

What God Intends for Us to Know, Part 1

Dan Todd | April 28, 2018

One of my very best friends, Steve Shockley, sold his thriving business, earned a degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and left Georgia to become a church-planter in Long Beach, California. He and his wife now live in South Carolina.



Our relationship began when, not long after he joined a church where I was on staff, he asked me to be his mentor. With some doubts about what he truly needed from me and about my own doubts to deliver, I agreed. He made the decision to agree very easy when he agreed to buy my lunch every Thursday if I would teach him what I was studying. At the time, I was studying through the book of John.

Very quickly, our relationship changed that from that of teacher/disciple to life-long friends who love each other as brothers in Christ. We spent many, many hours in conversations and debates and ministry and even went on mission trips together.

After I ended a tenure as pastor of a local church, Steve hired me to work for him at the warehouse he owned. Even though I was his employee, there were many occasions when we would sit in his office at work and talk and study the Bible together for hours at a time.

One day our conversation centered on the nature of God. This had been an ongoing discussion between us for several years and grew more interesting and more in depth as time went by.

On this particular day in February 2014, as we began one of our discussion sessions, Steve remarked, "You know that I am reading through the Bible....."

Let me interrupt here to say that actually both of us were reading through the Bible at the time. Though we are using different plans, it was the beginning of the year, so we are both in Genesis. My wife and I were in the midst of the story of the life of Joseph. You will see why this is important as the story progresses.

Also, right about here, it might help for you to understand that when it comes to processing information, Steve and I are on radically different wave lengths. I tend to be single-tracked, using the information I have to find the shortest solution to a question. Steve, on the other hand, takes his time to ponder over a question, traveling wide afield to see the issue from as many angles as possible. He has a wonderful gift of discernment and vision.

Imagine now that my brain has amped up, thinking about what we are both reading in the Bible, and gathering together from memory things we had recently discussed, trying to formulate my

thoughts to stay up with, or maybe even stay ahead of where Steve is going with whatever point he is going to make.

Since no one's brain works like Steve's and since his comments seldom give clear clues to where he is going, I've never been successful at this. But that doesn't stop me from trying.

OK. So, while my brain is gearing up, Steve continues, "...As I have been reading lately, I've begun to ask the same question more and more, 'What is it that God wanted Israel to know about Him?' God delivered Israel after they had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years..."

Remember that all the while, I am thinking – processing.

Right about here in his comments, my mind took in this new data and added it to the analysis process already going on in my mind in an effort to arrive at the same conclusion Steve was making.

As usual, I missed the point. I was on Mars. He was at Alpha Centauri.

Nevertheless, at synaptic speed, I continued processing...

Almost everyone knows about the years of Israel's captivity in Egypt. In addition, as pointed out earlier, I had just read about how Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery and how Joseph wound up in Egypt and was unjustly imprisoned there by his master. In both cases, God miraculously intervened in the lives of both Joseph and the nation of Israel to free them from bondage and captivity.

So, without giving my words due consideration, I cut in, "God wanted them to know that He is their redeemer...."

"Whoa!" Steve interjected before I could utter another word. "Wait just a minute. Let's stop right there..."

This is not an unusual occurrence in our conversations. Once Steve is on a roll to his objective, he doesn't like to be interrupted, especially when it is obvious that I have taken the path most traveled by and he is off on a safari to parts unknown.

Another thing that seemed to happen all too frequently was that, about the time Steve was really into his processing and explaining, someone or something would interrupt, like the telephone would ring or someone would come into the office.

Steve always declared this was the work of Satan trying to ruin his life. He referred to such interruptions as "pestilence." It seemed to happen every time we would get deep into a discussion and just before he was going to make his point.

Wait for it...

After stopping me because I was way off point, Steve once again picked up the trail.

“...The nation of Israel is in slavery in Egypt, yet God was the one who put them there. He must have had a purpose in doing so, but why? And when He delivered them from slavery, it began with the Red Sea. You know that there was the I-75 route – the shortest route – following the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea right up to the Promised Land, but no, He had them turn right and travel through a wilderness. Why would God do that? What is it that He is trying to teach them? What is it that God wants us to learn about Him?”

So here is a clue to where Steve is headed. My mind should pick up on something here, but since synaptic speed for me is like that of a snail, I am still processing along my earlier track...

Not only did God deliver the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. Much later in their history they were carried off into captivity by Babylon. Once again, God delivered them and restored them to their homeland and to Jerusalem. All of these events – Joseph’s imprisonment, Egyptian slavery, and the Babylonian captivity – ended the same way.

Each time, God delivered, redeemed, and restored His people.

The same thing is true of those who know Christ as Lord. We were in bondage to sin and death until God, in His providence, redeemed us and granted us salvation and freedom in and through Christ.

This is my line of thinking and seemed to be the logical conclusion to which Steve was headed. So I chimed in once again, “He is the God of redemption. God wanted the world to understand Him in terms of redemption.”

I could see the frustration in Steve’s face that I continued to interrupt his thoughts, but that was nothing compared to the frustration he experienced next.

Right about here, you guessed it, “R-i-i-ing.”

Pestilence.

Throwing up his hands, Steve answered, and our discussion ended – at least for a while.

I told you that Steve was my employer at the time. As he continued his phone conversation, I left his office and returned to the warehouse that I managed for him, which was a couple of miles away.

Shortly after arriving, I am on a ladder retrieving a file when my cell phone rings.

It’s Steve. Basically, he picked up right where we left off before the pestilence.

“Remember what you said about God wanting men to understand Him in terms of redemption? You were right about that...”

At this point, I could begin to feel a bit of pride, but from experience, I know that another shoe is about to drop.

Steve said, "...but..."

See? This is the way it always is. Do not fear, however, because the outcome is always enlightening and on target when Steve finally begins to make his point. As I pointed out, Steve has a real gift of discernment and an ability to see a picture from such a different perspective that I am seldom if ever disappointed.

This case was no exception.

"...God is the one who put them there. God did not just know that the Israelites would be slaves; He caused it all to happen. This was His plan. But what is it that He wanted them to learn – that He wanted us to learn from all this? OK, He wanted men to learn about redemption, but I believe that there is much more to this than just redemption."

Everything I have shared with you so far is a summary of the events. The conversation was much longer and the dialogue much more involved. I have paraphrased the discussion, but hopefully have expressed it accurately enough to give a general idea of a typical discussion between us concerning the things of the Bible.

In the next blog entry, I will elaborate on the theology that developed from this particular discussion.