

Cravings
October 8, 2017
Exodus 16:16-18

¹⁶This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.' ¹⁷The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. ¹⁸But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed.

If you missed the introduction for our series last week, let me bring you up to speed.

- The Hebrew people become slaves in Egypt, building Pharaoh's empire.
- God calls an 80-year-old Moses to tell Pharaoh to let the Hebrew's go.
- Pharaoh says, "No!" but after ten plagues he says, "Go!" But then he went after them because his entire economy was built on slave labor.
- The Hebrews followed Moses through a sea and into the wilderness.
- Pharaoh's army didn't get past the sea which meant the Hebrews were free.
- There was just one problem – the Hebrews had no experience with freedom. They had to learn how to organize and govern themselves in a way that didn't perpetuate the slavery they just left.
- So, they spent forty years in the wilderness being schooled in practices that promote liberty and justice for all – rather than an abundance for a few and none for most.
- One of the most important lessons they learned was in the field of economics and they learned it by eating manna in the morning and quail in the evening every day for forty years.
- The lesson of manna is also the lesson of daily bread, which we pray for in the Lord's Prayer and it means just that – enough for the day, no more, no less.

Manna, which literally means, "What is it?" was a sticky substance that accumulated like frost in the mornings. The instruction to the people was to go collect what you need. From the sounds of it some people "needed" a whole lot more than other people. Yet, somehow, when it got measured out everyone ended up with just enough for the day, no more, no less.

Well, here we are all these years later and once again it appears that some people seem to "need" a whole lot more than others. What fascinates me is all kinds of people want to beat people up with scripture about homosexuality, abortion, marriage, whatever but those same people seem to miss the abundance of passages that address the sin of gluttony. Gluttony fuels our economy. Imagine what would happen if we only bought and consumed what we needed?

Most of us associate gluttony with donuts. Yet, gluttony is so much more than our secret stashes of food and our struggle to discipline our eating. Gluttony is our insatiable desire for more than we need and I am guessing it gets the best of most of us.

There are a few things that fuel our gluttony and one of those things is anxiety. When we don't know what is around the corner, if we will have enough or not, we get anxious. The lesson of manna teaches that if we all take what we need, there will be enough for all. Living like that requires radical trust – in God and in our neighbor. The opposite of trust is anxiety – hence, gluttony. Let's face it, we have trust issues.

Modern marketing also fans the flames of our desire for more than we need. Some marketing campaigns are so crafty we lose our ability to differentiate between wants and needs. Technically, a need is something you can't live without – as in, you would die if you didn't have it. But how many times have you been sucked in by a commercial or someone's endorsement and suddenly said, "I need that!" Two-clicks later, Amazon has it at your front door.

Advertisers use neuroscience to get into our heads. "Don't Sell, Seduce!" is the title of one article I read about how our brain processes advertising. The author concluded with these words, "Need to shake up your advertising and boost sales? **Run a test of ads that skip the facts and logical persuasion**, and instead show imagery of a place and state of mind where your target customer would like to be. Bypass the rational analysis, and appeal directly to your customer's emotions."¹

What else can explain Chia pets?

According to Annie Leonard, author, and creator of *The Story of Stuff*, we consume fifty percent more stuff than we did fifty years ago.²

Well, it didn't just happen. It was designed. Shortly after the World War 2, these guys were figuring out how to ramp up the [U.S.] economy. Retailing analyst Victor Lebow articulated the solution that has become the norm for the whole system. He said: "Our enormously productive economy . . . demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction, in consumption . . . we need things consumed, burned up, replaced and discarded at an ever-accelerating rate."

And President Eisenhower's Council of Economic Advisors Chairman said that "The American economy's ultimate purpose is to produce more consumer goods."

MORE CONSUMER GOODS??? Our [economy's] ultimate purpose?

Not provide health care, or education, or safe transportation, or sustainability or justice? Consumer goods? How did they get us to jump on board this program so enthusiastically? Well, two of their most effective strategies are planned obsolescence and perceived obsolescence. Planned obsolescence is another word for "designed for the dump." It means they actually make stuff that is designed to be useless as quickly as possible so we will chuck it and go buy a new one. It's obvious with stuff like plastic bags and coffee cups, but now it's even big stuff: mops, DVDs, cameras, barbecues even, everything!

Only now are we beginning to see the fatal flaws of this system...it leads to slavery, debt, environmental devastation, and discontent.

What is the ultimate purpose of a manna economy? What is God up to in the wilderness? Why is gluttony such a big deal? The answer is: enough. Manna teaches the powerful lesson of enough.

In Jesus' sermon on the mount he says, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food,

¹ <https://www.neurosciencemarketing.com/blog/articles/dont-sell-seduce.htm>

² <http://storyofstuff.org/wp-content/uploads/movies/scripts/Story%20of%20Stuff.pdf> – This is the footnoted PDF script of the video with the same name.

and the body more than clothing?” He goes on to say, “But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6) The kingdom of God for Jesus is the same thing God was trying to create in the wilderness – a system of living in which everyone has enough, everyone is valued, everyone is free.

Jesus invites us to take our insatiable desire and point it in the direction of God. Hunger for justice. Pursue compassion. Serve others with the same determination you use to seek out a bargain or satisfy that craving. Practice generosity like you give money to Starbucks.

I am not fool enough to think that we can rise above the economy in which we live. We are all caught up in the consumption that drives it. But that is no excuse for turning a blind eye to the systems and policies that benefit a few with excess and deprive others of enough – that is how Pharaoh does business, not God.

The story of manna from Exodus 16 says, “*They gathered as much as each of them needed.*” Maybe we should try it sometime.

Amen