

Archived October

October 23, 2008

As We Are

Over this past weekend, my wife and I participated in a community volunteer work-day near downtown Houston. We began the day with indoor and outdoor painting as well as landscaping. About 40 people arrived to roll up their sleeves and put in some hard work for Fonwood Elementary School. You may wonder why this school, which is funded by the state is in need of assistance. There are many schools in Houston and in the greater areas that are under funded. It is truly unfortunate; schools in this situation must rely on the community for help.

Later that morning, we were about to roll paint on the exterior walls of the courtyard. I was trying to organize and determine the painting areas. Something/someone tugged on to the loose end of my shirt. I turned around and found a 7 year old boy named Stefan. He was bright-eyed and quick to help. Stefan asked me if i knew what I was doing. I chuckled and replied, "I'm just learning, and I can use your help." He quickly grabbed a paint roller and a bucket, while whisking me away to a section of the wall. He wanted to show me what he can do. He also wanted me to help him do it better. In watching my every move, he was a quick study as we painted the tile sections. He kept saying, "you know allot about painting." I mentioned that my dad was a contractor for more than 20 years. I just learned how to watch and listen, just as Stefan was already doing.

Stefan was a huge help! Full of energy, determination and spunk. We finished all the sections and later went to lunch. He sat right beside me and showed me pictures of his family. We laughed and laughed about our morning work. He looked like the most happiest kid around town. Before we left for the day I shared a few encouragements with Stefan. I reminded him about our painting job: just as easy as you have a talent, you can be anything you want to be with that gift. I encouraged him not to let anyone tell him otherwise, but to follow his dreams. Stefan had nothing to prove; he simply came seeking a friend - just as he was.

That day God gave me a gift in using Stefan. He showed me another glimpse of the Father's love. You see, Stefan was not interested in painting more than having a friend. He needed a friend that he could believe in. He cared about being cared for in having validation, esteem and acceptance. This is exactly who we are before our heavenly Father. He accepts us just as we are. He is the one who comes and finds us. He is the one who loves to give us the desires of our hearts as they are connected to the Father. As God found Adam in the Garden, he daily walks through and around our lives seeking us. I am thankful for Stefan and our friendship. It is so good to be reminded of how God feels about us and what he says: "The Lord has appeared of old to me, saying: "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you." Jer. 31:3

October 21, 2008

Running

Where are you running: to or from? It seems in this day in age that this question has become standard and accepted reality. All of us are too busy. More than what we are able to control. And I guess that's it. For me at least. Control. We either want it, need it or wonder if we are losing it. A very good friend of mine in the biz reminded me of this valuable fact. When I'm in a hurry, I miss it. When I spend more time on something, I can cover more of the details. I do not have to always run or hit it so hard. But that's just it - when do we have time for that?! It seems like we are always running. This can be from anything or to anything.

Rest and patience have become my two greatest teachers over this year. When I am at rest, I have no reason to run. When I am patient, I have no reason to worry. Simple to say, hard to do. Think about the areas of your life. What keeps you running and where to. There was a man who was afraid for his life. This man was a thief. Stole something that was not his. He had the ambition to take life into his own hands for the sake of control. Away from God, away from his family and away from people. His fear caught up with him and woke him from his sleep. A ladder appeared towards heaven. The voice of God spoke and said "I will give you this land. I am with you. I will watch over you where ever you go." (Gn. 28.13-15 surmised)

Trust is a serious issue. It takes faith and belief to grant the permission of trust. Many of us have been betrayed and trust is not easy to recover. Only the power of God can slow our run to a walk. Only the power of God can cause us to rest. Only the power of God can help us trust in order to live again. For me, I know he already has me right where he wants me. Even though I cannot see the other side of this mountain - He can. My trust in Him depends on my ability to fully believe. He already has promised us what he will do. He will never leave us nor forsake us (Matt. 28.20). It is this kind of promise that calls us into rest - His rest.

October 16, 2008

Joe The Plumber, Joe Sixpack and Joe Schmoe

After watching the presidential candidate debate, I was struck by the enormity of our ever increasing family unit issues in our country. The economic state, health care and education are the top issues we face as a nation. We also see alarming issues in the Church in view of our congregations and their family units.

Recently, my wife and I decided to get back to the basics for our family. We enjoy watching TV during dinner, but we have realized that this environment drowns out daily discussions and quality face time. We have a set schedule every day, which includes daily exercise at the gym (as a family) before coming home. By the time dinner is over,

and chores are done, we wonder where our time has gone. We are now back at the table. So how does this all affect our daily worship with God and worship in the Body?

As you may be aware the decline of church attendance and the incline of divorce/immoral rates are staggering. This is not coincidental, neither is this reality-parallel anything new. However, these findings are alarming as they do affect our outlook on God, relationships and community. As morality and the family unit shifts, so do we see the wakes in our churches and in our neighborhoods.

Maybe like you, I have seen more and more people disinterested in engaging in cooperate worship. People are not as open in discussions. People are far too busy and in a rush. Last but not least, we drive too fast and cut people off in the church parking lot. We are simply consumed by life's responsibilities. I catch myself often when my time with God, family and/or friends ebbs away due to business. He then reminds me of what is truly important in what I value and prioritize. For example, in my relationship and engagement with my family, there is something strong and solid about coming together at the table. There is also a strongpoint of connection when I am active in my wife's life from simple texting or facebooking to listening and asking questions about her day. There is a strongpoint of connection when we do things together as a family. We build community with one another. This is very much like our worship to God when we are engaged with Him in a sincere relationship.

In church worship, we all come from different home/time/family arrangements. I believe that our family unit shaping begins at home and needs to be encouraged by our local churches. Unfortunately, there are families who have experienced a shattering of relationships and may no longer be the unit they once were. This is sensitive to my heart, as my parents divorced when I was five. The family unit can be rekindled as our worship-relationship with God can be revitalized. It comes back to re-prioritizing our values, sincerity, relationships and responsibilities. You may have your own methods for resolve, but one thing is clear, all of our households are in need of community with God and with people.

We are living in the days of Joe the Plumber and Sixpack, but what about their families? It starts with us, our households and our communities to reclaim the significance of family rather than the focus on individualism.

October 14, 2008

To Audition Or Not To Audition?

There is a question that has been rattling in my brain since last week. You see, a friend of mine is in the process of creating another worship service. Currently, the attendances in both services are at 80%. The consensus was to create a service that was younger and hip, which would help identify to the new growing portions of their demographic.

In order to be different, this added service was going to be more of an alternative rock sound as apart from the 1990's contemporary and the 1920's traditional. The challenge was the selection process of band members and singers who would help create the music/style of this service.

The objective is two-fold: (1.) Auditioning members from both contemporary and traditional teams in order to create a new sound. (2.) Finding/auditioning members from outside the worship ministry and/or church to create a new sound.

The problem: is the auditioning process the best way to go, rather than picking who you want and forming the group? Because of the relational and emotional ties in the current teams, my friend explained that he was cautious in the following concerns: those who are loyal and may feel that their toes were getting stepped on; those who may experience hurt feelings if they are not chosen; those who may fear rejection because they are inferior to auditions; and those who may form the perception that the chosen group is for the elite.

If this were you, how would you handle these concerns?

October 7, 2008

Patience: Computers, Computers, Computers! How do you spell relief? M-a-c.

Okay, so maybe computers aren't the real issue but humans are. I started my day with a great morning, typed a few notes, took care of loose ends and bam! No sound from my pc. I usually work in Mac, but I have another computer for different tasks. Even as I type now, I am still waiting on my friendly team of tech supporters. It's amazing how dependent we have become on technology, yet I (we) get in patient in our system slows down by 7.5 seconds (for you speedsters .5). In any case, it is plausible to see these responses in our spiritual life. Right? How about when we are to lead worship and technology fails?

A moment like this happened about a year ago. All the lights went out, system gone and total blackness draped the worship center. I was at the piano, already enclosed in the worship and bam! An instance like this can prompt us to A.) Stop worship all together; B.) Freak out along with choosing option A; or C.) let God take residence as we worship Him power or not. My flesh wanted to choose somewhere between A and B, but my heart chose the better part of C. In fact, this day turned out to be one of the greatest worship experiences as we allowed God to lead through us with patience and focus.

It really does come down to what is important and what truly isn't. A good friend of mine always reminds me: "Branon, is this issue really of any eternal significance?" No matter how we may spell relief, choosing what is eternal, pure and right according to His pleasure, enables us to have patience and focus. All of this life is simply passing.

October 2, 2008

Bill Maher on Christianity

You may remember all the pointed jokes, comments and perspectives from this comedian. His stance on Christianity and belief in God was shared on last night's Jon Stewart Show. If you are not aware, Bill Maher made a move that will be premiered this Friday. He is asking questions to understand the reasoning of people's faith.

For some, this video may be hard to sit through, but give it a try and listen to what is being said. It is vital that we as Christians do understand what and why we believe about the Bible. Believing in what others tell us to believe is not enough; we must all stand on our own two feet in our reading and trust in God's Word alone. There are some interesting points that are raised in this video. If we are to share and live the Good News, do we really understand and positively demonstrate and communicate the authentic love for Christ? In the views represented in this video, we must come face-to-face in our understanding to listen and dialogue to a world who does not embrace Jesus Christ.

It is great that he is asking questions because this leads to conclusions that hopefully will lead to salvation. I have tossed this over in my mind all day to figure why a person would spend such great time, resources and financial means only to make a career that never satisfies founded answers. This brings to mind the apostle Paul on his relentless pursuit to kill Christians, only to be stopped and held by the love of God. My only conclusion: questions will still remain, life will continue in loneliness until the veil of skepticism is lifted and the eyes of faith are open by the help of God. What are your thoughts?

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