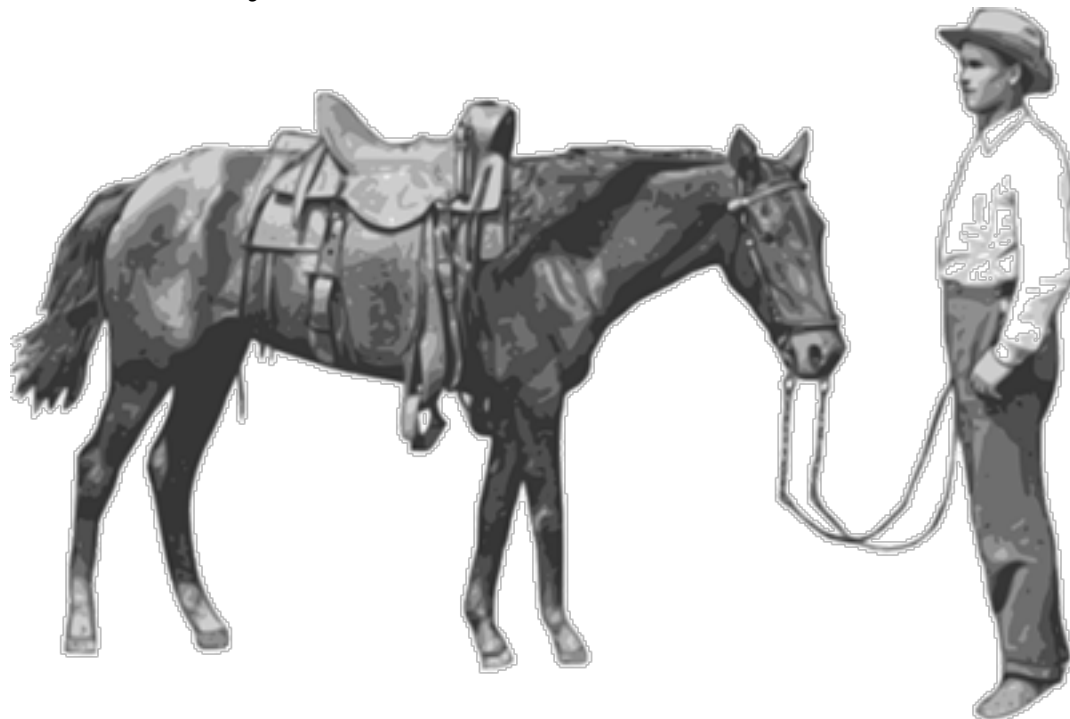


YOU CAN LEAD A HORSE TO WATER, BUT YOU CAN'T MAKE HIM DRINK

By Gerald E. Cumby



Have you ever been thirsty? I mean...REALLY THIRSTY? Most of us have been in a place where it was difficult to find nearby water. Just the thought of not being able to have water nearby causes the body and mind to thirst even more for water. Some people panic because their mind takes over their senses and causes all kinds of illusions and delusions in not being able to know where their next drink is coming from. Many stories have been told of the death of old cowboys who could not make it to a waterhole and died in the desert seeking water. That is because water is essential to our physical well-being. Without water, our bodies cannot function physically, mentally, or spiritually. It is an elementary truth...but a vital subject for discussion in that our well-being is always at the forefront of our thoughts. We are told to love others as you would yourself; but...when our bodies hurt or lack the vital nourishment that keeps us healthy and alive, we think of ourselves with great interest and fervor. Just reading this paragraph makes me thirsty. What about you?

The origin of the proverb "you can lead a horse to water but can't make him drink" came in about the 12th century and it is often considered as the oldest proverb of English that is in use today. It is initially believed to be recorded in 1175.

It means:

- **That no one can give water to the horse if he is not willing to drink it.**
- **Texas talk: "If you have the reins on a hoss, you probably can get him to the water hole; but, if that hoss doesn't want to drink the water, chances are he ain't going to drink no matter if you splash water all over him."**
- **The truth: "A cowboy knows whether his horse is thirsty or not. Just because the cowboy is thirsty doesn't mean the horse is."**

"On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." (John 7:37-38)

The following example has been used many times in sermons and devotions. I'm going to use it because it gives a great example for our devotion.

A car salesman could not make a sale after spending a lot of time with the customer. The salesman went to his Sales Manager and said, "I spent a lot of time with this customer today in trying to make a sale. I showed him all the details on the car and showed him the Car Fax stating that the car was in great shape. After all this time, the customer walked away from the sale. I guess it just goes to show you the old proverb is true, 'You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.'"

His sales manager had been in the same predicament time and time before, and he told the young car salesman, "Son, your job is not to make him drink, but to make him thirsty."

The parable and the sentimental, straight forward statement, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink" is not only an old proverbial thought, but simply the truth.

As a "Born Again" disciple of Christ, I have been in the young salesman's

shoes before when it comes to leading someone to Christ and carrying the sell to fruition (getting the person to come to Christ and pray the sinner's prayer). I have presented the message of salvation to the unsaved, but could not get them to make the final commitment necessary for his/her salvation.

I have asked myself on many occasions, "What am I doing wrong?" I have given the plan of salvation and I have prayed for the salvation of the soul of each individual...but, I can't get them to admit their sin and ask for forgiveness. The answer for my frustration, of course, is that you can't save any soul...only the Lord saves. Jesus said, "I have come to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10). The disciple can lead a person to the understanding that he/she is a sinner and needs a Savior, but the Holy Spirit must take control of the situation at that point. Jesus came to save those who are lost. The lost must be willing to humble himself and give into the Spirit as He changes the heart of the sinner and makes him whole again. He must come to the "Water of life." Our job is not to make him drink; our job is to make him thirsty for the Water of life.

What have we learned from the proverb?

- **We can offer good things to people but we can't force them to accept that which is graciously offered.**
- **You can present an advantage but can't force someone to opt for it.**
- **We cannot enforce our decisions on anyone even if those decisions are for their betterment.**
- **People will do whatever they wish to do no matter how much you ask them not to.**

What have we learned from God's Word that ties in with this proverb?

1. **Our responsibility is to present the Gospel message to the lost (those who have never accepted Jesus as Savior).**

Paul, the apostle, presented the message of Christ throughout the world as they knew it at the time. Many accepted; many rejected. Those who accepted needed mentoring by the more mature, experienced Christians. Paul taught the new converts and left those in charge who could take over for Paul as Paul would leave to go to another area to present the message of Christ.

2. The Holy Spirit does the work of bringing the person to Christ who listens to the message from the one witnessing to the potential convert.

The message is presented and the Holy Spirit draws the spirit of the hearer of the Word to a point of decision. The hearer accepts or rejects the message and the drawing of the Holy Spirit.

One of the truths we all must remember as we contemplate the truth of this proverb and its meaning. The lost must decide whether to accept the truth, but we must also understand the consequences of not witnessing (presenting the Good News to the lost).

What are the consequences for the Christian who knows the one who is lost, but fails to witness to him/her concerning their soul and spirit condition?

⁷"Now as for you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you will hear a message from My mouth and give them warning from Me. ⁸ When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require from your hand. ⁹ But if you on your part warn a wicked man to turn from his way and he does not turn from his way, he will die in his iniquity, but you have delivered your life." (Ezekiel 33:7-9)

This Scripture is one that causes our souls to stir and quake as we contemplate the responsibility we have to witness to our family, friends, and neighbors who we know are lost and undone before our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are to lead a person to Christ; that is our responsibility. It is not our responsibility to force the issue, but present the truth. The waterhole of life (Living Water) is available to all who respond to the call of Christ.

Give God glory and honor.

Jesus said, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." (John 7:37-38)

Most of us older folk have heard the song, "Cool, Clear Water!" by the Sons of the Pioneers.

The song begins:

*All day I face the barren waste
Without the taste of water, cool water
Old Dan and I with throats burned dry
And souls that cry for water, cool, clear, water.*

Chorus:

*Keep a-movin' Dan don't ya listen to him Dan
He's a devil of a man and he spreads the burning sand with water
Dan can you see that big green tree
Where the water's running free
And it's waiting there for you and me?*

2nd verse:

***The shadows sway and seem to say
Tonight we pray for water, cool, water
And way up there He'll hear our prayer
And show us where there's water, cool, clear, water.***

Chorus ending:

And it's waiting there for you and me?

**The Living Water is free.
Come and drink; Jesus is waiting for you and me!**

Song: [LetsSingIt - The Internet Lyrics Database](#)

SCRIPTURES TO GO WITH THE DEVOTION:

- Revelation 21:6, He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life."
- Revelation 22:1, "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb."
- Revelation 22:17, The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life."

- Jeremiah 2:13, "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."
- Jeremiah 17:13, "Lord, you are the hope of Israel; all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the Lord, the spring of living water."
- John 4:10, Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."
- Psalms 63:1, "You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water."
- Proverbs 11:30, **The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.** (KJV)