



**October 18th, 2007**

### **On a Personal Note . . .**

Last Tuesday, October 9, was the 20-year anniversary of the day my family landed in Houston from South Africa. The years have passed so quickly. I still can vividly remember my 11-year-old face pressed against the airplane window as we descended into Houston. Frankly and sincerely, I was looking for the large cattle herds and gun-toting cowboys. I was shocked to discover Houston is simply a massive concrete jungle. I would spend the next five years as a legal alien of this country in order to satisfy a prerequisite for membership/citizenship in this country, and then 1992 found me in a courthouse pledging my allegiance to the United States of America as I became a sworn citizen at 16 years of age. People sometimes ask me if I miss Africa and whether I will one day move back, and my answer is always the same: South Africa is a beautiful place to visit; America is a beautiful place to live. I cherish my African heritage and I'm proud of my family's history, but I'm proud to be an American. God called us to be Americans and so an American I became. My family teases me from time to time, but I did my best to become an American, and more specifically a Texan, as fast as I could. I can assure you it was no easy feat. I tried to lose my South African accent. I tried to look and act American instead of British; I had to relearn how to eat. I had to learn the subject-verb-object placement of the American way of everyday speech. In the culture in which I grew up, one spoke King's English. I learned to appreciate American humor which, unlike the British sense of humor, is not driven by subtlety, but rather a more rowdy and conspicuous display. My preteen and teen memories are filled with much laughter as our very British family did our best to transition to living as Americans. I can't remember exactly when it happened, but somewhere along the way it became natural for me to consider myself an American and to root for the American teams in international competitions.

As long as the Lord leaves me here in the United States for the rest of my life, I will only experience a cross-cultural immigration one more time. Because I've trusted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, one day, when I die, I will immigrate to Heaven where my citizenship truly lies. I will learn a new way of talking and thinking, I will not see everything I now expect to see when I land there, and I will experience a new way of life. I cannot wait for that day. I cannot wait for my 20-year anniversary in Heaven. I will be so different than I am now. I hope that you are looking forward to that day. If you have trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you have every reason to look with great anticipation toward your death or the return of the Lord Jesus, whichever happens first. We are merely plodding our way through the spiritual wilderness on our way to the Promised Land. *I'll fly away oh glory, I'll fly away, when I die, hallelujah by and by, I'll fly away.*

## Building Project Giving

I feel led to talk this coming Sunday about the progress of our building project. True, the Lord has certainly been working, but to be quite frank, I'm disappointed in the giving. We, as a church family, are not giving with a sense of urgency. Those of you who know me understand that it is not my dream to have a sprawling campus. Building buildings is not a vision for a church. The vision for any church is to see lives changed through Jesus Christ. A building is merely a tool to accommodate that purpose. I suppose I am a reluctant builder. I think it should be done on a need-to-have basis. We waited as long as possible, maximizing all the space in our current facility, but we have reached the place where we have to have a bigger tool if the Lord Jesus is going to continue to change lives through NEHBC. We have outgrown our current building, and we are desperately in need of more space. We voted with our hands on God's will for our expansion a couple of months ago; it is time to vote with the Lord's money. It is time for us to give generously and sacrificially over and above our tithe, to fund this new building project.

We are a church that is founded on God's Word. From the beginning, we insisted that we would be governed by the Word of God and that the Bible would be the center pole of our church family. Our preaching, our teaching, our counseling, our youth ministry, our children's ministry, and all we do is driven by and governed by the Scriptures. We are committed to the centrality of the Scriptures because it is God's voice in our church, and it is God's voice in our community.

As the growth of our community passes us by because we aren't building a bigger facility, God's voice is diminishing. If we don't build, God's voice will be dramatically diminished in our community. He has charged our church family with being the church that stands on the Bible in this community. When we expand our facilities, we will be increasing the volume of God's voice in Northeast Houston. With bigger facilities we will have a bigger training camp for equipping believers to go into our community, across our country, and around the world to tell the good news of Jesus, teach the Word of God, and stand for biblical standards of morality in a decaying world. We simply have to have a bigger facility to ensure our viability for the next decade.

When we voted as church family that these building plans are God's will, the battle to build was no longer a battle of flesh and blood but a spiritual battle. A battle we cannot afford to lose. At this point, the momentum in the battle is not on our side. We have lost that momentum and we need to gain it back. We need to circle the wagons, give all we can give by faith, and do what it takes to see this building expansion become a reality through the grace of the Lord Jesus.

We have to get to \$1.5 million to break ground and ultimately \$4.5 million to completely pay off the building project. If we all give generously and sacrificially, over and above our tithe, by faith, we will hit the \$1.5 million mark without a problem. It is time to pray more and give more. You can give through a check, you can give on-line through our website, or you can give stock\*\*. Let's get this done before the end of the year. We have 74 days.

*\*\*With regard to giving stock, let me make a few remarks. First Since NEHBC is a 501(c) 3 non profit, we can sell stock without incurring any taxes. A gift of stock from a donor avoids any capital gains tax implications for the donor and allows the donor to count the full market value of the stock as a charitable contribution. A direct gifting of the stock is a win-win for both you and NEHBC. To gift stock, please contact our Church Administrator, Bill Campbell, at 281.812.8688, ext. 207, or at [bcampbell@nehbc.com](mailto:bcampbell@nehbc.com).*

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## Fall Festival Blitz

I can't tell you how much I'm looking forward to our Fall Festival this year. In the past, it has drawn many unchurched and lost families to our campus, and we have been able to mingle with them, show them who we are, invite them to a worship service, and share with them the good news of Jesus Christ. I see no reason why this year will be any different.

Let me remind you of what the Fall Festival is like. It takes place in our north parking lot where a wide variety of booths and exhibits are set up around the perimeter. There is face painting, food, game booths, contests, music, bounce houses and other blow-up things, and of course, mountains of candy to be given out. The event is open to the public, and everything is free except for the food.

This year's Fall Festival will be Halloween night, Wednesday, October 31, from 6:30-8:30pm.

One of the reasons why the Fall Festival has been so well attended in the past by the community is because of our church family's participation in the annual Fall Festival blitz where we blitz the community with invitations to the event. This year's blitz will be on Wednesday night, October 24, at 6:45pm. Please plan on attending and engaging in this evangelistic event. What is the blitz like? When you walk in the door, you will be put on a team of 2-3 people. Your team will be given a packet which includes a map with a couple of highlighted streets on it and a stack of fliers. All we ask is that you go to those highlighted streets and put the fliers on those doors. That's it. It is as easy and as hard as that.

Please make a commitment to participate in the blitz. Grandparents and parents, this is a great opportunity for you to disciple your grandchildren, children, and teenagers in the discipline of evangelism.

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## **The Lord's Supper**

When it comes to observing the Lord's Supper, this past Sunday was a first. We devoted the entire service to the New Testament ordinance. It was quite liturgical in nature. There were guided times of Scripture reading, singing, reflection and prayer as we considered these different aspects of communion: 1. It is a time of thanksgiving 2. It is a commitment to the unity of our church 3. It is a memorial 4. It is a reminder of the New Covenant 5. It is a commitment to evangelism.

The service was designed as a time of teaching about the Lord's Supper as well as an opportunity to be renewed and refreshed in the Lord. I had not a few people tell me that they found the service to be very meaningful. The most common question I've been asked in the last two days is whether or not we will do it again. The answer is, I think we will, but not every time. One of the dangers in ritual is that the ritual itself becomes the focus instead of the purpose of the ritual. You know me; we'll keep mixing things up as we continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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## **Membership**

Questions about membership at NEHBC are not uncommon, and I always welcome them. Membership at a local church is a big and necessary part of walking with the Lord Jesus Christ, and so I'm always happy to answer membership questions. I'd like to take the time to talk about NEHBC church membership here.

First, let me talk about becoming a member at NEHBC. We have several prerequisites that have to be satisfied before one's membership is official.

- Age requirement: All members of NEHBC are 18 years of age or older. The congregation as a whole is the highest level of decision making at NEHBC and therefore, the membership should consist of individuals that can reasonably assess the factors involved in decisions for the church at large.
- Requesting membership: This can be done in one of several ways. One can walk down to the front during the invitation at the end of a service and tell me that you would like to join the church. One can check the box on the bottom of the white sheet in the weekly info guide and drop the white card in the offering bag on a Sunday morning or Wednesday evening. One can also contact a staff member via email or a phone call requesting membership.
- Statement of faith: Once one has requested membership, they will be mailed a statement of faith. It is a form on an 8.5 by 11 sheet of white paper that asks the applicant to write out their salvation testimony. We do this because a local church is to be a body of born again believers. The best way for us to know a person is saved is to see their testimony in writing. The statement of faith also asks the applicant to describe their baptism experience, if they have had one. The statement of faith is then returned to the church, by the applicant either through the mail or to a staff member or in the offering bag during one of the worship services.
- Review of Statement of faith: Once the statement of faith is returned, it ends up on Pastor Sonny's desk. Sonny is our Associate Pastor, and he handles the statements of faith. If he is satisfied with a person's salvation story and baptism experience, the statement of faith gets approved. If there is any red flag in the salvation story or the baptism experience, then Pastor Sonny sets up an appointment with the individual to talk face to face about any issues. Examples of red flags are any statements that indicate salvation through any means other than through faith in Jesus Christ alone or no indication that one was formerly in need of a Savior due to the wages of sin. Examples of red flags with regard to one's baptism would be if one has only been baptized by sprinkling or one was baptized by a church other than a New Testament church.
- Baptism: If an individual has not been biblically baptized, Pastor Sonny meets with them and walks them through the ins and outs of baptism and then the person is put in line to be baptized.
- Discovery Class: Once the statement of faith has been approved, prospective membership candidates are expected to have a one-time attendance at the NEHBC Discovery Class. This 90-minute class is taught by Bill Campbell, Church Administrator, and it designed to teach prospective members about our history, our infrastructure, our system of operating as a church, our leadership, and our vision. This class is very well done and helps prospective members know what they are getting into before the prospective member makes any commitments to NEHBC.
- Three months of regular attendance: All prospective members are required to demonstrate three months of regular attendance before they can become members. We define "regular" as 2 or more Sundays in any given month. Three months of regular attendance ensures the prospective member gets a good perspective of who we are before they make any commitments. It also gives a prospective member the opportunity to demonstrate to NEHBC that as members they will be active in and committed to the work of NEHBC.
- Once the statement of faith has been approved, the Discovery Class has been completed, and 3 months of regular attendance has been demonstrated, the individual's name goes before the board of trustees who vote to approve the new members. Upon approval, the new member receives a formal notice from NEHBC informing them they are now members of our church family.

Now let me share with you our membership expectations which are shared with all attendees of the Discovery Class.

- First, members are expected to have regular attendance in a Sunday morning worship service.

“Regular” is defined as two or more times each month. The Sunday morning worship service is when our church family gathers as a whole for corporate worship and is taught from the Word of God. The Sunday morning worship service is where I share the vision for our church and our progress in that vision. It is crucial that our members regularly attend the worship services.

- From time to time, we have members enter seasons of life in which it is really difficult to meet the regular Sunday morning attendance expectation. One may have an elderly parent that requires assistance on Sunday mornings. One may have a vacation home out of town where they live on the weekends. One may have an occupation that doesn't always allow attendance at a Sunday morning service. These kinds of seasons of life are understandable, and we pray for the Lord's grace in your life. However, we don't accept missing Sunday morning worship because of extracurricular activities like sports and hobbies. Sunday morning corporate worship should be a priority in the life of a believer.
- Second, members are expected to belong to a Sunday morning Bible Study class. It is in Sunday School that one learns the Scriptures in a small group setting, builds lasting relationships with other believers, and finds a home at NEHBC. In Sunday School one is encouraged, prayed for, ministered to, and taught to do the same for others.
- Third, members are expected to tithe. God's Word is clear that giving Him the money that belongs to Him is one of the minimal expectations of a believer. NEHBC expects her members to tithe faithfully. We don't believe the Lord will honor a church whose members steal from Him. I, personally, do not know who tithes and who does not, and it remains an issue between the individual and God. But, by committing to be a member of NEHBC, one is committing to tithe to God.
- Fourth, members are expected to serve. To love the Lord is to serve the Lord. We ask every member of NEHBC to have at least one place of service in our church. You have been given one or more spiritual gifts by God to be used at NEHBC for NEHBC (1 Cor. 7:7), and we expect our members to use their spiritual giftedness to cause other believers at NEHBC to love Jesus Christ more.

As you can tell, we take membership at NEHBC seriously. We believe it is right. From time to time, we have to contact a member to discuss non-compliance with our membership expectations. Those contacts are always made for the purpose of helping members meet the expectations; however, if there is no desire for a member to do so, their membership is eventually dropped by the board of trustees. I love the members of NEHBC. It is my honor and privilege to be a member of NEHBC, and I am excited to be serving alongside you advancing the causes of the Lord in our community, across our nation, and around the world.