

Everyone Wants a Village, Nobody Wants the Bill

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[0 : 00] Friends, my name is Anthony, and I get to serve as one of the pastors here. My job is not finding curtain openings, but that's okay.

I want to give a huge shout-out to Trevor for Jerry rigging our projector. And, you know, we are deeply thankful for our partnership with DC Bilingual that we get to meet here.

We have to talk about TV caring hygiene, but we'll get there. We will get there. If you want to follow along with the sermon notes, you can obviously watch the slides. You can go to table.center and follow along with the slides, or you can go to table.center.

There's also note-taking, a little app built in there. You can write your own notes. You can email it to yourself. And then you actually get a follow-up midweek with some, like, suggested exercises and a prayer practice and all of that.

Today, we are still in our series called Everything We Carry. And we're spending this week talking about continued stewardship of finances and resources.

[1 : 07] And we're going to be in 2 Corinthians chapter 8. So you can open up table.center. You can open up your Bible app. We're going to be in 2 Corinthians chapter 8.

And as you're making your way there, let's start with some good news, bad news. Good news is that Gen Z is making their way back to church. Bad news is that it's mostly men for all the wrong reasons.

So, Gen Z males are twice as likely as baby boomers to believe that wives should obey husbands. Let me hear the boos.

Let me hear the boos. Boo. Half of Generation Z men, quote, think feminism has gone too far and makes it harder for men to succeed. Again, let me hear those boos.

Boo. And according to the Gospel Coalition, a conservative-leaning, reformed-leaning theology website, an author writes, In the church, Gen Z men like me are rejecting the false masculinities offered by the culture and finding an alternative.

[2 : 13] Explaining why they're going back to these patriarchal, hierarchal churches. Now, the data is a little messier than the headlines suggest. A lot of what looks like young men flooding into church is actually young women flooding out of church, which is sort of topsy-turvy from what usually happens.

If you've been part of the table at all, you know that we are very women-heavy. And not a lot of, not tons of men. But in conservative-leaning churches, it's going the other direction because as patriarchal theology has been blossoming in our cultural climate, women are like, peacing out for good reason.

And these young men, they're looking for a particular kind of God. They want a God of hierarchy and domination and oppression.

And a God who says, hey, all the things that the culture of top men about how to be strong and domineering and leading and in charge. Well, good news, God is like that too.

And God wants you to grow in your domineering ways. It's this sort of strong man religion. Now, I want to acknowledge, people are starving for something.

[3 : 31] The amount of spirituality in the world and even in our Western and American culture really doesn't budge. People seek out spirituality and a sense of deep meaning.

But there are churches and religions that are offering a sense of deep meaning that's based and rooted in domineering and hierarchical systems.

So one of the reasons why the table exists is to say out loud every week and hopefully every day, there's another way to be church that's not based in domination, that's not based in a hierarchy, that's much more like a village of equals than a congress of hierarchy.

And the uncomfortable thing that nobody, especially me, likes to say on a Sunday is that other way takes resources.

It costs money. So we're going to be in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 and 9. We're going to skip around a little bit. And Paul is doing one of the most awkward things that a pastor can do, which is he is asking a church for money.

[4 : 42] Okay? So let me give you a roadmap of where we're going this morning. Number one, in God's economy, giving is a form of grace. And a village only works when everyone is a village.

Number two, I believe that God actually does want you prosperous. And we'll talk about the prosperity gospel and what we can take from it and what we can spit out. And number three, what all of that could mean concretely for us at the table.

So part one, grace and the village. So 2 Corinthians chapter 8, Paul is writing a letter to the Corinthian church that he helped planted. And he has been in this constant back and forth argument with about making sure that their way of doing life is more formed by the kingdom than the empire.

And Paul has this lifelong mission of taking up a collection for the poor in Jerusalem. And I did not really know this until seminary, but there are all of these allusions throughout Paul's letters where he's talking about taking up this collection because the Jerusalem church is suffering economic persecution and very likely a form of famine and starvation as well.

So Paul, as he's making all of his journeys around the Mediterranean and west of Israel, part of the reason is, yes, of course, to tell the gospel of the kingdom and the arrival of Jesus.

[6 : 09] But he's also taking up donations so he can take them back to the Jerusalem church. And the Corinthians, for their part, they have promised to give, but that's all they've done.

They've promised. They haven't actually done it yet. So this is 2 Corinthians 8, verse 1. This is from the Literary and Inclusion Translation, the Lit Bible.

The LitBible.net. You can check it out there. And this is what it says. Family, we want you to know about the generosity of God that was given through the called communities, the churches, the ecclesias in Macedonia.

During a severe test of oppression, the abundance of their joy, even in the depth of their poverty, overflowed in the wealth of their open-handed giving. So the surprise here in the first couple of verses of chapter 8 is that the Macedonian churches, so northern Greece, they are dirt poor and also in the middle of their own catastrophe.

And their extreme poverty, Paul is using rhetoric to remind the Corinthians, overflowed in a wealth of generosity. Okay? So verse 3.

[7 : 20] I attest that they gave in line with what they could and even beyond what they could, and they did so voluntarily. They were pleading with us earnestly for the joy of shared participation, koinonia, in serving those who are designated for sacred purposes.

It wasn't that we were expecting it, but they gave themselves, their very bodies themselves, first to the liberating sovereign and to us as God desired.

So Paul has to be begged to let them give. Macedonians are poor, they are mid-catastrophe, and they are begging Paul, please let us give to the collection.

And this is an absurd inversion, a church that you have to talk out of giving. That broke church is the most generous one that Paul can give an example of. So, skipping ahead to verse 9, Paul tells the Corinthians, Now, you are familiar with the generosity of our liberating sovereign Jesus Christ.

Though while he was wealthy, he became poor for your sakes, so that you could be wealthy with him. And this is what Pastor Tanetta talked about last week, this Philippians 2 theology, this hymn of kenosis, a Greek word that means emptying.

[8 : 37] Christ empties himself of his divinity, of his heavenly wealth, has solidarity with humanity to the point of death.

Now, a couple of key words in these first nine verses. Key word number one is charis. Let me hear you say charis. Charis is where we get the word charismatic.

And charis is the Greek word for grace and gift. And it threads throughout the entirety of these two chapters, chapters 8 and chapters 9. God has charis for his people.

It is a privilege to be a people of charis. Christ has an act of charis in verse 9. The collection itself for Jerusalem is called a charis or a gift. And it is the grace or the charis that funds their charis, their giving.

So, giving is not a tax on grace. Rather, in Paul's worldview, called Paul's economy, God's economy, giving is grace. Charis means giving and grace simultaneously.

[9 : 39] And it's the circulation of God's grace to us and therefore our grace to one another. God's gift to us and our gift to one another. That's key word number one. Key word number two is koinonia.

Let me hear you say koinonia. I learned in seminary something called koine Greek. It means common. And koinonia means something like sharing and participation.

It's like the relationship of business partners where you have to have deep trust in one another. A deep participation in each other's lives in order to strike out in business.

And it's the word used throughout the New Testament for how the early church acted. In Acts chapter 2, there was koinonia. Sometimes it gets translated fellowship. And fellowship wasn't just like a coffee hour after church.

Fellowship was like, oh, you're in debt. Let me sell my property to pay off your debts. Oh, you're in need. Let me empty my bank account to fulfill your needs. It's not just the coffee hour. It is a deep shared life together.

[10 : 37] Now, there's the saying that's been bouncing around online for a couple years now. Of everyone wants a village, but no one wants to be a villager.

Everyone wants a village, but no one wants to be a villager. And this is an essay from somebody named Casper Benjamin who writes on Substack called The Minority Report.

And he says this, Being a villager means accepting friction as part of connection. It means your neighbor might knock on your door when you are exhausted.

Allie, you know what I'm talking about. It means the community potluck happens on the one evening you hope to be alone. And when you always hope to be alone like me, that's always what happens. It means your carefully optimized routine is interrupted by other people's needs. Annoyance and inconvenience and unpredictability are not flaws in community.

[11 : 37] They are the cost of entry. He continues, Supports and irritation come as a single package. In recent decades, we've tried to separate the two, so we have increasingly structured our lives around hyper-independence and strong personal boundaries and optimized schedules and minimal interruption.

And we frame this as self-care and emotional maturity. To which he says, Boundaries are important, but when they become rigid, they stop protecting us and start isolating us.

Everyone wants a village, but no one wants a villager. Being on the receiving end of koinonia, of participation of a shared life, sounds beautiful. But being on the giving end sounds exhausting.

Paul continues, verse 13, I'm not saying this so that it would be a relief for others and a burden for you, but out of concern for what is equitable.

Let me hear you say equitable. Equitable. Right now, verse 14, Your abundance goes towards what they lack. That way it may also happen that their abundance goes toward what you lack, so that it may become, let me hear you say, equitable.

[12 : 52] As it is written, the one who gathered much, this is Paul quoting Exodus, the one who gathered much did not have excess, and the one who gathered little did not lack.

So this is Paul in the first century, in the first generation, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, inventing socialism, and Paul gets there first, right?

It's a question of equity, of fair balance, of equality. Your abundance meets their need now, theirs meets yours later's. Give according to what one has to meet their need.

As one socialist writer put it, from each according to their ability, to each according to their need.

And indeed, Marx is riffing off of Paul. The world, in my perspective, has never invented or created anything that the Bible didn't get there first.

Written 19 centuries before Marx by an apostle as church policy. Leftists in the room, you can say hallelujah. Then he says, Paul says, The one who gathered much did not have excess, and the one who gathered little did not lack.

[13 : 56] And this is a reference to the manna of Exodus 16. So the Israelites are wandering through the wilderness, and they are begging for food, and God rains down this flaky substance that they can eat.

And the manna was gathered daily, and it was literally impossible to hoard, because it rotted by morning. So God built the first welfare program with no means testing, with planned obsolescence,

so that no one could stockpile it.

Right? And there are modern versions of this. This is the Black Panthers offering free breakfast to the kids of Oakland in 1969, which then gets adopted as state and federal policy.

This is enslaved and free communities pooling their pennies into burial societies, because white cemeteries were closed to them. Mutual aid is that village with its sleeves rolled up.

So, point number one. Point number one is that grace is a gift, and everyone needs to participate in the village.

[15:06] Number two, God actually does want you prosperous. So, keeping going now in 2 Corinthians chapter 9, Paul continues, in verse 6.

Now, here's the thing. Whoever plants reluctantly will also harvest reluctantly. And whoever plants as a freely given charis gift will also harvest as a freely given charis gift.

Each should give as they have resolved for themselves in their hearts, not out of guilt or under pressure, since God loves giving when the giver can do it happily. And we'll come back to that word happily.

Verse 8. Now, God can make full generosity overflow for you, so that in everything, all the time, having complete fulfillment of every need, you will overflow with every generous act, just as it is written, they have distributed freely, they have given to the working class, and their justness stays present throughout the age.

Verse 10. The one who provides seed for planting and bread for eating will provide and multiply your seed and increase the fruits of your justness.

[16:17] In everything, you are being made rich toward every sincerely generous act, which is produced by our gratitude to God. Now, back in chapter 8, verse 9, Paul writes, Though Christ was rich, he, for your sakes, became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

And it can be easy to spiritualize this. God wants us rich spiritually. Yawn.

No, I think what Paul is talking about is that Christ was not just spiritually poor, he was literally poor. The Messiah has no place to lay his head.

He's a couch surfer around Galilee. And the result of Christ becoming poor is the Acts chapter 2 church where no one was in need.

So yes, Christ's downward move results in making a community of people prosperous. But there's a purpose to it. It's so that you can make someone else rich.

[17:24] This is not private interior piety. Oh, I'm so spiritually poor that I'll make other people spiritually rich. No, it's economic and communal justice. Now, if you've been around the church world for a while, you know about something called the prosperity gospel.

Raise your hand if you know what I mean by the prosperity gospel. Yes, yes. Prosperity gospel is basically this idea weaponized of if you give, God will give back to you.

Okay? And the prosperity gospel did not invent the desire for blessing. It just sold us a garbage version of it. So like Kenneth Copeland, prosperity gospel preacher, he called commercial flights, quote, a long tube full of demons.

And that's why he needs you to donate so he can have a private jet. So he doesn't go in the long tube full of demons. Sounds like a DC bar, a long tube full of demons.

Jesse Duplantier asked his people to fund a \$54 million Falcon 7X. His fourth jet, three wasn't enough. And claiming Jesus told him, I want you, the congregation, to bleed me for a Falcon 7X.

[18:35] Because, quote, Jesus wouldn't be riding a donkey. Jesus famously rode a donkey. But that's what he told his people. Jesus wouldn't be riding a donkey, so I need to have my Falcon 7X.

Creflo Dollar, which I just love that there's a prosperity gospel preacher with the last name Dollar. So good. Fundraised \$60 million for a golf stream. And that's not prosperity.

Not prosperity as I think scripture intends for. It's theft with a worship team. Now, I don't think the problem was ever with the idea or the word prosperity.

The Bible was filled. I had a list and I deleted it because it was so long. It is filled with promises of blessing and prosperity. The problem is our definition, which has been formed and hijacked by Western post-Enlightenment individualism and capitalism.

Because real prosperity is not private jets and \$1,000 sneakers and more for me. Real prosperity starts at the bottom.

[19:40] It starts with the least. It starts with the looked over and the left out and the last in line and it lifts. It doesn't leave anybody on the curb. It doesn't step over anybody in order to get paid.

Prosperity that forgets the poor is not prosperity. It's just greed in a Sunday suit. Real prosperity knows the earth is not a vending machine.

You don't get to take and take and take and call taking a blessing. Enough with growth. Enough with endless growth. Because a thing that only grows and grows and grows and never stops, we have a word for that.

It's called a tumor. Say the word with me. Enough. Enough. Enough is a house or an apartment that's big. Enough.

Enough is an account that's full. Enough. Enough is a life that doesn't need one more thing to finally feel safe. Because the market will never say enough. The market can't say enough because it doesn't know the word.

[20 : 41] But God has said the word. God said it on the seventh day when God looked at everything she had made and called it good and sat down and rested because God knows what enough is.

And real prosperity is the thing that billionaires cannot hoard. Beauty. They cannot buy it. Health. They cannot keep it. I want work that outlives my lifetime.

I want children three generations down breathing clean air and born into a world worth belonging to. That's the wealth. And that's the wealth Jesus kept pointing at. Not a bigger barn, but a bigger table. But, 2 Corinthians 9 says, Sow bountifully, reap bountifully. And some jackass says, well that's a way for me to get a jet. So it's been weaponized to produce an economy of not enough and to pull money out of the poor.

But listen to verse 11 again. This is from the NIV. NIV. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion.

[21 : 46] As Genesis 12 says about Abraham, blessed to be a blessing. Enriched to give again, not to pile up. And this whole set of two chapters has already been defined by equality in the chapter before.

Equality, not accumulation. Yes, God does provide abundantly, but any abundance we have is meant to be a seed for someone else, not a stockpile to hoard for ourselves.

Which is why God loves a cheerful giver. The word is hilarious. That's where, of course, we get the word hilarious. And it means cheerful, glad, ungrading, giving with delight.

Generosity is supposed to produce joy. But a village of one is not hilarious. It's exhausting. The joy only shows up when everybody is in.

So, I think God does want us prosperous. Manna kind of prosperous. Enough for everyone kind of prosperous. The kind of prosperous that makes you laugh instead of clutch.

[22 : 53] Because it's one thing for us to talk about a village in the abstract. But we've got to talk about this one. What does this mean concretely for us, the table? So, let me tell you why this matters for me and for us specifically.

And then I'm going to ask us to do something about it. So, remember the young men and the strong men churches. We are the alternative. And we are the alternative to lots of things.

And not just the table. There is a network of churches throughout this country and world who have been fugitive churches, pushing upstream against the gospel of empire and hoarding and oppression.

We are the ones who want to slip the grip of empire instead of blessing it. And we don't want sickening amounts of wealth. We want enough.

But scarcity puts a real strangle on our values. Rooted in improvisation and friendship and justice and curiosity and play, none of those survive in a church that's only protecting and hoarding.

[24 : 00] It's really difficult for a frightened church to befriend a stranger. Or for a broke church to improvise. Or a church that's scraping by to be ruckus for justice.

It's too busy keeping the lights on. Now, a fully funded table can mean lots of different things. This is just a small set of examples. We've got 40 plus people on our benevolence and DMV support wait list.

I would love to be able to serve them instead of wait list them. We've got 42 plus kids that we care for on a regular basis. And while we love and adore Aaron and Liz and Jess and Every Table Kids volunteer, I hate having to stretch them thinner and thinner to reach more and more kids.

Telling them the very good news about a God who loves them unconditionally. So what if we funded somebody to also help disciple those kids and their parents and their families? We have a worship

team.

Now, at the moment of transparency and honesty, I get some of the most complaints about the worship team. Everyone's got an opinion, right? And it makes sense. Worship, what happens here, it's like the most public thing that anybody really does.

[25 : 13] And those folks are the most exposed. The work is relentless. Set up and tear down every single week. 90 minutes of rehearsal before the service even starts. A broken television screen that we've got to improvise around.

They deserve far more thanks than they already get. Imagine a funded rehearsal space. Imagine resourcing it so Akechi and Jessica and the team don't have to carry it on top of full-time jobs and absorb all that stress.

Imagine us as a church showing up consistently every time as having a reputation of being a ruckus for justice and compassion efforts across the city.

Being reliably and loudly present. But that all takes resources. We cannot outsource the church we say we want onto a handful of insanely dedicated volunteers and then congratulate ourselves for not being a toxic church.

It may not be toxic for you. But it will become absolutely toxic for the couple dozen people quietly breaking themselves to make it happen. And the same is true with money.

[26 : 21] We cannot keep expecting that the dozen or so households giving \$1,000 or more every month can simply carry the rest of us. That is not a village. That's a few villagers and too many tourists.

Now some of us have told ourselves, I'll be generous when I'm rich. But at least according to the research and the statistics, that's a lie. The wealthier people become the less likely they are to give. Because waiting for wealth forms us into someone ungenerous if wealth ever comes. We will never drift into generosity at some point when we get a higher salary. We only become whoever we've been practicing being.

So if I hoard it now, I'll hoard it later when I am rich. I'll be generous when I'm rich is like saying I'll run a marathon when I'm faster. Generosity is a muscle.

You've got to work up to it. And I don't say this as someone who is overflowing with money and resources. I've had a pay cut in the midst of wild inflation and a world-class stupid presidency.

[27 : 26] My co-pastor has also had a pay cut and we have also both increased our own giving. So we're not asking you to commit to something that we are not committed to ourselves.

We're asking you towards something we've already walked into. Which is why today and last week we did not ask you to fill out a commitment card and stick it in a thing in the lobby.

If you did, that's fine. But what we've asked is for you to bring it up to the communion table. Paul calls his collection for Jerusalem a leturgia, a ministry, the root of our word liturgy.

The offering is not a break in worship. The offering is a form of worship. So a couple of updates about where we are in the campaign. \$24,275 was the amount of recurring money that we received every month at the beginning of the campaign.

And thus far we've had \$3,300 in new commitments. Actually, I think it's higher than that. I think it's closer to \$4,100 in new commitments. So, thank you. So that means about \$27,600 in committed recurring giving.

[28 : 48] Now, our monthly budget is about \$30,000 a month. That needs to bump up to \$33,500 to restore pastoral pay. That needs to get up to \$37,000 to order us to restore pay and to start saving.

And then get up to \$40,000 in order to do new things. Or basically any dollar over \$37,500. So, in a few minutes, when we come to do communion, you've got the commitment cards here in your seats.

There's also a QR code on there or online. I know many of you in this room are faithful Sunday attendees. You are already given. You've already committed to which we say thank you.

If you have not yet had a chance, now is your chance. We also added an option on the form online that if you are already a recurring giver and you're unable to add an additional \$35 a month, you can just commit to continuing what you are already doing.

And that is an act of worship as well. So, you can make a \$35 new commitment. You can add \$35 to what you're already doing. You can keep your recurring giving.

[30 : 02] Or you can do something else up to you or what God leads you to do. So, in a few moments, when Pastor Heidi leads the communion liturgy and we're invited forward, we will have a

basket for you in order to drop your cards.

Or you can also do it on the website. And we want you to bring it to the table because the table is the place where grace circulates. Charis in and thanksgiving out.

As Paul says in 915, thanks be to God for his indescribable gift. We don't just drop our gifts into a box. We carry it to the feast and we become villagers together.

There's a liturgy that's going to show up on the screen. And I invite you to participate in this with me. It's a liturgy that sort of sums up what we've been talking about over the past few weeks and today. And you're welcome to join in with the words. You're also welcome if you need to absorb it before you feel comfortable saying it. That's all right as well. God of the manna, who fed a wandering people morning by morning, who let no one gather more than they needed and let no one go without altogether.

[31 : 23] Teach us the word enough. God of the seventh day who made the world, called it good and rested together. Teach us the word enough.

From the hunger that is never satisfied. From the barn that is never big enough. From the fear that makes us hoard together. Good Lord, deliver us.

From mistaking more for a blessing. From calling our greed ambition. From building our safety on another's lack altogether.

Good Lord, deliver us. From the lie that we are alone. From the lie that they are not enough. From the lie that we hold, what we hold is ours alone.

Good Lord, deliver us. Where there is too much, teach us to loosen our hands. And where there is too little, teach us to have the faith to fill them all together.

[32 : 29] Let there be enough and enough for all. When one of us goes without, let none of us rest easy. And when one of us is forgotten, let the whole body remember.

Let there be enough and enough for all. Make us those who know the difference between a want and a need. Who measure wealth and beauty and health and in well-being of those not yet born altogether.

Let there be enough and enough for all. Make us a people whose abundance becomes another's bread. Who set a table long enough, no one eats alone.

Who carry one another the way we ourselves have been carried. Altogether, let it begin in us, oh God. Altogether.

We will not hoard the manna. We will not build the bigger barn. We will gather what we need. Share what we have. And trust that in your hands there is enough.

[33 : 40] Enough for me. Enough for you. Enough for all. Amen. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care.

Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care.

Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care.

Take care. Take care.