

MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR SHIRLEY FIELDS

7 February 2022 | 12:30 pm | Kerr Brothers/Harrodsburg Rd/Lexington KY

When David texted me last Tuesday that the family wanted to know if I would conduct Shirley's Memorial Service today, I responded this way:

**David, if it will give me an opportunity to serve your-all's family,
and express my love for your-all's Mother,
and give a tribute to her faithfulness,
I'd be honored...**

Because, that's what I'd love to do today:

- serve your-all's family again
- express my love for Shirley
- and give a tribute to her for her faithfulness

Shirley was

... my sister-in-Christ
... my friend
... a fellow member of the church I pastored
... fellow servant of our Lord
... **and if she'd had her way about it, she would have been my 'Mom,' also.**
She always called me "Brother Dave" and more than once she told me,
"I just think of you as one of my boys. You're part of my family."

I am indebted, thankful, and honored by all of those relationships.

By the way, you know how nowadays we talk about people being in "tribes." People who believe the same things, and hold to the same opinions and convictions or cultural practices are said to be in "tribes." Well, Shirley had her own 'tribe.' One of you posted that you could count at least 74 people who could trace their being in the world back to Shirley's motherhood.

So, I guess we can call you all the "Shirley Tribe."

I am honored to be a member of the 'Shirley Tribe' – not by physical birth and descent, but by our mutual love for one another.

I love Shirley [and I say that in the present tense because Shirley is still in the present tense in Heaven – and we will be in the present tense forever together there], and Shirley loved me while she lived here among us, and we shared life together. I think I could say that maybe I've had friends who loved me as much as Shirley loved me – but I've never had a friend who loved me more than Shirley loved me.

So as I thought and prayed about a relevant Scripture that would provide a context for my memories and our life experiences that we have shared together over the years, my mind kept coming back to the Book of Philippians.

Paul and the church in Philippi had a love affair going on – and they had loved one another passionately from their first encounters with each other and from the beginnings of their relationship with one another. Paul had evangelized and established that church during his turbulent visit there recorded in Acts 16. They had kept up their correspondence from the very first friendships they had established in the Gospel. They never forgot Paul – and they never slacked up on loving him and showing him that they loved him. And, he surely loved them also.

He's writing this Book of Philippians from prison – actually. He is separated from them by thousands of miles, and their correspondences with each other had been interrupted at time – but his heart is with them. And he knows that their hearts are with him also.

**It's been about 10 years since he has seen them in person...
But here's what he writes to them from his prison cell...**

Philippians 1.1-8

Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,

⁴ always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy,

⁵ for your fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now,

**⁶ being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you
will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ;**

⁷ just as it is right for me to think this of you all,

because I have you in my heart,

**inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel,
you all are partakers with me of grace.**

⁸ For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

So, I began to think back over the years from the time Billy and Shirley moved back to Lexington from Lawrenceburg. That's when I got to know them. I don't remember exactly what year that was. Debbie and I came to Thompson Road in 1982, and it was just a very short time later that they moved back and joined our church again. They had been members previously also before moving to Lawrenceburg.

But, from that time of our first acquaintance ... until now..., Shirley and I have shared our lives together over all these years.

So, I want to share some memories and tributes to Shirley about our **‘fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now...’** The word **‘fellowship’** is the Greek word that we pronounce in English all the time as **‘koinonia’** – and it means **‘mutual partnership’** or **‘shared life together.’**

Shirley and I had this kind of **‘fellowship / partnership / shared life together ... from the first day until now’**

SIMPLY PUT – LIFE WITH SHIRLEY WAS A SHARED FELLOWSHIP OF LOVE IN ALL THINGS ... but there are several particulars that stand out in my memories...

WE SHARED THE FELLOWSHIP OF FAITH IN CHRIST

When Paul says **‘I thank my God every time I remember you for your fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now,’** he means **they shared a mutual faith in Christ as Lord and Savior.** That’s what the Gospel is: **whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.**

Shirley had a simple faith. Shirley was not flashy or showy. She never held any kind of office or position. She was just simple believer in Jesus Christ and His Gospel. **‘Repent of your sins, and believe His Gospel.’** She believed that Jesus Christ died for her sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again from death to save her from her sins. She had trusted in Jesus Christ – and Jesus Christ only – to suffer God’s punishment for her sins and then was raised from death to show that her sins that had put Jesus to death were paid for and put away. She just simply believed that – as we all must do to be saved.

But sometimes, Shirley would also have a struggling faith – again, like we all do from time to time.

I remember one time in particular, I was visiting with her, and we would often talk about the Lord, or something I had preached. She would ask me questions or ask me to explain something I had said... She was uncharacteristically sad and despondent that day.

- I asked her why.
 - She said that she felt like she hadn’t been as faithful to the Lord as she should have been ... and that He wasn’t pleased with her ...that she hadn’t been faithful enough to deserve His being pleased with her
- I said, “Shirley, none of us is as faithful to the Lord as we should be. But God loves you, and He delights in you, and He takes pleasure in you!”
 - She came back with: “But I haven’t always been as faithful to Him as I should have been.”
- So, I said, ‘Shirley, let me ask you something: *how faithful to God did He require you to be when you first trusted Christ to save you?’*
 - ‘Oh, I wasn’t faithful at all to Him before He saved me. **I was just all sinner!’**
- ‘Well, did He love you then and save you in spite of all your sins just because you repented of your sins and believed on Jesus?’ / She said: ‘Yes!’
- ‘Well, then, if He loved you that much when you had no faithfulness at all to Him, He is going to continue to love you even though your faithfulness to Him may be inconsistent at times, and imperfect, and full of faults and deficiencies – just like all of us have been!’

I would explain to Shirley on more than one occasion that God’s acceptance of us and His pleasure in us is NEVER based on our faithfulness or performance – but ALWAYS on Jesus’ faithfulness, performance, and righteousness – WHICH IS PERFECT.

When you trust Jesus Christ, God accepts you ‘in Christ’ and takes the same pleasure in you He has in His Son. THAT is a SIMPLE faith!

SHIRLEY AND I SHARED THE FELLOWSHIP OF JOY

- Paul says also: “...always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy...”
- Just remembering the saints in the church in Philippi made Paul happy – filled him with joy.
- Fellowship with Shirley was a fellowship of shared joy, happiness, and laughter.
- Shirley’s face was always stuck on ‘smile’ – a real, genuine, warm smile and laughter that came from her heart of love.
- That picture you all posted on her obituary – that is classic, smiling, joyful Shirley – and her joy was infectious. You all didn’t have to go searching and picking to find pictures of Shirley smiling with joy. Every one of them has that same radiant smile of joy. Even the pictures you all took of her in her very last days, Shirley died smiling with joy!

Which is not to say she couldn’t also sometimes speak her mind – and make a matriarchal point!

She could! Shirley had ways of keeping everybody straight!

- One of the times I was visiting her, there was a house full of us there – as there always was.
 - I know Debbie was there;
 - I’m pretty sure Linda and Henry were there [that was always a kettle full of joy, wasn’t it?];
 - Jackie and Steve may have been there.
- Anyway, we were all laughing about something, and Shirley was trying to get control of the conversation ... probably even administering a dose of her motherly rebuke ;)
- I think sometimes she was a little embarrassed with us – thinking we were getting a bit out of hand
 - My mother would with us – and there were only six children of us – but sometimes when we get together and start cutting up, our Mom will just roll her eyes and say, “Some people can raise the dumbest kids!”
- Then, somehow, somebody brought up that “Crabby Road” character – was her name Maxine?
- **Maxine was a life-philosopher.** She was just an opinionated, straightforward, no-nonsense, common-sense woman who shot it straight and told it like it is.
- Shirley got kinda defensive: ‘You’re not saying I’m like Crabby Road, are you? I’m not crabby!’
- We went into full-blown damage control: ‘Oh, no! You’re not crabby! You’re just honest and insistent on good behavior!’
- **And we laughed some more about that!**

BUT AMID ALL THAT JOY – WE ALSO SHARED A FELLOWSHIP OF SUFFERING

When Paul wrote this letter to the saints in the church at Philippi, he often referred to the mutual sufferings they had endured together – mutual sorrows that only bonded them closer together in their love for one another.

You know that Bluegrass song: “I am a man of constant sorrow”? Well, in many ways, I think Shirley could have sung “I am a woman of constant sorrow”

Shirley knew suffering also, and we shared many of them together – **and that’s one thing that made her joy and laughter so real and infectious – she kept her joy even through all her sufferings ... because of her faith and hope in Christ.**

She suffered physically.

- Her health and strength had deteriorated over the last several years of her life.
- She had to be on continuous oxygen-assist for years. Sometimes, I’d call her, and she’d have to say, “Brother Dave, I’m sorry. You’ll have to call me back later. I’m having trouble breathing.”
- Hip replacements – broken hips – diabetes – problems with her vision and eyes – we’ve prayed thousands of prayers for Shirley’s health over the years – made numerous visits in hospitals etc
- **All of that, of course, is healed now...**

But Shirley also suffered in her soul – her heart was broken so many times.

- You remember when Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the Temple to dedicate Him to God when He was 8 days old, they were met by an old prophet named Simeon. Simeon took the infant Jesus in his arms, blessed God, and then turned to Mary with sadness in his eyes: **“yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also”**
- Over and over again, Shirley’s heart was pierced through with pain, sadness, and grief.
- Especially with the death of her children. She told me more than once with pain in her eyes and face: **“Brother Dave, mothers shouldn’t have to bury their own children – they ought to bury her!”**

WE SHARED TOGETHER THE FELLOWSHIP OF SERVICE

- You wrote in her obituary: **“Her most important work was for the Kingdom of the Lord, faithfully attending Thompson Road Baptist Church for decades, and inviting and taking her children and their friends...and the next generations to church to learn about Jesus.”**
- Shirley was a faithful servant in every way she could serve.
- I say again, Shirley never held an office or a position, but she led by her faithfully giving herself in faithful personal service.
- Shirley was a faithful and beloved member of her Ladies’ Sunday School class for all the years she was physically able to attend – for decades.
- We had our annual Spring Missions Conference and served numerous meals to our attendees and guests. For years, Shirley was there, helping us prepare and serve those meals to the Lord’s servants. Even when she couldn’t stand and help, she would come, and sit, and cheer, and encourage those who were serving.
- Shirley attended our Sunday services even when she was not physically able to attend.
- One of the last times I remember Shirley attending our Sunday service was on a hot summer day when we were having problems with our air conditioner being down. We had opened up every door and set up fans to try to move the air as much as possible.

- Shirley was already on oxygen-assist, and of course, brought it with her. But, she couldn't breathe in that stifling hot air. She said to me: "Brother Dave, I'm sorry, but I have to go back home. I can't breathe." [I think she may have even driven herself that day.] Of course, we understood, and even tried to offer to take her home.
- We all say of Shirley what Jesus said of Mary who anointed His feet with the expensive burial lotion: **"She has done for Me what she could do!"**

WE SHARED TOGETHER IN THE FELLOWSHIP OF FAMILY

- Shirley was all about her family. You all know that.
- And Shirley was gracious enough to share her family with me – and with our church.
- **And we have shared that fellowship together with you all – her family – for all these years – 'from the first day until now...'**
- **I can tell you this from my own personal experience – nothing thrilled your Mother any more than for all of you show up at church together, especially for Mother's Day – and many other services also.**
- **All of you all have been at some time or the other ... either members or in regular attendance in our church.**
- **But especially for Mother's Day!** We looked forward to Mother's Day! You all would start coming in, family by family, until the church auditorium was almost full – and her face would just beam with pleasure and joy and pride!
- We had a custom of giving recognition and token gifts to all mothers and 'mothers in Israel,' as we called them – all of our sisters who were servants in the church and servants of their families.
- But, we had one special gift that we reserved for **'the mother with the most children,'** and of course, we knew it would be Shirley.
- **So, we just started calling it "Shirley's Gift!"** She would see and have you all there around her, and 'her joy would be full!'

But, on this day especially ... today ... right here ... right now – if I know Shirley's heart, and I think I do because she shared her heart's desires with me numerous times – what Shirley wants more than anything else is that you, her family – all of you, every one of you – will be together again with her and Billy in 'our Father's house, where there are many homes' [in Jesus' words in John 14.2]

I suspect on at least some of those Mother's Days, Shirley may have invited you all to come to be with her in worship service – and then maybe with a quick smile and a flashing twinkle in her eye, would also say: "BE THERE!"

That's what Shirley would say to each of you right now, here, today:

"I am Home!

I am healed!

I am well!

I have met the others who have come here before me [and then she would begin to name them because surely our gracious Lord has already re-gathered them together...]

And then, she would say to each of you: “BE THERE!”

And you can – through her same faith in her same Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

**The One who says: “I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE!
NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER EXCEPT THROUGH ME!”**

For the rest of your days, I want you to hear Shirley from Heaven continue calling, inviting, beckoning, even telling you in her matriarchal motherly way: “BE THERE!”