



uncommon stories & illustrations

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general editor



Published by Gospel Light
Ventura, California, U.S.A.
www.gospellight.com
Printed in the U.S.A.

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Previously published in the Fresh Ideas series as *Illustrations, Stories and Quotes to Hang Your Message On* (compiled by Greg McKinnon) in 1997 and *Intense Illustrations* (Jim Burns and Mike DeVries, general editors) in 2002.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Intense illustrations.
Uncommon stories and illustrations / Jim Burns and Mike DeVries, general editors ;
Greg McKinnon, compiler.
p. cm.
Originally published: Intense illustrations. 2002.
Includes indexes.
ISBN 978-0-8307-4725-2 (trade paper)
1. Christian teenagers—Religious life. I. Burns, Jim, 1953- II. DeVries, Mike.
III. McKinnon, Greg. IV. Title.
BV4531.3.I58 2008
251'.08—dc22
2008032491

All definitions are from the Merriam-Webster online dictionary.
<http://www.merriam-webster.com>.

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introduction

An illustration is a “picture taken with words.” There is almost nothing more powerful than a story that makes a point. How interesting that as children we were often raised on stories. We cuddled up on a family member’s lap and listened to a story we had heard a hundred times before, but nevertheless we wanted to hear it again! Illustrations paint a picture in our minds, and some of the best stories we have heard over the years actually become living pictures inside us.

The point of a message is sometimes unclear until the speaker presents just the right illustration for it. Jesus, the master storyteller, painted the incredible story just right to make the point come alive. He used common, everyday illustrations that people of His day could easily understand. He had the ability to say, “Here’s My point, now let Me illustrate that point for you.” He could take everyday, ordinary life experiences and use them to teach the words of eternal truth.

The great communicators of our day use the same method to get their message across to their audiences. Think of the most influential communicators in your life, and I’m sure you will agree that they have an incredible ability to illustrate truth to you through an appropriate story. There is nothing quite like sitting at the feet of a great communicator.

In this volume, my good friend and longtime fellow youth worker, Greg McKinnon, has collected some of the finest illustrations I have ever seen or heard. The applications and Scriptures work. I know—I’ve used some of them!

I have no doubt that this volume of illustrations and quotes will become one of your most-often used resources to help kids and their families get the picture and visualize the Word. Thank you for all you do to make a difference in the lives of families who desperately need the hope you offer.

Yours in Christ,
Jim Burns, Ph.D.
San Juan Capistrano, California

a note on icons



The “two masks” icon indicates that the story or illustration is dramatic in nature. These illustrations tend to incorporate more serious or intense subject matter and real-life events.



The “fool’s cap” icon is typically used for stories or illustrations that are humorous in nature and generally have lighter subject matter than their more dramatic counterparts.



STORIES & ILLUSTRATIONS

story \sto-re\ **1a:** an account of incidents or events **b:** anecdote; especially: an amusing one **2a:** a fictional narrative shorter than a novel; specifically: short story **b:** the intrigue or plot of a narrative or dramatic work.

illustration \i-les-tră-shen\ **1:** the action of illustrating: the condition of being illustrated **2:** something that serves to illustrate: as an example or instance that helps make something clear.



1

a different perspective

key verse

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

illustration

In the year 1870, the Methodist churches in Indiana were having their annual conference. At one point, the president of the college where they were meeting addressed the group and told them they were living in a very exciting age. He said he believed that they were coming into a time of great inventions and that he believed, for example, that men would some day fly through the air like birds.

The presiding bishop didn't think much of this statement. As a matter of fact, he called it heresy. He said that the Bible says that flight is reserved for angels, so there would be no such talk there.

When the bishop got home, he told his family about what the president had said and how ridiculous it was. But his two young sons, Wilbur and Orville, looked at things from a different perspective than Bishop Wright, their father. And, of course, you know the rest of the story. But I wonder: Would the Wright brothers have invented the airplane if they had not had a vision planted in their heads by way of one not-so-visionary father?

application

It is impossible to fully imagine all the things that God has in store for those who love Him.

additional scriptures

Isaiah 64:4; Jeremiah 29:11; Mark 9:23-24; 11:22-26; Ephesians 3:16-20

a true work of art



key verse

“Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ”
(Philippians 3:7).

illustration

A wealthy man and his son loved to collect rare works of art. They had everything in their collection, from Raphael to Picasso. They would often sit together and admire the great works they had obtained.

When the Vietnam conflict broke out, the son went to war. He was very courageous and died in battle while rescuing another soldier. The father was notified, and he grieved deeply for his only son.

About a month later, there was a knock at the door. A young man stood at the door with a large package in his hands. “Sir,” he said, “you don’t know me, but I am the soldier for whom your son gave his life. He saved many lives that day, and he was carrying me to safety when a bullet struck him in the heart. He often talked about you and your love for art.”

The young man held out his package. “I know this isn’t much,” he continued. “I’m not really a great artist, but I think your son would have wanted you to have this.” The father opened the package. It was a portrait of his son painted by the young man. He stared in awe at the way the soldier had captured the personality of his son in the painting. The father was so drawn to the painting that his eyes welled up with tears. He thanked the young man and offered to pay him for the picture.

“Oh no, sir,” said the young man. “I could never repay what your son did for me. It’s a gift.”

The father hung the portrait over his mantle. Every time visitors came to his home, he took them to see the portrait of his son before he showed them any of the other great works he had collected.

The man died a few months later. There was to be a great auction of his paintings. Many influential people gathered, excited to see the great works of art and have the opportunity to purchase one for their collection.

On the platform sat the painting of the son. The auctioneer pounded his gavel. “We will start the bidding with this picture of the son. Who will bid for this picture?”

There was silence. Then a voice in the back of the room shouted, “We want to see the famous paintings. Skip this one!”

But the auctioneer persisted. “Will someone bid for this painting? Who will start the bidding? \$100? \$200?”

Another voice shouted angrily, “We didn’t come to see this painting. We came to see the Van Goghs and the Rembrandts. Get on with the real art!”

But still the auctioneer continued, “The son! The son! Who will take the son?”

Finally, a voice came from the very back of the room. “I’ll give \$10 for the painting.” It was the longtime gardener of the man and his son. Being a poor man, he could afford to offer only \$10.

“We have \$10. Who will bid \$20?”

“Give it to him for \$10,” a man in the crowd shouted. “Let’s see the masters.”

“\$10 is the bid. Won’t someone bid \$20?”

The crowd was becoming angry. They weren’t interested in the picture of the son. They wanted the more worthy investments for their collections.

The auctioneer pounded the gavel. “Going once, going twice . . . SOLD for \$10!”

A man sitting on the second row shouted, “Now let’s get on with the collection!”

The auctioneer laid down his gavel and said, “I’m sorry, but the auction is over.”

“What about the paintings?” someone asked.

“When I was called to conduct this auction, I was told of a secret stipulation in the will. I was not allowed to reveal that stipulation until this time. Only the painting of the son would be auctioned. Whoever bought that painting would inherit the entire estate, including the other paintings. The man who took the portrait of the son gets everything!”

application

God gave His Son to die for our sins on a cross. Much like the auctioneer, His message today is, “The Son, the Son . . . who’ll take the Son?” Whoever takes the Son gets everything!

additional scriptures

Matthew 13:44-46; John 5:24; 17:3; Romans 8:17; Ephesians 1:14; 1 Peter 1:4



free, but still locked up

key verse

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

illustration

The great Houdini, a master magician and a great locksmith, once bragged that there wasn't a jail cell in the world that he couldn't escape from, provided he could go into the cell dressed in his street clothes and work in complete privacy.

A small town in England had built a new jail that they believed to be escape-proof, so they invited Houdini to come and try to break out. Houdini accepted the challenge. They put him in the cell and closed the door. He was left alone.

Houdini took off his belt and took from it a tough, flexible steel rod. The he went to work on the lock. He worked longer than it had ever taken him before, and he still couldn't get the lock open! As time passed, he was becoming exhausted. He was stumped!

Finally, after two solid hours of work, Houdini collapsed from exhaustion. He fell against the door to the cell, and when he did, the door swung open! It had been unlocked all the time.

application

We cannot overcome sin in our life by our own efforts or through hard work, but when we admit that we are helpless and turn to God, He will set us free.

additional scriptures

Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18-21; John 8:31-36; Romans 6:15-23; 8:1-2; 2 Corinthians 3:17; Galatians 5:1



4

here comes the cat!

key verse

“‘I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jeremiah 29:11).

illustration

In an old house lived a group of many, many mice. They were the only occupants of the house, although they knew that somewhere, someplace in the house, was a giant cat. They went about their everyday lives day in and day out with the sneaky suspicion that any day the giant cat would come and devour them.

Sure enough, one day the big cat came. The word spread like wildfire, and the mice from all the corners of the house scrambled to save their lives. They ran under the bed, hid in holes and buried themselves under rugs. No mouse was safe. Every mouse trembled.

When the giant cat appeared, he had with him a huge red wagon filled with all kinds of delicious cheese. The cat came to give the cheese to all the mice! They finally came out and they had a great party. The cat was a good cat and only wanted to be friends with the mice.

application

Many people see God as a giant killjoy in the sky trying to keep them from having fun, so they avoid Him. But Jesus came that we might enjoy life to the fullest extent.

additional scriptures

Genesis 3:8; John 10:10; Romans 5:17; Jude 24-25