

What Does God Really Want?

Imagine that you are a parent. Or, maybe you don't need to imagine. Your young child, say a 13-year-old daughter, wants to do something really nice for you. Maybe it is your birthday, or Mother's Day, or she wants to do it -- just because. You have been working 10-hour days and trying to keep up with your housework on weekends. What you really need is a little help with the basic housework so that you can both enjoy some relaxed time together.

She asks you what she can give you. "Honey, if you would just clean your room, I would be so happy," you say. "Mo-o-o-om!" she whines. She wants to do something special, not something humdrum. What you want and need from her is simple responsiveness to your true requirements.

But she wants to surprise you. At supper, she presents you with a colorfully wrapped box. You open it, and find a hand-made glazed clay vase in her favorite color. It is not perfect, but it is carefully made, and you know she spent a lot of time on it.

Of course, you love it. How can you not? But her room is still a mess and, although you don't bring it up now, you know there will be some unpleasantness to deal with later. And, despite your fatigue, you will need to stay up late and see that she does the job.

God's children often wish to delight their Father with something special. We have a long history of doing this. Architects have dedicated their finest cathedrals to the glory of God. Likewise artists, within or without the walls of the church, have thought their best works to be their highest tribute to God. When I was in grade school, my piano teacher sought to inspire me to more diligent practice by telling me that Bach had dedicated every one of his compositions to God. I was impressed, both with the music and the dedication. I may have even practiced a little bit more.

But what does God really want? "Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (Micah 6:6-7). We want to do something dramatic and special, something visible that would draw gasps of wonder at such a gift. But

"what doth the Lord require of thee? " (v. 8). It is not anything big or impressive. It does not take artistic genius, or any kind of genius, to give God what he truly wants. We have only "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God" (v. 8).

Why is it so difficult to do this? It has been so from the first generations of mankind. Only one generation removed from Eden Cain, a farmer, and Abel, a shepherd, brought their offerings to the Lord. Both presumably brought the best that they had. But was it what God wanted? "The Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering, but unto Cain and his offering he had not respect" (Gen 4:4-5). Cain was furious. But God said simply, "if you do well, you will be accepted (v.7). What was missing from Cain's offering? It was not that Cain was less talented or capable of producing a quality gift. But Hebrews tells us that "by faith Abel offered unto God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain (Heb. 11:4). God had gently shown his creatures the way to redemption by providing them with coverings of skin. Whether or not they fully understood the concept of sacrifice and its relation to God's own son who was to come, we don't know. But Abel believed God. And, believing him, offered not simply what he did best, but what God truly wanted.

Farmers, shepherds, architects, artists, musicians -- we have all wanted to give God something of beauty, something unique and special. And, like other good parents, God no doubt appreciates our childlike efforts. But maybe, just maybe, what he really wants.....is for us to clean our rooms.

Dennis and Vicki Martin