

Boogity, Boogity, Amen

When the Nascar Nationwide Federated Auto Parts 300 opened up on a Sunday morning, as usual, a local pastor stepped up to the microphone to begin the event with a blessing in what is traditionally a solemn prayer. Pastor Joe Nelms, however, of Family Baptist Church in Lebanon, TN gave a twist to the traditional.

In the opening remarks of his prayer he thanked God for “these mighty machines” in reference to the cars that would race and for “GM performance technology.” He went on to list the different makes of the vehicles offering God thanks for the “Fords” among others. There is one comment, however, that has drawn more criticism than anything else he said: his simple thank you for his wife. “Thank you for my smoking hot wife, Lisa,” prayed Nelms to a cheering crowd.

Nelms has received both praise and criticism for his actions but staunchly defends his words. Nelms referenced Paul’s words in the New Testament saying that, just like the apostle, he was trying to be “all things to all men.” In this instance, it was a chance to show those who do not attend church that the fun does not stop when you start following Jesus. “Our whole goal was to open doors that would not otherwise be open. There are a lot of folks who think churches are all[full of] serious people who never enjoy life and [who have] just a list of rules. We who have been saved by Christ, we know that living has just begun. When I accepted Christ, that’s when I really learned what joy was.” Nelms said that several people have contacted him about the prayer, letting him know that they are willing to give church a try because of the risk he took.

Critics of the prayer, however, are not as laid back as Nelms and are calling it blasphemous, disgraceful and even disrespectful. In their opinion, a prayer that ends, “In Jesus’ name. Boogity, boogity, boogity. Amen” is entering the realm of the profane. Nelms continues to defend his actions amidst criticism saying that he was trying to create something new that would force people to actually listen to the prayer. And, evidently, many did, for better or worse that day on the racetrack.

Discussion Questions:

- 1. Who decides what is appropriate or inappropriate in a prayer?***
- 2. Do you think Nelms prayer was appropriate? Why or why not?***
- 3. Prayer is usually considered a solemn event. Why do you think there was such a strong reaction when Nelms made it more lighthearted?***