

To the surprise of everyone the guest minister preaching at the seminary said, "I have spent some of the best moments of my life in the arms of another man's wife. Yes, I have spent some of the best moments of my life in the arms of another man's wife."

After a long, dramatic pause he continued, "And that woman, was my mother."

When the young ministers in training heard that illustration they laughed and one of them got so excited, he said, "That's great. I will have to remember that." It was about a year later, when he was serving his first church. As he got up to preach, for the first time in his life, he couldn't remember what he had prepared.

He thought and thought, but it just wasn't coming. Then all of a sudden he remembered the illustration. And grasping for anything, he said to the surprise of his congregation, "I have spent some of the best moment's of my life in the arms of another man's wife. Yes, I have spent some of the best moments of my life in the arms of another man's wife. It's true, I have spent some of the best moment's of my life in the arm's of another man's wife."

Then there was a long pause, and the young pastor's face turned red, finally he said, "But I just can't remember who she is."

Unfortunately, the young pastor forgot the punch line. Do you ever have trouble remembering? Do you ever forget? Of course we do.

But one of the challenges of living a life of faith is that we forget more, much more than a punch line. We tend to forget to do the very basic actions that bring us closer to God. We tend to forget, or maybe neglect to take part in the very disciplines that will bring us closer to the God who loves us.

Today, we are going to talk about one of those disciplines. We are going to talk about prayer. It is important to build prayer into our lives, *because prayer actually helps us connect with God and grow in faith.*

*Making prayer a priority for our lives actually does a lot to help nurture a friendship with God that can see us through the challenges of life.*

And life is challenging. Life can be messy. Life simply doesn't always go the way we want it too. Life isn't always smooth. We just like to act like it is. And that is a problem for us. When we act like we have it all together, when we act like we don't need anyone else it doesn't take long before we start fooling ourselves.

In the Bible, one of the biggest obstacles to developing a relationship with God is believing that I don't need God. I can handle life all by myself, on my own. Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever acted like life is going well, even when it isn't?

For me, our scripture for today offers us some clues about how to deal with this dilemma. In our passage, we find Jesus teaching the crowds. The crowds are so many that he asks to get in the boat of some fisherman, who have already been working all night. They are tired. They were unsuccessful. So they agree to let Jesus use their boats.

When he gets done teaching the crowds, he says, "Why don't you put out into deep water and let down your nets?"

And the excuses begin to come. "Man, we are tired. We have been out all night. We have done what we are supposed to. This is the wrong time of day to fish. What do you know about fishing? You're just a preacher. Oh, but if you want to, I will do what you say."

This passage reminds me that we are good at making excuses. We are good at allowing the messiness of our lives get in the way. We sometimes even allow that messiness and our excuses to stop us from being faithful. When was the last time you allowed your excuses to limit you?

One of my favorite quotes, is one that my children have heard a whole bunch, "If you argue for your limitations, they are yours."

Pause

Reluctantly, Peter did as Jesus asked. He threw the nets over the side of the boat. And an amazing thing happened. The nets were filled so much, they needed help from their partners. When Peter saw what was happening he fell down on his knees and said, "Master, leave me. I am such a sinner and I can't handle your holiness."

And in that moment of honesty, Jesus was able to deal with Peter in a way that has helped change our world. Peter recognized his own limitations, and in the honesty of that recognition, he was reminded that God loved him and wanted to work with him in this world.

Prayer, helps us to build a relationship with God. Because it can help us get to a place of honesty about ourselves. It can help us realize how many excuses we make, to not be involved or active in growing in our faith. It can help us realize that we really don't have life all together. It can help us realize that maybe, just maybe we need God and one another to make it in this world. *Prayer helps us to realize that God wants to work with us, with all of our limitations and faults, because God loves us for who we are.*

There was once a little boy, who was walking by the shop of a hardware store on his way home from school. He looked in the window to see a sign that said, "Puppies for sale". He watched them for a moment and became so excited.

He rushed home. He found his mom. He begged her to buy one of the puppies. He even said, "I promise, I'll take care of it." She asked how much it was. He told her. Then he told her how much money he had saved. He said, "If you give me an advance on my allowance, I will be able to finish paying for it. Please mom, please. This is really important."

The mother knew full well the complications of having a puppy in the house, could not resist her son. "Okay, you can have the puppy, but I will expect you to take care of it."

"Oh, I will mom. I promise I will." Filled with excitement, the little boy hurried back to the pet shop to buy his new puppy.

When he got to the store, he gave his money to the owner and said, "I want to buy a puppy." The owner agreed. He said, "Which one do you want?"

The little boy pointed to a puppy in the corner. The owner said, "Oh, son. You don't want that one. It is crippled. He just sits there. He won't be able to run and jump like the rest of the puppies. Choose another one."

Without saying a word, the boy reached down, he lifted his pant leg to expose a chrome leg brace to the owner. "I can't run and jump very well either. I figure that puppy will need someone who understands. I want that one."

What disqualified that puppy from ownership from so many others, uniquely qualified him for this little boy. In the same way, we are loved by God, not because we are perfect. But because of who we are. With all of our flaws and imperfections.

Prayer helps us remember that God loves us. That God wants to be in a relationship with us. When we make prayer a priority in our lives, we can give up our excuses and give up our imperfections, because we are the ones that are loved by God.

So, are you willing to develop prayer in your life? Are you willing to give it a try?

May God help us commit to living our faith.

Amen