongs to somebody who isn't.³⁴

[Spiritual Maturity]

Ps. 19; James 1:25

BLESSING

ALL OF us know people who are living unproductive lives. Our society is filled with people who offer no productivity to the well-being of themselves, their families, their jobs, or society in general. They are just hanging on.

A leech sucks blood from a host. It takes nutrients without leaving its

host anything beneficial in return. Similar to leeches, unproductive people take, but do not give.

One of the ways God will bless you is by making your life productive. He will enable you to do more with your life than exist. He will enable you to make a life that is worth something.³⁵

[Giving; Christian Living, Power]

Ps. 1; 1 Cor. 12:4-7; Eph. 2:10

HAVE YOU ever been to a real pizzeria? Especially a real, authentic Italian place? The dough is the best! That dough goes through some major abuse before it is ready to be served and eaten. It is slammed down on the counter. Bam! It's treated very rough. A rolling pin mashes it and flattens it out. It is twirled around on a single finger, then thrown spinning up in the air.

Now, most people aren't thinking about the process of making the dough. They just want the good stuff—the pepperoni, sausage, cheese, and sauce. But the good stuff doesn't happen unless the dough has been made ready to receive it.

See, many people want to see the goodness of God, the power of God, or the blessing of God and wonder why it's not happening the way they think it should. God is trying to tell them that "the dough isn't quite ready to receive it." Sometimes we are just not ready for the blessings of God to be fulfilled.³⁶

[Sanctification; Maturity]

Luke 14:11; James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6

CREDITCARD companies send mass mailings to people with amazing news of great grace. The recipients have not applied for a new card or a new level of

credit, but the credit card company freely offers unsolicited spending power. These gracious companies write customers to tell them they are prequalified or preapproved. The only thing left for the customer to do is to accept the offer and spend! The limit has already been negotiated and all that's left to do is use it. By accepting Christ, we have accepted His terms and are prequalified for the spiritual benefits and resources available to us.³⁷

[Grace; Provision, God's]

Rom. 5:17; Eph. 2:8

CITIES have food banks and blood banks. They're designed to help other people live. Although these banks are set up to collect, they are not designed simply to hoard and to store. The resources they gather help other people to live—either by the infusion of food or by the infusion of nutrients from blood.

God has saved and blessed Christians so that we can share the blessings God has given us with others.³⁸

[Giving]

Gen. 12:3; Acts 2:44–45;

1 Cor. 16:1–4

THE STORY is told of Mr. Yates, who owned a farm in Texas. The Great Depression came and he was having trouble keeping up with the payments on his farm. The bank began to press Mr. Yates and gave him thirty days to pay his back payments or face foreclosure. With three weeks left to go, a man came to Mr. Yates's door. He worked for an oil company. He asked Mr. Yates to give the company a lease to drill on his farm for oil. Yates knew he was going to lose the farm anyway, so he decided that

it couldn't hurt. Well, that oil company did drill and hit a gusher—eighty-two thousand barrels of oil a day. Mr. Yates immediately became a multi, multi, many-times-over millionaire.

Now, there's a question on the floor. Exactly when did Mr. Yates become a millionaire? Did Mr. Yates become a millionaire when the oil company struck oil or did Mr. Yates become a millionaire when he bought the farm? Mr. Yates was a millionaire the moment he purchased the farm, but he lived in poverty because he didn't know what was underneath the ground.

When you came to faith in Jesus Christ as your personal sin bearer, the moment you came to faith, you were blessed “in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing” (Ephesians 1:3). Like Mr. Yates, many of us are living in the Great Depression. We are living spiritually poor, spiritually defeated, spiritually weak, and spiritually anemic lives even while sitting on top of all this wealth, because we don't know what's down there.³⁹

[Provision, God's]

Col. 2:2

WILLIAM Randolph Hearst, the great publisher, read about a painting and became greatly interested in it. Desperately desiring to own this painting, he sent his people all over to try to locate this painting but they couldn't find it anywhere. A year later, out of the blue, one of his employees came to him and told him that the painting had at last been found. Hearst, excited about the discovery, asked where it had been all this time. His employee said, “It was in your basement. You've owned it all the time.”

Mr. Hearst had never read the ledger that had record of everything he owned. He did not understand the wealth that he already possessed. Many believers operate their lives never fully understanding all of the blessing that is available to them in Christ.⁴⁰

A MAN died who was extremely wealthy. His will was full of art pieces—very expensive art pieces. This man had a son who had died before him, a son whom he loved, and this son would have been his only heir. Soon after the death of the wealthy man a public auction was held that included the valuable art pieces. People came from all over the world because of those works of art. Over a thousand people gathered to participate in the auction. The auctioneer began the auction by offering up for sale a portrait, painted by the deceased son. It was a rather plain painting—not at all like the other expensive art pieces. The floor opened for bids, but there weren't any. After what seemed like a long silence, a little old man walked down the aisle. As he neared the front of the room, the auctioneer recognized him. He had been the servant of the wealthy man.

He meagerly and almost shamefully offered a couple of dollars from his pocket for the child-drawn portrait. The auctioneer hit his gavel and said, "Sold!" The many people in the room shifted with excitement, preparing for the main part of the selling to begin. But much to their surprise and chagrin, the auctioneer hit the gavel again and said, "Auction over." The room filled with loud chatter and confusion, wondering at the early close of the auction. The auctioneer

went on to explain. In the will of the master, the instructions specifically said to offer for sale the painting drawn by his son first, and that whoever gets the painting of his son gets the whole art collection. The master had decided well in advance that whoever loved his son and accepted him could not only have his son's work, but all the other benefits that belonged to the father.⁴¹

[Salvation, Benefits of]

John 5:22–23; 2 Peter 1:17

WHEN I first started traveling and speaking in other places, my kids were small so I'd go by the gift store in the airport and I'd buy a gift to bring back to them. I would buy them a blessing. I'd buy a little toy or a trinket from the gift shop like some jacks for my girls or a little car for my boys. On my return I would give them the gift. They would always be excited. I would always get a hug and a kiss. There would be great gratitude and thanks because I had come back with a blessing and they were excited about the blessing. What made me feel good and excited me was the fact that they were excited about the blessing. I got a hug and I got a kiss as they expressed gratitude. But after a while, they began to look forward to my trips. They wanted me to leave again. In other words, my kids were so into the blessings that they had lost sight of the blessing. As long as the blessing brought back a blessing, they were fine. A lot of folk want to come to church and don't want to mess with the blessing. They just want the blessing to leave behind a blessing. God has said, "Return to me" (Malachi 3:7). He wants us to be focused on Him.⁴²

[Thanksgiving, Motivation for;

Intimacy, with God;
First Love]
Deut. 8:10–11; Rev. 2:3–5

THE GREEK word for blessed, *makarios*, was the name of an island off of Greece—the Makarios Island. It was known as the blessed island because it was self-contained. The residents didn't need to leave the island in order to get their needs met. The island offered everything that they needed. The natural resources of the blessed island were so thick, so rich, so fruitful, and so productive that everything they needed to enjoy their lives was already built-in. The inhabitants of the island were self-sustained and self-contained without having to run to another island to get their needs met. The blessed island provided everything they needed.

All the stuff you get is outside of you. The new car, the new house, and the new money are all fine . . . but they are all extra. They are a bonus. In the biblical world of being blessed, you should be okay being on the island. Just being in the Kingdom with the King ought to put you in a blessed location. One of the ways you know that you aren't blessed yet in the biblical sense of the word is that you got to keep leaving the island to have fun. You need more than your relationship with God to have peace. You crave more than your communion with the Father to have joy. The blessed person finds their sufficiency with Him.⁴³

[Kingdom of God; Contentment;
Provision, God's]
Matt. 5:1–12; 1 Tim. 6:6

IF YOU were to go to Universal Studios, either in Florida or in California,

they will take you on a tour in a tram through their movie lots. In these movie lots you'll see western towns and modern-day types of towns where films are made. The tour guides will explain to you as you drive through that what you are looking at is a facade. The external may look like it's a town or a city, but if you were to go on the other side, there's nothing there. There's no reality behind what you see. It looks good, but there's nothing else there. The lots are simply there to create an impression of a town or a city for the purposes of the film.

Unfortunately today, much of what goes on in the lives of Christians is not a reflection of true blessing but more like a facade. Beyond the external, their lives have nothing solid on the other side.⁴⁴

[Weakness]

BLESSING, SOURCE OF

ONE OF the reasons that we don't recognize the goodness of God is that we confuse the means of delivery with the source. Many times we think that unless a blessing falls miraculously from heaven into our laps that it didn't come from God. We mix up medium and source.

When we listen to the radio, we can do so only because the radio is a method of delivery. There are no drums in the radio. No horns and no guitars reside inside the equipment. The radio is only a conduit—a point of contact. Even when your radio stops working, there's music in the air. All the radio does is receive a signal that comes from another source and deliver it to you. If you lose sight of that fact, you'll give the radio more

credit than a radio ought to have. If you place too much weight on the medium, you'll forget the source.⁴⁵

James 1:17

NORMALLY, when people eat a balanced evening meal, it includes vegetables. Those vegetables will have been purchased at a grocery store. Of course, a grocery store bought the vegetables from someone who farmed and harvested them. The farmer had those vegetables to sell because he planted seeds in the ground. The land in which the seed was planted was also supported by both rain and sunshine. Rain and sunshine are dependent on heaven.

Rain from heaven must come down upon the land in which the seed has been planted—so the fruit and vegetable can sprout, so the farmer can deliver it to the grocery store, so that we can pick it up when we go shopping, so that we can have a nice evening meal. If a person gets stuck appreciating the grocery store, then they've missed the source.

The grocery store is simply the mechanism of delivery. Now, if God stops the sunshine and rain, stops the replication of the seed, or does not allow the land to be fruitful, then there is no trip to the grocery store.⁴⁶

[Provision, God's]

Matt. 5:44–45

THE CEREAL that we eat with milk comes from the grain, which came from the mill, which goes back to the provision of God in the wheat fields. The milk came from the cows that ate the grass that came from the ground that God provided. Everything you have is traced back to God.⁴⁷

BLESSING, SURPRISE

A MAN took his girlfriend out for dinner and when they sat down, he laid an elaborate box on the table for her birthday. All the while they were eating dinner, she just kept thinking about this box, because it was a big box, and she wanted to know what was inside. She could hardly eat. The waiting to open the gift was killing her, but her boyfriend told her to open the gift after dinner. All she could think about was what was in the box.

Finally dinner was over. "Can I open the box now?"

"Yeah, you can open the box."

She opened the box and pulled out a pillow. "Oh, wow, I mean, this is a nice pillow . . . but it's a pillow."

She turned the pillow over, thinking that something was taped to the backside. There was nothing.

"Well, thank you." It was obvious she was disappointed that she got a pillow.

Her boyfriend got up, took the pillow from her, and laid the pillow on the floor. He got down on one knee, took her by the hand, and said, "Will you marry me?"

She forgot about the pillow. The one who gave her the pillow now became a lot more important.⁴⁸

BODY OF CHRIST

SYMBIOTIC growth is the growth that occurs between two organisms where both benefit. Parasitic growth is growth that occurs in one organism because it's feeding off of another. Christians must ask themselves how they are functioning in the organism of the Body of Christ.

Am I a spiritual parasite? Sing to

me. Preach to me. Pray for me. Counsel me. Help me, but expect nothing from me. That is a parasite. A Christian interested in symbiotic growth says, "Yes, I have needs, but I'm willing to give too because everyone needs to benefit."⁴⁹

[Commitment; Giving]

Eph. 4:1–16

YOUR HUMAN body is made up of systems. These include the nervous system, circulatory system, muscular system, lymphatic system, skeletal system, and immune system. These are systems that are interdependent upon one another and when one system goes down, the rest of the body is negatively impacted.⁵⁰

1 Cor. 12:12–26

GOD DIDN'T put a hand on your wrist so your wrist could look good. He didn't put a foot on your ankle just so you could have something dangling. Every part of you was prescribed to accomplish a function. A nonfunctioning, noncontributing body part is something that you would have checked by a doctor, 'cause something is wrong.⁵¹

FOR TWO years, a little girl was an only child. She knew nothing about sharing because there was no competition. No competition for attention. No competition for love. All the dresses were hers. All the toys were hers. All the ingratiating elements were hers. It was all about her until the second child was born. When the second child, a girl, was born and brought home from the hospital, things had to be shared. Time had to be shared. Attention had to be shared. Love had to be shared.

One day, the father of the two girls walked into the nursery to find the eldest daughter standing and snarling over the new baby girl as she slept in the cradle. And then she did it. She took her hand and slapped the little baby. If a little girl can be that sinful at two years of age, imagine how sinful people are at twenty-two, thirty-two, or forty-two—especially when they've learned to become pros!

Needless to say, this little girl did not go without punishment because she exhibited a heart filled with evil! Because love had to be shared, she rebelled. But she needed to understand that rebelling against her sister also meant getting her in trouble with her father. When you are a rebellious member of the Body of Christ, your Daddy is upset.⁵²

BODY OF DEATH

YEARS AGO cars were not as sophisticated as they are now. When the power steering fluid level was good, turning the wheel was a breeze with one finger. When your power steering fluid got low, you'd have to force the wheel to turn. You'd have to pull and tug. It wasn't natural. The pull of the wheel back to the center was so strong that without power steering, when you'd take your hands off the wheel, it would snap back to its neutral position.

Some of our lives are like this. We pull and tug trying to make ourselves better and different. After awhile we get tired and go right back to where our bodies are naturally programmed to be. That is what happens when you try to fix the "body of this death" (Romans 7:24) through human effort. It is naturally bent to sin.

So it is always going to go back there. Once you take your hands off of it for one minute, it is going to roll right back to its natural bent.⁵³

[Flesh]

Rom. 7:13–18; Gal. 5:17

BOUNDARIES

PARENTS of teenagers know that the boundary lines between parent and child can get blurry real quick. The older the young person gets, the more apt they are to rebel against restrictions. Many a parent has had to remind their teenagers of who's who. The propensity of the young person is to mentally erase the parent-child distinction because they don't want to be told to clean up their room. They don't want restrictions; they want freedom without boundaries, which erases the line of demarcation.

God wants it to be clear that there is a major difference between man and God—a big-time difference. God is transcendent. God is infinite. Man is not. There is only one God. Man is not Him, so he needs restrictions.⁵⁴

BROKENNESS

THE PICTURE of brokenness is of a wild stallion that wants its independence. It does not want to be ridden; it does not want to be told what to do. Now, it doesn't mind the cowboy feeding it or keeping the trough full of water. It doesn't mind having a place to go into out of the rain. It just doesn't want anyone to get on its back. But the process of breaking a stallion or breaking a wild horse involves the cowboy getting on its back and riding it. The stallion usually bucks and bucks and tries to throw the cowboy off.

“Get off my back!”

“Bless me with the food. Bless me with the water. Bless me with a covering. But don't get on my back!”

The cowboy gets on the back of the horse and rides it out. Sometime he's thrown off, but if the goal is the breaking, he rides that wild horse until it yields. How do you know when a horse has been broken? It doesn't lose its strength; it doesn't lose the muscles in its legs. It does not lose its God-given uniqueness and identity as a horse. It's just now a horse under somebody else's control.

Many of us want the blessings from God, but we don't want Him riding us and bringing us into submission to His will.⁵⁵

[Blessing; Submission]

James 4:7

BROKENNESS, IMPORTANCE OF

TO ENJOY the fragrance of perfume or cologne, you must break the seal of the bottle in which it comes. To see a plant rise from the ground, the shell must be broken open by the substance inside. To enjoy roasted peanuts, there must be a breaking of its outer core. For a baby chick to experience life, it must break the egg that surrounds it. If you and I want to see God's face, we must be broken first.⁵⁶

Matt. 21:44

BROKENNESS, PROCESS OF

THE REFINISHING of antique furniture is an awesome process. Strong chemicals strip away the old varnish. Then sandpaper machines sand it down, exposing all the crooks, nooks, and crannies that need repair. The sanding

continues until the surface is even. Then it is varnished, over and over until it has a smooth, refinished surface. It is varnished until it gets back the glory of its originally intended look.

God will strip you down. He will sand and sand. He sands until He exposes every scratch, every nook, and every cranny. This is the part that hurts the worst. This is the part where most believers will cry out to the Lord in pain. This is the part when we must trust that His grace is sufficient. God follows the sanding process with the varnish. This is the point at which the life of Christ shines through in the life of the Christian. Your identity in Christ begins to reveal itself, and you'll find power you've never had because you've been broken.⁵⁷

[Transformation; Character,
Importance of; Trials; Tests]
Heb. 12:5–7; 1 Peter 1:6–7

A NUMBER of years ago, our kitchen was remodeled. The remodeler came in and showed us some great plans. He showed us pictures of what the new cabinets would look like, samples of our options for wallpaper, and color cards with choices for paint. It was a glorious sight to see what our new kitchen was going to look like on paper. In fact, there was so much excitement and anticipation about the new kitchen, we forgot about the process. To get that kitchen remodeled, stuff had to be torn down and torn up. Things got so bad in our house, that at one point, we had to move in with our daughter to get away from all of the flying dust. The remodeler had to tear up the floor, tear down the cabinets, move out the appliances, and sand down the walls. We had to get out

of there. We couldn't take it! But we wouldn't have been able to get a new kitchen if the old one wasn't torn up first.

Many people want God to give them a new life, a new job, or a new situation; but they don't want Him to touch anything. If I would have told my remodeler that I didn't want him to touch anything, he would have told me that I didn't want to remodel. If I wanted new paint, a new floor, or new cabinets, none of that would be possible if the old stuff wasn't messed up first. We have got to trust God and give Him permission to tear things up so that He can make all things new.⁵⁸

[Transformation; Character,
Importance of; Trials; Tests;
Surrender, Benefits of]

WE HAVE recycling bins in our church. They take paper, bottles, and cans. They are designed to give them new life. These materials are taken to recycling centers where fire is used to break down the core components of the paper, or the glass, or the aluminum in order to reshape them into something brand-new. But the materials can't be reshaped until they are put under enough heat that they can be stripped of all the external and only the inner essence it left. Then the materials can be remade. God wants to recycle us. He'll keep us in the fire as long as it takes to strip us.⁵⁹

[Transformation; Character,
Importance of; Trials; Tests]
Ps. 66:10; Isa. 48:10

ALL OF you have bought concentrated juices that are packed in the can. That juice will go a long way. In order