

## EXAMPLES OF SPIRITUAL FITNESS FROM MY OWN EXPERIENCE

### II Timothy 1:5

*I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now live in you also.*

#### INTRODUCTION:

I've heard a lot of sermons over the last 60 years. My dad was a preacher and when I was a toddler, he was in full-time evangelistic work, meaning that he preached revivals all year 'round. He preached each night for about 50 weeks each year, which meant that I was in church listening to sermons about 350 nights a year. When I got older and he was no longer on the road doing revivals, we were only in church for Sunday School, Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, youth groups and mid-week Bible studies. Add in the 2 2-week revivals in our own church, Daily Vacation Bible School (as it was called then), church camp various conferences and conventions and even though not all of these were "preaching services", I still heard probably 200 sermons a year.

To this day, I read a lot of sermons every week and listen to some most weeks. And I've preached a few.

All of this is so I can say that I remember very few sermons I have heard. But I do remember some. One of the most memorable sermons I ever heard was the one preached at the graduation ceremony at Lincoln Christian College the year our daughter, Cherish, graduated from Lincoln.

Mike Breaux was the preacher. Mike was at that time the preacher at the Southland Christian Church in Lexington, KY. Mike's daughter was graduating in the same class as our daughter and Mike's daughter had asked her dad to preach her favorite of his sermons.

This sermon has become one of my favorites, too. And I leaned heavily on Mike's approach as I prepared my sermon for this morning.

If you attend here on a regular basis, you undoubtedly know that I do not watch many movies. I probably see less than five movies a year and most of them are old movies. For me to make a list of my favorite movies is not too difficult because I haven't seen that many and I haven't liked most of them.

But I do like "Dunston Checks In", a 1996 flick about an orangutan that has been trained to be a jewel thief. His owner checks in to a luxury hotel and turns Dunston loose to rob from the guestrooms by climbing up the outside of the building and entering through the unlocked windows of the hotel. It is lighthearted, funny and mindless. I love it.

I like the movie "Lost Horizon". Not the 1937 Frank Capra original but the 1973 remake that was a musical starring Peter Finch, John Gielgud and Liv Ullmann. It is odd that I like this version so much because it is a musical and I don't normally like musicals. The movie was almost universally panned by the reviewers. Critic John Simon remarked that it "must have arrived in garbage cans rather than in film cans." And it did so poorly at the box office that it was nicknamed "Lost Investment." But I like it.

There is another movie I really liked. In my opinion, it had great acting, amazing video technology and some profound philosophy. Profound philosophy like:

- "Life is like a box of chocolates: you never know what you're going to get."
- "Stupid is as stupid does" meaning that stupid has nothing to do with your IQ; it has everything to do with your choices.
- For years I have agonized over the conclusions to sermons trying to make them powerful, memorable and decisive. But from Forrest Gump I learned that after the body of the sermon I can simply say, "That's all I've got to say about that."

In the final scene of the movie, the love of Forrest's life, Jenny, has died. Forrest is at her graveside. And he says:

*You died on a Saturday morning. And I had you placed here under our tree. And I had that house of your father's bulldozed to the ground. Momma always said dyin' was a part of life. I sure wish it wasn't. Little Forrest, he's doing just fine. About to start school again soon. I make his breakfast, lunch, and dinner every day. I make sure he combs his hair and brushes his teeth every day. Teaching him how to play ping-pong. He's really good. We fish a lot. And every night, we read a book. He's so smart, Jenny. You'd be so proud of him. I am. He, uh, wrote a letter, and he says I can't read it. I'm not supposed to, so I'll just leave it here for you. Jenny, I don't know if Momma was right or if, if it's Lieutenant Dan. I don't know if we each have a destiny, or if we're all just floating around accidental-like on a breeze.*

That is one of the most profound questions you will ever have to answer: do we have a destiny we are to fulfill or are we all just floating around accidental-like on a breeze. People, I do not want to be like a feather on the breeze just carried along accidental-like. I want to be like a pebble cast into a pool making ripples that will eventually reach every inch of the shore.

By saying that I want to be a pebble and not a feather, let me explain what I mean.

You probably do not recognize the name Edward Kimball. Edward Kimball was a Sunday School teacher at the Congregational Church of Mount Vernon in Boston, Massachusetts. Kimball taught a class of young men, some of whom could be quite unruly. Kimball had one goal for his class: that every student should come to understand just how much God loved him. In April of 1855, one of his students accepted the message, accepted Jesus Christ as his savior and accepted the call to be an evangelist of the gospel telling the message of that good news to as many as he possible could in his lifetime. That young man's name was Dwight Lyman Moody.

The pebble that Edward Kimball cast into the pool of Dwight L. Moody's life caused a ripple that touched his heart. But the ripple didn't stop with Moody. Moody became the greatest evangelist of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and through his preaching and his crusades, tens of thousands of people were led to make commitments to Jesus Christ. So Edward Kimball's life rippled through Moody to tens of thousands in this country and in Great Britain.

But that is not the end of the ripples. One of the people that was influenced by the ministry of Dwight L. Moody was a man by the name of J. Wilbur Chapman. Chapman was raised in a Christian home and became a Christian due to the influence of his Godly parents. Chapman attended a revival that was conducted by Dwight L. Moody and there Chapman became determined to be an evangelist. He preached for various Presbyterian churches in New York until Moody asked him to assist in preaching at the New York World's Fair. After that, Chapman was hooked on evangelism and conducted numerous crusades of his own.

J. Wilbur Chapman decided he, too, needed help in his evangelistic work and he hired a young man named William Ashley Sunday to be his advance man to help set up the revivals that Chapman would conduct. William Ashley Sunday, better known as Billy Sunday, then became a renowned evangelist in his own right.

Billy Sunday was one of the most dynamic and charismatic of the American evangelists. Sunday was a former major league baseball player and a real man's man.

One of the people influenced by the ministry of Billy Sunday was a man by the name of Mordecai Ham, who also became an evangelist. Ham held numerous revivals around the country and one of the young men who responded to the invitation at one of the Mordecai Ham meetings was a fellow by the name of William Franklin Graham. Billy Graham and his friend Grady Wilson both went forward at the same 1934 meeting for the purpose of making a deeper commitment to Christ.

According to the Billy Graham Association, by 1993, more than 2.5 million people had stepped forward in response to the invitation at a Billy Graham crusade.

But do you get the point I'm trying to make? It all began when an obscure Sunday School teacher by the name of Edward Kimball threw a pebble in the pool and made sure that the young men in his Sunday School class knew how much God loved them. And Kimball's pebble rippled up against Dwight L. Moody. And the ripple through Moody touched J. Wilbur Chapman. The ripple continued through Chapman and touched the life of Billy Sunday and through Billy Sunday reached Mordecai Ham and through Mordecai Ham to Billy Graham: because Edward Kimball believed that we don't have to just float around kind of accidental-like on the breeze, we can decide to make ripples.

Over 55 years ago, a relatively uneducated farm couple in central Illinois took in a couple of little boys so that their Dad and Mom could travel around the country and conduct revival meetings in various churches. This unassuming farm couple were Clarence and Helen Dyar and they made ripples on the lives of those two little boys.

My older brother and I enjoyed some of the sweetest years of our lives on that farm in Douglas County. And we saw Jesus in the lives of those two hard working saints. Clarence was Bible School Superintendent in the Longview Christian Church and we watched as he mounted the platform and stood in the pulpit to make the announcements and give the Sunday School report each Sunday. We listened as Helen played the piano for the congregational singing in that little church. And because we'd seen their lives up close and personal, we knew that they believed and lived what they professed.

I can't ever remember getting up early enough in the morning to walk into an empty kitchen in that two-story farmhouse. No matter how early I got up, Grandma was already at the table drinking coffee and reading her Bible. She would always remind us to "say thank-you, Jesus" before we ate breakfast. In a million little ways, she and grandpa made ripples that touched our lives. My inspiration to be a good grandpa to two little girls in Oblong, IL comes from trying to be to them the grandpa that Clarence was to me. Clarence Dyar still makes ripples in the lives of little girls he never had the privilege of knowing

You may not recognize the name, Riley Donica. Riley Donica was an evangelist with the Kiamichi Mountain Christian Mission in Oklahoma. One year at White Oak Christian Service Camp in Moberly, MO, Riley Donica was the mission speaker for a week of Junior High camp. I was a camper that week and I think I will always remember Riley standing up to teach a class on missions. The wind was blowing and Riley's notes were fluttering on the rugged pulpit he was using so Donica just reached to his side, pulled out a huge hunting knife and stabbed through his notes to stick them to pulpit. With that, he certainly had the attention

of these wide-eyed Junior High campers! In the silence that followed, Riley Donica challenged us from Ezekiel 33:7-9. In that passage, Ezekiel wrote:

<sup>7</sup> “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. <sup>8</sup> When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you will surely die,’ and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. <sup>9</sup> But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself.

Riley Donica challenged us to become like the watchmen on the city walls and warn people that God’s judgment was coming so they could prepare for it. Based on Ezekiel 33, Riley Donica explained to us that if we do not warn people of the coming judgment, they will die in their sins but their blood will be required at our hands. At that week of church camp, I decided to preach the gospel. And Riley Donica’s life rippled against mine and through me, almost 50 years later, Riley Donica is making ripples in your life.

Riley Donica and Clarence and Helen Dyar are just a few of the many whose lives have rippled against mine and who have made a difference in who I am. Now, through me, their lives ripple into yours.

But that is just my story. There are dozens of stories in this room of people whose lives have been changed because of the ripples others have made...ripples that were made because people decided not to just float along kind of accidental-like on the breeze. Instead, they decided to be pebbles in the pool of life and make ripples.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

In the closing scene of the movie, “Forrest Gump”, Forrest is standing by the tombstone of his beloved Jenny. Forrest is musing about life: the meaning of life and whether or not it has any purpose.

I want to take you to another tombstone: mine. I want you to look at what’s engraved on its face.

**Darrel L. Brandon**  
**“We’re still feeling the ripples.”**

When my life is over, I want the ripples to continue. Those whose lives rippled into mine, I want those same ripples to touch you and to touch others through you.

And that’s all I have to say about that.