

Coffee Connect | The Thing

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Blake Smith

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Hello, and welcome to Coffee Connect, a Project Zion Podcast series where we share inspiring stories and thought-provoking reflections of life and ministry that remind us of God's loving presence in the world. I'm your host for today, Blake Smith, and I want to share a reflection called "The Thing."

Prior to becoming a full time Minister, I spent a number of years in the restaurant hospitality industry. During those years, I worked in a variety of different roles for a variety of different restaurants. However, it was in the last restaurant in which I worked that I learned the true value of customer service. It was there that I saw firsthand the benefit of treating each person who entered the restaurant with dignity ... as a guest, rather than a customer. In fact, my mentor in those days shared that he treated every shift as if he were hosting a gathering in his home. And everyone, with the exception of the employees, of course, was his guest.

I believe it was because of his philosophy and the policies of the company which supported his philosophies, that we had as many "regulars" as we did occasional visitors. Rarely was there a meal that guests didn't have to wait at least a short time for a table. Not surprising, since the food was really good, and the hospitality was even better.

It's a fairly well-known fact in the hospitality industry, that in order for a restaurant (especially a locally owned restaurant), to thrive, if not simply survive, it needs that "thing" that sets it apart. In most cases, that thing is a memorable specialty food item, or cuisine. One of the reasons I never attempted to open my own restaurant, was the fact that I didn't have a specialty. That said, I was reminded recently that there might just be another "thing" that would be just as useful. Let's be clear, it's not a new thing. It just happens to be a thing that is hard to find. My mentor knew the secret to success all those years ago. People just want to be treated like they matter, even perhaps, a little special.

The reminder came when my wife and I entered the cafe at a high-end Club, which we wouldn't otherwise have been able to enjoy. Had it not been for the incredible generosity of a good friend. Here, we were to fish out of water, trying not to stand out. We were greeted warmly, ushered to a table and taken care of as if we owned the place. Our every need was met with incredible professionalism, and without any hint of judgment as to our status or worthiness to be there. Watching the employees interact with other guests confirmed that everyone was treated the same, and it really felt good. We live in a world where our differences have come to hold more weight than the things we have in common. We are divided by more things and we can count (skin color, gender identity, economic status, religion,

political affiliation, age, geography, ethnicity, and the list goes on). It seems that every day there are new labels being created in order to lift one group up while holding down another. But it doesn't have to be that way! The reality is that we are all God's children ... worthy of love and acceptance, dignity and respect ... valued by God beyond our wildest dreams, and created for the purpose of experiencing joy and abundant life in concert and cooperation with one another and with creation. What if everyone could have an experience like my wife and I had? What if we always treated one another as guests and family (loving family not quarreling siblings)? Heck, even being treated as customers would be better than being treated as objects to be put down and discarded. All this time, I had the thing within me that could have made my dream for my own thriving restaurant a reality. Hopefully it's playing a part in my ministry. All this time, we've had the thing within us to make God's dream for a thriving, mutually enriching world a reality. We just need to start using that thing, a belief in the worth of all persons and a knowledge of God's unconditional love for all of creation, to bring God's dream to life. The Isley Brothers said it well... "It's your thing. Do what you want to do." Better yet, do what God wants you to do. Thanks for joining us here at Project Zion Podcast. Have a blessed day.