The Peter Plan

Part 4 of 5 – Why Four Weeks?

Dear friends in Christ,

Aristotle said, *“We are what we repeatedly do.”* Thankfully, Aristotle was no theologian! For while we repeatedly sin, through faith in Christ Jesus and for his sake, God does not count us as sinners, but holy saints.

However, Aristotle was onto something. Repeated behavior eventually becomes normal behavior. We call it *habitual* behavior. For example, if every morning you go for a run, we call you “a runner”. That is your normal behavior. *“We are what we repeatedly do.”*

How long does it take for habits to form? There have been many psychological studies done on that topic. The answer to the question depends on the activity and how regularly it occurs. But the consensus seems to be that for most regularly occurring activities, habits form somewhere between four weeks and nine weeks.

For example, say you want to take up running. After a week of running, you probably could quit pretty easily. You just need one good excuse, and you will stop. The same is true after two weeks. But somewhere between four and nine weeks of running, it would become a habit. At that time it would seem odd to you to *not* run. You are “a runner.” *“We are what we repeatedly do.”* In four to nine weeks, behavior becomes a habit.

Apply that to church attendance. Pastors in mission churches will tell you that when a prospect comes for five straight weeks, the pastor is pretty certain that prospect will become a member eventually. Attending that church has become that individual’s habit.

The converse is true as well. If people *miss* church for five weeks, it may be that not attending church is becoming their new habit. It might vary for some individuals, but not by much. The point is, research (and experience!) would seem to suggest that if someone is absent from worship for four weeks, that is a good time to check up on them.

That is the first step of *The Peter Plan*. When an individual has missed worship for four straight weeks, we want to check up on them. We are not assuming that the person missed worship because they despise God’s Word. The four-week contact is not accusatory. Our first assumption is that the person missed a month of church for a legitimate reason, like a change in work schedule. However, just in case it is a matter of the individual losing interest in hearing God’s Word, we want to contact people at four weeks.

This also shows love to the absent member. Many pastors have stories where they followed up on someone who had missed worship for six or seven weeks. When the pastor called on the absent member, the member became accusatory. *“What took you so long? Wasn’t I missed? Don’t you care about me?”*  The long time it took to follow up on the absence wasn’t viewed as patient. It was viewed as apathy.

Therefore, four weeks seems the ideal time to check in on someone who has not been in worship. If that person’s circumstance has changed so they cannot make it to worship, a plan can be made to serve that individual’s spiritual needs another way. But if that person is beginning to stray spiritually, it can be discussed *before* a dangerous habit develops.

Therefore, when *The Peter* Plan is in effect, if you know that are going to be gone for four straight weeks, you have two options. First, you could contact the pastor or a member of the Board of Elders and let them know. It will be noted in our records. However, you don’t have to do anything. You will be contacted after four weeks, but it will simply be to see if everything is ok. You will most certainly *not* be accused of sin! At that time, you can simply explain why you were absent: long vacation, recovering from some surgery, change in work schedule, etc.

This is why we will check up on those who have been absent for four weeks. For that is the only loving thing to do in that circumstance. And *“we are what we repeatedly do.”*