

August 1, 2004

Pastor Jerry Shirley
Grace Baptist Church
3770 N. Water St.
Decatur, IL 62526

Dear Pastor Shirley:

I have always heard when July comes look for Christmas. Can you believe that July is over and it is only five months until Christmas? The months and weeks go so quickly.

If you are like me the years are adding up and if you think your work is done, dismiss that idea from your mind. We need to always have an optimistic, enthusiastic attitude toward life. This reminds me of Caleb, at eighty-five years old he came to Joshua to claim his inheritance in the Promised Land. He said, "now therefore give me this mountain." What an example Caleb is for us. You see, age is no barrier to making conquests for the Lord. Our power comes from faith in God. Caleb is a man that taught us to look ahead and not look back. The best is yet to come. I look forward to each month. I am in some wonderful churches and it is thrilling to see how God is working in and through you in your churches. We can claim that mountain together.

We started July 4th with Brother Woodward in Ocala while he was on vacation. Wednesday the 7th we were in Lakeland for Brother Brian Stewart at New Testament Baptist Church. Sunday 11th we were in Stuart at Community Baptist Church for Dan Holland and then the 18th and 25th preaching at Calvary Baptist Church in Melbourne. We had a busy and most rewarding month.

Continue to pray for us as we travel. The highways are dangerous here in Florida. The 4th we saw two terrible accidents and three were killed in one of them. Pray for our health, that decisions will be made where we go and we will be a blessing to the pastor and church.

In His Most Wonderful Name,
Glenn Stockton
The Pastor's Friend

ENCOURAGEMENT

AUGUST 1, 2004

Good Morning Friend,

The Bible has a lot to say about relationships. In fact when Jesus was asked “what is the most important commandment of all?” He answered by saying that **love is the most important commandment of all**. He then amplified His answer by speaking of the two most important directions of love... vertically between you and the Lord and horizontally between you and other people.

Perhaps the most intimate epistle of Paul’s thirteen epistles, which also happens to be his shortest epistle, is his brief letter to Philemon... only one chapter in length. It is rich in its emphasis on relationships. Three individuals are the focus of the chapter.

Paul writes to Philemon and urges him to take the initiative in restoring his fractured relationship with his former slave, Onesimus. Paul assumes the important role as peace-maker in bringing these two people together.

Philemon is identified as a godly man known by all to be an encourager and a refresher. Yet he is in a severely broken relationship with Onesimus.

Onesimus was once a slave to Philemon. He escaped from his job with Philemon, thus becoming a runaway slave and possibly a thief. After leaving Philemon, he became a Christian through Paul’s ministry to him, likely in prison.

Paul’s epistle urges Philemon to take the initiative in forgiving Onesimus. He urges him to welcome Onesimus back into his friendship... to love him and to forgive him.

FORGIVENESS is modeled by God to us. We learn to forgive by learning it at the feet of Jesus. Paul states this clearly:

- And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you (Eph. 4:32)
- Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another,even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye (Col. 3:13)

Onesimus had wronged Philemon yet Paul appealed to Philemon to take the first step in the process of reconciliation. Always, we are to take the first step... even if we feel that we are not guilty... even if others agree with us that we were wronged... even if the offender continues to hurt us.... and even if the offender is dead.

The pain and hurt of fractured relationships is costly. Here are some very practical suggestions.

- Admit, to yourself, the pain it is costing you.
- Express the pain candidly to the Lord.
- Outwardly and symbolically release the pain. Let me make this suggestion. Take a nail and hold it in your hand, squeezing it tightly. Don’t rush. Take the time to feel the pain. Eventually open up your hand and release the pain. Take the nail outside. Dig a hole and bury it. Prayerfully commit the release and the forgiveness to the Lord. And by God’s grace, *remember it no more*. But you say, *How can I do that?*

When the offense returns to your mind, let it go. Refuse to replay that old offense again. **It is your choice** whether you replay it again and again or if you decisively refuse to do it.

Elsewhere Paul writes, *As much as lieth within you, live at peace wiht all men.*

Be Encouraged
Glenn Stockton
The Pastor's Friend