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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]