

# FORUM

## The words of a child



**Nigel Alston**

**Motivational Moments**

*Children are unpredictable. You never know what inconsistency they're going to catch you in next.*

— Franklin P. Jones

Jimmy Buffet is quoted as saying "if we couldn't laugh, we would all go insane." I agree, and believe laughter is good medicine for the soul and children seem to be full of surprises that produce an ongoing supply of it. I remember a conversation I had once with a little girl named Sydney, then 7 years old. You never know what children are going to say next, and sometimes, you get caught off guard. I was that day when I learned she later described our trip to the corner store as "romantic."

Children are innocent that way, often providing more information than you expect, asking the unexpected one moment and saying the unexpected the next.

Sydney not only thought we had a romantic interaction, she doubted if I was telling her the truth.

"What's your name," she wanted to know.

"Nigel" I said.

"No, for real." "That's my name," I said, trying to contain my laughter. I was cracking up inside.

Sometimes it's not the question asked but the reason for asking it that produces a smile. It starts off as an innocent inquiry even though in the back of your mind, you wonder, "Where did that come from?" I'm sure that is what the mother of a little boy initially thought when he asked her if it were true what the Bible says about men and women being created from dust and returning to dust when they die.

"Yes," his mom said, verifying the scripture. "Why?" She was probably standing still, bracing herself for the unexpected. She would not be disappointed.

"Well I was crawling around under the bed and I saw someone but I couldn't tell if they were coming or going!" he said.

Isn't that funny? I found myself laughing at that story. It's cute isn't it? Surprise, surprise, surprise.

That's what I said as I read an email sent to me recently, simply asking, "Have you seen this?" From the first comment to the last question, I laughed and couldn't wait to share the email with others. Again, the honesty and innocence of each statement or question brings to life what children believe to be true and what they have been taught and or observed from others.

Imagine you are a small child seeing the world through little eyes. Adults have taken you to church.

You have attended vacation bible school and you have listened to your Sunday school teachers. You believe the stories they and your parents have told you.

Here is a suggestion for God from Jane. "Dear God, instead of letting people die and having to make new ones why don't you just keep the ones you got now?"

Remember, you are seeing the world through a child's eyes and you want to know what God thinks. Neil had a question about kissing. "Dear God, I went to this wedding and they kissed right in church. Is that ok?" Or this one from Jennifer. She asks a thoughtful question. It makes sense to me. "Dear God, In bible times did they really talk that fancy?" How about this one from Robert. "Dear God, I am American. What are you?" Do you have a smile on your face yet?" I do, again.

Some comments are thoughtful too, like this one from Ruth. "Dear God, I think the stapler is one of your greatest inventions." And Elliott, I'm sure, wanted to show his gratitude to God. "Dear God, I think about you sometimes even when I'm not praying."

Hold on, it gets better. Some are thankful, even though they didn't get what they

asked for, like this comment from Joyce. "Dear God, thank you for the baby brother but what I prayed for was a puppy." Now, that is hilarious. As is this recognition of the difficulty of being God, from Nan. "Dear God, I bet it is very hard for you to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only 4 people in our family and I can never do it."

Little Mickey wanted God to check him out. "Dear God, If you watch in Church on Sunday I will show you my new shoes." Cool, huh? And consider this serious request from Denise. "Dear God, if we come back as something please don't let me be Jennifer Horton because I hate her."

A lesson in forgiveness might help her. Peter on the other hand was not so forward. "Dear God, please send Dennis Clark to a different camp this year." A simple request, right?

Maybe the parable of the rich man would help Raphael. "Dear God, If you give me a genie lamp like Aladdin I will give you anything you want except my money or my chess set."

Thank God for little children and laughter.

*Nigel Alston is a radio talk-show host, columnist and motivational speaker. He is the chairman of the Winston-Salem State University Board of Trustees. Visit his Web site at [www.motivationalmoments.com](http://www.motivationalmoments.com).*

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## Why I am for Barack Obama



**Joseph Lowery**  
Guest Columnist

From the stage of a recent Barack Obama rally in Atlanta, estimated to be 30,000-strong, I witnessed a marvelous expression of a new attitude being born in the American psyche.

Witness the mosaic: young and old, black and white and brown; from all economic stations, "all fired up" over this extraordinary candidate. And I said, "Thank you Lord for allowing me to live long enough to experience this now." It's not just the force of the moment, but it is an idea whose time has come — "the fierce urgency of now."

That's what Barack Obama's candidacy embodies: freedom now, not four years later or the next time around. Not only is Obama a breath of fresh air, his promise of hope is deliverance from the dynasties of an old guard that commands the current political landscape. Not only does he represent a break from the status quo, he generates an enthusiasm among young people — energy not witnessed my entire 86 years of life. Obama is the face of tomorrow today.

In a society where race defines so much, Barack Obama is not hampered by his blackness. In the overwhelmingly white Iowa Democratic Caucus, which gave him a sweeping victory, an unshackling played out in the same way the burden of race was lifted, and the people of Massachusetts (black people



A view of one of Obama's Iowa headquarters.

make up only six percent of the electorate) chose Deval Patrick — a black man — as governor.

Can we celebrate, finally, that the white electorate is taking a cue from the African American community by voting for a candidate with little to no regard of his or her race? Are the voters in a state that is 95 percent white affirming to the nation — but especially to the African American community — that indeed a black man can win?

As the Democratic primaries move to the southeastern states — South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Maryland, Virginia, Tennessee and Louisiana — where black voting strength is considerable, that message has particular relevance.

I am certainly not advocating an appeal to racial politics, although I will admit to a deep level of pride. My caution is don't embrace this soaring political star simply because he's

black but because he's deserving.

To know Obama is to celebrate the American success story that we have always yearned to live.

Abandoned by his father and raised by grandparents, he studied hard and believed in his intellect. His achievements are celebratory: Columbia under grad, Harvard Law, first black president of the Harvard Law Review, civil rights attorney, Illinois state senator, and the United States Senate — the third African American since Reconstruction to hold that seat.

He has not climbed to the pinnacle of achievement without hard work and personal sacrifice. As a community organizer he passed up lucrative offers to be a corporate lawyer to labor in the trenches. It was only his arrival on the national scene and his best-selling book that allowed him and his wife Michelle to pay off law school

loans.

Supporting Barack Obama is not just voting for a black man. It is a statement for change. It is an act of courage.

In the early days of the civil rights struggle, so many people hung on the sidelines even though they believed in the correctness of our cause. They were shackled by their own fear, although not without reason. The threat of physical harm was real. We were challenging the status quo and our opponents were vicious in their grasp on an old order. But we pushed forward, relegating our fears to the background in pursuit of liberty. We had to trust in the Higher Power that had inspired those aspirations in the first place.

Certainly the wagging of our vote in the presidential primaries won't be challenged with fire hoses and dogs. Though, I sense a subtle and uneasy fear in our community, more insidious, cloaked and unspoken. The fear of change, of the new and of potential peril can only be resolved by embracing the possibilities on the other side.

To recall the words of James R. Lowell, "Then to side with truth is noble, when we shared her wretched crust, Ere her cause bring fame and profit and its prosperous to be just; Then it is the brave man chooses while the coward stands aside, Till the multitude make virtue of the faith they had denied."

We are on the brink of touching a collective dream, fleeting and possible. Let us make it real as we celebrate the future today.

*The Rev. Joseph Lowery is co-founder and President Emeritus of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.*

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