

# **Eric Small: Camp ministry a story of God's faithfulness & many relationships**

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Eric Small is the executive director of [Pineywoods Baptist Encampment](#), where he has been since 1990. From deep in the heart of one Texan, he shares his background and thoughts on camp ministry. To suggest a Baptist General Convention of Texas-affiliated leader to be featured in this column, or to apply to be featured yourself, [click here](#).

## **Background**

### **Where else have you served in ministry, and what were your positions there?**

Before Pineywoods, I was a volunteer in churches leading boys programs, youth choir, etc., and then I surrendered to God's call on my life and became the youth and music minister at First Baptist Church in Groveton in the 1980s.

### **Where did you grow up?**

Orange, Texas

### **How did you come to faith in Christ?**

I grew up in a strong Christian home and was impressed by my dad not just to accept teachings and doctrine, but to ask our pastor to explain out of Scripture the basis for our beliefs.

As a boy, I remember eavesdropping on a conversation my dad had with our pastor in our home.

Eventually, the reality hit me that I was not connected to God, and under conviction of the Holy Spirit one night at Royal Ambassador camp at East Texas Baptist Camp, I walked to the front during invitation fully expecting to give my life to Christ. The man who met me turned me around and told me to go home and tell my pastor, which was not what I expected. Bewildered, I sat back down.

When I got home, I told my brother of my experience, and he urgently told me I had to take care of this if God was calling me. So that next day—Sunday—I went to talk to my pastor, Roy Parker, and gave my life to Christ.

## **Where were you educated, and what degrees did you receive?**

Bachelor of forestry with a specialization in parks and recreation from Stephen F. Austin

## **About camp ministry**

### **Why do you feel called into camp ministry?**

During my ministry at First Baptist in Groveton, I felt there was something else I should be doing and drove myself crazy trying to figure it out. I went to Southwestern Seminary for a year but was losing hope and chasing after a peace I could not find.

Then on a mountainside at Glorieta, I read Psalm 37:7, which says: “Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him.” It spoke to me that my life was not my problem but his. I committed to be the best youth and music minister I could be where I was until he let me know what was next. It was very

freeing to be reminded God is directing my path.

Sometime later, as I was fixing a sewer problem at my house with equipment borrowed from Pineywoods and was in a conversation with the manager, John Hyde. Out of the blue, he said I should be in camp ministry.

I really wanted to be very sure this was God's will. I prayed about it, and John asked me to make a list of everything I had done that had prepared me for camp ministry. Between classes that Monday at seminary, I made my list.

I had a forestry degree with specialization in parks and rec. I had worked some construction jobs. I was the maintenance man at an apartment complex during college. I'm an outdoor enthusiast. I led a Royal Ambassador program during and after college. I have architectural drafting skills. I was a youth minister. I am called to ministry.

And then the peace came. I called John. He just had a man quit, and I started at Pineywoods in February of 1990.

## **What is your favorite aspect of camp ministry? Why?**

Favorite is hard to define. I love to tell the story of God's faithfulness over the years and his amazing story through Pineywoods. I love the faith that he has grown in me as I serve.

I love to see the impact on lives as they experience his grace through the ministry here. I love the long-term and new fresh relationships I have been able to develop throughout the years. I love the fact that many of the adult sponsors bringing children and youth now began coming here as children—and I was the manager then.

I love the team God has assembled here, the longevity we have been blessed with and the family we have become. I love the freshness the

summer staff brings each year and their energy and enthusiasm to serve. I love knowing I am blessed to be a part of something so much beyond me.

## **What one aspect of camp ministry would you like to change?**

Twenty-something years ago, I would have said something about the board of trustees relations. However, throughout the years, through building trust in both directions, I have the best board I can imagine. We are unified in vision and purpose, and they are a great encouragement to me and the staff here as we minister. Much of the board has become such good friends over the years. As we do camp and global missions together, it just gets better.

## **How has your ministry or your perspective on ministry changed?**

I would like to think I have gained some wisdom over the years. I am a constant observer and learner and have experienced a lot of life with my own family and through experiences at camp. I pray I am more understanding and gracious now and always looking for solutions that would honor God.

## **How do you expect camp ministry to change in the next 10 years?**

Government regulations are always challenging. However, so many regulations are implemented for good reasons. We have tried to do our best to keep up and comply.

Also, staying relevant and effective in the culture we live in, and learning how to show God's grace and mercy to the realities of the current generation.

## **Name the three most significant challenges and/or influences facing your ministry.**

As stated above, our ever-changing culture and staying relevant and effective, as well as, sadly, the decline I see in a lot of churches.

## **What do you wish more people knew about camp ministry?**

The refreshing that comes with getting away from the normal crush of life and spending intentional time seeking God in a place away that is designed to enhance that experience.

## **About Eric**

### **Who were/are your mentors, and how did/do they influence you?**

I think I have learned from those God has placed in my path—both good and bad—to help mold me. The list is long and filled with teachers, coaches, Sunday school teachers, Royal Ambassador leaders, pastors, principals (who I got to know very well in junior high), employers, friends, my wife Karla, my parents and others.

As far as camp ministry, when I was young and naive, Red Colquit took me under his wing and mentored me and encouraged me in ways that helped me be successful and navigate the waters of camp management.

### **What is the impact of camp ministry on your family?**

I have five children and 11 grandchildren, who all love to be together and love family. Obviously, camp ministry has had a great impact on my family. My kids were all exposed to the years of summer staff and learning how to work, watching me struggle through situations and how God came through,

and just the exposure to the world out there and the great need that exists for humanity.

### **What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?**

There are too many to narrow it down to a favorite. However, as it relates to camp ministry, Hebrews 12:15, which says: “See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God.”

### **Who is your favorite Bible character, other than Jesus? Why?**

Again, too many. I still lead a boys program in my church—Central Baptist Church in Livingston—and I love to tell the boys stories of the characters found throughout the Bible.

### **Name something about you that would surprise people who know you.**

During our AIM Boys Camp at Pineywoods each summer, you will find me staying in a dorm with the boys and being a camper.

### **If you could get one “do over” in ministry, what would it be, and why?**

Oh my, I really do not like to think of all the “do overs” I wish I could do. I guess what would cover them all would be that I wish I would have always sought God’s direction before so many conversations and actions.