

INTERRUPTIONS FROM LIFE

by Keith Madsen



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Dramatic monologs to
illustrate sermons

PRODUCTION NOTES

These dramatic monologs are guaranteed attention-getters. They are very short and easily memorized. The themes are broad-based and Scripture references accompany each script for the convenience of the pastor when planning worship. They are designed as interruptions to sermons by persons the pastor does not always think about when preaching: an old widow living alone, a workaholic businessman, a single mother, a teenager, a young father in financial trouble, an adult who had been abused as a child, and a person with a disability. It is not necessary to select "interrupters" who fit these descriptions. Those who really are in the circumstances described may not feel comfortable airing their thoughts, and they may not even feel the same as the characters in these monologs. It is preferable to find good actors who can play these parts well. In some cases, props or costumes help to make the character more believable, e.g., a gray wig for the "widow" or a wheelchair for the "disabled" interrupter.

Dramatically, the monologs are the making known of the characters' private thoughts while listening to the sermon. It is best to plan the interruption about three or four minutes into the sermon, which gives enough time to present the theme and a few initial thoughts. The interrupter should sit on an aisle, and then move to a visible place in the sanctuary shortly after starting the interruption. The pastor should freeze during the interruption to show that time is being suspended while these private thoughts are being made known. In each instance, the sermon being interrupted is one of particular relevance to the person doing the interrupting, but the interrupter is concerned about whether his or her special needs will be addressed.

After the interruption the pastor should not refer specifically to the monolog, as the idea is that only the congregation is being let in on these private thoughts. But the pastor should speak to the issues raised by the monolog in the latter part of the sermon.

The worship leaders should use their own discretion about whether or not to warn the congregation that the interruption is coming. Most actors, however, would feel more comfortable if it could be clear at some point that the interruption was staged. The bulletin statement that we used to warn the congregation was simply, "Look for a dramatic surprise in today's sermon!"

One rehearsal will be required to put interrupter and pastor together.

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Pretty Words

An interruption of a sermon on fellowship

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES: Acts 2:42-47; 1 John 1:5-7 (See also Acts 6:1-7).

(The interrupter is dressed like an elderly woman. During the first part of the sermon she rocks back and forth as she listens, as if in a rocking chair. Then the Pastor freezes.)

WOMAN: Such pretty words, Pastor! Yes, such pretty, pretty words! Words like “Koinonia” and “fellowship.” Yes, you can tell our pastor went to seminary! It takes a well-educated person to know such pretty words! *(Rocks a little more and then sighs deeply.)* Of course, they would be even prettier if I knew what they meant Yes, that’s why I come to church, to hear pretty words by the pastor . . . and to get away from home, too. It’s so lonely there. No one to talk to. No one to even make coughing noises and shuffle around the house. Old Henry never was much of a talker, but at least he made noise. Now he’s gone.

(She gets up from her seat, turns, and walks toward the audience.) Of course, people here don’t always talk to me either. They think I’m just another old woman with nothing to say. If I weren’t so shy myself, I would tell them! Yes, I would tell them that’s not the way it is! I have a lot to say. So many memories. So many things I’ve learned. The Depression — our family learned so much during the Depression. We didn’t have much, but we learned what was important. It’s people! It’s a family sticking together in hard times because they love each other. It’s people helping each other out and caring about what happens to their neighbor! Young people today don’t understand that. They think it’s all about how much you own. They don’t understand that Oh! I’m sounding so much like an old woman, talking about the

1 **past. Maybe that's why they don't talk to me.**

2 *(Looks out at the congregation meditatively for a moment.)*

3 **I guess I didn't talk much to old people when I was**
 4 **younger either. I remember Miss Jensen. She traveled**
 5 **across the old West in a covered wagon. I should have**
 6 **talked to her Well, maybe in Glory! *(Walks away from***
 7 *the congregation, then looks back one more time.)* **I *do* wish**
 8 **they would talk to me more, though. We shouldn't have**
 9 **to wait until we get to heaven to enjoy each other. My**
 10 **ears may not be as good as they used to be, but I do have**
 11 **two of them, and they are so under-used.**

12 *(Sighs again.)* **Oh, well. These thoughts are depressing**
 13 **me. I must listen again to the pretty words the pastor is**
 14 **saying. *(Walks back to her seat.)* They will be soothing for**
 15 **now, I'm sure. And, who knows? Maybe they will even**
 16 **give some answers for my loneliness. *(She sits.)***

So Little Time

An interruption of a sermon on grace

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES: Ephesians 2:8-10; Romans 3:21-24.

(The interrupter is dressed in a suit and tie like a businessman [with slight adaptations a woman could be used], preferably equipped with a cellular phone. As the Pastor speaks, the businessperson periodically checks his/her watch. The Pastor freezes.)

BUSINESSMAN: Grace . . . another sermon about God's grace. I wonder how many sermons I have heard on grace since I was a kid? "Unmerited favor" — I've known that definition since I was a teenager. Why doesn't the pastor preach on something new? Today's world is a world of computers, advanced video technology and fax machines, yet our sermons are on such old-fashioned topics.

(Checks his watch again.) I hope the service is over on time. If it is, I'll just have time to rush out and catch Sanders on the cellular before he heads off to New York. I've got to finalize that deal! *(Looks at watch again.)* I wonder . . . maybe I could go to the lobby and call him on my cellular from there! Nobody would suspect . . . no, with our PA, it would probably come over the loud speakers. Some might think it was irreverent, or — or tacky or something. Who knows?

(Looks at watch again.) I'm so far behind where I should be in life, and there seems to be so little time. *(Pauses meditatively, then gets up from his seat and roams around in front of the congregation as he thinks out loud.)* So far behind . . . yes, that's what Dad would have said. I can see those frowning, disapproving eyes right now. "You're wasting time, son, and time is money! Don't you want to amount to anything in life?" You can bet *he* never wasted any time — not with me, not with Mom, not with anyone. Yes, Dad, I want to amount to something in life — though

1 I'm not exactly sure why. It would never be enough for
 2 you. Whatever I accomplish seems so insignificant when
 3 I'm finished with it that I have to rush on to something
 4 else. Others seem amazed at all I get done, but it's never
 5 enough for me. I don't know why, I really don't. Maybe
 6 it's like some people are with chocolate — they can never
 7 get enough. Or maybe . . . maybe it's because I feel I have
 8 to accomplish great things in order to be acceptable, to
 9 be worth something myself. Maybe . . . but I really don't
 10 know. All of my working sure hasn't gotten me in the
 11 good graces of my own wife and kids. The kids never see
 12 me, and by now I don't think my wife wants to. *(Pauses*
 13 *again to think.)* Enough of this philosophizing! Where does
 14 it get you? Nowhere!

15 So here I am, in church once again. A lot of people
 16 I work with would call being here a waste of time. Well,
 17 maybe it is or maybe it isn't. But I guess as long as I'm
 18 here, I might as well listen. *(Walks back toward his seat.)* It
 19 doesn't take any more time to listen while I'm here. And
 20 who knows? I might even learn something new. *(He sits.)*

Broken Dreams

An interruption of a sermon on family

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES: 1 Corinthians 7:1-15; Genesis 21:8-21.

(The interrupter plays the part of a single mother. You may choose to have a boy, eight or nine years old, sitting next to her. This boy will say nothing and will look straight ahead during the whole monolog, as if nothing is happening. If you choose this option, the mother should motion toward the boy when referring to him. Once again, at the proper time, the Pastor freezes.)

SINGLE MOTHER: A sermon on family — great! Just what I needed. As if I didn't feel guilty enough already! I knew I shouldn't have come here today. The pastor's going to talk about what a great thing family is, and how couples get divorced too much these days, and how they should be more committed to each other. So, tell me something I don't know! I'm divorced! I know how much it hurts already. You don't need to convince me it shouldn't happen!

(Gets up out of her seat and turns and looks out over the congregation.) Look at all the couples sitting together here today. Old couples. Young couples. Couples with their children. I know the Bible tells us not to envy, but oh, how I do! It was my simple dream to be just like them. Was that too much to ask? I wanted to sit in church with my husband and children, to share together in worship, and to enjoy the beautiful music we've had here. Then we would go home to a nice relaxing meal together. Later the kids would go out to play, and . . . Oh, well!

That couple over there — *(Points to an older couple.)* I wonder how long they've been together. I wonder what their secret is. Bill and I, we once talked about growing old together like that. It hurts to see so many succeeding where I have failed! *(Walks away from the congregation quietly)*

1 *and meditatively. Then she looks up at the pulpit.) Please don't*
 2 **make it hurt worse by telling me what ought to be! I know**
 3 **what ought to be.**

4 *(Starts to roam again, looking periodically out at*
 5 *congregation.) We vowed "until death do us part." I had no*
 6 **thought but that we would fulfill that vow. And then**
 7 **things changed. It seemed like we weren't even the same**
 8 **people who had made that vow anymore. We were**
 9 **strangers to each other. I have no excuses. I just don't**
 10 **know what happened.**

11 *(Pauses meditatively again.) And then there's my son.*
 12 **What will I do with him? He needs a full-time father as**
 13 **well as a full-time mother. Who will be there as his role**
 14 **model? Will I be strong enough to keep him in line all by**
 15 **myself when he's a teenager? I feel I can barely take care**
 16 **of myself sometimes, and yet I must take care of him. He**
 17 **hurts too. He has feelings he doesn't know how to express,**
 18 **just like I do. Can we be a real family — just the two of**
 19 **us? (Pauses meditatively.) A sermon on family — Wow! Well,**
 20 **it would be too conspicuous if I left. (Heads to her seat.)**
 21 **And besides, who knows? Maybe the pastor does**
 22 **understand where I've been. Maybe I'll find some kind of**
 23 **healing for these broken dreams. (She sits.)**

Talk to Me!

An interruption of a sermon on facing fear

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES: Joshua 1:1-9; 1 John 4:18.

(The interrupter plays the part of a misunderstood teenage girl. During the opening words of the sermon, she will get increasingly fidgety. Then the Pastor freezes.)

TEENAGER: B-O-R-I-N-G! What do all the pastor's words mean anyway? Not much to me, I'll tell you! The only ones he (she) thinks about when preaching these sermons is the adults. Why doesn't the pastor ever talk to teenagers in the sermon?

(Gets up from her seat and starts to roam.) Adults forget what it's like to be a teenager, I guess. Can't blame them, though. So far being a teenager has been a highly forgettable experience. Sure, there's been some good stuff—the football and basketball games, meeting friends after school, the dances The dances? *Not!* What a pain they are—not knowing if you're going to be asked, and if you're going to be asked by the right guy. And then if you *are* asked, your nerves are shot wondering what to say and how to behave so he'll think you're cool!

And then there's school. There's so much pressure! One bad grade in one class, and you may not make it to the college you want. Worse, your parents may *kill* you before you ever *get* to college. I got a "C" last semester in English and considered putting myself up for *adoption* rather than going home.

(Pauses and becomes a little more serious.) I guess what it comes down to is you're kind of scared a lot of the time. Not scared like when you're at a Stephen King movie or something, like you're going to run away screaming or anything like that. But scared like . . . like you're never going to make it. Never going to make it to marriage

1 because you're not pretty enough. Never going to make
 2 it in a job because you're not smart enough. Never going
 3 to make it in the world. I never do anything right, and
 4 the scary thing is, I'm not sure I'll *ever* do it right. I know
 5 some of my friends feel that way too. (*Looks up at the pulpit.*)
 6 Maybe the pastor doesn't know what any of this is like.
 7 Maybe he (she) doesn't know what it's like to be a scared
 8 teenager. He (she) seems so confident up there all the
 9 time. Maybe he (she) has always been that way. I wonder
 10 if God even knows what it's like? Oh well, maybe it's best
 11 to not think about it. Maybe it's best just to go out and
 12 party and try not to think about what you're afraid of.
 13 Some of my friends do that, and it seems to work for
 14 them. (*Walks back in the direction of her seat, but then stops*
 15 *and looks back up at the pulpit once more.*) But it sure would
 16 be nice to have some answers instead . . . or at least *some*
 17 kind of direction from God about how to deal with these
 18 fears. If the pastor would just talk to me about that, I'm
 19 sure I wouldn't be bored! (*Sits back down.*)

The Pastor Doesn't Know My Father

An interruption of a sermon on forgiveness

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES: Matthew 18:21-35; Matthew 6:14-15.

(The interrupter plays the part of a woman who was abused as a child. The actress may be young or middle-aged. By the time the Pastor freezes, the woman is visibly agitated.)

WOMAN: Forgive? Well, he's right, of course. I *should* forgive my father. But how?! *(Pauses and gets up from her seat, walking around meditatively.)* The pastor talks about forgiveness as if the only things we have to forgive are irritating little things — your husband criticized your cooking in public, the neighbor told a story about you that wasn't true, your teenager lied to you about where she was going — boy, I wish those kinds of irritations were all I had to forgive! The pastor doesn't know my father. How could I forgive *him*? How could I forgive him for stealing my childhood and leaving scars on my soul that just won't go away?

(Pauses and paces meditatively for a few seconds.) I've seen how some fathers are with their children — playing together in the park, and laughing and acting silly. I've seen smiling children riding on their daddies' shoulders, seemingly unafraid of anything. I'm happy for those children, but still it hurts to see it. It hurts to see what I never had. The word "Dad" always meant fear for me. It meant being afraid to go home because I didn't know what I would find, or what mood he would be in. Would Mom still be there . . . and would she be OK? Would I have to defend myself the moment I walked in the door? Seeing his face in my mind still terrifies me. I wasn't even safe in my own bedroom!

(Pauses to pace once more.) Does the Bible know of such fathers? I remember good old father Abraham. He *trembled* when he thought he would have to raise his hand against

1 Isaac on the altar. There was the father of the Prodigal
 2 Son who welcomed and honored his errant child. And
 3 then there's our "heavenly Father" — Why do they call
 4 him that? No wonder God seems so far away to me!
 5 Anyway, there are certainly no fathers there like mine.
 6 Could the Bible tell me anything about facing this kind
 7 of father that it doesn't even seem to know exists? (*Looks*
 8 *up at the pulpit.*) You say "forgive." Well, I *do* want to do
 9 that. But how? If my father could just acknowledge
 10 causing even one of the millions of tears I've cried and —
 11 and say he's sorry But he won't. I've given up waiting
 12 for him to. (*Walks slowly toward her seat and then stops. Looks*
 13 *up at the pulpit again.*) But I'm so tired of having all of this
 14 anger and bitterness inside. Forgiveness is my only way
 15 out. If you could just talk to me about it in a way that
 16 would relate to what I've been through with my
 17 father (*Returns to her seat.*)

No Thought for Tomorrow

An interruption of a sermon on worry

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES: Matthew 6:25-34.

*(The interrupter plays the part of a young to middle-aged father.
With a few adaptations, a working mother could also be used.)*

FATHER: Come on, now! Does the pastor really expect us to be able to do what he's saying? "Take no thought for tomorrow!" Yes, I know that Jesus said it, but he must have meant something else — something less radical. *(Gets up from his seat and starts pacing.)* I can't *stop* thinking about tomorrow. Tomorrow is the day we buy groceries, and there's no money in the checking account! Tomorrow is the day the car insurance bill is due. Tomorrow my son is supposed to go to his friend's birthday party, and I got mad at him and almost wouldn't let him go, all because I didn't want to put out the money for a cheap little birthday present!

I get angry about money all the time. I don't want to, but I do. It seems that my wife and I argue about money constantly. I get upset with her for buying clothes. She gets upset with me for buying books. The truth is, we need them both. Why does spending money on needed things have to be such a crisis for us?

It didn't used to be that way with us. That's why I like the word "yesterday" much better than the word "tomorrow." Yesterday we didn't worry so much. We just had each other, and that was OK. Part of the reason it was OK was that we always thought we were on our way up.

Now it doesn't look that way. Tomorrow's world just looks bleaker and bleaker. The economy seems to continually get worse, and no one seems to have any real answers. The raises I get don't even keep up with inflation and the new expenses that are always coming up, and it

1 will only get worse when the kids go off to college. How
 2 will we help them pay for *that*? Sure, the birds of the air
 3 don't worry about all of this, but who ever heard of a
 4 mortgage on a bird's nest? And birds don't have shopping
 5 malls! (*Holds his head and shakes it as if he is getting a*
 6 *headache. Then he looks up at the Pastor in the pulpit.*)

7 I do need help. I can't keep on living in fear of what
 8 tomorrow will bring. I can't keep on living in slavery to
 9 money and bills. *How* do I stop worrying? How do I just
 10 enjoy each day with my wife and kids without worrying
 11 about paying for their tomorrows? If I get in over my
 12 head, will God come in and rescue me in some miraculous
 13 way? Or does he want me to just have a different attitude
 14 when things fall apart? (*He starts walking back toward his*
 15 *seat, and then he turns and looks back up at the Pastor.*) There
 16 are all sorts of people telling me what they think I should
 17 buy, how I should spend my money. And there are many
 18 others who say they can tell me how to make more. But
 19 none of them can give me any advice on how I should
 20 feel about it, how not to worry about it. That's the help
 21 I need now. Can I find that help here? (*Sits down.*)



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