

Your Gifts and His Grace
Genesis 43

There's a fun game called How Well Do You Know Your Family? Maybe you've played it or something similar. You draw cards, and each card has a question. The idea is to see how well those who are playing know each other. You can play it with family or close friends. There are questions such as, "*What is my favorite dessert?*" or "*What would I most love to do this weekend?*" How well do you know your siblings, or spouse, or your children or parents? How well do you know your best friends?

Scripture says that God knows each of us very, very well. But how well do we know Him? Romans 1 says that everyone naturally knows God, but that's a general knowledge of God. His existence and power and authority are clearly perceived in His work of creation.

But we don't naturally know God in a personal and saving way. Knowledge of His character, His heart, and His ways eludes us without His intervention. In fact, Scripture explains that even once a person is born again and trusts in Jesus, knowing God still does not come naturally. While we live on this earth, the effects of sin keep us from knowing God much more than we realize. Being saved only begins a lifelong journey of getting to know Him better.

What's the proof of that? Well, don't many of our actions and thoughts and feelings seem to reveal that, apparently, we must not know God very well? What is it that you fear or worry about constantly? What escalates your worries? Does there seem to be a disconnect between what worries you so much and what you supposedly know about God?

Or how about this: Think about what things compel you to disobey God again and again. What makes you angry, or jealous? What stirs lust within you, or brings out your selfish pride? Or how about this: who do you look down on? Or who do you mistreat?

If someone were to look closely at our actual lives sometimes, don't you think they might be compelled to say, "*You don't really know God too well, do you?*" Couldn't someone say, "*It just seems that how you think and how you act, how you view others and view yourself, and how you view God – all of these things would be different if you knew God better.*" And this is true for all of us. Sin deceives and hinders us from in so many ways.

And yet in spite of all that, God does enable us to know Him and He's constantly acting in our lives so that we can know Him more and more. Often he does this through our sin. This came clearly into view in and through Jesus Christ. But God has always been doing this, and He has always been who He is today. Long before Christ came into the world, God was making Himself known better to His people because we desperately need to know Him better.

We need to know Him better so we will be transformed for His glory and our joy. We need the peace that floods the hearts and quiets the minds of those who know Him well. We need courage to live and strength to obey. We need the real, applicable, personal knowledge of God

that only He can give. It changes not only our eternal life, but also, our present life – how we respond to life, how we feel about many things, and in some cases, how we feel about how we feel.

So a good question would be, “*Where do we begin?*” The Scriptures answer that question. “*Where do we begin to know God better?*” I like that question. But I want to expand it. We should ask, “*Where do we begin, and how do we continue?*” Scripture answers that also. I put those two questions together because the place where we start for truly knowing God is the place to which we must return each day.

Genesis 43 helps us answer these questions. What happens here helps us understand. And to help us know God and ourselves better (because knowing ourselves better is essential also) I want to pose these two questions to you today: Do you know the impact of the gifts you bring to God? and Do you know the impetus of (in other words, the motivation or the reason for) the grace God gives to you?

Now, when this chapter begins, the famine is still going on, and Joseph’s family back in Canaan have used up all the grain they had brought from Egypt. Their brother Simeon remained in custody in Egypt.

In the last chapter we learned that Joseph did not reveal his true identity to his brothers. But he had commanded that they be given their grain for free. So he showed them grace, but also, he began to test them, because he wants to repent. He wants them to be remorseful for their evil treatment of him almost 20 years ago. Locking up Simeon is part of the test.

Will they forsake another brother the way they had forsaken him all those years ago?

Their father Jacob doesn’t want them to return to Egypt because the Egyptian governor in charge of the grain (who is actually his son Joseph) demanded that they return with their youngest brother Benjamin. Jacob is afraid to send, and possibly lose, Benjamin. He favors Benjamin, like he favored Joseph. His favoritism contributed to the other brothers’ hatred of Joseph.

So Jacob tells his sons to return to Egypt for more grain, and they have to reason with him. They must take Benjamin - they have no choice. But the brothers are different now. Judah, who suggested Joseph be sold into slavery rather than be killed, promises on his own life that he will protect Benjamin.

Jacob agrees, but with this caveat: he tells them to bring gifts for the governor. Notice the list of items in verse 11, “*some of the choice fruits of the land...and carry a present down to the man, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds.*” And verse [12] *Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight. [13] Take also your brother, and arise, go again to the man. [14] May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man.*”

Jacob realizes they will starve if they don't receive grain from Egypt. But why bring gifts? It's to gain favor with the man and to satisfy His wrath. There's obviously an end result in mind – they want to live. They need to survive. They want to please the governor. They want forgiveness for the money they think they accidentally took but intentionally have not returned.

But notice this: they don't really know the governor, do they? They don't know who he is. He's their younger brother who they betrayed. They don't realize the extremely grievous nature of their offense against this man. And because they don't know him, they don't realize how they've sinned against him. And therefore, they don't understand that the gifts they bring won't get them any favor.

I've said for many weeks that the parallels between Joseph and Jesus Christ are amazing. These are intentional in the redemptive plans of God. Joseph is the savior of God's people in a way that foreshadows the greater Savior, Jesus. So much of Joseph's life and experiences help us to know Jesus and ourselves better. This action by Joseph's family has caused God's people throughout the ages to consider the actual impact or influence the gifts we bring to God have on Him.

And by "gifts" I mean whatever you think you have that God wants. Your tithes and offerings, yes, but everything: your abilities – what you do for God, how you can serve Him. What you do or don't do to "live for God." Even your worship, your prayers, your Bible reading. Anything you can give to God. What is the impact of the gifts we can bring to Him?

Well, the Scriptures teach that anything we have to give God is something He first gave to us. You are a manager or steward of all you have, managing what belongs to the Lord. And you contribute nothing to your salvation. 1 Thessalonians says that only Jesus can save us from the wrath coming against sin. Jesus absorbed the wrath of God; He assuaged God's anger. Jesus was able to pay the price required by God for our sin.

Our gifts don't contribute anything to that. So what good is your gift? We should see our gifts to God as a loving response to His grace. If you don't see your gifts to God that way – if you lose sight of how God views your gifts to Him – then you don't really know God like you might think you do.

And again: we are all prone to lose sight of this. But the impact we think our gifts have on God reveals that we don't know Him well. Understanding what our gifts mean to God is essential to knowing Him.

You know the old saying, when trying to buy a present for someone: "*What do you give to the person who has everything?*" Joseph was second in Egypt only to their king. He had everything one could want. It's not that the gifts aren't a nice gesture. It's not that they have no value. It's just that they aren't what Joseph wants and frankly, what he deserves. He wants their repentance and their love. He wants a relationship with them. They are focused on their felt

needs; he is focused on the heart. Do you see how this illustrates the situation between God and his people?

Now in this next half of the chapter, the brothers arrive in Egypt, and they have Benjamin. And notice verse [16] *When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Bring the men into the house, and slaughter an animal and make ready, for the men are to dine with me at noon."* What is significant about Benjamin? For Joseph, it's more evidence of a changed heart in the brothers. It's an effort to do what's right.

And Joseph's response is fascinating. They were the reason for His suffering, but he shows mercy and grace by inviting them to dine with him. He invites them into fellowship. Now the brothers tell Joseph's servant that they have the money from before, and that's why they're afraid. So the servant relays that information to Joseph, and also that they brought the money back. But look at verse [23] *He replied, "Peace to you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you. I received your money."* So now they know the money wasn't a mistake. They were intentionally given the grain for free. And the glory is given to the God of Abraham!

They had to be puzzled about what was going on. And when Joseph arrives, they give him the gifts, but he's interested instead in the welfare of his father, Jacob, and he's moved to tears by the presence of his younger brother – his only full brother – Benjamin. I wonder if Benjamin favored their mother. We don't know. Maybe he favored their father.

Also, Benjamin was just a little boy the last time Joseph saw him. All the feelings are right there for Joseph. When they sit down to eat, they're at different tables. This was according to Egyptian custom, and it's more evidence that Joseph is not ready to reveal himself. There's actually more to this meal than meets the eyes. Genesis 37 says that after his brothers threw him in the pit, they sat down to eat. That's how insensitive they were. And now Joseph watches and listens again as they eat.

They don't sit together because Egyptians believed they were superior to Hebrews. They had different customs and Hebrews were shepherds, viewed as unclean. But notice verse 33 says that as they ate, the brothers looked at one another in amazement. This is largely because they've been seated in order according to their birth. How would the Egyptian governor know this? Does he have some kind of powers?

I think they would also be amazed to be at this meal. In the midst of a famine, they are sitting at a feast. There's another test here also, verse [34] *Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs.* Joseph wants to see if they will be jealous of Benjamin as they were of him so long ago? But apparently they are not. And so they eat and drink in peace, although next week we find that Joseph's not done yet.

Wouldn't they have to be wondering, *"What's the reason for this graciousness?"* Are they thinking, *"Wow, that gift must've really done the trick!"* Wouldn't they wonder, *"What is this*

Egyptian governor's motivation for his kindness?" Well, they don't know the reason because they don't know him. They don't understand the impetus of the grace he shows them.

What is the reason? Well, remember, we're here to learn about God. We're here to get to know our Savior better – the greatest of Savior's, who came into the world to save us from God's wrath and restore us to Him. This event between Joseph and his brothers teaches us about God's grace.

Do you know the impetus of the grace God gives to you? The apostle Paul writes, *"even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved,"* and the reason Paul gives is this: *"because of the great love with which he loved us."* God shows grace because He loves us.

The impetus of His grace is His great love. The gifts we bring can only be a response to the love God shows. Of course, God commands us to obey Him. Obeying God is the best way to live. And it's true that we reap what we sow. That's how the world works. But we must see our gifts to God the way God sees them.

Joseph didn't see the gift that his brothers presented to him and think to himself, *"You know, I was going to throw these guys in prison and put them to death, but these pistachio nuts changed my mind!"* That would be absurd. Joseph showed them grace because of his love for them and his love for his father. If they had known him, they would've known that.

The impetus of God's grace is His love. That's why the apostle John writes that, *"God is love."* I want you to listen to what John says in 1 John 4. And I want to get everyone's attention right now. So little children, please look at me. Please put down what you have and look at me and listen right now. And youth boys and girls, please look at me now and listen.

John writes, *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made known among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atonement for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."*

If you don't see your gifts and God's grace according to what He tells us in His Word, then you don't really know God. You may know some things about God, but even the demons know some things about Him. I'm talking about a living, personal knowledge of God. I'm talking about a real faith in His love and the humble response of presenting to him whatever gifts you have that He might use.

Do you know much about His grace and forgiveness? Do you know much about His ways? As you learn, it transforms everything. *"Where do we begin and how do we continue to know God?"* We return again and again to Jesus our Savior, and there, with the person and work of Jesus in

view, with His gospel in view, we learn about love, we learn about grace, we learn about forgiveness, we learn about mercy, we learn about humility, we learn about suffering, and we learn God's power and plans and glory.

As we go to the Lord's table this morning, we need to understand why Jesus commanded us to do it. It was because here, at His table, we come to know Him more. We come to know Him, and He strengthens us by His Holy Spirit, according to His great love. Have you admitted who you really are as you stand before God? A sinner in need of His grace? Do it today, and know God through Jesus Christ.

Let's bow together in prayer.