

An encouraging and entertaining suite of writings I gave my children after they left home! Not “kiddie” sermons, but grownup messages to my nine sons and daughters from their devoted daddy meant to exhort, encourage, and keep them laughing!

Daddyvotionals: essays from the empty nest

By John Abild

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Daddyvotionals

essays from the empty nest



JOHN ABILD

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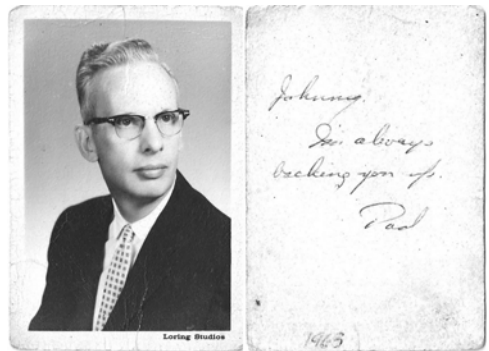
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Chapter 1

I'm Always Backing You Up

Back in 1963, when I was 15, my dad (your Grandpa Abild) had his portrait taken for some reason I don't remember. It may have had something to do with his work as an engineer at Pratt & Whitney Aircraft. He gave me a wallet sized copy as you see here, including the inscription on the back side, and I've kept it for well over fifty years. It became ragged and wrinkled from carrying it in my wallet for many years, and now I keep it in my desk. I'll show it to you if you'd like.

What I would like to speak of here is my dad's autograph on the back, "Johnny, I'm always backing you up." What do you think he meant by those words? Did it mean that he approved of everything I did? Was that a blanket endorsement of all the



things I would do in the future? Was he intending to back me up in all the sinful things I did in the ensuing years? Certainly not!

My dad never condoned my worldly behavior and my sometimes rebellious demeanor. He didn't endorse the sins of my youth and would correct me when he could if he knew about them.

I believe that his simple statement was in essence saying that I could depend on his love and care always, in spite of bad behavior, bad habits, bad direction, and bad fruit in my life. He definitely would not go along with some of my crazy trendy activities, my uncivilized speech, and my questionable personal associations. He would frown on these and punish me for doing wrong.

Yet, I always knew that I had a home I could go back to, a father who loved me anyway, someone I could talk to without fear of rejection. I didn't need to be afraid because "my dad is backing me up."

I would like you, my children, to have that same comfort in knowing that I am backing you up in the same way. Whatever you do and wherever you go, as long as I am alive, I'll be encouraging and supporting and praying for God's blessings upon you.

I think that this is also the heart of God our Father. Consider all of the trouble He has had with Israel from the very beginning. She as a nation would rebel against God's requirements, fall into awful sin and idolatry, yet God would always draw her back, with great chastening, as if He had a hook in her jaw. He spoke often in Scripture of His unending love for His people.

Even now, while Israel is still in unbelief in the promised Messiah, the Father continues to sustain the nation, protect her from her many enemies, and will in the end take her—and us, His church—unto Himself as His bride forever.

Until then we have His great and precious promises with which God will “back us up.” He’ll always be the Father we can have confidence in to love us and care for us to the end.

Yer lovin' dad

Chapter 25

The Solomon Scenarios

With no disrespect intended to King Solomon, I thought I would take a playful look at this wise king. I wonder what life may have been like as the husband of 700 wives and 300 more lovely ladies. You



know life must have been interesting for his “family.” You can imagine some scenarios that might have transpired. That’s what I’ve done here.

1. Have you ever imagined what a family gathering would be like with that many people? Would all the wives and concubines have to wear name tags so Solomon would remember them?

2. Where did they all live? No house or palace could hold all those women. Even if they got along with each other most of the time, there would be fighting and contending to be the king's favorite.
3. What if Solomon, while walking on the grounds of his palace, encountered a beautiful woman and suggested they get married? It would be embarrassing if she said, "But we're already married!"
4. If Solomon "entertained" a different wife or concubine every night of the week, it would take 3.8 years before he would encounter the first one again.
5. How many children resulted from these relationships? Hundreds? We don't know.
6. Imagine if one of young Solomon's friends suggested that the two of them go down to a good fishing spot the following weekend to see how the fish are biting. The king might reply, "Sorry, I can't make it. I'm getting married next weekend." So the friend inquires, "Okay, what about the weekend after that?" "Nope, I'm getting married that weekend too." Solomon would have to tell his friend that he has wedding plans every weekend for the next 13½ years!
7. 700 wives? 700 mothers-in-law!
8. Anniversaries must have been fun. Two anniversaries per week on average had to be exciting!

- [illegible]

In what respect was Solomon so wise? Surely not in marriage!

Yer lovin' dad

Chapter 34

The Christian and Humor

What is the place of humor in preaching?

Over the years since I've been a Christian, I have heard numerous godly ministers who have a wonderful sense of humor. Their comical comments are often very effective in stressing a scriptural point while at the same time offering a bit of levity and entertainment.

I've also heard some religious comedians whose only goal is to achieve laughs on the subjects of religion and church life. These don't impress me; rather, they turn me off, and I turn them off. More often than not, Christian comics only exemplify what the Bible calls "foolish jesting."



Hobart Freeman, our pastor in Indiana, could in no way be regarded as a silly man, yet he would often come up with highly amusing statements that gave everybody a laugh while emphasizing his subject very well. Tom Hamilton, who pastored our Kentucky church, would also say some funny things. A few other ministers I knew were the same.

This got me thinking and wondering if there was anything “funny” in the Bible. I can’t think of much! I admit to chuckling every time I read about Balaam’s talking donkey. Sarai laughed when she heard the Angel of the Lord say that she would bear a child, but then that laughter brought a rebuke. Also, the preposterous predicament Solomon was in with 1000 women brings numerous funny scenarios to mind, like the thought of them all having to wear name tags.² And then there’s the absurd statement by Aaron claiming that he threw everyone’s gold jewelry into the fire and a calf came out!

There are several verses that are amusing in Proverbs where the writer speaks of one who lacked temperance with regard to wine. Proverbs 23:29f says,

Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, *when* it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth

² See our chapter *The Solomon Scenarios* in this book

down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, *shalt thou say, and* I was not sick; they have beaten me, *and* I felt *it* not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.

I wonder if in Jesus' ministry, in the presence of His disciples or brothers, He would utter anything humorous. We know that He bore the fruit of joy to perfection, and joy often evokes funny things. But the subject of humor is never touched in Scripture, as far as I can recall.

So we would wonder, does God have what we call a sense of humor? In the scope of eternity it surely doesn't matter, but it is interesting to think about. When we look at some of the monkeys and other animals He created and some of the various birds' mating dances, we think that He must—they're so funny looking. But in all fairness, we must wonder what these creatures think of us!

A big question here is, what about humor in the pulpit? Is the assembly of the saints and the preaching of God's Word the proper venue for funny entertainment? I don't think so. If a minister of the gospel appears for his sermon wearing a clown outfit or a funny hat, speaks in a silly voice, makes fun of old people or certain ethnicities, are these funny? Not a bit. Not in the house of God. Maybe not anywhere, but surely not in church. To be funny, in the sense of being a stand-up comic with a "Christian message," is a detraction from the true gospel and the glory of the Lord.

So what are we to think about some ministers who just seem to have a way of mixing an occasional amusing comment or story into their preaching, causing the congregation to laugh? This comes

naturally to some preachers, and they do this in good taste while making a spiritual point. *This* becomes the deciding factor, in my thinking—is it natural, and does it flow without forcing it out of a godly and joyful personality? If this is the case, such humor is an edifying feature of a man’s sermon delivery.

But we have to also remember the Bible’s warnings against foolish talking, jesting, and mocking. The careful minister will avoid even getting near to the line between these. He won’t try to get as close as he can to bad humor just to get a laugh, but will flee foolishness in the pulpit.

After all, the preaching of the Word of God is the most serious subject there is. Men’s souls are at stake, and hell awaits the unrepentant sinner. There’s nothing frivolous about death and the eternal abode of the soul. Joking about heaven and telling funny stories about meeting St. Peter at the Pearly Gates are tasteless, and detract from the seriousness that should be assigned to eternal things. I receive such jokes as these in emails, and they get deleted, not forwarded.

So what about humor in the pulpit? Here is a section from Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ book on preaching that expresses what I believe about this³:

“We turn now to another point in this list of the various things one has to consider in a sermon...the place of humor in preaching. Here again is a very difficult subject. What makes all these things difficult is that they are natural gifts, and the

³ Taken from *Preaching & Preachers* by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones Copyright © 1971 by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Used by permission of Zondervan. www.zondervan.com

question that is raised is the use of natural gifts, or the place of the natural gifts, in this great work of preaching. The history of preaching and preachers shows that there have been tremendous variations.

“In the case of an outstandingly great preacher like Spurgeon there was a great deal of humor - some of us would say too much humor. You have heard of the lady who went to him and complained about the humor in his sermons. She was a great admirer of Mr. Spurgeon and derived great benefit from his preaching. But she felt that there was too much humor in the sermons and told him so. Spurgeon was a very humble man and he said to her, ‘Well, madam, you may very well be right; but if you knew the number of jokes I do not tell you, and the number of things that I refrain from saying, you would give me more credit than you are giving me.

“Now I believe that was true. He was a naturally humorous man, it bubbled out of him. But then take Whitefield, on whom Spurgeon modeled himself - he was never humorous. Whitefield was always tremendously serious. In the 18th century to which he belonged, there were other men like John Berridge of Everton in England, who, again, was one of these natural humorists. These men always trouble me because I feel that they tended to go too far, and allowed their humor to run away with them.

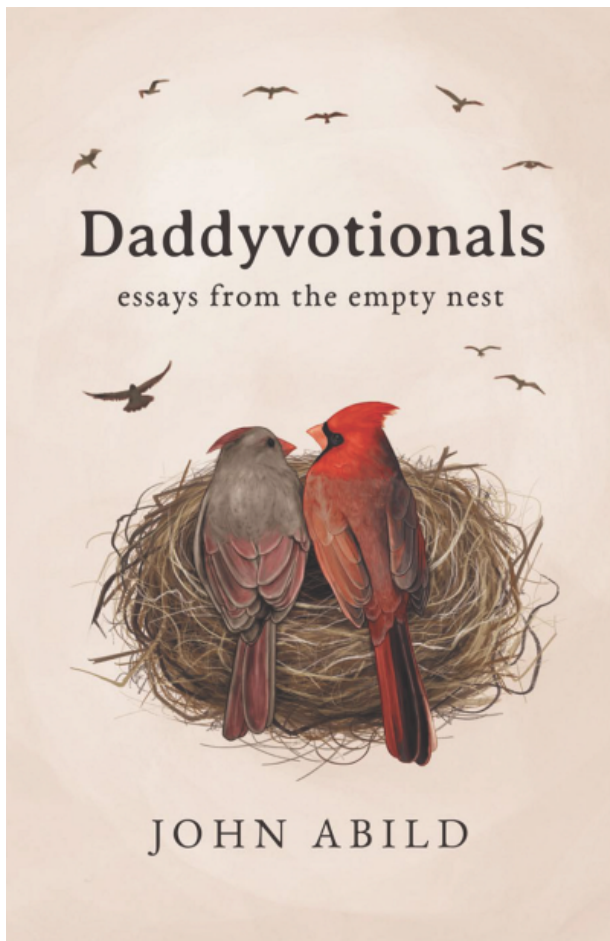
“I would not dare to say that there is no place for humor in preaching; but I do suggest that it should not be a very big place because of the nature of the work, and because of the character of the Truth with which we are dealing. The

preacher is dealing with and concerned about souls and their destiny. He is standing between God and men and acting as an ambassador for Christ. I would have thought that as the overriding consideration, the most one can say for the place of humor is that it is only allowable if it is natural. The man who tries to be humorous is an abomination and should never be allowed to enter a pulpit. The same applies to the one who does it deliberately in order to ingratiate himself with the people. That this kind of thing has been expected of so-called 'professional evangelists' has always passed my comprehension."

I think there is a lot of wisdom in what Dr. Jones wrote above, as it applies to the preaching of the Word by God's ministers. If good humor flows naturally out of a joyful heart, it can be a blessing to the hearers.

When we consider that Jesus and His disciples spent three years together, I expect they enjoyed many laughs at the funny things that would have happened, much like we laugh in our family situations.

Yer lovin' dad



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