

to the needs of an adult who no longer has parents to depend on or take care of. Hence, she took this upon herself to explore (she is a professional writer who has written for publications such as *Women's Day*, *Family Circle*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Reader's Digest*, and has contributed to the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books).

In sharing her own experiences, as well as the experiences of others she knows, she offers readers some thought-provoking ideas into the journey of grief and recovery. These include her responses to well meaning friends who questioned why it was taking so long to “get over” the deaths, her responses to bitter-sweet memories as she encountered events which reminded her of her parents, responses to her grown children about the deaths of their grandparents, among many others.

Her approach to the format of the book contributes to its readability. She divides the book into four sections: “When a Parent is Dying,” “When a Parent Has Died,” “Comforting the Parent Left Behind,” and “Finding New Meaning” as grief resolves. Within each section she writes a few paragraphs about the events as she experienced them and then follows with several paragraphs of reflection and “how to” for the reader to consider. These vignettes are often powerful and emotional as readers place themselves into the same situation, whether yet experienced or not. The brevity of each of these sections makes the book easy to pick up and put down at leisure, or as otherwise needed.

This small volume is a valuable resource to share with friends who have had this experience. It is not a theological text, but a spiritual aid and a grief recovery aid. It might be pastorally shared or even be the basis for a discussion group or support group. However one's creativity might think to use it, Bartocci has given us a wonderful work to ponder and consider as we, or those we care about, travel the difficult journey of a parent dying.

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Dykstra, Robert C. (2001). *Discovering a sermon: Personal pastoral preaching*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press. ISBN: 0827206275. 138 pp. \$18.99.

*Discovering a Sermon* is a treasure-chest of wisdom for

preaching written by an academic pastoral theologian who loves to preach and who is keenly aware of how his own discipline of pastoral theology can speak a helpful word to those who teach and learn preaching. Dykstra is not only a scholar, but a self-reflective preacher, able to look deep into his own soul and draw forth insights that will help preachers avoid serious pitfalls, while pursuing what really matters. And what really matters? In a word: play! Dykstra, who teaches pastoral theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, has learned much from British psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott and his disciple, child psychoanalyst Adam Phillips, about the virtues of playfulness, curiosity, vulnerability, honesty, and “pursuing the mundane” in preaching. Chapters are appropriately entitled: “Playing with the Text,” “Playing Witness to Life,” “Playing with Strangers,” and “Playing with Fire.” In essence, Dykstra wants preaching to emerge from a process that looks a lot like the always wonder-filled, sometimes scary and death-defying, often whimsical and boredom-inspired, usually imagination-laced way in which children create meaning and discover truth.

“Playing with the text” means entering into a creative “holding environment” in which the biblical text is treated like one of Winnicott's “transitional objects”, an “irreplaceable treasure, a coveted possession that must never be lost, ‘laundered,’ or otherwise altered by others.” In short, according to Dykstra, “exegesis begins in Eden.” After learning how to play alone with a text, Dykstra encourages preachers to learn how to “play witness to life.” Similar to child's play, this is best accomplished by learning “intensive daydreaming about an unresolved problem.” Dykstra encourages preachers to attend to their lives, “tracking a specific interest or concern for a period of an entire hour.” He is concerned that preachers become more like children, “increasingly inclined to be intrigued once again by ice cream, by everyday life.” Preachers are then encouraged to move on to “play with strangers.” By this, Dykstra means that preachers begin to consult strangers, real and imagined, to find out what they might have to say about the emerging sermon. Just as a child must consult others to check and balance an interpretation of life, homiletic playing with strangers includes consulting commentaries of all kinds, and “confering” with “strangers whom the preacher imagines could eventually hear, or overhear, the sermon in its final form.” Finally, Dykstra advocates “playing with fire,” by which he means engaging in a kind of metaphorical juxtaposition of “the preacher's current preoccupation or desire with what-

ever may be the assigned or selected biblical text of the day.” The sparks that fly at the intersection of biblical text and the stories that emerge from the preacher’s preoccupations and concerns “can lead to an explosive flash of creative insight” for preaching.

*Discovering a Sermon* is largely subservient to an individualistic, developmental (staged), and therapeutic paradigm of pastoral theology. This means, for instance, that others (strangers) remain as largely imaginative constructs designed to merely check or repair the preacher’s already emerging topic. The fact that topics for preaching might emerge in the first place from this interaction with strangers, which would imply a more socially constituted view of the self from its inception, would require a slightly more

circular process than Dykstra proposes: one in which one might, perhaps, enter the preparation process at any “step” or stage, say at the step of “playing with strangers,” and work backward and forward.

This being said, however, Dykstra is correct that preacher can learn a lot about preaching by studying child psychology and by attending to the artful habits of children, as they make sense of the world in which they live. Dykstra provides a refreshing angle of vision on things that preachers must learn if they are to inspire and cultivate the childlike (and adult) faith of those who listen to them week after week.

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## REVIEWS OF RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN

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Kushner, Lawrence & Karen. (2000). *Where is God?*, ISBN: 1893361179; (2001). *What does God look like?*, ISBN: 1893361233; (2001). *How does God make things happen?*, ISBN: 1893361241. Dawn W. Majewski, Ill. Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing. \$7.95 per book. Ages: 0-4.

*Where Is God?*, *How Does God Make Things Happen?*, and *What Does God Look Like?* are three small board books excerpted from the picture book *Because Nothing Looks Like God* (previously reviewed in the journal of *Family Ministry*, Vol. 15:1 Spring 2001). The original review was very positive; *Because Nothing Looks Like God* is a tremendous contribution to the body of faith-based literature for children. However, the decision to produce these three board books is puzzling. The form seems mismatched for the content; the format is for babies and toddlers but the developmental level of the content is more appropriate for older children. (The recommended ages on the back of the board books are “0-4.” The recommended ages for *Because Nothing Looks Like God* are “4 and up.”)

To be sure, parents of babies and toddlers appreciate the sturdiness and durability of board books which withstand the most exuberant page-turning and most determined gnawing that quickly turn ordinary picture books into ripped and soggy lumps. By the time children turn three or four, however, they often regard these books as

“babyish” and small board books usually are set aside and replaced by full-size picture books.

The content of these three books asks children to understand some fairly abstract notions: Where is God? “God is in the beginning. In the first red tomato, and in cookies fresh from the oven. In the first day of summer, and in the tiny hands of a baby.” What does God look like? “God looks like nothing, because nothing looks like God,” illustrated with examples of things that cannot be seen like “the hug in your dad’s voice” or “the long hours until suppertime.” Perhaps most graspable are the responses to the question “How does God make things happen?” “Your family helps God make things happen. Sisters take turns on a slide. Brothers share a new game. Watch how everyone comes together to help with dinner.” (*How Does God Make Things Happen?* continues by exploring how schools, towns, and the child help God make things happen.)

Conversations with older children could deepen their understanding of the content of these three books. But these conversations and comprehension are clearly beyond the abilities of babies and toddlers, the usual consumers (in both senses of the word!) of small board books. A note of preface to these books suggests that as long as we are reading books to our children about letters and numbers, we should include books about “life’s bigger questions.” Further, they note, “each child develops an image of God by age 5, with or