

Father gives the gift of weekly mentoring from positive role models

By Nancy Twigg

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When Cleveland, Tenn., resident Craig Thompson faced the prospect of what to give his oldest son David for his 13th birthday, he knew he wanted to go above and beyond the usual.

"I wanted to give him some type of rite of passage, like a bar mitzvah, to mark his passage from childhood to adulthood," explains Thompson, who owns and runs an Internet provider service, WingNET Internet Service, in Cleveland. He came up with the idea of arranging for his son to spend time with one entrepreneur a week for a year. "I wanted him to meet with businesspeople to help give him a good start in business."

Thompson began working on the idea as soon as he thought of it, but as David's birthday drew nearer, Thompson had made little progress. "I didn't have a peace about it. Then one day when I was praying, I felt God saying, 'You have a good idea, but what you need to focus on is godly men,'" says Thompson.

"That clarification made sense. I immediately began jotting down names of family members and people I'd met that I wanted to have an opportunity to impact my son's life as a godly man," Thompson explains.

Thompson began sending out personal invitations to 52 Christian businessmen from various walks of life, asking them to spend part of a normal day with David during a specific week in the year between David's 13th and 14th birthdays. The objective was for the men to share their life experiences with David: advice on work, faith, family, and anything else that might benefit a young man.

On the Monday after David's Feb. 7 birthday, the weekly adventures began. David has met with a variety of men including a concert promoter, college professor, newspaper editor, chiropractor and youth pastor. Some have allowed David to shadow them in their jobs. Others, like David's uncle, ORNL chemist Cyril Thompson of Knoxville, have planned special outings that allowed ample time to talk.

Though there is much diversity within the group of men he has spent time with, David sees similarity in the advice they offered. "I've learned two main themes. First, develop a really good relationship with God because through Him, all your good decisions will be made. The second thing is to find a good wife," explains David.

To enhance the educational value of the experience, Thompson requires David to write a short essay after each encounter about what he learned from that man. Those essays along with information about the project are posted on Thompson's website, The Power of 52 Godly Men (www.52godlymen.com).

Thompson's hope is that his son's future will be shaped and influenced by his time with these men of good character. "I want him to hear some of the consistent lessons that are truth he needs to latch onto. Also, for the men who are willing to share their failures, I want him to realize because these men shared what they learned, he doesn't have to follow that same path," explains Thompson.

Thompson also hopes other parents will hear about this project and want to do something similar. (The forward-thinking parent also purchased the 52GodlyWomen.com domain in preparation for when his younger daughters turn 13.) He plans in the near future to offer a nominally priced guide to walk parents through the logistics of organizing this kind of gift.

"I really would like to see this spread. I would love to see that somewhere down the road, our country and the families in it were stronger because parents did things like this to intentionally help mentor their families," Thompson says.

Nancy Twigg is a freelance contributor to the News Sentinel.

