

br
ok
en

Ryan Casey Waller

Forward Movement
Cincinnati, Ohio



hungry

If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be.

Deuteronomy 15:7-8

Have you ever looked into the eyes of a hungry person? Ever watched someone dig through trash and then eat what they have found rotting there? Or maybe you've traveled to an impoverished country and hugged a child of skin and bones?

If you are reading this book, it probably means you've never had to miss a meal in your life. I could be wrong, but you are most likely among the people who go to sleep at night with their appetites fully satiated. This is nothing to feel ashamed of, but it is a privilege worth acknowledging. The reality is that 870 million people around the world won't have enough to eat tonight and will go to bed hungry—870 million of them. *Tonight.*

In Texas, the state I call home, one in six people live in poverty. That means their average income is around \$11,000. If a household has two people, the poverty line jumps to sixteen grand. Most of us drive cars worth more than sixteen grand. Some of us have watches worth more than that! I'm not writing this to shame you. I *am* you. Well, I don't have a \$16,000 watch, but I've got some really nice things. And I always have enough food. Always. The only time I don't eat is when I'm being a spoiled brat about the food not being good enough—or not something I like to eat.

I live in tremendous privilege. There's no other way to say it. I may not drive a Mercedes, but I own a car. That fact alone makes me richer than 92 percent of the world.

In my home state, one in five folks are food insecure¹, which means they don't have reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. Nearly two million Texas children don't have regular access to food, and three million of them qualify for free or reduced-cost lunches in our public schools.

In other words, poverty and hunger aren't distant problems for *other* people. They are *our* issues—you and me—those of us who live in tremendous privilege.

Our lesson for today comes from a sermon by Moses. Actually, it's from his final sermon, which appears in the book of Deuteronomy. It's the longest sermon in the entire Bible. When Moses finishes giving it, he dies, because that's what happens when preachers preach too long.

Moses is talking about what is supposed to happen every seventh year when all debts are cancelled. Yeah, you read that right. All debts are cancelled. The Jubilee is a year of release when debtors

1 <https://www.feedingtexas.org/learn/>

are given the chance to re-enter society and the economy in viable ways. Later on, Moses reminds the people that if they don't like this teaching, they should remember when they were slaves in Egypt and God chose to set them free.

Give to the poor, Moses says. Do it liberally, joyfully, without concern for what you'll get back. Set the people free. Give them life, just as God first gave it to you.

I read those words, and they basically terrify me. So many people need help. I see them on street corners. They come up to my car window at stoplights. Sometimes my heart is soft and I give. But the honest-to-God truth is that most of the time my heart and hand stay closed, and I don't give. And, look—it's tough to say whether that's right or wrong of me, and we all know the reasons why. Some people say rewarding a panhandler only perpetuates problems, encouraging homeless people not to seek help from legitimate charities and shelters that could assist them in getting off the streets. Others say giving money to a homeless person could exacerbate an addiction by providing funds to buy drugs or alcohol.

I once knew a guy who regularly took a homeless man to the grocery store to buy him food—and sometimes liquor. Is that right? Debatable. I'm not sure I would do it. But my pal had a genuine friendship with that homeless man. How many of us can say that about the homeless people we see every day? I know I can't.

A few months back, I was walking into Barnes & Noble bookstore, and a man asked me for lunch money. I blew straight past him. I went in to look for a book, but my heart grew heavy. The Spirit began to move. So I went back outside and gave that man cash. I have no idea if he was hungry or looking to get high. But here's the question I've been chewing on: Does it really matter?

I'm not saying we should turn off our brains and give to every person who asks. Some people are wolves in sheep's clothing. But in this passage, Moses isn't telling us to make shrewd decisions about when to give. He is telling us to keep our hearts soft and our hands open. *Give freely*, he says. *Don't begrudge the poor—love them.*

We are never going to agree on the best way to feed the hungry, house the homeless, or support refugees. What matters is that we do these things—each of them in our own way. Recently Harvard University received the largest single donation in its history. Investor and philanthropist John Paulson gave \$400 million to the school's existing endowment of \$36.4 billion.

And author Malcolm Gladwell went bananas about this donation on Twitter.² Here's the recap:

Gladwell's first tweet: "It came down to helping the poor or giving the world's richest university \$400 mil it doesn't need. Wise choice John!"

Gladwell's second tweet: "Next up for John Paulson: volunteering at the *Hermes* store on Madison Avenue."

Gladwell's third tweet: "If billionaires don't step up, Harvard will soon be down to its last \$30 billion."

Harvard psychologist Dan Gilbert tweeted a reply to Gladwell: "Cheap jokes and bad logic. If you want to end poverty, research and education are the best investments."

Entrepreneur Marc Andreessen also responded to Gladwell: "America's universities are a wellspring of progress and economic growth. Gifts to them are moral virtues, full stop."

² <http://www.businessinsider.com/malcolm-gladwell-goes-nuts-on-john-paulsons-harvard-donation-2015-6>

These three very smart men disagree about how to best give to the poor. Reasonable minds have always—and will always—disagree on this issue. What matters is that reasonable minds *care* about this issue, because God cares about this issue. God cares deeply about the poor.

Jesus Christ has no earthly status. He has no privilege, no money, not even a place to lay his head. He lives as a very poor man. And this poor man tells us that whenever you and I feed the hungry, it is as though we have brought bread to his very lips.

So here's my question for you: Do you see the face of Jesus when you see the face of a poor person? I don't. Not always. But I want to. I want to stay soft. I want to stay open.

My father has had a long and successful career in the construction industry. And his success afforded my family some financial privilege while I was growing up. But construction is a volatile industry, and we experienced some lean years.

In third grade, my teacher said our class was collecting groceries for a family who could use a little help. She asked us to bring something back the next day. That evening I excitedly told my mother about our class project. I told her I wanted to help this family. My mother's eyes welled with tears. I don't remember what she said, but she sent me back to school the next day with food for the needy family. I was so proud to be helping!

It wasn't until I was an adult that I learned *we* were that family.

So stay soft, my friends. Stay open.

You never know who you are helping. The poor...
a friend...perhaps even the Son of God.

