

Do you ever get so caught up in what you are doing that you miss what is going on around you? Yep, me too.

A three-year-old granddaughter named Casey stepped up to the miniature golf check-in point. She eagerly pointed to the club and ball she wanted. "How old are you?" asked the man in charge.

"I'm fwee," came the reply.

"Then you are free!" he said to her with great kindness.

"No, I'm fwee!" she insisted, with a puzzled expression on her face.

The grandpa with her said to the man behind the counter, "She means she is three years old."

"I know what she means," said the man with a revealing smile. "And I am telling you that since she's three, she's free! She doesn't have to pay to play the game."

The grandpa said afterward, "We almost missed the good news. We were so preoccupied with our own agenda and getting our point across, that we almost missed the good news the man behind the counter was trying to tell us."

I love that story. For me it highlights how we can get so preoccupied with living, or with getting our point across, or with taking care of ourselves, that we miss what is going on around us. We can get so caught up in ourselves, that we actually miss what God is trying to accomplish around us.

We are in the midst of a sermon series called *How to Build a Life: Discovering We Matter*. We have been talking all month on how when we place God at the center of our life, we discover we are a part

of a community of faith, and that when we allow God to work through how we have been uniquely made, we help the community of faith, really be the body of Christ.

Today, we are going to talk about how we can learn to be more open to the movement of God's spirit around us. Because like that little girl and her grandpa, if we are not careful, we can get so caught up in living life and in our own agenda's that we can miss the good news and the opportunities to live our faith.

**So how can we begin to live life, more open to God?** *First, we need to take time for prayer.*

I have included in the bulletin, a method for prayer called *The Acts Method for Prayer*. It is simply one of many methods that can be used for praying. I have been using this method recently and have found it helpful.

It doesn't matter what method we use for prayer (at least to me anyway). But what matters is that we work at building prayer into our life. When we build prayer into our life, it helps to raise our awareness of God all around us. It helps us to be more open to the movement of God's spirit all around us. And that helps us live more faithful lives.

*The second, as prayer helps you be more open to God, begin to look for opportunities to let God's love and grace be shown through your life.* Those opportunities may come from the oddest places.

In our scripture for today, Paul is writing to Philemon on behalf of a runaway slave named Onesimus. Somehow Onesimus connected up with Paul and in the process became a Christian.

Now Paul is sending Onesimus back to Philemon, the rightful slave owner. There is so much about this whole situation that we

don't know or even understand. We don't know what led to Onesimus' running away. We don't know how he connected up with Paul. We don't know, really, if he had stolen anything in his running away. We don't even know if Philemon was a good slave owner or a bad one. We don't know much. We don't even know what Philemon actually did.

What we do know is that Onesimus was a slave. He connected up with Paul and became a Christian. And that Paul was sending him back to Philemon, who had several choices. He could punish him severely. He could even have Onesimus put to death. He could follow Paul's plea and receive him back or even set him free. *All we know is that Paul gave Philemon a chance to be faithful and to make some decisions regarding Onesimus by looking at this whole situation through the eyes of faith.*

In a similar way, every situation that you and I find ourselves in can be looked at through the eyes of faith. How can God be seen in and through me, even in this situation? God gives us chances to serve, are you willing to see them? God gives us chances to be faithful, are you willing to take time?

We can spend so much time worrying about the details of life, that we forget the details aren't the point. The point of life, at least a life of faith, is to be more open to God and to seize the opportunities God gives us to let God's love shine through us.

Many years ago, I was working on my computer at home. I was working on a sermon, I believe. I was deep in thought when my daughter, Natalie came down into the room. As she walked toward me, she started talking to me, "Dad, can you help me with something; it will only take a minute?"

Unfortunately, my almost automatic response was, "Aaaggh, Natalie, not right now, I am kind of busy and I need to finish this up." I said all this without even looking at Natalie. She stood for a

moment looking at me, slaving at the computer. I could see her out of the corner of my eye. Then she said, "Okay, I'll stop by later."

And she dropped her head and turned and walked away.

In the next few seconds several thoughts came hurtling through my mind. I thought to myself, "Scott, in the long run, what is the most important investment you make, this draft of a sermon, or the life of your daughter." I felt God had hit me between the eyes with my misplaced priorities.

I pulled away from the computer and I said, "Natalie, come here, what do you need."

She stopped walking away. She turned and looked at me with excitement in her eyes and she came running back. That is when I discovered that she had been playing with a new, little calculator. She said, "Dad, I was wondering what is 6 x 8?" I said, "48". She punched it on her new calculator and said, "You're right." Then she walked over and gave me a hug and said, "I love you dad."

In that embrace, I found myself thanking God for the moment, for the undeserved love of a daughter and all I could say was, "I really love you too, Natalie." Then she went trotting off to go do something else.

Sometimes we miss the gifts and opportunities God gives us because we are too busy with life. On this day, I hope we can learn to celebrate each other and the opportunities that we have to share the love and grace we have experienced from God with others. May God help us live lives of faith.

Amen