

Pebbles on the Water, Seed on the Wind

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Bible Text: Philemon 1:7
Preached on: Sunday, February 4, 2018

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Go to the book of Philemon, a little book right before Hebrews. Paul is writing to this man and his local church. As a matter of fact, the church is meeting in his house. Philemon is a man of some means, probably quite wealthy. He owned slaves. He had a large home. And as we see, there is much to commend Philemon. There is much about him that we want to be about us and Paul esteems him highly and says so in the text that we are looking at today.

Remember, Paul is writing this from a Roman prison hut, one of thousands that were around Nero's Imperial Palace in Rome. He is under house arrest for preaching the Gospel and there chained to a praetorian guard, he dictates this letter to his faithful companion, Dr. Luke. Dr. Luke writes it down and then it's delivered by Onesimus. Epaphroditus, takes the letter to the Ephesians. Onesimus brings on this letter to Philemon. So it is written to someone but it's also written to the church and we always have to remember that as we are going through this. This is not just a letter about Philemon and how Paul wants Philemon to receive back the runaway slave, Onesimus, and receive him back not as a new slave but as a brother in Christ, because while Onesimus was running around as a runaway slave, also having stolen from his master, Philemon, Onesimus happens to run into the Apostle Paul and he is gloriously converted and he has been serving Paul and aiding Paul, and now Paul sends him back to Philemon and to the church at Philemon's house and he's going to tell him to receive Onesimus back as a brother and no longer as a slave, and all that is wonderful and glorious and we're not at that part yet. We're at verse 7, all right? Paul writes, verse 7,

7 For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

I've entitled this "Pebbles on the Water, Seed on the Wind." Pebbles on the water, seed on the wind. You know, when you are faithful to honor Christ and do good deeds in and through your local church for God, God has a way of that being like throwing a pebble in the water. If you throw a pebble into a pond, the waves will go out from that pebble and eventually reach the furthest shore, and there are little seeds like the dandelion seed and others that are just a little puff of almost cottony looking material, and if the wind is steady at all, they can just blow along in the wind a long way, and you don't know where they are going to land and where they are going to take root and germinate and produce

their own fruit. And that's the way good deeds, faithful deeds, faithful men and faithful women are in the local church. God has a way of taking that and sending that other places to have an effect. The Apostle Paul is in a Roman prison and he says to this man, Philemon, "Do you know what? Knowing of your faithful deeds," he doesn't say it that way but that's what he's alluding to, "knowing your love for the saints, your faithfulness to your local church, brings me joy and comfort way over here in Rome in my imprisonment."

So Paul has already in this chapter stated his thankfulness for Philemon. He says up in verse 5, "I am thankful for your love for the church and for your faith in Jesus Christ," but now he speaks of the motive for his prayer and his thanksgiving. But remember the flow of all of this. First of all, he commends Philemon for his faith because it's out of that true faith he has experienced the new birth evidenced by faith in Jesus Christ, and out of that new faith, Philemon, a man who was obviously a pagan, wealthy businessman in Ephesus, has had his heart turned. Now he's showing a devotion and love not to the pagan idolatries of the Gentile Ephesian culture, but he's showing a devotion to the church and to the truth and to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So Paul has already said to him, "I see your faith. I see your love for the church," and now writing in verse 7 he says, "and your love for me." He at least implies that. Philemon it seems has been faithful to take care of the Apostle Paul in many ways, but I think one thing we need to remember that all of this depends upon his faith. Everything else flows out of a true saving faith.

You know, you can have a love and a devotion to church work and not really love Christ and not really have saving faith. We're going to be amazed at the number of faithful church workers who are not in heaven. They just learned to be disciplined and learned to be about this good cause, their moms did it and their grandmothers and granddaddys did it, and that's just what you do, but they don't have true saving faith. So we're not talking about just love and devotion to the church and the church's cause, we're talking about your faith, you're changed, you are truly born again, you are truly God's child which leads to a love and devotion to Christ and to his church.

So Philemon's true faith is the source and the center of his love and devotion to the church and his love and devotion to the church's pastor, in this case, Philemon's pastor was the Apostle Paul. Now, I know there is an understudy pastor here, probably Archippus, Philemon's son is functioning as the pastor, but Paul is still to a great extent pastoring as he is training Archippus and many others to take over these churches in due time.

Three thoughts I want to bring out of this text now this morning. First of all, I. The pastor's joy and comfort. II. We'll talk about the saints or the church's refreshing. And then III, we'll talk about pebbles on the water and seed on the wind.

In verse 7, the apostle continues here and he writes and says to Philemon, "For I have come to have much joy and comfort." That phrase "I have come to have" means they go back a ways. He has known Philemon for some time. He has watched him. He has spent quality time with him. He has heard reports about this man, this man who is not an elder

in the church as far as we know, he's not even a deacon in the church, he's just a faithful Christian businessman who has proven to be a blessing to the church and to the church's pastor.

Now, no doubt, at least no doubt in my mind, Philemon had a fond affection for Paul. He supported Paul in his preaching ministry and in his missions church planting ministry, and as Paul is writing from prison in Rome, he keeps hearing reports. There are people who come by and visit with Paul and even worship and study under him in that prison hut that he's in outside of Nero's palace, and they would bring reports of how well the little church is doing that meets in Philemon's house, and how Philemon, as usual, is so trustworthy and is helping make sure, take care rather, that everything is seen to and everything goes well. So Paul writes to Philemon and says, "I've known you a long time," in effect, "and I want to tell you what I hear about you, Philemon, brings joy and comfort to my soul."

Now, I think one of the things inevitably was how Philemon supported financially the work of his local church and financially the work of the Apostle Paul's preaching ministry. Though it is not spelled out specifically, if you'll study the New Testament, you'll note that Paul regularly when he went from church to church, would go there and minister and he would receive an offering from them, financial support from them, that would support him as he went to the next church. Then he went to the next one, he would expect them to help him. And he would keep on keeping on. And when he went to these churches, the people were very poor but there were some very wealthy people. Without question, those were the folks who chipped in and really made Paul's ministry sustainable and profitable.

Now, there is a real word here for all of us about being a good church man. Philemon was a good church man, a faithful man. Again, he's a layman in the church. No special office. No special authority, at least as far as we know. But Philemon was blessed to have some wealth. He had a nice sized home and he had the financial means to back up the work of the Lord. Again, the majority of folks in the early church were very poor so men like Philemon were very needed and very helpful. And he had the reputation of doing whatever needed to be done to accommodate the church that met in his house, the preachers that might come by. We know later in verse 22, Paul just states, he just boldly states, "Now Philemon, when I get there, get me a room ready. I'm going to stay at your house." I don't know that if I've ever done that to any of you, but I guess it's biblical if I did. But the point I'm making here is Paul was comfortable, he was secure that Philemon loved him, loved the Lord's work that much that it wouldn't be an imposition at all. So he's a good church man. In his case, a wealthy churchman. But I want to remind us all: Philemon had more to offer than just his money but material support, at least until we get to heaven, is a part of supporting God's work and it is always going to be that way until we get to that place.

I want to spend a little time talking to you about a person in history who was Philemon like. This was a person of immense wealth and how they dedicated themselves to support Gospel ministry, and what an impact it has had literally all over the world but particularly

for us who calls ourselves Americans. The lady's name is Selina Hastings. Selina Hastings was born on August 24 in 1707 to British nobility. In 1728, Selina married Theophilus Hastings. Theophilus Hastings was the ninth Earl of Huntingdon. She therefore had the title of the Countess of Huntingdon. Later she became called in short, Lady Huntingdon.

In early life, from her teenage years onward, she was very dedicated to honoring God. She was of the Anglican faith and unfortunately the Anglican faith had lost its mooring and had become nothing more than just a shell of going through religious motions and teaching some works religion. So that's all she really knew, but she was very dedicated and very strict to be holy and righteous. In fact, she would not participate and she would remain aloof from the sin and the extravagances of high society British lifestyle. She wanted to always conduct herself in a virtuous and religious manner and she was confident that this personal righteousness that she was living out would win her one day an entrance into heaven, but something happened. When she was 22 years of age, she heard this fiery bold evangelist by the name of George Whitfield. George Whitfield was a companion of John and Charles Wesley. Now they did split some as time went along because George Whitfield was a Calvinist Methodist and John and Charles Wesley were more Arminian Methodists. But she was particularly impacted by George Whitfield's preaching and this Calvinist Methodist preacher that she sat under eventually convinced her that she was not converted, that she could not be saved by trusting in her own righteousness, that she must repent of that notion and trust in Christ's righteousness alone. She was gloriously converted. Her heart was aflame to advance the Gospel. She had been shown the sin of her works and trusting in her works. She had been shown the sin of trusting in the church and in self-righteousness and she had entered the glory of resting by faith in Christ alone.

Now you've got to understand something, in the eighteenth century among British aristocracy, there was immense wealth. As a matter of fact, they were just a handful of families across the British landscape that owned everything and everybody else was basically poor. Not exactly that way, but this was old wealth. So she had a lot of financial means at her disposal and from the moment she was converted, she became an ardent supporter of George Whitfield's ministry. She gave tremendous amounts of money to support him and fund his preaching and his church planting ministry. She lived her life laboring in prayer, witnessing for Christ, and using her wealth and influence to the fullest extent to further the Gospel of Jesus Christ and church planting efforts both in Britain and in the early American colonies.

As an overview, she supported Whitfield personally. Historians tell us she supported 64 church plants and got them going. She supported missionary work in the American colonies. She founded a Christian college and she supported George Whitfield's pastoral training school. She was Philemon like. She refreshed the hearts of the saints. That's what Paul tells Philemon here. He says, "You have refreshed the hearts of the saints."

When she died, Lady Huntingdon requested that no one write a biography about her. She wanted all the glory to go to Christ. Well, I appreciate her sentiment but that was a

mistake because it was like 80 years before anybody documented the influence she had on early America and on Gospel preaching and missions of her era. These things need to be recorded to stir us later to be faithful as she was faithful.

Lady Huntingdon was of the spirit of Philemon. She loved Christ. She loved the Gospel. She loved the church. She loved the man of God. And she threw everything behind them to support them, and this was such a mighty refreshing to the saints in England and to the saints in the American colonies as John and Charles Wesley and particularly George Whitfield, preached all over these colonies. In fact – now listen – in fact, it is probable that apart from this one lady's support, Whitfield and the Wesley's may have never been able to have sailed over from Britain to the original 13 colonies and preached the Gospel and plant churches, because even secular historians will tell you to this day that under their preaching and ministry, there was what is called the Great Awakening. This was a powerful thing. This was about the middle part of the eighteenth century.

Now, Ezra Stiles was the president of Yale University and he watched and documented what was happening in this Awakening, and according to Ezra Stiles, he said that as many as 50,000 new converts were added to the churches in the American colonies in those days. You say, that's not really all that many. Well, it is when you consider that all the 13 colonies only had about 350,000 people in them total. That's a sizable percentage of people, not to mention all the people regularly in church that were newly converted and became more faithful to the things of Christ. 150 new churches were planted and the Baptists down in the colony called Georgia at the time, increased from 21 churches to 79 churches and this paved the way for the great expansion of Baptists all across the Southeast, and that includes us, doesn't it?

Historians write about the dramatic impact of this Great Awakening and how it had a thorough impact on the entirety of the early American colonies. Great social change began to happen. Morality was on the increase. Many towns and cities no longer had a tavern. There wasn't necessarily preaching against alcohol, but so many people got saved in town, people quit drinking. I like it when it works that way, don't you? Can you imagine an awakening where the bars close down because they don't have any more business? That's documented historical fact. There was a God-centeredness in the colonies. I called it a vibrant Christian consensus. Not everyone was a Christian but it was just thoroughly understood and thoroughly established that the God of the Bible and the morals of the Bible and the precepts of the Bible are the only right thing to govern our life and our colonies by.

In the founding of our country, perhaps nothing was more influential than this Great Awakening. When you read the Constitution, when you read the Declaration of Independence, do you know what you see? You see a God-centeredness. You see a Christian consensus. And I am thoroughly convinced that would have never happened, we would not have the great documents we have on which this great nation was founded had it not been for a lady by the name of Lady Huntingdon who said, "You boys go and preach the Gospel, plant the churches. I've got the checkbook, just keep doing the work."

That was the way Philemon was, standing behind the work. "What needs to get done? Then let's go and get it done." I don't know if I've ever had a Lady Huntingdon in my work. I've had a lot of Philemon like people, but I guess it's because Lady Huntingdon would be today a billionaire and we just don't see too many billionaires get excited about the Gospel these days, do we? But just don't leave it to the billionaires, let's all be faithful Philemon's and support the work. She was, as Paul told Philemon in verse 7, a refreshing to the saints.

You know, I sat in my study this week and I just thought about and this morning thought about more people in this congregation who have done so many Philemon type things through the years, just to stand behind the work to get it done, and behind all of this, what we're talking about is how this was a great joy and comfort to the Apostle Paul. As Paul is sitting there in prison and he writes through Luke, Luke dictates it and he writes, "Say this to Philemon, I have grown to have joy and comfort in your love. I know you are going to take care of things. I know you're going to see that things get done right in the church." Paul knew – here's the point – Paul knew he could count on Philemon.

Does your pastor know he can count on you? When we try to do something for the glory of God, when we purposely take the Gospel to the ends of the earth, we are trying to plant these churches and help these brethren plant churches around the world, does your pastor know he can count on you? I can answer that for most of you and the answer is yes. So many of you have faithfully exhibited a Philemon type spirit and I want to tell you, that does give joy and comfort to my heart.

You know, there was a day when we would come up on the missions conference and I'd lose sleep literally and have butterflies in my stomach and anxiety about, "Are they going to support this work? Are we going to have to call these missionaries and bring some of them home? I'd say we don't have money anymore, etc. etc." Do you know what? I don't have to take a half a baby aspirin today to go to sleep over that, and I do lose sleep sometimes over things that are church related, but not worrying about whether or not you're going to support the work. That's Philemon like. Paul said, "I have comfort and joy knowing that you're going to stand behind things."

You know, Philemon was the kind of guy who said this, "Paul, show it to me in the Bible and I'm in. I'm in." Let me pick on Brother David Young for just a moment. Brother David has a phrase and that phrase is, "I'm out." Now, when we're doing something that don't matter much, you know it's not eternal, it's not about spiritual things, and it gets to be maybe people are getting frustrated, David will say, just to keep the peace, "I'm out." So we tease him about it. "I know what you are, you're out." But I can tell you about Brother David, you show him in the Scripture, you show him it's for the good of the church, I'm telling you, he's all in. That's Philemon like. "You show me it's of God, I'm in. Count on me."

You know, Paul couldn't always count on John Mark, could he? Remember the time when John Mark, there was some kind of problem, we don't know all the details but Paul basically said, "I can't count on this guy anymore," and he left John Mark. Now, we know

it does end good because later on he says, "John Mark has proven he can be trusted again. Now he's back on board on the team." Paul couldn't always count on Demas. Remember he said, "Demas loved this present world. He has forsaken me." Then in 2 Timothy 4:16 as he's in his second Roman imprisonment when he's about to give a defense, he said, "Nobody stood with me. All my supporters left me and left me all alone by myself." That's the testimony of almost all pastors and preachers. Those who said, "I'll stand with you," those who said, "I'll support you, I'll back you," and then when it gets tough, when it starts hurting their business, when it starts hurting their profits, than they are out. Paul couldn't count on any to stand with him when he made his defense before Nero in the second imprisonment. Paul couldn't count on Demas and there was a time when Paul couldn't count on John Mark, but Paul says to Philemon, "I know that I can count on you and that gives joy and comfort to my heart."

So here's the apostle writing from prison, suffering the worst of physical and emotional stress, yet he writes of his joy and his comfort. Did you catch that? He's writing that from prison. He says, "I have joy and comfort." This tells us something about the key to a truly blessed life. Happiness is not in what we have, happiness, I should say joy is in what we are. Happiness is dependent, I should say, on what we have, joy depends on what we are. Paul's joy is based in and centered in the great great love of God, the love God has for him and he has for us, but even more so as he writes to Philemon, we understand that it's not just that God loves me, he loves us, it's also the love he has given us for each other that gives us joy. So Paul says, "In this desperate season of my life in the Roman jail, it gives me great comfort and joy to know that I've got faithful Philemon out there. Not even a pastor but he's going to make sure God's work goes on."

There's a special love that Paul had for Philemon and Philemon has for Paul, and by the way, that we have for each other. Romans 5:5 speaks of this love, "and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." If you really belong to Christ, there is going to come a day, maybe your deathbed, when the only joy you'll have is, "Jesus loves me and my brothers and sisters in Christ love me." Because nothing else will matter then. When you're on your deathbed, it doesn't matter what the stock market has done. It just doesn't matter. It doesn't matter about your car, your house. It doesn't matter. "Jesus loves me and I have this love for my brothers and sisters in Christ."

The apostle there in chains thinks on the godly faithful Philemon, his genuine faith in Christ, his love for Christ, his love for the church, and his love for the apostle himself, and he overflows in his chains to write of the joy and the comfort this knowledge brings him. No wonder he could say in 2 Corinthians 6:10 to the church at Corinth, "as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things." Paul has got nothing but he says, "Man, I've got everything." And Philemon was a human instrument to help him enjoy that and know that.

Well, first of all, this faithful, serving, dedicated church man, Philemon, was a joy and a comfort to his pastor. Secondly, he brought the churches refreshment. He was a great refreshment to the churches. We see there in verse 7 that he says there, "For I have come

to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother." The hearts of the saints being refreshed. Now again, the church was made up of a lot of poor people. First of all, they had to be likely very stressed at one time as to, "Where are we going to meet?" And then this wealthy man is converted named Philemon and he says, "Use my house." The indication is that Philemon was the kind of man that would do all that he could to support the church and this brought them refreshment. Refreshment.

Listen to 1 Timothy 6:17 and 18, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share." That's the way Philemon was. Now, when Paul uses the word "refreshment" here that "you are a refreshment to the church," what he means here, it's the idea of a military that's marching and they get a little R and R. That's what that means. They just can kick back. So there are things that are a burden to a church, things that are a challenge to a church, difficulties that come to a church, but Philemon was the kind of guy who would step up to the plate, take care of some things, so on some issues the church could find rest. That's taking care of. Philemon said he would do it. He is always trustworthy. We don't have to worry about those things. He was a refreshment to the church. Can I ask you this morning: what loads do you carry to refresh the brethren? Maybe those in your small group? Would they miss you if you were gone?

This word "refresh" is a keyword for all of us. Not only is it used of a military stopping for a time of rest, it's used to just literally mean to cease from labor. To cease from labor. You know, the reason why there is something in us that makes us want to be faithful in our churches so that others can be refreshed from having to think about that burden because we are going to take care of that one, it's because Jesus has first given us rest from our burden. You say, "Why, pastor, after these four decades, do you think you have people that are still trustworthy? They can be still counted on? They are still faithful?" I can tell you why: they haven't gotten over the rest Jesus brought their souls and they want to live out that principle by being faithful in God's church so that others might experience some rest from burdens and difficulties and challenges that face all churches.

Jesus said in Matthew 11:28 and 29, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Hebrews 4:10, "For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His." Being saved is entering a rest. "What am I going to do about this sin burden? I keep failing God. I transgress his law. I'm troubled by it. I am burdened by it." Enter his rest. He kept the law. He never sinned. You receive Christ, you get his rest. "I feel the guilt of my sin. I know I stand condemned before a holy God. It's there when I go to sleep. It's there when I wake up. It's there when I live my life. Guilty. Guilty. Guilty." Enter into his rest. His rest. Jesus says, "I know your filthiness and your sin and your vileness and your guilt better than you could know it, and I have paid for it on the cross. Enter my rest." And those who have, just want to live a life of service and dedication so that they might emit that same to others.

Do you remember an old man who managed a grocery store here years ago? Remember First Baptist Church then, his name was Smitty? Some of y'all remember Smitty? What a sweet Christian man. I honestly don't remember if Smitty was a widower or whether he was never married. I don't remember but he was single the whole time I knew him and when he retired from the grocery store, every vacation Bible school, every children's, camp, every youth camp, everything, Smitty went. Do you know what Smitty did? Anything that needed to be done. He just wanted to be refreshing to the saints. He had very very little when he died but when he died, he left this church \$25,000. He's just that kind of guy. He's the kind of guy Paul would write to. He's the kind of guy Jeff Noblit would write about him to say, "That guy is a joy and a comfort and a refreshing to the saints."

3. Paul writes to Philemon and he says, "Philemon, man, your life has been one of dedication to Christ, the church, to me. You bring joy and comfort to my heart." Then he writes, "And also, Philemon, you're one that has brought great refreshing to the church you are a part of." Now 3, I just entitled this "Seed on the Wind." Seed on the wind.

You know, we've said much about the way Philemon was a blessing seeing that he was wealthy, he could do things and take care of things so many others could not, but let's be mindful and let's be reminded that truly good deeds for the church and for Christ's sake will not be really known as to their real worth until we get to heaven. For example, it's usually the consistent performance of the little things that make the difference; little things that individually are not regarded as significant or noteworthy but which accumulate together to make an honorable reward. Maybe you can't do what Lady Huntingdon could do. Maybe you can't do what a Philemon can do. But you can be faithful week in and week out to do what God has told you to do, and over your life, build a great reward of faithfulness in the church. And when you are faithful in your local church, God just has a way, he just has a way to take the faithful deeds here and float them to be a refreshing and a blessing to many in all these other places.

Now, just to keep us in the context, Paul is commending Philemon for his godly faithfulness because – now are you listening to me – because in just a moment he's going to say, "Now, I've got something for you to do. Receive Onesimus back." You see, Philemon has no idea Paul knows anything about Onesimus. So he's about to spring this on him. I don't know but perhaps when Paul does spring on him that Onesimus has come back, he's been saved, forgive his debt, receive him back as a brother no longer as a slave, I can almost imagine Philemon going, "Oh, he's just bragged on me about how godly I am and how I would do anything for the Gospel for the cause of Christ." Paul is setting him up but it's all a good setup. He's basically saying, "Philemon, keep on being what you are when you deal with this Onesimus returning thing and this reconciliation that I want you to have." But we'll deal with the particulars of that when we get to that part of the text.

For this concluding point, let's note how faithful duty in one local church, Philemon in his local church, blessed Paul way over there in Rome, and just like Paul wrote to the

Romans when he told the Romans, listen to this, he writes to the church at Rome and he says, "The report of your obedience has reached to all. Your faithfulness at the Grace Life Church of Rome has now just trickled out and floated to influence folks all over the place." It's like throwing pebbles in a pond. You throw pebbles in a pond and those waves eventually go out and affect the outer banks. It's like seed in the wind. You know, maple trees have helicopter seeds. Do you know what I'm talking about? When they fall, they... And if there is a strong wind, there is no telling where that seed may land. Dandelions have those puffy balls that just float in the air, then they come apart into little bitty old light strands, and in the wind, they might go anywhere and land and have a good effect.

Well, faithfulness in one local church can float off and have a blessed effect to brethren in other places all over the world. There is a very large church in the Shoals area that was without a pastor. The founding pastor, I think he had just retired and they called this new pastor and the new pastor came to town, he started watching our broadcast and became associated with our ministry, and since then he has sat down with many of us on staff and basically said, "The church is in a mess. I've got to get us back to the Bible. You guys are doing it right. I need your help." That little seed floated out there to that church in the Shoals and planted there. Not that – listen to me – not that Jeff Noblit is a great preacher. That's not the issue. Your church is doing it right. Are you hearing me, church? It's not about my ministry, it's about us. It's about us.

Grace Baptist Church is a church in Selkirk, Manitoba, right outside of Winnipeg, Manitoba. Several years ago, they went through a terrible series of splits and division and fights and was just left with a handful of people, and they wanted to rebuild and be right with God and be solid. Very convicted. They hadn't been solid in the past and they had a man that had been a part of that church, his name was Bill MacLeod. Now Bill MacLeod was an evangelist of great note in Canada. Bill MacLeod has testimonies of going back into the logging camps all across Canada, back in places that were very difficult to get to, and he would go back in there and he would camp with those guys and he would preach the Gospel, and the record is that sometimes every man in the logging camp got saved. He's just a highly respected man in Canada. Well, he came here years ago and got associated with our ministry. He goes back to Canada and he tells that little struggling church, "Get in touch with Grace Life Church of the Shoals and learn what they're doing." And they've been doing that. We've been associated with them for several years now.

Now they are without a pastor again. They are talking to Brother Blake, our intern, about coming to be their pastor. Now it hasn't happened yet but they are talking and praying. I think on their end they're settled, I don't know if Blake is settled yet, and I'm not sure if I'm settled yet. I've got to talk to him about it a little bit. There are some good people in that church, some good godly saints. You see, you never knew just like the little dandelion seed, you never knew the wind blew something up there all the way to Selkirk, Manitoba, and we've been able to be a refreshing to the saints way up there. We didn't plan that. You see, that's the cool thing. We didn't do this, God did it. We didn't call them and say, "Hey, look at us!" No, they came to us and said, "Hey, would you help us?" And all we do is respond.

Josh T., student at Liberty University, started watching our broadcast and he had a class where he had to do an internship in a local church. He picked us. He came down here. He stayed for how long did y'all stay? A few years, three or four years? I don't know. He met Becky and Becky came here from New York State just to be in our church, hang around for a while. Well, Josh and Becky get married. He was disciplined here. He goes up to Pittsburgh and he has planted now Grace Life Church of Pittsburgh and now we've had a little seed float on the wind all the way up to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. You just never know what God is going to do. Now, why did Josh pick here, though, for his internship? Because you're doing good faithful deeds here, then God floats it somewhere else. You see, what most churches do, they try to go out there before they've got it right here. Are you listening to your pastor this morning? Most churches would do world missions a great big favor to stay home. I learned years ago much of what I do on the mission field is to correct the American unbiblical Christianity that's gotten to the mission field. It's just the truth. Do you want me to tell you the truth? It's just the truth. There is a lot of goofy worldly nonsense instead of strong, Christ-centered, glory of God focused, Bible saturated, local church ministry.

A couple of weeks ago, there was a couple here from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. They didn't know about Josh and Becky and I said, "What are y'all doing here?" They said, "Well, we were close by. We've been watching you guys on the internet. We've been blessed by your ministry for years." Just another seed. By the way, you pay for that internet broadcast. You just paid for the new equipment, but it's blessing a couple in Pittsburgh we had no idea it was blessing. We don't know what God is going to do, do we?

In South Hall, London, now South Hall is an Asian community. It's actually called Little India. Sikhs live there. Hindus live there. Muslims live there. And a minority are Christians. But some young professional Indian guys live there. I think all of them had their Masters degree, and they began praying about the things of Christ and about the Gospel, and they found our broadcast and they began to have a Bible study around our Anchored in Truth broadcast, and pretty soon they were asking us about being a church plant, and that's all history now because now there is a faithful church there in South Hall in London and Pastor S. is their pastor and he has family back in, if I can say this right, Punjabi, India, and now that the church is planted in India, he says my family back home are planted in South Hall in London, he said, my family back in India needs a solid church because the little bit of Christianity there is way off the wall. It's very unsound. Can y'all help plant a tree church in this part of India? So now that little seed floated on the wind all the way to South Hall, London, and God let us be a refreshing to the saints there and that has gone all the way back over to India and it's going to be a refreshing there, but only because first we were striving to be true here.

Philemon would have never – listen to me – if Philemon had neglected the local church, he could have never been a blessing to Paul. Paul would've said, "You came in paddling your own canoe. If you're going to do God's work, we are going to do it God's way and he has designed it the way he wants it done through local churches, and so until you get

that right, Philemon, I'm not going to talk to you about associating with you." It was key that Philemon was dedicated where he was in his church, then he was a blessing to Paul and others.

Then our work through T. O. there in the Philippines in Manila, and he has planted a Bible college there. There is an Anchored in Truth Bible college there. I don't know how many church plants he's got now. Singapore. Vietnam. Scattered out all over the place and it's a blessing. We had no idea that he was going to find us and ask us, in effect saying, "I want to be biblically sound. I love what y'all are doing. Will you help us build this?"

When I was there just a few months ago and we were at a restaurant, I don't know if it was before or after the conference, T. had been very quiet. I was very humbled by what he asked me. He looked at me and he said, "Pastor, how did you get so much wisdom?" I was floored. I had no idea how to answer that question. How did you get so much wisdom? And I gave to him an answer about how as a young minister I begged God for wisdom to do his work his way, not just do stuff but have wisdom to do it right. Do you know what I think the better answer is? We don't have any wisdom. I don't have any wisdom. Somehow, somehow in grace, I've got a church that dared to do what the Bible says and keep on doing it and that made us unique because hardly anybody is doing that. It's not special. It's kind of like salt, if you apply it, it works. We just decided to apply it 37 years ago and keep on keeping on and that has made this work different. So because of that faithfulness, so many of you faithful here, that seed has floated all the way over there to Southeast Asia and now it is just multiplying all over the place over there. Who would have thought of such a thing? Grace Life Church would be in Austria. Grace Life Churches in Peru. Grace Life Church of Pinedale, Wyoming. Grace Life Church of Richland Center, Wisconsin. Grace Life Church of Pryor, Oklahoma. Grace Life Church of Ankeny, Iowa. Grace Life Church of Dallas, Texas. And all of our work with the Grace Baptist partnerships all over London as they are taking closed down churches and revitalizing and planting new churches in them. Who would have ever thought such a thing? And I've left out a bunch. Seed on the wind. That's what happens if you are faithful in your local church, then God can blow your influence to be a refreshing all over the world.

Now, a lot of younger pastors have real struggles with this. Do you know why? They don't want to do the long hard work. They want to in year six and year eight have this worldwide ministry. I did the same thing and God said, "If I can get you to shut up and get you out of the way, I might can do it through you." And thank God he did that. Now, we're going to have a great faith commitment offering and a true church conference and every bit of that is about we want to be true here that God might use us to be a refreshing there for his glory.

Paul writes from way over in Rome all the way to Ephesus to Philemon's little household church, to Philemon in particular, and says, "Philemon, I want you to know you've been refreshing the saints of God." May Grace Life Church ever exist to be true to Christ, true to his word, and be an instrument in God's hand to be a refreshing to those around the

world. Now before you get too excited, it took Philemon to put some money on this thing to make it work. It took Lady Huntingdon to put amazing amounts of money or that wouldn't have been a Great Awakening in America and probably wouldn't have our Declaration of Independence or our Constitution without it. Think about that. And it takes some Philemon level giving to do this, but in addition to that, it takes all the rest of us being faithful doing what we can do. And all of God's people said, amen. So we can be a joy and comfort to the men of God and be a refreshing to the saints of God just like Philemon was.