

I. Introduction and Personal Reflection

God permits things that He uses to get us to that place. I am going to give you just a couple of good biblical illustrations in that area of our life, because all of us need it. Listen, no matter how long I have been saved, this coming September will be sixty-two years ago that I accepted Christ as my Savior, and that has been a long time ago. I was telling one of the fellows here just a while ago, I said, "I still get nervous every time I preach anywhere." I get nervous. Do you know why? Because congregations and people are different everywhere, and the needs of every church are different. All you have to do is to be in thirty, forty, fifty churches a year, and sometimes you can read attitudes when they come in. Sometimes you can read attitudes when they go out. Sometimes it is good to see them come in, but then sometimes it is good to see them go out. So, I am glad that is over with.

And yet, you get in other churches, and listen, I have used this church as an example to a lot of preachers who get so set in their ways that they are not willing to flex. I said, "I know a church called Old Paths Baptist Church." I said, "They are a church that is outside the box." As a matter of fact, I do not think they have ever known what a box was, but they are outside that box. They do not fit the mold of other people or of other churches. Pastors say, "We are coming over this morning, that you are an independent church." Amen. Most independent churches are more dependent upon the other churches around town and what the other churches are doing. But you have to do what you have to do, amen.

You have a pastor who loves you, number one. Number two, he is very aware of what you need. Then he seeks to meet that need. Biblically, we call that a shepherd pastor. That is one of the most important things you can have: a pastor who loves you. A lot of preachers have the pulpit ministry, and that is about it. From then on, they do not really touch people's hearts. A lot of young pastors today are CEOs and not real pastors. But being a pastor, and just being a born-again believer, there are things that all of us face, and I want to share that with you this morning. No matter what our age, no matter how many years we have been saved, no matter where we are spiritually in all our lives, these things are important for all of us.

So, let us bow our heads in prayer and ask God just to bless in a very, very special way. As you have your heads bowed, I am going to read my text this morning, and I want you to think through this.

John 12:24

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

John 12:25

He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

Father, we pray in these few moments, Lord, that You would speak to our hearts. I thank You, Lord, for Old Paths Baptist Church. God, make this a great day. Be with Brother Lake as he preaches in the morning service, giving power. I pray for the power of God this morning. I pray for open hearts. This is a Sunday school aspect of the teaching. So, Lord, use me to be a blessing to all of our hearts. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

II. The Call to Die to Self

I was sitting at a missions conference a few years back, and there was a man that was giving his testimony. He had been a missionary. As he gave his testimony, he was talking about when he was younger, and he was in a country in Africa that at that time was called Rhodesia. If you know anything about Africa, countries change names all the time, depending on who is the ruler and so forth. Rhodesia, in the Congo area, was facing a lot of opposition as far as the missionaries in that area were concerned. Many missionaries during that time were slaughtered and martyred.

Tom Courtney was arrested and was accused of being a spy. There was no trial; he was just accused, and he was to die. He talked about the night that he was in his jail cell, knowing that he was going to die the next morning. He said, "All I could do was just pray and ask God to give me the grace." He had been in there for several weeks and had talked to some of the jail keepers and jailers. The morning came, and he was taken outside, and they had him stand up against a building. He looked out and he saw eleven men facing him, all with rifles. He knew then he was going to be shot. They gave him a choice to face it or turn his back, put a blindfold on, whatever. He said, "No blindfold. I want my back to the wall." He stood there. When the command was given and all eleven men fired their guns, he said he looked down and he felt like he was looking at himself, and he said, "Am I dead or am I alive?" He felt all over his body, and he felt no blood. He felt nothing. One of the guards came over and said, "Let me take you around the back." He realized that he was still alive. He said he stayed in his cell that night. He said, "That night I died." He said, "I did not die physically." He said, "I died to myself. I died to the world." He said, "I knew that God had intervened in my life." The jailer came the next morning, and he said, "I was going to be released." He said, "As he took me out into that courtyard where they fired at me the day before, I could see the outline of my body on the wall, but not one single shot hit me." When he gave his testimony, he said, "I have never gotten over that. The world does not mean anything."

John says, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

When I was going to Tennessee Temple, I was going to go to a university. This was about that same time. There was a man that came to our church, and he had been a missionary, somewhat in the same area where Tom Courtney was. They were living on a mission compound, and there had been seven or eight of the missionaries who were killed. He said he was taken out and tied to a post. He knew he was going to die. This particular missionary belonged to a mission agency who had totally folded. There was no money to get him out. There was no way to contact the UN or whatever. He said, as he was tied to the post, one of the soldiers came up and he put a gun to his

head. He said that he pointed the gun to my head. He said, "I told him, 'Young man, if you shoot me and I die, you are going to die and go to a devil's hell.'" He said that young man pulled that trigger three times with a gun on my forehead, and three times that gun misfired. He said he threw the gun down and ran as fast as he could. He said, "Not even a couple of minutes after he ran, I heard a helicopter." The UN had come in, and it came down, and I was rescued.

I had the joy of having him in my home that night when he gave the testimony, and he came over to our home. I was a youth pastor in the church. He shared for about an hour and a half all that took place during those days when some of his dearest friends were shot. With tears in his eyes, he said, "That was the first time in my Christian life that I really died to myself."

I think in the world in which we live today, one of the most difficult things for any of us to have or to learn is to learn how to die to ourself. Brother Browning said that when the gun did not go off, and then the next day when he was released, he said, "All I could think about is in Psalms 34:7."

Psalms 34:7

The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.

That same angel that is there for those two men is the same angel that we have access to, amen? He is the one that does the protection. I heard last night on the radio when we got our TV and we got back from the game. I was telling Brother Lake, I said, "They did not know whether we were going to preach a glory service this morning or a funeral service." I am not sure. Right now you look sort of funerally. Let us all smile, amen? We will win one of these years. I do not know whether I am going to live long enough to do it or not. Move on, Boston, move on. He said that because I took his glory from the next hour. If you know Brother Lake, when Ohio State loses, it is three days of mourning at least. When we went home last night, not only did he not say much, he got lost. Then the preacher came to rescue him, and then the preacher got lost. It is just the way it goes.

But in our Christian life, how do we get to that place where we die? "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. For he that loveth his life shall lose it, but he that loseth his life shall keep it." So, how much do we love our life, or how much are we really willing to let go? The question this morning is, "How do I let go? What are the processes that all of us go through in our Christian life?"

III. The Process of Dying to Self: Burial and Humiliation

John talks about a man who had a certain garden. He said he went and planted the seed in his garden, and the seed grew and multiplied. I could take a seed and lay a seed up here on the pulpit. As long as I left that seed there by itself, nothing really takes place. There are a lot of Christians sitting in churches today who are just like that seed. They come, they sit, they go, and nothing really takes place in their life. There is no growth in their life.

In the last church I started, I remember that my trustee or treasurer, whatever it was, came up to me and he said, "Preacher, I get a special blessing being treasurer." I asked, "How much money

do you steal?" He said, "I get a blessing being treasurer, and I will tell you why." He said, "Because I see people walking in the aisle accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior. They start to be faithful, and then they start to give a little bit." He said, "Then I see them begin to tithe, and I see growth in their lives." God wants us to grow, amen. There are a lot of churches; they need to put Pampers in the offering plate when they pass it, because there are a lot of babies in the churches, and they just do not grow.

God tells us, "Here is the way that we grow ourselves is first of all, we submit ourselves to the Lord."

James 4:7

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

So, how do we do that? He says, "We take this little kernel of wheat, and we take that little kernel and we bury it." That is a hard thing. Hold your right hand up. Now take this and hold this up. That stands for Clemson, okay? And hold this finger up. Now, this is the Lord, this is you and I. We so much want to live our lives out here, so everybody sees us, right?

Paul said, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Galatians 2:20

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Our responsibility is to let Christ be the one that is seen in our lives, amen. But do you know what most of us do? "Do you see me?" That is not the Christian life. The Christian life is to be hid with Christ in God. The Christian life is to lay ourselves aside. Believe me, that is a very hard thing to do, no matter what age we are. In this day, with all the Facebook stuff and so forth, it is hard. We have these millennials today. I told one fellow last night, I said, "A couple of months ago, I thought about this, and that is strange for me just to think about anything." I said, "I am not a millennial, I am a perennial. They think I am dead in the fall, but I come back up in the spring, amen." But I am even far better than being a perennial millennial. I am a pre-millennial, amen. I know the Lord is coming.

So, how do we get from here back to here and stay back here?

1. You have to be willing to be buried.
2. We have to be willing to be hid in Christ.
3. We have to be willing to shove ourself aside.

I remember in St. Catharines, Ontario, where my last church was, we had a lady. She played the organ and so forth, and a sweet couple, and they were very faithful. But her husband said behind the pulpit one night, and he was my song leader, he did a good job. He said, "My wife does not like to sing on Sunday evenings because there are not as many people in the church on Sunday

evenings or on Sunday morning." Do you know what? She never sang on Sunday morning again. Why? Because it was out here, out here.

"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground." What happens when you fall underground? What is the word, everybody? Die, you die. Now listen closely. It really is the beginning of the process of death for this outer shell. So here you are, you are under the ground, no one sees you. But the process really begins as the illustration to how we die.

The first thing that takes place is we become dirty. That is, we are there in all that mud. Is not that great? Here I am, I am a Christian, and the preacher talked about dying, and what happens? I end up underground in mud. Now the kids like to play in mud. Most adults like to sling mud. But really, we need to be buried in the mud. Now here is the key. We may come to the place where we say in ourselves, "Well, why? I want to do this, and I want to do that, and I am just saved, and I want to serve God, and I have got all these gifts, and I am really talented," and on and on they go. "And why am I here in the mud?" That is the first step that God takes you to really make you what He wants to make you, and not what you want to make of yourself. You see, that is the death process, yes or no?

So not only now, as you have mud on you, and that is humiliating enough, but how does a seed really begin to grow? You have got to fertilize it, right? If you are a farmer, we found that the best fertilizer is manure. So there are two M's in the outline: mud and manure. It stinks. Remember when Jonah was swallowed by the whale? A backslidden prophet made the whale sick, and he burped him back up, vomited him up on the shore. Can you imagine how much he smelled? All that slime and all that stuff on his body. That was humiliating. But that is another process that God uses. Do not ever get angry with God at the process that He is putting you through in your life right now. You see, we do not see the end, but God does. God knows what He wants to put us through. So He puts them through that process of the mud and then the manure.

IV. Growth and Avoiding Self-Exaltation

Then he realizes he is submitting to it. All of a sudden, something takes place on this seed. Underground, nobody sees it. But all of a sudden, the outer shell of that seed falls off. When that outer shell falls off, all of a sudden that germ that is in the center of that seed, where the growth really is, that germ begins, and we use the word germinates. The warm sun and the water, and it begins to come up as a plant. God knows what He wants to do with that plant. God knows what He has. God knows the gifts that He has given you. By the way, every gift that God has for you, for you to serve or use in the church, God gave you when you accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior. Your growth in your Christian life, and as you grow in your Christian life, you will find there are gifts that God has given you that you never knew you had. But the only way you find them is as you mature and become faithful in the Lord. God pulls you out, and you begin to do this, and you begin to do that. Some of you are disciples, youth workers, soul winners, servants, amen, faithful. Those are all things that God gives you.

I think what Paul said, "That which I would do, I do not, and that which I would not do, I do." Paul said, "I was given over all manner of concupiscence since Romans chapter 7." But he said, "It is not I, but Christ." So here is a seed, and it begins to grow. It begins to mature. It begins to be something. When we allow the growth process to take place in our lives, then there is a joy that comes into our lives that the world does not in any way understand.

Let me step on to another process. We are grown, here we are, and we are that seed that has allowed the manure and the mud and the water and the heat and the cool and so forth to take place. So that outer shell comes off. Then the inner seed begins to grow, begins to germinate. I have seen so many that have gone through a lot of this process. Then they come to the thing, "Well, hey, I can do it myself. Once again, what I am, look what I am, look what I am."

In our boot camp, we had missions for twenty-five years. I taught the young people this. I said, "You praise gifts, but you applaud talent." Do you understand that? You praise gifts, but you applaud talents. I find so many today are working and wanting the applauds and the pats on the back. "No, that was a good sermon, preacher." "That was a good song, so and so." It is hard sometimes not to hear that. But when God is in it, God is in it, amen. And God gets the glory. Let me tell you where we have to stop and we have to think about ourselves. Now that we have grown, or now that we are beginning to grow, we are up out, and we are beginning to blossom, and buds come on our tree, or however God is using us. We have got to come to this place in our lives.

V. Obedience in God's Vineyard

In Matthew 21:28, he said, "Son, go work today in my vineyard." So here you are, you come out to that place, you have grown as a seed, you are maturing. He says, "Now work today in my vineyard." One of them says, "Oh yeah, I will go." But what did he do? He did not go. The other one said, "Well, I am not going." But he then repented and went. When he said, "Son," now listen closely, "When he said, 'Son, go work today in my vineyard,' we have to come to this realization: The possessor of the vineyard is God." Who do you belong to when you come to know Christ? The same command that He gave in Matthew 21:28, "Son, go work today in my vineyard," is really the same command that He is giving us. But our ability to be effective in the vineyard is in direct relation to our obedience to the possessor of the vineyard.

I found out one thing over the years: I can trust the possessor of the vineyard. If you look back in Isaiah chapter 5, verses 1 to 7, he is talking to Israel. He relates them as a vineyard. He says, "I have fed you, I have watered you, I have dunged you," otherwise, "I have put manure on you." He said, "I put a hedge about you. I put a fence around you." He said, "I put a tower within you." He said, "I have done everything. I have fertilized you. I have watered you. I have done everything that I can do with you." "And I expected you to bring forth what? Rocks? No, fruit, fruit. I expect you to bring forth fruit." He said, "But she would not." God had to deal with them because they did not bring forth fruit.

When we go through that process of dying to ourselves, I have been reading a book lately, and the title of the book is *Crushing*. God puts us through those trials in our lives, and that is God's

crushing. We cannot take crushing very much anymore, can we? Do you know why? It hurts. Sometimes others falsely judge us because of perhaps some of the trials we are going through. A lot of times they just do not understand the trials we are going through. But once you go through some of those deep trials in your life and you come out on the other side and you see God begin to use you, then you see someone else who is going through a trial. You know, you can go down and you sit down and talk with them, amen? You can share how God uses those trials in your life.

VI. Reasons to Trust God

Here is why we can trust Him, listen closely.

4. Because He purchased the church, amen? He purchased us. How did He purchase us? With His own blood. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin. "What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus." He purchased us. Until we come to know Him as Savior and really totally submit to Him, will we ever realize that He paid the price for me? When we come to the place of realizing that He paid the price for us, then we really come to the place where we learn to trust Him. So, He purchased us.
5. Secondly, because He planted us. I have to go back to Isaiah chapter 5. He said to Israel, "I have done everything for you. I have planted you. You are Mine." Those of you, especially in the ministry here, and you have come to know Christ as Savior, God planted you right here, amen. God planted you to serve. Sometimes people just come in and soak it up and leave and do nothing with what they received. But He planted us.
6. Thirdly, He not only planted us and purchased us, He rules over us. Now let me tell you how He rules. Listen closely.

1.) *He rules proprietarily.*

Matthew 21:28

He says, "Son, go work today in my vineyard."

When I was a kid, Brother Lake would know that it is gone down Route 8, down toward East Sparta and Magnolia and Waynesburg and all those areas. There was a gas station on the east side of Route 8, about halfway down. I can remember my, we would go over there and fill up with gas. I saw a sign over top of the door going into the gas station. By the way, that is when they used to come out and fill up your gas tank, check your oil, wash your windshield and all that stuff. It did not cost you a dime, just cost you for the gas. And the gas was fifteen cents a gallon too. But over top of that door, there was a sign, and it gave the man's name, and it said, "Proprietor." Now listen closely. The word proprietor, I asked my dad, I said, "What does that mean?" "That means he owns the gas station." You are not your own. He has purchased you. He is our proprietor, amen? He owns us. I have no right of my own. Paul said, "I die daily." He said, "For it to me to live as Christ and to die is gain." He owns us. So He rules over us proprietarily.

2.) *Secondly, He rules over us paternally.*

He is our Heavenly Father. We had a young man, actually a family from Barbados whose dad had died. They were a very wealthy family. We do not know how they found out about our

Christian school, but she brought the four, actually three of them went to our school, one of them actually lived with us. Mark was a good young man, but he was fourteen, and Nicholas was eleven when their dad died. They had a little chip on their shoulder, and they were good boys. When we played basketball or something, Mark, he would get a little upset, and I mean, he would tear into you, foul you, do whatever. One day we were playing basketball during gym time in our Christian school, and I was playing basketball. I noticed something was happening to Mark. I said, "Mark, are you okay?" He said, "Yeah." Afterwards he said, "Preacher, why did you ask me?" I said, "Mark, there is a difference in even in your countenance. What has happened?" He said, "Preacher, a few nights ago I was reading my Bible, and I read where God said He is the Father of the fatherless. My dad is gone, so God is my Father. I better straighten up." God is our Father. By the way, that boy went on to get straight A's except in the med school. He is now a medical doctor up over in Toledo, Ohio. We come to the place that God is my Father. He rules over us paternally. He is my eternal, paternal parent, amen.

3.) Thirdly, He rules over us patiently.

Are not you glad God has patience with you? My wife is glad that God has patience with me because sometimes she does not, and rightly so. We are all that way.

Isaiah 40:31

But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

God deals with us patiently. Brother Lake has probably known me the longest. He has patience with me, and I need that. But my Heavenly Father has patience with me, and He has been good to me.

VII. The Eagle and Grapevine: Embracing God's Process

Let me give you a little illustration as I close. I love the eagle. The eagle really is nothing but a buzzard with a beautiful white head. When the United States, when the Continental Congress was meeting on the thirteen colonies and becoming the states and so forth, they got into an argument about what bird could we have that would symbolize these new colonies. The eagle kept coming up, and there arose a conflict among John Adams and John Hancock and all of them. They did not want an eagle; it is a buzzard. The eagle was also known as a thief. I was in Alaska, and I mean, I saw a tree one time. It had seven eagles in one tree. But I know one thing in Alaska: little dogs and little cats do not run free. They like them. They steal them.

But there is a process, listen, there is a process that a young eagle goes through that every single one of us needs to go through if we are going to be what God wants us to be in Him. There is so much; you can teach a whole conference on the eagle. But the thing that I like most was that the eagles would build their nest high up in the trees. The Word talks about that gives a burst. They build their nest high up in the trees. The male and the female take equal care of the young ones. When they make that nest, and before the eggs are actually hatched, they will make that nest as

soft and comfortable as it could be for those eggs and those young eagles. By the way, the male would sit on the egg just as much as the female.

But then it comes that when those eggs begin to open up one at a time, and a young eagle is born. Oh, they love that soft nest. "Woo hoo! Man, this is great!" They began to grow, and their feathers began to mature. So one night during their sleep, the mother eagle would take her talons and she would pull that nest up and make it totally uncomfortable for those young eagles. So they wake up the next morning, stretch their wings, and they would come back. So they wake up the next morning, stretch their wings, and they go to sit, "Oh, ouch!" I mean, they are complaining to mama. "No, this nest is not comfortable. Mom, what is wrong?" She just smiles. She brings one over here. We will call him Bob. She pulls him over here to the edge. He looks out, and, "Woo! Look how high I am!" She shows him back up. She throws him out of the nest. I mean, he is flopping around, his arms are going all over the place, he does not know what to do. The male will come down underneath. And like the Word says, "He lifts us up on eagle's wings." That eagle will pick that young eagle up and carry it back up to the nest. Can't you see that? "Oh man, I am glad that was over with." And the mother eagle, "Ouch, you go again." She keeps throwing him out.

I asked a man there when I was in Alaska, I said, "How many of those eagles die in that process?" Now listen closely. He said, "Forty percent of them die." Do you know why, listen closely, do you know why they die? They die because they refuse the wings of their parent. Do you know why a lot of believers come and sit in the church, maybe for years, they just walk away? Because they are refusing the wings of our Heavenly Father. He said, "I will bear you up on eagles' wings. I will. I have been ruling over you paternally. I have been ruling over you patiently. I have been ruling over you providentially, ask Joseph." When all that he went through, he said to his brothers, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." And all those trials that God puts us through in our lives, God wants to use this.

Remember the marriage supper, that Jesus had the wedding, they ran out of wine, and then he said, "You saved the best until last." So here is a seed, this plant that grows up a grapevine. The grapes are taken off, and they said, "Boy, now we are ready to be used." All of a sudden, they throw it in this tub, and they begin to squash it. Those grapes think, "How can I be used now? How can I?" But when it comes out, that pure wine, that pure juice, God says He saved the best for last. When we go through those trials, and we are cast out of that nest because it is no longer our comfort zone, God wants us to do something. Do not refuse the wings of the eagle in the process of your growth.

Let us pray. Father, we thank You so much for these dear folks. Thank You, Lord, for their listening spirit. I pray for Brother Lake as he preaches in the next hour. God, may our hearts be stirred. Thank You, Lord, just for his faithfulness in the ministry over these years. We will give You the praise in Jesus' name. Amen. Pastor. Wow, amen. Well, now you know why we have Jerry come back. Jerry, that was a much-needed message this morning for all of us. I appreciate that so much. I do not know about you, I got three sermons out of it. I am going to clean that up and use it. Yeah.