

## **Foolish Trades**

Many of us can tell of times in which we saw or personally made a "deal" with someone, and looking back, reflect on how foolish we were. "Jack and the Bean Stalk" is the story of a boy who made a foolish trade when he traded the family cow for some magic beans. In the Bible, Amnon traded life and luxury for one brief moment with Tamar. Not only did death follow, but also incredible suffering in his family. Among all the terrible repercussions of his decision was the separation of David from Absalom -- A very foolish trade indeed.

I would like to share some of the many times I have witnessed foolish trades, trades which had happened before I found out. Had I seen what was taking place, I would have said or done something.

Take, for example, a particular church which was probably the fastest growing in the state and certainly had baptized more than any other church in the state. The pastor found himself in a relationship with a woman, and he traded that brief relationship with her for his entire ministry. In the same year, in two different states, two men I knew well, repeated this exact story. Foolish trades!

Consider this: A veteran pastor found himself drawn to a young college lady; casual contact between the two led to a ride in a car alone which led to sitting together in a restaurant briefly holding hands -- nothing more. Yet like a stone dropped in water, the ripples were set in motion and could not be stopped. This pastor lost his ministry having done nothing more than being drawn to a youthful smile and holding hands with a young lady.

Another example: A pastor sat engulfed in an "R" rated movie. A fluke occurrence (God's working) brought his attendance at the movie to light, and his watching such a movie -- sufficiently explicit sexually -- brought about the examination by the deacons. This pastor ended up trading his wonderful church for a few movies. A foolish trade.

A staff member of a wonderful church found himself frequently in the presence of the same group of teenage girls. Leadership noticed this and warned him that the appearance was not good. Two more warnings -- unheeded -- resulted in this man losing a great position and having to trade a life in the ministry for a life in secular work. Not a hand was held, no kiss was shared -- the issue was a moral impropriety. Note: wise pastors will watch for things which could lead to sin and will stop them before they hurt the work of God. Foolish trades are not uncommon.

A good man, a friend of mine, found his church experiencing such amazing growth that he simply neglected his home life. His involvement in the church was nothing sinful, but his spending so much time away from home caused his wife to feel unloved and insecure. The devil brought a man into the life of this lady, then another and another -- men who had time for her and seemed to care for her. Now a pastor is out of the ministry and has lost his wife. Trading one's marriage for any amount of ministry success is not a wise trade.

He enjoyed the flirting of the teenage girl. The preacher had not planned to do wrong; but the smile, the teasing and the suggestive comments by the girl led to a touch, then to a secret nighttime meeting; and immorality followed. He traded his ministry for brief flirting and regular contact while at school and in the youth department. For decades he has now worked in the secular world bearing the frustration of an embittered wife and a world of unknown loss. There is simply no telling what might have been accomplished through his children and personal influence had he not made such a foolish trade.

By the way, most preachers are like me: if it even smells of wrong, we call the police and let them sort it out. Walk straight, or it is likely you will trade your future for a moment of folly or even potential folly. Bob Jones Sr. said, "Never sacrifice the eternal on the alter of the immediate."

The preacher (three on my mind right now) chose to enjoy the smile and admiration of the teenage girl. Too many carefully planned moments alone, a casual touch not rejected, a door closed that should have been open, a counseling session held with a young lady alone -- and three men traded their ministries for a jail cell.

Many are the preachers who traded their ministry for immoral foolishness -- simply not a good trade! Others traded their ministry for an opportunity to watch pornography on the computer, or for a bottle of booze, or for drugs. These preachers too made very foolish trades.

Do not fool yourself: No beanstalk will ever be worth your foolish trade. It will be a beanstalk of grief, sin, and shame.

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