



Session One

He's a Giver, Not a Taker.

“...knowing God better is what we must have above all if we are to face life in any circumstances.”¹

We often assume He's one more taker in our lives.

We'll believe the _____ and the _____ that portray God as _____ and _____.

Job 42:12 - “The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first.” Because He's a giver.

We can be quick to _____ and slow to _____.

What kind of God gives this?
And to me?²

In His Own Words...

- He gives a ram for Isaac. (Genesis 22:13-14)
- He gives Abraham and the Israelites a land. (Genesis 28:4)
- He gives rest. (Exodus 33:14)
- He gives promises and fulfills every one of them. (Joshua 23:14)
- He gives Hannah a son. (1 Samuel 1:1-20)
- He gives wisdom. (1 Kings 4:29)
- He gives success. (2 Chronicles 26:5)
- He gives victory over enemies. (Psalm 44:7)
- He gives protection. (Psalm 91:1-2)
- He gives the ability to understand Truth. (Psalm 119:18)
- He gives wealth and possessions. (Ecclesiastes 5:19)
- He gives knowledge and understanding. (Daniel 1:17)

- He gives the widow her son. (Luke 7:15)
- He gives His Son. (John 1:14)
- He gives us an opportunity to live with Him forever. (John 3:16)
- He gives the Holy Spirit. (John 3:34)
- He gives grace. (Acts 4:33)
- He gives freedom. (Galatians 5:1)
- He gives love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23)
- He gives peace. (Philippians 4:7)
- He gives good gifts. (James 1:17)

That's a Wrap...

1. He is a giver and is only capable of giving us _____.
2. He will only ever take something away to give something else.
3. He will only take or allow loss when something _____ is at stake.

Where the Rubber Meets the Road:

Look back at your list of Biblical evidence. Which three examples resonate most as a current need for you? Look up the verses, write them in your journal, and answer as many of the following questions³ as apply.

- Is there an example for me to follow?
- Is there a command for me to obey?
- Is there an error for me to avoid?
- Is there a sin for me to quit?
- Is there an idol for me to abandon?
- Is there a promise for me to claim?
- Is there any new thought about God Himself?

Day 1
He is selfless.

If we can open with a little real talk.....we're selfish. We're born selfish. We want what we want, and it's our natural instinct (and desire) to go after it.

Not only that. We snack on a steady diet of self-serving propaganda. *It's a dog-eat-dog world, man. I'm looking out for numero uno. Follow your heart. YOLO. When in Rome. Carpe Diem. Life is Short. Do your thing.* The messages leak into our bloodstream and feed our inner indulgent, leaving us fighting a daily battle to rein in our yuck. 'Tis the plight of man.

But it's not the plight of God.

This is not a battle that wars within Him.

One major objective of this study is to dismantle the ways in which we "humanize" God by showing Him into our own framework of depravity. God created us to find our fulfillment in Him, and everything He does is about helping us move towards that. There is nothing selfish about His motives. His selflessness is best demonstrated by His plan to allow Jesus to pay for our punishment, so that our sin would not separate us from relationship with Him. Everything He does is about us.

We are His every motive.

Let's look at the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah. The content of the narrative is challenging enough on its own, so choose a translation that's easy to understand and read Genesis 22:1-18.

Why does God command Abraham to sacrifice his son?

***How do you reconcile this directive with God's selflessness?
How does it make sense?***

To be honest, I've always thought this was a jacked-up story. Why did God command Abraham to kill Isaac? That feels like a monstrously selfish

request. Especially considering God had promised to make Abraham's line a nation through Isaac AND the fact that Sarah and Abraham had waited eons for the birth of their only son. They were rushing Sarah from the nursing home to the delivery room, and now God seemingly asks for their son back.

When we get past the audacity and savagery of the command, we can see what's actually at play. We see in verse 1 the whole thing is a test, which tells us God never intended for Abraham to kill Isaac.

And when we read Abraham's words to his servants in verse 5 ("Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."), we see him pass the test before he even starts lassoing Isaac.

What does this verse indicate about Abraham's faith?

Verse 8 further gives us a glimpse of what is happening inside Abraham as they near the designated place.

By Abraham's use of *we* in verse 5, he indicates his belief that Isaac would return with him. He believes God will provide an alternative sacrifice (the ram caught in the thicket, v. 13) OR.....

Read Hebrews 11:17-19, what was the second option he believed God could do?

Abraham knew God's heart so well and believed His promise so completely that he trusted God with the outcome of His obedience. Confidently knowing, "He'll either give me a new plan or bring Isaac back from the dead. Either way, we're coming back together because God will fulfill His promise."

God's heart all along.....long before this incident.....was to selflessly bless

Abraham more than he had ever blessed a man. God's love had to ensure that Abraham's character and faith and obedience could responsibly handle the blessing. Which he proved he could.

AND! Because God's a sharp multi-tasker, while testing Abraham, He also gave us a dramatic representation of what He would do for us with HIS Son.

He would not spare Him for us.

There was no ram in the thicket for Jesus.

There was no change in the plan as a tormented Jesus prepared for the cross in the Garden of Gethsemane.

God is selfless because when it mattered the most He gave the absolute best He had.

His Son.

Look up Romans 5:8 and write the verse here.

Day 2
He is creative.

Did you know...

- a lobster's blood is colorless but turns blue when exposed to oxygen?⁴
- cats have 32 muscles in each ear?⁵
- dragonfly nymphs breathe through their anuses?⁶
- a hummingbird's heart can beat more than a 1000 times per minute?⁷
- giraffes clean their eyes and ears with their tongues?⁸
- finger nails grow fastest on the hand you favor?⁹

And it's not just the oddities of Creation that point to God's creativity. What is the purpose of color? He could've pigmented everything in shades of brown. Why does a sunset cast far-reaching oranges and pinks and purples? Why does music stir our souls? Why did He choose to throw laughter into the mix? Why go with so many varieties of flowers when one would have sufficed? And what kind of mind dreams up the barred beauty of a zebra?

We miss such a rich aspect of His character when we grow immune to wonder.

According to Psalm 19:1-2, why is Creation chock-full of intriguing detail and transcendent artistry?

The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known.

-Psalm 19:1-2 NLT

It's the same reason we are told all mankind has the opportunity to know Him in Romans 1:20. What does this verse say we can "see" in all God has made?

Our Father uses the intricacies of Creation to woo us, to make Himself known to us, to show off for us. When He unzips the mundane and sands

down the coarse coating of our hearts enough for us to marvel, we encounter God. The Creator of the Universe. His creative flourish draws our curiosity about Him and allows us to identify elements of who He is. In ecosystems we see Him as an orderly God who thinks in terms of cause and effect. From the peak of a mountain range, we glimpse His vastness. The complexities of a developing infant whisper of His tenderness and His precision. The perfection of a tulip tells of His soft spot for the stunning. As Wayne Grudem asserts in his *Systematic Theology*, “in some sense every created thing gives evidence of God’s character”.¹⁰

***What is the greatest hindrance to your sense of wonder?
How can you protect it? And why is it important that you
do?***

Furthermore, when we delight in preparing a new recipe, composing a song, crafting a wreath, formulating a fresh process, designing a logo, up-cycling an old lamp, drafting the landscape of the backyard, building a story, we connect with something in us that is like Him. Our creativity is a reflection of His. A resemblance to our Father.

What does Psalm 33:6-9 (NLT) tell us about God’s words?

***Write your own prayer of wonder, acknowledging God’s
creativity and what it tells you about Him.***

***Father, thank You for using Creation as a vehicle to make Yourself
known to us. Thank You for the dramatic blue of a clear sky and the
rumble of the ocean, the dart of a hummingbird, the crow of a rooster,
and the pure ingenuity of leaves changing color in the fall. You are the
origin of creativity; please heighten and protect our sense of wonder.
Quicken our worship. Command our awe to buckle our knees in
humility and reverence. We love you, Lord, and we want to love You
even more. Please reveal Yourself to us as we seek You during this
study. We think You’re the coolest! In Jesus’ name.....Amen.***

I love my youngest girl's brain. Because it is nothing like my own. Campbell can study a treehouse through squinty, thinking eyes and determine how to most effectively reinforce it. She deciphers owner's manuals and programs our lives. She regularly stands before our dining room table, strewn with puzzle pieces, and methodically constructs order out of disarray. She understands how elements work together to create a whole. To serve a purpose.

God is pretty fabulous at puzzles too. He *creates* the relationships between objects and events to construct a whole for His purposes. God authored the analytical. Psalm 139:16 reads,

*All the days ordained for me
Were written in your book
Before one of them came to be.*

So. Before our grand debut on planet Earth, God knew every day you and I would spend in skin. Metaphorically speaking, He stood before His massive dining room table and put all the pieces together of your life...before there was even a puzzle. Every event in your life, every relationship, every city you've called home, every difficulty, every tear is a piece in the puzzle. In the end, they'll all fit perfectly to create the mosaic He intends your life to be. No piece is too large or small. None too wonky or misshapen. All of the pieces are part of the plan to assemble you and me into children who look more like our Father.

Can you see how God is using the "pieces" of your life to build you into the person He wants you to be?

- If yes, record that process in your journal and thank Him for His faithfulness.
- If no, write a prayer in your journal asking Him to show you how He's working through the events of your life. And then tune in to see what He reveals over the course of the next few weeks.

Romans 8:28 speaks to God’s commitment to masterfully connect all the “things” of life – the puzzle pieces – together with a grand result. “The things themselves may not be good, but God harmonizes them together for believers’ ultimate good, because His goal is to bring them to perfection in His presence.”¹¹

*And we know that for those who love God **all things work together** for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.
Romans 8:28 (ESV – emphasis added)*

We can bank on Paul’s words as we trust God’s divine process, “being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). He knows every day of our lives. He works all of the events together for our good, and He finishes what He starts.

He gives purpose and connection to our stories.

In His time, He brings everything to completion.

And don’t even get me started on how your puzzle is connected to my puzzle. And how His best for you works in conjunction with His best for me where our lives intersect.....Oh my! This head hurts.

Reread Philippians 1:6 (above) and answer the following questions:

What does this verse tell you about God that you should thank Him for?

What does this verse show you about a need you have?

What do you need to do in response to this verse?¹²

Day 4
He is generous.

“God is very bighearted. In every circumstance, he doesn’t just give us what we ask for, or even what we need. He gives us more, and in the process, invites us into a deeper relationship with him. He gives us those things we can’t even identify or put into words. He lavishes us with his love and care. He doesn’t hold back from the grit and grime of our lives. He gives of himself. He interacts with us in ways we didn’t think possible. He speaks to us, he listens to us, he sings to us – he even dances over us. Indeed, our God is very bighearted.”¹³

Nana and Papa had the most painful grass known to mankind. One did not plant her backside on it without the immediate consequence of harsh prickles. Their yard was constantly in bloom. Magenta roses. Violet irises. Indigo hydrangeas. And their home was perpetually stocked with the good stuff. Soda. Candy. And a confection always in the glass cake stand at the end of the table. So it was sweet to be there....to be home....for the spring break of my junior year in college.

The days were beginning to stretch their legs later into the evening, and the beach traffic was just experiencing the first surge of the season as students headed east for the week. I walked onto the front stoop, snagging a long inhale of love-and-home-and-sunshine-and-all-is-right-with-the-world when my dad sped into their half-circle drive in a cutie blue-green coupe.

What?!?

The parents had failed to mention a new car purchase. My dad was forever a truck.....my mom was a sedan.....and my younger sister was a bicycle. So.....maybe I was a COUPE!!!!!! [double fingers crossed].

Sure enough. That Toyota Paseo belonged to this girl. All mine. For no other reason than the fact my parents loved me, and this generous gift flowed from that.

It had a manual transmission and an owner with automatic experience. If you

are hearing the grind of gears and catching a whiff of a burning clutch, then you, my friend, are on the right track. I had one week to master the stick-shift before I took on the rolling hills around Clemson University. My spring break nightmares were plagued by stop signs on a slope.

My parents took out loans to pay for my school; they bought me a car. I never had to work while attending class (though summers and holidays were fair game). My parents modeled generosity fueled by love.

Look up Matthew 7:9-11. How do these verses compare a parent's generosity to God's?

Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly reveals His desire to give to us. He wants to speed into the driveway of our lives and hand over the keys to our hearts' desires.

Back up a few verses and read Matthew 7:7-8. List and personalize the if/then promises in these verses. I'll do the first one here....

If I ask, it will be given to me.

Now look up Psalm 37:4 and write that if/then promise here.

Thankfully, this doesn't mean He'll give us anything we want; He's too wise in His generosity for that. We're all remembering that love we wanted to marry in seventh grade. Need I say more?

But when we are genuinely and naturally enjoying Him, seeking Him, and

talking to Him, we give Him access to our hearts. With that access He will begin to change our hearts to be more like His. And if it isn't wise for Him to give us what we really, really want, He'll change our desire to match His. And then.....as we persist in our love for Him and dive even deeper into relationship with Him.....He genuinely BECOMES the desire of our hearts. And we can seek Him, and we'll find Him. We can ask for more of Him, and we'll receive it.

We can knock, and He'll open the door and invite us in.

He's a giver God, and He gave his very own Son "so that everyone would have life, and have it in its fullest" (John 10:10, CEV). Generosity is an inherent part of His character. And He is only capable of giving His best.