

These sermon illustrations are provided as a resource for you to use enhance points you may be making in your message and as a way to share how God works through your Kentucky United Methodist Homes for Children and Youth. Feel free to edit, tweak, and use in whatever way is helpful to you and your ministry. Each 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday, we will add more illustrations and topics to this list.

### **Forgiveness, Grace, Transformation...**

Today's scripture (or theme) reminds me of a story I heard about our Kentucky United Methodist Homes for Children and Youth. The executive director gave a message at the Sunday chapel service. This particular Sunday, the topic was forgiveness. He made the statement that "no one in this room doesn't know someone who has hurt them and needs to be forgiven." He went on to challenge them to think of forgiveness differently. He said "You need to forgive them, not just for their sake, but also to free your heart. Otherwise you are going to be bound by anger and resentment." After the chapel service was complete, a young man came up with tears in his eyes. He pulled out a card from his back pocket, and it had a long list of people who had hurt him. It was filled with people like his mom, his dad who left him, his grandma who beat him and many more. With a trembling voice the young man said "I want to learn how to forgive, because I am so tired of being angry all the time."

### **Prayer, Praying for Others, Care for Others, Thankfulness, Faith...**

Today's scripture (or theme) reminds me of a story I heard about our Kentucky United Methodist Homes for Children and Youth. There was a child that was received by the home who was malnourished and neglected by his family. The cottage he lived in had a youth counselor who had a tradition of cooking a HUGE breakfast each Saturday morning she called "the southern spread." It had eggs, biscuits, meat and much more that the boys feasted upon! After breakfast, the Sunday chore for each boy was to do a deep clean of their room. After cleaning his room, a strange odor remained. The youth counselor noticed this after a few weeks and investigated. She washed his sheets and everything looked clean but the smell remained. However, once she lifted the mattress she found the problem. He had hidden days and days worth of extra food. He lived in fear of going hungry again. The problem was the food began to rot. The counselor helped him clean it up and looked him in the eye and said "We will always feed you." Any time you need food, we will make sure you have it.

A few months later, a youth counselor from another cottage was there to help out with a situation. During the shift, she received news that her Dad was in the hospital and needed emergency heart surgery. The boy said he was getting ready to say his prayers and asked if she had anything he could pray for. She asked him to pray

for her dad. She left and went to be with her dad and despite severe risks the surgery and recovery went very well. Weeks later, a staff person from that cottage asked how her dad was doing and shared that the boy had been praying every single day for her dad since the day she asked him to pray. She wrote a letter to her dad and this is some of what she said about the boy “He never said a word that he was praying for you. Only through another staff did I find out that a boy with his own problems and worries thought of you, a stranger, everyday remembering to ask for you to get better. I was able to tell him today that you are doing great and that your surgery went well. He was smiling from ear to ear. I believe because of this child’s prayers you are doing better.”

## Hope

Today’s scripture (or theme) reminds me of a story I heard about our Kentucky United Methodist Homes for Children and Youth. An 11 year old girl named Samantha was suffering severe abuse and neglect from her adoptive parents. She said “I was afraid to go home after school. I thought I was going to die. One day I just collapsed and begged God to help me.”

God did. Within a few weeks, her adoptive parents decided they did not want her anymore and they dropped her off at the Methodist Home. That was the last she saw of them. They thought she was a hopeless cause. Not worth their time or energy. But the staff at the home knew that Jesus could heal her.

The Home became refuge for her. It was a safe place to find hope and healing. She began as a quiet timid girl rarely asking for help. She couldn’t even fully express the trauma she had been through. The staff let her keep some food in her room and wear oversized clothes because that helped her feel safe and comfortable. She was encouraged to write her thoughts in a daily journal. She filled up 20+ journals in her time at the Home. The journals helped her process her pain and be able to share it with others. Two scriptures that people gave her at the home still resonate with her:

*Psalm 27:10 – Thought my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.*

*Jer. 29:11 – “For 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.”*

Samantha went on to graduate from the home and is remembered as a kind-hearted, quiet child who always helped others. Today she has plans to finish college and publish a book about her story. When she thinks about her time at the Home, she remembers how people reached out and helped her go from hopelessness to healing. That is why she feels compelled to help others by volunteering with the homeless and at the local animal shelter.

Feeling utterly hopeless, she called out to Jesus, and He extended a hand to her through our ministry and led her to healing, love and a new life.