

## **The Labor and Birth of Samuel James October 28, 2008**

As the birth of my fourth child loomed closer and closer, my dread for labor continued inside my heart. I did not want to go through childbirth again. My third labor (just 18 months prior) was still fresh in my mind. The pain and effort of labor and delivery dominated my memory.

Jason and I prayed over the coming birth of our son and, we both kept “hearing” the Lord say to us “this one is going to be ‘different’”. We did not know what He was telling us, specifically, but we both heard continually to prepare ourselves, because this birth was not going to be like the others.

Difference number one became clear weeks before the first contraction hit. My mother would not be able to attend this birth. She was at the previous two (out of three) births and blessed our whole family with her presence. Not having her here for this baby saddened my heart. However, I understood her situation and even “released” her of her assumed responsibility to attend. I knew she was needed at home in Wyoming. As Samuel’s due date hurried closer to us, Jason and I also realized that his mother, Tami, would not be able to attend. This was also a huge difference from the other births. Tami attended all my births until this one. It was very difficult for Jason and me to accept that neither of our mothers would be here to celebrate our son’s birth. There would be no grandma cooking breakfast, baking the birthday cake, reading stories to the grandkids, taking pictures of labor, smiling through tears as the child is born, and the house was oddly empty.

The rest of the “difference” of this birth became apparently soon into labor.

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Monday, October 27<sup>th</sup>, I woke up to a contraction. I lay in bed and allowed the contraction to roll through my body. Hmm... Maybe this is IT. All day, the contractions continued. They were between 10-15 minutes apart. I folded laundry, made meals for the kids, and continued life “as usual”.

Around 3pm, I began cramping. My back started to ache and the contraction’s intensity increased slightly. I realized I was in labor, for real. I called Jason at work; he was already on his way home from a short workday. We called the midwife, the grandparents, our childcare friends and our intercessors.

Jason and I walked the kids down to the guard shack to put the midwives and their apprentices’ names on the “guest list” so they could have access to Base Housing. The entire walk was about one mile. It felt good; the contractions were not strong enough to make me stop. I was able to walk through each one.

Four hours later, the contractions were still only 10 minutes apart. Their intensity was

about the same. We called our midwife, Jeni Rector, and asked her to come over to listen to the baby's heart rate, check blood pressure, etc. It was about 9pm when she arrived at our house. The heart rate, etc was great. I wanted Jeni to do an internal exam to see if I was dilating at all. I wanted to know if I was really in labor or if this was just a "false alarm".

The internal exam told us that I was about four and half centimeters dilated, 50% effaced and that the baby was at "0" station. The cervix was still posterior, tucked behind the baby's head. My contractions were working. There was still much to be done inside my body, but I felt good knowing something was happening with all these contractions.

We decided to go to bed. By now, it was midnight. Jeni went home, leaving her birthing bag in case she needed to hurry back. Jason, Rachel and I went to bed. I did doze through the night, contractions waking me every 15-20 minutes or so. Many contractions woke me with the pain and I moaned through them. Jason would reach his hand out to me and pray for me as I managed the pain of early labor. All night, as the contractions tinkered along, I labored.

The sun rose and Jason got up with the kids. I moved to the recliner in our room and watched the morning sky. I was tired. I was frustrated that I had been in labor for 24 hours and there was no baby. This had never happened to me. My longest labor was my first, totaling just about 15 hours. The second labor was only eight hours; the third only about six. Twenty-four hours was long. Even though the contractions were not terribly intense and were still spaced out 10-15 minutes apart, my body was already weary from the labor. And many of the contractions were painful enough to cause me to moan and breathe through the pain.

As I sat in the recliner, I allowed myself to imagine laboring at the hospital. I imagined what an epidural would feel like, how it might take away the pain. I imagined losing myself to the doctors and their labor management. Maybe that would be better. Maybe that is what I wanted. To just toss natural childbirth and homebirth out the window and do something completely different.

When Jason came back into the room, I told him I was thinking about going to the hospital to have this baby. He totally stopped whatever he was doing and came to sit beside me.

"Why?" he asked me. His face was tender and compassionate. I started to cry.

"Because I'm tired of this. I've been in labor 24 hours! Let's just go to the hospital. Let them give me an epidural, break my water, give me pitocin and have this baby."

We talked about the pros and cons of the hospital. Jason reminded me that epidurals don't always work. We agreed on a "contract". I would labor at home for five more hours. After that, we would reevaluate whether to go to the hospital or stay at home. I lifted my chin and agreed.

By then the kids had left for the babysitter's house. Rachel, my sister, took the kids to a friend's house and stayed there until the baby was born. It brought me great peace to know the kids were safe and happy with their aunt and good friends.

Jason wanted us to go for a walk. I was very discouraged about the long labor and not seeing much improvement, but I agreed to go on the walk. Jason brought his stopwatch so we could get a good idea on the pattern of my unruly contractions. The first two contractions on the walk were 12 minutes apart. By the time we arrived home, one mile later, they had progressed to about 4 minutes apart.

The crisp, fall air and my husband's company refreshed my spirit. Jason and I held hands and laughed on our walk. We enjoyed being together. I was encouraged by the increase of intensity and the closer spacing of my contractions. Maybe I really would have this baby today.

Back home, we paused for lunch and to call everyone with updates. Then, we went for another one-mile walk. This one was more intense. The contractions were a constant 4 minutes apart throughout the walk and many lasted around a minute in length. Still, when we got home and sat down, the contractions petered back out to around 10 minutes apart.

We called Jeni to update her on my progress. Everyone liked the idea of Jeni coming over to check on dilation and the status of the baby. Jeni's internal exam brought good news. Those spacey contractions were actually doing some good stuff inside my body. I was now at a 6/7 in cervical dilation, 75% effaced and the cervix was no longer posterior. My body was ripening for delivery. I sat on my coffee table (which we had used as an examining table) and cried. The changes were great, but I still felt so very far away from being "done" with this labor. I was tired. Jeni sat beside me and hugged me, comforting and assuring me that it would be "ok".

Jeni had brought a mixture of black cohosh and blue cohosh, two natural herbs that increase contractions in slow moving labors. The instructions said to mix a teaspoon of the finely ground herbs with a cup of water. I chose to just take the teaspoon of herbs like a teaspoon of dirt. It tasted like chalk. I swallowed it, licked the spoon and chugged water. Half an hour later, my labor finally became "active". It was on. The time was 3pm. I had been in labor for 32 hours.

The change in my labor was obvious. My contractions became very painful. Many were long, feeling almost as two contractions piled on top of each other. The pain in my lower abdomen increased with each contraction.

Jeni called her apprentices, and, judging by the intensity of my contractions, she assumed delivery was only a few hours away. Maybe even by five pm. I called my amazing doula, Amelia, and told her to come on over.

I labored in the chair in the living room, in the bathroom, and walking around the downstairs. When the contractions grew incredibly intense, Jeni suggested the birthing tub.

I got in the tub, but the water was cold. Everyone hurried to warm the water up for me, but I started shivering and felt miserable. Contractions continued, and now I was cold. Not fun. After their sweet efforts to warm the water, I changed my mind and wanted to go upstairs. Several attendants joked how I could not make it up the stairs.

I did make it up the flight of stairs, pausing at the top to moan through a contraction. It was 4:30pm. Jeni called Rachel and told her we would have a baby by 5pm. Five o'clock came and went. No baby. The contractions raged on, rolling through my abdomen and lower back.

I moaned loudly through each one. As the hours crawled by, I grew more and more tired and frustrated with the labor. When would my baby come?

“How much longer? It hurts...” I kept saying. Jason and Amelia responded with encouragement and support.

“You’re doing great, Jessica.”

“You’re body is working great. You’re almost done.”

After two hours of Jason encouraging me with “You’re almost done”, I snapped back, “If I was almost done, I would be pushing!” I could hear the snickers of the midwives as they told each other my laboring quip.

I tried many positions to ease the labor and hurry it along. Although, easing labor does not hurry it along. I showered through a few contractions before giving up on the water bringing relief. I laid on the bed, falling asleep between contractions, deciding against laying down because I wanted to be done with this labor. I labored on the toilet the most because I knew it opened up my body and brought an increase in contractions.

I have to admit, I complained a lot. I kept complaining about the pain and how long the labor was taking. My mind ran to the hospital and the pain medications they offered. A few times, I allowed myself to imagine asking to go to the hospital. My heart was angry that labor was taking so long and I was not surrendering to its strength.

Finally, around six pm, I gave it up. We were in the bathroom. Jason was standing beside me, Amelia in the doorway. I do not know what changed my weary, tired heart, but I suddenly had enough of my complaining and irritating thoughts.

“In the name of Jesus, I declare that this baby is coming out!” I said loudly. My voice was shaky, but strong. It felt good to declare a truth. I continued, “God, you are my strength! I will trust in YOU. I surrender to your will. To your plan. To your plan

with this labor. I choose not to complain.”

I could feel myself changing inside. My mind’s fog of pain lifted and my spirit grew strong. I kept praying aloud in the tiny bathroom. Jason and Amelia were “amen-ing” and agreeing with me.

“Lord, I thank you for this little mighty man of God you placed inside me. I thank you that this baby will do mighty things for the kingdom of God. I thank you for these contractions that will bring this baby.”

A contraction stole my breath. As it tore pass the peak, my prayers continued. Scriptures I planted in my heart poured from my mouth.

“Father, your grace is sufficient for me. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. You are more than enough for me. I will trust in YOU.”

“Lord, I ask you to bring this baby forth. Deliver me! I ask that after the next two contractions, it would be time to push. Lord, please. Deliver me.”

Two contractions rolled through my body. I was not ready to push, but I was leaning on the Lord now. It was OK. I prayed in between contractions. I thanked God for making my body work. I thanked Him for contractions that brought babies. I thanked Him for the son inside me. I thank Him for the people who were with me through the labor.

When a contraction began, I gasped, “thank you, Lord.” and breathed/moaned through the pain. I was learning to surrender.

“Have mercy on me, Lord. Have mercy,” I begged the God of all.

I felt the contractions shift as the baby’s head pushed hard against my cervix. I knew it was time to push. I was on the toilet. I pushed twice and heard the scurry of midwives. The exciting part was upon us. I debated on pushing the baby out in the bathroom.

“Don’t have that baby in the toilet, Jessica,” someone said. Everyone chuckled softly.

“I promise to scoot to the edge before he comes out,” I quipped back. More soft chuckles.

I pushed. I scooted to the edge and dropped to the floor in a squat. I pushed again. I could see the bed through the doorway; it looked better than the floor. I had experience birthing on beds; not so much on floors. My amazing helpers assisted me to my bed.

I laid on my side, Amelia holding my leg up for me. I continued pushing with each contraction. It hurt terribly. In an effort to “see” my progress, I covered my vagina with my hand. The labia was fat and stretchy. With no thoughts, only instinct, I slipped

two fingers inside the vagina. Wonder of wonders, I felt a head! He was less than two inches from the perineum. I could feel my baby.

The midwives were trying to get a heartbeat.

“He’s too low,” someone said.

“Jessica, can you feel your baby?” they asked me.

“Yes!” I gasped. “He’s right there...”

“That’s why you can’t get the heartbeat. He’s coming.”

“You’re doing great, Jessica.”

I kept my hand on my vagina, feeling it grow with the baby’s head descending. I pushed hard. Pain rolled through my body.

“You are more than enough.” I prayed. I kept repeating, “More than enough. More than enough,” reminding myself that God IS MORE THAN ENOUGH!

Another push. Hard. His head bulged against the perineum. My hand covered his head; I could feel my skin stretching around my baby’s head.

“Do you want oil, Jessica?”

“Whatever! OK.” I shouted. They poured the olive oil on the stretching perineum, anointing Samuel’s emerging head.

“You’re doing so great, Jessica. He is almost here.”

I grunted loudly with the next push. The baby stretched out of me.

“I see a forehead. Eyes. Nose. Jess, he’s coming.” A pause. I was breathing. Not pushing. “Jessica. Come on. You’re almost done. Push. You’re almost done. Push your baby out.”

I took a deep breath. Whispered quickly to the Lord, “you’re more than enough,” and pushed with every bit of strength in me. The midwives moved my legs around a little to make more room for the baby and, amazingly, per God’s miraculous design, a human being slithered out of my body.

“Jessica, reach down here and catch your baby. Jessica, look.”

My eyes had been closed in the intensity of my labor. I opened them to see a slimy, wet baby between my legs.

“Jessica, reach down and get your baby!” the midwife’s excited voice laughed at the new life.

“Um, can somebody help me?” I could not summon the strength to reach down and pull my baby to my chest.

Jeni laughed. Lots of hands held the baby and brought him to my chest. Celebration swept me away.

“Praise God! Praise God! He’s here! Thank you, Lord! Hi, Samuel!!”

I cuddled the baby.

“Did anyone look? Is it a boy?”

“Jason, you look. See if it’s a son.”

Someone checked and, sure enough, it was a son. My Samuel James.

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I have never lost myself to the pain of labor before like I did with Samuel’s birth. Only surrendering to God saved me from the pain. It changed my heart. It changed my view of labor and contractions. God is my strength. He is my Deliverer. He proved to me that He is MORE THAN ENOUGH. I thank God for His power, strength and mercy during this labor. He brought me through the hardest moment of my life. Praise be to His name.