

# The God Who Gives, Knows What He Is Doing

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     There we go. Can you hear me okay? Good stuff. Thank you very much.

Well done team on getting that together. I know you were under pressure there. Well done. I'm going to read a few verses from John chapter 3, but I'll say up front this will probably be more thematic than it will be a thorough exposition of the passage.

It will be more about the reflections and lessons that I've been pondering on this past week. I was talking to James about this and I was just thinking you might have thought you guys from Alabama, sometimes I might be a bit quiet.

And I was saying to James, if you could identify with a Bible character, who would it be? And I said, this is going to sound weird, but I'd identify with Mary. But I think it's just because I've been pondering these things in my heart and I've been thinking deeply about them and trying to let it affect me and trying to learn from it.

And so these, I'm just going to, basically five things that I've learned from this past week that God has reminded me. And really about the God who gives is the God who knows what he's doing.

[ 1 : 2 2 ]     And so John chapter 3 from verse 25, I'm just going to read this. Well, this is God's word and we pray that he blesses it to us.

I just want to share five things that I've been pondering on this week. And hopefully I'll be able to say not too much about each one.

But number one, if you build it, they won't always come. Number two, your ministry won't necessarily look like the next person's ministry.

Number three, God's measuring stick is faithfulness, not success. Number four, God does not owe us anything.

But he knows what is good and he gives in abundance. And number five, whatever God gives us is as much to fulfill his plans in us as it is for those we serve.

[ 2 : 3 3 ]     And so let me just say a little bit about each one of them, okay? If you build it, they won't always come. Consider the prophets of the Old Testament, most of whom were given the task to speak a message to people who would not listen to them.

Just because we put an event on doesn't mean people will come out and listen. However, at the end of the day, we could have done it at a different time, a different place. We could talk about if this building was in a community somewhere or if we did it at the end of summer.

Or if we did it 100 years ago or 50 years ago, more people would be coming. At the end of the day, this opportunity arose. We couldn't change the place or the time.

And I am convinced that it was the Lord who gave this opportunity. So in my reflections, I've been going back and forth with very mixed feelings. On the one hand, feeling extremely encouraged at the time we've had together and what we've been able to do.

And on the other hand, trying to fend off any discouragement that I've had and any assumptions I've had about what I might have thought God was doing. So as a disciple, which Larry very helpfully defined last week as a learner and follower of Jesus, I've been reflecting on how the disciples of John must have felt when everyone was going off to Jesus to be baptized.

[ 3 : 56 ] It seemed like ministry was thriving somewhere else. And yet John reminded them, God is sovereign. God knows what he's doing.

And anyone who has any ministry has that from heaven. And the one who calls a person into a ministry is the one who governs the shape of it.

And so we are sowing seeds into a very sleepy world. One which the devil would have people to stay in the darkness and in distraction. He's blinded the eyes of many people in our world and in our community.

And the devil would not want people coming to a place where the Lord is proclaimed. And likewise, people in darkness don't always want to be around the light because it exposes sin.

Yet we have seen, many people find their way here on a Sunday, haven't we? To hear God's word and to gather together. And so although nobody showed up, perhaps it's about the Lord wanting us to show up.

[ 5 : 03 ] And us to continue to show up in places that are dark, even if nobody is listening. Because isn't that what he did? He showed up as light in the darkness.

Yet the town slept when the King of Glory arrived. He wasn't received, but he showed up for us. He showed up for sinners like us because we were lost.

Your ministry won't necessarily look like the next person's ministry. And so a wee example, you get there's many examples. But for instance, we're told about Elijah the prophet and his contest with 400 prophets of Baal.

He stopped the rain for three years. God appointed ravens to bring Elijah food. And Elijah saw God keep the flour and oil flowing.

And yet consider a contemporary of his, the prophet Micaiah. He is most known for speaking a message that the king hated. And then he was slapped in the face and then he was thrown in prison for telling the truth.

[ 6 : 07 ] Your ministry won't necessarily look like the next person. And this past week I've seen other ministries with more people showing up. But it would be very presumptuous, very premature and lacking in wisdom to draw any kind of conclusion about that.

Many people show up to many things for many reasons. And I'm glad if they show up to something that will allow them to hear the good news. And I pray that the Lord would open their hearts, that they would pay attention to that.

But even if people show up to a good ministry, we've learned from the parable of the sower to be cautious about drawing conclusions from responses. And so in any case, I heard about a few different holiday clubs and I want to share some updates about a few different holiday clubs.

One in the east of Glasgow, a friend of mine's in a scheme, very well attended. Lots of kids jumping about, having fun and hearing the gospel.

That's a good church and they're doing a good work in a difficult neighborhood. And then we've got a holiday club here where nobody shows up from the community. But we have a really encouraging time for different reasons that I'll get into in a moment.

[ 7 : 18 ] And we received many angry comments from our advertising online. And then I heard of a kids' summer club from Open Doors in Indonesia.

A kids' summer club that 200 Muslims turned up to and started destroying the place. They began shouting and throwing things.

Driving the Christians out. Smashing the place up. And I think about those kids. So, it doesn't sound like a pleasant experience.

But the Lord is not surprised by any of those experiences. The Lord is not surprised by any of the different circumstances or responses.

And neither should we. Perhaps you've had a similar situation to someone else. And perhaps you're in a situation in life. And you're praying.

[ 8 : 23 ] And yet you see the Lord answer prayer in someone else's life. But it doesn't work out that way for you. And you wonder why. Why does God answer their prayers and not ours?

Perhaps you're doing all the same things. But getting very different results. And I'm reminded that Jesus hardly ever repeated the same thing. There's not a secret method.

And C.S. Lewis explored this in Narnia. When Aslan said to Lucy. Things never happen the same twice. The Lord cares more.

More about people. Than to just have a secret method. His word is not an algorithm. It is living and active. And His spirit is more like wind.

Than it is like a mechanical motor. Driving a boat. And so the Lord deals with people. Individually. And personally. And uniquely. Because He cares about the small things.

[ 9 : 24 ] Not just the big things we've been learning. And that's good news. And so God's measuring stick is faithfulness. Not success. John the Baptist's ministry was not about gaining the most followers.

But preparing the way for the Lord. And pointing people to Jesus. He told his own students that he wasn't the Christ. And yet they were still hanging around him. And he was pointing to Jesus.

And saying I must decrease. And He must increase. And yet I know. Our enthusiasm for Jesus to increase. I know that we want to see people come through the door.

To hear about Jesus. That the Lord does not require us to produce results. He's looking for us to be faithful. Not successful. Whatever that's supposed to look like.

And so considering this past week. What is a successful holiday club? If it was measured by the number of children. Then the holiday club here wasn't very successful.

[ 10 : 28 ] But was it a faithful holiday club? Yes it was. It really was. These people travelled over a thousand miles. To deliver God's word.

With faithfulness. And proclaim His name. Proclaim the greatness of God. And to serve a church. And they have fulfilled that task faithfully. And some of you came to serve.

Each day. And many of you were praying. Faithfulness. Not success. Now I remember hearing a story about. A lead actor.

Of a very well known film. Gladiator. And on the first day of filming. The director gave him a piece of. Unscripted direction.

And so the actor just followed it. And he brought out all these acting skills. To do this scene. Really well. And it was inconsequential.

[ 11 : 24 ] The scene. He didn't really know why he was asked to do it. But he did it with. With a lot of colour. And enthusiasm. And afterwards the director basically said to him. You and I are going to get on very well.

And basically. It was less about the scene being vital. And more about whether the actor. Would follow direction or not. And see this has always been the case with God.

God is not impressed. With success. Like Solomon. Who accumulated. Much wealth. Many wives. And multitude of war horses. Success was his folly.

Whereas his father David. Was a man called. A man after God's own heart. Because he was more concerned about faithfulness to God. And you only need to read the Psalms.

To see that. And so I remember. At the beginning of this year. Having a real sense. That I felt like it was time for us. To go up a gear. As a church. And for me personally.

[ 12 : 20 ] As a pastor. And I've found the opportunities. The Lord has given. To do this. In this past week. Perhaps didn't seem. All that successful.

If it's measured by numbers of children. And if we were only concerned about success. But if we were concerned about faithfulness. Then like that actor. We have followed direction.

As best we can. Without really knowing why. The Lord has given this to us. And perhaps you have sensed. In your life. The Lord has taken you in a direction.

But it's not taking shape. The way you expected. Perhaps it's less about the shape of it. Or what we think the outcome will be. And more about our faithfulness.

And trusting. And following the Lord's direction. And so point number four. God does not owe us anything. But he knows what is good. And gives in abundance.

[ 13 : 15 ] As I've been reflecting on this past week. And thinking about this verse. Where John the Baptist says. A person cannot receive even one thing. Unless it is given him from heaven.

I've been thinking. That it wouldn't have been hard. For the Lord. To fill this place with children. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Nothing's too hard for him.

Think about all the Lord has done. I mean when he was on earth. He fed thousands. With a handful of loaves. He turned water into wine. He commands the wind and sea.

With a word. His word brings the dead to life. And he's the one who made everything you see in this room. He's the one who gives you breath in your lungs this morning. Is anything too hard for the Lord?

Not only would it have been easy for the Lord to fill this place. But we're reminded in 1 Corinthians 3. That we just plant in water.

[ 14 : 12 ] But he gives the growth. So. Why was it quiet? Well God doesn't owe us a busy holiday club.

And I might think that it seems like a good thing. Perhaps at some point it may be. But even so. God does not owe anybody anything. I want you to just stop for a moment.

And just focus on your breath. Right? Where does that come from? You see. Sometimes in the West.

We think that life is a right. But it's not a right. We don't have a right to life. Life is a gift. From God. Psalm 150 says. Let everything that has breath.

Praise the Lord. Why? Because everything that has breath. Gets it from the Lord. We do not need to exist. We are not consequential to God's universe.

[ 15 : 09 ] God in his goodness. Nevertheless has given us life. And breath. And everything. Out of his great kindness and love. Why does he give us that? So that we might seek him.

And find him. Yet he's not far from each one of us. Not only does he give us life. Through his son Jesus. At the beginning of creation. But because we are sinners.

And we don't deserve it. He gives us salvation. And eternal life. Through faith in Jesus. So one of the things I've been reminded of this past week. Is that perhaps I presumed to know what gift the Lord was given when he arranged all this.

I truly believe that it was the Lord's doing. But in my finite mind. I thought it was. I thought in a very limited way. Like a two dimensional way.

How often do we think that we can anticipate what God is doing. And then it doesn't work out that way. I wonder how Paul felt in Acts 16.

[16:09] When he couldn't get to Asia. And it says that they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit. To speak the word in Asia. I wonder how Paul felt. I wonder if they were confused.

If they were discouraged. Or maybe they were just leaning into the ambiguity. And praying and trusting that wherever they went. The Spirit was leading them. You see the Lord is sovereign.

And the Lord could have easily have filled this place with children. And so I've been meditating on the fact. That the Lord didn't when he could have. So the Lord must be giving us something else.

How good is God? God doesn't owe us anything. But our Father in heaven. Knows what is good for us. And he gives us an abundance. I know that my Lord cares for me.

And for each one of you. And I know that the serpent has always been wrong. In the lie that God withholds good. He doesn't withhold good from us. Whether we see it or not.

[17:10] God knows what is good. And he doesn't withhold it. But he gives it in absolute abundance. And think of all that we have had. Think of everything that we presently have right now.

That the Lord is doing. That he did not owe us. But he loves us and graciously gives us. In his wisdom for his own glory. And for our good. And so my final point is this.

Whatever God gives us. Is as much for him to fulfill his plans in us. As it is for those we serve. In my own reflections.

On a very, very quiet holiday club. God has done more. For me and my family. And for this church.

And for my brothers and sisters from the states. Than I ever expected. And I felt bad. For this team that came over. On a missions trip. Expecting to reach out into the community.

[18:06] And I was discouraged. That there weren't all these outsiders. For us to share God's love with. But like a father. Sometimes wants to draw away with his children.

And spend time with them. I've been reflecting on the fact that God loves me. God surely cares about his adopted children.

Just as much as the orphans. Orphans that he wants to save. So any one of you that know the Lord. That are his children. He wants to spend as much time with us.

As he does anyone out there. It's so subtly easy to forget. That God. Might just be doing things in your life.

As much for you. As for the next person. And we mustn't think. That being busy in ministry. Is God's goal for a life. That is not God's goal for a life.

[19:05] To be busy in ministry. He wants us to be faithful. Of course. To the work that he gives us. But he did not invite us. Into a business. He invited us into his family.

So it has been. An important lesson. And I see the application. For all of us. You see. Some of us have put a lot of. Effort into this past week.

Expecting to serve the community. And others are feeling the pain. In the church. Of not getting to do. What they've. Been able to do in the past. And you're feeling in limbo now.

Others. Are able physically. But not circumstantially. And so we think about. All the wonderful ways. That we want to serve the Lord. And reach out into the community.

Yet the Lord knows. Where each one of us are. He knows our desire. To serve him. And serve others. Yet what he is doing. In the world. Is as much for you.

[ 20 : 05 ] As it is the next person. And so I thought to myself. And I wanted to say to you. That God does not. Sacrifice transforming you. So that he can transform.

Someone else. He doesn't stop. Caring about making me. And you. A new creation. So that he can work on others. He doesn't need to stop. One project.

To start another. Like me. And God isn't in a hurry. To make new children. And forget the ones. That he's already making. God doesn't treat his children.

Like a production line. And just get them. Quickly manufactured. And passed on to packaging. Look at how often. The Lord wanted to spend time. With the twelve.

Alone. Jesus didn't seek the crowds. Nor did he. Seek always being busy. Jesus wants to spend time. With his disciples. Just as much.

[ 21 : 01 ] As he wants other people. To know about him. And these things. That he gives us. Are as much about our own growth. And good. As they are about the people we serve.

So this past week. I've mostly been thinking. What God might do. For the children of the community. But I've realized. The Lord was just as concerned.

For the children in his own family. To bless us. To have us enjoy. His love together. And to use these things. To grow us.

As his children. And if that wasn't obvious enough. That God was doing that. He ensured. That we saw that.

Me and James. With our own children. That we got to spend time. Just with our own kids. Wow. You see.

[ 21 : 55 ] No matter where you are in your faith. Whether you don't believe yet. Or whether you've believed for decades. We must not underestimate. Just how interested. The Lord is. In having us know him more.

He is just as interested. In your growth. As he is the next person. And if you don't know God yet. Then I can confidently say. That he's more present. Than you could possibly know.

And he's more interested. In you to know him. Than you could imagine. So pray to him. Speak to him. Confess your sin. Ask forgiveness. He delights to forgive.

And he lavishes his grace. On those who come to him. And if you do follow Jesus. Then know that your father in heaven. Has you where he has you. To fulfill his purposes.

And you just as much as any person you pray for. The Lord and Savior. Your Lord and Savior. Loves you just as much. As the people that you want to share him with.

[ 22 : 56 ] You are not just a means. To an evangelistic end. He wants you in the father's house. He wants me in you with him. Where he is.

To be with him. And see him in his glory. Not just for an afternoon. But forever. Isn't that good news? Let me pray. Lord.

I am absolutely over. God bless you. Thank you.