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Growing with God - Hunger

Jerry Arnold

“Father in Heaven, we are now about to open Your word and we are asking for You to do what only You can do. We pray that You will be the one who teaches us, who leads us in thought and in an emotion. We pray Heavenly Father for You to move in such a marked and mighty way that miracles will take place and lives will be changed for eternity. We ask and we pray this in Jesus’ name, Amen.”

We have such a blessing in our church family to have so many young adults. Every week it seems that somebody is coming up and announcing another person is pregnant or somebody had their baby, and babies, babies, babies everywhere. Pregnant women and babies, it’s kind of how you define our church. And my wife had an opportunity to go to Cradle Roll I not too long ago, couple of weeks ago, and she said there were twenty three babies in there; three of them were girls and twenty were boys. Those girls are in for a treat, ha?

Well, babies! And babies are on my mind, at least one baby in particular, because for fourteen weeks and two days I have been a grandfather. Not that I’ve mentioned that every week, but I did tell somebody, I’m throwing by book of illustrations away. I’ve got a grandson, who needs to read about stuff? I have a little story here that I think you will enjoy. It’s called, *A baby on the way*. “For weeks a six year old boy kept telling his first grade teacher about the baby brother or sister that was expected at his house. One day, the mother allowed the boy to feel the movements of the unborn child. The six year old was obviously impressed but made no comment. Furthermore, he stopped telling his teacher about the impending event. The teacher finally set the boy on her lap and said, ‘Tommy, whatever became of that baby brother or sister you were expecting at home?’ Tommy burst into tears and confessed, ‘I think Mommy ate it.’”

You know, life, babies, birthing, growing, it’s all kind of mysterious. It’s hard to explain, it’s hard to understand. Scientists dedicate themselves to it and study it all their lives, but still when it comes down to a miracle of life, it’s hard to understand. It’s a mystery, and God is behind it all. I have had a great privilege of babysitting for my grandson. I enjoy it, and I am an easy mark. In fact, Karen just has to say, “Hey, you want to go and see Conner,” and yes, I am in. It’s one mile from our driveway to our daughter’s, it doesn’t take long, and we know that track pretty, pretty well.

I’ve been studying this boy and other than being sick, there are really basically only four reasons that he cries. One is that he is hungry; the other is that he is tired; the other that he has a diaper issue, and the other one is, he has to burp. Those are the only four reasons. So when I am babysitting him, I just go through those four. Let’s see. Is it a burp, a diaper, is he tired, is he hungry? Now if he is hungry, obviously he needs to be fed. And if he is tired, then Conner, he likes to be held. And my wife has taught me, he likes to feel secure. Okay, how does he, I don’t know how he feels secure, but anyways, you hold him tight, and you just kind of bounce with him. And so you do this and you are going around the house like this.

Now, the kid is growing. And so he is going to learn to fall asleep in a rocking chair or he is just going to cry himself to sleep before long. He is getting big. The diaper, I understand some babies don’t care. But Conner, if he is at all wet or otherwise, he is having a fit. He needs

attention. And the burp, that is just a pain that must be relieved. Well, I've looked at these areas and I've actually discovered that they are in a way, the needs of all of us. And we are entering a series called, "Growing with God." And we are going to look at those particular areas. And in those areas we are going to discover ways that God ministers to us to help us to grow. Today, we will look at hunger. Next week we will look at tired. When Conner is tired, and or when we are tired, we need somebody to hold us, to make us feel secure, and in that environment, we will find rest. When we have a diaper, I liken it to a life that is so messy, somebody is got to come alongside and help clean it up. And just think in your mind of the humility of that process. But that has to happen spiritually to really grow. The burp, that's a pain that is so intense you can't get rid of it yourself. You need the gentle hands of somebody patting your back or rolling you on your stomach or however you can get rid of that type of pain. Spiritually there is a dimension to that. We are going to look at all these.

Today we are looking at hunger. Now before we open the Bible, I want you to think for a few moments of what it's like. You've been around friends or maybe you've experienced it? When the wife announces that she is pregnant. That becomes all the talk, all the talk, baby talk, baby talk. "How did you do?" "Oh, I vomited, and huh," yeah, yeah, you know, sick here there, you know. "Feeling better?" "Oh, you are starting to show." "Oh, we need to go to Penny's and get you some maternity clothes," and on and on, and on. It's all about the baby. It's all consuming. And we are sinful, selfish human beings.

Imagine how consuming it is to God who loves us with an eternal compassion and love that is so much beyond our ability to understand. You see it was God kneeling down in the dust that formed Adam. Breathe into him the breath of life and took a rib from him and made a woman; God, personally involved in the creative act of man beginning. That story was taught a group of Sunday schoolers and one boy was fascinated at the idea of woman being made from a rib. And that week, this little boy was at home. And his mother asked him what was wrong because he was lying on the carpet all curled up like this. And he said, "I've got this horrible pain in my side, I think I am having a wife." God earnestly wants you and I to understand His care for us as we grow with Him.

Please turn in your Bibles to Jeremiah chapter 1. In Jeremiah chapter 1 we'll begin with verse 4. Jeremiah says, "Then the word of the Lord came to me..." So what we are going to read next is a direct quote from God. Here is what God says: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations." Now he is speaking directly and specifically to Jeremiah. But in principle, the truth is for us as well. That before we were ever in our mother's womb, God knew us. God cared about us, God loved us. God has a plan for us.

This week Pastor Kevin and I were chatting about the topic of the sermon this week, and I said, "Kevin, you are a father. You've got three lovely children. If we are trying to understand the perspective of God's love towards us, and I ask you about your love towards your children, what will you come up with?" And he just painted this fantastic picture of how he wants his children to trust him, to believe in him, to understand that he is going to open up windows and doors that they cannot even imagine. And I watched him do this couple of weeks ago with the children. The two little twins were there by the waiting pool. Now the older girl, Kara, was in

the water. She was swimming away. Kevin had taught her to swim. And the way he taught her is he would just be in front of her and say, "Daddy won't do anything to hurt you. You just follow me, you can do it, you can do it." And he stayed right with her until she learned how to swim. And he even asked her, he said, "How do you feel Kara?" And she said, "I feel great!"

So Kevin is likening that to God with us. And I watched as the two twins put their foot in, put their foot out. Put their hand in, put their hand out. Just kind of stand back, scared of that water. Kevin, all the time knowing that they would actually love it because he doesn't even like to give them baths because it's splash city. Eventually he and Malinda coaxed them into the water, and they loved it. This is a beautiful, tender picture to me of God with us. He has adventures for us that we may be reluctant and afraid to enter into, but He wants us to trust Him enough to follow Him through it. And in the end, He will say, "How do you feel," and we'll say, "I feel great! I feel great, never knew I could do that, never knew it was possible." "While you were in the womb, before you were formed, I knew you. I loved you; I had a plan for you."

Another picture of God and His relationship to humanity is given in Matthew chapter 23. And here it shows a very feminine side of God. Matthew 23 verse 37, this passage takes place during the last week of the life of Jesus. He has come to Israel to redeem them, to the whole world, and they are rejecting Him. Verse 37 Jesus says this: "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" Here is a beautiful picture of God saying, "I am like a mother hen, and I want to gather all of you under my wings so you will be protected from whatever is out there. And I want to be the One that provides that sense of security and wholeness and comfort for you." What a tender picture it is.

Now if you are in Matthew, our next passage is Zephaniah, let me help you get there. Go forward to Matthew chapter one. Then keep going you'll come to Malachi, go pass Malachi, keep going forward, you will come to Zechariah. When you come to Zechariah keep going, the next thing would be Haggai and then Zephaniah. Zephaniah 3 verse 17: "The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you in His love; He will rejoice over you with singing." I'll tell you, that is a picture of a loving Father or a loving Mother. Mighty One to save, right there to protect, and of course we look at that in the context of eternal life and all that, but also, "...He will rejoice over you with gladness."

I don't know what it is about my grandson. He doesn't particularly look like me; he looks like miniature of his father. But when I look at that kid, I can't stop looking at him. I just am in awe at him. I rejoice over that kid in gladness. And of course, I seek to quiet him when he is disturbed, in love. And what more tender picture is there than a mother with her child, and the mother singing to the child? I just read this morning that you can tell you are mother when you are in the grocery store by yourself, you hear a baby crying, and you begin to rock and hum softly. I've seen my wife do it. Our kids were in their teens. And we'd be seated some place, and she'd be gently rocking and humming to herself. It's a mother's instinct.

Well, picture God this way. God saying, "I want to save you, I rejoice over you with gladness, I want to quiet you with My love, and rejoice over you with singing." I am learning a lot about

parenting, in fact, probably more this go-around than I did the first go-around. Singing! Do you know that babies like some songs better than others? I have learned that when Conner is restless, and you are really trying to calm him down, you have two options. Karen can sing the words, I can't remember them. So I have to hum "Away in the Manger." That's a calming song. If that doesn't work, "Singing in the Rain" does. And I don't know why, I don't know how the kid learned that song, or why it's his favorite? But children respond to that singing. They respond to that gentleness and what is going on, and so do we. This is a picture for us of God's attitude towards us. And our study today is to learn to grow with Him, to learn from Him, to learn of Him.

I'd like for you to turn in your Bibles to First Peter, chapter 2. We have an expression that is used in verse 2. We'll read verses 1, 2, and 3 though, but the thought is verse 2. The reason we are reading all of it is because it's one sentence and I just don't like to jump in mid sentence. First Peter 2 verse 1: "Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and all evil speaking, as new born babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious." The pure milk of the word! I could show you a couple of other passages that talk about the milk of the word and the meat of the word. And it's a process for a baby to go from milk to cereal, and then work their way to solids and then eventually meat if you will. Well, soy meat, okay.

Well, we are talking about the milk; the milk of the word, the beginnings of growing with God. Now, I have spent time this week studying in the library about affective ways to teach Bible study. How do you grow, the milk of the word? How do we really assimilate it to our experience? And it was as I suspected. We've made it so complicated; people really don't know how to do it. Let me read you just couple of titles I looked at. "Effective Bible Study, a Guide to Sixteen Methods." Boy, it just makes you want to curl up with it, doesn't it? Here is another one: "Profitable Bible Study, Eight Methods of Studying the Bible." Well that's getting closer, but that's still too difficult. This one I thought was very interesting, "A survivor's guide to Biblical Studies, twenty eight rules of thumb for reading and interpreting Biblical text." Can you imagine, you've spent your morning reading the Bible, and you say, "Oh, what was rule fourteen now? Boy, man I think I missed that one."

It's so complicated. You know, even, even feeding a baby today has become complicated. Now, I suspected something and I did some research at our local Wal-Mart. And it confirmed my suspicions. Back in my day, when our children were little, if you had to supplement, the child's, you know, the mother's nursing, you had to supplement with formula, there was one formula, and you go and you get it, and that's it. No problem! Today, at Wal-Mart, on their shelves, you can buy twenty five different kinds. You can get milk with iron, milk that's milk based, you can get milk that's soy based, you can get milk for babies with fussiness or gas, you can organic, you can get it with lipids, you can get fussy with gas or spit-up, and of course the always popular, comfort proteins for easy digestion. Wow, where do you start?

And then I thought, well surely, it will be easier with bottles. Oh no, there are twenty two different types of bottles. There is natural flow, there is bubble free, there is orthodontic, there is slow-flow nipple, there is the always popular, comfort to hold bottle. It's seems like nothing is easy anymore, and it's all very complicated. And that kind of has come into the Bible study and

teaching of the Bible as well. But I want to show you some of the things I've learned by feeding Conner and how they apply to the Bible. First of all, I want you to know, I did not pick the formula. I let the baby's mom and dad do that. I cannot even read the fine print in here, it's too small. I have no idea why they chose this one, but they did all the research. So the information has come down to me from others who know. Now that's a hint about reading the Bible. Other people have walked this path before, all right?

So I'm going to babysit for Conner. That means at some point I'm going to have to feed the kid. So Hannah, mama number one, and Karen, mama number two, want to make sure I don't hurt this kid. So they make very clear directions for me. They said that you take this formula, you take the bottle; Conner is good for about six ounces, all right? On the bottle, there it is, two, three, four, five, six ounces, right there. I can see it, I can understand it, I can relate to it. First step, you have to add water first. I don't know why, but I was taught that. So, I am only going to go two ounces, there we go here; got to have a steady hand to do this. There we are, two ounces.

Now, their instructions were this: Inside of this container of milk is a little scoop. Take that scoop, get it full. It's one scoop for every two ounces. I get it, six ounces three scoops, four ounces two scoops, right? I can handle that. Here we go; you put it right in there, just like that. I did learn on my own that you got to tighten this down. You put it in there and you give it a shake. Oh, I forgot to tell you about water temperature can't be too cold, can't be too hot. Well you get it? Here it is, it's ready to go. I don't know how it works, but somehow, this will sustain life.

Now, I learned something about bottles and feeding that I didn't know before. And that's this: Conner is going to eat at his own speed. When my babies were little, we had bottles that were more flexible. And I learned a trick. And I tried it with Conner, and it doesn't work. You see, Conner will take more time than I am willing to give sometimes. He is just looking around, and every now and then he takes a drink, and every now and then he is just looking around. So I tried squeezing the bottle, shhhh, you know, like a cat being sprayed, just leaking away. That's the way I used to do it. The bottles are hard now. Somebody squalled. I can't do that. So you are stuck dealing with the baby at their own pace.

There is something about this milk. The kid is fourteen weeks old. All he's had is this and his mother. And in the last two weeks, some major changes are taking place. He's gone from being this well formed athletic looking baby into a sumo-wrestler. He's even got fat on his head. I am concerned. I told Karen, "We've got to get him exercising or something." She said, "No, no, babies do that, it's okay." Just this milk and his mother, and this kid, you know; if he gets any bigger, he's going to be scary. It all happens, it all works. It's a simple process and miracles of whatever is happening in his body are taking place, and he is growing.

Let's apply this spiritually. First of all, before I teach you a simple way to grow with God, I want to tell you. What I am going to teach you, the devil doesn't want you to know. What I am going to teach you, the devil doesn't want you to practice. The devil doesn't care if you read the Bible trying to understand doctrine so you can argue with somebody else. The devil doesn't care if you read the Bible to gain an understanding of history. The devil doesn't care if you are looking

for sociological principles or psychiatry or something like that. He doesn't care. You can read the Bible all day; he is not going to bother you.

But what I am going to teach you to do is seek the heart of God, to seek a relationship with God where you will know God. And when you know God, you will have eternal life, Jesus said. The devil doesn't want you to do that. And so though this method is simple, it will require some resolve on your part to continually follow through with it. Reading the Bible devotionally is not so much a technique as it is, are you ready for this, an attitude of the heart. It is the spirit of seeking after God. It is the spirit of humility which listens to the voice of God. It is the spirit of adventure that pursues the will of God and it is the spirit of adoration that rests in the presence of God.

Turn to Hebrews chapter 4. We are just going to look at verse 12, just a very first part: "For the word of God is living and powerful." The New International Version says, "...living and active." The Amplified Version says, "...alive and full of power" making it active, operative, energizing and affective. The word of God is alive! It does something, it is powerful, it is active, it is operative, energizing and affective. Now go to Isaiah 55 and we are going to see what that word does. Isaiah chapter 55 and we'll start with verse 8, God says this: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways', says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain comes down and the snow from heaven, and do not return there but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to me empty or void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."

Do you realize what is being said here? God's word is alive. He is saying it is His thoughts which are higher than ours. It is His ways which are different than ours. His word is affective like rain that comes down and causes life to grow, and He says, His word which comes from His mouth will not return empty, but it will do the work it sent to do. As we expose ourselves to God, as we begin to read His word, that word affects us supernaturally. God is the One doing the work, we just avail ourselves of His working.

Now, if you were to ask me today, if you were to say, "Jerry, I want to start reading the Bible, how can I do it?" Here is what I would tell you to do. First of all I would ask you, "Do you want to read it in the New Testament or in the Old Testament?" If you say you'd like to read it in the New Testament, I would tell you what I was told. I was told, "Begin with the Gospel of John, and just start reading." That's all. Just start reading, what you understand enjoy, and so forth and so on. Now, I use to tell people that for many years. "Start in the Gospel of John." I don't say that anymore. You can if you want, I don't know why, but Matthew is the first book, so I'd say, start in the beginning. Read Matthew. When you are done reading Matthew, read John, then read Mark, and then go look at some of the letters. But the main thing is, is to enjoy the process. Open your heart attitudinally. You are trying to connect with God. That's all.

If you want to read it in the Old Testament, fine. Start in Genesis. Why? It's the first book. It's a reason it's there. In fact, many scholars say, Genesis is the entirety of the Bible, the rest of the Bible is just explaining Genesis. I don't know if that's true? But you can read the stories of

Genesis, and read the Bible until you get to Exodus chapter 20 and then stop. Because you are going to get into all kinds of details about the sacrificial system and all kinds of laws that are weird to our culture, and to our understanding, and so, skip the rest of the part. Go to First Samuel. Story picks up again. Read First Samuel through Esther, if you get bogged down in Chronicles, give up on it. Forget it. Move where you are being blessed. But expose yourself to the milk of the Word.

Now let me share with you some of the lessons I've learned from helping Conner, from feeding him. Number one, I've mentioned earlier, you have to take it as it comes. Some of you would want to read more than others, you take it at your pace. You take it at your pace! You also will want to develop a daily habit of doing this. Here is another thing I learned. Mama number one, Hannah, and mama number two, Karen, made it very clear. After I've mixed the bottle of milk, and I fed Conner, and we've done the burp thing, and everybody is happy again, and the diapers are changed and all this, and there is some left over; if it's sitting out on the counter, I can't read the print on here, it's too small. I don't know what the time period is on it, but they said after a short while, throw it out. Don't take a chance on this spoiling, and then giving it to Conner. Because then somebody is going to have to be all night up with him because he is colicky and in pain, and all kinds of stuff.

So I've learned, once you are done with this thing, it's gone. Lesson: yesterday's bottle is not affective today. We need to have a regular experience with God. We need to meet with Him and let Him hold us quietly and give us the milk of His word, and we will grow. Here is another thing I've learned from Conner. When you feed him a bottle, you better put a bib on him because not everything gets in. In fact, he's got some cute bibs. My favorite is this one. His father is the police officer with the city of Chattanooga, and he's got a bib that says: "My Daddy can arrest your Daddy." That is cool. That is so cool.

Well, you are feeding this kid. He's got a bib, and he'll have stuff drooling down his mouth there on the front, and he just looks up, he is just having a good time. For some reason he likes it when you pet it, he'll smile at you. Point: you read, not everything you read is going to sink in. It's okay! Enjoy the process. God is holding you. God is loving you. He is caring for you. He is nurturing you. You won't understand; it won't all be simulated. And here is another thing that I've learned. I don't know why, but for me, Conner likes it when I hold him with my left arm, and I feed him with my right. I suspect it's because I am more accurate. But anyways, he likes that. And Karen keeps teaching me that he likes to feel secure. So you don't have his arms and legs flopping around and stuff like that, you kind of bundle him up a little bit, and when he is getting sleepy, you put a blanket on him because he is going to cool off. Even though, he is like a little space heater on you.

Well, he likes to eat when it's quiet. There are not a lot of distractions, and it's a secure environment. What's the lesson for us? Read your Bible in the quiet place where there are not a lot of distractions, a place where you feel secure. And let your senses feel the very presence of God as He comes close to you. Now this is not a hard process. It is not a difficult process. It is mostly an attitude and a decision.

The other day, Jim Kelly and I got a phone call. Jim is our head Elder and church administrator. We had one of our loving church members in his mid seventies, he was requesting prayer. We went and anointed him. And this individual had been at death's door, had come back, but still there was danger. And we gathered at his bed, we were around a circle there, and he said he wanted to pray first. Now I'll tell you, he prayed a prayer, it got me right in the heart because I realized. "Man, that's the prayer of a man who's been nurtured in the loving arms of God. It's the prayer of a man who knows God." Here is what he prayed. He said, "Jesus, I am asking you to come and hold me. I want you to hold me in Your arms." He said, "I've got cloths, blood cloths in my lungs and I am asking You to remove those. I want You to heal me. But if You don't, it's okay because I want to be with You."

Now that my friends is the experience of one who's been nurtured and growing with God, and held by God. Death's door, "I want to be healed Lord, but it's okay because I want to be with You. Lord, come hold me." I'll tell you brothers and sisters that tender scene can be repeated a thousand times over with us. It can be repeated every day of our lives. If we will take some time to let the milk of the word come into our lives. Just to read with an open mind, just to read with an open heart, just to read with the desire to connect with the heart of God. Not to prove something right or to prove something wrong. Just to find God. And I promise you; He will hold you and His word will do a work in you that is unbelievable.

One of the points I forgot to make about Conner's rapid growth here in the last couple of weeks, is this. He's been getting the same amount as far as I can see, and all of a sudden, he is growing. It's going to be that way for you too. You may go for a short while and feel like, "Man, nothing is happening. Then all of a sudden you are going to grow. And you'll say, "Wow! God is with me. God is doing something in my life. God is changing me. Praise God I'm glad I stuck with it, I'm glad I hung in there.

Today, simple appeal and that is this. Would you like to say to the Lord, "Lord, I want to enter into the experience of growing with You. I want a devotional life with You. I want You to hold me, and I want You to give me the milk of Your Word." If you want to say that to God, please stand. "Loving Father, hold us. Hold us gently. Rejoice over us, save us, sing to us, and give us rest. And above everything, let us feel Your heart in our lives. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen."