

“Know the Giver”

As the recent Christmas season is now in the history books, there will be many who found that their Christmas list was not fulfilled. The items that they had asked for were not received. So as a result, the remnant list of items that were not secured this Christmas will find themselves on a birthday list, if not next year's Christmas list, once again. It's a pattern that so many recycle year after year. The training ground for this behavior actually starts when we are young. For most, we are told to make out a list of the things that we want for Christmas and if we're good then we can expect to see those gifts under the Christmas tree as delivered by good ol' Santa. At least, that's what I was told growing up. Whatever I would ask for, as long as I had been a good boy, I could expect to receive it. Well, there were many Christmas mornings that I did not find everything on my asking list, as I am sure many others experienced the same thing. This taught me a very valuable lesson at a young age that not everything I ask for I am going to get. As I grew older and somewhat wiser, I realized that not everything I was asking for was appropriate due to my age or capacity, affordability to the giver, or just downright not good for me to have. Yet, even as adults we still carry the harmless holiday habit of creating a list (even if it is only a mental list) of cool things to be given at Christmas. We hope that the givers of these gifts know us well enough that they bless us with the exact present that we were hoping to receive. In turn, if we are to give a gift to someone that will brighten their day we too must know them fairly well. Usually, if the giver is not too familiar with the recipient, then chances are that he will miss the mark on a giving something that will be enjoyed or appreciated by the other. This dynamic also works vice versa. If the one who asks does not know the giver too well then the asking can go amiss because of not truly knowing, understanding, or fully appreciating what the giver has within his power to give. Let me share a couple of examples to really highlight this very important and relevant point.

Suppose you are the five year old son of one of the wealthiest men alive, Bill Gates, yet you do not comprehend his level of wealth, power, prestige, nor influence in addition to his ability to provide for more than what you ask. As such, you ask for a signed jersey of your favorite ballplayer from the local sports shop. Or, in another example, you are a genuinely wrongly accused murderer who has been sentenced to death. On your way to the death chamber, you are asked by the judge who can overturn the ruling and set you free, “Do you have any last requests?” You pause for a second and answer, Sure, a can of Pepsi". In both examples, the request that was made by both figures was a far cry from what the giver could have delivered. The young boy could have asked and received a personalized jersey in the locker room of his favorite ballplayer right after watching the game from the dugout. The falsely accused criminal would have been freed that afternoon in time for dinner with his family paid by the state for the erroneous ruling. You see the point is that because both did not really know the power of the giver, their requests were insignificant and irrelevant to what the giver could have granted. In a parallel similarity, Jesus extends this very same message to an unsuspecting adulteress by a well in Samaria.

As we read the account of Jesus' divinely ordained encounter with this Samaritan adulteress (John 4:1-26), the dialogue that transpires between Jesus and this woman is very telling and directly speaks to us today. Among many of the lessons that we can draw from this conversation, the one that stands out as greatest is when Jesus tells this woman that if she only knew who He was she would be asking for something much greater (*paraphrasing*). Jesus is revealing to this woman that because she lacks true understanding and awareness of who this Giver is and what He is capable of giving her, her asking is then shallow and without significance. Her failure to recognize the significance of the giver did not allow her to ask (and therefore not receive at that moment) the gift of God (salvation, forgiveness of sin). In fact, as the account unfolds, it is obvious that even after Jesus speaks to her further she still continues to ask questions or makes statements that reveal her inability to fully acknowledge and appreciate not only the Giver, but His offer. Her misguided and irrelevant statements to Jesus really displayed her ignorance of the giver and it was costing her the blessing that Jesus wanted to bestow upon her. I firmly believe that all Jesus wanted was to be a part of this empty and hurting woman's life. Jesus knew that He could have a significant impact not only on her life but on the rest of the villagers in that Samaritan community. All He was saying to the adulteress was, "let me be a part of your life because I have something far better and greater for you".

This encounter with Jesus has equally important implications for us even today. This event serves to teach us that knowing the true giver of gifts has far more reaching benefits in ways that we don't fully understand

right now. Jesus offers himself today to you and me and makes it clear that if we truly know Him and what He is able to do for our lives, then we would seek Him and ask Him for the gifts that matter the most. We don't know what to ask because we don't fully know the giver, Jesus. As a result, our reactions are similar to the Samaritan adulteress - we fail to see Jesus and His capabilities because we are focused on irrelevant matters or questions, or we get so stuck on what we perceive God should be doing in our lives that we fall extremely short in recognizing what He wants to teach us. The next Christmas season and those to follow I submit to you that instead of asking for personal goodies, that you take a moment to reflect on the ultimate giver and what He truly wants us to know. *Jesus said that if you really know who I am and what I can give you then the object and purpose of your asking would be radically different. They would truly be in alignment and congruent with what I want to do in your life.* With so much on the line the greatest investment of time would be to spend time with the One who wants to give you more than you could ever imagine.

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