

*“God is present in our world, awaiting
with wings of love to infuse hope.”*

*This Hope
We Have*

Selected Sermons
and Meditations of
JON APPLETON

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This book of selected sermons and meditations is published through the generosity of the family of Jon Appleton (1934–2016) and dedicated to his loving memory.

Oh, the joy—
of anticipation,
of experience,
of memory.

—Jon Appleton, 1990

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Foreword

Sitting in the congregation, watching with pride as my father delivered his sermons, is a wonderful memory. Then it was absolutely exhilarating to go home with this much-admired man being my daddy.

Growing up the son of a Baptist minister, Jon Appleton was destined to follow in his father's footsteps. Of his calling he once wrote,

As a young man sensing "a call" to ministry, little is perceived about "the bigness" of such a beckoning. Such naivety allows the possible rush of joy intermixed with wonder and humility to trust that "all things are possible; only believe." A part of working out one's calling is the daunting, compelling task of becoming one's self.

Jon Appleton worked diligently in studying and being mentored by those who helped him develop and define his life as a minister. He was ever evolving, feeling there were and always would be questions. He reveled in searching for answers.

Jon's sense of humor served him well. The devilish grin and look in his eyes were captivating to those with whom he came in contact. It was an endearing quality incorporated into his ministry.

In the pulpit he delivered heartfelt, thoughtful, and thought-provoking messages. His brief and to-the-point sermons were among his trademarks. Those in attendance would leave the services with smiles on their faces and something in their hearts to contemplate.

Jon loved people from all walks of life, accepting their right to view Scripture and life differently. He encouraged open dialogue and won many friends by listening without chastising.

Many would say you could look far and wide yet come up empty in finding a person whose charisma replicates that of Jon Appleton.

Our family's hope is that the sermons and meditations in this book will be inspirational and give a glimpse into the heart of the man who spoke this poetry of truth.

Catherine Appleton Peay
Highland, North Carolina

Preface

Jon Appleton's preaching notes were crafted for proclamation rather than publication. But, fortunately, they were preserved.

Some of his sermons were written in outline form—with phrases and single words to trigger Jon's mind—more so than as manuscripts. As for most preachers in the final stages of preparation before delivery, there are handwritten notes in the margins and changes to the typed text. These notations included self-reminders such as “tell the Alpine story.” It is likely that Jon's beloved wife, Virginia, and some of the congregants in Athens, Georgia, could tell those stories, too.

Jon made good use of his multiple communication gifts. His sermons were a balanced blend of scholarship, humor, storytelling, poetry, and application.

Within the inspiring pages of this book are selected sermons, including several from Holy Week and Easter as well as from the Advent and Christmas seasons. Some of Jon's Communion meditations, a pastoral prayer, and a benediction are included as well.

Often, throughout the year, he would turn to his beloved Gospel of John for inspiration. Several of those sermons are compiled into this collection.

While Jon preached from a variety of texts and addressed many relevant topics for worship and Christian living, there is one common thread. Jon Appleton embraced and proclaimed hope—hence the title of this volume, *The Hope We Have*.

May those who read these collected words encounter—or encounter again—this great hope that Jon called “the cement of Christian commitment.” Such “real hope,” Jon proclaimed, is “the hope that God can do through us what we cannot do for ourselves.”

Such hopeful words deserve proclamation and publication so they may be embraced again and again.

John D. Pierce
Editor/Publisher
Nurturing Faith

“Jon Appleton was first and foremost a pastor who loved the church and preached the gospel with clear-eyed conviction.... In the sermons and prayers he meticulously prepared across the years, his insight into what it means to live out the gospel in our times and the inclination of his heart and spirit in worship live on. Dip into this treasury of inspiration, and you will find that Jon’s voice still rings true, lifting, instructing, and challenging us.”

R. Alan Culpepper,
Dean and Professor Emeritus,
McAfee School of Theology, Mercer University

“For five years I was Jon’s associate pastor at First Baptist Athens, Georgia. Jon became a mentor who taught by example. He showed me how to shepherd and love people. He was a true pastor.”

Scott Walker,
Director of The Institute of Life Purpose,
Mercer University, Macon, Georgia

“Dr. Appleton reveled in riddles, which he spun frequently to confounded listeners. But when it came to matters of faith, his message was clear: anchor your faith in a journey of thinking, using the brain and soul in which God gifted you, for salvation is a personal and treasured revelation that lasts a lifetime.”

Paula Hooper,
Member and colleague,
First Baptist Church, Athens, Georgia

“Margaret and I met Jon and Virginia Appleton at the elevator on the tenth floor of the Galt House in Louisville, Kentucky, in December 1975. By the time we reached lobby level, we all knew we had found lifetime friends.... These are not just ‘Jon sermons’; these are ‘Appleton sermons.’ Each one comes from that inspired intellect of his...but he couldn’t publish any of them until they earned the approval of Virginia’s sensitive sermon-hearing skills. Here they are with our blessings and our prayer for God’s blessings upon you as you read them.”

Truett Gannon,
Pastor Emeritus,
Smoke Rise Baptist Church, Stone Mountain, Georgia

“Jon was invested in the people he cared for, as evidenced by personal touches, remembrances, and poems in services and ceremonies where he officiated. Jon’s clever wit beautifully complemented his depth of character, intelligence, and integrity as he ministered to so very many people over the years. We consider ourselves to be truly blessed to be among those people.”

Wayne and Mimi Dill,
First Baptist Church, Athens, Georgia

“Jon Appleton was an authentic, insightful, approachable, compassionate, prayerful, courageous, and committed pastor, and his sermons were the same way.”

Tripp Martin,
Senior Pastor,
First Baptist Church, Auburn, Alabama

“Jon was a neighboring pastor with a poet’s soul who welcomed me as a friend and colleague. When great sorrow came to our family, he cared for us and walked with us as he did for so many.”

Jim Ross, Madison, Georgia

“Jon Appleton’s sermons were good in his early years at First Baptist Athens. However, many were great in his later years.”

Claude Williams Jr., Athens, Georgia

“For twenty-three years, Jon Appleton invited us into his mind and heart every Sunday with thoughtful sermons of God’s love and grace. He challenged us to be open to surprise, mystery, and all of the unanswerable questions of our faith. His life and ministry were the sermons for us all. Now, those provocative thoughts are made available for each of us to glimpse into the personality and soul of one of our Baptist prophets.”

Becky Matheny,
Pastor for Spiritual/Communal Development,
Lake Oconee Community Church, Greensboro, Georgia

