

## TALK IS CHEEP

Having finished all my catch-up work since coming back from vacation, I decided to make a call in the afternoon on a prospective new member that just moved to the area. Sam Davis retired from his previous career and has chosen to spend his remaining days working a small farm in the Cedar Crossing/Oak County community. The old Compton place, which is only about ten minutes from the church, seemed to fit right into his plans.

I found Sam working back in the barn repairing the big double door leading out to the pasture area.

“Hi, Sam,” I said. “How are you?”

“Hey, Pastor. I’m doing good. How was your vacation?”

“It was great . . . I just wanted to stop by and visit with you a little. I know you’re going to be joining the church and I just wanted to see if there was anything we could do for you.”

“No, I can’t really think of anything. I’ve got a lot of fixing up to do around here, so that will

keep me out of trouble for a while. Do you mind if we walk while we talk? I have a few things I need to check on.”

“No, that’s perfectly all right,” I answered. “Do you have a family, Sam?”

“My wife passed away about three years ago and I have two adult children back in North Carolina.”

“Is that where you were from originally?”

“Yeah, I was born and raised in North Carolina,” said Sam, as he threw a couple of pitchforks of hay to the cow standing at the fence. “But I spent most of my life on the road.”

“Oh, what did you . . .”

“Thanks for the fresh alfalfa hay, Sam,” interrupted a voice coming from the fence area. “It’s quite tasty. Hey, Rev, over here. Come over here.”

I looked to the fence, but the only thing I saw was the cow. Then I looked at Sam, but he just shrugged his shoulders. My little gray cells deduced an answer to the question that I was about to ask Sam about his career on the road.

“Hey, Rev, do you know any good chicken jokes?” the cow asked.

I decided to play along. “Yes, here’s one. What do you call a rooster who wakes you up at the same time every morning?”

“I don’t know,” answered the cow.

“An alarm cluck,” I said.

“An alarm cluck . . . oh that’s a good one. Here’s a religious question. What does an evil hen lay?”

“I don’t know,” I replied.

“Deviled eggs,” said the cow.

“Cute. Uh . . . how about the farmer who sent his son to the market with some chickens to sell?”

“No, I can’t say I know that one,” replied the cow.

“Well, the crate filled with the chickens slipped out of the boy’s hand and broke open when it hit the ground. The chickens scurried off in different directions, but the determined boy walked all over the neighborhood, scooping up the wayward birds and returning them to the crate he had repaired. By that time the market had closed, so,

hoping he had found them all, the boy reluctantly returned home, expecting to get yelled at by his father.”

“Pa, the chickens got loose and by the time I got to the market, it was closed,” the boy confessed sadly. “But I found all twelve of them chickens.”

“Well, you did really well, son,” the farmer beamed.

“You mean you aren’t mad?”

“No, son. We made a good profit today.”

“I don’t understand,” said the boy.

“When you left here this morning, you only had seven chickens and now, we have twelve.”

The cow stood at the fence, chomping away on his hay, and looking me right in the eyes with a blank expression.

“You see, he only had seven to begin with, and when he finished rounding up chickens, he ended up with twelve, so he had accidentally rounded up five of somebody else’s chickens,” I repeated.

The cow continued staring at me while he munched his meal. I looked over at Sam.

“I guess he didn’t get it, Pastor,” Sam said.

“Say, you’re a pastor, aren’t you?” asked the cow.

“Yes.”

“And pastor means shepherd, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, it’s from a Latin word for shepherd,” I answered.

“How about going over there to that sheep and see if you can’t do a little attitude adjustment on her?”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Well, every time I try to have a positive, upbeat conversation with her, you know, bring out the good, all she ever says is ‘Baaaa’”

“Yes, well . . .”

“Oh, he started out with seven chickens and when he finished rounding them up, he had twelve,” exclaimed the cow. “I get it. Very humorous.”

“I’m afraid I don’t know any more chicken jokes,” I said.

“That’s okay,” said the cow. “I’ve enjoyed our conversation. Look, though, if you go over there and try to talk to those baby chicks, well . . . it’s just not worth it.”

“Why’s that?” I asked.

“Because their talk is cheep,” said the cow.

I stood at the fence and stared at the cow with a blank expression.

“Don’t you get it?” asked the cow. “Little chicks say cheep, cheep, cheep.”

“You know, Sam,” I said. “I can’t believe I’m standing here exchanging chicken jokes with a cow.”

Sam shrugged his shoulders and said, “You never know when you might pick up some good sermon material.”

“Sam, there isn’t the slightest possibility that your previous career had anything to do with ventriloquism, is there?”

“Yes, Pastor.”

“You’re very good. Why did you decide to retire from it?”

“The times are different from when I started out. The audience changed. Or maybe I should say the audience’s tastes changed. The last couple of years working comedy clubs were tough. My G-rated humor didn’t seem to have a chance against the R-rated and X-rated stuff. So, I went back to North Carolina and did the church circuit for a while. While I was well received in those venues, it just got to the point where the income barely covered the cost of travel.”

“I can understand that. When I find myself watching television, I seem to gravitate to the channels that carry the old programs from even before I was born. Writers back then had to write things that were genuinely funny because they had much more narrow parameters. Nowadays, it seems like if you just say something from the gutter or about sex, it gets a laugh.”

“So, now I’m here on the farm reduced to talking with my animals.”

“Wait a minute, I resent that,” said the cow.

“Sorry, Bovy. That was kind of insensitive.”

“Sam, before I say anything more, is it okay to talk in front of him?” I whispered.

“Oh, sure. The only ones he might tell are the baby chicks and nobody takes them seriously, because as you now know . . .”

“Their talk is cheep,” I said.

“Right.”

“You know, we should have you come do a show at church sometime. I know the people of St. John would love it.”

“I’d love to, but let me ask you a question,” said Sam. “This is a concept I’ve been thinking about for a while, and I’d like to get your opinion on it.”

“Sure, Sam.”

“What if you took the entertainment principle and applied it to a ministry?”

“You mean like Christian music, humor, and such?” I asked.

“Well, sort of. I don’t mean that those art forms would be the ministry, although they certainly do function as that on their own. What if you found someone in your community who was in need, like someone who’s not a member of a church, and you put together a fundraiser or benefit



at your church to help them out? You wouldn't have to limit it to someone like that; you could certainly do it for someone in your church too; but what if your focus was on reaching out to the community at large? The church could put on a dinner, we could provide entertainment along with it, and you could raise money for someone in need and spread the Gospel to possibly a group of people, like friends and family, that might not otherwise hear it."

"That's a very interesting concept, Sam. If you did something like that, basically the church family could come together for a good meal, with good, clean entertainment, and know that the money they are raising is going to a good cause in the community. At the same time, you could craft an outreach strategy that would touch others with the Gospel message and what it means to be a Christian organization that asks nothing in return."

"Yes. Do you think something like that could be viable?"

"I like it, Sam. Would you be willing to sit down with my friend, Pastor Fred Anderson in Jack Valley and me for a brainstorming session?"

“Sure, Pastor.”

“One thing that intrigues me about it is how simply it provides a vehicle, so to speak, for the average parishioner to get engaged in the outreach process. As a shepherd, I don’t mind telling you, it can be a little frustrating trying to lead the congregation in that direction sometimes. I’m only one person who, because of my position, is more often than not around people of faith. The people in the pew are out in the broader world every day, more often than not around people who lack faith. I understand the timidity with talking about religion to co-workers, etc. If we had something like what you’re talking about engaging them, whether it’s simply supplying a name from someone in the community that they know or whether it’s just coming to support at the benefit, I think it would be a good start down the outreach path.”

“Well, you just let me know when you’d like to get together, Pastor Schmidt.”

“I sure will, Sam. The other thing that kind of excites me about it is that I preach about spreading the Gospel all the time and we talk about it at council meetings and seminars and conferences, and

this would kind of put some of that talk into action.”

“Well, Pastor, as you now know, talk is . . .”

“I know, as your cow so enlightened me, talk is cheep.”