

“A Great Friend”

By now most of you know that on Valentine’s Day, we all lost a great friend. That person was none other than Rev. Reuel Westbrook, simply known by us younger folks as Bro. Reuel. He had an enduring desire to be a lifelong learner, but was never into titles and such...calling him “Reuel” was just fine by him. I, along with Jay Collins, had the distinct joy and sadness of walking with him closely during his last days this side of glory and had the difficult task of conducting his funeral on Sunday.

Now understand, the difficulty of conducting his funeral wasn’t because of the obvious sorrow that we felt in his loss, or in struggling with how to say something nice about him as sometimes happens in funerals. No, the difficulty was that we could have filled up an afternoon recalling all the wonderful facts about Reuel’s life, his dizzying high speed race through every day of his life, all the places he had served and all the friends he had encouraged. Yep, trying to encapsulate all that into a ten to fifteen minute eulogy for each of us was indeed...difficult.

Everybody who knew him well called him friend. But Reuel wasn’t just a friend of ordinary people everywhere; he was a true friend to pastors. Now I can’t say that he always agreed with all pastors, or that he didn’t occasionally think that some pastors needed to check their theology against the Holy Bible as opposed to getting their theology from a book that someone of prominence wrote about the Bible. But regardless, he loved pastors, especially young pastors, and loved to encourage them anyway he could.

And one of the ways he would encourage pastors and all folks in general was through writing cards or notes...albeit sometimes it was more akin to actual scribbling than writing. If you were the recipient of one of his little, short one sentence cards, handwritten by him, then let me just be honest with you. You didn’t receive it because you were special...nope, he sent those cards out to hundreds of folks. In his lifetime, there is no telling how many cards of encouragement he sent out or gave out...thousands would not be an exaggeration. No sir, receiving one of Reuel’s cards did not mean you were special to him, as in, you got one and no one else did, no, it simply meant that he cared that you and everyone else he could get to, knew that you were special to God. Being a humble man who struggled most of his life with his own self identity, he believed that being special to Reuel meant very little, but being special to God meant everything. Reuel’s humility and his work ethic were two things I shall never forget about this great man.

And you know, when I use the term “great man,” I do not use it in relationship to the world. For by the world’s standards, he was anything but great. He never authored any books that I am aware of, never held office at the state convention, not even aware of any boards he was

appointed to (even if he had, none of these would have defined him), was never the pastor of a large congregation or churches with chandeliers and multi-million dollar facilities, wasn’t a featured speaker at pastors’ conferences, etc., no, never great by the world’s standards, but he was a great man because he was a faithful pastor to ordinary folks in South Greenwood.

In fact, he wasn’t just a pastor “in” South Greenwood; he was a pastor “to” South Greenwood. He probably stepped into more homes, walked more streets, prayed more fervently for the down and outers, encouraged more folks...after he retired than most of us do our entire lifetimes. And in retirement, he didn’t get paid to minister, he did it for the same reason he did it before he retired. You see, Reuel did it because one, he was called by His Master into ministry when he was a young man, and two, he did it because he truly loved all people. When Reuel met his Lord on Valentine’s Day, I am quite certain he did not boast about all he had done, rather, knowing Reuel, he apologized to his Lord for not having done more.

And lastly, Reuel wasn’t just a great friend to pastors and ordinary folks, he was a great friend to this association. He was the kind of pastor that associations need more of these days. He never wanted to know what the association could do for him, he always wanted to know what he could do for the association. For him, the association wasn’t a building with employees. No, for Reuel, the association was a friend with forty-six fellow pastors and churches (some struggling and some doing well), but all whom he wanted to partner with, not for his sake or a church’s sake, but for the Kingdom’s sake, and he saw the association as the best avenue to connect with all forty-six churches and pastors.

Bro. Jay Collins, during the funeral, reminded all of us of Reuel’s enduring nature, believing we were better together, working towards common goals that God has for His Church. He never liked for preachers to take pot-shots at one another. Jay reminded us that Bro. Reuel said something to the effect one time about mules lounging in the barnyard often kicked and bit at one another, but mules hooked to a harness pulling a common plow neither had the will, the time, nor the capacity to kick at one another. Old timey wisdom like that is in short supply these days. I am glad that Reuel was a great friend to me, to pastors, to lay folks and to this association. And for that, I will remember him in the fondest of ways.

May we all spend less time in self-ego promoting activities and more time in being a mule in God’s vineyard, yoked together with the brethren to plow the fields and reap the harvest, which God already has declared as plentiful. Being friends with lots of good people is wonderful, but being a friend of a great man like Reuel Westbrook is one of life’s greatest earthly blessings. A true friend sticks closer than a brother...seems I read that somewhere...Bro. Reuel was that kind of great friend!