

Boy aged 4: Dad, I've decided to get married. Dad: Wonderful; do you have a girl in mind?!

Boy: Yes... grandma! She said she loves me, I love her, too....and she's the best cook & story teller in the whole world! Dad: That's nice, but we have a small problem there! Boy: What problem?! Dad: She happens to be my mother. How can you marry my mother! Boy: Why not?! You married mine!

As we journey through life and experience things, we come to realize that certain things just aren't as important as we once thought. We're constantly learning new things and we're always developing new interests. For many of us, our relationship with God becomes more and more important and our thoughts can be more on the things of God.

Try to think back through your life and count the people you've had a really close relationship with. I'm talking about the ones that you would tell anything to. Then, try to think about people who've shown you what un-conditional love feels like. The feeling of unconditional love takes time and needs to be nurtured.

When God describes heaven, He uses the term; to become like a child. Matthew 18:4 **18** At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" **2** He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. **3** And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. **4** Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. **5** And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

Children learn to speak by hearing first. Forming sounds and turning them into words comes by listening. Once they learn to speak, a child starts to recognize letters and then they kindergarten. In kindergarten, they're taught to recognize letters and numbers.

This is very difficult for them. They're open minded for being taught but, it takes a long time to learn how to read. This is only done through repetition. Teachers, parents and grandparents spend hours repeating the same letters and words over and over for a child. This is just like God with us. He keeps teaching and teaching.

Another good example I would like to use for how children learn is with coloring between the lines. It's very difficult for a child to learn this and as parents, we put all their pictures on the fridge and praise them as much as we can. God does this with us.

The other day, I was watching my youngest granddaughter color and even though she couldn't stay between the lines, she just loves to color. We give her lots of praises and everyone tries to encourage her to keep coloring.

This sounds like the Holy Spirit.

My oldest granddaughter is now 11 and she's become a very good artist. I remember when she was learning to hold a crayon/pencil. She really struggled with that and no matter how many times we showed her, she couldn't do it that way. To this day, she still holds pens and pencils different. Some children become left handed or they might need to turn the paper sideways in order to write. We all have different styles of doing things but we all need to be taught the basics first.

Everything in our lives requires learning and when we desire to learn, it becomes much easier. For a child, from birth, they're learning constantly. When we practiced something a thousand times, we reach a level that makes it look easy.

By God's design, everything around us is constantly changing and requires constant learning. Just ask Jim and Avis! They're both trying real hard to help with our media group and thankfully, they're willing to learn new things. I don't know about you but, one thing that I've noticed about life is that I've never been able reach complete knowledge of anything. I've been able to get pretty good at a few things but I'm constantly having to learn.

It's like reading the bible. Every time we open the word, something new comes from it. I've been thinking a lot about our church and about how to become known as a praying church. God's been present and is making some changes. I've also learned that some of you think I'm a little bit different from previous Pastors. Even though I'm different, I'm also very much the same. It's kind of like the example of holding the pencil. It's only a difference in style.

Needing to coloring between the lines is still the same. We all do things a little different but we all want to bring God's word to people.

Think about how many Sunday worship services or bible classes you've gone to. Every time you come to one, something new is learned. We've also been blessed with the computer and the internet. They've opened up a tremendous amount of knowledge. Our lives are constantly changing and hopefully they're continuing to move forward.

Even though things are always changing, there's one thing that never does. Thankfully, the one thing that never changes is God. In Ecclesiastes 1:8-10 **8** All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. **9** What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. **10** Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time.

When it comes to material things like cars, homes and technology, they do change. Ecclesiastes is talking more about the character of man. God is the ultimate teacher and prayer is how we learn to know God's character and His unconditional love. God sees all things, knows all things and hears all things. In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 it says **4** Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. **5** It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. **6** Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. **7** It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love is the greatest gift from God. The unconditional love of Christ will never change. Many of us have a limit to our love and because we can struggle with feeling loved, we all love at different levels. Hurt builds up walls and our society tears people to pieces.

Our ability to give unconditional love has conditions. Satan is going to try and stop us from finding God's unconditional love. Love is God's ultimate desire for us. The beginning of proverbs talks a lot about gaining knowledge, understanding and wisdom. Proverbs starts by saying; **1** The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: **2** for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight; **3** for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair; **4** for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young— **5** let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance—**6** for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise.[b]

Proverbs is kind of like learning the alphabet. We need to repeatedly see and hear these teaching. In order to apply them, we need to desire them. That's done through prayer. Like a child, once we grasp the basics, we can learn to do anything well. Unfortunately, we're not children anymore and we can't be forced to do anything.

Elevating our relationship with Christ is all about desire. Praying about "all" things is no different. It's strictly an individual choice. If we desire a deeper relationship with God, then we need to practice using prayer more. We also need to read the instruction book more. These two things allow God to become that closest friend and this is how we learn what unconditional love really is.

It's been on my heart to try and help us with becoming known as a praying church. This can only happen with your help. Thankfully, you've all been practicing prayer for a long time. If we want to become known as a praying church, we have to risk learning and risk trying new things. We don't have to think about the alphabet anymore. We just need to apply it.

I've also been emphasizing taking a good relationship with God and to try and make it better. It's all about prayer. In my prayers, I pray that we don't ever have an end date for getting a better relationship with God. I hope it keeps getting better and better.

In order to become known as a prayerful church, we need to go back to the basics and be open to trying new things. It may take some time and it's going to take some examples of people who are willing to risk asking others how we can pray for them. It's going to be difficult at first but , we can get to a point that we don't even remember the difficulty anymore.

Anyone who's willing to help needs to develop their own style and this will be challenging. That's how growth happens. We need to risk failure. Maybe we need to dare each other or double dog dare. We all know that the best things in life are the hardest to get. When we become determined to succeed for Christ, nothing can stop us. Being thankful and content in all things or forgiving doesn't just happen because the bible says so. It takes a lot of prayer and a lot of risk. Learning God's character traits and wearing Christ is an investment of time. The sanctification process requires that we make a choice. Salvation came from believing that Jesus died for our sins. That part isn't our challenge.

Having a healthy, unconditional love for Christ takes time and it takes work. Being able to say that Christ is your closest relationship and that His unconditional love is a part of your heart is strictly an individual choice.

For some people, when they think about their animals, unconditional love is felt. Having children and raising them does this too. It's real important for us to know what it feels like. Then we'll want to get more of it.

Thinking about these earthly examples. Just imagine how much more God can give it. We need to specifically pray for God to help us with making this connection better. The people or animals who we hold closest in our hearts, are for understanding God's character of love. The more we invest our time in Christ, the more we learn to love.

God answers all of our prayers and when we search for those answers, we learn His voice.

Faith is spoken a lot about in Christianity. In the end of the verse in Matthew 17:20 Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." Even though this section was talking about why the disciples couldn't remove a demon, this kind of Faith is only gained through our desire to find Christ and to make Him our closest friend.

Unconditional love has power!

We have the bible, we have an eye witness accounts of Christ walking on Earth. When we visualize Christ here on Earth we have tangible evidence and that makes it easier to have FAITH.

Most children learn the alphabet by first learning the alphabet song. Use music and songs if you like.

Pray, pray, pray!

Think about the rewards for choosing to mimic God's characters or for learning to pray without ceasing. The result is that we gain the ultimate closest friend and we get to experience the ultimate amount of unconditional love. The Holy Spirit craves this and because we've learned the kindergarten part of salvation, the spirit will make the sanctification part easy to learn.

"True love" can only be found in our relationship with Christ. Practicing prayer is just like learning to read. We must do it over and over.

Being able to love better is only achieved by choosing to make Christ our closest friend.

Let's Pray