

- Do you ever feel like Moses in our first reading: you know you're doing the right thing, doing what God wants, but you just get so tired of it? Did you ever long for somebody like Aaron and Hur to hold your proverbial arms up, to help you do what needs to be done? Someone to provide a seat for you when you can't stand it anymore?
- *Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.*"
 - As I mentioned last week, these are the marching orders of Jesus and the most basic call of discipleship
 - These are also the foundation of our message series on getting back to basics, concentrating on what is truly important in our faith and allowing God to speak to us.
 - So, of course, even with the basics, we remember what Julie Andrews taught us: we start at the VERY beginning. At the beginning of the Bible, in Genesis when it talks about the beginning of the world, who does the creating? God. And John opened his gospel so beautifully:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.*

So, we start with God because God started everything.
- I want you to think for a moment of what your image of God really is. Think about who God is and how God works in your life. Go beyond the childhood images of the old man with the long white beard and flowing robes. Think honestly.

- Is God the indignant judge calling you to task, calling you to a high standard impossible to reach?
 - Is God the irritated policeman just waiting for you to step out of line before he gives you a ticket?
 - Is God the precise accountant recording every blessing God gives you and exactly how much you owe to make it up?
 - Is God the angry parent who never recognizes any good while repeatedly pointing out everything wrong?
 - Sure, when put bluntly like this, we realize these are skewed images but I think they are often operating within our hearts, just below the surface, perhaps, but truly controlling our relationship with the Almighty.
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- But let's take a page from Saint Paul who wrote our second reading to remind Timothy, his beloved friend: *Remain faithful to what you have learned from...the sacred Scriptures, which are capable of giving you wisdom.*
 - Like Paul and Timothy, we learn about God from the Scriptures, from Jesus Himself.
 - The disciples are struggling to understand, the scribes and the Pharisees are complaining, and nothing seems clear. So Jesus offers them the images of God we heard this past summer:
 - God is like a shepherd with 100 sheep who leaves the 99 behind and searches for the lost one...and then brings it home gently over his shoulders.
 - God is like a woman with 10 coins who searches carefully for the lost one and then has a celebration costing more than the coin itself.
 - God is like a father who had two sons...who goes out to each to offer his heart.

- These and all the other images that Jesus gives us of the Father are perfectly summed up in a single word He gives us in the one prayer he taught us. “When you pray,” he said, “pray like this...Our Father, who art in heaven...”
 - The Aramaic word Jesus used for “Father” was *Abba*, which is the intimate form, used by a child.
 - Jesus has in his mind and heart the image of a God who first and foremost, guess what ...loves us and loves us and loves us and loves us and loves us and NEVER stops loving us.
 - God, Jesus tells us, is about mercy and forgiveness, about compassion and guidance and, well, love.
- This is the most important and most basic message we must have as disciples: WHO GOD IS.
 - God is our beloved and wants us to know it, even using sexual imagery in the Song of Songs to demonstrate the closeness God desires with us.
 - Now this love calls us to others (that’s the message for next week) and guides our lives (that’s the following week)...Stay tuned...same Bat time. Same Bat channel.
- But the point right now is to allow God to love us...which may sound easy but can be pretty difficult. To do that, we need two basic things, our own Aaron and Hur that will hold us up:
 - The first is our image of God as a loving Father, who rejoices in us, delights in us, and wants what’s best for us, even and especially when we are struggling.
 - Think it doesn’t really matter? Would you ask something from someone who frightened you, nagged you or was mad at you? Probably not and then only reluctantly and certainly not the intimate connection needed for prayer.

- Even more than that, think for a moment about your closest relationship...think about the time when you wanted to do something out of love rather than compunction or fear or mere duty.
- When we do something because we know we are loved and because we love, we operate from strength. We want to make the Beloved proud. If we are loved, we have a different outlook. Love makes all the difference.
- This is the GOOD NEWS I spoke about last week, what makes all things possible, what sets us on our adventure in fidelity, what gives us strength, what shores us up.
- Our image of God leads us to the other support that we need that Jesus mentions in our Gospel: prayer.
 - Prayer is not where we go after all other avenues are exhausted. Prayer is spending time with our Beloved, bringing to God our hopes and joys as well as our challenges and struggles.
 - Prayer establishes and builds an **intimate** connection that allows us to talk and listen to God, allows God to pull us outside ourselves, beyond our situation to see God's Presence and love.
 - Sometimes, when we're facing difficulties, the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, financial challenges, illness we can forget about God's love or, worse yet, think that God doesn't care or hear our prayers.
 - Here's why Alpha is so valuable. Alpha makes the introduction to Jesus for us, giving us the basics to ground us, help to know Jesus better and to feel more confident in prayer.

- And that’s why Jesus reminds us not grow weary in prayer. He knows we can, or fall into rote, or stop praying all together because God isn’t answering.
- Jesus reminds us to stay the prayer course, not because God needs to hear us but because **we need to hear God**, we need to be reminded of our loving Father, and harder yet, we need to trust this Father, even and especially when it is difficult.
- When it’s hardest to pray, pray hardest. Not just when we’re in the most trouble or when we need God to get us out of a tight spot, but also when I’m exhausted, excited, angry, anxious, annoyed, busy, behind, even distracted.
- It doesn’t matter **how** or **when**, only that you DO, that you take time out for God EVERY DAY. Just a couple of minutes: in the shower, in the car while you’re parked on 270, after school and before your parents get home, in the evening before turning on the TV or opening Twitter to see what tidbit of wisdom your awesome pastor put out that day. Wherever, whenever but EVERY DAY.
- Don’t know how? Start with a request, “Lord, help me to pray.” Sounds simple but would you ever reject a request for help from someone you love? God all the more so!
- Then after that **keep it simple, keep it real, and keep it up**.
 - There is no one way to pray. Pray in the way and at the time that works for you. Think of a conversation with your good friend, your BEST friend.
 - Pray what’s in your heart. Start simply: focus on Please, Sorry and Thank you. Eventually, you’ll be more comfortable.

- If you're still having trouble, use the daily scriptures, There's even apps to read the scriptures to you if you're in the car.
- There's nothing you're SUPPOSED to do or know already. Just sit quietly and ask God what He's trying to tell you. Sometimes it'll hit you like a ton of bricks. Others times confusing or seemingly unhelpful. Stick with it, *do not grow weary*. God will help.
- As my own Dad used to say, "If it's important to you, you'll find time, you'll make time."
- Nothing you do is more important even though other things may be more urgent, like taking care of your kids, reaching out to your spouse. Remember what they say on an airplane? "Put your mask on first so that you can better assist someone else." Prayer is our oxygen and, when the oxygen is flowing, then we can do more for others.
- Let me close with these words from Mother Teresa who was reflecting on the scripture passage from Revelation (3:20): *I stand at the door and knock*. She imagines Jesus saying to each one of us:
 - I stand at the door of your heart day and night. Even...you doubt...I am there. I await even the smallest sign...even the least whispered invitation that will allow me to enter...whenever you invite me, I do come – always, without fail. Silent and unseen I come, but with infinite power and love...I come with mercy and my desire to forgive and to heal you, with a love beyond your comprehension...I come longing to console you and give you strength, to lift you up and bind your wounds...

- I thirst for you...I thirst to love you and to be loved by you that is how precious you are to me. Come to me and I will fill your heart...
- Whenever you...open the door of your heart, whenever you come close enough, you will hear Me say to you, again and again, not in mere human words but in spirit...I love you for your own sake. Come to me with your misery and your sins, with your troubles and needs, with all your longing to be loved. I stand at the door and knock...Open to Me...I thirst for you.
- Now, let's go, make disciples.