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365 Ways to Criticize the Pastor

Sample Chapter

Rev. Pat Jobe

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Foreword

“Pastor” is a nice word. But I’m from the South, and we call ‘em preachers.

I pray people will buy this book for their preachers and give it as a gift of healing, as a token of their apology for being so confoundedly awful and insufferable and nit-picking and judgmental and bizarre and pitiful and self-absorbed.

It is intended as a gift for seminary students who dream their impending careers will be miraculous gifts from God wherein they serve the elect with love, and their lives are uninterrupted scenes of brilliant preaching, tender-hearted pastoring, and light and lovely appreciation.

I am not bitter and cynical. The church is the body of Christ, and it operates as a font of light and love and joy and creation and freedom more often than it could if it were not the body of Christ. If the church were simply a misguided, deluded tangle of fighting, overgrown babies it would have gone out of existence 1900 years ago. Radio Bible teacher Steve Brown puts it even more succinctly. “If a business operated like the church, it would be broke in 30 days.”

The church is my spiritual mother. My life springs from her. I am not writing as a former preacher embittered by my bad experiences, but rather as a working preacher who adores my folks (some more than others). I wrote this book not to make any of them feel bad, but rather to give us all a good laugh, a moment of renewal as we press on with our eyes on the prize.

But humor is always dangerous. I have done radio commentary, published newspaper columns, and spoken in public for more than 30 years. Jokes, wisecracks, smarting-off — all of this is fodder for misunderstanding. Feelings get hurt. Apologies have to be offered. Human relationships are messy enough to make some of us wish we had never heard of humor, especially humor that stands a chance of being misunderstood.

It's worth the risk. P. T. Barnum said he would rather entertain a nation than run it, and that reflects a mere smidgen of the good that can be done by those who make us laugh.

So, enjoy, but understand there is a risk. Know that I laugh most at myself, and when I find myself laughing more at others than myself, I always know it's time to make an adjustment.

Any similarity between the characters in this book and actual people is purely coincidental.

May the Lord bless you and keep you. Amen.

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*“Blessed are you who
are persecuted for my name’s sake.”*

-Jesus

December 25

Yesterday, we had the worst cussed Christmas program in the history of the church. Shepherds in bathrobes, angels who looked like unmade beds, at least one of whom was picking her nose, and music that sounded like a cheap radio drowning out singers who could not care less. At the center of it all was the Rev. Arnold Chister.

The Rev. Arnold Chister pastors the Treadwell Freewill Baptist Church here in Nebo, NC. He is married to the Rev. Elizabeth Chister, who pastors the Nebo United Methodist Church, and her being a preacher is giving us Freewill Baptists a fit.

December 26

My boy, Wilson, and those grandkids came by for their presents. Acted like two hours at Grandma's was gonna kill them. If it was like the old days, the preacher would put the fear of God in them.

December 27

Clean-up after the Christmas program went like a fire drill. It's a wonder they didn't destroy the place. You Know Who was oblivious.

December 28

His wife is also oblivious.

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December 29

His children don't have sense enough to come in out of a shower of rain. He's got a 14-year-old boy, Robert Taylor, a four-year-old girl, Tabitha, and they even bring foster kids into their house. Is he a preacher or a dad gum social services agency?

December 30

I'm sure his mother is a nice enough person, but I've heard his daddy was bad to drink.

December 31

He's been here four years, and he has yet to offer a Watch Night service. We used to bring in the new year on our knees. Instead he travels Down East to see some friend of his, and what you bet they do to bring in the new year? I doubt it has anything to do with praying.

January 1

My new year's resolution is to keep Rev. Chister on his toes. If I always let him know when folks need a visit or a comforting word, he'll appreciate all my help. Or if he doesn't, he'll hear about it.

January 2

Already I have had an opportunity to call Rev. Chister about Sister Irene's ingrown toenail. For some reason he didn't seem that appreciative. Even if it is his day off, does he think Sister Irene gets a day off from her toe?

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January 3

He needs a haircut. God bless him. I think he has a heart for the Lord, and I know people from his generation wore their hair a little longer, but I hope he knows he would look much nicer if he would just trim it up a little.

January 4

The prayer room walls were fine before he painted them. What's wrong with white? Isn't white one of the colors that people associate with holiness and purity? What was it he said about earth tones?

January 5

Sister Irene called to say that Chister's wife had preached on the wise men. Well, that should make it clear that women have no place in the pulpit. If the Lord had intended women to preach, he could have sent wise women along with the wise men to the manger. And there's nothing in the Bible about the shepherds being women or even the angels. Go back and read your Bible, sister. None of the angels' names in the Bible are women's names. Hey, look at the nativity scene there in the front room. See? Even Jesus' father is a man. Seems plain enough to me.

January 6

Sister Eunice said one of those black teenagers Rev. Chister's so excited about having at church was eye-balling one of the white girls. Help me, God.

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January 7

Bubba came by today. I don't know why we call him Bubba. He doesn't drive a pick-up or throw beer cans out the window. He drives a van with his tools on it. He fixed my washing machine again. I asked him if he was going to church anywhere, and he smiled and told me no. I told him I was worried about him. He said he'd be okay. I do wish the preacher would go see him.

January 8

Rev. Chister mentioned it was Elvis' birthday. Elvis. You'd think he could come up with somebody better than that to talk about.

January 9

Nobody from the church has been by or called in weeks. It was nice they came Christmas caroling, but you'd think they'd be more interested in me. I wish we had an old-fashioned preacher who would inspire people to do right.

January 10

Irene said her toe is better. The preacher's wife is leading a mission team from her church to Honduras, gonna lay block for a health clinic. You'd think they'd be people right here at home we could help. He still hasn't gotten a hair cut.

January 11

My boy Wilson's drinking again. I just know it. He hasn't admitted it to me, but he's been avoiding church and Sunday School. I'd die if people knew it, but I do wish the preacher would go see him. If my husband, Basil, was living, he'd die over this.

January 12

The preacher wrecked his car again. He's done it about four times in his years here. We always take a love offering to help him cover his deductible. He even told us he fell asleep at the wheel after his great-aunt's funeral. Lord, help. He's always making fun of himself. I don't see the humor.

January 13

Irene has a cousin at his wife's church. Her cousin said one of their members had a heart attack yesterday, and that woman's down there in Honduras working with people who can't even speak English.

January 14

He plays the guitar and sings in church. He's not that good. Some of the others say he's awful, but I know one or two like his Hank Williams stuff. It beats me why.

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January 15

Irene brought her granddaughter to the church house. She's a softball coach in one of the high schools Down East. Well, that should be enough said, but she doesn't have a boyfriend, just to make the point plain enough. Rev. Chister hugged her like she was a normal person, and then they grinned at each other. You'd think they were up to something.

January 16

He's got the deacon board to spend \$300 on some family up in the holler, said social services was gonna take their foster kids if they didn't have a proper bathroom. Now what business is that of ours? The deacon board needs to start looking for a new preacher.

January 17

I need to pray. Lord, you know Wilson's drinking again. He didn't sound like himself again on the phone tonight. God, bless him. Give me some hope here, Lord. Let that preacher know how much we need a miracle. In Jesus' name. Amen.

January 18

His wife was at the church supper tonight. She needs to gain a few pounds. What is it with these modern women? She looks like that song from back in the sixties, "Skinny legs and all." She did get a nice tan in Honduras. That's probably what she went for.

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January 19

More black folks are coming to church. Help me, Lord. If I'm wrong about this, show me somehow. Amen.

January 20

I walked the graveyard today and talked to Wilson's daddy. It's a beautiful old graveyard, but it looks mighty desolate in the winter.

I told him, Basil, did you ever think you'd see the day we'd have a preacher married to another preacher? Black folks in church with us? Lord only knows what all else?

Basil, I sure hope they've got rose-colored glasses in heaven.

January 21

Rev. Chister came by Wilson's tonight. I don't know what they talked about. I'd been begging him. He wanted Wilson to go to an AA meeting. Lord, let it be.

January 22

He's talking to the deacon board about taking our kids to Honduras next time.

January 23

His New Year's Eve buddy from Down East was here. They were talking about bilingual worship and bringing in the Mexicans. Only they weren't calling 'em Mexicans. Hispanolees or some such. That Down East boy is one of those modern preachers, too.

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January 24

Irene's toe flared up again. No preacher visit. It's worse the second time. Not the toe, the lack of visits.

January 25

I told Eunice we may as well give up on him visiting much. He goes by the nursing home to see Iris Wells. He said Iris is a real inspiration to him, 92 years old, and up there in that nursing home with no feet. He said after one visit, she looked up at him and said, "The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord hold you in the hollow of his hand." He'd have more stories if he visited more.

January 26

They live in the Methodist parsonage which is fair enough since we don't have one. He keeps a lot of his office hours there. Just doesn't seem right, a Baptist preacher's office in a Methodist building. Next thing you know she'll convert him to sprinkling.

January 27

I know a lot of people disagree with me, but if I was baptized by sprinkling by a Methodist woman preacher, I'd be scared it didn't count.

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January 28

It snowed knee-deep to Wilt Chamberlain. Nobody's seen either one of them out shoveling the driveway. The kids have been out playing in the snow, but the grown-ups are nowhere to be seen. And both of them preachers.

January 29

It's melted a little. Eunice called to say nobody's called to check on her. It's just not like the old days. I checked on Irene, so I guess the three of us are checking on each other, like we could do anything if there was an emergency. A new preacher could come in here and get this mess organized.

January 30

He mentioned that Gandhi was killed on this date. He was in India years ago and said 800 million Indians stop whatever they are doing, park their cars, stop work in the fields, whatever they're doing, all 800 million of them to remember Gandhi on this date, to remember his changing the whole world with the force of his nonviolent love. Surely, the Rev. Mister Chister knows that Gandhi was not a Christian. Surely.

February 1

He's begging the church for van drivers again. Why do we need a van ministry? He's dragging the most rag-tag, ungodly looking teenagers in from the worst neighborhoods in the county. If they wanted to go to church, I'm sure there's one close enough for them to walk.

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