

“We’re All Nervous When We Talk About Money” // 2 Corinthians 8 // God’s Power in Broken Vessels #3¹ (Su 8a)

READ: 2 Cor 8:1–9

2 Corinthians 8... I want you to try to remember an awkward moment where you were enjoying your relationship with someone only to figure out at some point they were only really interested in you for financial reasons. Early in our marriage, Veronica and I did one of those timeshare vacation packages--some of you will be able to relate to this: you’re newly married; you’ve got very little extra money for vacation, and then someone tells you about this deal where you can go to some beach resort for free; it even comes with a coupon for a nice dinner or something. And you get there and everyone is so kind to you: “Oh, let me carry your bags, Mr. Greear... Right this way, Mr. Greear. Would you like a warm cookie, Mr. Greear?” And you’re like, “This is amazing! We’re being treated like royalty, and this is free, and no strings attached.”

...Yeah, no strings attached except for the 3 hour sales pitch you’re gonna have to sit through! And, oh, don’t think you can politely say “not interested” one time and then excuse yourself to go back to the pool. Oh no, you’re going to have to say no 50x to at least 3 different people, all of whom have mastered the face of ‘How dare you, you

ungrateful cheapskate?’ After 2 hours of saying ‘no’ several times to the first guy, and then several times to his boss, and then several times to her boss, I literally pulled out my Excel spreadsheet and told the final boss man that if he could find \$450 extra dollars in my budget somewhere, I’d gladly redirect it toward his timeshare. He actually, I kid you not, pointed to my **tithing** line item and said, “What if you redirected this for a while--and just thought of it as being generous to yourself?”

In chapter 8 of 2 Corinthians, Paul seems worried that the Corinthians are going to feel about him the way that I felt with the timeshare guy: “Wait a minute, Paul... you mean this whole time, all this, ‘*God loves you and I love you*’ bit has really, Paul, been ‘*You need US to pay your bills*’?”

So, in chapter 8, Paul seeks to diffuse that. Now, remember: he’s already explained that he takes no personal salary from any money he collects from them--he raises that on his own with a part-time job--no, the money he’s collecting is used to help alleviate the needs of poor believers around the world--but still, Paul knows that talking about money in a group setting like this makes people nervous--everyone’s nervous that this talk is gonna end with a guilt trip--where you sit across the table from a high-pressure salesman who has perfected his “how dare you” face.

So, Paul says right out of the gate, vs 8, “**I say** (all of this) **not as a command...**” (2 Corinthians 8:8). IOW, Paul says, I’m taking the God-card off the table. I’m not giving you any commands. In fact (later, in chapter 9 vs 7) he says: **“Each one must give as he has decided in his**

¹ Sources consulted: Eric Mason, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 2 Corinthians*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2024); Gary Millar, *2 Corinthians for You* (London, UK: The Good Book Company, 2020); Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 2 Corinthians* (London, UK: Westminster John

Knox Press, 2004); R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019); Chris Hodges, “[Grace Giving](#)”, November 6, 2022, Church of the Highlands; Craig Groeschel, “Love Gives”, November 12, 2023, Life Church; Tim Mackie “[A Generous Gospel](#)”, September 6, 2017, Exploring My Strange Bible Podcast; . And others as noted throughout.

heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful (or willing) giver.” IOW, “If what I’m saying about generosity doesn’t excite you, I’m not talking to you! God’s only interested in cheerful, enthusiastic givers.” That’s the only kind of givers God wants, because God doesn’t approach us with needs. Generosity is not about what we give to God; generosity is about what we receive from God.

So let’s just all breathe a little sigh of relief, could we? Paul didn’t give his instructions here in the spirit of a command, so neither will I. And that means if you’re worried about today ending with me making you feel guilty about not giving, let’s just take that off the table, OK?

So here’s the question for this weekend: *If, for Paul, talking about generosity is not primarily about collecting money to meet needs, what is it about?*

In chapter 8 Paul identifies **3 reasons he wants the Corinthians to be generous** that have nothing to do with his personal needs.

(Now, you’re like, “Wait J.D., hold up, hold up--chapter 8? You said we were going through the whole book of 2 Corinthians and last weekend we finished up chapter 2, and now we’re in chapter 8? What about chapters 3–7?” We’re coming back to those, I promise, but November is the time of year when we always talk about mission and generosity in our church as we get ready for the new year. One of our core 5 identities of being a disciple here at Summit is “steward” (*worshiper, family member, servant, steward, witness*) and in November we always talk about being a ‘steward.’ Well, chapters 8–9 of 2 Corinthians are all about stewardship, so we wanted to jump ahead there for a couple of weeks, and then we’ll circle back to chapters 3–7, OK? And btw, for you type-A people, jumping ahead like this won’t mess up the flow of this book. Scholars say 2

Corinthians breaks down into really clear sections where each one is kind of its own thought unit, which means we can jump ahead and then back again without seriously interrupting the flow of thought.)

3 reasons he wants the Corinthians to be generous that have nothing to do with his personal needs: *He is concerned, first, that they have...*

1. The Right Response to Grace (8:7, 9)

Look with me at vs 7 But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.... 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Grace toward others is the right response to experiencing the grace of God toward you.

This is very interesting: **Paul uses the word “grace” more in these 2 chapters than in all his other New Testament writings combined.**

And Paul wrote two thirds of your New Testament. And, did you know, in the entirety of these 2 chapters, Paul never once uses the word for “money?” Not even once. You see, the focus of these chapters is not money, it’s on grace² and the kind of instinctive generosity that grace creates in the hearts of all who experience it.

The climactic verse is verse 9: You know the grace of the Lord Jesus, Paul says, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Ponder, for a moment, Paul says, Jesus’s generosity to you. Where would you be had Jesus not died for you? Where would you be had he

² Tim Mackie

not left the comforts of heaven and poured out all his riches for you? Ponder that for a while, and let that shape how you approach your stuff. He left heaven and voluntarily entered into your poverty, and he not only sympathized with you in it--he actually took your place under it so that he could bring you into the riches of heaven. ***Does that do ANYTHING in your heart?***

How could an experience of grace that large NOT produce a change in your heart? Imagine I came in here late... worship ends; the Scripture is read; we have the little bumper video and the lights come up for the sermon; but no me. And everyone's looking around trying to figure out what to do--it's a little awkward; our production people are back there losing their minds (where is he?) I've got about 15 people who have me on "find my friends" and they are all looking for me. And they're like, "He's on the premises!" Well, after a few minutes I come in and say, "Y'all, I am so sorry. You won't believe this, but I was walking into church this morning, and I looked up, and right above me was one of those grand pianos they were hoisting up to the 2nd floor to put it into one of the rooms up there, and just as I was looking at it the guy who was using the pulley to get it up there let go, and that grand piano dropped 40 feet and just smashed me 5 feet into the pavement; I was like Wile E. Coyote... dusted myself off. You'd say, "You're lying. If you got hit with that kind of force... look; walk; smile different"

Paul says, "If you've been hit by the force of the gospel, every part of you will be different." And so, Paul says, vs 7, "Why would **your wallet, your pocketbook**, be the one place not radically touched by the gospel?" **Vs 7**, Paul says, "You excel **in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness...**", so why wouldn't you excel in this grace also? **Imagine a tree where every branch is filled** with lush green leaves and an abundance of fruit, except for one lone, big branch that is barren and dead and brown. If it's a healthy tree,

wouldn't you expect the life of the tree to produce fruit on every branch?

In fact, in Matthew 6 Jesus went so far as to say that what you do with your money is the MOST reliable indicator about where your heart actually is. You see, it's easy to TALK a big game about faith; but the level of your generosity will always reveal the truth of what's really going on in there. You remember back in **COVID days** how we had to do all these symptom-screening tests--going to school; getting on a plane; going into the mall--and you could get a "false-positive"? You'd just gotten out of a hot car or eaten something spicy and it raised your temperature and triggered a "false positive?" There was even what they called 'white coat syndrome' where you'd get anxious about being tested and that caused you to demonstrate "COVID-like symptoms" which made you test positive.

There are a lot of false "positives" in the Christian life. Talking about your faith and knowing a lot about the Bible and coming to church and even living in a moral way can all be false positives; the TRUE measure, Jesus says, of what's really going on in your heart is what you do with your money.

So, here's the question: ***What if we measured your walk with God not by how high you raise your hands in worship or how often you come to church, but simply by what you did with your money?*** What if we pulled out your bank statement and said, "OK, let's figure out what's most important to you." What does your bank statement show you treasure most and trust most? Because this right here (mouth) doesn't always give an accurate picture; your bank statement usually does. One of the reasons Veronica and I decided that our biggest expense every month would be our giving--bigger than our mortgage, was that we wanted our bank statement to declare that Jesus is the most important to us. We have striven, by God's grace, to ***excel in this act of grace also.***

OK, here's the 2nd reason Paul wants them to grow in generosity. He wants them to experience...

2. An Increase in Joy (8:1–2)

Vs 1 (Paul says) We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia (BTW, this was another batch of churches Paul had planted in Northern Greece--the books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians in your Bible were written to them), 2 for in a severe test of affliction, their *abundance of joy* and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

- OK, look at this: Paul says these Macedonian churches were in “extreme poverty.”
- And the word he used there for “extreme” means “as deep as the ocean.” In other words, they weren't just *poor*, they were “PO.” They couldn't even afford the O-R.

And yet, Paul says, vs 2, they responded with a “wealth of generosity,” which means, he says, vs 3, that they gave not only *according to their means* but even *beyond their means*. Literally, vs 4, they *begged* for the favor of taking part in helping the poor believers in Jerusalem. And in doing this they experienced, vs 2, an “abundance of joy.”

Which, right there, shatters 2 myths people often believe about generosity.

- **Myth 1: Only rich people can be generous;** and
- **Myth 2: Only rich people can be happy.**

You see, here we have a church that is itself in *extreme* poverty and yet also really generous and really happy.³

Let's talk for a minute about **Myth 1 =** that **only rich people can be generous.**

- And let me talk specifically to our college students and young adults, because you college students have little to no money--all you got right now is school debt and homework, and you don't know how to put that in the offering plate--you would if you could; and you young professionals never realized how expensive the world is and how little distance a dollar would carry you.
- And, you think, “Well, none of this applies to me right now because I don't have any money.”
- **Let me give you a little life insight from Uncle J.D.,** and hopefully it won't sound condescending: It was *easier* to be generous *back in college* when I had no money than it is now. And I know it probably shouldn't be that way and it sounds ironic, but it's true.
 - Life felt so much simpler back then. I mean, when I was in college, I didn't have kids to think about or college tuitions to save for.
 - I could furnish my whole apartment with a futon someone had left in the hallway. It was my couch, my bed, and my dining room seating all in one. The futon was awesome--it was the Swiss Army Knife of furniture.
 - But then one day you get married, and your wife says, “We need more than this futon; we need a real couch.” And she rules out of consideration anything you've found on the side of the road, which feels unfair. And you find yourself in IKEA spending more money than you ever thought possible on a couch, and then a few years later she says, “We need to replace this couch, because it doesn't really fit w/ the vibe

³ “Some people with very limited resources are still open-handed and generous with what they have. Paul says such people are rich.” “Some people have lots of money but have so

much anxiety about their stuff or their security, that they're imprisoned by their stuff. Paul says they are poor.” Tim Mackie

we're going for in this room." I'm like, "Vibe... I don't even know what that means! I just need a place to sit and eat my Totino's pizza while I watch football." But the next thing you know, you're out at Pottery Barn taking out a 2nd mortgage to buy something called a "sectional." When I was in college, I had no idea such things even existed!

- Or dishes--in college, my "dishes" were a mix of paper plates, the back of a pizza box, or that one pan we had that was never actually clean. Basically, anything with a flat surface functioned as a dish. **But now we have matching dishes**, and even better, "sets that go with seasons." "Well, these are all summer dishes; and these are our Christmas plates; and then there's a stack of Easter bunny plates that only come out once a year."

The point is, as you get older you get more responsibilities and more bills. And trust me, I've seen this more times than I can count: ***If you don't establish generous habits early, it becomes much harder to start them later.***

- Veronica and I made a decision early on in our marriage, in the futon days, to give sacrificially--we said never less than 10%. And that was when we had almost no marginal money. And that was hard. And then we made a decision that as God increased our income, we'd increase the size of our sacrifice--which meant increasing not only the amount we gave, but the **percentage** of our budget that amount represented. (We've tried to move upward from 10% year by year.) And believe it or not, that's been an EVEN HARDER decision.
- Get this: **Studies among Christians show that Christians making less than 45K are twice as likely to tithe as those who make more than 150K.** *Ooh, let me say it again for you in the back: Studies show that Christians making less than 45K are twice as likely to tithe as those who make more than 150K.*

- Being rich in generosity has nothing to do with how much money you have. These churches in Northern Greece were in extreme poverty and yet they overflowed with a wealth of generosity.

Which leads me to the **2nd myth** = that **only rich people can be happy**. Again, Paul points to these Christians in Macedonia that are in extreme poverty and yet really happy because of their generosity.

- So many studies done in our day show this is true, too--both inside and outside the church. One recent one, for example, done inside the church, showed that "high generosity" people were 74% more satisfied with life, and nearly 3x as likely to say they were "very happy" every day.
- Another study done by the Harvard Business Review, outside the church, aid that **significant financial generosity is one of the top 6 predictors of life satisfaction anywhere around the world.**
- Is that surprising to you? It shouldn't be. Jesus said it plainly: ***"It is more blessed*** (literally, happier! The Greek word here, *makarios*, literally means 'happier') ***to give than to receive"*** (Acts 20:35). It is happier to give than to receive.
- Again, EVERY study ever done on this--secular or Christian--shows that **THE happiest people in the world are generous people.**
- **"Why is that?"** you ask. It's because you are made in the image of God, and God is a generous God, and when you act consistent with that image, you experience the joy of being like him--and that's true even if you're not a Christian. Even if you're not a Christian you find joy in acting in accordance with your design.

Our joy in generosity is one of the many small hints that we're made in the image of God and not the product of evolution.

I think the best illustration of this comes from my favorite Christmas movie--favorite right behind Diehard, of course. And I'm going to give this illustration even though it's too early for a Christmas illustration--we're not even at Thanksgiving yet. But I do it as an olive branch for you psychos who start celebrating Christmas before Halloween. OK, let's see it: If you've already put up your Christmas tree, raise your hand. OK, for you--I'm going to give you a Christmas illustration as a way of saying, "I see you in this foolishness and I love you anyway."

The Grinch that Stole Christmas. The Grinch is someone who is fabulously rich but also deeply unhappy. And to explain this strange creature, Dr. Seuss says: *"It could be his head wasn't screwed on just right. It could be, perhaps his shoes were too tight. But I think that the most likely reason of all, may have been that his heart was two sizes too small."*

- That'll preach. You see, you think the reason you're unhappy is you need new shoes or a new job, but what you really need is an enlarged heart: a *God-like* heart. And God uses generosity to produce that in you. Generosity actually enlarges your capacity for joy.
- You young adults in the room: you think happiness is found at that next income level; that will actually take you farther away from it.
- Generosity--a God-like heart--is how God enlarges your capacity for joy.
- Which is why we often say, "Generosity is not something God wants from you; it's something he wants for you."⁴

The **3rd reason Paul talks to them about generosity** is, he says, I'm concerned about you...

⁴ Tony Evans: "Many of us are being held hostage by bitterness because we are not willing to give to others what we have been given."

3. Finishing what you've started (8:6, 10–11)

Vs 6: Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should **complete** among you this act of grace. And, 10 ...this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work... 11 So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have.

Paul knows that when it comes to growing in this grace in particular, it's easy to start with good intentions but never actually go through with them. But, Paul says, *it's not the intention to be generous that brings the benefit (or blessing) to you; it's the follow through.*

I read a story this week about a lady named Debra Veal, the first woman to cross the Atlantic alone in a rowboat. She didn't start out alone; initially it had been her and her husband Andy. She is petite; 5'4." He was 6'5" and an Olympic gold-medal oarsman. And yet, after 14 days he had panic attacks from the ocean and had to be rescued. But little Debbie continued on by herself, however, for 99 more days until she'd completed the 6600 mile journey. It's an amazing story. She battled 30-foot waves, force-8 squalls and sharks, all while having to dodge container ships that came too close for comfort. She's gone on from then to become a motivational speaker who gives TED talks and she's written a couple of books.

Here's my favorite paragraph from the Guardian article: *"The adventure-loving PE teacher turned internet entrepreneur admitted she had thought about quitting as she confronted the solitude, storms, sharks and blazing sun.* (Yeah, no joke! But then this great line) *Friends and family who kept in touch by email helped keep her going.*"⁵ (I mean, let's be honest--it's a game changer for the whole 'stranded at sea' thing when you can update your Instagram reel

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2002/jan/27/sailing.sport>

while you're out there. Imagine how much different Gilligan's Island could have been if they'd been able to post on social media out there.)

The point is: it's easy to start something; it's harder to finish. The rewards come not from starting, however, but finishing. Andy's not being invited to give TED talks and write books to tell us how he bravely started the journey. No, we want to hear from little Debbie who actually did it.

Resolving to be generous does nothing for you; it's the follow-through that counts. Some of you, last year (just like Paul said, a year ago, vs 10) made a decision to invest more in the Kingdom. You felt led to make a 12-month Stewardship Faith Commitment as a part of our Lasting Legacy series. You prayed about it and committed to a number that the Lord put on your heart. Or you decided to tithe. But here we are, nearing the end of 2025, and not that much has changed.

Listen, for some of you, it's time to actually get out your budget and do this thing. It's not the initial decision that releases grace into your life; it's the follow through.

I always tell people. An emotional response in a sermon doesn't do anything. For anything, but especially with generosity, you have to: **A. Make a plan.** Actually sit down with your spouse and get out your budget or your calendar and make a plan. **Dave Ramsey** always says, "If you don't tell your money where to go, you'll end up wondering where it went." So, make a plan. Then,

B. Act on that plan at the beginning of each month. In other words, do your generosity--your tithing--first thing in the month. That will do a couple of things for your heart that almost nothing else can do: First, it will teach your heart what comes first: ours is a God who gets

the first and the best, not our leftovers. It will also give you a chance to *trust* him. See, some of you say, "Well, our budget is tight and what if we don't have enough left over at the end of the month to make ends meet?" I'm going to challenge you: test God in this and see. Because God literally says that in **Malachi 3:10**--it's one of the only times he uses language like this-- "**Test me in this and SEE. See if I'm faithful.**" I promise you'll find him faithful there. I hear story after story in our church of how people do this and find God faithful.

I've told you my favorite illustration on this from David Jeremiah... He said a couple in this church came to him and told him they wanted to obey God but just couldn't afford to tithe. He said, "I tell you what. Write out the check for whatever the tithe would be; give that to me, but I'll put it in my desk drawer and won't turn it in until the end of the month. And, here's the thing: if at the end of the month you can't pay your bills, just tell me and I'll give it back to you and not cash it." He said, "Does that sound reasonable? Would you trust me to do that?" They looked at each other and nodded and said, "Yes, we'd trust you with that." Dr. Jeremiah then said, with a twinkle in his eye, "Well, shame on you—it seems you trust me more than God." (MIC DROP! I don't do that to you, I'm incur!) You see: **Tithing is ultimately a trust test, not a financial one.**

Look, church, I get it: In an unstable economy, it's not easy to be generous. Who knows what's going to happen next? Your premiums might jump up. You might get laid off. And who knows what will happen with the stock market or Trump's tariffs? Generosity is not a declaration of confidence in your financial future; it's not a declaration of confidence in the U.S. market; generosity is a declaration of confidence in a God bigger than your financial future and more stable than the stablest economy.

The point is, it's not the intention to start that counts. It's time to stop talking and start acting! **(PIC)** We need less Big Andy and more

Little Debbie. (And I put that up here because that's what you've been thinking about since I first said 'Little Debbie' 7 minutes ago!)

Now, at this point, you say, *"OK, pastor, I'm with you. I want to do this. But how? I've made these good intentions before. How do I know I won't quit again?"*

Paul hears you. And so, in the last part of this chapter, Paul identifies a handful of things that sabotage our good intentions, things that turn us back into Big Andy's. I'm going to present them as a series of "stop/starts." 2 stops, 2 starts.

STOP: Worrying About the Amount (vs 12)

Vs 12, Paul says: For if the readiness (to give) is there, (your attitude before God) is acceptable. It's not about the amount. We give according to what we have, not according to what we do not have. (That's in the JDV, btw--I combined a couple of translations there)⁶

What God cares about is the heart--the **readiness**, the 'eagerness' to give. I love that phrase, "We give according to what we have, not according to what we do not have."

- You see, a lot of people feel guilty that they don't have much to give. Maybe you hear people tell these stories about giving and you think, "Well, I can't give like that. I can't even dream about giving like that."
- I'm so poor that even my dreams are on a budget. I'm so poor that the first item on my bucket list is 'to save enough money to buy a bucket.'"

God could care less about the amount. It's never about the amount, because God doesn't approach us with needs he expects us to supply--God's not up in heaven going, "Oh, there are so many great things I want to do in the world if only the people of TSC would spare me a little start-up capital!"

No, what God cares about is our heart. You can't give what you don't have. What is important is that your heart resembles his, and if that's true, you'll share generously from what you have. It's less about the amount you supply **for** God and more about what that amount signifies about your heart **toward** God.

So, STOP worrying about the amount and vs 13,

START: Sharing in Suffering (vs 13–14)

Look at vs 13: For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness 14 your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.

Pay attention here, this is really important; it's the heart of love, grace-based giving, and this insight helped me so, so much. Paul is saying, "I'm not asking you to take on the responsibility for everybody else's needs. You can't do that. **I'm saying that when you love someone**, you'll use whatever you have to share in their needs."

⁶ My translation

Because that's what love is, right? When you love someone, you *enter into their pain*. You hurt *with* them. When someone you love is hurting emotionally, you enter into that hurt and *share* in it. When my kids are hurt, I hurt with them, not because I have to, but because I can't not do that. If you don't enter into the hurt, you don't really love them.

- **Love-based giving is when you give to the point that you share in the person's hurt.**
- Which is what inspired what **C.S. Lewis** called **"The only safe rule of giving" =** (this is in *Mere Christianity*, btw, and it really helped me on a practical level) **"Giving more than you think you can spare."**⁷ (x 2)
 - Here's the actual quote, for context: **"I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. (That's what you want--'tell me the amount, pastor'! 'No,' he says...) I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc. is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little."**
 - Because, see, only when you actually *inconvenience* your life are you sharing in someone's pain, which is the essence of love: *taking someone else's pain into yourself*. Only then are you loving like God.
 - By the way, **C.S. Lewis actually lived this out himself**. Lewis was one of the most prolific authors of the 20th century--the JK Rowling of his generation--but Lewis never made any money on his books. He literally gave all of it away. He really believed that he could live on "enough" and be generous with the rest.

⁷ "I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc. is up to the standard

Another stop:

STOP: Thinking like an Atheist (vs 15)

15 As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."

This is a quote from Exodus 16, which tells the story of how God provided manna for the children of Israel in the wilderness. We just did a deep dive on this earlier this year, so let me just give you the *Cliff Notes* here: The children of Israel were in a place in the wilderness where they couldn't procure food for themselves. And so, every night, God miraculously rained down from heaven this stuff called **"manna."** Each morning, when Israel woke up, the ground was covered with it. Manna in Hebrew is *man'hu*, and literally means, "What the heck is it?" (And I told you that based on the description Exodus gives, it seems like a mix between a falafel and a protein bar).

This manna was provided daily. But, of course, people back then were just like they are today, and so they wanted a little extra stockpile of it just in case one morning it didn't show up. But God said, *"That's exactly opposite of how I want you to think. I want you to trust that I'll be there tomorrow to provide for your needs just like I was today, and (here's the key) I want you to express that by gathering only enough for today and sharing any excess from today with those who don't have enough today."* And, to drive home the point, God caused whatever excess they secretly stockpiled to rot, breed worms, and stink.

common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little." (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book III, Chapter 11, "Charity")

So, think about being in this situation: Say you're a Hebrew dad or a mom who goes out in the morning and collects a bunch of manna for the day, and by lunch it's clear that you have more than enough for your family. You've made everything you can make with manna: manna-cotti, peanut butter and manana sandwiches; manana bread... (these puns NEVER get old!). But still you have some left over. And you notice there's some other family over there that for whatever reason didn't gather enough for the day--maybe they were sick or maybe they just overslept. But for whatever reason, they are short and you have excess. Well, **you might as well go ahead and share the extra manna** you have with them, because, a) tomorrow, God will again supply whatever you need for that day and b) whatever you gather will just go bad tonight anyway.

When you trust that the God who provided for you today will be there to provide for you tomorrow, *that's how you think*. But when you don't think that way--when you hoard and refuse to share because you're afraid that tomorrow there won't be a God to provide for you... **well, functionally, you're thinking like an atheist.** Paul says, don't think like an atheist: the God who provided for you today will provide for you tomorrow, and he wants you to use whatever excess he's given to you today to meet needs around you **TODAY**.

Now, let me be clear: the Bible is not against wise savings. The book of Proverbs commends it in at least 6 different places that I know of.⁸ It's certainly wise to save for retirement. But the Bible **also says** you should respond to the needs and Kingdom opportunities in front of you *today*.

Let me just say it straight: For many of us saving has become a replacement for trust in God, and that's evidenced in how we ignore

the needs and opportunities God puts in front of us today. We won't give generously *today* because we're afraid we might be in a situation tomorrow where God won't provide.

- You're only **comfortable when you have enough money** in the bank that you can say, "I don't even need God for the future, I have all that I need *right here*." You don't say that verbally, of course, but it's what you whisper in the secret places of your heart.
- **See? Functionally, you're an atheist.**
- And, as with the manna, that has a **rotting effect on your soul**. And it makes you stink. Everybody else smells it—you're greedy; stingy; you're fearful, worried. It just stinks.

(So, you say, "Well, what are you saying, Pastor? I'm confused. Should we save or not save?" Yes, save, but **not in a way that keeps you from meeting the needs and opportunities God puts in front of you TODAY**. Next week I'm gonna present to you some INCREDIBLE reports from what we call our Legacy Lanes, which are the 5 areas we believe God has called us to leave a lasting impact on our community. Stuff that's gonna blow your mind. And, after giving you that incredible report, I'm gonna present you with some exciting opportunities we have in them going into the next year. You definitely don't want to miss next week--I'm so excited about it--it will be one of the most inspiring weekends of the year.)

But let me end with one last START: STOP worrying about the amount; START sharing in suffering; STOP thinking like an atheist... FINALLY,

START: Contemplating the Gospel (vs 9)

⁸ Prov 6:6–8; 13:11; 21:20; 27:23–27; 30:24–25. Joseph, in the Bible, was praised for his wisdom in storing up grain to weather coming years of famine.

Let's end on this incredible, majestic verse, vs 9: For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

The gospel is not about a God who approaches us with needs. No, he's always the Giver and we're always the receiver.

- We see that most clearly in our salvation: We were unspeakably poor; he was indescribably rich.
- And he lavished such incredible grace upon us and poured himself out so completely for us that it made even the angels stand in wonder, awestruck, hands over their mouths.

Paul's not talking about throwing in a little bit of your lunch money in the offering bucket because of a high-pressure, timeshare guilt trip. He's talking about a whole reorientation of your life around the grace of God. Make your experience with God's grace the entire foundation and the shaping reality of your life, he says. **You're not an atheist who is unsure if there's a God who will provide for the future;** you know an extravagantly generous God who loved you when you were his enemy and died in your place and promises never to leave you or forsake you and will be there for you tomorrow and then the next day and the next day and every day for the rest of your eternity.

You see, if all you do in response to this message is give a little bit or make a few resolutions about generosity it won't survive until the end of the week. But if you reorient your life around the grace of God, you'll flourish in this grace for the rest of your life. You excel at other graces; excel in this one, too.

Here's the illustration I love to use here: To my wife's chagrin, I'm not good with flowers. She loves them, however, and she likes perfectly kept flower beds. Well, one day, early on in our marriage, she

complained that our flower beds had too many weeds in them, and told me since it was outdoor work that was my responsibility and that I needed to do something about it. I told her I didn't really care about flower bushes so I didn't know why this was my problem, but she prevailed, and so I headed out to take care of the weed problem. Now, you may know this, but there are two ways to kill weeds. You can get on your knees and spend several hours pulling them up by the roots. This is the correct way. Or, you can napalm them with weed killer, which was my way. So, multiple times that summer I blasted our flowerbeds with weed killer... and all our weeds died, just like the advertisement promised, but so did all the rose bushes. (I ended up soaking the beds so thoroughly with weed killer that nothing could grow there. Beautiful, lush rose bushes with budding scarlet flowers turned basically into tumbleweeds. And so my wife, of course, complained about that, too--in her pleasant, Spirit-filled way, of course. (And I was like, "Can't please you, woman. Too many things growing; not enough. Make up your mind." J/K)

But, let's say that to make her happy I went down to the florist and bought several dozen roses, brought them home, and began stapling them to the dead branches of the rose bushes. Would that have fixed anything? Well, for a while, those dead rose bushes would have looked alive, at least from a distance. If you were driving past our house at 35MPH, things would have looked fine. But, in reality, stapling roses to a rosebush doesn't make it alive.

VAMP

This is where a lot of people are, spiritually. Constantly trying to add spiritual fruit to their lives. Constantly going back over dead bushes to staple fake flowers onto themselves. And I can tell you from first-hand experience, it's exhausting.

There's a better way. 2 Cor 8:9. Put your roots down in the gospel, and soak in your awareness of how much compassion God showed to you. Think about where you'd be without Jesus; where you'd be had he left you to what you deserve.

So, right now... Bow your heads, and let's let the Holy Spirit minister to you! I want you to let the Holy Spirit saturate you with grace. Open your hands to receive it, right now. Think about some sin he pulled you back from, and forgave you of. Let him pour grace out over you... Just listen, and receive.

J.D. leads Communion

- Communion is a two way street: We're not just thinking about God, remembering him; Paul says we're literally participating in Jesus' body and blood. The benefits and blessings of our salvation come to us in a new way in this moment. It's not like we become more righteous in God's sight, of course. That's already been completely given to you when you accept Christ... But we get a new taste of God's grace and experience more of the powers of sanctification. Jesus promised to be present in this moment, giving you, if you're open to it and earnestly desiring it, a sense of your forgiveness and how much he loves you. Closeness to Jesus. He'll use this moment to produce in you the fruits of the Spirit. These are what God works in you in this moment with the bread and cup.
- Because of he's here in this bread and cup in such a strong way: (Warning: if not fully surrendered to Jesus, Christ's presence is so strong with these things, you can bring condemnation to yourself)

- But, this bread and cup ministers the benefits of Christ's death to you in a fresh way. Experience that now--as you take the bread, remember Jesus!

Cup: we're not preachers; we're not worship leaders; we're not performers; we're sinners in need of a Savior.

Call for Prayer Teams / Sending