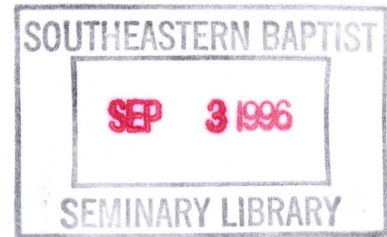


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Affliction brings God glory

By Dwayne Hastings

WAKE FOREST, N.C.--Everything that happens in life is for a reason, whether it's good or bad, said Billy Ramsey Nov. 29 in an address at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"All of us are in process, a development process," said Ramsey, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Ft. Worth, Texas. "There is a divine design at work in our lives -- God is working on us."

In every situation, Ramsey said, there is a dual dynamic where God is testing and Satan is tempting.

Defining testing as the means by which God evaluates man's readiness for promotion, Ramsey reminded the Wake Forest, N.C., school's chapel audience of Luke's scriptural account of Satan asking to sift Simon Peter as one does wheat.

"Christ allowed it, promising to pray for Peter in hopes that when he was turned around, he would strengthen the brethren," Ramsey said.

Yet on the other side of every situation, the devil tempts, Ramsey noted, explaining, "Temptation is a solicitation to do something that goes contrary to God's Word or will for our life."

It is a process not unlike that seen in nature among eagles and their offspring, Ramsey said, citing Deuteronomy 32:11-12.

"In this particular passage, the Holy Spirit is revealing to Moses the process which God will sometimes use upon his children -- the same way the eagle cares for her young and trains the young birds to fly," Ramsey explained.

"The eagle finds the safest place in the cleft of the rocky cliff to build her nest," he said, using thistles and thorns to build a framework for her nest.

"She builds that foundation because there are many predators that would try to destroy her young," Ramsey said, noting the eagle lines the nest with fur, feathers and wool to provide a comfortable home for her offspring.

Everything those eaglets need for their growth and security is wonderfully provided, Ramsey noted, until the day when the young birds must leave the nest.

"She begins to pull out of that nest the fur and the wool and the feathers, causing the sharp objects, with which she had built the foundation of the nest, to start coming through," he said.

The mother bird is creating discontent in the lives of those little birds, Ramsey said, literally stirring up the nest.

"Those little eagles were not born for the nest; they were born to fly," he said, explaining it was not cruelty that drove the mother eagle to act.

Anyone who seeks to walk with the Lord, likewise, knows what it is like to have your nest stirred, Ramsey said. "You know what it is like when God begins to disturb your comfort zone --

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in effect, you are having your nest stirred.”

You are either in trouble, you are getting out of trouble, or you're about to get back into trouble -- all the time, Ramsey said. “It's a divine process to make Jesus evident in our life.

“Every time we go through a difficult time in life where God is trying to stretch us, you don't have to look very far to see him and feel his presence in the midst of that process,” Ramsey said, noting that once the mother bird has stirred the nest, she stands over her chicks, fluttering her wings above them to draw their attention off their adversity and onto her majesty.

And as that mother eagle pushes her children off the edge of the nest, she swoops gracely below them as they plummet in a freefall toward the rocks below. She carries them skyward time after time until they realize they have within them a God-given ability to soar, he said.

The Bible says the mother eagle literally “beareth” them on her wings, he continued, just as God provides for his own.

“There is nothing in this world like being pushed out of the nest,” Ramsey said, adding not everyone cares if you know how to fly.

“Yet it is for our good; it is for his glory,” he said. If it takes affliction in order for our lives to bring him glory, then it is surely worth it, Ramsey concluded.

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