

I Timothy 4:6-16
September 5, 2021
"The Best Sermon Illustration"
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[Title Slide]

Let us Pray:

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.
Come as the fire and burn,
Come as the wind and cleanse,
Come as the light and reveal,
Convict us, Convert us, Consecrate us...until we are wholly thine.

And now, Lord, my prayer is simply this:
That the words of my mouth
And the words of all our hearts will be found pleasing and acceptable to you,
for you are our rock and our redeemer...Amen.

Sermon

The first thing I want us to do this morning is find a Bible – paper or electronic – open it to today's Scripture - I Timothy 4:6-16.

While you do that (Dave & Carrie / Deb) a little Bible searching music please. [Theme to Jeopardy]

Okay, now that you have the scripture, mark it and set it aside - we'll come back to it later.

About 14 years ago I attended a conference on youth ministry at Princeton Theological Seminary and there I heard an astounding statement. It was about the importance of stories. The speaker told us how we all have a story and if we listen very carefully to the people around us they are letting us in on their stories from the very second we engage in conversation.

The speaker then went on to say that a recent study found that a preacher can preach the same sermon within four to six months and that most parishioners will not remember the sermon from before. This same congregation though will remember the stories that were told even if they were preached a year or more later.

So, this morning, I'm not going to give you a sermon. Instead, I am going to share with you some good sermon illustrations and stories I have heard or read over the years. These are some of the stories that stick with me and have proved to be God's teachable moments in my life.

Please keep in mind this morning's message is not aimed at anyone, it is simply a bunch of stories this minister has heard and liked over the years. However, if anyone feels a gentle tapping on the shoulder of their soul this morning, I simply say, investigate that nudge a little further this week and see if God might not be trying to tell you something. I have found that gentle nudge has been God's way of promoting and spurring change in people's lives – that we might become the people God knows we could be.

So, sit back, relax and listen.

The first story involves an ordained Presbyterian minister, who by the way is not me. Stop thinking it's me...right now. In fact, it's not even any ordained Presbyterian minister I know, however this story is a good one. It goes like this:

The minister had finished preaching on one of his best sermons to date. He was feeling good with his delivery; even better with his theology and was delighted that God's Holy Spirit had showed up that morning to help fill in some of the gaps along the way. The minister had just pronounced the benediction and was traveling the length of the aisle to greet worshippers as they left morning worship. Now, truth be told, this was some of the tensest time in his week because he never knew what he might encounter at the doors on a Sunday morning following worship. But this morning, this morning he was feeling okay about taking up position at the door to shake hands.

He stood at the door greeting folks as they were leaving and exchanging pleasantries with parishioners.

"Have a nice day." [Shake a hand]

"It was so good to see you this morning. How's the garden this year?" [Shake another hand]

"Oh, Mr. Winthrop, it's so good to see you up and around after your hip replacement."

Just about then, he felt the tug at his robe and knew that in 3-2-1 [look down at knees] his son's face would appear through his robe, as was their ritual.

"Hey pal, how you doing?"

"What was children's church like this morning?"

"Pastor that was a fine message this morning. You've given us all something to think about."

"Oh, well thank you Mrs. Jeffries." [Shake a hand]

"And who is this good looking young man?" [She bends to shake son's hand]

"And I'll just bet you love Jesus don't you?"

The young boy looked up at this pillar in the church and boldly proclaimed, "NO!"

Flustered, the preacher was just about to say something, when Mrs. Jeffries being much older, and wiser flashed an it's okay smile to the pastor and followed the boy's declaration with a probing question, "And why don't you love Jesus?"

"Because he stole my daddy!"

"Hmm.," the pastor said, "Kids say some funny things." "HONEY!"

Well, after the kids were put to bed that evening, this preacher retold the story to his wife and after it was over he said, "Can you believe it?"

"Yes, I can." came his wife's reply.

"Wait a minute, you're taking his side on this one."

"Well yeah," his wife said, "can you blame him? You've got meetings almost every night. You rush home just in time for dinner and then you're gone for another meeting."

"How many times have you had to reschedule things with him for an emergency at church?"

"I know that one day he'll understand the importance of your pastoral position, but for right now he's just a five-year-old who wants to play with his daddy."

That conversation stuck with that pastor.

That Wednesday evening the pastor began the monthly session meeting with that story and then announced starting today, "all church meetings will be over by 7:00 p.m.; Fridays are my day to spend with family so barring the unforeseen real emergency messages will be taken at the church and followed up on Monday; and Sundays following worship are also family time."

He ministered to that congregation for another ten years.

The second story I tell this morning is again about an ordained Presbyterian minister, who once again is not me. This pastor was working on a sermon in his study at home. He was deep in thought when his daughter came in to see him. He put the lid of his laptop down and turned his attention to his daughter who climbed up on his lap and asked what he was doing. He told her he was working on his sermon and her face lit up. She wanted to help.

He told her that he was doing fine and was happy enough just to have this visit from her. But she kept insisting. The more he told her it wasn't necessary the more she begged to help. And as the tennis match of request to help and assurance that help was not needed went on, this minister was reminded of the time constraint he was under. He had set aside only an hour to work on this message before he had to be at his next appointment.

Just then, he remembered that there was something she could do to help. He needed to check out a story for his message this week that he had read in a book that was downstairs by his reading chair in the living room.

So he told his daughter, "Daddy needs the book with the white cover by his chair in the living room. It's in the basket by Daddy's chair. If you would get that for Daddy that would help Daddy out a whole bunch." The girl jumped off his lap and ran downstairs.

A few minutes went by and she had not returned.

So he waited.

A few more minutes went by and he stood up from his desk and went to the stair well and yelled down, "Honey, do you need help finding the book Daddy needs?"

"No Daddy," came the response, "I found it."

Within a few moments the sound of little feet clapping up the stairs was heard and the little girl burst into her Daddy's office with book in hand, "Here you go Daddy. Here's the book you needed."

Her father turned to the child, took the book from her hand, opened it up and said, "Thank you dear." And then placed the book on the desk next to his computer. He then he picked the child up on his lap and gave her a great big hug and thanked her for being such a big help. Within moments of hugging his little girl she jumped off his lap and was off to another part of the house to play with her brother.

The father then got up from his desk, walked downstairs into the living room to his reading chair, leaned down and picked the white book up from the pile of books next to the chair and returned to his upstairs office to finish that sermon.

Now I have never heard that man preach, but I surely would like to.

The third story this morning has nothing to do with Presbyterianism or ministers, so we can all breathe a collective sigh of relief.

It involves a husband and wife who had been married a few years when they welcomed into their home the bundle of joy he had always wanted. Their new baby girl came into this world with a cherry red hue. He sat with her every day and talked to her so lovingly. He bathed that little girl of his almost every night and even gave her a fresh coat of wax once a month. He loved his vintage Ford Mustang convertible.

And his wife knew how much he loved that car. So much so that she only drove it on special occasions and usually under very supervised conditions. That's what made it so tough the day she had to make the phone call to him from the side of the road after she had been in the accident at that intersection he had always warned her about.

Thank God her husband's cell phone was out of range at that particular moment and she

got his voice mail. Maybe the blow would be softened if he heard it first from a recording.

Trembling still from the accident and the fear of having to break the news to her husband about his baby, she reached into the glove compartment of the car to get the insurance information to exchange with the other motorists and police officer on the scene. As she opened the envelope containing the insurance papers several thoughts ran through her head -

How much is the repair bill going to be?

How much will their insurance premiums jump?

How mad will her husband be with her?

She couldn't answer those first two questions for about a month.

She got her answer to the last one as she pulled out the insurance card – paper clipped to the insurance card was a note that read, "Honey, if you're reading this note than it's probably not a good moment right now and I want you to know something-it's you I love & not the car."

This next story is about a man who went looking for the perfect car. He wanted to get the car of his dreams, much like the man in our previous story. This man searched high and low. He went on the Internet; hunted through the classifieds; he stopped by every car dealership he passed to check out their inventories. Then one day he found it.

Mint condition. Just the right color; make; model and year. Things were looking good. He walked around it. .. body was in great condition - immaculate condition. Tires looked right. Paint looked brand new. Things were looking real good. Then the sales associate approached him.

"Great little car there, huh?"

"Yeah. Almost too great. What's wrong with it?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Nope. It's a great little car. Want to test drive it?"

"Sure."

The dealer handed him the keys; slapped a dealer tag on the car and off the man went for a test drive. It handled beautifully. It made that little interstate feel like the autobahn. The man drove the car back to the dealership and tried as hard as he could to contain his excitement as he entered the dealers office.

"What are you asking for that car?"

"You saw the sticker price, didn't you?"

"Yeah, I saw it, but that has to be a mistake it's way too low for a beauty like that?"

"Nope. No mistake."

"Well, if that's right, then there's got to be something really wrong with that car. So, tell me, what's the problem with the car? You've got to tell me before I buy the car!"

"Nothing's wrong with the car, sir. It is in fine working condition. It's a great buy."

"You're sure nothing's wrong with the car."

"No sir."

"Then you won't mind if I take it to my mechanic for a second opinion."

"Not at all sir."

The man returned from his mechanic with the same diagnosis that nothing was wrong with the car. So, he declared to the sales associate, "Let's make this deal happen." And the two began processing the paperwork.

Just as the man was about to sign on the dotted line and make the sale official the sales associate said, "Oh, I guess I should tell you..."

"Oh, here it comes," the man thought to himself as he looked at the sales associate.

"While there is nothing mechanically wrong with the car I should tell you that the one statement we have heard about this car from previous owners is that this car doesn't take you where you want to go...it takes you where you need to go."

Upon hearing those words, the man set the pen on the table, got up from his chair and left the dealership.

Conclusion

Those are four pretty good sermon illustrations – at least to me.

But if you want to hear the best sermon illustration, then find that Bible you set aside.

I want us to read the passage together and see if we can't find the best sermon illustration.

[Scripture Slide – 1 Timothy 4:6-16]

⁶ If you put these instructions before the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound teaching that you have followed.

⁷ Have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives' tales. Train yourself in godliness,

⁸ for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

⁹ The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance.

¹⁰ For to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

¹¹ These are the things you must insist on and teach.

¹² Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

¹³ Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching.

¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders.

¹⁵ Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress.

¹⁶ Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.

[Title Slide]

Did you catch it?

Do you see the best sermon illustration in that passage?

It's there. Did you notice it?

It's staring you right in the face.

It's right there in verse 12 - "but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity."

The best sermon illustration is you.

"You may be the only Bible or image of Christ anyone ever reads or sees."

When your family; friends; co-workers; strangers look at your life, what are they reading?

Who are they seeing?

Are we the kind of illustrations God can use in a sermon?

Amen & Amen.