

The Perfect Gift For You
From the Series, “The Different Gifts of Christmas”
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Introduction

I once visited the home of a successful corporate lawyer at Christmas time. Being a successful corporate lawyer means a lot of things. One prominent thing is income - This man made a lot of money, and it showed. It showed in his car. It showed in his home. His home wasn't quite a mansion, but it was a large, beautiful home in the suburbs of Philadelphia.



When I visited, I saw something interesting: There were gift baskets all over. You've all seen a gift basket - Someone puts a lot of different food items into a box or basket. Maybe it's fruit like apples and pears - Usually very nice apples and pears. Maybe it's candy or cookies. Maybe it's some boxes of crackers along with special meats and cheese.

Anyway, whatever might be in a gift basket, this man had lots of them. Some were on the kitchen counter. Others showed up in various places around the house. It looked like they were so numerous the man didn't know quite where to put them all.

I couldn't help but say, "Wow! That's a lot of gift baskets." He gave a very interesting and memorable reply. He said, "Yeah - People send those things every year." Then he went on, "...and I don't know why they do. I don't really like them. If I want food, I can go to the store any time and buy it. If I want an apple, I get an apple. If I want candy (which I'm not supposed to eat) I could buy it." "In fact," he said, "I can go to the best restaurants in town any time I want. As far as gift baskets go, ***I'm beginning to really hate them.***"

How sad! How could that happen? Here's a man who, every year, gets a house full of gifts that he doesn't like.

We're in our Advent series, "The Different Gifts of Christmas." Today, we're going to talk about: "The Perfect Gift for You.

Have you ever received a gift that you really liked? Have you ever received a perfect gift? If you're a normal person, you likely have never received a perfect gift. But let's imagine for a bit -

What would it take for that to happen? What would it take for someone to give you a perfect gift?

Let me make a suggestion: In order for someone to give you a perfect gift, you would need two things:

Knowing

First, that someone would have to know you. They would have to know what makes you happy. They would have to know if there are things that bother you, so they could avoid those things. If somebody knew you, and knew you really well, they would know what you want for a gift. That's the first thing you would need: Someone who knows you.

Loving

Here's the second. Imagine that somebody met the first condition: They know you, and they know you well. Someone asks them, "So, do you know what you're going to give as a gift?" The person answers: "Yes, but who cares? Why would I bother?" That's a person who doesn't care. If a person knows you but doesn't care about you, that's bad. You want somebody who knows you *and who cares*.

Now, let's say the perfect gift for you is something big - Something hard. In that case, you want someone who cares about you a lot. Maybe you want someone who loves you. ***So, to receive the perfect gift, you would need someone who both knows you and who loves you.***

We're observing the fourth Sunday of Advent. Today, we lit the candle of Love. So, we're going to talk about it. We'll begin by asking a question: Is there someone who both knows you and loves you? The answer: Yes! And that's one of the biggest points of Christmas.

Let's learn about it.

I. Someone Knows You

Let's revisit a passage we looked at recently in our Advent series. This is something that God said to the prophet Jeremiah:

The word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you..." (Jeremiah 1:4-5)

When we read these words, we learn two important things. Both of those things have to do with the relationship God had with Jeremiah.

First, God formed him. Jeremiah was not an accident. No one is. The infinite God exercises total control over every aspect of the universe. Nothing is a surprise to him.

Next, God says that he **knew** Jeremiah. In fact, God knew Jeremiah long before Jeremiah was even conceived. We don't have time to hit every part of the Bible that says so, but God knows each of us. And he knew us long before we were born.

We've spoken about this in the past, so let's quickly review. What does it mean to know someone? All of us know **about** people. If you don't sleep through every minute of your history classes in school, you know **some** things about a lot of people - Important people - People like presidents and prime ministers and other world leaders.

But **knowing** someone is very different than knowing **about** them. To **know** someone means you **met** them. To know someone means you've had a personal encounter with them - You've had a personal experience.

This leads to something: The more time you spend with someone, the more you know them.

This becomes practical. Here's how: When you know someone well, you know how they will act in a given situation. You know that because you've been with them in different situations. You've seen what they did in those situations.

You know what they like. You know what makes them happy. You know that because you were there to watch how they responded when they saw different things. And sometimes you saw that they were happy.

Conversely, you know what they don't like, and you know what makes them unhappy. Again, you know this because you've watched them in different situations where things came along, and they didn't react well to those things.

Well, God knows each of us. This raises an interesting question: Is it possible to know someone **better** than they know themselves? Let's look at something the great King David wrote in the book of Psalms:

- 1 You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.
- 2 You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- 3 You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
- 4 Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.

(Psalm 139:1-4)

David said that God knew him. How did God do that? David said God searched him. And he didn't just look in David's pockets - God searched David's whole being.

Can you search someone's whole being? I can't. I can search a location, such as a park. I can search things, such as looking through files. But I can't search a person's whole being. God can, and only God can.

And what did God know about David? Everything. Sitting and standing. Coming and going. God knew all of David's thoughts. He knew all of David's ways. Even before David could say one word, God knew it. I'd say God knew David very well, and David recognized that.

Now, here's another question: If God can know us better than we can know ourselves, is his idea of a perfect gift different than ours?

A story

Let me tell you a story I once heard. Years ago, there was a television series called "The Twilight Zone." It was a show that was designed to make people think. One episode had the title, "What you need." The episode was first aired on Christmas day, 1959.

It starts in a little café in New York City. You can picture it – there's a counter where a few people could sit. A few small tables. There are just a few people in the café. At one table sits an attractive woman reading a book. At the counter sits a man in his early thirties.

Into this this scene steps an elderly man carrying a large leather bag. His name is Depott. Depott walks up to the woman and says to her, "I have something you need." Her name is Gretta. Depott reaches into his bag and pull out a small bottle of fabric cleaner, which he hands to Gretta. She doesn't know what to say. You can tell she's thinking, "Why in the world should I need this?" But she politely thanks the man and puts the bottle into her purse.

Next, Depott walks up to the man seated at the counter. He is called "Lefty". As it turns out, Lefty was a former baseball player. He was very good in his day, but sadly, a sports injury sidelined him. Now he's just someone looking for work. Depott says, "I have something you need." He hands the baseball player a bus ticket. Lefty reads it and says, "Scranton, PA. Why do I need to go to Scranton?" Depott just nods and walks away.

Depott is about to walk out when he notices the last man in the corner. His name is Fred. Fred is a con artist who has seen better days. Depott walks up to him and says, "I have something you need." He reaches into his bag and pulls out a pair of scissors, which he then hands to Fred. Fred says, "Why do I need this?" Depott replies, "Hang onto it." He then leaves. Fred finds a place for the scissors in the front pocket of his jacket.

Almost as soon as Depott has walked out the door, the phone rings (They didn't have cell phones in those days). The owner answers it and says, "Hey Lefty, it's for you." It turns out there's a minor league baseball team in Scranton. The just lost their coach. Lefty's name came up. If he can be in Scranton by the next day, they'll interview him. It's not a done deal – but if he can do well at the interview, he's back in baseball. Lefty laments, "But how do I get there?" "I'm broke and I don't have a car." Suddenly, he remembers – he has a bus ticket to Scranton.

Lefty is so excited, he jumps up. Sadly, in the process he spills something on the lapel of his jacket. He says, "Oh, no - This is my only good jacket. I can't go looking like this!" Suddenly, Gretta remembers that she has a small bottle of fabric cleaner. She pulls it out, puts a little on a napkin, and gets to work.

As she starts to wipe the spot on the lapel of his jacket, Gretta's eyes meet Lefty's. There's some chemistry going on there, and you know something good is going to happen.

While all this was going on, Fred left and headed home. He gets to his apartment building and steps into the elevator. As the door starts to close though, something terrible happens. Fred's wearing a long scarf, and it gets caught in the door. The elevator starts to move, and you can watch the scarf pulling Fred to the floor. He's terrified – he's about to get his head pulled off. Suddenly he remembers – he has a pair of scissors in his pocket. He's able to pull out the scissors and cut himself free in the nick of time.

We'll stop here. It's a great episode and I'm sure it's available on some online service. I'll let you watch and see the rest. But that's the idea: Sometimes the perfect gift isn't something we'd expect.

Now that story was from TV. It's not real, but God is. And his stories are very real.

Since God knows us better than we know ourselves, what are some things that God might give to us? What might he think of as the perfect gift? Let's read something else from the Psalms.

13 As a father has compassion on his children,
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;
14 for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.

(Psalm 103:13-14)

God knows us. He knows how we are formed. Because of that, he knows we are dust. That's another way of saying that we are limited. We sometimes fail. Instead of being courageous, sometimes we're afraid. Instead of being good, we're bad.

How does the God who knows us respond to this? How does he respond to our weakness and limitations? ***He responds with compassion.***

What's the perfect gift for us? We think we need a better car. We think we need a better job. We think we need all kinds of things. God knows what we really need. We need ***compassion***. And he has compassion, we're told, on those who fear him.

Now, here's another question: Compassion is great, but do we need something more? Earlier, we said that to get the perfect Gift, we need two things. We need someone who knows us, and we need someone who loves us. Does that fit with God? Yes - Again, that's a big part of the message of Christmas. Let's read something that Jesus said many years after he was born:

14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. (John 10:14-15)

Jesus says that he knows his sheep. Because he knows his sheep, he feels led to do something - He lays down his life for them.

Why would Jesus lay down his life for his sheep? Because he loves them.

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. (John 15:13)

Jesus knows his sheep. If you're one of his sheep, that means he knows you. Jesus loves his sheep. If you're one of his sheep, that means he loves you. Jesus says that a sign of the greatest love is to lay down one's life for one's friends. If you're one of the friends of Jesus, he is willing to lay down his life for you.

This is where we stop for a moment. We can't help but be awestruck that someone would be willing to do this for us. But, you may have noticed something here. We've said, ***IF*** you're one of his sheep. ***IF*** you're one of his friends. So, we have to ask: Are you one of Jesus's sheep? Are you one of his friends? If not, how do you become one?

If you're interested, here's what you need to do.

Understand why Jesus died.

The first thing you need to do is understand why Jesus died. People have debated this for a long time. Some believe that Jesus died to set an example. In other words, you should care about people so much that you're willing to die.

To understand this, imagine a burning building. Some fire fighters show up. They do the best they can, but it's really bad. Someone yells out, "There's a child trapped in there!" So, one

brave fire fighter runs into the building. He's able to get the child out, but he's horribly injured in the process. Later, he dies from his injuries, and he suffers a lot of excruciating pain along the way.

To this we could say, "How noble." That fire fighter gave his life so he could save someone else, because that person else could not save themselves.

But let's imagine the scene differently. It's the same fire, but this time, everyone has escaped. Everyone - they're all out. A crowd has gathered to watch, as often happens at times like this. One man jumps in front of the crowd and yells out, "I love you all, so I'm going to be an example!" He then runs in to the burning building. It collapses on him, and he dies. He's dead, and he no doubt suffered excruciating pain along the way. But he didn't save anyone. He didn't save anyone because no one needed to be saved.

What kind of an example is that? In order for it to mean something when someone gives their life for someone else, the someone else must have a real need to be saved.

Earlier, we said that, in order to receive the perfect gift, you need two things: You need someone who knows you, and someone who loves you. Actually, you need one more thing: You need someone who knows how the universe works.

Now, the universe is pretty big. So, let's boil it down to what we need to know:

...people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment... (Hebrews 9:27)

The universe is big and complex. But as far as we're concerned, those are the most important parts: One day, we will all die. After that, we will stand before God and face judgement.

To this, some will say, "I'm not worried about judgement - I'm pretty good." Here's a Bible verse that addresses this response:

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3)

Look at that: "All have sinned." That's you and that's me. If any of us stand before God in the judgement, we will all fail. That's why we need some things. We need to be saved. We need God to have compassion on us. We need Jesus to love us so much that he would be willing to die for us. He did that to pay for our sins.

Earlier, we read a few words from a sentence in the book of Hebrews. Let's read it in a fuller context:

27 Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; (Hebrews 9:27-28)

Christ was sacrificed to take away our sins - Yours and mine.

Think about it. If we could stand on our own in the judgement, we wouldn't need Jesus to die for us. Since Jesus died, it would be like he was the guy who ran into the burning building for no reason. The reason Jesus had to die is that we could never stand on our own in the judgement. Jesus died for you and me because we needed him to die for us.

Here's how the apostle Paul describes this:

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

So, in order to become one of God's sheep – In order to become one of this friends – You have to understand why Jesus died. Jesus died because you and I are in danger. We will all die one day and face judgement, and we cannot stand in the judgement by ourselves. Because of this, Jesus had to die. He had to die so we could be saved.

In the quote above it says, "And this is not your own doing." It is "not a result of works." You cannot do enough good works to save yourself.

Once you understand why Jesus died, there's a second step. You must have faith. You must have faith that: God knows you well - Better than you can know yourself. Faith that God cares about you so much, that he is willing to offer you a gift. Not just any gift - The perfect gift for you. The gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Let's pull this all together.

CONCLUSION

We started our discussion today by looking at a man who had a house full of gifts that he didn't like. How could that happen? That's what happens when no one knows you. When no one knows you, they can't offer you anything that you need or want.

Fortunately, God knows each of us. More than that, he loves us. And so, he can offer the perfect gift for us: Salvation through Jesus Christ. And that's just the start. Because God knows you personally, he can give you many gifts. All those gifts are perfectly tailored for you. All those gifts will help you on your unique journey. Many of those gifts will be things that you would not expect, but the God who knows you and who loves you knows that you need each one.

That's one of the most important messages of Christmas.

Would you like to become one of God's sheep? Would you like to become a friend of God? Then accept the gift that he offers to you this Christmas - The perfect gift. You accept it through faith in what Jesus did for you.

If you've never done this, please talk with us. There is some important information on how to contact us at the end of this article. We'd love for you to receive the greatest gift that you could ever receive this Christmas - The perfect gift for you.

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church of Teaneck, NJ
www.TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site
PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:

PeaceWithGod.net