

THESE THINGS I KNOW

When I graduated from Seminary in 1976 I “knew” it all. My finely tuned ordination paper was equivalent to the Nicene Creed, but longer, at 19 pages of single spaced wisdom. In the following years I learned some lessons that I failed to grasp in Seminary. I would like to share a bit of history and four of the many lessons that I have learned over the years.

Lesson One: Humility. In December 1977, Sue and I had applied to The Conservative Baptist Home Mission Society’s ‘New Churches Now’ program to be church planters in Bloomer, WI. We were rejected! The senior pastor I served under then resigned. The chairman of the Deacon Board at the church I served at evaluated my ministry skills and declared me unfit to be an interim, let alone a pastor of any church. Adding insult to injury, my two preschool children came down with pneumonia with one being hospitalized for 10 days. Feeling cast down, I counseled with Fred McCormick, Tristate Director for Conservative Baptists. He encouraged me to humble myself, approach the critical Deacon and seek him as a mentor. I did. The Deacon changed his mind and I served under his direction learning valuable ministry skills. Later, I reapplied to the ‘New Churches Now’ program and miracle of miracles, I was appointed church planter. I served that church until my retirement. That church has seen nearly 300 baptisms and sent 19 young people into full time ministry.

Lesson Two: Solace in Scripture. In 1980 there were six families in our church plant. There was one family who began to keep track of my work habits. They presented me with a list of 33 shortcomings such as “mowing the lawn” in the afternoon (because in the evenings I was doing visitation). The Deacons of the church, wanting to preserve the feeble little fellowship, asked me to apologize. I did, but I felt frustrated and angry. I was working 60 hours a week and I felt the nit picking was unfair. That night I could not sleep and longed to resign. The Spirit of God brought Psalm 42 to my mind. I prayed it to the Lord and He brought peace to my heart.

Lesson Three: Keep It Simple, Stupid. In 1976 our family was just beginning weekly Bible studies with the view of a church plant. Serving as Associate Pastor, focusing on youth, and having a goal of church planting resulted in my Senior Pastor thinking it wise I attend all church Boards and Committees. This church of 140 folks had a Deacon Board, Trustee Board, Christian Education Committee, Advisory Board, Nominating Committee, Youth Committee, and Deaconess Committee that met regularly. Added to that was Sunday night church, Wednesday night youth groups & Saturday evening socials. That kept us in the church building most evenings. The result, was in October 1976 I was home two nights the whole month. There was actually NO TIME for community or outreach. I purposed then and there, if I had to draw up a church structure, to keep it simple.

Lesson Four: Preach Jesus. About 1982 we had just become a self-supporting church. A key family in our church “got” the Holy Spirit. They decided to start a “spirit filled church” and invited half of our church to join them. Many people went and their first couple of meetings consisted of “roasting Eldon”. I wanted to defend myself and preach a long series of messages on their errors. Larry, one of the Deacons, pulled me aside and counseled me. “Just preach Jesus,” he said. I did and God protected the church.

At the end of over 40 years connection to the church we were given a sweet farewell. The church has a new swell young pastor and family. He is leading the fellowship in a profound way. I can say with John: “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” 3 John 4. Well, what does it take for a guy to stay in a church? The things I know are:

1. Having a wife committed to the work
2. A group of people loving each other
3. And that same group of people having a clear purpose of what God wants

These are traits for the long haul.

Pastor Eldon Carlson
CBNC Networking Director