

# Personal Growth

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Morning, friends. We're going to be opening God's Word now. It's going to be from the book of Philippians, chapter 2, verses 5 to 11. Sorry, 5 to 13. And that's what we're going to be looking at just before I have to get my stuff set up here on the table, my timer, which I've now started, my Bible, my other notes. Today's May 17th. I know some people will be watching this, and it's not Sunday, but today's May 17th. Friday was the 15th of May, and it was a significant day for me. Because it was on the 15th of May, 39 years ago, that I asked my wife, I mean, she wasn't my wife then, I asked Louise to marry me. 39 years ago on the 15th of May, I asked her to marry me, got down on my knees, she said yes. We got married in October, we're still married. And so it's got me thinking about love. And, you know, I haven't been a perfect husband, far from it. There's been lots of times I've been a very bad husband. And if it wasn't for love, if it wasn't for a commitment to love, our marriage definitely would not have survived. Also, of course, from a Christian point of view, the fact that we have Jesus as our Savior and Lord is the reason our marriage has kept going.

And I still love her. And I know that she still loves me. You know, it's really funny. I can think back to those early heady days, and other days, of course, since then, when it sort of dawned on me that she might love me back, that it wasn't just me loving her, but that she might love me back, and that maybe something like marriage would happen.

And, you know, when you're in that time period of love, it can be a little bit, you can sort of lose sight of it a little bit when you've been married a long time. Then it comes back into sight. But, you know, in those early days of love, it's really true that you are both most free and most bound. You feel so alive. You feel so alive. And you feel so whole. And you feel so free. And at the same time, in a way that delights you, you feel bound.

To the other person. Like, it's interesting, if you think about it, isn't it, that when there's that love, you both feel free and whole and bound all at the same time. And at the same time, if you think about it, that the more you love, and the more that that love is, you enter into it, the more you feel free. And you know that, and the more free you are, the more you're able to love.

[ 2 : 43 ] You know, for those of us who've struggled with maybe addictions, or those of us who've struggled with an, you know, an over-preoccupation with money, or some other type of thing that binds us, you know, these things get in the way of love. And they get, they bind your freedom, and they get in the way of love. And the more that love helps you to be free, the more free you are, the more you can love. And there's, there's, and this is like a human thing. It's not a Christian thing. It's not a Jewish thing, or Hindu, or Buddhist, or atheist thing. It just seems to be deeply human. And at the same time, if you think about it, that at the very, very heart of feeling in love and being loving, there's a humility that goes along with it at the same time. Like, both a type of a humility and amazement that somebody so amazing would love you, and, and also a type of humility whereby you willingly, in a sense, don't think about yourself for the sake of the other. And, and so love grows humility, and humility grows love. If a person is very, very selfish, or self-centered, narcissistic, proud, it gets in the way of love. It hurts love, it damages love, it sucks love away. So there really does seem to be something about a connection between humility and love. We're going to be looking at a passage in the Bible today, which is a very, very, very deep and profound passage. I think I shared last week, because sort of overlapping a little bit about what I looked at last week, and what we're looking at this week. If you look at an academic commentary on some of these verses, 60, 70 pages, 80 pages fly by as they try to unpack the depths of this text. And we're going to look at it because, you see, this text wonderfully illuminates and invites and grounds to go deeper into this type of mystery. So it would be a great help.

Here, once again, I have my text set for my Revelation Bible studies, not this. But find the book of Philippians, it's chapter 2, and we're beginning at verse 5. And we're going to read through till verse 13.

Philippians chapter 2, I'll eventually find it, beginning at verse 5. And it goes like this. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. And I shared with this last week, in the original language, there's this wonderful dual meaning, which can't be translated into English.

And the dual meaning is that, in a sense, if you're in Christ, this is yours. But there's also this other meaning that what he's about to tell you is, in a sense, a model to shape you. So you can't capture it in the English language as you can in the original language. But there's this double sense that if you're in Christ, then what's about to follow is something that you're in and that will form you.

At the same time, there's this idea that what you're about to hear is something that, if it grips your memory and if it grips your imagination, it's something that will shape you in a really, really good way, in a way that will allow you to live well with yourself, well with your God, and well with others. And so I'll read that verse again. It's verse 5. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, or another way to put it as an advantage to cling to. But he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant and being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. And we'll pause right there. We're going to look at verses 12 and 13 in a moment. And so, you know, on one level, you look at this text, and I'm not going to talk about one aspect of it. If you're curious about it, I talked about it last week.

[ 7 : 27 ] Basically, if you strip away some of the very technical language, which has been translated literally in the version which I just read, what it tells you is this, is that from all eternity, there was God the Son, as well as the God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. And God the Son, to save us, to fix us, to make us right with God, he sets aside his appearance as God, his divine prerogatives, his powers as God, everything that makes him look like God. He sets all of these things aside, and he, in a sense, empties himself. He still remains God, but he takes into himself what it means to be human, so that there's this perfect match of being fully God and fully human. And he humbles himself. He's obedient, in a sense, not only obedient to God the Father, but obedient, in a sense, to love and to goodness. And he's obedient. He humbles himself. He empties himself, becomes fully human.

And he does this to serve. And his service takes him even to a deeper emptying and emptying and emptying and obedience and death. Then there's this great, in a sense, reversal, where God highly exalts him, and he now has the name that is above all names, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so the question is, how on earth, how on earth can God be humble? Like, how on earth can God be humble? And how on earth can God be obedient? Like, how does that make even any sense? If you've talked to some of your Muslim friends, or if you're one of our Muslim friends watching this, you'll say, yes, George, that's the issue. Jesus can't be God if he's humble. Jesus can't be God if he's obedient. If you're one of our Jehovah Witness friends who are watching this right now, you'd say, yes, George, that's exactly the point. He can't be humble if he's God. He can't be obedient if he's God. And in fact, if we think about it, it doesn't, in a sense, make any sense to us. Like, God is humble? Like, what? Like,

I thought you wanted to have him worshipped all the time. I thought the glory has to go to him. Like, how can he be humble? How can he be obedient? Well, remember our opening lines, this profound mystery that the more we love, the more we're free and the more we're bound. Think about it for a second and remember how love grows freedom and we need to be free to love. And remember how we talked a little bit about how there's this deep connection between humility and love. And if you think about it for a second, I could have added another line, that there's this deep connection between love and obedience. I mean, I can tell you right now, if one of our kids called us up at three o'clock in the morning and said, you know, mom or dad, we really need you to come over here. And even if it meant driving an hour, we would drop everything. My wife would drop everything. I would drop everything.

We would do that drive. We would be obedient to that request out of love. I don't know. I'll just be honest. If the government called me up and told me to drive somewhere for an hour, I'd say, what right do you have to call me up and ask me to drive anywhere for an hour? I'm not going to do it. Love changes everything. And so the Bible reveals this picture of the fact that God, the Son of God, can be humble, that he can be obedient. And he does this out of goodness and out of love.

And so, one moment. So on one hand, we sort of understand how there's a connection of love to all of these things. But see, here's the problem. The way that we fundamentally think of God is that the God is a solitary God. And if God is a solitary God, he can't be humble, or she can't be humble, or it can't be humble. And, but at the same time, that solitary God can't not only be humble, but you can't even wonder how on earth it, she, him, they, not they, him, can be good, and how they can even be love. Because you see, at the very, very, if I just, if I just lived off in a tower one day, I get some money, and I live off in a tower. I live on the top floor of the tower where I can't see anybody.

[ 12 : 08 ] And I don't know, I pay some, some Yahoo just to bring me food every week. And I live up there in complete and utter solitary isolation. And I make sure that there's no internet, no TV, no phone.

I just live up there in complete and utter solitary isolation. Nobody hearing that story would think I was loving. And nobody hearing that story would think I was humble. And how on earth could I be obeying anybody when there's just me? I just do what I feel like doing. And if you think about it for a second, and I don't mean to offend my Muslim friends or my pantheist friends, but if God is just solitary, there's only God, well, how can he really be love? How can he really be good?

And if everything is God, or God is everything, well, how on earth does that make any sense, that that type of God is any different than me or you being at the top of a tower, having our needs met, being completely and utterly solitary for decades and decades and decades and decades?

You need another person to love. You need, in a sense, another person. You need something else, someone else to show that there's a goodness or that there's freedom or that there's love. You need that to happen. And you see, this is then the profound truth. It's only in texts like this, it's only, and this text comes out, why does this text come out? This text doesn't arise because Jesus was, because Paul was, I don't know, smoking some controlled substance, no longer controlled. You know, he'd been to the pot shop, he's smoking something, and one day he comes up and thinks, you know, I think this is a really cool idea. I think I'm going to write it down. No, that's not how it comes. Jesus changes everything. Jesus changes everything. You see, when it describes in this, this God, the Son of God, emptying himself, setting aside all of the privileges and advantages that he has, and he doesn't grasp them, he doesn't keep them. He's willing to let go of all of the advantages, all of the prerogatives. He's just willing to let it go. Why? Out of love, out of goodness, out of mercy. And he's willing to set it all aside and to take into himself our human nature and live a fully human life. He doesn't come as the emperor of Rome. He doesn't come as the most gorgeous man that's ever existed, the most athletic man, the most well-educated man, the richest man.

He comes and has a lower working class existence amongst a conquered people. And he lives a normal human life. He works by his hands. He depends upon the generosity of others. He empties, he empties, he empties. His miracles are acts of grace and healing for others. His words of wisdom are words that free and make us whole. But he comes to die. He comes to die upon the cross. He continues to empty himself and to empty himself and to empty himself. And in so doing, he not just reveals the nature of the true God, but he also does it in such a way that he can save you and me. But the fact of the matter is, is you see that this emerges out of who God is. You see, from all eternity, the Father can love the Son, from all eternity, the Son can love the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit can love the Son and the Holy Spirit can love the Father. From all eternity, in a sense, the Son can give of himself to the Father and the Father can give of himself to the Son. From all eternity, the Father can, in a sense, desire the glory of the Son and put the Son first. And the Son can desire the glory of the father and put the father first and and from all eternity there can be this dynamic activity of giving and revealing and receiving and honoring and obeying all of the things that we see in love a freedom of humility you can from all eternity that is god you see there are many people who have this basic sense that despite the fact that there's war and terror and and cruelty in the world and and we look at the world and and i mean there's times when we think that must be the realist realist realist realist thing and that the things like love and goodness are just illusions that the realist thing is the strong eating the weak and the and the and the disease consuming that which is healthy and the strong is just something which is illusory and will come to an end but you know at a very very deeper level we all have a sense that that's not the most real that what is most real even if we can't articulate why it must be the case that there's many people who just hold it as an article of faith that before all things there was love when all else fades away there will be love at the very very uh farthest reaches of where you can go there is love at the deepest depths that you can go there is love that we dwell amidst love and that with that love comes this basic sense of goodness and freedom as somehow despite all of the appearances and all of the philosophies whether it's pantheism or whether it is our friends from islam that this is in fact the most fundamental and the most real and i just want to share with you friends what you are sensing is the reality of the triune god revealed in the life and death and resurrection of jesus that is what you are sensing you are not sensing that all is one when you sense this power and reality of love and of goodness and of freedom and the humility that has to go with it you see what we see here is that humility is in a sense um to be humble is to be self-effacing self-effacing means we uh we don't we're not putting ourselves first we're not thinking about ourselves in a sense what pride is is like it says it's a black hole right if you deal with somebody who's a very very selfish if you deal with somebody who's clinging to their advantages clinging to their roles clinging to their place if you're dealing with somebody

[ 18 : 41 ]    who's narcissistic who's proud who's selfish who's self-centered who's all about me they're like a black hole wherever they go they suck everything into their orbit and the heart of pride is is that black wholeness that ruins marriages it ruins friendships it ruins the relationships of parents and children that ruins office places ruins countries and at the heart of humility isn't thinking bad things about yourself or thinking you're bad it's self-effacing it's the opposite of the black hole it's the child completely and utterly enraptured by the kitten so enraptured by the kitten or the butterfly or the bug that you almost have you have a sense that if you go inside of them they would forget that they exist but not in a bad way but in a good way it's that self-effacing this which is at the heart of love where it's almost as if you don't exist because you see the one that you love or you love the one that you love and that from all eternity the self-effacement of the father to the son and the son to the father and that takes on action in this profound mystery which is described here and in a sense what obedience is is another is a is a as a giving of yourself is a self-giving is obedience that's that's what you know we we can see how this is all messed up you know uh when we give ourselves to somebody who's just going to hurt us who's just going to ruin us who's just going to wreck us but you know at the heart of the heart of obedience is you give yourself to the good for others and the heart of love is a self-surrender um i mean that's why when love is betrayed and love is broken it's so crushing because it's this deep self-surrender and all of this we see in jesus all of this we see at the very heart of reality in the trinity and out of this heart of reality in the trinity jesus comes and there's the miracles there's no advantages there's the miracles for others the prayer for others the teaching for others the death for others the goodness for others and you see the profound uh i shared with you last week that at a very literary level if you look at this um these verses six to eleven and it's a um it's a very very structured piece of writing in the original language uh with technical language and biblical language and balancing phrases etc but there's one part that that um you know you expect zig and a zag and a zig and a zag but then there's something goes whoa where'd that come from and that's the phrase uh even death on a cross that's the that's the heart of it that's the in a sense that the the thing which is discordant that makes everybody turn that puts a whole context to everything that all culminates in this perfect self-giving and humility that culminates in the death of jesus upon the cross and because it's god the son of god who is doing all of these things what we have described here is this wonderful mystery where it's both everything that happens is on one level eternal because it's god the son of god but on the other hand what happens is also in history it happens in history he lives in historic life he dies a death in history the grave is empty in history he resurrects in history and so this profound movement by god to save us in a sense if if we think of pride and selfishness and self-centeredness is something which affects every human being and that every human being has within themselves this black wholeness that um you know by the grace of god we resist sometimes we give into it and and our lives our

thoughts our our paranoia our our then our desire for vengeance our desire for retribution our desire just to have our own way our desire just to be the princess or the king for this moment for this day that that wrecks and ruins this black wholeness in a sense what you see in this entire picture is is it god unraveling all of that and going in the complete opposite direction and he does it so that you and i can be in it it's history and it's real it's not just a story it's real it happens in history but because of who he is it's something that happens in eternity and being eternity means it's outside of time which means that it can be available at any time including your time and my time right now if we realize this we can realize a little bit about what it means to follow and live in light of it right and it begins by saying that there's this way that we can be in him and in the same way that there's something that as this story grips us it's something that can shape us and model us and draw us and be the ground in which we stand and we see that in verses 12 to 13 where if you just read them without the context of what's just gone on before they just sounds crazy what do you mean you have to be obedient you have to work hard you have to have fear and trembling like not what none of this stuff makes sense if you don't understand this stuff which follows from it look at verses 12 to 13 therefore my beloved as you have always obeyed so now not only as in my presence but much more in my absence work out your own salvation with fear and trembling it's a it's a an image fear and trembling is an image of the solemnity the earth-shattering nature of it many of us before we get married were wrecks nervous wrecks in a sense that's describing fear and trembling because there's the momentousness of what we're engaged in and there's a type of a solemnity and a depth to what we're about to do i i remember uh the night before my marriage i i was fine but i i i could i like i was a wreck the morning of my marriage i was a wreck i remember trying to go for a run to try to calm my nerves and it it it worked while i was running and i guess if i could have run like 100 kilometers and just run went right from running and to be a sweaty wreck to actually exchanging the vows i wouldn't have been a wreck but all it was doing was just putting it aside i was a wreck fear and trembling fear and trembling you see that's what it's saying here look at it again not only as in my presence but much more in my advance it says obey right work out your own salvation with fear and trembling it makes it sounds like it's 100 yours but then in the very next breath the same breath it says for it is god who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure for it is god who is who works in you both to will and and um both to will and to work for his good pleasure it's a little bit like this uh last sunday was mother's day and if you had a little three-year-old you have to tell them that it's mother's day like somebody has to tell them that it's mother's day and somebody has to tell them that it's a really good thing to give mommy a present on mother's day and as well as that assuming that we weren't in shutdown if this was a different time so not only would you say it's mother's day don't you love mommy yes i love mommy we should you should draw her a picture yes i should draw her a picture here's some paper and pens and and crayons and markers oh i have these things i can do it and you should buy your mommy a gift wouldn't you like to buy your mommy a gift yes i'd love to buy mommy a gift well here's twenty dollars to buy your mommy a gift in fact it might even be the mom who gives the kid the twenty dollars all things come from the parents in that story and because the parents give the child in a sense the will and because the mom and the dad have been

loving the child so there's a natural desire for the child to give something to the mom and the paper comes from the mom and dad the crayons from the mom and dad the fact that it's an event comes from mom and dad the money for the gift comes from mom and dad and if the little kid ends up giving their mommy something that obviously the little kid likes or that's something completely and utterly absurdly weird well the mom and dad just think it's hilarious and they make a note that they're going to tell that funny story when the child gets married uh far later on so that the whole room will laugh but that's another thing you see that's what this image is here it's not an image it's not a religious image it's not a religious image as if if i become more religious like that you know then uh you know then that that means i do this more and more and more and in a sense you know god it's it's more and more me and less and less god or you know maybe at first you need to have god's grace but then no no no what what this is an image of it says if you understand that to deal with the black hole within you that god the son of god in a sense has to do this profound act to deal with your black wholeness and in a sense there's the complete reversal the reverse engine the the reversing the unmaking the unmasking of the black hole within us and that god does what we can't do for ourselves and that when we put our faith and trust in him we're in him and that act that he does for us becomes ours and so it has to be a hundred percent from god and that's why it says to work and to will comes all from god but what happens is i go from my black wholeness as this as i'm in christ and christ is now in a sense with me and i am with him and he is in me and as this story shapes me then as he continues to to give and to form and as this eternal thing continues to become more real in me in history i go from zero percent to one percent to three percent at no time does god ever stop doing anything other than a hundred percent but the more i'm gripped and the more i'm in the more i can become free to obey the more i can become free to love the more i can become humble to love and to be free let's just sort of wrap this up with four takeaway points for you um i'm really sorry we really are going to be trying to work on getting the words here uh as soon as we can on the screen i know some of you really like this let me just tell you just go to info church of the messiah whatever that is email us we'll email you these things you can look in the little thing in the side which are about to come up uh or you can go online i think on monday it'll all go online when the audio version of this sermon goes online uh but here i'll just tell you them i'll they're sort of very obvious but there's four prayers that come out of this that helps us to know what it means to grow it's four four prayers that helps to shape you in your life in response to being in christ here here's the first one almighty god if the turning point of human history is the sacrificial death life death and resurrection of the lord jesus christ then in him may it be the turning point of my whole life and my life each day friends this is a conversion prayer if you have not given your life to jesus and those of us who have given our lives to jesus this is a day-to-day prayer it's the point of this whole beautiful story from verse 5 to verse 13 to see that god does something that changes all human history and the history potentially changes the history and the story of every human life including yours nobody's life is so consumed by the black hole that this story isn't for them that this prayer isn't for them that jesus isn't for them isn't for you almighty god if the turning point of human

history is the sacrificial life death and resurrection of the lord jesus christ then in him may it be the turning point of my whole life and my life each day here's a second thing that comes from this a prayer that we can pray to god almighty god since for the good of others the lord did not cling to his advantages then in him neither will i you know you want to guys you're married to somebody you want to know how to kill your marriage you come home and you're with your wife and and she's been working hard all day maybe she's been with the kids and she's just frazzled or she's had her own job and she's doing some stuff around the house and cooking things and she says something to you and you think yourself one moment at my job i'm an important person like this isn't how people talk to me yeah yeah keep that attitude up and watch your marriage die let me just tell you i remember one day i was with this man true story he'd lived with several women all of the that those relationships had broken up he'd been married a couple of times those marriages had all ended uh we were having lunch i told him about i'd done something something had come up and i apologized to my wife and he said to me i would never apologize to my wife and i said to him and that's why you're divorced several times and all of your relationships have broken up and he was a neat middle eastern guy who can talk direct to and he paused for a second he said you're probably right but he didn't say it with a smile so this is an important prayer almighty god since for the good of others the lord did not cling to his advantages where his office or his role or his money or whatever then in him neither will i this will make a perfect to be gripped by the gospel and then gripped with this will make a difference in the church it will make a difference in your work it will make a difference with your kids it'll make a difference with your marriage it'll make a difference with your friends and with your neighbors third prayer from this text almighty god since for the good of others the lord humbled himself then in him so will i just pray it again almighty god since for the good of others the Lord humbled himself, then in him so will I.

Final prayer. Almighty God, since for the good of others the Lord was obedient to you, then in him so will I. See, it all flows from this.

[ 33 : 34 ] Remember, obedience, love, humility, freedom, that there's a deep connection between all of them.

And in light of the gospel, in light of these other prayers, this is the context about learning how to obey your wife in the right things, obeying your kids in the right things, obey God in the right things, obey the government in the right things, and not obey them in the things that you shouldn't be obeying them in.

This becomes the entranceway into an obedience and a wisdom and a sense of the right and wrongness of the world, a compass where the north is, an ability to see the things whereby you can be disobedient to evil because you should always disobey evil.

Always. Always disobey the black hole. Almighty God, since for the good of others the Lord was obedient to you, then in him so will I.

Friends, let's pray. Father, I come to you acknowledging that there is a black hole in me. And I, Father, I acknowledge that it wasn't because somehow I was very good at controlling my black hole or keeping my black hole away or destroying it that you said, well, I think George is a wonderful fellow.

[ 34 : 56 ] I think I'll have him as my child. Father, I know that wasn't the way. That in the midst of my black wholeness, you still loved me. And you, in the person of your Son and in the power of the Holy Spirit, you do this deep, powerful reversal of the black wholeness of the human race that has infected all of creation.

And we thank you, Father, that you sent your Son, that he was willing to be set aside as advantages, to be humble, to be obedient in love. And he did this for me.

And I thank you, Father, that he did for me what I could never do for myself, that it's all grace, all unmerited, all love, all goodness. Father, grip us, grip me, grip everyone who is here with the truth of this.

And may these prayers be ours, that we will be gripped by him and be in him. And this will turn and change and be the turning point of our lives and the turning point of every day.

Father, pour out the Holy Spirit upon us. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen. Amen.