



June 26, 2008

I'm One Proud Papa

In some ways, I feel like our teenagers are my kids, and I have to tell you, right now I'm feeling like one proud papa.

Last week, I spent a couple of days with our teens on their mission trip to Arkansas. Their assignment? Go door-to-door in the remote town of Camden, home of the third largest government housing district in the state. While there are some very nice neighborhoods in Camden, as well as a quaint downtown area, much of the outlying areas are low income.

Overgrown yards. Dilapidated houses. Plywood front porches. Roaming pets. Lots of loiterers. Many would have looked and seen people in great financial need. Our teens looked and saw thousands of people in need of Jesus. And so, into this intimidating setting that would have overwhelmed many adults, an army of our teenagers launched their attack.

I don't use that military imagery lightly. These are the teens that completed our nine month qualification process to participate on this mission trip. These teens had been highly trained and prepared for this mission.

In teams of two to three, under the careful watch of adult supervision, they went door-to-door carrying their Bibles and handfuls of literature. To say the homeowners were shocked would be the understatement of the year. 12-18 year olds knocking on their door and asking if the homeowners would be willing to talk about Jesus is not what they are used to in their neighborhood.

Think it wouldn't work? Think again. Well over 100 full Gospel presentations were given. Several people were saved. Thousands of pieces of literature were distributed. Bibles were given to the bibleless.

I'll admit it, I got a little emotional several times watching it happen. These teenagers will one day take their turn as pastors, missionaries and lay leaders in local churches. Whatever local church or mission field ends up with former NEHBC teens is going to be doing alright.

The teens of NEHBC are being disciplined well. Their knowledge of Scripture is expanding. Their heart for evangelism continues to grow. Their desire for personal holiness is a breath of fresh air in a culture of gross immorality. Their love for Jesus is evident.

I am one proud papa.

Sunday Nights in the Summer

We got off to a great start this past Sunday evening.

Many more people than I expected showed up early to drink coffee and mingle. We had a nice variety of hot coffees and even some fancy iced coffee. A big thanks to Matt and Holly Reynolds for heading up the coffee ministry.

I've heard from several sources that the teenagers had a really great worship service. Out Front, the youth band, led the praise and worship time and then some pre-selected teens and one of the adults shared testimonies about the Arkansas mission trip.

I thought the praise and worship time in the adult service was pretty moving. I know it prepared me for the sermon time. Our 8:45 team of musicians did a great job. I finished preaching through 1 Samuel and will begin another Old Testament book this coming Sunday evening. As usual, I won't announce the book in advance because I like the element of surprise. However, here is a hint: I have outlined nine sermons that cover the book from start to finish.

Youth Pastor Search

I am well into the process of finding our next youth pastor. Please pray for God to reveal His man for NEHBC.

I'm following my usual strategy of looking inside and outside our church. The huge advantage of hiring someone from within is that we know what we are getting and they know what they are getting. They understand our system and what we are trying to do.

At the same time, I give extensive attention to looking outside our church. The day after the position recently became vacant, I sent out an email to about seventy pastors and Southern Baptist denominational workers all around the country. The term "denominational workers" refers to state convention employees (there are over 30 state/regional conventions in our country), seminary presidents and professors (Southern Baptists have six seminaries), and other employees of our other Southern Baptist agencies. These are the people who are constantly in our churches and schools across the country and are well positioned to know the identity of the best current or up and coming staff members.

Some of our NEHBC folk have asked me how long it will take to find the new person. My response is always the same: "as long as it takes." As I've said here numerous times before, I'd rather have no one than the wrong one. I hope this is a quick process, but the Lord has to determine the time frame. When He is ready, He will reveal His man.

Until then, we have a great interim plan already in place. We have outstanding adults working with our teenagers. Adults who love the Lord, our church, and their own families and who also have a passion to influence teenagers for Jesus Christ. I'd be more than satisfied if I currently had a teen in our youth group sitting under the adult leadership we have in place.

Parking Ministry

I can't overstate how thankful I am for the faithful and important service performed each week by the parking ministry. Jaime Douglas and his team are the first point of contact for all the members and guests who pull into our parking lot for Sunday morning worship.

Through constant greetings, giving stickers to children, providing physical assistance to the elderly or moms with a slew of small children, or handling traffic flow, they have a tremendous presence in our parking lot.

Take a moment this coming Sunday to give a word of thanks and encouragement to those that serve in the parking lot. They are so faithful to show up each week and minister to us. They have been a blessing to me, personally, on many occasions.