

Grace 'n Grits

story by Christmas McGaughey
photos by Tom Price

CALVARY CHAPEL STONE MOUNTAIN

Pastor Sandy Adams stood up and looked at the rows of empty chairs. He didn't bother to get behind the podium but walked over to the only two people in the room—his wife, Kathy, and James Chapman, who led worship during their Wednesday night Bible studies. The only other adult in the building was James' wife, Donna, who was ministering to the children.

Dumbfounded, Pastor Sandy sat down. How could this be? They had been working hard to plant a Calvary Chapel in the Atlanta area for five years. The usual Sunday morning crowd was around 150 people, and there were always several dozen folks on Wednesday nights. Now he faced a room of empty chairs. His heart ached with discouragement. He looked at James and his wife and asked, "You all just want to go home?" Kathy and James urged him to teach, saying they were there to hear from God's Word.

Gulping back his wounded pride, Sandy sat down and began to teach through the verse-by-verse lesson. He couldn't imagine

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anything more disheartening until a few moments later a new family with several children showed up. Inside, Pastor Sandy groaned with embarrassment.

"It was one of the most humbling moments of my life. I'll never forget when the lady asked us if it was our first Bible study," said Sandy, chuckling while recalling that night in February of 1985. Now Calvary Chapel Stone Mountain, near Atlanta, Georgia, has around a thousand members and a healthy attendance at its Bible studies. "I had to tell her we'd been going for five years. Talk about eating some humble pie."

"That particular night was the pinnacle of my frustration. After laboring for five years and having only four people show up to a Wednesday night Bible study, including myself, it was like a dagger in the heart, especially since my expectations were set so high." He started the church at age 22 and recalls, "I ambitiously told my wife when we started that within nine months, we'd have thousands of people." It was that February night that he laid down his lofty plans and decided that whatever happened he was going to teach God's Word.

"It's not like it all happened at once. I'm still learning how to walk humbly with my God." In times of discouragement, he has leaned on Matthew 16:18b. Jesus said, "... I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." Pastor Sandy has clung to the belief that Jesus builds the church—His church—and that He does it His way in His time.

The good-natured pastor with the Southern drawl said he loves being in the South where he grew up. He thanks the Lord for what has happened at CC Stone Mountain. Many of the folks currently in leadership were saved in the church, have grown spiritually, and now fill leadership positions.

Grace and Grits

CC Stone Mountain's uniqueness comes from its close-knit family atmosphere, the grits they serve in the café on Sunday mornings, and the emphasis on God's grace. "We're known for our grits and God's grace," Sandy said, laughing.



Calvary Chapel of Stone Mountain.



CC Stone Mountain found it necessary to build an addition onto the sanctuary last year.



Pastor Sandy Adams enjoys a rapport with the youth, chatting with Josh Pruitt and David Nasternak after service.



Pastor Sandy is available for prayer and consultation after the service. Christy and Larry Allen have been blessed to hear God's Word taught.



Miquel de Jesus leads worship after years of playing Christian music. He replaced Kevin Fitzgerald, now a full-time missionary in Dublin, Ireland.

After he graduated from Calvary Chapel Bible College in Southern California in 1980, he was given the opportunity to join the staff of a local Calvary. But Sandy wanted to share the good news of God's grace with people from the South. "I prayed about it and felt the Lord say to me, 'Sandy, you're from the South. You know the language and culture. They don't need another Calvary Chapel in California; they need one in Atlanta, Georgia.'"

He returned to Atlanta where he married his wife, Kathy. They started a Bible study in

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Pastor Sandy Adams



Assistant Pastor James Chapman fellowships after the service. He shares administrative duties with Pastor Bob Temps.

Zechariah 4:6
 "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit... Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And He shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'"



Pastor Sandy encourages the congregation to bring their Bibles to follow along in the Scriptures. Verses related to the main passage are projected on a screen in the sanctuary.



Children act out the story of Jesus and the woman at the well.



A puppet show captivates the viewers.

their home, teaching verse-by-verse through the Bible. “People needed a grace place where they’d be loved on, hear God’s Word, and be accepted for who they are.”

“I’ve heard Pastor Chuck say many times that the emphasis in Scripture is not on what we can do for God, but on what He has done for us. The Bible teaches us that God worked to save us and that He’s working in us to make us like Jesus, but He loves us just as we are and right where we’re at.”

James Chapman, assistant pastor of CC Stone Mountain, said he enjoys the many cultures and races of people who are one family there—something that is unusual in Southern churches.

“People think of the South, and sometimes their first thought is segregation. But it’s really interesting the diversity that God has brought here: we have black, white, and Asian,” he said. “In the early days, the KKK would march in Stone Mountain and go right by our building. It was always our prayer that God would do a work among the different races in our community. It’s neat to see how God has brought us all together.” He added, “I have heard several people say, ‘This is my family.’ And it’s true; people stay afterwards, praying together, fellowshiping with each other.”

A Balance Among Extremes

Raised in the Atlanta area, Sandy grew up among emotionally charged Pentecostal churches and conservative Southern Baptist churches. After going to Calvary Chapel Bible College, he realized what was missing—balance.

“It’s really the whole package that makes Calvary Chapel such a wonderful church, and what I believe is such a biblical church,” he said. “In the South, there is a lot of tradition and legalistic leanings.”

Sandy’s desire in starting a church was not to draw believers from other churches. “We didn’t see ourselves in competition with anybody. What we decided early on was that we were here to reach the people that nobody else was reaching.”

While ministering to the community during this past Christmas season, CC Stone Mountain offered free gift-wrapping in the parking lot of a local shopping center. “It was a tremendous thing. So many people, especially here in the South, think that all churches are interested in is their money. It was great to do something that challenged that notion.” Volunteers from the church wrapped over 2,000 gifts and gave away 1,000 books. Gift-wrapping was free and no donations would be accepted. This gave volunteers many opportunities to share the Gospel.

Slow and Steady Growth

When Sandy speaks to other pastors about ministry, he laughs about how his ideals and his reality were so far apart. He recounts a visit to CC Fort Lauderdale, the church of Pastor Bob Coy, “I walked into Bob’s bathroom and counted more people than we had in our church for the first ten years. ‘Hey,’ I concluded, ‘if we ever *stall out* in Stone Mountain, if my ministry ever goes *down the drain*, I’m going to Calvary Chapel Fort Lauderdale to preach to the crowd in Bob’s bathroom. I’ll start *in John*.”

Behind his humor is a deep conviction that while all healthy churches grow, they don’t all grow at the same



Children sit with Sunday school teacher Michelle Perdue as they watch a puppet show. Anna Clark heads the Sunday school program at CC Stone Mountain.

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Pastor Sandy Adams



Haiti photos by Roland Jacques

During their recent trip to Haiti, Angela Wojcik and Pam Butler lead children in praise to Jesus.

CC Stone Mountain Ministers in Haiti



Pastor Sandy with a child in Haiti that his church supports.

Calvary Chapel Stone Mountain has joined with Haiti Endowment and Calvary Chapel Murrieta, California, to help plant churches and train pastors in Haiti. This past November the church took a team to the town of Popeye, in the Haitian bush. As a group ministered to children, Pastor Sandy led a seminar for pastors, while some men helped with construction for a new building.

Gift-Wrapping God's Love



photos by Bob Temps

CC Stone Mountain offered free gift-wrapping in the parking lot of a shopping center this past Christmas. Church volunteers wrapped over 2,000 gifts and gave away 1,000 books. The service was free and no donation was accepted, which opened up an opportunity to share about God's tremendous gift of His Son born in Bethlehem.

pace. In Sandy's office is a book called *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. That has become his credo. "I think that's what is required to really get a church going in this neck of the woods. You've got to know that you're called by God, be committed to plant a Calvary Chapel, and give it a long obedience in the same direction."

When Sandy tells his story to other pastors, he says he once thought there was "something deficient about a ministry that grew slowly and steadily." He would look at mega-churches in California and compare them to the much smaller crowd in his own sanctuary. "I would hear the testimonies of churches that had grown by leaps and bounds and wonder what was wrong with us. We were just stepping, not leaping and bounding." But he adds, "I've now come to believe that the slow and steady growth we've experienced has taught us a lesson or two we might not have learned if we had exploded overnight."

He encourages those in similar ministries to measure the fruit, not in quantity, but in eternal significance. "Think of the handful of people who were saved in your church last year. Don't tell them you're discouraged with ministry. To that man or woman, boy or girl, your church is just as important to them as the mega-church is to the multitudes that attend it. Your church is where they first met Jesus and where they now meet Him every week."

Eventually Calvary Chapel Stone Mountain did begin to grow. In the early '90s, the church doubled in size, and soon after Sandy had to start looking for a new location. He went away to spend time alone with God, asking for direction. The Lord gave him Haggai 2:9, in which He says: "The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former ... And in this place I will give peace ..."

"I believe the Lord personalized that passage to my heart. It was the confirmation we needed to take a step of faith, purchase land, and build a new facility." Four weeks after opening, the new sanctuary had filled with new people, and the church returned to two Sunday morning services. The Haggai verse is etched into the sidewalk as a memorial to what God has done.

Now, aside from having a growing fellowship, the church sends teaching tapes around the

world and supports Calvary outreaches in Haiti, India, Mexico, and Ireland. Last summer, they sent one of their assistant pastors, Kevin Fitzgerald, to Ireland as a full-time missionary. Several sister Calvary Chapels have grown out of CC Stone Mountain as well as a Christian school for elementary students. The CC Stone Mountain musicians have produced two worship CDs.

Sandy said that after 22 years of ministry he feels he is just getting started. He looks forward to all that God has in store. He quotes 1 Corinthians 2:9:

Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. 📖

Contact Info:

Calvary Chapel Stone Mountain
1969 McDaniels Bridge Rd. SW
Lilburn, GA 30047
Phone: 770-736-2828
Email: ccsm@mindspring.com
www.calvarychapelstonemountain.com



Pastor Sandy prays with a man in need of encouragement after a service.



CC Stone Mountain

Assistant Pastor Bob Temps stirs a tray of grits.



photos by Bob Temps

Pastor Sandy baptizes young believers behind the church.



Natalie, Nick, Zach, Kathy, Mack, Sandy Adams (clockwise from top left).