

The Henry Tisdale Story

Again, this is based on a true story that occurred in the early 1900's in the southern United States. There are conflicting reports on what actually happened, and what the name of the man actually was. My version is probably only an embellished version paralleling the actual story, re-fashioned by evangelists over the last century for maximum effect. Regardless, this story has been a powerful tool for me personally.

What I'm about to tell you is based on a true story that happened in the early 1900's in Mississippi.

There was a man named Henry Tisdale that operated a drawbridge over a river. He had the very important job of making sure that the bridge was up when ships were passing through on the river, and the bridge was down when trains crossed over.

He had a son named William, whom we'll call Billy, that always wanted to see what his Daddy did at work, and Henry Tisdale told his son, "When you turn six-years-old, I'll take you to work with me."

As promised, when Billy Tisdale turned six, Daddy took him to work with him. They climbed the small tower together that overlooked the river, and Henry showed his son the big lever that operated the bridge. "When you push the lever," he told him, "the bridge goes up. When you pull the lever, the bridge goes down."

Little Billy thought his Dad was the greatest thing in the world.

Around lunchtime, Henry and Billy went down by the river, and were enjoying a nice time together in the beautiful afternoon sun. That's when Henry heard a terrible sound. It was the sound of a train coming. Problem was, he wasn't expecting a train...and the bridge was up.

Not wanting to panic his son, Henry said, "Billy, stay right here. Daddy'll be right back."

Henry Tisdale ran up the hill, got into the tower, and looked out at the train coming over the crest of the hill on the far side. He recognized the train. It was an early passenger train with 400 people on it. If Henry Tisdale did not get the bridge down in time, the train would crash into the river, and these 400 people would lose their lives.

As he normally did, Henry Tisdale looked down at the gears and the place where the bridge would come down to make sure it was clear. Horror of horrors, Henry Tisdale saw that in the excitement of the moment, his son Billy had come running up the hill, wanting to see his father in action...and little Billy slipped and fell into the gears. If Henry Tisdale pushed the lever, his son Billy would be killed, crushed in the powerful gears.

I know what you're thinking: Go down and save your son, Henry! Well, Henry Tisdale didn't have the time to run down the hill, save his son, run back up to the tower, throw the lever, and get the bridge down in time to save those 400 people. He had an awful, dreadful, terrible decision to make: Save Billy, or the 400 people in the train?

Now maybe you're asking yourself, What would I have done? Henry Tisdale didn't have as much time as you just had to think about it.

I don't know anything else about Henry Tisdale except what happened next. Henry Tisdale began to weep...as he pulled the lever.

Henry chose to save those 400 people over his own son. He heard Billy cry out his name for the last time, and then Billy died.

The bridge came down just in time for the train to cross over, and soon it passed right in front of Henry Tisdale, where he could see inside. You know what he saw? He saw people laughing, talking, drinking tea, reading the newspaper—they had no idea how close they were to losing their lives only moments before! And even though they couldn't hear him, he screamed at the people on the train, pointing at the blood of his son, "Look at what I've done for you! Look at what I've done for you!"

But no one noticed him.

Tonight, God sits in His heavenly tower, looking down at this world—looking at you—pointing at the blood of His Son, and saying through me, "Look at what I've done for you."

Will we notice His sacrifice? Or be like the people on that train, going on with life, never considering what He's done for us?

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him would not perish, but have everlasting life.”