

Why Did the Pastor Eat an Unpeeled Banana in Church Today?

by Rob Evans

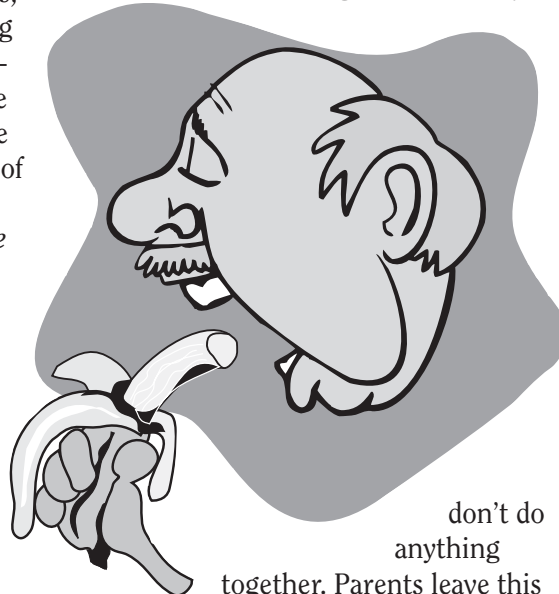
Pastor Whataguy had just invited the kids to come down front for a children's sermon. He gulped as they rushed toward the altar area in a flood of smiling, eager faces. They wiggled against each other in anticipation. He really wasn't known for being a "kids-kind-of-guy." He had always been more "steady-as-she-goes," and in some ways feared losing that handle. But his fear of appearing the fool in front of the adults was pushed aside by the sheer enthusiasm and energy of the kids.

Besides, he thought, there are more important issues at stake here than appearances. He had finally agreed to make this bold move to address an issue that had been stirring in his heart: I must become a better example of pro-kid and pro-family values in my church.

Pastor Whataguy is looking forward to the day when the church he pastors is like the church in the Book of Acts. But right now it seems the church resembles American culture more than biblical culture with its programs, departments, and specialists. And here he is initiating another program—a kids' sermon. He shuddered. He had dreaded do-

ing the children's sermon when he was an intern.

As the kids settled on the floor, he thought back to the meeting with the children's workers that had led to this sermon. He could still hear the words of one of the more dedicated workers: "Families come to church together and they leave together, but they



don't do anything together. Parents leave this place week after week with no inspiration, equipment, material, or ideas for what they can do with their own kids. We must do a better job equipping parents for their own ministry at home."

"OK, what do you propose we do?" Pastor Whataguy asked. Several hours of discussion produced a consensus:

1. He and the children's pastor would try to coordinate sermon topics. Of course the adult content would be far more mature, but the essence would be the same. The arts, crafts, and handouts the kids took home would give the family something to do and talk about during the week.

2. They decided to have a book table to provide parents with tapes, books, and videos that would reinforce the sermons and songs heard in children's church and the adult service. That way families would be equipped with music and stories they could use in the car or at home. And when the kids came to church, they would already know the songs and stories. The workers also decided to take all profits from the book table and use them to buy materials for struggling single parents in their church and community.

3. The adult choir director—a proud new grandmother—suggested that the choir include a kids' song every Sunday. Pastor Whataguy smiled as he tried to imagine the choir doing songs with hand motions.

4. The team suggested that when the pastor led in prayer, perhaps his wife could join him during the petition part of his prayer. This might encourage couples to pray

together at home. That made sense. But now the hard part. Would he, the senior pastor, consider presenting a children's sermon?

"Why not use a kids' specialist?" he asked.

"Because the men in the church look up to you," came the reply.

The children's workers were persuasive. They even used one of his favorite Scriptures—Malachi 4:6—where God would "turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers." But a kids' sermon?

"What do I do in front of all of those kids?" he asked.

"Here's a book of object lessons," came the reply. "It'll get you started."

The workers decided on one about peeling a banana and talking about "what's inside that counts." He would then tie the object lesson to the story of Saul and David. Saul looked great on the outside, but he had no heart for God. David was small on the outside, but had a heart that loved God. He thought he could handle that. He was impressed with the content. Kids' presentations that had annoyed him in the past usually had weak content.

The adults could use this too, he thought to himself. But that brought up another issue.

"What will the adults think of all of this playfulness in church? Will they regard it as showing disrespect for God?" he asked.

Someone had a suggestion: Write an insert for the church bulletin and call it, "Why Did the Pastor Eat an Unpeeled Banana in

Church Today?" It would explain this new approach to the more conservative members of the congregation. The pastor is modeling pro-kid, pro-family values from the pulpit. Nice ring to it. Great idea. End of meeting.

And now he was looking down at all of these smiling young faces. The atmosphere was more pleasant than he had anticipated.

He felt like a playful, young dad again as he held up the banana and said, "I'm hungry. I didn't have breakfast yet today." He then proceeded to take a bite out of the top of the unpeeled banana. He chewed with exaggeration. It was quite bitter.

"Yuck," he said, "it tastes bitter. I don't think this is the right way to eat a banana."

The kids were shocked. Some laughed. He hoped that at least one child would speak up. One finally did.

"You should peel it before you eat it," a helpful little future administrator cried out.

"I should? Oh! Thank you very much for telling me. I'll try it." Pastor Whataguy peeled the banana, took a bite, chewed thoughtfully, and said, "Yes, that is much better."

He then began his children's sermon with his mouth full of banana. He had their attention and made the most of it. He talked about Saul and how handsome he was. He held up the banana peel and said, "Saul looked good on the outside, but he was bitter to God, because he did not obey God."

Then he talked about David. "David was just a little boy who didn't look like much on the outside, but on the inside—in his

heart—he loved God more than anything."

Most of the kids were getting the message. He could tell some of the smaller ones were a bit lost, perhaps wondering if David was a banana.

"So next time you eat a banana, don't forget to peel it first. And when you get to the inside, I want you to think about David, who had a heart that made God happy, because of his great love for God. Do you love God?"

The kids shouted, "Yes!"

"Good, you may go back to your seats."

As the kids went back to their seats, the choir sang "As David Did," a song about David. The choir rippled with hand motions and tambourines. The kids listened with rapt attention; this was a song they could understand and enjoy.

The morning was a triumph. The bulletin announcement worked well. The conservative members were pleased. Even the tape table was swamped with requests for the tape with the song about David on it. The new "Family Resources" column in the bulletin was obviously doing its job.

With kids hanging on him afterwards, much like a human jungle gym, Pastor Whataguy looked forward to getting back to that book on object lessons. Then he paused and thought, *I wonder if there's anything in it that deals with pizza?*

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