

The Gifts We Overlook

Deuteronomy 8:11–18; Colossians 2:6–7

Enough: Finding freedom in a world that always wants more

One winter morning, my cellphone alarm went off and woke me up at the usual time. I reached over to turn it off and then up to turn on the lamp on my nightstand, as I do many mornings. It's part of my morning routine, like opening the refrigerator, turning on the faucet. I expect things to work.

But, on this particular morning, the light didn't come on. That's strange, I thought. Is the bulb out? When did I last change it? Then I did what I sometimes do in that situation – I flipped the switch again ... and again ... you know, because maybe I didn't get the switch flipped correctly or completely. Still, no light. I kept flipping it, and finally, after getting out of bed, I soon realized none of the lights worked.

Then I knew what had happened while I slept: The power had gone out. What struck me was how important electricity is in my daily life. I had flipped those switches thousands of times and never once thought about who or what made them all work.

I wonder how much of the care that sustains my life I notice only when it's interrupted. Sometimes a gift becomes so familiar that we stop seeing it as a gift.

That's where we begin our new series, *Enough: Finding freedom in a world that always wants more*.

We know that pressure. There's always something else to buy, improve, accomplish, or prepare for. Even when we're doing reasonably well, we can feel behind. And for some households, the question is far more immediate. Enough means covering groceries, paying for medicine, keeping the car running so we can get to work.

This series makes room for both. Some of us need help loosening our grip on what we have. Some of us need help getting what we need. Together we'll ask how faith can guide our choices about money, time, relationships, and purpose.

Today we start with one question: before we ask what we might give, do we recognize what we have received?

We lose sight of gifts in two ways. We stop noticing them, and we start taking credit for them. Moses speaks to the second. Paul's words to the Colossians help with both. And this is where "enough" begins: not with what we lack, but with what we've been given.

Think of something you worked hard for. Maybe you raised a family, learned a trade, finished a degree, built a business, or cared for someone through a hard season.

Your effort was real. The long days and sacrifices mattered.

Now consider the fuller story. Who taught you what you needed to know? Who encouraged you when you were ready to quit? Who took care of something else so you could do what needed doing?

Many hands are in what we call *my* accomplishment. That's hard to say in a culture that prizes independence. We would rather help than need help. But believing we must manage everything ourselves is a heavy burden to carry.

Moses understood how easily people forget what sustained them.

In Deuteronomy, Israel stands at the edge of a new chapter. They have known slavery, hunger, and a long journey through the wilderness. Now Moses asks them to picture a settled life: food on the table, houses to live in, herds and savings growing, some room to breathe.

Those are good things. People who have been hungry need food. People who have wandered need a home.

But Moses sees a danger in the comfort ahead. When life gets secure, we're tempted to say, "My own strength and the work of my own hands got me all this." Moses answers in verse 18: remember God, the one who gives you the strength to prosper.

They may remember the harvest and forget the wilderness. Remember the work and forget the rescue.

And notice what came first: the rescue. Before they built anything, they were brought out, fed, and led. God's care ran ahead of their effort.

Remembering is not a passing thankful thought, either. Verse 11 ties forgetting to how the people live. Remembering is meant to shape their choices. We can believe in God and still handle our resources as if no one else had a claim on our attention. We can say we're grateful while rarely thinking about the people whose work makes our daily life possible.

So, Moses invites them to tell a truer story. Yes, you worked, and you were sustained. Yes, you made choices, and you received opportunities.

When I answered God's call to ministry and entered seminary, I was very aware of the high financial cost of my education. My little home church noticed, too, and even though I hadn't asked, they pledged \$1,000 per year to a program through the UMC that matched their gift with another \$1,000, for \$8,000 over four years. Looking back, their gift saved me on student loans, but even more, was a significant sign of their love for me and support of my ministry.

Now it's your turn. Take thirty seconds of quiet. Bring to mind one person who helped carry you: someone who taught you, encouraged you, or took care of something so you could do what needed doing. *[Pause 20 to 30 seconds.]*

If you're willing, turn to someone near you and say two things: that person's name, and one thing they did. If you're joining us online, type the name and what they did in the chat. And if you'd rather hold it quietly before God, that's a faithful response too. *[Allow about 60 seconds, then bring everyone back with a simple "Thank you."]*

That recognition can change us. When I remember the patience someone gave me, I may be more patient with someone who is learning. When I remember being welcomed, I may notice someone standing alone. When I remember receiving help, asking for help again may feel a little less shameful.

Gratitude begins to shape how we live.

Our stories are different, of course. We haven't all received the same opportunities, health, income, or family support. Some people work tremendously hard and still face real financial pressure. This passage gives us no reason to measure anyone's faith by their bank account. Its warning is aimed at taking complete credit when resources grow.

Nor should we use Israel's wilderness to explain someone else's pain by saying God sent it as a lesson. Moses is looking back over his own people's story and finding meaning in it. That is very different from handing that meaning to someone else in the middle of their suffering.

We can recognize care received and still name what was unfair, what hurt, and what remains unresolved. You can be thankful for a caring friend and frightened

about a diagnosis. You can love your family and feel worn out by caregiving. You don't have to settle every hard feeling before you can say a sincere thank-you.

So, if gratitude doesn't wait until life is fixed, and doesn't depend on how much we have, where does it come from? Paul gives the Colossians an answer.

Colossians starts with what the community has already received: Christ Jesus. Then Paul calls them to keep living in that relationship, rooted and built up in Christ, strengthened in faith, overflowing with thanksgiving.

Picture a tree. It doesn't earn its water each morning. It's rooted, and nourishment rises from below. A rooted life is still growing. We can be grounded in God's love and still have questions. We can belong to Christ and still be learning how to handle money, relationships, disappointment, and change.

We don't have to begin every morning proving we deserve God's attention. That's what Christians mean by grace: God's love reaches toward us before we have earned it. The rescue comes first, just as it did for Israel. In Jesus we see that love in a human life: people noticed, welcomed, forgiven, challenged, and given a way forward.

And Colossians asks us to keep living from there. That includes ordinary Tuesdays. The kitchen table when the bills arrive. How we speak to someone who needs our patience, how we respond to our own mistakes, and whether we let another person care for us.

That's a different starting point from the constant pressure to do more. It gives us somewhere to stand.

Here is a simple practice. Try it once, or return to it each day. Three questions.

First: **What have I received?** Choose something specific. A conversation. A meal. A skill someone taught you. A call from someone who remembered.

Second: **Through whom did it come?** Think of the person, and their time, patience, or attention.

Third: **What response would honor that gift?**

Maybe it's a thank-you that names exactly what mattered: "When you checked on me after that appointment, I felt less alone." Maybe it's using something you already have with more care, or offering help where you have capacity. Or maybe the response is accepting the care someone has offered you.

You are allowed to receive. If your resources are stretched, this is not another assignment to find something more to give. Protecting food, housing, medicine, and necessary care matters. Sometimes the honest response is simply, "Thank you. I needed that."

If you have children at home, try it at the dinner table: each person names one thing they received today and who it came through.

Imagine your own life shaped by this kind of attention. Before you reach for the list of everything undone, you notice what's already here: a friend who texted, a neighbor who waved, a body that carried you into another day. The pressure eases a little because you've stopped pretending you built your life alone.

Now imagine that beyond you. A family table where children name who helped them today. A street, a workplace, a school pickup line where people whose work goes unnoticed hear that it matters. A neighbor in a hard season who can say "I need help" without feeling they've lost their place among us. That is a community learning to remember grace.

We began in a dark bedroom, flipping a switch that had always worked. Only when the power went out did I see how much I'd been counting on.

So, this week, don't wait for the lights to go out. Name one person who helped carry you. Then choose one response: a word of thanks, a thoughtful choice, an act of care, or the courage to accept help.

Gratitude doesn't wait until we have enough. It's where enough begins.

You were held before you noticed, and you are held still.

Thanks be to God. Amen.