

## **“TO GROW TO MATURITY IN FAITH....WE NEED....FERTILIZER”**

### **1 Peter 1: 3-9**

It's that time of the year when the lawns are all nice and green again....Lawnmowers are up and running – And just last week, I made my annual trip to the garden store to get my “4 step – Lawn and Fertilizer Program” – Nice little chemical pellets.....But that's not what farmers use! I grew up in rural, SW Indiana – Farm country – And my grandfather Billman owned a 200 acre farm, and I remember his farmland during this time of year – Smelling the absolutely worst smell that I can remember from my childhood. I thought that the sewage line had broken somewhere – I mean the smell could just about knock you over! Then I realized what this smell actually was.....Nearby, was a truck that was full of manure of some sort – evidently to fertilize a nearby field.....And, I really had no idea that this was how those delicious tasting vegetables got on my dinner-plate – Through the use of that manure that smelled so terrible! I often wonder who it was that first discovered that mixing manure in the soil with plants would help them grow to maturity faster and bear a larger yield of vegetables. Whoever it was, perhaps found this principle in the Bible – It is a clear teaching of scripture, that if we want to grow to maturity in our Christian faith, one of the things we'll need is fertilizer – Yep – Dirty – Stinking – Rotten – Fertilizer! Stuff that on the surface seems to have no purpose except to smell up our lives, but when put in the hands of the Master-Gardener, causes us to grow in maturity. I'm talking about the trials and adversities that all of us face from time-to-time in our lives. I'd like to explore 2 questions today about the “Fertilizer” of adversity in our lives: Why do we need adversity? And, how should we react when the fertilizer of adversity is plopped into our lives? Our scripture lesson from 1 Peter 1 this morning, verses 6 and 7 remind us, “In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – May result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” Why do we need trials? So that our faith may be proven to be genuine! Without trials, we don't need our faith as much – If we want genuine – True Faith – It needs to be exercised! Out of adversity and trial come the virtues of a Christian-life, such as patience, courage, kindness, and sympathy. Power and influence are won out of the struggles of life. What is needed in education, more than anything else, is some means or system which will train the powers of self-discovery and self-control. Easy lives and so-called good environment will not arouse our dormant powers – It usually takes the stress and strain of hard necessity to make us acquainted with our hidden selves – To arouse the sleeping giant within us.....How often it is said that the worthless sons of worthy parents are indeed a mystery – With the best heredity and environment, they amount to nothing, whereas the sons of poor and ignorant farmers, laborers, and back woodsmen with few opportunities and many hardships and disadvantages, become distinct world-Figures – Probably the inheritance in these last named cases was no better than in the former – But their environment was better! A traveler in Africa came upon one of the large butterflies of the tropics, struggling to free itself from its cocoon – The traveler took pity on the butterfly's struggles, and with his knife, cut the cords of the cocoon at which it was straining – And out the butterfly came safely and easily – But, all the brilliant coloring on the butterfly was gone! The anguish of the struggle was necessary for that – the beautiful colors of our souls are won in the struggle with, and victory over, trial and adversity.....So it is with our faith – If we want to grow strong, we need to push through tough times, and remember God's faithfulness to us even when we can't see him! Have you been able to see God during this COVID 19 pandemic? We are being tested with adversity nearly every day – Thousands have become sick and died, and we are quarantined in our homes – advised not to venture out without adhering to social distancing and wearing face masks – All the while, running scared from an invisible adversary that has no cure – No proven vaccine – Wow! Talk about adversity – It has been thrust

upon us with no end in sight! But this adversary has a silver lining – It should help us to become more mature in Christ! As 1 Peter 1, verse 8 says, “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith – The salvation of our souls.” We have to remember that the trials in our lives, the suffering we endure, is used by God to help us develop into the men and women of God that God wants us to become! In fact, if our lives are without trials of many kinds, we will end up being immature, incomplete, and lacking something. So, how should we respond when trials are plopped into our lives? We must keep the long-view in mind. . . . This means to remember that we are eternal beings, and that this mortal life of ours is really only the “Basic Training” for the reality that will be accomplished when Jesus returns to set up his eternal kingdom – And we see this principle at work in our scripture lesson this morning from 1 Peter 1: Peter is writing to encourage his Christian brothers and sisters, who have been scattered from their homes due to the persecution of the romans – and he reminds them of God’s great mercy and gifts for them. In verses 3 and 4, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade – This inheritance is kept in heaven for you!” In other words, Peter is reminding them and us – “Even though you’ve been uprooted from your homes and your entire lives have been disrupted, don’t let that make you forget the awesome inheritance that is waiting for you in heaven – These present trials are really only for a “Little While” – We must keep our eternal perspective of things. So we need to fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen – For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. We’ve got to remember, that the trials we are experiencing are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all – Even if we can’t understand why a trial like this COVID 19 pandemic has come our way – and what possible good could come out of it – We need to remember to keep our eyes on the eternal – The unseen – For what is our life really? It is so short – Remember that God is using the trials of our life – and everything else going wrong in our lives – To accomplish the greatest good in our lives and in his kingdom. God’s ultimate goal for our lives is not to make us happy, comfortable, affluent, successful, healthy, and stress-free. . . . God’s ultimate aim is to conform us to the likeness of his son, Jesus Christ – To make us more like Jesus – And God will use everything that happens in our lives to bring this about. There’s a story about when the Confederate army retreated after their defeat at Gettysburg – General Robert E. Lee wrote to Jefferson Davis a remarkable letter in which he said, “We must expect reverses, even defeats, they are sent to teach us wisdom and prudence – To call forth greater energies, and to prevent our falling into greater disasters.” True of a nation’s life, this is also profoundly true of the life of the individual. So, what shall we say of sickness, sorrow, and affliction? Shall we let these things overwhelm us, or shall we be able to say, with that great spirit who kept both his soul and his body under the dominion of a great and holy purpose – No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ who loves us! And this COVID 19 trial that we find ourselves in today – Many of us will not see for years – or perhaps even until we stand before God someday – What God was doing in this specific trial of our lives – And some may even shake their puny finger back at God and say, “How dare you do this to me?” And will we lose hope in our eternal salvation? Will we lose our faith in God’s ability to make good on his promise that for those who are called according to God’s purpose – All these things will work together for God’s grace – And we must submit to God’s sovereign ways – Keep the eternal view ever present in our minds – and let us thank God for giving us the fertilizer of this trial, which will give us what we need to grow more mature and become fruitful in our faith to our Lord Jesus Christ! In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. . . . Amen!