

How long does it take to know another person? In some ways, it doesn't take much time at all. If you look around church this morning and see someone that you don't know, there's an easy fix for that. Just walk up to the person before or after church and introduce yourself. Easy. Done. Now you know each other. It just takes a couple of moments and a few words.

In other ways, though, knowing someone else takes a lot longer. Think about the people in your lives that you know the best. They're probably not people you just met. Instead, they tend to be people we've known for years, even since we were born. When you are growing up, you get to know your family pretty well. But as the years go by, you get to know them even better, things you never knew before. Most married couples thought they knew each other on their wedding day. It doesn't take long for them to realize, though, that they only get to know each other better as time goes on.

To really know and understand someone takes time. It can take all our lives, and it can take all our love. After all, when we really know someone, it means we know their problems, their faults, their little idiosyncrasies that make them who they are. It's a process that requires our love and effort: to really grasp another person, to know them, to understand them, and to love them.

It's the same for our relationship with God. Do you really know God? Most of you would say, *"Yes, of course I know him! He's Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He's the Triune God who loved me and sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to be my Savior. When I die, I'll be with him forever in heaven."* At least I hope that's what you'd say. But even knowing that much about God, doesn't mean you have a perfect grasp on who he is or how much he loves you.

He's a God who hides himself. (Is. 45:15) Some days it can feel like he's hiding himself too well. He doesn't tell us everything he has planned for our lives. He doesn't tell why everything happens the way it does. He doesn't reveal how long our lives will be or when Jesus will return to take us to heaven.

But even the things God has told us about himself, none of us can grasp completely. After all, God reveals himself through his Word, the Bible. How many people have the entire Bible memorized and know all of it perfectly? No one does! But that doesn't mean we shouldn't try to keep on learning. In fact, the more we study God's Word, the more we get to know our God, the more we will grasp his love. And the more clearly we see his love for us, the more we can love him and those around us. That takes time; it takes knowledge, and it takes strength. In other words, it takes faith.

It's my prayer that you seek him in the Bible, to know him more every day, to grow in your faith. That was Paul's prayer for the Ephesians in our text. **"For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name,"** (Eph. 3:14-15). Right here at the beginning of our prayer, we're getting to know God better, because we're reminded that he's our Father.

We all come from different families and have different earthly fathers, but we all have one heavenly Father. He made every one of us. He keeps us breathing. He provides for us by sending rain to make things grow, to accomplish what he desires for our eternal good. He gives us knowledge and strength to earn money and be able to buy food and shelter and clothing. To put it another way, God is our Father, and he acts like it.

The fact that he uses that word "Father" tells us something else about God. We might expect that the God who created all things wouldn't have time or patience for people like us. If he's powerful enough to form the mountains and fill the oceans, then what could he do to me if I don't listen to him? And why would he listen to me, either?

But he is our Father. A Father listens to his children. We approach our heavenly Father with boldness and confidence and ask him for things the way dear children ask their dear father. That shows you something about God's love: he listens to you. He hears your prayers because of his Son. Paul told the Ephesians earlier, **"Through [Christ] we...have access to the Father,"** (Eph. 2:18). It's God's love in Christ that makes us certain that he hears us when we pray to him!

Paul knew that, too, so he said, **"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith,"** (Eph. 3:16-17).

Usually, if you're going to ask someone for something, you want to be sure that person can actually give it to you. You wouldn't ask me for a million dollars, because you know I don't have a million dollars. But think of it: with God, you can ask for anything, because he is powerful enough to give it. That's why Paul appeals to God's "glorious riches." God is rich, he's got everything, so we can ask for anything.

Could we ask for power! Why not? That's what Paul asked for, "<sup>16</sup>*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup>so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*" That's what Jesus meant when he talked in our gospel lesson about '**the one thing needed.**' Like Paul, we want God to give us power in our "inner being." You can't always see it on the outside, but it's there, alright.

Do you realize that as a believer, Christ is living in *your heart*? That's power! Without Christ in there, our hearts would be in despair. "*How could God love me, with the way I live? I sin every day. I take him and his Word for granted. I get frustrated with myself and even with him, because my so-called Christian life seems so weak and ineffectual. I don't think I'll ever be able to grasp God's love the way he wants me to.*" But through faith, with Jesus in our hearts, God tells us, "I've forgiven you. I've died for you, and look, I am alive! And you will live, too, because you are connected to me by faith."

That connection to Jesus is no accident. The fact that he lives in your heart, that you believe and grasp his love, is by God's design and working. "**Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ,**" (Ro 10:17). The Holy Spirit brought us to faith through the water of baptism and through his Word. What love our God has for us that he would take unworthy sinners, wash our sins away, and then come to live in our hearts by faith! Could we ever fully grasp that love?

Maybe not, but that doesn't mean we won't try! Paul continues his prayer: "<sup>17</sup>**And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup>may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup>and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.**" God has given us the roots of his love in our faith, and he continues to build on that foundation as we continue to hear his Word. Our goal is to fully grasp Christ's love for us, to have the knowledge and strength to live every moment with a love that is so "**wide and long and high and deep.**"

On this side of heaven, however, our grasp of God's love is limited, because it's a "<sup>19</sup>**love that surpasses knowledge.**" We can't understand it or know him fully. We can't appreciate his love completely. And yet he wants us to continue growing in that love to the point that we are "<sup>19</sup>**filled to the measure with all the fullness of God.**"

It reminds me of this *Far Side* cartoon where a student asks the teacher, "*May I be excused? I think my brain is full.*" Do you ever feel like that, like your brain, your heart, and your faith are already full enough? Or do you really see a need to spend more time getting to know your Savior? Are you seeking him with *all* your heart or with just half of one? It's good to be satisfied with what you have, except when it comes to our faith and our grasp of God's love. And too often we sit passively through worship, sort of listening while letting other real world concerns occupy our minds, waiting for the hour to pass. Pretty soon you're wondering, "*Why am I here again?*"

The truth is, if your faith isn't growing, it's dying. When you're not thirsting for God's Word, when hearing it or paying attention to it becomes 'optional' – those are red flags that your faith is getting weaker. Eventually, it could die. And then you'll never fully grasp God's love. Instead you could spend eternity getting to know his wrath.

But what a testament to God's love that he doesn't want that to happen! It's his power that keeps that from happening. Remember, Christ lives in your heart by faith, and he wants you to keep it and to grow in it! He wants to bless your faith – through his Word.

God is here in his word in our worship services. Going to church isn't meant to be some chore to keep you on God's good side. These services are God proclaiming that you're already on his good side. The services are about God pouring out his gifts on you through his word and sacraments. Don't stay away from church. Come running to the place where God promises to bless you. Talk to those you know who are no longer in church, and encourage them to come and receive God's blessings, too.

God is wherever you gather in his name, around his word. Whether you read or study on your own or with fellow believers who gather for Bible class, God will deepen and strengthen your grasp of his love. And yes, it takes time. Love takes time to seek God and the blessings he gives through faith. Whatever problems and troubles you face in your life, whatever you want or need, go to your Lord in prayer. Seek his promises for you in his word, to grasp more fully his everlasting love, and know that he is with you to give more than you could ever ask or imagine.

**"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen,"** (Eph. 3:20-21).