

## “I Have No Idea”

I’m bothered by people who are certain about everything. They bother me because I too often see myself in them, or a self I used to be, which shows that being bothered can be good for us. “Be kind with this person; you’ve encountered him before in your mirror.”

Ministry leaders who are certain about everything also bother me because of the burdens they impose on others. If something *has* to be a certain way, what does that mean for people who are not experiencing it that way? There must be something wrong with such people; they must be defective in thought or behavior. I’m not thinking about cardinal tenets of the faith. I’m thinking of cause-and-effect declarations about life and ministry. I’m thinking of the person who says there’s only one right way to do this or that, or the one who says if you’ll just do A and B then the result will always be C, never mind all the evidence to the contrary (“They must not have done A and B correctly!”).

For example, in my 30 years of connection with church planting I’ve heard a number of prescriptions about how to be a “success” in starting a new church. All of the prescriptions have this in common: You can find examples where they worked and examples where they didn’t. A plan was used in one place and got amazing results and in another place with disappointing results. My conclusion: *I have no idea why one plant grew rapidly and another didn’t.* I’m not saying we shouldn’t look at the plants and learn what we can. I’m saying that there’s some level of mystery involved that we can’t explain. The same is true for churches and ministries in general. There are factors beyond our comprehension or control, which is a good reason to make your definition of ministry success about faithfulness rather than results.

Parenting is another area rife with false declarations of certainty: “If you’ll just do this and that with your kids, then they’ll turn out a certain way.” Except when they don’t. Newsflash: The kid gets the deciding vote! The same parenting methods don’t always yield the same outcomes. My conclusion: *I have no idea why one child takes a certain path and another takes a different path.* I’m not saying that parents don’t have an impact for better or worse on their children. I’m saying that there’s mystery here. There are factors beyond our comprehension or control, which is a good reason to focus on our biblical responsibilities as parents (i.e., our faithfulness) rather than the outcomes we’re experiencing at any given moment.

All that to say this: We ministry leaders need to be careful about the declarations we make to those under our care. We can harm people’s souls with our false certainties. It’s okay to say, “I have no idea.” It’s okay to acknowledge mystery. We don’t have to have all the answers.

As you live out your calling, may the Lord bless you with a humble spirit, and may he bless through you your fellow stumblers on this mysterious journey.

*Robby*