

Let's Have Coffee

When I first came on the scene of working in a CB church back in 1976 I was blessed. Fresh out of seminary I had all the answers; at least I thought I did. My ordination paper was a 19 page single spaced masterpiece. I was blessed by being surrounded by seasoned pastors that molded me, even when I did not realize I needed shaping! I may have learned more about ministry in those monthly meetings than I did in 3½ years of seminary.

The fellows that shaped me were Phil, Ralph, Bill, Dave, Ray, Warren, Russ, Dean and M.R. At our gatherings, we laughed, prayed, swapped stories and encouraged one another. M.R. sponsored breakfasts for anyone who wanted to come for a free breakfast, receive a free book and listen to stories in ministry. It is interesting all these years later I remember vividly Dean's comments to me at one such meeting.

Dean said, "Eldon, you have a 3 year cycle in your church. The first year is a honeymoon stage—whatever you suggest is gospel and people will rally around. You introduce programs and they flourish. The second year is maintaining those programs. The third year people begin to withdraw and say things like, 'this is more work than I thought;' 'I am getting tired!' and 'I want out.'" Dean went on further to say: "It's how you respond to that withdrawal of commitment and enthusiasm which will reveal if you will have another 3 years or not." "If you preach commitment & follow through you probably need to start packing your bags. But if you back off and go have coffee with the guys—the Lord will give you another 3 year cycle." Dean, I do not know where you are, but thank you!

As simple, as this seems I have found it true. It may not be 3-year cycles but there are cycles to be sure. When I sensed withdrawal from favorite programs, I had a strong temptation to preach in a way that emphasized a lot duty. The result, when I was reminded, I had coffee with the guys and preached sermons on God's sufficiency, wonder and grace. It was true I then received another 3 year cycle that enabled me to multiply myself to minister for 40 years in the same church. To God be the glory and thank you Dean for your words of wisdom.

Another episode very early in my church planting effort was when nearly half of our new congregation left and formed a "health and wealth" church. I found out their "Bible studies" consisted of roasting Pastor Eldon. I wanted to respond and preach a dozen sermons on why the prosperity doctrine was straight from hell. Larry, my deacon, took me aside. He said, "Just preach Jesus." That was not what I wanted to hear. However, by God's grace, I did avoid the temptation of defending my doctrine; I did emphasize Jesus and many did return.

My point is, every pastor needs a cluster and accountability. Now decades later I have fond memories of those God moments that I did not even see as God moments in my life. Join a cluster, keep yourself in love with Jesus, and preach the whole counsel of God.

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