

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

MY M&M STORY

WHY ARE PEOPLE WHO HAVE THE LEAST
SOMETIMES THE MOST GENEROUS?

2 CORINTHIANS 8:2 KJV



SERMON & PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

www.ReasonTogether.Church

REASON TOGETHER STUDY

MY M&M STORY

How Can Deep Poverty Produce Rich Generosity?

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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Aloha.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

To every member, every friend and every honored guest who is with us today, we are grateful that you are here.

This is a place where questions are not treated as enemies of faith.

We bring our questions.

We open our Bible.

And we Reason Together the Word of God.

Let us pray.

Our heavenly Father, we thank You for the truth of Your Word.

Thank You for every good and perfect gift that comes from Your hand.

Thank You for the people You use to teach us, including those we never expected to become our teachers.

Open our eyes today to the blessings we have taken for granted.

Show us the difference between consuming what You give and allowing Your gifts to pass through our hands in love.

Protect us from pride when we serve others.

Keep us from imagining that having more makes us more important or that having less makes someone less valuable.

Teach us to recognize Your image in every person.

Give comfort to those who are struggling and conviction to those who have abundance but closed hearts.

Above all, show us Jesus Christ, who gave Himself so that sinners might be saved.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Our principal Scripture is found in 2 Corinthians chapter 8.

The Bible says:

"Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia;

"How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.

"For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves;

"Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

"And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.

"Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also.

"Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.

"I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."

Before we begin, let me say something about giving.

Guests are never expected to give to Reason Together Church.

If you are a member of another church, we encourage you to support your home church.

For those who consider this their church home, there is a giving box available in the back.

Give only as the Lord leads you and give cheerfully.

We do not give to purchase the attention of God.

We do not give to earn His love.

We give because everything we possess first came from Him.

And sometimes the clearest lesson about giving does not come from the person who possesses the most.

Sometimes it comes from someone who has almost nothing.

Today I want to share the sermon that people have requested from me more often than any other message I have preached.

It is a true story.

It happened during the years when my wife and I were serving in Asia.

I have told it in churches, at missionary events and in conversations around the world.

I have told it when ministry was going well.

I have remembered it when ministry was difficult.

I have returned to it when I felt discouraged, forgotten or tempted to complain.

The title is simple.

My M&M Story.

But this is not really a sermon about candy.

It is about two packages that began with almost exactly the same contents.

Both packages ended the morning empty.

Yet those two empty packages told two entirely different stories.

Less than eighteen hours before this event, I received a care package from a pastor who had spent several days working with us.

He had returned to the United States and believed God was leading him to remind me that someone still cared.

If you have never lived far from home, it may be difficult to explain what a care package can mean.

The value is not limited to the items inside.

The box says, "Someone remembered you."

It says, "Someone knows where you are."

It says, "Your work may be happening far away, but you have not been forgotten."

That particular package contained a couple of new tee-shirts.

It contained a nice pair of sunglasses.

It contained a couple of books from a series I enjoyed.

It contained the equivalent of about thirty dollars in local currency.

And it contained several packages of M&Ms.

I stayed up late reading one of the books.

The next morning, I prepared to go soul winning in one of the communities where we ministered.

As I was leaving, I saw the candy sitting on the counter.

I gave in to the temptation and placed two packages in my shirt pocket.

We began walking down a dirt road toward the area where we would be witnessing.

I opened the first package.

I ate those M&Ms American style.

For anyone unfamiliar with that expression, it means I did not take one piece and carefully contemplate it.

I poured several into my hand.

Then I placed the entire handful into my mouth.

I did that again.

And then I did it one more time.

I did not time myself, but I am confident that I finished the package in less than one minute.

It had been a long time since I had tasted familiar American candy.

That little package satisfied my desire for something sweet.

It reminded me of things I once enjoyed without thinking about them.

I placed the empty package away and continued walking.

I remember thinking that I was now ready to teach people about the messages of God's love found in the Bible.

Within ten minutes, those people were going to teach me.

That particular Saturday began like many others.

It was only about seven o'clock in the morning, but the temperature was already climbing.

I knew it would become very hot in the jeans and sneakers I was wearing.

But because of the dirt, broken material and conditions in those areas, I did not wear shorts or sandals while ministering there.

We entered a community where we had taught every Saturday.

Soon I saw a scene that always brought joy to my heart.

Children began running toward us from every direction.

My wife, Danielin, had been teaching in that community every week for approximately three years.

The children affectionately called her Ma'am Bible.

They had begun calling me Preacher Joe.

In that part of the world, many children assumed that every American man was named Joe.

Before long, more than one hundred children had gathered.

Some circled around us.

Some asked what songs we would sing.

Others wanted to know whether they could hear Bible stories in English.

Poverty and hunger were ordinary realities in communities like that.

I saw them almost everywhere I went.

The poverty was not limited to one unusual household.

Everyone there was poor.

Many were hungry.

Some families lived in conditions most Americans would have difficulty imagining.

I knew I could not solve every problem before me.

I did know that I could share the love of Jesus Christ.

I could tell them that they were seen.

I could tell them that they possessed dignity because they were made in the image of God.

I could tell them that Jesus loved them and died for them.

I could tell them that eternal life was offered through faith in Him.

There was one boy to whom my wife had always given a little additional attention.

He had a physical deformity and was missing a leg.

While other members of the mission team were completing the final activities of the morning, I remembered the unopened package in my pocket.

I asked my wife if she could find a way to give the candy to that boy.

I wanted him to have something special.

I was gladly willing to give it to him.

But I was concerned about what would happen afterward.

His family was extremely poor.

The only clothing he had on was an old tee-shirt.

He did not have a pocket in which to hide the candy.

He did not have a bag in which to conceal it.

I thought the best thing would be for my wife to find some quiet way to give it to him without attracting attention.

Without hesitating, she took the package from me.

Then she walked directly toward him in full view of all the other children.

The community became exceptionally quiet.

Every child watched to see what she was about to do.

She handed the package of M&Ms to the boy.

She told him that she loved him.

Then she walked away.

I was happy that he had received the chocolate.

But if I am honest, I was also a little upset.

Now more than one hundred children knew that one child had received something they did not have.

I thought one child's happiness might become one hundred children's disappointment.

I worried that the boy was already treated differently because of his disability.

I feared that this special gift might separate him even further from the other children.

Human nature told me that the best thing he could do was hide the package.

Scarcity teaches people to protect what they possess.

Hunger says, "Save it for later."

Fear says, "If you open your hand, there may be nothing left for you."

Human calculation says, "There is not enough for everyone."

I expected that boy to hold the package tightly.

He did the opposite.

He screamed joyfully over what he had received.

Then he said something in his language that caused the other children to gather around him.

I watched them come closer.

I watched the circle tighten.

And I began to cringe as he opened the package.

I had just consumed an identical package.

I tried to remember how many pieces I had eaten.

I had taken approximately three handfuls.

I mentally estimated that the package contained about thirty-six individual M&Ms.

There were more than one hundred children gathered around him.

Even if he wanted to give one piece to every child, there would be more children excluded than included.

I began doing the arithmetic of insufficiency.

Thirty-six pieces.

More than one hundred children.

The numbers did not work.

I remember praying that this had become a God-sized problem and asking Him to let everything work out.

The disciples once faced a similar calculation.

John chapter 6 records that a great multitude followed Jesus.

Jesus asked Philip where they could buy bread so the people could eat.

The Bible tells us that Jesus already knew what He would do.

But Philip began calculating.

He answered:

"Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little."

Philip looked at the crowd.

Philip considered the cost.

Philip reached a reasonable conclusion.

There was not enough.

Then Andrew spoke.

He said:

"There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?"

Andrew located something.

Then he immediately explained why it was insufficient.

Five barley loaves.

Two small fishes.

Thousands of hungry people.

What are they among so many?

That question could have been asked in the community where I stood.

One little package of M&Ms.

More than one hundred children.

What is it among so many?

While the adults were calculating what was missing, a child began using what was available.

The boy reached into the package.

He removed one M&M.

Then he took a small bite from it.

He handed what remained to the boy standing beside him.

That boy took a small bite.

Then he handed the remainder to another child.

The third child finished it.

Three children shared one M&M.

I had never seen anything like that in my life.

The boy with the package did not need an adult to order him to share.

No one organized a distribution line.

No one warned the children to take only a portion.

No one wrote rules upon a board.

The first boy passed the package to someone else.

That child removed a piece and took a bite.

The package moved again.

One child after another received a taste.

No child attempted to seize the package and run away.

No child poured a handful into his mouth as I had done.

No child said, "This is mine."

The package continued traveling.

It passed from hand to hand.

It moved through the entire gathering until every child had received a taste.

Then I noticed that a few pieces remained.

Some of the parents were standing nearby.

The package began moving among them.

They did exactly what the children had done.

One person received a taste and passed it onward.

Then the final person in the group ate.

The package was empty.

I believe the Biblical account in which Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes.

I believe He fed the multitude and that twelve baskets of fragments remained.

But Jesus did not multiply the candy that morning.

If He had, I would tell you about the physical miracle I witnessed.

Instead, I witnessed something quieter but unforgettable.

I witnessed what unselfish love could do with something small.

The quantity of candy did not increase.

Its reach increased because every hand remained open.

The miracle in John 6 produced twelve baskets of leftovers.

The M&M package produced an empty bag.

Yet that empty bag became evidence that no one had been excluded.

Think about the two packages with which I began that morning.

They contained approximately the same thing.

They came from the same care package.

They traveled down the same road in the same shirt pocket.

Both were opened.

Both were consumed.

Both ended empty.

But they were emptied for entirely different reasons.

The first package was emptied because one person consumed everything.

The second package was emptied because everyone was included.

The first package satisfied one appetite.

The second package created joy throughout a community.

The first package disappeared in less than one minute.

The second has remained in my memory for years.

The first package gave me a brief taste of home.

The second gave me a sermon I would carry around the world.

An empty package cannot tell you whether something was selfishly consumed or lovingly shared.

You must know whose hands it passed through.

And that brings us back to the churches of Macedonia.

Paul described what God had done among those believers.

He did not begin by praising their wealth.

He began by identifying grace.

"Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia."

Their generosity was not proof that they possessed great financial resources.

It was evidence that the grace of God was working in their hearts.

Paul then placed four remarkable realities together.

Great affliction.

Abundant joy.

Deep poverty.

Rich generosity.

He wrote:

"How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality."

That sounds like an impossible equation.

We expect great affliction and deep poverty to produce fear.

We expect scarcity to create closed fists.

We expect someone who has almost nothing to say, "I cannot participate."

But the Macedonians possessed something poverty had not taken from them.

They possessed joy in Jesus Christ.

Their deep poverty did not create their generosity.

Poverty by itself does not make a person generous.

People with little can become selfish.

People with much can become extraordinarily generous.

The source was not poverty.

The source was grace.

Grace produced joy in the middle of poverty.

Joy overflowed through open hands.

The boy did not share because he had enough.

He shared because his joy was greater than his poverty.

His surroundings revealed deep poverty.

His shout revealed abundant joy.

His open hand revealed rich generosity.

The boy's poverty explains how little he possessed.

Only grace explains why he shared it.

Paul says the Macedonians gave according to their ability and even beyond what anyone expected.

They were willing of themselves.

Paul was not chasing them through the church begging them to contribute.

They were pleading for the privilege of helping other believers.

Their generosity was not squeezed out of them through guilt.

It flowed out of them through grace.

Then Paul reveals the open secret behind their giving.

He says:

"But first gave their own selves to the Lord."

Before they gave a gift, they gave themselves.

That is the order Christian generosity must never forget.

God does not merely want something from you.

God wants you.

It is possible to give money without giving your heart.

It is possible to contribute publicly while living privately for yourself.

It is possible to make a donation while remaining far from God.

No gift can purchase forgiveness.

No offering can place God in our debt.

No amount of generosity can pay for sin.

The Macedonians first gave themselves to the Lord.

Then their possessions became available for His purposes.

That boy shared more than chocolate.

He shared his joy.

He shared his moment.

He shared his place in the circle.

He turned a personal possession into a community celebration.

The M&Ms were visible.

The heart behind them was the greater gift.

Jesus once sat near the treasury and watched people give.

Mark chapter 12 says:

"And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury."

Many who were rich cast in much.

Their gifts were visible.

Their amounts may have impressed everyone nearby.

Then a poor widow approached.

She placed two mites into the treasury.

Those coins represented almost no purchasing power.

Yet Jesus called His disciples to Him.

He did not want them to miss what had just happened.

He said:

"Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury."

That statement seems mathematically impossible.

She did not place more currency into the treasury.

The rich gave larger amounts.

Jesus nevertheless said she gave more.

Why?

He explained:

"For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living."

The people nearby could count the coins.

Jesus could see the cost.

The people could see what entered the treasury.

Jesus could see what remained afterward.

The rich gave and remained rich.

The widow gave when there was nothing to spare.

We count what was given.

God also sees what the giving required.

Two people can give the same amount while making entirely different sacrifices.

Two people can give dramatically different amounts while revealing the same surrendered heart.

That is why David refused to offer God a sacrifice that cost him nothing.

Second Samuel chapter 24 records David saying:

"Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing."

The world measures a gift by its price.

God sees the sacrifice beneath it.

Jesus watched the widow.

I watched the boy.

The widow may never have known that Jesus called His disciples together to speak about her.

That boy may never have known how many congregations would eventually hear what he did.

Neither one stood behind a pulpit.

Neither one prepared a manuscript.

Neither one announced a sermon title.

Yet both delivered messages that outlived the moment.

Some of the greatest sermons are preached by people who never stand behind a pulpit.

The widow preached with two mites.

The lad appeared with five barley loaves and two small fishes.

The boy taught a preacher with one package of M&Ms.

There is, however, an important warning beside the account of the widow.

Immediately before Jesus watched her, He condemned religious leaders who "devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers."

The very people who should have protected widows were benefiting from them.

Faithful Bible teachers differ over whether Jesus was chiefly praising the widow, condemning the religious system or allowing His disciples to see both realities at once.

But at least two truths are plain.

Jesus accurately recognized the extraordinary measure of her sacrifice.

And Jesus condemned leaders who exploited vulnerable people.

We must never use the widow's faithfulness as permission for religious manipulation.

No preacher should pressure an impoverished mother to give away the money needed to feed her children.

No church should make a struggling person feel ashamed because there is nothing left to contribute.

No one should promise that giving a certain amount will force God to provide a financial multiplication.

No one purchases a miracle.

No one buys salvation.

No one earns the love of God through an offering.

Paul gives the necessary balance in 2 Corinthians 8:12:

"For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not."

God does not demand that you give what you do not possess.

Then 2 Corinthians 9:7 says:

"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."

Not grudgingly.

Not under compulsion.

Not because someone embarrassed you.

Not because a preacher suggested that God would be angry if you did not surrender your grocery money.

Christian generosity grows from grace, willingness and love.

Jesus honored what the widow freely gave.

That does not give religious leaders permission to take what vulnerable people need to live.

The Church should not devour widows' houses.

The Church should help protect widows.

The Church should care for children.

The Church should defend the dignity of the poor.

The Church should never turn someone's desperation into an opportunity for profit.

And generosity is larger than money.

Some people hear a sermon about giving and immediately conclude that they have nothing to offer.

Perhaps your bank account is nearly empty.

Perhaps you are already deciding which necessary bill must wait.

Perhaps financial generosity is not possible today.

But money is not the only gift God can place in an open hand.

You may possess time.

You may possess knowledge.

You may be able to prepare a meal.

You may be able to offer transportation.

You may have a room in your home.

You may know how to repair something.

You may be able to sit beside someone who is lonely.

You may be able to listen without interrupting.

You may be able to pray with someone who is frightened.

You may be able to offer forgiveness.

You may be able to share a cup of coffee and give someone your full attention.

You may be able to tell another person what Jesus Christ has done for you.

First John 3:18 says:

"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth."

Love does not remain an idea.

Love moves toward another person.

Love opens its hand.

Love asks who has not yet received.

Those who possess financial abundance are not excused from using it faithfully.

First Timothy chapter 6 instructs the rich not to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God.

Then it tells them:

"That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate."

The poor are not excluded from generosity.

The wealthy are not excused from generosity.

God does not call every person to give the same amount.

He calls every believer to place the whole life under His authority.

So ask yourself a different question today.

Do not merely ask, "How much do I have?"

Ask, "What has God placed in my hand that was never intended to stop with me?"

The boy did not begin by asking whether there was enough for everyone.

He began sharing what he had.

I saw thirty-six pieces and more than one hundred children.

He saw people who should not be excluded.

Human arithmetic asks, "How much is there?"

Love asks, "Who has not received any?"

That does not mean wisdom is unnecessary.

Biblical generosity is not careless destruction.

We are responsible to provide for our families.

We should not enable destructive behavior.

We should not pretend every request is honest.

But we must also be careful that wisdom does not become a respectable name for selfishness.

Sometimes we say, "I am being wise," when we really mean, "I do not want to be inconvenienced."

Sometimes we say, "My contribution will not solve the whole problem," as though helping one person has no value.

Sometimes we use the size of the crowd as an excuse to keep the lunch in our own basket.

Andrew asked, "What are they among so many?"

That was a reasonable question.

But the loaves did not need to be sufficient in Andrew's hands.

They needed to be placed where Jesus could use them.

Do not despise the small thing God has placed in your hand.

Do not pretend it is enough to accomplish what only God can do.

But do not withhold it merely because it appears small.

God can use a meal.

God can use a ride.

God can use a conversation.

God can use a widow's mites.

God can use a lad's lunch.

God can use one package of M&Ms.

The package did more than supply a brief taste of candy.

It produced thanksgiving.

Second Corinthians 9:12 says:

"For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God."

The children received something.

Many of them came to thank me for my generosity.

But their response caused me to thank God.

Their gratitude exposed how much I had taken for granted.

Their open hands corrected my closed assumptions.

Their sharing encouraged me during later seasons of discouragement.

The blessing traveled in both directions.

I thought I had brought the gift.

Before the morning ended, I realized that I had received the greater one.

That is an important lesson for anyone who serves.

The person helping is not always the only teacher.

The person receiving help is not a project.

The poor are not scenery for someone else's ministry story.

They are people made in the image of God.

They possess names, families, intelligence, humor, courage, gifts and lessons that we may desperately need.

Mission work should never begin with the belief that God was absent until we arrived.

God was already working in that community.

He was already capable of teaching an American preacher through a child whom the world might overlook.

I came prepared to speak about love.

The boy demonstrated it.

I came carrying two packages.

He showed me what one package could become when it passed through an open heart.

Whenever ministry later became difficult, I remembered him.

Whenever I began feeling sorry for myself, I remembered him.

Whenever I watched greed and corruption take center stage, I remembered him.

Whenever I began wondering whether anyone cared, I remembered the pastor who sent the package and the boy who shared it.

And whenever I remembered how grateful those children were for a small taste of candy, I had to ask how grateful I was for what Jesus Christ had given me.

That is where every Christian sermon about generosity must finally lead.

Not merely to the widow.

Not merely to the Macedonians.

Not merely to the lad with the lunch.

Not merely to the boy with the candy.

It must lead to Jesus Christ.

Paul was speaking about generosity when he wrote one of the greatest descriptions of the Gospel in the New Testament.

Second Corinthians 8:9 says:

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Christian generosity begins with grace.

We do not give first and then persuade Jesus to become gracious.

Jesus gave first.

We love Him because He first loved us.

Paul continues:

"That, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor."

Jesus possessed the glory of Heaven.

All things were made by Him.

Angels worshipped Him.

He shared eternal glory with the Father.

Yet He entered the poverty of our fallen world.

He was born in humble circumstances.

He was laid in a manger.

He lived without earthly luxury.

He said that foxes had holes and birds had nests, but the Son of man had nowhere to lay His head.

He was rejected by those He came to save.

He was betrayed for pieces of silver.

He was mocked, beaten and falsely accused.

His garments were taken.

His hands were opened upon a cross.

He did not merely give something He could spare.

He gave Himself.

The boy shared what he possessed.

The widow gave all her living.

The Macedonians first gave themselves to the Lord.

Jesus gave His life for sinners.

Paul says He became poor:

"That ye through his poverty might be rich."

This is not a promise that every Christian will become financially wealthy.

Jesus did not die to make greed religious.

He died to make spiritually bankrupt sinners rich in grace.

Through Christ we receive forgiveness.

Through Christ we receive reconciliation with God.

Through Christ we are adopted into God's family.

Through Christ we receive eternal life.

Through Christ we possess an inheritance that cannot be corrupted or taken away.

The greatest poverty is not having an empty wallet.

It is standing before God with a debt of sin we cannot pay.

The greatest riches are not stored in a bank account.

They are found in belonging to Jesus Christ.

The first package left an empty bag because I consumed it.

The second left an empty bag because everyone was included.

Jesus left an empty tomb because the work of salvation was finished.

He died upon the cross.

He was buried.

On the third day, He rose again.

And the gift He purchased is offered to you today.

You cannot purchase it.

You cannot earn it.

You cannot deserve it.

You must receive it by faith.

Romans 3:23 says:

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

That includes the wealthy and the poor.

It includes the giver and the receiver.

It includes the missionary and the child.

All of us need a Savior.

Romans 6:23 says:

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Salvation is a gift.

But a gift must be received.

You may be generous and still need Jesus.

You may help the poor and still need Jesus.

You may give money to churches and still need Jesus.

Good works cannot erase sin.

Only the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse us.

You must repent of your sin.

You must believe that Jesus died and rose again.

You must place your trust in Him.

If you are ready to receive Jesus Christ today, I invite you to pray.

The words of a prayer do not save by themselves.

Jesus saves.

But you may use these words to express the repentance and faith of your heart.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner.

I know that I cannot save myself.

I believe that You died upon the cross for my sins.

I believe that You were buried and rose again.

Please forgive me.

Cleanse me from my sin.

I turn from trusting myself and place my faith in You.

Be my Savior and my Lord.

I receive the gift of eternal life that You purchased for me.

Teach me to follow You.

Teach me to love others as You have loved me.

Thank You for giving Yourself for me.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

If you prayed that prayer sincerely, please tell someone before you leave.

We want to pray with you, encourage you and help you begin following Christ.

If you already know Jesus, do not leave this message as merely a touching story about a child far away.

Ask what God has placed in your hand.

Perhaps it appears too small to matter.

Perhaps you have been waiting until you possess more.

Perhaps you have been calculating what you cannot accomplish instead of offering what God can use.

Do not wait until you believe you have enough.

Begin by giving yourself to the Lord.

Then ask Him what should pass through your open hands.

It may be money.

It may be time.

It may be food.

It may be encouragement.

It may be forgiveness.

It may be a Gospel conversation.

It may be the simple assurance that someone has not been forgotten.

You may never stand behind a pulpit.

But an open hand, an open home or an open heart may preach a sermon someone remembers for the rest of life.

That child did not possess very much.

But what passed through his hands has continued traveling for years.

The M&Ms disappeared that morning.

The lesson did not.

I entered that community prepared to teach those children about the love of Jesus.

Instead, one child showed me what unselfish love looked like.

He taught me that joy can be greater than poverty.

He taught me that love does not begin by asking whether there is enough for everyone.

Love begins by refusing to exclude the person standing beside us.

He taught me that the same gift can tell a different story depending upon whose hands it passes through.

And he reminded me that if people could be so grateful for one taste of something sweet, I should never stop being grateful for the Savior who gave Himself completely for me.

On that day, the teacher was definitely the student.

May the Lord deliver us from consuming every blessing as though it ends with us.

May He make us rich in good works and willing to share.

May He protect the vulnerable from those who would use religion to exploit them.

May He give hope to those who believe they have nothing valuable to offer.

May He teach those with abundance to hold it with open hands.

May every gift we share produce thanksgiving unto God.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ travel through our lives until others discover the riches of salvation in Him.

Aloha Nui Loa.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

My M&M Story

How Can Deep Poverty Produce Rich Generosity?

2 Corinthians 8:1-9

Deep Poverty, Abundant Joy and the Grace of Christ

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Reason Together Church

www.ReasonTogether.Church

Bring your questions. Open your Bible. Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

The Question Behind the Story

2 Corinthians 8:2 How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.

The public title is My M&M Story, but the Biblical question beneath it is larger than candy. How can people surrounded by deep poverty display rich generosity? Ordinary arithmetic expects scarcity to tighten the hand. The boy in this account opened his hand, invited others near and allowed one small gift to travel through an entire gathering.

The experience does not prove that poor people are naturally more generous than wealthy people. Poverty can produce fear, caution and competition. Paul does not praise poverty as though deprivation were a virtue. He begins with the grace of God, then describes joy overflowing through poverty into generosity.

The story therefore becomes a doorway into 2 Corinthians 8. Poverty explains how little the child possessed. It cannot explain why he shared it. The best Biblical explanation is that grace can produce a joy greater than the pressure of scarcity.

GOVERNING ANSWER: The child did not share because he had enough. His poverty explains how little he possessed, but grace explains why he opened his hand.

A Personal Word from Pastor Tom

Proverbs 27:17 Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

I have told this story more often than any other ministry experience. I first told it because it was a beautiful example of love, gratitude and sharing. Those lessons remain true, but repeated study has shown me that the experience reaches farther than I first understood.

I arrived that Saturday believing I was prepared to teach. Within minutes, a child became my teacher. He did not know that I was performing calculations in my mind. He did not hear my fear that one special gift might cause disappointment. He simply received joyfully, called others close and shared.

That is one reason the story has remained with me. God often corrects the assumptions of the helper through the people the helper came to serve. Christian ministry must leave room for the giver to become a receiver and for the teacher to become the student.

PERSONAL CONFESSION: I thought I had brought the gift. Before the morning ended, I realized that I had received the greater one.

The Care Package Before the M&Ms

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.

Less than eighteen hours before the event, a pastor had given me a care package. Its contents included clothing, sunglasses, books, local currency and several packages of M&Ms. The package communicated more than material assistance. It said that someone remembered us and cared about the ministry.

That background matters because generosity was already moving before the children gathered. One pastor gave to encourage another servant. The gift traveled into my pocket, then one unopened package traveled into the hands of a child. The child extended its reach farther still.

No giver in the chain created the blessing from nothing. Each person received something and decided what would happen next. This is a common pattern of grace. God supplies, people receive and open hands permit the gift to continue its journey.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS: Generosity often starts when someone recognizes that a received blessing may be entrusted rather than possessed.

The First Package

1 Timothy 6:17 The living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.

I placed two unopened packages in my shirt pocket. While walking toward the ministry area, I opened one and ate it in less than a minute, taking several pieces at a time. I later estimated that the package contained approximately thirty-six pieces.

It is important not to turn ordinary enjoyment into sin. Scripture says that God gives good things to enjoy. Eating candy privately is not a moral failure. The first package matters because it creates an honest narrative contrast. One package ended with one person. The second passed through a community.

Both packages eventually became empty. Their identical physical condition concealed very different moral histories. An empty wrapper cannot tell us whether a gift was consumed privately or shared lovingly. We must know the hands through which it passed.

HONEST CONTRAST: The first package was not sinful, but it reveals how easily a blessing can end with the person who received it.

The Community and the Children

Genesis 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him.

The ministry team entered an impoverished community in Asia where it taught each Saturday. My wife had served there weekly for three years and was affectionately called Ma'am Bible. The children called me Preacher Joe. More than one hundred children gathered, eager for songs and Bible stories in English.

Poverty and hunger formed part of the setting, but they must never become the identity of the people. The children were not scenery for someone else's ministry story. They were persons bearing the image of God, with names, relationships, intelligence, agency and spiritual value.

A responsible retelling preserves the severity of need without making deprivation picturesque. Compassion looks honestly at suffering, but dignity refuses to reduce a person to what he or she lacks.

HUMAN DIGNITY: Need may describe a circumstance, but it never exhausts the identity or value of a person made in the image of God.

The Boy and the Unopened Package

James 2:1 My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.

One boy had a physical deformity and was missing a leg. Because my wife had given him additional attention, I asked her to find a way to give him the unopened package. I hoped the gift could be concealed because he had no pocket and because I feared the reaction of the larger group.

Instead, she carried the package to him in full view of everyone, told him that she loved him and walked away. My concern intensified. I feared that one child's special gift might isolate him further or disappoint more than one hundred children who received nothing.

The fear was understandable, but it was still a calculation built upon an assumption. I expected scarcity to produce possessiveness. The boy was about to reveal that my arithmetic had left out joy, restraint and open hands.

THE HIDDEN ASSUMPTION: Adults often calculate what scarcity will make people do before giving them the dignity of showing us who they are.

What the Boy Did

Acts 20:35 It is more blessed to give than to receive.

The boy cried out joyfully and called the other children to him. He removed one M&M, took a small bite and passed the remainder to another child. A second child took a bite and a third finished it. Three children shared one piece.

The package continued through the gathering. Children received portions, then passed what remained. After every child had received a taste, a few pieces remained and several parents followed the same practice. When the final person ate, the package was empty.

The most striking feature is not merely that the original recipient surrendered candy. It is that the next recipient also restrained appetite and continued the gift. Generosity became communal. The first open hand invited another open hand, then another.

COMMUNAL GENEROSITY: One child began the sharing, but the blessing reached everyone because each recipient allowed it to continue.

Did the Candy Miraculously Multiply?

John 6:11 And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down.

The original account explicitly distinguishes this event from Christ's multiplication of the loaves and fishes. The number of M&Ms did not increase. Approximately thirty-six pieces were divided through small bites until more than one hundred children and several parents received a taste.

Calling the event a physical miracle would weaken both accounts. John 6 proclaims the supernatural sufficiency and identity of Christ. The M&M experience displays voluntary restraint, gratitude and sharing. Both challenge the arithmetic of insufficiency, but they do so in different ways.

The truthful statement is more compelling than an embellished one. The quantity did not increase. The reach increased because people chose not to stop the gift in their own hands.

TEXTUAL HONESTY: God did not multiply the candy. Its reach increased because a community practiced restraint and sharing.

The Two Empty Packages

Luke 12:21 So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

The two packages began together, contained approximately the same product and traveled in the same pocket. Both ended empty. One was consumed rapidly by one person. The other moved through many hands until no one present was excluded.

The contrast is not between eating and refusing to eat. The boy also tasted the gift. It is between a blessing that terminates in private consumption and a blessing that becomes participation. The second package created a moment of fellowship because recipients thought about who had not yet received.

The physical outcome alone cannot reveal the moral difference. Christian evaluation must ask more than what remains. It must ask what happened, who was included and whether love traveled with the gift.

TWO MORAL HISTORIES: One package became empty because one person consumed it. The other became empty because no one was excluded.

The Gift Traveled Beyond That Morning

2 Corinthians 9:12 The administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God.

The candy disappeared that morning, but the lesson did not. The memory encouraged me during difficult periods of ministry. It entered a published account, became a frequently requested sermon and now supports a Reason Together Study.

This afterlife does not increase the monetary value of the candy. It reveals another dimension of generosity. A loving act may produce gratitude, correction and testimony long after the object itself has been consumed.

Paul says Christian giving supplies need and produces thanksgiving unto God. A gift travels in several directions at once. It reaches the recipient, changes the giver, strengthens fellowship and may continue teaching people who were not present at the original event.

THE LASTING GIFT: The M&Ms disappeared that morning. The thanksgiving, correction and testimony continued to travel.

Grace Is the First Subject

2 Corinthians 8:1 Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.

Paul begins his account of Macedonian generosity with the grace of God. He does not begin by praising a naturally superior culture, a heroic personality or the moral benefits of deprivation. Their giving is evidence of grace at work.

This order protects the sermon from romanticizing poverty and from turning the child into the savior of the story. The boy's action was beautiful, but Christian preaching must finally ask what makes such open-handed love possible. Paul directs attention to grace before he describes the gift.

Grace is God's undeserved favor expressed supremely in Jesus Christ. When grace is received, possessions cease to function as the foundation of identity. The heart can loosen its fearful grip because it knows that life rests in the Giver rather than in the gift.

THEOLOGICAL ORDER: Paul begins with grace because Christian generosity is not the achievement of poverty. It is the fruit of what God gives.

The Macedonian Churches

2 Corinthians 8:1 The grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.

Macedonia included churches associated with Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. Acts 16 and 17 records imprisonment, opposition and public pressure in the region. Paul points to congregations acquainted with affliction rather than to wealthy patrons giving from comfort.

We cannot reconstruct the precise financial condition of every believer. Historical background can illuminate the text, but it must not replace Paul's inspired description. He says their poverty was deep and their trial was great.

The collection was intended to assist needy believers in Jerusalem. The Macedonians were not giving toward a luxury project or attempting to purchase spiritual favor. They wanted fellowship in serving fellow believers who were also in need.

HISTORICAL SETTING: Afflicted churches with deep need asked to participate in relieving needy believers elsewhere.

Paul's Impossible Equation

2 Corinthians 8:2 The abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.

Paul deliberately places opposites together. Affliction is great, joy is abundant, poverty is deep and generosity is rich. The wealth in the verse is not an account balance possessed by the Macedonians. It is the liberality flowing from them.

Deep poverty did not manufacture abundant joy. The grace of God gave them a joy that suffering could not fully extinguish. That joy then abounded into sincere generosity. The verse does not deny pain. It shows that pain does not possess the final authority over a grace-filled heart.

The M&M experience makes the equation visible. The community displayed material scarcity, the boy displayed joy and the gathering displayed generosity. We should not claim knowledge of every motive in the child, but the Biblical pattern explains why the combination matters.

PAUL'S PARADOX: Deep poverty describes the need, abundant joy describes the heart and rich generosity describes the overflow of grace.

The Abundance of Their Joy

Philippians 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.

Biblical joy is not denial. The Macedonians experienced affliction and poverty, yet Paul also describes abundant joy. Their circumstances were real, but their circumstances did not exhaust reality. They belonged to Christ and participated in His grace.

The boy's first response to the gift was joyful. He called others to him rather than guarding the package in silence. Joy became expansive. It looked outward and wanted others to participate.

Possessiveness often whispers that joy will shrink when a gift is shared. The child demonstrated the opposite. His portion became smaller, but the joy of the moment became larger because other people entered it.

JOY OPENS THE CIRCLE: The boy did not protect joy by keeping everyone away. He enlarged the celebration by calling others near.

They Were Willing of Themselves

2 Corinthians 8:3 For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves.

Paul emphasizes willingness. The Macedonians gave according to their ability and beyond what observers expected, but their unusual sacrifice was voluntary. The verse celebrates eagerness rather than pressure.

This matters whenever leaders speak about giving. A dramatic example can easily become emotional leverage. The preacher may admire the child, the widow or the Macedonians without turning their actions into a compulsory formula for every listener.

Christian leaders may teach, invite and administer. They must not manufacture generosity through shame, fear or promises that a donation will force God to provide financial return. Grace opens hands. Manipulation attempts to pry them open.

FREEDOM MATTERS: A gift extracted by pressure may transfer money, but it does not reproduce the willing generosity Paul commends.

They Begged to Participate

2 Corinthians 8:4 Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

The picture reverses common assumptions about religious fundraising. Paul was not begging impoverished people to surrender their last resources. The Macedonians were asking Paul to receive their gift and permit their participation in serving the saints.

Paul calls this participation fellowship. They did not regard the Jerusalem believers as distant problems or anonymous recipients. Giving joined churches across geography, culture and circumstance in a shared work of grace.

The M&M package similarly became more than an object. Each recipient entered a fellowship of receiving and passing. The gift formed a temporary community around one question: Who has not yet received a taste?

FELLOWSHIP IN GIVING: The Macedonians did not merely send resources. They asked for the privilege of standing with believers in need.

They First Gave Themselves

2 Corinthians 8:5 But first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.

This verse is the theological center of Christian generosity. God does not principally seek possessions detached from the person. The Macedonians first placed themselves under the lordship of Christ.

Self-surrender changes the question from How much must I release? to What belongs to Christ? Time, attention, influence, money, hospitality and opportunity all come under His claim. A person may make a donation while still guarding the heart from God. Paul begins deeper.

Generosity cannot substitute for conversion. The Gospel calls sinners to receive Christ, trust His finished work and belong to Him. Open hands then become part of a surrendered life, not a payment offered in place of that life.

THE FIRST GIFT: Christian giving begins when a person gives himself or herself to the Lord.

Not by Commandment

2 Corinthians 8:8 I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.

Paul presents the Macedonians as an example, yet explicitly says he is not issuing a command that mechanically duplicates their gift. Examples test the sincerity of love by inviting reflection, not by erasing conscience and circumstance.

The M&M story should work the same way. It asks whether grace has opened our hearts and hands. It does not command every person to divide every item with every nearby individual. Wisdom, responsibility and real need still matter.

A sermon becomes manipulative when admiration is converted into shame. Paul leaves room for willing purpose. The Holy Spirit may convict a comfortable person of selfishness, while comforting a struggling person who has been made to feel guilty for lacking resources that do not exist.

PASTORAL METHOD: Let the example test love without turning one extraordinary act into a compulsory rule.

According to What a Person Has

2 Corinthians 8:12 It is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.

This verse is essential whenever the Macedonians or the widow are preached. God does not judge a struggling believer for failing to give nonexistent resources. A willing gift is evaluated according to what a person has.

The principle does not excuse selfishness among those with abundance. It does protect people from pretending, borrowing recklessly or neglecting food, shelter, medicine, children and necessary obligations to satisfy religious pressure.

Biblical stewardship asks what God has actually entrusted, what responsibilities accompany it and how love should direct its use. The answer may involve giving money, receiving help, sharing time, offering skill or admitting that present capacity is limited.

A WORD OF RELIEF: God does not demand that a person give what he or she does not have.

Equality, Not the Ease of Others

2 Corinthians 8:13 For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened.

Paul did not design the collection to transfer distress from Jerusalem to Corinth. He sought a form of equality in which present abundance supplied another's need, with the recognition that circumstances could later reverse.

Generosity is therefore more than admiration for dramatic sacrifice. People with resources have a particular responsibility to help relieve burdens. A church should not praise the tiny gift of a poor person while allowing wealthy members to remain untouched by the need.

The manna illustration in verses 14 and 15 reinforces sufficiency rather than luxury. The goal is not that one group lives easily while another is depleted. It is that abundance becomes provision and that lack is genuinely addressed.

PAUL'S AIM: Christian generosity does not glorify unequal suffering. It moves present abundance toward real need.

Cheerful Purpose and Divine Sufficiency

2 Corinthians 9:7 Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity.

Purposeful giving is neither impulsive pressure nor reluctant compliance. The giver considers, decides and acts before God. Cheerfulness does not require a constant smile or erase the cost of sacrifice. It describes a heart that is not being dragged against its will.

Verse 8 promises divine sufficiency for every good work. The emphasis is not that every donor will become materially wealthy. God supplies so that His people may continue in faithful service.

The child's joy illustrates this spirit. He did not appear trapped by the gift or forced by the crowd. He called others near. His delight became part of what he shared.

CHEERFUL GENEROSITY: God seeks purposeful hearts that are free to give, not reluctant hands moved by necessity.

Thanksgiving Is Part of the Fruit

2 Corinthians 9:11 Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God.

Paul repeatedly connects generosity with thanksgiving. Material need is supplied, but the action also turns attention toward God. This keeps the donor from becoming the center of the story.

The children thanked the preacher, yet their gratitude corrected the preacher. I had consumed one package without considering how far it might travel. Their response taught me to see both the gift and the Giver differently.

Healthy Christian testimony should follow the same direction. We may remember the people God used, but thanksgiving ultimately rises to Him. Human generosity becomes an occasion for worship rather than self-promotion.

THE FRUIT RISES UPWARD: A Christian gift reaches people, forms fellowship and produces thanksgiving unto God.

God Measures More Than Amount

1 Samuel 16:7 Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

Amounts matter because needs are real. Paul organized an actual collection, selected trustworthy administrators and expected believers with resources to participate. Yet the visible amount is not the complete moral measure of a gift.

Biblical evaluation includes the resources available, the proportion given, the cost to the giver, the motive of the heart, the presence or absence of coercion and the good produced. No single mathematical formula captures all of these dimensions.

Human beings count what leaves the hand. God also sees what remained, what the gift required, why it was released and whether love traveled with it.

GOD'S MEASURE: We count what was given. God also sees what the giving required.

The Widow at the Treasury

Mark 12:42 And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.

Jesus sat opposite the treasury and watched how people gave. Many rich contributors placed in much. A poor widow placed in two lepta, extremely small copper coins. Mark explains their combined Roman equivalent for his readers.

The KJV word mites communicates smallness, but claims that the coins were exactly two modern American pennies should be treated as illustration rather than precise conversion. Currency, prices and economies differ.

What matters is the contrast Jesus states. The rich gave from abundance. The widow gave from want and surrendered all her living. The visible sum was tiny, but the cost was immense.

THE TREASURY CONTRAST: The rich deposited more currency, but the widow surrendered a greater share of the life available to her.

Did the Widow Really Give More?

Mark 12:43 Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury.

Jesus said she gave more. He did not make an error in arithmetic. He measured a dimension unavailable to ordinary accounting. The rich could give large sums and still retain abundance. The widow gave from want.

This does not mean visible amounts are irrelevant. The treasury could purchase more with the larger gifts. Jesus reveals that moral and spiritual value cannot be reduced to purchasing power. Sacrifice, trust and proportion belong to the evaluation.

The boy's package helps the statement become emotionally understandable. He possessed little, yet he opened what he had to others. The gift was small in quantity and rich in generosity.

JESUS' VERDICT: She gave less money and more of herself. Heaven's accounting sees both.

Was Jesus Praising the Widow or Condemning the System?

Mark 12:40 Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.

The traditional reading sees the widow as an example of costly trust. A contextual reading observes that Jesus had just condemned scribes who devoured widows' houses and would immediately predict the destruction of the Temple. On that reading, the scene also exposes a religious system failing the person it should protect.

Both observations deserve attention. Jesus explicitly declares that she gave more. The context explicitly places her between exploited widows and Temple judgment. The text does not record a direct command such as Go and do thou likewise, nor does it say that a particular scribe forced her gift.

A responsible commentary can preserve the woman's agency and devotion while recognizing institutional failure. Personal faithfulness and a broken system can occupy the same scene.

RESPONSIBLE READING: Jesus can honor the greatness of her sacrifice while condemning leaders who permitted widows to be consumed.

Do Not Turn the Widow into a Fundraising Weapon

James 1:27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.

A preacher who uses the widow to pressure impoverished people may reproduce the injustice Jesus had just condemned. Scripture repeatedly commands God's people to protect widows and others who are vulnerable.

The account should awaken generosity among those with resources and compassion toward those without them. It should never shame a person who must purchase food, medicine, housing or care for children. Second Corinthians 8:12 remains beside Mark 12: give according to what you have.

The Church must model the character it preaches. Invitations to give should be voluntary, administration should be transparent and assistance should move toward people in genuine need.

PASTORAL SAFEGUARD: The widow is not permission to extract from the vulnerable. She is a reason to honor sacrifice and protect those in need.

Philip's Calculation

John 6:7 Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.

Jesus asked Philip where bread could be purchased for the multitude while already knowing what He would do. Philip calculated cost. His answer was accurate within the limits of the resources he could see.

In the M&M story, I performed a similar calculation. Approximately thirty-six pieces could not give more than one hundred children a whole piece. The arithmetic was correct, but the conclusion assumed that a whole piece was the only meaningful portion and that each recipient would stop the gift.

Human calculation is necessary, especially in stewardship. It becomes spiritually inadequate when it assumes that visible resources are the only reality present. John 6 prepares the reader to see that Jesus is never limited by the numbers confronting His disciples.

THE LIMIT OF ARITHMETIC: Philip correctly counted visible insufficiency, but he had not yet accounted for what Christ would do.

Andrew and the Lad's Lunch

John 6:9 There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?

Andrew noticed what was available, then immediately measured its apparent insignificance against the crowd. John alone mentions the lad. The text does not record the boy's words, say the lunch was everything he owned or narrate the exact transfer into Jesus' hands.

Sermons often imagine voluntary surrender, and that may be reasonable. It must still be labeled as imagination rather than explicit revelation. Claims that the boy was certainly destitute, that his mother packed the lunch or that he alone planned ahead exceed the text.

The secure point is that a small provision was present and Jesus used it. What seemed negligible in human estimation became the occasion for displaying the sufficiency of Christ.

EXPOSITORY DISCIPLINE: The text gives us a lad and a small provision. We should not require invented details when Christ already supplies the wonder.

The Essential Difference Between John 6 and the M&Ms

John 6:13 They filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above.

Jesus multiplied the bread and fish so that the multitude ate as much as they desired and twelve baskets remained. This was a sign revealing His identity and sufficiency. Nothing comparable happened physically to the candy.

John 6 belongs in the study because both scenes contain a crowd, a child, a small amount of food and adults calculating insufficiency. The similarity gives the preacher a useful bridge. The difference protects the truth of both accounts.

The M&M story does not imitate Christ's miracle. It illustrates how far a small gift can travel when recipients practice love and restraint. John 6 finally directs confidence away from human generosity and toward Jesus.

CHRIST REMAINS GREATER: The children shared a fixed amount. Jesus created abundance and fed the multitude fully.

The Widow of Zarephath

1 Kings 17:12 I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse.

The widow of Zarephath prepared what she expected to be the final meal for herself and her son. Elijah asked her to make him a little cake first, but his request came with a specific word from the LORD that the meal and oil would not fail during the drought.

The account displays costly trust and divine provision. It must not be converted into a universal demand that poor people surrender food to religious leaders in exchange for promised wealth. Elijah's authority rested upon a particular divine word that God fulfilled.

The widow strengthens this study by showing that scarcity is not invisible to God. Her need was real, her decision was costly and God remained the faithful Provider.

SPECIFIC PROMISE: Zarephath is a testimony of trust and divine provision, not a blank check for religious exploitation.

An Open Heart and an Open Hand

Deuteronomy 15:7-8 Thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him.

Deuteronomy links the heart and the hand. A hardened heart produces a closed hand. Compassion becomes visible when the hand opens toward a person in need.

The passage acknowledges that poverty will remain in the land, yet persistent need is not permission for permanent indifference. The inability to solve every problem does not cancel responsibility toward the person standing before us.

Open-handedness is not the absence of wisdom. It asks how to love effectively, not how to avoid loving entirely. Sometimes help will be money. At other times it may be food, transportation, advocacy, employment, counsel, presence or protection.

BIBLICAL IMAGE: The open hand is the outward expression of a heart that refuses to become hard toward need.

The Blessedness of Giving and Receiving

Acts 20:35 Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Jesus teaches a distinctive blessedness in giving. Paul quotes the saying while describing labor, care for the weak and freedom from covetousness. The giver participates in strengthening another person.

The verse does not demean receiving. Every human being begins life as a receiver and remains dependent upon grace. There are seasons when faithful humility requires accepting help rather than pretending self-sufficiency.

The M&M story reverses the roles. I believed I was giving to the child, but his action gave correction and encouragement to me. Healthy Christian community allows giving and receiving to move in more than one direction.

MUTUAL GRACE: The giver may receive and the receiver may give. Christian fellowship refuses to assign permanent superiority to either role.

Generosity Is Larger Than Money

1 John 3:18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

Money matters because material needs are real, but generosity is not confined to currency. God may place time, attention, knowledge, transportation, hospitality, influence, forgiveness or practical skill in a person's hand.

Some people have limited financial capacity and substantial relational capacity. Others possess wealth but guard their schedule, home or attention. The Biblical question is not merely how much money left the account. It is whether love became deed and truth.

A small gift should not be despised when it meets a real need. A symbolic gesture should not be used to excuse meaningful responsibility when abundance is available. Faithfulness asks what God has entrusted and where love requires it to move.

THE LARGER QUESTION: What has God placed in your hand that could become useful in someone else's life?

The Poor Are Not Scenery

Proverbs 22:2 The rich and poor meet together: the LORD is the maker of them all.

Ministry is distorted when people in need become background for the helper's photograph, fundraising appeal or heroic story. The M&M account has power because the preacher is not the hero. He watches, miscalculates, learns and retells.

The child remains a person rather than a symbol. His disability explains why he had received attention and why I feared further isolation. It must never be used to make him pitiable or spiritually superior merely because of disability.

We should not invent his name, later conversion, present condition or private theology. The available account does not provide those facts. Dignity includes the right not to have an imagined biography placed upon a person for the convenience of a sermon.

MISSIONAL HUMILITY: God may already be working through the person we came to serve, and the teacher must remain willing to become the student.

Do Not Romanticize Poverty

Proverbs 30:8 Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me.

Poverty can expose people to hunger, unsafe housing, interrupted education, illness, exploitation and constant anxiety. It may produce necessary caution as easily as generosity. Scripture never asks us to call such suffering beautiful.

The surprising quality of the boy's act depends upon recognizing the real pressure of scarcity. If poverty naturally created virtue, there would be no paradox in 2 Corinthians 8 and no reason for Paul to begin with grace.

Christian compassion seeks relief, justice and faithful provision. We may honor people who give sacrificially without turning their suffering into an object lesson that comfortable people admire from a distance.

DO NOT CONFUSE THE TERMS: Poverty is a burden. Generosity is a grace. The presence of one does not automatically create the other.

A Word to the Person Who Has Little

Psalms 34:18 The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart.

This sermon is not a demand that you surrender food, medicine, rent or the needs of your children to prove faith. God sees your circumstance and accepts willing faithfulness according to what you have, not according to what you do not have.

Receiving help is not spiritual failure. The Jerusalem believers needed assistance and the Macedonians considered it fellowship to participate. The body of Christ includes seasons of giving and seasons of receiving.

Do not despise what appears small. A prayer, a word of gratitude, honest work, attention to another person or a modest act of sharing may carry farther than you can see. Your value, however, does not depend upon producing an inspiring act. It rests in the God who made you and the Christ who gave Himself for sinners.

PASTORAL COMFORT: God is not ashamed of your need, and He does not measure your worth by the resources you possess.

A Word to the Person Who Has Abundance

1 Timothy 6:18 That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.

Scripture does not condemn wealth merely for existing. It condemns pride, oppression, greed and trust in uncertain riches. Resources become an opportunity for faithful stewardship.

The widow's small gift should not become a reason for wealthy people to admire poverty while contributing from painless surplus. Jesus' comparison places a searching question before abundance: What does generosity cost, and what remains closed to God?

Those with resources can give substantially, employ responsibly, relieve debt, support ministry, protect vulnerable people and create opportunities. The call is not theatrical sacrifice. It is readiness to distribute and willingness to share.

A WORD TO ABUNDANCE: Do not use the generosity of the poor to excuse giving that never meaningfully touches your life.

Generosity Must Not Become Enabling

Philippians 1:9 I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.

Open-handedness does not abolish discernment. Christians may consider safety, honesty, addiction, dependency and the actual effect of assistance. Love seeks the true good of the person rather than the emotional comfort of the helper.

Discernment, however, can become a respectable disguise for indifference. A person can imagine every possible misuse until no help is ever given. Wisdom asks how to love effectively, not how to construct a permanent excuse for a closed hand.

Churches and ministries should combine compassion with accountability, local knowledge and practical follow-through. Generosity is strongest when it honors both immediate need and long-term dignity.

WISE LOVE: Biblical generosity is neither careless enabling nor cautious indifference. It seeks the genuine good of the recipient.

Reject the Prosperity Formula

2 Corinthians 8:9 Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

Second Corinthians 8 does not teach that sacrificial giving guarantees personal financial increase. The Macedonians gave from deep poverty, and Paul never says their gift immediately made them wealthy.

The riches promised through Christ are forgiveness, reconciliation, adoption, the Holy Spirit, eternal life and an incorruptible inheritance. God also promises care and sufficiency for good works, but He does not surrender His sovereignty to a financial transaction.

The M&M story offers no prosperity mechanism. The candy did not multiply and the child did not receive a documented material return. The blessing appeared in fellowship, gratitude, inclusion and the enduring testimony of grace.

GOSPEL RICHES: Christ's poverty makes sinners rich in grace, not masters of a formula for controlling material wealth.

Trustworthy Administration Matters

2 Corinthians 8:21 Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.

Paul treated the Jerusalem collection as spiritual fellowship and practical administration. Trustworthy people were appointed, accountability mattered and appearances of dishonesty were taken seriously.

A church cannot preach cheerful giving while practicing careless stewardship. Financial clarity, appropriate oversight and honest communication protect both donors and recipients. Trust should never be used as an excuse to avoid accountability.

The same principle applies beyond money. When people entrust time, stories, photographs or access to vulnerable communities, leaders must handle those gifts with integrity. Generosity does not cancel privacy and dignity.

CHURCH INTEGRITY: Open hands require accountable leadership so that entrusted gifts are administered honestly and reach their intended good.

The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ

2 Corinthians 8:9 For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul does not leave generosity at the level of human examples. The Macedonians may encourage the Corinthians, the widow may challenge ordinary accounting and the child may open our emotions. Jesus supplies the decisive pattern and power.

Christian generosity begins with what believers know: the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. He did not wait for sinners to become deserving. He moved toward them in mercy. Every faithful gift is a response to His prior gift.

The Gospel culmination must remain greater than the illustration. The boy shared something he had received. Jesus gave Himself. The candy can open the heart, but only Christ can save the sinner.

THE SUPREME GIVER: Human examples may move us, but Jesus Christ alone defines grace and accomplishes salvation.

Though He Was Rich

John 1:3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

The riches of Christ reach beyond earthly possessions. The eternal Son shared divine glory, acted in creation and possessed the worship of heaven. His generosity begins from immeasurable fullness.

Paul's statement assumes the preexistence of Christ. Jesus did not begin at Bethlehem. The One who entered human poverty was already rich in divine glory and fellowship with the Father.

This prevents the verse from becoming a simple lesson about a wealthy man donating money. The movement is incarnation. The Creator enters the condition of His creatures and accepts the form of a servant.

ETERNAL RICHES: The One who became poor for us is the eternal Son through whom all things were made.

For Your Sakes He Became Poor

Philippians 2:7-8 He made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant ... and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Christ's poverty includes incarnation, humble earthly circumstances, rejection, suffering and death. It cannot be reduced to the amount of money Jesus carried. The eternal Son entered the vulnerability of human life.

At the Cross, generosity becomes self-gift. Jesus bore sin, shed His blood and died in the place of sinners. He did not merely distribute a resource external to Himself. He gave Himself in obedience and love.

The words for your sakes make grace personal. Christ did not become poor because heaven lacked abundance. He entered our bankruptcy so that those without righteousness could receive what they could never purchase.

THE COST OF GRACE: Jesus did not give from expendable surplus. He entered our poverty and gave Himself upon the Cross.

That Ye Through His Poverty Might Be Rich

Ephesians 1:7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.

The riches believers receive are centered in salvation. Sinners receive forgiveness, reconciliation, adoption, the indwelling Holy Spirit, eternal life and an inheritance that cannot be corrupted.

These riches are gifts of grace rather than wages of generosity. We do not become rich in Christ by first proving that we can share. We receive salvation by faith, then grace begins reshaping how we hold everything else.

A person may possess little in this world and be rich toward God. Another may possess abundance and remain spiritually bankrupt. The decisive question is whether the person has received Jesus Christ.

TRUE WEALTH: The riches of grace are not purchased by our giving. They are purchased by Christ and received through faith.

The Open Hands of the Cross

1 Peter 2:24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.

The image of open hands can serve devotionally. The boy opened his hand and a gift traveled through a community. At Calvary, the hands of Christ were opened upon the Cross as He gave Himself for sinners.

Imagery must not replace atonement. Jesus did more than model generosity. He bore our sins, satisfied the righteous demands of God and died in our place. Salvation rests upon His completed work rather than upon the emotional force of a story.

The proper response is first faith, then imitation. Receive the Savior who gave Himself, then ask Him to make your heart and hands resemble His grace.

ATONING LOVE: The Cross is not merely an illustration of sharing. It is where Christ bore sin and purchased redemption.

The Empty Tomb

Matthew 28:6 He is not here: for he is risen, as he said.

The two empty packages make a memorable contrast, but the sermon must reach a third emptiness. The tomb of Jesus was empty because death had been conquered and the crucified Savior had risen.

These emptinesses are not equivalent. The first package was emptied through individual consumption. The second was emptied through communal inclusion. The tomb was emptied by resurrection power. The contrast works only when the differences remain clear.

Christian hope does not rest in the moral beauty of a child. It rests in the historical Gospel: Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again. Because He lives, sinners may receive eternal life and believers may live as channels through whom grace continues to travel.

RESURRECTION HOPE: The M&Ms disappeared because they were eaten. The tomb was empty because Jesus Christ conquered death.

What Should We Do With the Story?

2 Corinthians 9:8 God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye ... may abound to every good work.

Begin by receiving grace. Generosity separated from Christ can become pride, performance or an attempt to earn righteousness. The Gospel invites us to trust the One who became poor for our sakes.

Then examine what God has placed in your hand. Ask whether fear, habit or self-protection has caused every blessing to stop with you. Consider who has not yet received, what need is actually present and how love can move wisely toward it.

Finally, allow generosity to become a pattern rather than a single dramatic moment. Purpose in the heart. Give willingly. Practice accountable stewardship. Receive humbly when you are in need and give thanks to God in every direction of grace.

THE PRACTICAL MOVEMENT: Receive grace, surrender yourself to the Lord, open what He has entrusted and let love ask who has not yet received.

Commentary Summary

2 Corinthians 8:2 Their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.

The M&M story is a true account of a small gift traveling through a community because one child and many recipients practiced joy, restraint and sharing. The quantity did not multiply. The reach increased.

Second Corinthians 8 interprets the spiritual paradox. Grace produces joy, joy opens the heart and an open heart can open the hand even in deep poverty. Mark 12 shows that Jesus measures sacrifice as well as amount. John 6 exposes the limits of human calculation while preserving Christ's unique miracle.

The study must never romanticize poverty, pressure vulnerable people or promise material wealth in exchange for giving. It calls those with abundance to responsibility, those with little to freedom from shame and every person to the grace of Jesus Christ.

FINAL ANSWER: Grace can produce rich generosity in deep poverty because its source is not what people possess but the Christ to whom they first give themselves.

A Final Word

2 Corinthians 9:15 Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.

The finest ending is not admiration for a child, guilt over a package or determination to become more impressive. It is thanksgiving unto God for His unspeakable gift.

Jesus Christ, though rich, became poor for our sakes. He gave Himself upon the Cross, rose from the grave and offers forgiveness and eternal life to every sinner who will repent and believe.

Receive Him. Then live with the security of someone who knows that every good gift comes from God and every possession remains under His lordship. May grace open our hearts, may love open our hands and may thanksgiving return all glory to the Giver.

CLOSING AFFIRMATION: The boy shared a gift he had received. Jesus gave Himself so that spiritually bankrupt sinners might become rich in grace.

Selected Sources for Further Study

The Holy Bible, King James Version. Primary texts include 2 Corinthians 8-9, Mark 12:38-44, John 6:1-13, 1 Kings 17:8-16, Deuteronomy 15:7-11, Acts 20:35, 1 Timothy 6:17-19 and 1 John 3:16-18.

Thomas W. Hawksley, "My M&M Story," 2016 Ministry Magazine, Mission Field Edition, pages 44-45. This is the controlling documentary source for the personal account.

R. C. Sproul, "The Scribes and the Widow," Ligonier Ministries. A defense of the traditional sacrificial-giving reading of Mark 12.

Emerson Powery and Madison N. Pierce, commentaries on Mark 12:38-44 for Working Preacher. Helpful treatments of the widow within the surrounding critique of scribal abuse and Temple judgment.

NET Bible and Bible.org study materials on Mark 12 and Luke 21. Useful for coin terminology, literary context and the interpretive debate concerning commendation and critique.

H. B. Charles Jr., "A Church Worth Talking About," on 2 Corinthians 8:1-5. Helpful emphasis on grace, deep poverty, joyful generosity and self-surrender.

Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Lad's Loaves in the Lord's Hands." A classic homiletical treatment of the lad, the small provision and the sufficiency of Christ.

Alistair Begg, "The Widow's Offering," Truth For Life. A concise presentation of the conclusion that Jesus measures sacrifice rather than visible sum.

The sources above inform the background and interpretive cautions. The conclusions of this Commentary remain governed by the Biblical text and by the documentary boundaries of the original M&M account.