

Judges 17-18 “A Mother in the Real World—Lessons from Micah’s Mom”**

Main Idea: By looking at Micah’s mom in Judges 17-18, we learn three vital lessons that every mother in the real world needs to know, not to mention every father and child too.

- I. Moms in the real world have influence (17:1-2).
 - A. They influence by what they say.
 - B. They influence by what they do.
- II. Moms in the real world don’t always use their influence as God intends (17:3-4).
 - A. Micah’s mom talked about the Lord.
 - B. Micah’s mom brought an idol into her son’s life.
- III. Moms in the real world need a Savior (and so do dads, and kids, and everybody else (17:5-18:31).
 - A. We see the need in Micah’s life (17:5-6).
 - B. We see the need in a young Levite’s life (17:7-13).
 - C. We see the need in the tribe of Dan (18:1-29).
 - D. We see the need in the life of Moses’ grandson (18:30-31).
 1. While the Law is good, it can’t save us or our kids.
 2. Our kids need what we need, a deliverer.
 3. What we all need, God in His grace has provided.

Make It Personal: Three vital questions to ponder...

1. What am I doing about my need for a Deliverer?
2. What am I doing about my family’s need for a Deliverer?
3. What am I doing with the influence God has given me?

God is the perfect parent. There is none else.

God always does what’s right for His children, all the time. But no other parent can say that, not in truth.

That’s why I’m going to preach this message on this Mother’s Day morning.

Like last year, it was another message about a mother in the real world, Mrs. M, as we referred to her, Manoah’s wife and Samson’s mother, in Judges 13.

This year it’s Micah’s mom, in Judges 17-18.

If you think you’re a perfect mom, or had one, this isn’t for you. This message is for moms who did things to their kids they later regretted, or said things they wished they could take back, or made promises to them that in retrospect cause them great pain.

Like Micah’s mom.

This message is for moms in the real world where things happen that break your heart at times. I’m so thankful for a Bible that has much to say to moms (and dads, and kids, and singles too) who live in the real world. The Bible doesn’t sugar-coat our problem. We are *not* good moms and dads and kids in God’s sight, not left to ourselves. We are *sinner*s who constantly miss the mark.

But in His grace, God offers us as sinners exactly what we need. No matter who we are and what we’ve done, He offers us hope, a way to begin again through His Son, Jesus the Christ.

Yet here’s the kicker. As sinners, we won’t appreciate God’s gracious provision for us until we grasp precisely who we are and what we’ve done.

So He tells us. Sometimes He says it bluntly, as in Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” At other times He says it graphically, as in today’s text, through a picture we’d rather not see.

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

But He knows we need to see it, for we need to see ourselves as He sees us. Painful as it is. Resistant as we naturally are to the implications. For our good and His glory, we must see it.

You hardly ever hear a sermon from Judges 17-18 (I can think of only *one* and that was second-hand on a cassette tape). Frankly, it's sort of embarrassing even to read. I thought of entitling this sermon, "A Reality Show Mother," for the plot we're about to behold is something you might see (although I wouldn't recommend it) on *Days of Our Lives*.

But we need it. I read recently that over 5 million children in the United States do not live with their mothers.

I received a letter last week from Rex Whiteman, who shared a story about a mom who came to the Union Mission last year. He called her Gina, who writes:

Last year I made some very bad choices in my life that weren't good for me or my kids. I was on probation for other violations when I relapsed and failed a drug test. I placed my children with family so they would have someone. I thought for sure I had lost them forever.

Thankfully, there's more to the story in Gina's case, as she shares:

While in jail, I realized my need for God. When I was offered a rehabilitation program, I chose Brookside [at the Union Mission] because it is faith based. I wanted to learn more about God, how to maintain my sobriety, and how to change certain areas of my life. I also wanted to learn how to be a good mother and raise my children to love God and be productive in society.

While at Brookside, I began having minimum visitation with my kids on Friday nights and Saturdays. Those went well and after several weeks they allowed more visitations. I had to do random drug testing to show I was staying clean. On March 25th of this year, I *got my kids back!*

Today, I want to be closer to my kids and be the woman and mother God wants me to be. It isn't easy with three small children but I am thankful for every minute.¹

It all starts when we're honest with ourselves, about our condition, and our need for what God alone can provide. And friends, that's true not just for people with drug problems, like Gina, but for those of us who struggle with anger, or people pleasing, or a quick tongue, or any other manifestation of the sinful heart.

So while what we're about to see might make us uncomfortable, I'm convinced it's precisely what we need, what *I* need. By looking at Micah's mom in Judges 17-18, we're going to learn three vital lessons that every mother in the real world needs to know, not to mention every father and child too.

I. Moms in the real world have influence (17:1-2).

We are what we are today, every one of us, in part, because of the *influence* of our mothers. Granted, there are other influences. But oh, the influence a mother has on her little ones! And even on her grown-up ones, as in this case.

Notice verses 1-2, "Now a man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim said to his mother, 'The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you and about which I heard you utter a curse—I have that silver with me; I took it.' Then his mother said, 'The LORD bless you, my son!'"

¹ Letter from Union Mission, Rex Whiteman executive director, May 2014.

So we meet a mother and her son named Micah. He's not a little boy, for he has his own sons according to verse 5. But he's still feeling the powerful influence of his mother.

It's why he comes to his mom with a confession. He'd stolen money from her, he says, and we're not talking small change either.

The author doesn't give her name, for reasons that will soon be apparent. But apparently, Micah's mom (a widow, based on no mention of a husband in the story) is a rather well to do woman, based on the amount of money Micah stole from her.

Micah says he took *1,100 shekels of silver*. That's about 28 pounds.² To put that in perspective, in a moment we'll see a man who's thrilled to get a salary of 10 shekels of silver a year, which gives a good indicator as to the market value of this stash. It's worth noting that back in Judges 16:5, this is the amount of the bribe each of the Philistine rulers gave Delilah to risk her life and betray Samson, five times 1,110 shekels of silver.³

Where'd this mother get this kind of money? And what in the world is this son doing taking it? We're not told. Why did he confess? We do know that. Micah says he confessed because he heard his mom utter a curse, probably something to the effect of, "May the Lord cause great harm to come upon the scoundrel that took my silver!"

Apparently, that curse did what his conscience wouldn't do, put some fear into his soul. So he makes his confession, of sorts, to his mom.

I say, of sorts, because I don't see any remorse here, just the fear of undesirable consequences. Sort of ironic, too. Micah is the shortened form of the name "Micahyahu," which appears in the Hebrew text of verses 1 and 4, and means "Who is like Yahweh?"

This Micah certainly isn't.

And, of course, that's the point of this story. This is just one man in one family doing what an entire nation was doing at the time. This is the time of the judges in Israel, eleven centuries BC, a time when every man was doing what was right in his own eyes. Time and time again God sent deliverers to bail them out, and time and time again they did what Micah did, turned from God and His law and did things their own way.

How bad was it? In the Judges' epilogue, which is the section we're in (Judges 17-21), the human author of Judges doesn't even comment on the moral breakdown. He chooses rather to let the actions speak for themselves in their ugly clarity.

And not just Micah's actions either. His mother's, too.

When I say that mothers exert tremendous influence on their kids, it's not always a godly influence. As we look at Micah's mom, we see two ways mothers influence their kids, even their adult kids.

A. They influence by what they say. And...

B. They influence by what they do.

We've all been influenced by what our mothers *said* and *did*. Words and action. Both powerful influencers, often for good, sometimes for ill.

Look first at what Micah's mom *said*. "The LORD bless you, my son!" Huh? Micah's not a five-year-old who's confessed to taking a cookie. He's, what, forty? And he just fessed up to stealing the equivalent of tens of thousands of dollars from *his own*

² According to the NIV footnote.

³ See NIV Study Bible footnote on Judges 16:5. Based on the rate offered for Joseph in Genesis 37:28, this amount would have been the purchase price for 275 slaves.

mother! If he's doing that to his mother, what's he been doing to other people, like his boss and unsuspecting neighbors? This guy's in trouble.

And she responds, "May Yahweh, bless you, my son!?" Bless you?! Is that what she said? Is this what a godly mother asks the Lord to do for her I-don't-like-the-consequences-yet-refuse-to-repent-of-my-sin son?

Many of us have been blessed by the unconditional devotion of a mom. I know I have. If there was a fight on the playground, the other kid started it. If there's a fight in the church, the other guy started it. *I know my son. He would never do that!*

Thank God for a mother's unconditional love! But let's be honest. Love *can* be blind, can't it? In this case it sure was. The Lord bless you? No, mom. There were some other words that this son desperately needed to hear from his influential mother. And the absence of those words exerted a powerful influence on his life that I'm sure she never anticipated.

That brings us to our second lesson. One, moms in the real world have influence.

II. Moms in the real world don't always use their influence as God intends (17:3-4).

Granted, dads don't either, and kids are responsible for the choices they make regardless. But here's a good question for moms (and dads, and grandparents too). How is what I'm saying and doing now influencing my kids and grandkids for the future? They're listening, and watching, and everything that we do, and fail to do, is a contributing factor in their lives. We'll come back to that thought a little later.

Notice how Micah's mom influenced her son in verses 3-4, "When he returned the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, she said, 'I solemnly consecrate my silver to the LORD for my son to make a carved image and a cast idol. I will give it back to you.' So he returned the silver to his mother, and she took two hundred shekels of silver and gave them to a silversmith, who made them into the image and the idol. And they were put in Micah's house."

In this scene we're told that Micah's mom did two things for her son.

A. Micah's mom talked about the Lord. "May Yahweh bless you, my son," she said back in verse 2 after he faced up to taking her silver. Now she says, "I solemnly consecrate my silver to the Lord."

Stop there for a moment. That's good, isn't it? She's dedicating this returned money to the LORD, and she wants her son to know it. She's a God-fearing woman, and she's using this teachable moment both to honor the Lord and bring her son to Him.

Uh, not so fast. Here we see a huge part of the problem, not only for Micah and his mom, but for the whole nation at this time. There was plenty of Yahweh-talk, but that's all it was. Talk.

How do I know? Let her finish her sentence. "I solemnly consecrate my silver to the Lord *for my son to make a carved image and a cast idol.*"

Are you serious? Did she say what our ears just heard? Yes, Micah's mom who talked eloquently about the Lord also...

B. Micah's mom brought an idol into her son's life. *I'm dedicating this money to the Lord so my son can make a carved image and an idol.*

That's sort of like saying, to use a base illustration, "My son seems to be struggling to love his wife as he ought, so I'm going to buy some pornography for him, and pray that God will use that to rekindle his marriage."

Friends, the use of idols never fosters a true love for the Lord. That's why He condemned the use of man-made idols in His worship from the outset. He declared in

Deuteronomy 27:15, “Cursed is the man who carves an image or casts an idol—a thing detestable to the LORD, the work of the craftsman’s hands—and sets it up in secret.”

This is a flat-out violation of the second command, “You shall not make for yourself an idol (Deut 5:7).”

I don’t doubt her sincerity. In fact, Micah’s mom is probably a very religious woman. But she doesn’t know and fear the true LORD God of Israel.

She’s a syncretist. So she talks about the Lord, and she certainly would say she believes in the Lord (just like her son would, and in fact *does* later in the story). But she sees no problem in violating the Lord’s own revealed word because she doesn’t truly belong to Him.

And what she has, her syncretism, she’s passing on to her son. And you can be sure, apart from grace, it’s not going to go away. And it didn’t. We’ll be seeing this idol again, and again, and again.

It’s called influence, and we all have it. Dads do. Kids do. Teachers do. And without question, mothers do.

You say, “I don’t get it. Why would the Spirit of God include this story in His Word? What’s the point?” Oh, there is a point, but rather than telling us, he’s showing us. And it’s this. What I’m calling lesson #3...

III. Moms in the real world need a Savior (and so do dads, and kids, and everybody else (17:5-18:31)).

A Savior? Yes. Someone from the outside to break into the story and rescue those who are on the slippery slope to destruction. That’s what you see in the book of Judges, right? God keeps sending *deliverers* to rescue His people. Othniel. Ehud. Deborah. Gideon. Jephthah. Samson.

The problem is, these deliverers keep dying. And the bigger problem is, they can’t really fix the problem, just sort of put a band-aid on it until it starts seeping again.

The author illustrates the need in four ways in the next chapter and a half. I’ll use the word *spread*, because that’s what happens. Without a Savior, sin *spreads* like cancer.

A. We see the need in Micah’s life (17:5-6). Look at verse 5, “Now this man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and some idols and installed one of his sons as his priest.”

Uh oh. You can be a novice to the Bible and know this isn’t good. If one idol is bad, this fellow has a whole stash of self-designed worship paraphernalia. He built his own shrine, and made his own ephod (the ephod was a garment worn by priests, probably here a linen waist cloth⁴), and topped it off with some idols. One commentator refers to these as “Micah’s collection of cultic Tinkertoys.”⁵

He even recruited one of his sons to be his priest. The problem is, that’s forbidden. He’s doing all this in direct violation of God’s Law. Friends, when your worship isn’t informed by God’s Word, it will take you away from the true God, not towards Him.

And lest we miss the point, the author inserts this editorial comment in verse 6, “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.” Or to put it another way, “If Israel had a good king, you can be sure he wouldn’t have tolerated this God-defying non-sense. But without a king, everybody becomes his own king.”

⁴ According to Herbert Wolf, p. 481.

⁵ Dale Ralph Davis, p. 201.

Dale Ralph Davis comments concerning this time period of the judges, “They were the days when Israel was out of control, the days when the dictates of every man’s own glands formed the standard for life, the days when they needed a godly king.”⁶

But it’s not just Micah’s mom and Micah. Next...

B. We see the need in a young Levite’s life (17:7-13). Notice verses 7-9, “A young Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, who had been living within the clan of Judah, left that town in search of some other place to stay. On his way he came to Micah’s house in the hill country of Ephraim. Micah asked him, ‘Where are you from?’ ‘I’m a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah,’ he said, ‘and I’m looking for a place to stay.’”

Interesting fellow. Sort of restless. Looking for a better life. Decides to move.⁷ Nothing wrong with that. Unless you lack a moral foundation that prepares you for the lure of the world, or in this case, the lure of the pseudo-religious.

Verse 10, “Then Micah said to him, ‘Live with me and be my father and priest, and I’ll give you ten shekels of silver a year, your clothes and your food.’”

Reminds me of the fellow I met on the bus in the seventh grade. I’d just become Christian and was looking for Christian friends. He said he was a Christian. Talked a lot about church. When he wasn’t swearing like a sailor.

The term “father” doesn’t mean the fellow is old. He’s not. It means he’s being offered a position of great honor and respect. And if he accepts it, he’ll become the spiritual leader and counselor in Micah’s household. And get paid for it handsomely. Ten shekels a year, a nice wardrobe, and gratis room and board.

A priest for hire. What a novel idea. And that of course is the problem. This whole thing, though it looks so spiritual on the surface, is actually flat-out blasphemous, for it’s *novel*. God’s Word doesn’t permit Micah to hire his own priest, nor does God’s Word permit this Levite to become one.⁸

But that’s what happens when everyone does what’s right in their own eyes. And isn’t that what we’re doing it today, too, when we ordain homosexuals, or in our circles, put a man in the ministry whose family life disqualifies him?

Notice verses 11-13, “So the Levite agreed to live with him, and the young man was to him like one of his sons. Then Micah installed the Levite, and the young man became his priest and lived in his house. And Micah said, ‘Now I know that the LORD will be good to me, since this Levite has become my priest.’”

He looks like his mother, doesn’t he? Talking about the Lord. Religious. Even willing to pay for his religion. Everything’s blessed now in Micah’s house.

So ends the chapter. But it’s not blessed, and it never is when we elevate our own notions over God’s. First, it was a mother, then a son, then a Levite, next a whole tribe.

C. We see the need in the tribe of Dan (18:1-29). Though lengthy, I want to read the account in its entirety, because I want us to feel the weight of what happens as sin spreads. It’s going to sound, at first, like we’ve moved to a new, unrelated story, but if you’re familiar with Judges, you’ll know that’s not the case. The sins of the past never just disappear, for unless they’re dealt with God’s way, they always multiply and *spread*.

Verse 1, “In those days Israel had no king.” There’s that statement again. If this nation just had God’s kind of king, what you’re about to see wouldn’t happen.

⁶ Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges*, p. 201.

⁷ Bethlehem was not one of the 48 cities that Moses set apart for use by the Levites.

⁸ The text says he’s a Levite, and not all Levites were qualified to assume the priesthood.

Verses 1-29, “And in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking a place of their own where they might settle, because they had not yet come into an inheritance among the tribes of Israel.⁹ So the Danites sent five warriors from Zorah and Eshtaol to spy out the land and explore it. These men represented all their clans. They told them, ‘Go, explore the land.’ The men entered the hill country of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah, where they spent the night. When they were near Micah’s house, they recognized the voice of the young Levite; so they turned in there and asked him, ‘Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? Why are you here?’ He told them what Micah had done for him, and said, ‘He has hired me and I am his priest.’ Then they said to him, ‘Please inquire of God¹⁰ to learn whether our journey will be successful.’ The priest answered them, ‘Go in peace. Your journey has the LORD’s approval.’”

Don’t miss what’s happening here. The Levite is speaking for Yahweh and tells the Danites that they have “the LORD’s approval.” Why’s he doing that? Because that’s his job. He’s a self-designated man of the cloth and it’s his job to speak for God, just ask him.

Let’s continue in verse 7, “So the five men left and came to Laish¹¹, where they saw that the people were living in safety, like the Sidonians, unsuspecting and secure. And since their land lacked nothing, they were prosperous. Also, they lived a long way from the Sidonians and had no relationship with anyone else. When they returned to Zorah and Eshtaol, their brothers asked them, ‘How did you find things?’ They answered, ‘Come on, let’s attack them! We have seen that the land is very good. Aren’t you going to do something? Don’t hesitate to go there and take it over. When you get there, you will find an unsuspecting people and a spacious land that God has put into your hands, a land that lacks nothing whatever.’ Then six hundred men from the clan of the Danites, armed for battle, set out from Zorah and Eshtaol. On their way they set up camp near Kiriath Jearim in Judah. This is why the place west of Kiriath Jearim is called Mahaneh Dan to this day. From there they went on to the hill country of Ephraim and came to Micah’s house.”

Alright, get ready. You’re about to see Micah’s mom’s influence surface again, and again, and again.

Notice verse 14, “Then the five men who had spied out the land of Laish said to their brothers, ‘Do you know that one of these houses has **an ephod, other household gods, a carved image and a cast idol?** Now you know what to do.’”

There it is, and there’s a very revealing sentence. “You know what to do.” Unfortunately, they know precisely what to do with a stash of idols, and it should be to smash them, for they’re God-fearing Israelites, right?

Verse 15, “So they turned in there and went to the house of the young Levite at Micah’s place and greeted him. The six hundred Danites, armed for battle, stood at the entrance to the gate. The five men who had spied out the land went inside and took **the carved image, the ephod, the other household gods and the cast idol** while the priest and the six hundred armed men stood at the entrance to the gate. When these men went into Micah’s house and took **the carved image, the ephod, the other household gods and the cast idol**, the priest said to them, ‘What are you doing?’ They answered him, ‘Be

⁹ The tribe of Dan settled south of where Micah lived, who was in Ephraim, just north of Judah.

¹⁰ It’s probably significant that the Danites don’t use the Yahweh’s covenant name in verse 5, but rather the general name of God, *Elohim*.

¹¹ That’s up north, about 100 miles from where they started.

quiet! Don't say a word. Come with us, and be our father and priest. Isn't it better that you serve a tribe and clan in Israel as priest rather than just one man's household?' Then the priest was glad. He took **the ephod, the other household gods and the carved image** and went along with the people."

Glad? Sure. This priest is getting more of why he's in the ministry. A bigger congregation. A bigger salary. A bigger name. Because he's not a man of God. He's a man who uses God to get what he really wants out of life. And he's just found his second congregation made up of people who are just like him, who are more than willing to pay a preacher handsomely, as long as he gives them what they want most of our life.

Verse 21, "Putting their little children, their livestock and their possessions in front of them, they turned away and left. When they had gone some distance from Micah's house, the men who lived near Micah were called together and overtook the Danites. As they shouted after them, the Danites turned and said to Micah, 'What's the matter with you that you called out your men to fight?' He replied, 'You took **the gods I made**, and my priest, and went away. What else do I have? How can you ask, 'What's the matter with you?' ' The Danites answered, 'Don't argue with us, or some hot-tempered men will attack you, and you and your family will lose your lives.' So the Danites went their way, and Micah, seeing that they were too strong for him, turned around and went back home. Then they took **what Micah had made**, and his priest, and went on to Laish, against a peaceful and unsuspecting people. They attacked them with the sword and burned down their city. There was no one to rescue them because they lived a long way from Sidon and had no relationship with anyone else. The city was in a valley near Beth Rehob. The Danites rebuilt the city and settled there. They named it Dan after their forefather Dan, who was born to Israel—though the city used to be called Laish. There the Danites set up for themselves **the idols**, and Jonathan son of Gershom, the son of Moses, and his sons were priests for the tribe of Dan until the time of the captivity of the land. They continued to use **the idols** Micah had made, all the time the house of God was in Shiloh."

I don't even need to comment on the story. It speaks for itself. But there is one detail I need to emphasize. It's the next party affected by Micah's mother's idol. But it's not really a *next* party, for we've already met him, but this time he's named.

Jonathan. See him in verse 30? He's the son of Gershom, the son of *Moses*.

Can that be right? Moses' grandson? He's the priest for hire? It's so shocking that later Jews actually changed the name in the text to *Manasseh*, to protect the honor of Moses. And while "son of" could cover another generation or so, it doesn't prevent the connection. Even Moses' own bloodline is caught up into this spread of sin.

D. We see the need in the life of Moses' grandson (18:30-31). And his sons too, as the final verse indicates. Amazing. The direct descendants of Israel's greatest patriarch, Moses himself, perpetuating the idols that Micah made and his mother funded.

Could lesson three be made any more clearly? *We need a Savior*. Moms, dads, kids, everybody.

But what kind of Savior? That's the question, isn't it? What can save us from Micah's self-centeredness, and his mother's spiritual blindness, and the Levite's greed, and the Danites' might-makes-right approach to life, which, when you put it all together leads to the self-destruction of a nation?

Can the Law save us? If we put the Ten Commandments in every yard in America, would that save our country? Dear friends...

1. *While the Law is good, it can't save us or our kids.* It can reveal our sin, yes. But it can't get of it, not even for Moses' own bloodline. So the truth is...

2. *Our kids need what we need, a deliverer.* And it's not the Law, because we can't keep the Law, not perfectly. Even Moses' own grandson couldn't.

So where's the hope? You won't find it in Judges. Keep reading. You come to 1 Samuel and what do you see? A gift from a gracious God to His needy people, a king after His own heart by the name of David. And he cleans things up, for awhile.

But even David can't save, not from sin, for he too is a sinner.

So keep reading. And as you do, you'll meet someone else, the Son of David, in fact, the King of kings. And when you see Him, when you truly see Him, you'll know this.

3. *What we all need, God in His grace has provided.* God sent His own Son into the world, Jesus the Christ, who lived a perfect life, then died in the place of sinners on the cross, and three days later God raised Him from the dead, so that whoever repents of his sin and believes in this Saving King shall not perish, but have eternal life.

I've been recently reading Iain Murray's biography of *Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, a pastor who served in Great Britain from the 1920s until his death in 1981. Lloyd-Jones taught a lot about what our country needs, revival. "He saw revival as the extension to many of that same divine power which is present in the conversion of every individual.," says Murray.¹² Revival isn't something that man can produce or "work up," any more than man can produce one single conversion. The Spirit of God must produce it, and He does, taught Lloyd-Jones, through the clear, consistent communication of the Word of God.

And specifically, through the clear, consistent communication concerning what the Word of God says about our sin problem. "No man can be saved," said Lloyd-Jones, "until, at some time or other, he has felt desperate about himself."¹³

That's why a large number of Lloyd-Jones' sermons did what I've been seeking to do today in this sermon: disturb, unsettle, awaken spiritual concern. "Present day preaching," said Lloyd-Jones, "does not even annoy men, but leaves them precisely where they were, without a ruffle and without the slightest disturbance."¹⁴

Friends, you can't take a person from where he is until he becomes convinced he must leave where he is. That's what preaching is supposed to do. And when it does, oh the life-change that results!

Just two examples to illustrate. Lloyd-Jones began pastoring in a very rough town called Sandfields in Wales. The townspeople were hard, and the church people complacent. But as he preached the simple gospel, a very upstanding woman in the church came under conviction. "I was for two years under Martyn's ministry before I really understood what the gospel was," says the woman. "I thought you had to be a drunkard or a prostitute to be converted...I was unhappy. I suppose it was conviction." Lloyd-Jones gave her a book to read that showed how wrong her view of sin was, that she too was a sinner, and that she could be cleansed from her sin through the merit of the blood of Christ. "There, at last, I found release and I was so happy."¹⁵

The woman was Lloyd-Jones' own wife.

¹² Says Iain Murray, *The Life of Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, p. 127.

¹³ Murray, p. 130.

¹⁴ Murray, p. 130.

¹⁵ Murray, p. 110.

The other example is a man known as “Staffordshire Bill,” basically the town drunk. Even wild living men didn’t like to be around this fellow.

One day Bill was drinking with buddies in the bar and overheard a couple of guys talking at the next table. He caught the words “the Forward” and “preacher” and then heard a complete sentence that was to change his life. “Yes,” said the one man to the other, “I was there last Sunday night and that preacher said nobody was hopeless—he said there was hope for everybody.”

That’s all Staffordshire Bill heard, but he said to himself, “If there’s hope for everybody, there’s hope for me. I’ll go to that chapel myself and see what that man says.”

The first Sunday he walked to the open gate, stood there and looked at the church, and lost his nerve and went home. The next Sunday he returned, heard singing, and assumed he was too late, so with fear in his heart he left again. This time, however, he had no thought of drowning his sorrow in the bottle. The Spirit of God had already begun a work in his heart.

The third Sunday he returned, was standing at the gate, nervously wondering what to do next, when a church member said, “Are you coming in, Bill? Come and sit with me.”

That night Staffordshire Bill passed from condemnation to life. In fact, he was so transformed by the gospel that on that very night as he left the church building, he was introduced to Mrs. Lloyd-Jones by someone who said, “This is Staffordshire Bill.” And the pastor’s wife says, “I shall never forget the agonised look on his face, for he flinched as though he had been struck a sudden blow. ‘Oh no, oh no,’ he said, ‘that’s a bad old name for a bad old man; I am William Thomas now.’”¹⁶

And everybody saw the change. The man was 70 years old, but he never missed a church service. “He thought nothing of those three to four steep uphill miles,” says Mrs. Lloyd Jones, “when once ‘the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’ had shined in his heart. He was at every meeting—twice on Sunday, Monday night prayer meeting, Wednesday night Church Fellowship and Saturday Brotherhood—that old battered face transformed and radiant with an inner joy.”¹⁷

Make It Personal: Three vital questions to ponder...

1. *What am I doing about my need for a Deliverer?*
2. *What am I doing about my family’s need for a Deliverer?*
3. *What am I doing with the influence God has given me?*

¹⁶ Murray, p. 142.

¹⁷ Murray, p. 143.