



April 3, 2008

The Starbucks Experience - Everyday People, Everyday Living

Over the 2007 Christmas holidays, we went to visit my in-laws in Austin, Texas. Put together in one house our family of five, Pops and Nana, and Nicole's elderly grandmother, and you have a bustling household experience. As a result, when I need to prepare a sermon I head for the local Starbucks at La Frontera in Round Rock where I am happy to sit and work. I have logged many an hour of sermon prep at that particular Starbucks and such was this particular occasion between Christmas and the New Year.

I found myself sitting in one of the prized, overstuffed chairs with my Bible and laptop nursing a Gingerbread Latte. After a time, I looked around the store and took notice of all the everyday people around me doing everyday things.

One young couple, deeply in love, sat together holding hands while discussing in detail a contract with a wedding photographer. Giddy was the word I'd use to describe the bride-to-be. Statistics say their marriage is unlikely to last. I silently asked the Lord to not let them become a statistic.

At the table next to them sat a man in his mid-forties from the computer industry obviously waiting for an appointment. The tap-tap-tap of his stylus on the table top was more than a little irritating. Finally, a young woman in her early to mid-twenties walked in and what commenced was clearly a job interview. Twenty minutes later he walked out the door alone. She remained at the table and did her best to hold it together, but moments later she was quietly wiping away tears. Dashed hopes and dreams.

At another table sat a man and woman in their fifties discussing New Year's Eve plans. Both were enjoying their conversation immensely. Their wedding-ringed hands comfortably touched throughout the conversation. Ballroom dancing was the plan to which they finally committed. It is always good to see a married couple that genuinely enjoys being together.

Over in the corner sitting in two overstuffed chairs was a father and what I'd estimate to be his fifth or sixth grade son. The son played with his coffee cup while his dad stared out the window. They hardly said a word to each other. Another poor father-son relationship. I prayed it would become healthy. It is never too late. My guess is mom and any sisters were taking advantage of the post Christmas shopping sales somewhere.

At another table sat a lady in her early thirties trying to earn a living. Clearly in sales, she was working her cell phone and reading numbers off a spreadsheet on her computer. I have to say that if she isn't earning a living in her current position, it isn't due to lack of effort.

Two women in their fifties, who strongly resembled one another, sat huddled close together at a table. At times they talked and at other times they sat in silence as if in deep thought. When they did talk, they were discussing stories about which they were both familiar—they kept helping each other with details. At times they laughed and at other times they wiped away tears of sadness. Turns out it was their second Christmas since their mother passed away.

All around me were everyday people doing everyday things. All of them so distracted by the business of life. I wonder if any of them noticed what anybody else was doing at the tables around them.

I wonder if you take the time to stop and notice the people around you. If you do, you'll see everyday people doing everyday things. All of them in desperate need of the Lord Jesus Christ. All of them needing someone like you to give them the Hope that you carry.

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" Romans 10:14-15 (ESV)

NEW SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS

On May 4, we are launching a unique Sunday School class. It is strictly for saved women who are married to lost men.

At first glance, that may sound strange to you, but both our church and our community are filled with this demographic. We have not a few ladies who come to worship each Sunday who are in this position. It is quite difficult for a lady that loves the Lord to live with a man who does not. She is in the agonizing position of being called by God to live in submission to a man who does not revere the Lord or His Word.

This class is designed to be an encouragement to these ladies. Together, they will study Scripture, pray for the salvation of their husbands, and hold each other accountable for living out 1 Peter 3:1-6.

Of course, the goal for each lady in the class is to get kicked out. (I never thought I'd write that sentence in all my life.) We want to see their husbands decide to become followers of Jesus Christ at which point the lady and her husband will start attending Sunday School together.

I believe great things are going to come about through this ministry. If you are in this position, I want to encourage you to attend this class starting May 4. Help me pass the word around to ladies you know that should come to this class.

CHURCHWIDE PICNIC

A few hundred people participated in our picnic this past Sunday after church. First, a big thanks to our Men's Ministry for their leadership and service. They planned and organized the event and, not surprisingly, it was logistically successful.

The classes did a good job setting up gathering points throughout the field. As I walked around, I saw lots of people meeting for the first time and friendships being renewed. Events like the picnic are important for a church like ours because with three Sunday morning services, it is difficult for people in one service to meet those in the other services. The picnic affords everybody who wants it the opportunity to meet others with whom they don't usually get to mingle.

The church provided all the food, drinks and plate ware. Some classes did some serious additional planning. One class had a large deep fryer set up and fried a boatload of fresh catfish caught by some of the men in their class. Let's just say not a few folks were hovering around their tent. Another class demonstrated that the only point of eating a meal is to get to the dessert. I reckon they had enough dessert to cater to the entire gathering. I've never seen such a display of pies, tarts, cakes, cookies, brownies and the like in all my life. All around the field, the bags of footballs, soccer balls and Frisbees quickly emptied as games broke out among age groups of all kinds.

The only shortcoming of the event I noticed was that towards the end, we were running short on food. I don't like for that to happen, and I've taken steps to correct it in the future. Next time we will make sure there is plenty of everything. The first time we tried this picnic idea was this past September 16, and we ended up with pans of hamburger patties and hotdogs left over. This time, we ordered the same amount of food—and we ran out of hotdogs and barely had any hamburger patties left over. Go figure.

We'll do it again soon—I hope you can make it.

MISSIONS

Seven weeks from today Team Estonia heads out. All told, five churches are involved in this trip. Four churches worked together to raise the money to purchase the Estonian Bibles we will distribute: NEHBC, Shoal Creek Baptist Church (SCBC) in Alabama, First Baptist Church of Southlake (FBCS) in the Dallas-Forth Worth metroplex, and Newmarket Baptist Church in Virginia.

Four churches are playing key roles in the distribution of the Bibles by sending personnel to the field: NEHBC, SCBC, FBCS, and Faith Family Baptist Church here in Houston. Though we are four churches, we are going as one team to work together to distribute as many Bibles and Gospel tracts as possible.

It is our goal to distribute 32,000 pieces of literature, either Bibles or tracts. The country of Estonia has roughly 1.3 million people of which about 700,000 are Estonians with the vast majority of the remaining 600,000 made up of Russians. 32,000 pieces of literature among 700,000 Estonians means almost 4.5% of Estonians in Estonia will get either a Bible or tract from us on this one trip. Can you fathom such a thing? This gets even better. If there are three people, on average, in each home among the 700,000 Estonians, we will put either a Bible or tract in 14.7% of Estonian households. I am overwhelmed at the possibility.

I am so thankful to the Lord Jesus for the way He has made this all happen. I wish I could take credit, but I can't. Multiple American churches banding together to take the Good News to an unreached people group. (Less than 2% of Estonia is born again.) Almost 15% of Estonian households getting literature from us. I stand amazed at the way the Lord moves. I'm just thankful I get to be along for the ride.

Please join with me in a specific prayer request. I'm praying that out of this trip, the Lord will raise up a layperson with an unquenchable passion for reaching Estonia with the Gospel message. I'm praying for

a layperson who will become the point person for leading our team to Estonia each year. Someone who will fall in love with both the Thompson's and Estonians. Someone who will promote Estonia and the Thompson's at NEHBC. Someone who will spend all year recruiting people to go on the next Estonia trip. Someone who will go to bed at night and have dreams of thousands of Estonians following Christ. Who will it be? I have no idea. I can't even begin to guess. The Lord doesn't pick leaders based on human criteria. I'll wait for Him to show me who it is.

By the way, let me send a waft of the aroma of the cake baking in the oven that is our 2009 NEHBC mission trip schedule. The locations have all been picked. Almost all the dates have been locked in, and we are fast closing in on the others. Remember, the long term goal is to have a trip a month, and we are getting close. We go to 9 trips in '09. Three are domestic trips. Six are international trips. In 2009 we are debuting an international mission trip for the teens in addition to their annual domestic trip. They have been to Mexico, but I'm talking about leaving the continent. The teens will be able to pick either or both trips. 2007 was a breakout year for missions going in the five-year life of our church. 2008 has continued the momentum. Just wait until 2009—go ahead and order your passport and start putting aside a little money each month. Be a part of something much bigger than you—taking the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth.

LET'S TALK ABOUT DIRT - AGAIN

If you've come by the church this week, you know we are playing with large amounts of dirt again. It is simply part two of last summer's field project. The back side of the field needs a couple hundred loads of dirt and the dozer is doing the heavy moving. We are in crunch time to get the field ready for Sportsman's Day on May 17. This phase of the project also includes fixing low points in the current field and a few drainage issues. Take a walk into the field sometime if you have not done so. The field is much larger than it looks from the parking lot—the depth and width is deceiving. I think you'll be surprised by the size of that field.