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Growing with God – Diapers

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“...and we are asking for You to bless us. We are praying for You to be the One who will speak and bring conviction to us, helpful thoughts, whatever it is we need. We ask that You would do that. And we pray this in Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Now if you are a visitor here today, you may wonder what this baby is doing up here on the table? We are doing a four part series called, “Growing with God.” And the four parts are built around things I’ve learned from my grandson. Conner, I learned, cries basically for four reasons. He is either hungry, he needs to be burped, he has a diaper issue, or he is tired. Couple of weeks ago we looked at hunger. And we learned that the Bible talks about it being the milk of the word. It talks about growth, spiritually, that the Bible is the milk of the word. And we discussed how to just read the Bible. Read the Bible for the purpose of developing faith.

Many times the emphasis in church has been on faithfulness. The emphasis in the scriptures is on faith. If you really connect with God, if you really trust God, if you really have confidence in God, you will be faithful. But you can strive to be faithful all your life and never develop faith, and ultimately be lost, and unfortunately many people have. So we’ve learned to read the scriptures to find God.

The next week we looked at burping. And that’s dealing with the pains of life. Again, we went back to the Word of God, and we discovered how to go a little deeper in the Word of God; how to find ourselves in the story and to see how God deals with people in our situations. We looked at answering four questions when we read the story. What is the story? Who is in the story? What did they experience? What does this teach us about God?

And this week we are dealing with diapers. Another subtitle could be, “Cleaning up the Mess.” Now, I taught you what I know about feeding a baby. I even mixed a milk bottle. I taught you what I know about burping a baby. I showed you three or four different ways. I want you to know I know how to change a baby’s diaper. But in all honesty, I don’t know how to talk about it. I mean, what do you call it? Honestly, from the pulpit, in the church, family audience, what do you say? And how do you demonstrate it in a way that has any type of dignity involved? In fact, that was really impressed upon me. I don’t know how many of you know our head Elder, Jim Kelly? Jim would you kindly stand? That’s Jim. He is the guy who runs this church. You ought to give him a round of applause. He is our administrator, go ahead and be seated Jim.

Two weeks ago after the service, I was chatting with some of Jim’s cousins and his wife. And we knew this sermon was coming, about changing a diaper. And one of Jim’s cousins suggested that we bring Jim up here, lay him on a table, and we change a diaper on him. I want you to know, this guy wants to serve God so bad, and in so many ways, he said he was willing. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized, there would be no dignity in it. I mean, really! Changing you diaper, having somebody change your diaper, I mean, we are talking about privacy out the window. There is, it is so, I don’t know how to say it, but I just couldn’t put this doll through it. By the way, this is not my doll, but it is Conner’s clothes, and just so you know that is a Colts’ hat. And if you don’t know, that’s the brother that beat New England the year before. “Yeah, you sit there proudly, good boy!”

But changing diapers, cleaning up the mess! Boy, we can make a mess, can't we, with our lives? And before we open the Bible, I want to help you to understand what I mean by a mess. First of all, it is assumed that cleaning up the mess includes forgiveness of sin that the Lord wants to cleanse us of all unrighteousness. That's part of it. We will not be emphasizing that today, but that is part of it. The other aspect is a little less easy to get our hands on, but yet, I think it is essential. It is imperative in the hope that God wants us to have, and that is this. That cleaning up the mess is developing faith to believe God will take all things and work them together for good. That somehow not only will God forgive me for the mess I've made, but God will come into my life, get involved, and clean up the mess to the point that He can turn this into a good thing.

Let's read that in the Bible. Let's look at Romans chapter 8. In Romans 8 we read this incredible verse. We find it in verse 28. Paul says this as if it's a matter of fact, as if it's common knowledge, and he is just reminding the people that he wrote to. He says it this way, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God; to those who are the called according to His purpose." "All things work together for good to those who love God!" Even the messes of my life, God can turn to the good.

Let's look at this promise, and this hope in the context in which it comes to us. Back up to verse 26, same chapter. "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses." Now that's the Holy Spirit that is being spoken of there. "The Holy Spirit also helps in our weaknesses, for we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now, He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God." And then it goes on, "And we know, that all things work together for good..."

This is talking about a prayer experience. And that's what I want to talk to you about today. Praying in the Holy Spirit, praying in such a way that our vulnerable selves are given to God in such a way that He is able to clean us. He is able to clean us from sin, and He is able to clean up the mess in our lives and turn it to the good. Let's look at Revelation chapter 1 verse 10. We will read a verse that is very familiar to most of us. Yet, few actually understand its meaning. Revelation 1 verse 10. John who was the author writes this: "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. And I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet..."

Now when we read this verse, many people say, "Oh, yeah, yeah, 'I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day,'" some say "Well, that's Sunday because that's what they call the Lord's Day." Others say, "No, no, no, that's the Sabbath because Jesus is Lord even of the Sabbath." And others say, "Oh, no, no, it's epoch in time," and again, typical of Christianity, we get in this 'dog fight' over something that doesn't matter. And we miss what the text says. The text says, John said this: "I was in the Spirit, and when I was in the Spirit I heard a voice behind me." He heard a voice when he was in the Spirit. In verse 11 that voice speaks and says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," it is the voice of Jesus that he hears. John is in the Spirit, and when he is in the Spirit, he hears the voice of Jesus. Not only does he hear the voice of Jesus, but John will turn towards that voice in verses 12 and 13. It says, "Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the

seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.”

John is in the Spirit. When John is in the Spirit, he hears the voice of God. When John is in the Spirit, he sees God. He turns toward the voice, and he sees God. This experience is repeated in chapter 4. Revelation chapter 4 and verse 1, John says: “After these things I looked, and behold a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.” Immediately, I was in the Spirit; and behold a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.”

When John was in the Spirit, he left earth and went to the throne of God. When John was in the Spirit, he heard the voice of God. He saw God. He went to the throne of God. Brothers and sisters, that is what prayer is supposed to do for us. Prayer in essence is worship. Prayer is not a list of things that we need. As I will show you in a few moments that is not what prayer is. Prayer is worshiping God. Prayer is never asking God to come down here. Prayer is saying, “Lord, take me to You. Let me be at Your throne. Let me with You. Let me hear Your voice. Let me see You. Let me experience You.” And I’ll tell you brothers and sisters, when we learn to pray that way; we have a God that nobody can take from us. We have a faith that is strong. We have a hope that can carry us through. We know our God is victorious. We know our God is mighty. Our God is wonderful, and our God can get us through every single thing that comes our way. That is the faith that God wants us to have! And that comes by praying in the Spirit.

How do we pray in the Spirit? Well, first of all, we are going to have to be honest. Let’s turn to Psalm 139. David is the author of this Psalm, and this beautiful Psalm is divided into four basic areas. God knows all, God is everywhere, God formed me, and God search me. These are the four areas of this Psalm. Look at verses 1-6: “O Lord, You have searched me and know me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it.”

God knows all! That’s what he is saying. Man, God knows all! God knows all brothers and sisters. It is true; He knows all about you, He knows all about me. He knows everything we are into, and everything we are not into. He knows everything about us. We cannot surprise God. You cannot hide a sin from Him. You cannot duck and run for fear that, “Oh, no, I don’t want God to find out. God knows everything! He knows it all. You may think, “Well, I’ll run from Him.”

Next part of the Psalm is God is everywhere. Look at verse 7: “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall fall on me,’ even the night shall be light about me. Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from you, but the night shines as the day, the darkness and the light are both alike to You.”

You can see at night as if it's day! There is no such thing as darkness to God. You can't hide from Him. If I go to heaven, He is there. If I go to hell, He is there. If I go the East, He is there. If I go to the West, He is there. North, South, no matter where I go, God is! I can't run from Guy! He knows everything and He is everywhere. Spirit is going to be acknowledging that, and rejoicing in that. Because though God knows everything, and though God is everywhere, He loves us. In fact, the next part of the Psalm bears that out.

God formed us. Look at verse 13: "For you have formed my inward parts. You have covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You. When I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth..." Now ladies, what I'm going to tell you, may offend you? But I didn't write this. So don't be mad at me, okay? But I pondered what does it mean to be 'wrought in the lowest parts of the earth,' and what I studied said that that's some poetic way of describing the womb. Now, be upset with me if you want, but I didn't write that. "...skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed."

God saw our substance being yet unformed. I wrote in my margin, "DNA, question mark?" Likely! Who knows, or there may be some other discoveries we'll have before the Lord returns, and it will even be clearer. It goes on to say, "...And in Your book they all were written. The days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them." God knows all! God is everywhere, and God formed us! He knows why you do what you do. He knows why you don't do what you don't do. He knows you better than you know yourself. He understands you, He loves you, don't run from Him! Don't hide from Him; don't try to keep a secret from Him. Be honest with Him, be open with Him, let Him clean you up. That's what the Bible is teaching us today. Let God, who already knows the mess, let Him clean it up.

But I'll tell you, the choice is always ours. God never forces Himself upon a 'dirty diaper' life. He waits! And here is the type of thing that causes Him to respond. Look at verses 23 and 24, a beautiful prayer at the end of this Psalm: "Search me, o God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." This Psalmist, David, says, God knows all, He is everywhere. He formed me. I can't run from Him; I can't duck from Him. I can't out think Him. I just, I am going to surrender to Him. "Lord, search me, cleanse me, show me where I'm dirty. I'll give it to you. I will let you have every aspect of me." That brothers and sisters is a picture of faith and confidence in God, and that's where God wants us to be in our prayer experience.

Jesus weighed in on prayer. Let's turn to Matthew chapter 6. As you know, He spent a great deal of His life on earth in prayer. In Matthew chapter 6 when Luke records the prayer that Jesus says, he records it in the context that the disciples heard Jesus praying. And when He was done, they said, "Lord, teach us to pray like that." Well we come to chapter 6 verse 5. Jesus has some counsel about prayer. He says: "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward." What is their reward? They are seen by men. That's it. That's your reward. You want that? That's it, that's what you get.

Verse 6, "But you..." He says, "...when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."

Now listen carefully to what I am going to say. Praying together is a great blessing. Praying at prayer meeting, praying with the family, praying with friends, praying at church, praying in a small group, all those things are enriching, and wonderful experiences. But the prayer that cleanses us and takes our lives, and makes us what we are supposed to be, it's a private prayer. You go to God alone, and you talk to God about things that you will not talk to any other human being on earth. They have no right to hear it at all. It is between you and God. It is personal between you and God. Open up, be honest, and Jesus says, "You do that privately, God will reward you publically." How? You will be a person of faith. You will have confidence in God, and He will clean up the mess of your life. That is the promise we find in the word of God.

We go on in verse 7 Jesus says, "When you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words." I am not sure how the heathens pray although a man from India talked to me after the second service. And he said, well, one of the ways they pray in India is they have their mantra. You know, and they just repeat this phrase over and over and over and over. It made me think, "Wow, he's just described the way I prayed before." Not that I just have three word mantra, but, I get my list of needs that I have, and over time you pray that list back and forth, and up and down, you memorize it. In fact, it becomes so meaningless, eventually I've had the experience where I've said, "Well God, you know what's on the list, take care of it." And so, there is nothing happening in prayer.

I've even had the experience where I've knelt down and prayed, gave God all my needs, and got up more depressed than before I started. Why? Because I failed to understand something, and Jesus addresses it in the very next verse; the very next verse says: "Therefore do not be like them. For you Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him." In other words, prayer is not me having to tell God what my needs are. He already has got that. He knows that. He knows everything and He is everywhere, and He made me. And unfortunately, in many of our lives, prayer is indeed just that, it's our petitions. "I need help here, they need help, get rid of this..." whatever, on and on and on, and we never connect with God in the Spirit, by His Spirit. We don't go to His throne, we don't hear His voice, we don't see Him, and we don't worship Him. We just repeat our issues and concerns. And Jesus says, you know, He already knows that. Why are you talking to Him about that?

And then He goes on to describe how He wants us to pray. And He says, "Pray this way. Our Father..." Now, what I want you to do when you come to this in the Scriptures, most of you have memorized this. You understand, "Our Father which Art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name..." and you can go all the way through it. I learned it as a little boy, had to learn it for my first confession. Because in the church I grew up in, I had to learn that and the 'Hail Mary' and the 'Apostle's Creed' and when I'd go and make a confession, depending on the Priest's mood or how bad I was, or whatever, he would say: "Okay, now say three *Our Fathers*, couple of *Hail Mary's* and a couple of *Apostle's Creeds*." Okay, Done! Prayer never meant a thing to me, never meant a thing to me. I sometimes wondered if maybe that's a little bit of vain repetition thing Jesus was talking about.

But here is what I think Jesus wants us to do. Take the prayer as a template, take its phrases, break those down and talk to God about those different phrases. And once you have that template in your mind, you can be anywhere and pray for an hour, and enjoy it. When was the last time you went to the doctor's office and it took you an hour and a half longer than what you thought? Probably the last time you went to the doctor. And have you ever noticed the people there? They are sitting around and they are looking at their watches, and they are angry, and they are frustrated, and they are saying unkind things about the doctor, and "Why did we come?" and, on, and on, and on, and on.

Compare that with a person who has this template, "Our Father" and he talks to God or she talks to God about being their Father "...which Art in heaven" and talks to God about being in heaven. And just keeps going down through that prayer, breaking it apart in its particulars. I will tell you, with just a little bit of meditation, just a little bit of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we can spend a wonderful hour with God going through this prayer, and have worshiped Him! And have had our spirits buoyed and strengthened, and courage, wisdom and hope brought to us by the Spirit of God. See I believe that's what God wants for us. He wants to develop a connection with us where we say, "All right God, I've got a mess, now clean it up please." And we subject ourselves to the humiliation of all that's associated with the privacy of our hearts.

Karen and I celebrated our thirtieth anniversary on Monday. And we have three children, three grown children. They are all married, and we have a grandson and another grandson on the way. And there was a time period in my life where I kind of didn't think about our children as children. In fact, when they were teenagers, I had different ideas about them. But now that we've kind of come full circle, where we are grandparents, I am pretty nostalgic about the old days when the kids were little. We lived in a mobile home, the best we could afford. There were times when I remember that were just precious. You know, wrestling with them, having fun and things.

But to me, the homiest feeling I have in my mind is at the end of the day, when all three kids had been washed, bathed, they are all clean, they smell nice. They've got their pajamas on, fresh, clean pajamas. When they just kind of gather around us and we read a story, have word of prayer, take them to bed, do the tucking in and the tickling, and all that kind of stuff. And there they are. You go away and come back in a little bit and they are asleep. And that picture, that picture of contentment, of being clean, of being secure, of being content it just sticks in my mind and in my heart right now. And I believe that's where God wants us to be spiritually. Those children didn't worry about the bills. They didn't worry about the car that needed to be fixed. They didn't worry about any of that. The only thing they knew, they were clean, comfortable, secure, and they felt the love of mom and dad. That's all they knew.

I believe God wants you and me to enter into that type of experience spiritually with Him. He wants to cleanse us. He wants to take the sin away, and then He wants to deal with the cause of the sin in our lives. Are you willing? Are you willing to say "God, I will subject myself to Your deepest inspections into my heart. Search me oh God. Try me. See if there be any wicked way in me. I am willing now that I might be comforted by Your cleansing." If you want to say, "Yes" to God, please stand.

“Oh Father in Heaven, we want You to cleanse us. We give ourselves to You for that purpose. And we pray this in Jesus name, Amen.”