

Sometimes, we just don't get it. Have you ever felt that way?

I heard a story that I thought was humorous. I like it because it pokes fun of people like me. Ol' Fred had been a faithful Christian and was in the hospital, near death. The family called their preacher to come and stand with them. As the preacher stood next to the bed, Ol' Fred's condition appeared to deteriorate and he motioned frantically for something to write on. The pastor lovingly handed him a pen and a piece of paper, and Ol' Fred used his last bit of energy to scribble a note, then he died.

The preacher thought it best not to look at the note at that time, so he placed it in his jacket pocket.

At the funeral, as he was finishing his message, he realized that he was wearing the same jacket he was wearing when Fred died. And knowing that death bed wisdom is the best wisdom, he said, "You know, Ol' Fred handed me a note just before he died. I haven't looked at it, but knowing Fred, I'm sure there's a word of inspiration for us all."

He reached into his pocket. He opened the note. His face changed color as the note read, "Hey, you're standing on my oxygen tube!"

The preacher in this story just didn't get it. He just didn't realize how he was a part of the problem. He just didn't get it, until it was too late.

Do you ever feel like you just don't get it? Do you ever find yourself just not understanding what is happening in life? Do you ever find yourself unhappy with where you are and what you are doing? Do you ever wonder if God sees and really cares?

I believe that many of us want to be in a relationship with God. We want to draw close to God. We yearn to have a closeness and a companionship that we see others have. But we just don't seem to know how to get there. We don't get it.

That is exactly why we are doing this sermon series, *O Lord Help! Learning How to Pray*. It is designed to help us look at our prayer life and see how we can begin to build into our life, practices and attitudes that help us in prayer. Over the last couple of weeks, we have talked about helpful

attitudes for prayer, attitudes like a willingness to experience God, a willingness to be honest with God, a willingness to be open to God and let God reshape us.

Today, and over the next several weeks, we turn our attention to some practices or methods that we can begin to experiment with as we seek to develop a life of prayer. If you look at the history of Christianity, you will discover that through the ages, many methods for prayer have developed.

These various methods remind us that since we are all different, God will speak to us differently. The important thing is for us to begin making prayer a priority so we can come to know God and allow God to know us.

As we look at methods of prayer, I just want to share a bias that I have. Prayer is both asking and listening to God. I say this, because if we just look at how we pray in worship as the pattern for prayer, we can easily get the idea that prayer is just asking for God. As if God is the great slot machine in the sky and we put in our prayer requests, pull the handle and wait for God to deliver.

Prayer is asking. But it is much more than asking for favors for ourselves and for others. In our scripture for today, Jesus reminds us of something very important in prayer. *"Don't bargain with God. Be direct. Ask for what you need."*

Ask for what you need. God knows who we are and what we need. And Jesus is reminding us that because God loves us, God is willing to provide that for us.

When it comes to prayer, here are some helpful practices that I tend to use. These are especially important if you are just starting out in attempting to pray.

First of all, find a time a place to meet God. If you have to set up an appointment with God, do it. And, make this a priority. Don't give God the left-over time in your life, when you are tired. Find a time and place each day when you will be at your best.

If you do it as left-over time, you will quickly discover that other things push out your time with God. But if you do it at a time of day when you are your best, you will discover that you actually can experience God.

Second, find a time and a place when you will be uninterrupted. If you are uninterrupted, you will be able to do a process that allows you to become more open and receptive to God.

Third, follow a method of prayer. Today, I have included in the bulletin an insert title "The Secret to Abundant Living: Learning how to Ask." It is a method of prayer that I have used in the past. I have found it helpful.

There are many other methods; I will be introducing you to some of them over the next couple of weeks. What I invite you to do is to actually follow this method each day for the next week. Give it a try, see how it works. Evaluate it on, does this help me draw close to God. And don't rush to evaluate it after trying it just once. Do it for several days. Experiment to find a time and a place and a method over the next month that works best for you.

I believe that God wants to know each of us well. I believe God wants to know each of us intimately. For me, the real question is are we, are you, willing to come to know God well.

There was once a man by the name of Jim who was dying. He had been a good; faithful man all of his life. He had been a good husband and father. He had been a hard worker in his job and in the church. He was stricken with cancer.

As the cancer began to take its toll, and his time on earth was coming to an end, he asked his pastor to come and visit him.

When his pastor came, Jim asked to be alone with him. They talked about a lot of things. They talked about life. They talked about Jim's legacy. They talked about Jim's death. Finally the pastor asked, "Jim, are you afraid?"

Jim looked at the pastor and said, "Afraid? No, I am not. I want to tell you something though. It is only in the last ten years or so that I have

learned not to be afraid anymore. It happened because I was visiting with the pastor of our church, just before you came. I said to him, 'I don't know how to pray.' He just looked at me and said, 'Just pull up an extra chair, imagine that Jesus is sitting in that chair, and talk to him.'

"Ever since, that is what I have done. That is why this chair is sitting right here beside the pillow. It is the chair where Jesus sits so I can talk with him."

"The pastor said, "That is a great way to do it. I am happy for you, that you have found a way to pray that really helps you."

Jim said, "Please don't tell my family about this though. They may think I am losing it."

The pastor said, "Don't worry, I won't tell anyone."

It was a couple of days later the pastor got a phone call again from Jim's daughter. This time it was to tell him that Jim had died. AS they visited, the daughter said, "You know, it was the strangest thing. Because when my dad died, he didn't die peacefully in bed. He had moved partly out of the bed and had rested his head on the chair next to the bed. What do you think that means?"

The pastor just said, "Oh, I don't think you should worry about that. I think it means he was resting on the lap of Jesus."

Jim had come to know how great it is to walk with Jesus. We can too. We just need to be willing to learn how to ask. We need to stay open to God and open to God touching us and walking with us.

May we learn to live lives that are faithful.

Amen