

## Settlers and Pioneers

One of the most treasured items in my library is a little book written by an Episcopal priest, Wes Seeliger (1938-2000). The book, *Western Theology*, explores the difference between two very different spirits in the church today, the settler spirit and the pioneer spirit. There are at least two reasons why this book so resonated in my heart, and continues to do so today. First, it helped me articulate the unique “wiring” and gifts God has placed within me. Secondly, I now know that the stirring I have often felt is because I am a pioneer and the spirit that motivates me is a pioneer spirit.

To put it simply a pioneer is “one who ventures into unknown or unclaimed territory.” Pioneers are trailblazers, champions of a new order, and advance agents who break new ground. Literally, the word pioneer means “a foot soldier sent on ahead to clear the way.” Pioneers are people who refuse to live as yesterday’s people. Their feet are firmly placed in tomorrow.

Settlers, on the other hand are people who settle down and settle in. The word for settle comes from the same word as “sit.” The settler’s are most concerned about certainty, predictability and safety. Settlers often settle for the status quo and are often the people who are most resistant to change. Pioneers move ahead while settlers choose to stay behind.

In his book, Seeliger gives a list of and somewhat humorous contrasts between settlers and pioneers. Here are a few to whet your appetite:

In pioneer theology, the Church is the wagon train. It’s always on the move.

In settler theology, the church is like a courthouse where the main objectives are maintaining law, order, tradition, stability and security.

In pioneer theology, God is the Trail Boss. He keeps the pioneers on the move.

In settler religion, God is kind of like the Mayor in the courthouse. His main job seems to be keeping score about the settler’s doings.

In pioneer theology, Jesus is the Scout, riding ahead to find out where the Pioneers should be going.

In settler religion, Jesus is the Sheriff. He monitors all activities and He “saves” the settlers by offering safety and security.

In pioneer theology, Christian women and men are Pioneers. Their lives are aimed like a rifle – to the future. They respect the past and the pioneers who have gone before them; but they use the lessons of the past to create a better future.

The religious settler wants no part of life on the trail. Life in the settlement is adventuresome enough for them. Settlers live almost exclusively, for the Last Roundup.

By now, you no doubt have gotten the drift. Pioneering is about change and pushing forward. Settling is about status quo and staying where you are. The question is, “which one are you?” “Is your church a pioneering church, always on the move or a settler church protecting the status quo? May God help us all to fully abandon ourselves to Him and to commit ourselves to moving forward into the future with Him. Wes Seeglier says it this way, “Will your church and your spirituality hold its safe, certain and secure ground while history marches by? Or, will it blaze new trails? And, more importantly, where will you be?” Happy Trails!

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