

Not Just Any Old Joe

My heart is broken. I am in Africa and Joe Adams has passed into the glory. I am so sorry to be so far away at such a time as this. The Adamses have been members of our church for several years. They have single-handedly watched over our Fifty-Plusers with love and affection. They have even helped some of them pass over into heaven with great care. Hard to believe, but true, Joe has joined many of his class members on the other side.

As we look back over the years my heart is warmed with the memories of Joe. The one consuming thought I have today of Joe Adams is, he was not just any Joe. The Scripture comes to mind of what was said of the father of King David, "...whose name was Jesse...and the man went among men for an old man in the days of Saul" (I Samuel 17:12). In so many ways, Joe was a man among men...and he will be greatly missed. What made our Joe so special?

1. He developed a heart for God.

When I first met Joe Adams, he was very much what one would define as a nominal Christian, living the average Christian life. I walked with him through his struggles of growth in grace. I remember as God began to talk to Joe, he listened. I still have in my library a book he gave me during this time that defined what he was personally experiencing. The title is "The Spirit and the Flesh." I am glad to say as his pastor, he made the trip in to the spiritual walk God had destined for him. I remember so well Joe going out the door with tears in his eyes at the times God spoke to him. Would that all my members would say, "*As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God*" (Psalm 42:1). He developed a hunger and thirst for God. He was not just any old Joe.

2. He overcame life's obstacles.

Joe knew what it was to be blessed in his business and he knew what it was to have some serious reversals. I have known him through downturn and upturn and he remained the same friend for all seasons. He learned to trust God and leave the results in His hands.

Joe loved to read. One of the saddest days came when he lost his eyesight, only able to see light and very faint images, but his reading days were over. There was a time when he came down the aisle with a spring in his step and then the time came when he would tenderly hold to his wife's shoulder as she led them to their seat. He never lost his smile. He always hugged me on the way out the door. In the last couple of years I would have to say, "I'm right here, Joe." I always thought Joe was a sharp dresser, but after he lost his vision, he dressed even sharper than usual, disclosing that his secret to looking nice was his wife.

Through it all he was faithful to services and His Lord. He was not just any old Joe!

3. He married and loved his one great love of his lifetime.

Beverly Ann and Joe met in their youth. They married and did everything together. They had a remarkable love for each other that ripened through the

years. We were scheduled to have dinner together one recent weekend, but they asked to have a rain check on it until we returned from Africa. The reason was that he and Beverly Ann were going to enjoy their forty-fifth wedding anniversary together, the two of them. Mrs. Pope and I certainly understood and we both thought how romantic they still were after all those years. I am so happy they made it to forty-five together!

Joe and Bev never had children, but in a real sense, they adopted with open arms all friends as though they were family. In a precious way this is why our Fifty-Plusers is such a close group; if you participated in their activities, you were more than a welcomed guest -- you were part of the family.

I cannot think of Joe without thinking of Beverly Ann. I cannot think of Beverly Ann without thinking of Joe. Isn't that the way God intended for all marriages? *"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh"* (Genesis 2:24). He was not just any old Joe!

4. He was pleasant.

Being pleasant is perhaps one of the most important characteristics a person possesses, yet gets little praise. Joe did far more smiling than frowning. There is a verse in the Bible that commemorates Saul and Jonathan and could just as easily be tweaked for Joe and Bev, *"Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided..."* (II Samuel 1:23). They were not divided in his passing and in this life he was pleasant. I loved to see him smile and I loved to hear him laugh and I was able to see and hear him do both quite frequently.

When I enter the auditorium and sit down in my seat at church, I often scan the audience and look for the "old faithfuls." I would often look to my left and see Joe and Beverly Ann. I would see Joe get his hearing aid adjusted and often get a smiling nod from his wife, as if to say, "We are here, Pastor." I will say with Jonathan after he knew he would not see his great friend, David for a long while, *"Then Jonathan said to David, To morrow is the new moon: and thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty"* (I Samuel 20:18). He was not just any old Joe!

5. He has made Heaven more like home.

An older man once commented that when he thought of heaven, he thought of a place of mystery, misty clouds, high-spiraled buildings, be-jeweled walls and pearly gates. Then he said, he had a little brother who died and then the clouds were not as thick and in the clearing he could see the buildings were not as spiraled and it was not quite as mysterious. Years past and his mother died and the clouds were greatly dissipated, the walls were not quite as untouchable because now a little brother and mother were there. Then his dad died and he began to see the lakes and flowers, the spirals were nearly gone and almost all the clouds were removed. Then he said, as the years have gone by I find I have more friends on the other side than I do here. Now Heaven is no longer a place of mystery. Heaven is home.

As I write these words I hear my dear grandmother singing, “Oh, they tell me of a home far beyond the sky; oh, they tell me of a home far away...oh, they tell me of an unclouded day.” That was the last time I saw my grandmother. She’s home now. I am beginning to understand why the old timers refer to it as home now. Well, Joe and I missed our last opportunity to have dinner together here on earth, but we shall sit down together at the Wedding Supper with the King! Then we’ll all be home. When Solomon was old and about to pass he said, “...*man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets*” (Ecclesiastes 12:5). This man who had a palatial mansion and worldly splendor beyond description said in essence, “Now, when you see the mourners gathered at my funeral, just remember, I am home and not just any home -- the home I have been longing for, my eternal home.”

I love Joe and we shall all miss him, but he’s home now and as David said of his deceased child, “*But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me*” (II Samuel 12:23). He was not just any old Joe! He’s in his new home waiting for us; that’s our Joe!

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