



December 13th, 2007

Back in the Saddle



It is good to be back home after a much needed two week vacation. I actually just used my first vacation days of 2007 – it has been one of those years. We spent the first week doing a whole lot of nothing at the beach in Florida. Most people don't head to the beach in December; however, for a family in our season of life, it is a great time to go. First, school is still in session and so there is hardly anybody there which means lots of quiet. Second, because we have preschoolers, we can't take them very far into the ocean swimming wise, so whether we go in July or December we still can't really swim in the sea. Until the kids are older, our significant swimming time takes place at the pool where there are no tidal currents to deal with and we can see the entire pool at the same time. Third, it is definitely still warm enough to be on the beach. During our week it was in the 70s, and we built sand castles and dug holes. A week later and the temperatures would have been in the 80s. The bonus is that because it is out of season, the beach condos go for a song. If you have never tried the Florida beaches in December, you ought to give it some consideration.

We really enjoyed our time at the beach playing on the sand, catching crabs, taking long walks along the sea with the water washing up on our feet, sitting in the hot tub, swimming in the heated pool, and just being together as a family. You'll be hearing some stories about the trip right here on Thursday Thoughts in the coming weeks.

We left Florida and drove to Deatsville, Alabama, on the northwest side of Montgomery. Our very close friends from seminary pastor Shoal Creek Baptist Church. When Nicole and I got to seminary, we prayed that the Lord would give us one couple with whom we would grow very close. We prayed for a couple in the same season of life and with whom all four of us would get along very well, a couple with whom we would walk together through the tough days of seminary. The Lord gave us several good friends in seminary but with whom we really only became very close after seminary. It was Shane and Shannon who walked with us through seminary. We spent lots of time together talking, praying, crying, sharing, and dreaming. We have vacationed with them on several occasions. At one point the four of us really believed the Lord was leading us to start a church together. Shane and I spent much time discussing co-pastoring a church in which both of us would be the Senior Pastors of the church. Very unusual to be sure, but we thought it was the direction in which the Lord was leading us. To this day, Shane and I talk every week by phone. When we left seminary, Shane was called by God to go on staff at FBC Woodstock, GA, where he served for five years before the Lord led him to become a Senior Pastor in Alabama.

When we left Florida, we went to visit the Russell's for several days and we had a ball. The highlight for me was attending Shoal Creek Baptist Church last Sunday morning and listening to Shane preach. My soul was blessed. The Lord's anointing is on him. We had a great time with Shane and Shannon. There is no awkwardness when we are together; we simply pick back up where we left off the last time we saw them. It was sweet serendipity to find out that, including rest stops, it is only an 11-hour drive from our driveway to theirs. No doubt we'll be making that drive again.

I very much needed the break. In one sense it was refreshing for me to not have to preach the past two Sundays. In another sense, I missed preaching in general tremendously, but preaching at NEHBC even more so. I miss y'all when I'm gone. I love our church family so much. I can't wait to see you on Sunday.

NEHBC Happenings

A lot happened while I was gone. Here is a brief overview:

- Several of our Sunday morning adult Bible Study classes had Christmas parties. I have to tell you, in the past, Nicole and I have visited many of them and they are a blast. If you are not in a Sunday morning Bible Study class, you need to find one. We have some great classes who support each and minister to each other during difficult times, study the Bible together, and challenge each other to reach the lost. Until you join a Sunday morning Bible Study class, you will never feel like you are part of the community at NEHBC.
- Our Men's Ministry had a chili and gumbo cook-off. There was much smack talk going on leading up to this competition. Congrats to Dick Polk on winning the gumbo contest. Richard Tafoya won the chili contest, but only because I wasn't there with my chili . . . ahem. Congrats to the winners – from all accounts they defeated some tough competition. Several folks who attended to participate in the eating have told me how good the food and fellowship was. Wade Smith is doing a fabulous job leading our men to serve the Lord, reach out to lost men, build relationships

with one another, and challenge each other to be leaders in the Kingdom of God.

- Our Men's Ministry also played golf on Sunday afternoon, December 2nd. Memories were made on several levels. I have to tell you, whether you are a novice or a scratch golfer, you ought to show up when our men get together for golf. I promise you will find men at your skill level with whom you can play. Jim Hamilton and Dick Polk did a great job organizing the golf.
- Our Women's Ministry was not to be outdone. They gathered on Thursday night, December 5, at Atascocita Country Club for an evening dinner. Almost 100 ladies attended with a significant number of unchurched present. Pam Bentley, our team leader, gave a clear presentation of the Gospel and called ladies to salvation. I want to thank our NEHBC ladies for inviting their lost friends and family to the dinner so they could hear the Gospel. The way this event was planned and carried out was a great example of how we as a church want to be driven by evangelism, governed by the Bible, and sustained through prayer. Pam is providing significant leadership to our Women's Ministry.
- Our Women's Ministry also gathered to decorate our church for the Christmas season. Thank you ladies for working so hard to ensure our lobby and worship center is ready for Christmas. Your hard work helps prepare our church family for the Christmas season. You are a blessing to NEHBC.

60-Day Building Emphasis

Our 60-day building emphasis is coming to an end. I called on some of our laymen to lead a full court press from the beginning of November through the end of December. They have led well in this effort. They have shared in our Sunday morning Bible Study classes and all of the services. They have prayed. They have talked to people individually. They have carried the load for their pastor in many regards, and for that I am very thankful. Beginning in January, we'll continue to pray for the Lord's provision for our building expansion project as well as provide regular updates on the receipts, but the current full court press will be over.

Looking Ahead at the Rest of the Month

Outside of the Bible Study Christmas parties and a couple of youth events, the rest of December is fairly quiet at NEHBC. However, there are some great things coming up that I'm really looking forward to. This coming Sunday, I'll be back in the pulpit and I'll be talking about forgiveness from our love passage in 1 Corinthians 13:5. Love forgives all things. This will wrap up the passage's description of love. Then on Sunday, December 23rd, I'll be preaching from a bit of an uncommon passage related to Christmas – the day that Mary went to see Elizabeth to congratulate Lizzy on her pregnancy. There is a lot for us today in that passage. That will lead us to December 24th and our 50-minute Christmas Eve services in which I'll be preaching about Christmas again. Then December 30th I'll finish 1 Corinthians 13, and in January we'll be rolling again.

Remember, this coming Sunday is the last time our Sunday morning Bible Study classes will meet in 2007. It is also the last time we will have all three services in 2007. On December 23rd and 30th we'll

just have two services: 10am and 11:10am. The Christmas Eve services are at 4pm and 5pm.