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Growing with God – Resting

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...I was a sophomore when we had Hannah, and lest you think I was a little eager to marry, I was twenty four when Hannah was born. I was late getting to school, that was the problem. But Hannah was a beautiful little girl, and we dearly, dearly loved her and enjoyed her. And we were benefitting from all the lessons you learned from having a child. And one of the things we wanted to do is to be good parents. And so as was our custom, we were taking her to church with us. At that time we were members of the Village Church in Berrien Springs. Some of you may be familiar with that church?

And we went to church one particular Sabbath. And I don't know if we were running late, or if we had been down in Sabbath School, maybe Irene Oster's class. She used to teach down there. And anyways, we came up, and like most parents with young children, we looked for a seat in the back, just in case. In case you got to get up and you have to go out. But unfortunately like most churches, it fills in from the back towards the front. It was full back there, and we kept working our way forward, forward, forward until we ended up in the very front pew. There we sat the three of us. And things were going well. Hannah was sleeping contentedly in her mother's arms. And you know you keep looking at her, and she is such a beautiful baby and we were enjoying that.

And then a lady stood up to sing. I don't know who she was, I don't remember the song. I just remember, she could sing loud, and she could sing high. Because one of those high notes that you could tell it was coming, and you wondered about your eyes if you were wearing eyeglasses. Do I need to protect them somehow from the shattering glass? And anyways, she hit that note. And when she hit that note, Hannah woke up screaming, "Waa." And there was nothing her mother could do to console her. Her little heart was in turmoil, and there was nothing that could be done.

Now we are right in the front of a very large church. What do you do? Your options are few, but you know you've got to do something. You've been there if you are a parent. You know when your child is calling out in church, everybody in the world is staring at you. And they are all wondering, "What are you going to do, what are you going to do?" And you know they are saying things like, "Put a cork in their mouth," you know, "Do something. I am here and you are spoiling my space," and on and on. And what do you do? And so is the option jump up and run up the full length of the church back with everybody watching, or what can you do? So Karen is in a panic, I am in a panic, Hannah is just squalling away.

There is an exit, says it right on the door. So Karen jumps up, grabs the baby, runs through the door, fully anticipating she'll go outside, come around in the back and be in the mother's room where it's safe. Well, it was just a little hallway, just a foyer like, a small foyer. She opened the door from the sanctuary, hit the door that supposed to go outside, and it won't open. It's locked. She can't get out. She is stuck in that room. Now what do you do? Bring the squalling child back out, go down the aisle, or what do you do? Well, she didn't know what do, but we have been parents long enough to learn that when Hannah was upset, when she nursed she calmed down. It wasn't time for Hannah to eat, but it was a crises. And so Karen began to nurse

her. I said, "Was there a chair back there?" She said, she can't even remember. But she just knows that through the rest of the worship service, she nursed Hannah. And every time she would stop nursing Hannah, Hannah would begin squalling again. So, all right! We had an interesting afternoon with an overfed baby. All I am going to tell you is two or three times it took the two of us to clean up the mess.

You know, there is something about resting that is so beautiful when a baby is resting. When another person is resting, it is so beautiful. But how do you find rest when there is such turmoil? Turmoil in major areas, and that's what I'd like to study with you today. Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 11. Matthew chapter 11 will be a very familiar passage to you. But hopefully today, when we study it in its context, it will be more meaningful. Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus is the speaker, and Jesus says this: "Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Beautiful songs and poetry and sermons have all been written and preached and sung over that passage. "Come unto Me all ye that labor, and I will give you rest." For those of you who are guests today, this is the fourth sermon in a four part series called, "Growing with God." I learned from my grandson, Conner that he basically cries for four reasons. He cries when he is hungry, he cries when he has to burp, he cries when his diaper needs to be changed, and he cries when he is tired. And I realized by those simple, little things that there are four areas that they are titles to, if you will, that teach us about spirituality. And so, we had a doll up here for the first sermon and we liken the hunger and reading the word of God, the Bible being the milk of the word. And I mixed a bottle of milk, and we had some fun with that.

The next week we looked at burping. And burping, we liken it to a pain in your life that someone else has to take care of. They have to help you to get rid of it, and of course it's God. So we looked more deeply into the word of God. How do you study more deeply into the stories of the Scriptures, and you ask questions, and you find God there, and you find yourself there, and He takes care of your pain. Last week, we talked about a diaper issue. When your life is a mess and someone has to clean it up. And we talked about sin and how God will clean that up, but we also talked about how God can take the mess, the situation we are in and make it well. And this week we are talking about resting. You see Conner, my grandson, cries when he needs rest. And there is turmoil in his little heart. And all would agree that there are not too many more beautiful pictures than the picture of a baby that is resting, just quietly sleeping in his mother's or his father's arms. And their little lips, you know kind of pursing, and they do strange things with their face and it's just fun to watch them.

Resting! Jesus said, "Come to Me and rest," but He doesn't do this in a vacuum, He does it in the context of experiences, most of which He will talk about. Now what I want to talk about to you today is "How do you find rest in God?" And we are going to see that this passage identifies three areas of turmoil. Three areas where Jesus was rejected if you will, three areas where we may feel rejection, in fact, three areas where just may have a lot of confusion, doubt and pain. It's relating to God, relating to other people, and to our situation in life. Let's see that in the scriptures. Please turn to Matthew 11 verse 2, it says this: "And when John had heard in prison

about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples.” John, John the Baptist, Jesus’ cousin! John the Baptist who we are told from the Angel Gabriel that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit at birth. John, the number one disciple of Jesus, the number one believer of Jesus! John, about whom Jesus will later say in this very chapter, is the very, most powerful prophet that ever lived. The greatest man that ever walked was John. Jesus’ number one disciple, the one who said, “This is the Lamb of God who has come to take away the sins of the world.” John who has lived out in the wild, who has eaten the wild honey, and the locust, who has dressed in the camel’s hair and the leather girdle, this John has been in prison for nearly a year. And when he is in prison for a year, he’s got questions; questions about God. Would God really act this way? “Here I am. Why am I in prison now? What did I do to deserve this?” For eleven months he’s been in prison. In just a few weeks he will lose his head! He will die! The number one guy! What is God all about?

And in this time of doubt, in this time of pain, in this time of questioning, this Spirit filled man, sends two of his disciples to Jesus with a question. Verse 3: “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” That’s where John is at with God. “Are You really the One or do we look for another?” Now how do you get peace in your heart when turmoil is there? And especially if peace comes from God and your issue is God? All of us from time to time live with questions that beg for an answer, and we are not getting them. All of us from time to time will sense a prison. Some people feel in prison in marriage, some people feel in prison in their singleness. Some people feel in prison because of their health situation. There are all kinds of prisons, and all kinds of questions associated with prisons. And John is saying, “Are You the One, or do we look for another?”

What do you do with your doubts and your questions, the turmoil and the unrest? What do you do? If God is the One who gives rest and the issue is God? Well, the story goes on in chapter 11, another situation, verse 16. Jesus again is speaking, and He says: “But to what shall I liken this generation?” He is in essence saying, “What shall I say the people around Me are like? What are they like?” He says, “It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions and saying: ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; We mourned to you, and you did not lament.’ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’”

Jesus is saying, “What do you folks want?” You know, we played a happy song, you wouldn’t dance. So okay, you want to play a funeral, they wouldn’t do that. There is nothing they could do, John or Jesus, to win this people over. No matter what they did, they found a complaint. They found an issue. John doesn’t eat at all, “He is a sinner.” Jesus eats and drinks with sinners, “Well, He is a sinner.” You know, “He is demonic, He is with the devils,” on and on, and on and on. Jesus knows what it’s like to be rejected. He knows anyone here if you are in that room. He knows what it feels like. But notice this. In the room of our lives, there are few things more important to us than God and relationships with other people. Have you ever been in a situation where no matter how hard you try that person will just not warm up to you, that person will not change their attitude towards you, they will not believe you. You may be dealing with an adolescent, and you are crying out to them, “Look, I am your friend. I am not trying to

hurt you. I am trying to protect you. I am trying to help you grow up.” But yet, they put a steel wall between you and them, and they will not let you in. And they take your best efforts and turn them into evil surmising.

This happens in life. And it creates tremendous turmoil in the heart because all of us want to be accepted by other people. All of us long for relationships that are meaningful. How can you have rest when there is turmoil in your heart? Turmoil with God maybe, turmoil in relationships; it doesn't end there. Jesus says in verse 20, another situation: “Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent...” and He goes on to describe. The cities He worked the hardest in, they rejected Him the most. What a sad commentary, and how sad it must have felt for Jesus. Jesus was rejected in those cities.

For us, have you ever asked the question, “Where am I in life, and where am I going, what am I doing here and how did I get here?” And, you know, “I've got a dead-end job, and what happens here, and what are the next steps? And you know, I thought by this age I'd be farther along, I thought I'd have this, I'd have that or be with somebody, or whatever?” All these questions and you begin to wonder, “Who am I, and really, what have I done or what will I ever do?” And then if you put it into the realm of the spiritual, we hear sermons week after week, you know, “You have talent. You have a gift from the Holy Spirit. Use it to the glory of God. Find a ministry, get involved, do something.” And we say to ourselves, “But what? I can't do anything. I have no particular talents. I have nothing really going for me. What do I do?” And so then, “Not only do I feel like a loser in my regular life, but in my spiritual life, I've done nothing. I haven't brought anybody to Christ; I don't know what's going on? I'll never be paraded in front of the congregation, and say, be like this person,” you know.

And so we have a tendency to feel like such a loser. “Nobody is listening, nobody is caring. My job just feels like it's nothing, and what have I accomplished or will I ever? I've been praying for years and nothing changes. Nothing turns around.” It creates turmoil. Jesus says: “When you have turmoil in your heart with God, when you have turmoil in your heart in your relationships with people, if you have turmoil in your heart with who you are and where you are in life, Jesus says, “I will give you rest.” The question is, “How does He do it?” Well, our initial response would be to say, “Well, we pray to Him and He does that.” But I don't know if you've been where I've been in these situations or you've been doubting God, and people have hurt you, and you feel like a loser. I am telling you there is no prayer I've ever prayed that has really helped me because I can't come up with it. I can try, I can try, I can try!

But the whole issue is “I already feel empty. And when I reach out to God, nothing is connecting. It doesn't get above the ceiling. And I just don't know where God is, and who I am, and how I fit in, and how everything is working?” And there is no rest that way! I learned about fifteen years ago how to pray in a way that punched me through the ceiling and helped me connect to God, and gave God an opportunity to give me rest even when God was the One I was questioning. I taught a church how to pray this, this way. There was an eighty two year old man that came up to me afterwards, tears streaming down his cheeks, and he said, “Pastor Jerry, for thirty years I've been praying the same prayer because I didn't know how to pray any other way. And I've been growing more and more doubtful about my spirituality and my

connection with God. Thank you, you have given me hope, you have given me a new way to pray.”

I want to teach you today how to pray a prayer that is inspired by God; a prayer that doesn't originate in your heart, but a prayer that originates in His heart. You see, there are one hundred fifty of those prayers in the Bible. And there may be more scattered around, but they are all in one section called “The Psalms.” The Psalms are inspired poems. They are written by people, but they are written by people who are inspired by God to write this. So it is the language of expressing ourselves to God. It is the language, if you will, of prayer. It is the expressions of the human heart, a human heart that is inspired by God. This is how God wants to be talked to. This is the language of prayer.

Now I'll tell you, praying the Psalms creates a structure that helps us because for many of us, our prayers are the same prayers, over and over. There are a hundred and fifty Psalms. That's a hundred and fifty different prayers, in a hundred and fifty days. And I promise you, here is what's going to happen. You pray through a Psalm in the morning and you go out to work or a school, or wherever you go during the day, and you are going to have a conversation with somebody, and something you prayed about in that Psalm is going to resonate as a need that this person has. And you are going to be used by God, and He and you are going to be able to share hope and encouragement to them. Plus, by praying through the Psalms every single day is a brand new prayer, a different expression. And what shocks me of been doing this for fifteen years, is how there are some days that that Psalm describes the very experience I am having. And it's all right there, and I just talked to God about it.

Now there are a hundred and fifty Psalms. I don't remember what day I started doing this, but I am a simple minded person. And things have to line up for me or I get dysfunctional. And so I like to pray according to the day. I finished my praying through the Psalms this last time in January. So I began praying Psalm one on February one. Psalm two on February two; Psalm three on February three, right on up to today which is February sixteen. Please turn in your Bibles to Psalm 16. That's where I am at. I am going to pray through Psalm 16 for you just to show you how to do it. But I want you to know I am not playacting, I will be praying. I also want you to know that I pray with my eyes open usually. I like that. I like it better than them closed because I pray when I drive, I pray when I walk, I pray when I do other things, and if you call me on the phone and I offer a prayer for you, I have my eyes open. Now I'll tell you why. I don't close them to imagine being somewhere; I keep them open because Jesus is with me here. And that's just what I believe and it's been my experience.

And so I am going to be praying, and I'll be praying with my eyes open. You may be uncomfortable with that, and you may want to close your eyes, and that's okay. You can do that. That's quite all right. But do follow along with me. “Father in Heaven, as I pray through Psalm 16, I pray that Your Spirit will move in such a way that I will pray in a fashion that other people will say they can do it as well. And that they'll be blessed. When they have a time of turmoil, they'll be able to still have a prayer for you and you'll be able to minister to them. I ask this in Jesus' name.”

“Preserve me, o God, for in You I put my trust.” “Father in Heaven I know that every weapon, every energy on earth that has not been designed by You is striving to separate me from You. I pray you will preserve me in Your care. I pray You will hold me. That You will not allow me to slip away. That if it requires You holding me tighter than others, please do that. Whatever it takes, please preserve me Lord, and preserve me in Your presence. I want to trust You more than I do and I need Your help to do that.”

“O my soul, you have said to the Lord, ‘You are my Lord, My goodness is nothing apart from You.’” “Heavenly Father, You indeed are my Lord and I want You to be Lord of my life. I want You to be Lord of every aspect of my life. And it’s so true, I have no goodness; I have no goodness to offer You. And what I have is nothing apart from You. So Lord, please be Lord in my life and teach me what that means and what it’s supposed to be like.” “As for the saints who are on the earth, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.” “Lord, I want to be among Your saints. And I pray for my brothers and sisters here today that they will be among those saints as well. And that together we can fellowship on our journey towards heaven, encourage one another and delight in one another.”

“Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after another god...” “Lord, You know my heart. My heart is ready, willing and wanting to go after other gods.” “...their drink offerings of blood I will not offer, nor take up their names on my lips.” “Lord, I do not want to give an offering to another god, I do not want to take their name upon my lips, I don’t want anything to do with them, but I need you to work a miracle in my life because I am prone to do that. I want to do that. But I am asking You to change me. “You o Lord, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup;” “Lord, from Your cup I want to drink water, living water, from Your very throne. You have written here that ‘You are the portion of my inheritance’. Lord I look forward to that inheritance of being with You for eternity.” “...You maintain my lot. The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Yes, I have a good inheritance.” “Lord, You are maintaining, You are upholding, You’ve got it there. Help me to press forward toward that day when You will return, and I will be ready to meet you in peace, and eternity in Your presence will begin.”

“I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel; My heart also instructs me in the night seasons.” “Lord, please give me wisdom, understanding, knowledge and discernment, and please Heavenly Father, even speak to me as I lay on the bed at night. And even after I fall asleep, please defragment my mind, if You will, give me thoughts in my dreams that are from You. Give me direction and understanding. And help me to know what I should do and what I should say.” “I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.” “Lord, I want You ahead of me. I want You before me. I want You to have priority in my life and to be my strength that I will not be moved. Lord, let me keep my eyes on You.”

“Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh will rest in hope.” “Father, I pray for anyone that’s here today who is struggling with You, who is struggling with relationships, who is struggling with their situation in life, I pray Heavenly Father that you will give them a rest that is in hope.” “For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.” “Lord, if you can raise me from the dead and give me completeness and wholeness, take me while I am alive and do more for me than what I’ve ever imagined or dreamed could be done.”

“You will show me the path of life;” “I want that path Lord.” “...in Your presence is fullness of joy;” “I believe it and I am longing for it.” “At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” “Heavenly Father, I want to be there with You for eternity. Please save my family and save the church members and the visitors that are here today. I pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Now brothers and sisters tomorrow I am going to pray Psalm 17. It’s a different prayer. I am not going to get bored; I am not going to get bogged down. There is victory and there is power in this. And so even though I may have turmoil with God, turmoil with people and turmoil with work, I have a prayer, an inspired prayer I can pray. And God will meet me there and build me back up to what He wants me to be. Now I want to share a story with you. I have permission from the family to do this, but I am changing their names. Mike and Janet! I became acquainted with them a number of years ago, and we began growing in the Lord together and in our relationship. They had suffered a tremendous loss of one of their children dying in an unfortunate accident and sequence of events that followed that. And so they had been through a tremendous faith crises.

They were really reaching out to God during this time in their life, and they were longing for some methodologies to help them. I taught them how to pray the Psalms and they appreciated it very much. Sometime after that their daughter who lived in a state many miles from here was in a situation in her life that was very dangerous, very dangerous spiritually. Very dangerous because of the friends that she had the boyfriend that she had, the situation, it was bad and it was tending to get worse. Well Mom and Dad wanted to bring her back here to this area of the country. But their daughter is an adult, a young adult. You can’t just go throw a blanket over them and bring them back. Besides, if you did do that they may be here physically but their heart is somewhere else and what good have you done?

They became convinced that they needed to drive out there and try to convince their daughter to come back. It was in the words of Mike, hand-to-hand combat with the devil. Not their daughter being the devil, but the influences upon her, the friends, the boyfriend. Everything that the world was trying to offer her was clamoring for her attention at that time. It was very difficult to reason with her and to try and help her come back to a place she had left; running away to some degree from God. What are you going to do in this situation? You can only pray, “God help us” so many times before you grow weary of that. So, Mike and Janet, in their motel room opened their Bible to the Psalms. And for nearly three hours they prayed one Psalm after another, one Psalm after another. And the turmoil in their hearts became a rest in the Lord as they were gaining courage and strength. And while they are praying, the wicked hand of Satan came off their daughter. Their daughter announced she would go back with them. She came back and married a young Christian man, and together, they are trying to figure God out. They are trying to serve Him. They want to go to heaven.

I’ll tell you brothers and sisters, there is power in prayer. Now that’s a cliché you’ve heard many times, but it’s more than a cliché. It is real. But when turmoil is so deep in our hearts that we can’t even think clearly, especially if the turmoil is with God or with other people that we care about and somehow it’s all turned sour. Or, with our situation in life, and who we think we are and our self worth, and all that’s associated with it. I am telling you brothers and sisters, pick up that Bible. Turn to the Psalms. Pray the inspired prayer that is already there and God will speak

to your heart. Jesus will say, "Come to Me, I will give you rest." And the turmoil will turn to rest, and you will have faith in God.

Now my appeal today is very simple, but it's clear, so listen to it. It's this: If you would like to say to God today, "God, I am willing to give it a shot. I am willing to try praying through the Psalms. I will start tomorrow by praying in the Psalms. And I will do it for several days and see what happens." If you are willing to make that level of a commitment, I am going to ask you to stand. "Father in Heaven, I pray Heavenly Father that You will indeed give us all rest. Help my brothers and sisters to connect with you in a prayer experience that is deeper than any they've had before, fueled by Your Word, engaged in Your Spirit. Heavenly Father I pray that You will lead for where ever You lead we will go. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen."