



"Send us to bring them in"

## **GROWING IN HUMILITY**

**by Colleen Wheeler**

During worship recently, the Lord gave me a vision of a tadpole swimming in a pond. Then the word came forth.

"Some of you are like tadpoles in My pond of life. You must grow before you can climb up on your lily pad. A tadpole does not have arms or legs. It swims but it cannot climb. You cannot escape the growing process; you must go through it. I am calling you to grow first, then go."

about seven years old, my parents took my brother and me to a little beach on the Hudson River where they kept a small rowboat. One warm day, while they sat on a huge flat rock talking to each other, my brother followed me as I walked toward the rowboat. It was anchored about a foot from the shoreline in front of the rock my parents sat on. Jimmy and I wore cutoffs, T-shirts, and sneakers, and I had my long brown hair pulled up into a ponytail on top of my head.

As I stepped into the water, Jimmy walked behind me, following each step I made. I grabbed the backside of the boat to keep me balanced, and so did he. The water was up to our waists and our feet were touching the bottom of the muddy river. We worked ourselves around to the side of the boat, hand over hand; the water was getting higher, almost to necks, but our feet could still touch the bottom. When we finally reached the front of the boat, we let go and headed toward our parents. As I took a step near the shore, it suddenly seemed like the ground dropped out from under me. I felt my body sinking into a hole. I kicked my legs hard and finally rose to the surface, then swam desperately to dry ground. When I got out of the water, I looked back and saw that Jimmy was in the hole I had sunk into; he was struggling and sinking. I screamed to my mother and father to help, but they thought we were playing around, so they simply laughed and continued their conversation.

I balanced my feet on the edge of a rock and leaned over to pull Jimmy out, but he ended up pulling me back in. Now we were both in the hole. This time, as I tried to swim to the surface, Jimmy grabbed hold of my ponytail. I kept struggling to get to the top. I looked through the water ripples and saw my parents talking, but I couldn't get their attention. Jimmy kept pulling my ponytail, making me sink back down every time I got near the surface.

All of a sudden I felt a huge hand grab the back of my T-shirt. In an instant Jimmy and I were pulled up out of the water. My father held my brother and me in each of his hands, dangling us by our shirts. We hung there in midair, coughing and crying with fear. As my father lowered us onto the soft, dry sand, he smiled and said, "Did you two see any fish down there?" He laughed gently, and then told us he had an eye on us the whole time. My earthly father saved us from drowning in the depths of the Hudson River.

### **Do Not Move Out Prematurely**

We need to discern our maturity through God's eyes and let go of striving over who is going to make it to the top first. Can we relax and trust in His perfect timing to bring us to the next level? As a tadpole must go through a growth period before crawling up onto the lily pad; we too must grow before we can be raised up and go. The growth process for the tadpole cannot be rushed or forced; it must happen naturally, in God's perfect timing.

I remember asking my first pastor if I could preach. He said he would let me, but he was waiting for something to occur in me first. I did not understand what he was waiting for and it drove me crazy. I constantly tried different ways to change into the person I thought he was looking for because I was anxious to do what I was called to do. "Just tell me what I have to do and I will do it," I used to ask him. I did not understand the natural growing and being process, but only related to going and doing. The Lord wants to mold and shape our character before He brings us to the next level.

My earthly father kept his eye on my brother and me. How much more does our heavenly Father have His eye on us at all times. He knows all things. He sees when we are being impatient and watches our responses. He knows when we take things into our own hands and try to walk into the waters before His timing. He watches as we become frantic with anxiety in all the activity. He knows when our hearts are filled with frustration, competitiveness, jealousy and strife that drive us prematurely to the top. He looks upon us when we let go of our anchored boat before our appointed time, and He even allows the bottom to drop out from under us occasionally to wake us up. In His love and mercy, He pulls us up from the murky waters and gives us another chance to get it right.

### **Sea Sponge / Season**

I received a vision during prayer of a SEA SPONGE. When I wrote down the two words, I saw the word SEASON when the P and the E were dropped off. I then saw a diver swimming all the way down to the bottom of the water toward a sea sponge. The boat remained afloat as the diver dove into the water to bring up the sponge. I believe the Lord wants to speak through this metaphor. It is time for a cleansing. The process may be challenging, but it will only be for a season.

This is what I believe He was saying: "Have you been doing the same thing over and over and getting the same results? Have you been getting nowhere and just going through the motions? Listen to me. I want to do a new thing in you. I desire to pluck you up and bring you out from what you have been doing and put you in My boat.

I will purify you from all the junk you have been feeding on (as a sea sponge filters impurities): the boastful pride of life, prestige and power. I have a future and a hope for you, and I wish to raise you up to a higher level in Me so you can perform great exploits. But I cannot do this until you are willing to come out from what you have been doing.

"Be humble; be willing to go through this purifying process. I desire to purge you from all that is not of Me and prepare you for what is coming. I may have to place you on a shelf for a season to burn out the dross so I can fill you with my presence. Are you willing to go through that process? This is only for a season. Rest in Me and know that I am your God. I am cleansing and purifying you so I can use you for My glory. I will soak you in My river of life and do great and mighty things through you.

"As a sponge exfoliates a body, you will exfoliate My body the church. But do not move out before the purification process is complete. Doing so would be counterproductive. You might end up being too abrasive, thereby hurting My people. When I am ready to use you, you will know it. You will smell of My sweet fragrance, filled with My love. I am making you pliable, more loveable, more like Me. I will work through you and use you to cleanse the scales from My wounded body. Be open to what I am doing. Do not move out, but stay in My will and trust My plan. Be still and know that I am your God. I will never leave you or forsake you. Believe Me when I say this; those who have ears, let them hear."

Before the Lord could bring me to this season of my life, I had to learn the hard way. I was in need of healing, but had ignored that need. Instead of taking the time to get healed, I entered into a whirlwind of ministry, running myself ragged while my relationship with the Lord grew distant. I fought my way through church politics to become what I felt God had called me to be.

Enduring unjust spiritual lashings while carrying around unhealed hurts, I reached a very low point. But during this season of reflection and healing, the Lord showed me my own sins of anger, bitterness and strife. Like Peter said to Jesus when He told him that he could have no part of Him unless He washed his feet, I also say, "Lord, not just my feet, but wash all of me!"

I am turning to Him, my Husband, Friend and Identity, and away from the approval of man. I have repented of idolatry: placing men on a pedestal, making them gods and seeking applause from them. I am calling out to God to set me free from the chains that have held me captive for so long under the oppression of man. "Yes, Lord, I will go through the process. I want to be that pliable sea sponge so I can wash others' feet."

**Will You Wash Feet?**

During a prayer meeting, I saw a vision of Jesus on His knees humbly washing feet. His head was down and His long hair was hanging over His face. His body language showed that His heart was beating with agape love for His disciples.

In order to truly love one another, we first need to receive the Father's love. Then we can serve with clean hands and pure hearts. Part of servanthood is bowing low to wash the feet of others. Even though feet sometimes smell bad, we need to wash them, and He will give us grace to do so.

I realize now that the Lord has been preparing me for this task for years. Before I got saved, I shared a tender moment with my husband. He carried me through the front door of our apartment when we were newly wed. Sadly, this was the last happy moment we had together. My marriage soon disintegrated, and I spent endless nights lying in bed waiting to hear his footsteps pass by the bedroom window. I was always happy to hear them, but also felt angry and hurt. Most of the time, I pretended to be asleep when he came into the room because I didn't want to start arguing with him about his late arrival.

His nightly ritual consisted of coming into the house and tossing all his clothes on the floor, including his socks, which were so soiled they could practically stand up by themselves. He would then sneak into the bedroom, lift the covers, and climb into bed, snuggling his body up to mine. I became so disgusted by the smell of alcohol and his dirty feet. I started yelling at him to at least wash his feet before he got into bed.

As time passed he began to sleep on the couch, but the stench of his feet was so strong I could smell them from the other room. Most mornings I walked to the living room with a small plastic bag, picked up one sock at a time, held them at arm's length, and placed them in the bag. I quickly tied a knot in the top of the bag and tossed it into the hamper. After a few months of this, I finally gave him his own hamper.

I sometimes wonder if I had been saved then, would I have been able to wash my husband's feet?

How do we react when we encounter the smelly feet of others? Are we humble enough to endure the stench? In the days of Jesus, people wore sandals, and their feet picked up all the dust and mud of the land they walked on. Whenever guests arrived at someone's home, a slave would immediately wash their feet. The visitors' feet were always soiled, as dung and dirt often seeped in through their sandals. When Jesus washed the disciples' feet, He expressed the essence of humility, an act of a true servant.

### **We too Must Be Servants**

During the time I was married, I managed a hair salon in a fishermen's town that attracted a lot of tourists. We offered full salon services, including pedicures. The procedure was humbling, but I didn't mind. I liked making people feel good, and it was my job to serve them. Besides, this additional service brought in extra money.

One day, an old overweight fisherman walked in and asked if we did pedicures. I looked at his crusty feet and saw overgrown toenails peeking out of his worn leather sandals. When I looked toward my boss I noticed he had a big grin on his face. Looking back at the man I said, "Sure, have a seat." I ran in the back to prepare his footbath water, wondering how much barnacle residue had built up on the bottom of his feet. I poured extra soap into the pedicure bowl and added half a bottle of Clorox bleach.

The man's toenails were as hard as a crab claw. How I got through that pedicure treatment is a mystery to me. At the end of the vision I had of Jesus washing feet, I saw a disturbing image. Jesus was being scourged, the flesh on His back torn apart as deep wounds were opened. I believe the Lord showed this to me because there is something similar going on in the church. Many leaders are scourging their servants while they are trying to wash feet. They are ministering with their own unhealed wounds, which leads to wounding their sheep.

If you have been out to sea so long that barnacles have built up on your feet; if you are like the sea sponge filtering impurities you need to get out of your comfort zone and allow Jesus to buff up your feet, until you are healed and purified. Remember it will only be for a season.

A humble and contrite heart God will not despise. But we cannot develop humility apart from the Lord. We must go through His lessons in order to learn. Once we are able to endure the hardship and humiliation that come with the maturity He desires for us, we will walk with authority and carry the mantle He has ordained for us to carry. Jesus wants to wash our feet first so we can wash the feet of others with His heart of humility. We must allow Jesus to cleanse us and heal us so that we can become the true servants He is calling us to be.

It is time to get a divine pedicure! Then we can follow His example and care for other people's feet without wounding them further. Jesus came to serve, not to be served. We too must be servants.

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