

## IT HAS SIDE EFFECTS

1 Thessalonians 2:4-6, part 2

### INTRODUCTION

It is Super Bowl Sunday, so television commercials are going to be a big thing today. I've already seen a couple that will be shown today that I think are pretty good. Watch for the singing sheep and aliens learning about avocados. One thing I'm pretty sure of is that if there are any commercials for pharmaceuticals they will only be memorable for how awful they are. I can remember a time when if you watched television you saw exactly zero commercials for pharmaceutical drugs. You might see one for Alka Seltzer, Pepto Bismol or some other over the counter drug, but not for prescription drugs. That is no longer the case. If you watch television now you will be assailed with a flood of commercials for Humira, Xarelto, Latuda, Lyrica, Eliquis, Viagra, Cialis and more. The ads have a couple of things in common. One is a terrifying list of possible side effects, maybe all your internal organs shutting down, loss of control of some bodily functions, sometimes even death. Seems to me if death is a possible side effect maybe you're better off with the disease. The other thing these ads have in common is that they are just terrible.

Typically I have two reactions to these drug ads. One is I commonly think, "I don't want to hear about this. I don't want you to be talking about this on television." To call some of the things they talk about on those commercials awkward would be serious understatement. The second reaction I have to most of the drug commercials is to think that it doesn't apply to me. I don't need this medicine. I share these thoughts because the topic we are going to consider today is kind of like that. The majority of us will be thinking we don't want to hear about this because it's kind of awkward and unpleasant, and we don't think we need it. This does not apply to us in any way. I am here to tell you that it applies pretty much to all of us, and we really need to hear it. Hopefully it will not be unpleasant, but will inspire us all to overcome this negative trait that is common in all human beings. We're going to look at something found in 1 Thessalonians 2:4-6. It is a characteristic that Paul and his friends felt compelled to remind their readers was specifically not true of them. I'm going to start with a biblical story that illustrates the problem.

In 2 Kings 5 we encounter a man named Gehazi, who was the servant of the prophet, Elisha. A man named Naaman came to Elisha with leprosy, and the prophet healed him. In his gratitude he wanted to give Elisha money, but the prophet politely declined the gift. Gehazi thought that was dumb. He thought Elisha should have taken something from Naaman. So he went after him and told him a lie. Verse 22 says he told him, "My master sent me to say, 'Two young men from the company of the

prophets have just come to me from the hill country of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two sets of clothing.” Liar, liar pants on fire. Nothing about that was true. Naaman gladly gave him a large gift. When he got home Gehazi hid the loot. He apparently got a little confused about the fact that prophet with a "ph" and profit with an "f" were two different things. When he saw Elisha the prophet asked him where he'd been. Gehazi told him he hadn't gone anywhere. Uh, Gehazi, prophet. You work for a *prophet*. Elisha knew about the whole thing. So in verse 27 he says, “Naaman's leprosy will cling to you and your descendants forever.” Yikes, not just Gehazi, but his descendants. I think it's safe to conclude that Elisha wasn't real happy about Gehazi's little scam. Neither was God.

Gehazi wasn't a bad guy. He wasn't an ax murderer or a mafia don or a drug dealer. He was just a guy who thought it would be nice to have some extra cash set aside for a rainy day. His desire for a little more money got the better of him. He serves as a cautionary tale. At least one takeaway from that story is that God doesn't seem to think very kindly of his weakness for money. He's not real fond of ours, either. Let's learn about that.

#### GREED CAN BE A PROBLEM

Paul and his friends were innocent of was greed. They clearly state in verse 5, “You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed, God is our witness.” Paul was so adamant that they were not driven by greed that he felt it necessary to call God as his witness to that fact. As we noted a couple of weeks ago they had to say this because greed was not uncommon among itinerant preachers and religious leaders of that day.

It is no secret to anyone that this is still a problem. A few years back I was personally familiar with a situation in which a pastor who led a large church here in Southern California was fired from his position because he had a pattern of very questionable moral choices and some iffy financial maneuvers that became public. After he was fired he sued the church, claiming they were guilty of falsely maligning him and that in doing so had damaged his ability to collect speaker's fees from outside sources to the tune of \$750,000 annually. Yeah, maybe there's a problem there.

Greed is alive and well. I personally have been seriously annoyed by the greed of the Spanos family. They bought the Chargers in 1984 for around \$70 million. Do you know what the team is worth now? In 2015 it was pegged right at \$1.53 billion. That looks to me like a pretty good return on investment. On top of that the team makes millions of dollars each year. So here's the question: why did Spanos want to move the team to LA? Because he wants to make even more money and thought he could there. How much do you need?

Yeah, greed is alive and well. But in those other people, right? No one thinks of himself as greedy. Surveys recently have shown that Americans have rated greed as the top problem in our country. But the *London Economist* did a survey in which they asked which of the 7 deadly sins, pride, envy, lust, sloth, wrath, gluttony and greed, people felt they were guilty of or struggled with. Guess which one came in last. It was greed. Pastor and author Tim Keller wrote, “Even though it is clear that the world is filled with greed and materialism, almost no one thinks it is true of them...Greed hides itself from the victim.”

His point is obvious. If our world is full of greed, how is it that none of the people in it are greedy? That would be like saying we all know that being overweight is a pervasive problem in our country, but thank heaven none of us are overweight. Ephesians 5:3 says, “There must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.” Greed was a problem back then, and it is a problem today. In these days if a person is clearly guilty of sexual immorality there would be scandal in the church. It surely would be addressed. But greed? Not so much.

The number one reaction to any discussion of greed is “not my problem.” As said, none of us thinks we are greedy. The problem with greed is that it is in the eye of the beholder. We can all agree that some very wealthy people are greedy, but not us. But where is the line between greedy and not greedy? Webster’s defines greed as “excessive, inordinate, or rapacious desire, especially for wealth.” When is a desire for more “excessive”? The Greek word for it meant “wanting more.” Well who doesn’t want more? You hear that statement sometimes, “less is more.” No it isn’t. More is more. We all know that.

I could look at someone like Larry Ellison, former CEO of Oracle, who has something like 15 mansions he owns around the world, has two private yachts big enough to have basketball courts on them and insists on having a powerboat follow along behind his yacht when he’s playing basketball to retrieve balls that go over the side into the water, and who owns the island of Lanai, and say, “he’s obviously greedy because he has way more than he could ever need.” I’ve thought at times the height of luxury would be to own a vacation home in Hawaii. He doesn’t just own a home in Hawaii. He owns an island. The whole thing! No question he’s greedy, right?

On the other hand, think of a person who lives in one of the terrible slums of Rio who is never sure if there will be enough to eat today. That person could look at me and say, “You own a big house that has more bathrooms than people living in the house, you have so much food you have to restrain yourself so you don’t eat too much, you

have a big huge television, you have so many clothes they barely fit in your big closets, you have a car with cameras that show you what's behind and beside you. Clearly you are greedy because you have way more than you need."

Generally we view people as having a greed problem if they have a lot more than we do. In other words, I'm the standard. I'm about right when it comes to how much people ought to have. If you have a moderate amount more than me that's okay because I'd like to have about what you have, but if you have lots more than me it's because you have a greed problem.

Greed is not merely a function of how much you have. It is possible to be what I call a low end materialist. It is possible to have nearly nothing but be so obsessed with getting more that you are the very definition of greed. In Luke 12:15 Jesus said, "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed." There are all kinds of ways to be greedy. Let's remember that at its heart greed is "wanting more." Is that ever a problem for you?

I don't believe I am an especially greedy person. I don't want my life to be about money. But I've had a couple of little glimpses of the fact that there's more "wanting more" in me than I'd like to think. Recently I was reading a long account of what went wrong when the Target corporation tried to expand into Canada. People there actually were pleased about Target coming, but when they expanded into Canada the company fell on its face. The expansion utterly failed. They ended up shutting it all down after losing \$2 billion in 2 years. There were a number of factors involved, as there always are, but the key element had to do with some disastrous decisions by the Target CEO, Gregg Steinhafel. He put them into an impossible situation that doomed the whole project. When it all fell apart he was forced out and was given a severance of \$61 million! Wait, he messed up a golden opportunity for the company and cost the company \$2 billion, and he was given \$61 million? My reaction to that was, "Hey, I want his job. You get \$61 million for failing disastrously? I know as an administrator I would fail, but I can guarantee my failure wouldn't be a tenth of what he did. I'd be thrilled with a severance a tenth of what he got." Right there I was thinking, "I'd like to have more. I want some of what that guy has." That is greed.

Recently Laurie and I have been watching shows on television like *Flip Or Flop* and *Fixer Upper*. The shows all feature people remodeling homes. I'm actually a bit surprised that I find such shows at all appealing. There are no airplanes, no explosions, no sports, no adventure, but I do like them. But I've noticed they have an unsettling effect on me. I see how great these homes look when they are done and start seeing problems with our house. Gee, I wish we could do something like with

our kitchen. Our bathrooms are just bad. Something within me is saying, “I want what I see on TV. I want more.” As Jesus said there are all kinds of greed.

This came into clear focus for me when we had a couple of college students from Michigan stay in our home for a few days. When they came into the house one of them said, “Wow, you have a beautiful home!” It was a good reminder. He didn’t come in and say, “Wow, you really need to do something about your kitchen.”

Unfortunately that thing of “wanting more” is natural for us. It is natural to think that to be safe, to be happy, to have a full life, we need more. Researchers have discovered the desire for more is built into us. We don’t have to choose it. Which is to say the *natural state of the human heart is greed.*

How much is all right in God’s eyes to have and to want? Where is that line? The bad news is there really isn’t a line. There is only one verse in the Bible that comes close to drawing a line, but I can tell you without doubt that you won’t like it. The verse is 1 Timothy 6:8, which says, “If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.” If you’ve got food to eat and clothes to wear, you have enough. I don’t think Paul was handing down a rule there and saying if you want more than that you’re greedy. But he was saying anything we have beyond enough to eat and clothes to wear is gravy. It’s not a need, it’s a want.

Greed always involves two elements that are both spiritual errors. The first is selfishness. Greed is always about something more for me. Obviously if you take selfishness out, greed disappears. The second error is thinking that there is some thing I must have that will make me safe, make me happy, or give me fullness of life...an almost infinite number of things that could be the object of greed. It could be more money, a better house, a better job, a better husband or wife, or almost anything else. Once again, if you take that element out, if you don’t think that thing is going to make you happy or safe or more fulfilled, then there’s not much concern with getting it.

## GREED IS DISASTROUS

Why make such a big deal about greed? Every now and then you’ll hear the Wall Street mantra, “Greed is good.” The advertising industry is essentially about greed. It is designed to convince you that without this thing they are advertising you are deprived and destined to be miserable. Our economy is based in large part on people deciding they need more, and someone finding a way to sell it to them. So why the big deal? The big deal is that greed might get you stuff you think you want, but like those drugs I mentioned in the opening it has side effects.

*It is a lie*

In Luke 12 a man came to Jesus and asked him to make his brother give him his portion of their inheritance. That's when Jesus warned him to guard against all kinds of greed. He went on in verse 15 to say, "Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." In other words, you think getting the money is going to make your life happy and full. It won't, because real life doesn't come from stuff. The stuff always lies to you and promises things it can never deliver.

Last summer Laurie and I watched a series on television called *Zoo*. It was derived from a James Patterson book of the same name, and the premise was what if animals somehow gained the ability to communicate with each other and decided to get free of the rule of human beings? Obviously a fanciful premise, except something like it has happened at our house. Only it isn't animals, but appliances that are communicating and rebelling against us. Our TV started going out, our clothes dryer has become ill, then our washing machine died, next a toilet quit working. There was a time in our lives when money was so tight we could not afford to deal with such things. When even one went out it provoked a financial crisis. In those days I imagined what it would be like to have money in the bank, enough money that fixing or replacing those appliances would be an annoyance, but nothing more. I wished we could have enough money for that. I wanted more. These past few years, with no more kids in college and no more weddings, we are at last in that place. We replaced the television and washing machine and paid for the toilet to be fixed. We had enough money to do that. We are waiting for the dryer to finally call it quits. It has been less stressful to be able to pay for those things. But here's the problem: it's not enough. I still wish we had more.

Mason Cooley, the New York professor and famous aphorist, said, "Lust and greed are more gullible than innocence." His point was that while an innocent person may be gullible, the person who lusts or is greedy keeps believing the lie that a little bit more will satisfy them and give them what they want, even after they have seen over and over that what lust and greed want never delivers the satisfaction they promise. They always leave you wanting more.

Ecclesiastes 5:10 says, "Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income." Erich Fromm, the philosopher said, "Greed is a bottomless pit which exhausts the person in an endless effort to satisfy without ever reaching satisfaction." That was a way of saying exactly what the writer of Ecclesiastes said a long time ago.

Is it possible to have little and be content and happy? I can recall when Laurie and I were first married and had just planted a church. We lived in a little apartment in Solana Beach. We had our apartment decorated in Early Salvation Army style. Our 19

inch black and white television sat on an old ripped ottoman, and our bed was a lumpy, used full size mattress that was shaped almost like a U, so when we said we slept together we meant it because in that mattress you inevitably were together in the middle. Our car was Laurie's 1978 peach colored Mustang II, possibly the second worst car Ford ever made next to the amazing exploding Pinto. But we loved each other madly, and since I worked at home we were together pretty much 24/7. Half our income initially went to pay our rent. So we had nothing, except a whole lot of joy in life. We were happy.

Compare that with Markus Persson. He created the video game Minecraft. He sold it to Microsoft and is now worth \$1.3 billion. In August of last year he tweeted a series of messages that gave a glimpse into how much joy it has brought him. He said, "Hanging out in Ibiza with a bunch of friends and partying with famous people, able to do whatever I want. And I've never felt more isolated."

The point here is that one side effect of greed is that you end up ever chasing a mirage. It's like the thing that you see in the desert. It's always out there a little farther down the road. You pursue it but you end up chasing something that just isn't there. Plus no matter how much you have it will never be enough. The end is you miss out on what life is really about.

### ***It is idolatry***

We have seen before the message that is repeated in Ephesians 5:5 and Colossians 3:5. Ephesians 5:5 says, "Of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of God." That should be pretty clear, I think. If you are greedy you are an idolater.

In Matthew 6:24 Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." This is a binary choice. It is on or off. We would like it to be both/and, but it is either/or. You cannot choose to worship God but also really like to have a lot of stuff. We lie to ourselves thinking we can work out a satisfactory arrangement where we really love God, but we can pursue some stuff too. Jesus said down at your core you're lying to yourself. You are choosing one or the other, you can't choose both. The side effect of greed is that it leads you to worship a false God.

### ***It is spiritually deadly***

In 1 Timothy 6 Paul addressed the problem of people who wanted to get rich. In verse 9 he said, "Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction." That is a

powerful verse that we can see played out over and over in history. But at the very least it means that pursuing wealth is dangerous for our souls.

Jesus commented on this in his graphic and attention catching way in Matthew 19:23-24. In the context he had just had a conversation with a wealthy young man who was concerned about the future of his soul. He wanted to be a part of the kingdom of God, but he liked being rich too. Jesus then presented him with a painful choice. Do you want the kingdom of God or do you want your money? What if you couldn't have both, which would you choose? The guy went away sad, because he would not give up his money for anything. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

We don't want to believe that, but Jesus put the truth in stark relief. How easy is it for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle? There are people who try to explain this as referring to a gate in Jerusalem that a camel could only fit through if it was unloaded. But there is no evidence of such a gate ever existing. Jesus was being funny here and using hyperbole. The imagery is hilarious, but the point is it is not possible for a camel to fit through a needle. He wasn't saying no rich person would ever enter the kingdom of God. He was using the hyperbole to show that being wealthy and loving God don't typically go together very well. His contemporaries thought rich people were favored by God. He's saying it's quite the opposite. He was saying that the guy he'd just talked to was not the exception, but the rule. Riches make it hard for a person to pursue the kingdom of God.

Before any of us enthusiastically nod our heads in agreement that all those rich people out there are in trouble, we should recall that from the perspective of every one of the people who heard Jesus speak that day, we are all rich. In fact we have wealth they never even dreamed of. In other words, we are all in peril, for our very wealth poses a threat to our spiritual well-being.

Wealth and comfort in this world tend to dull our spiritual senses. The thing that drives us to God is our need. We all deal with guilt, every human being, and long to be free of it. That need for forgiveness drives us to the gospel. Our need for some kind of hope in the face of death drives us to God for the hope of eternal life. Our longing for righteousness, our need for it, drives us to God's love and grace. And often it is the need of relief from the oppression and stress of daily life that drives us to God for hope, comfort and strength. When we have no needs, when life is pleasant and easy, we don't find ourselves in need of God as greatly. A heaven we have never seen and cannot really imagine, is never going to be especially appealing for a person whose life on earth seems to approximate heaven.



The heart dynamic of the Christian life is living by faith. One of the most powerful, exciting and compelling spiritual experiences is to be in need, to have no other hope, and then to see God come through and provide. But if you never are in the position where you have need, God never has to provide, and your relationship with him can easily begin to feel a little unreal, even distant.

Carissa's freshman year in college we had a plan for how we were going to get her through school. It was a plan that was frightfully vulnerable, for it required a whole lot of things to go precisely the way we needed them to. Immediately it began unraveling. All that we needed to go right started going wrong. I found myself very distressed because I had no answers and didn't know what to do. We prayed. Our prayer wasn't theologically deep. To paraphrase it was "Oh God, help!" Out of the blue money, quite a bit of money, suddenly showed up. It came from sources we could never have anticipated. It was really exciting to see God answer prayer. Our faith was built and God became even more real. If you never have a need, you never get to experience God showing up like that.

This side effect of greed is that you end up with a withered spiritual life in which God seems distant and unreal at best and your own soul bears a disturbing resemblance to Gollum in Tolkien's ring trilogy.

### ***It causes trouble***

Proverbs 15:27 says, "The greedy bring ruin into their households." Proverbs 28:25 says, "The greedy stir up conflict." Both of these verses tell us that our wanting more will always bring trouble in our relationships.

Sadly I've had a front row seat at seeing the truth of these Proverbs play out. I have seen brothers in Christ destroy the bond of the Spirit between them as they fight over money. I have come to the place where I tremble when I hear about Christian brothers going into business together. I can give you a list of those I have known who have ended up suing each other, always over money. I know of a family that was shattered as the members of the family went to war over the inheritance after a wealthy member died.

There is an astounding verse in 1 Corinthians 6. Some of the believers in Corinth had disputes with one another over money. They took each other to court in the effort to win and get more money for themselves. Paul was appalled. In verse 7 he wrote, "The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means that you have been defeated

already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?” Do you hear those words? The point is if your life, like Christ’s, is about loving people are you going to fight with them over money? Are you going to sue them? If your life is about the kingdom of God, about God’s glory, what will you do if a brother cheats you? You will say, “I’d rather be cheated than bring shame on the name of Christ by hauling a brother into court over money.” In fact, you’d say, “I don’t really care about money. If it’s that important to him he can have it because it really has little to do with what my life is about. That is the very opposite of greed. This side effect of greed is that it damages your ability to actually love and be close to other people.

### APPLICATION

The question before us then is how do we get free of the natural human default setting of wanting more and being greedy?

### LOVE GOD

In the end this has to be a work of the Spirit. It is the power of God’s grace that changes our hearts and transforms us. If you have received the grace of God through Jesus Christ you have been given a priceless gift worth more than anything on this earth. That’s where we start. It is the starting place for everything in the Christian life. Out of love for God because of what he has done for us we choose to put serving him and giving him glory over getting more for ourselves. We choose to care not for more comfort, more money, more financial security for ourselves, but more glory for God.

### REMEMBER YOUR HOPE

The natural human penchant for greed is a function of being focused on this world. Sir Fred Catherwood, the late British politician and writer, said greed is the logical result of the belief that there is no life after death. If this life is all there is, then you’d better get as much of it as you can. But if, in fact, you believe that you will spend eternity in God’s kingdom, that the kingdom of God is, in fact your home, then you will not demand that you have all the good things of this life.

You’re on an airplane, flying across the country. It will be a six hour flight. Do you become obsessed with getting as many of those little packets of peanuts the airline hands out as you possibly can? If your airline is one of the few that gives blankets do you try to stock up on as many as you can? Hey all you can envision is life on this airplane so you’d better make it as full of the good things on the flight as possible, right? If you do that you’re as dumb as a box of rocks. On the airplane you are on your way to another place. That destination is your focus. When you get there it will be wonderful. You’ll see loved ones or enjoy a spectacular place, and that’s what you care about. The peanuts and blankets are just things you need to sustain you as you

fly. To see them as the object of desire is foolish beyond belief. And when we forget our hope we become similarly foolish by being obsessed with the things of this world that we are just passing through.

## BE CONTENT

Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:6, “godliness with contentment is great gain.” We are all seeking gain in this life. The mistake is that we think it is found in getting more for ourselves. More money, more power, more security, more pleasure, more approval, more praise. But Paul says the great gain that we all seek is in found in godliness with contentment.

Proverbs 14:30 says, “A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.” In other words when we are at peace with where we are today, when we are content with whatever we have, it gives life. But when we envy, when we are unhappy with what we have and want more, want what we see others having, it rots our bones. It destroys our souls.

How can we be content? The key to it is faith. You hear over and over from me, “what God supplies is enough.” Is it? Do you believe that’s true? If God is sovereign, if he is good, if he loves you and cares about you, then today, this day, he has given what he knows you need and what is for your best. If that is true then the obvious response is to say, “This is enough, Lord. Thank you for what I have today.”

## BE GENEROUS

In Acts 20:35 Paul quoted Jesus saying, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” That’s another powerful concept. It says the life, the joy, that we all long for isn’t found in getting stuff. It’s found in giving. Do you want to be free of greed? The number one thing you can do is be convinced that the only more that is truly satisfying is to give more. The answer is to become a person who has to be constrained from giving because he or she does it to excess, if there is such a thing.

2 Corinthians 9:7 tells us that “God loves a cheerful giver.” Have you ever observed what the Bible promises to the generous? 2 Corinthians 9:11 says, “you will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous.” God promises to supply what you need in your generosity. Proverbs 11:25 says, “A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be blessed.” You will be blessed in your giving. In fact, Proverbs 11:24 says, “One person gives freely, yet gains even more.” You will be a blessing to other people. 2 Corinthians 9:13 says they will praise God because of you.

Do you know what generosity is? It is simply love ruling how you view and employ resources. 2 Corinthians 9:8 says, “God is able to make all grace abound to you so that

in all things at all times having all that you need you will abound in every good work." In verse 11 Paul said God will give you resources so that you can be generous on every occasion. Notice that in both those verses the words "so that" are used. Why does God give us things? Why does he bless us? So that we can be generous, so that we can do good for others. Why do you have stuff? It is not so that you can be comfortable, secure, powerful, get whatever you want, it is so that you can use it to help others! But I don't have much. 2 Corinthians 8:2 says of the Macedonians, which included the Thessalonians, had extreme poverty, and it welled up in rich generosity!

Generosity is a powerful weapon to fight against the side effects of wealth. And in the end it is the path to great joy. Do you believe that Jesus told the truth? He said it is better to give than receive. If you want full life and joy, give it away. Be generous.

I came across a couple of stories that took place this past Christmas. In the town of Cumming, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta, a single mom named Meredith Gross works as a server at a Red Robin restaurant. She often engages her customers in conversation. On the occasion in question she served a couple who ordered very little. Their bill came to \$4.27. In her conversation with them they learned she has a young daughter. When they paid their bill they gave her a tip of \$200. She initially refused to accept it, but they insisted. They said they wanted her and her daughter to have a great Christmas, and they wanted her daughter to get the gift she most wanted. They said, "All we ask is that instead of telling her it is from Santa tell her it's from Jesus because he loves her.

The other story took place in Swatara, Pennsylvania and Silver Springs, Maryland. On December 14 a person who asked to remain anonymous went to the Walmart stores in both places and paid a total of \$180,000 for all the items that had been put on layaway at the stores. One customer who had experienced a tough year came in to the store to cancel her Christmas layaway because she couldn't afford it, only to find it had been paid for. She immediately burst into tears. The manager of the store said most of the people who learned their items had been paid for began crying. How much fun do you suppose that was for that unidentified Santa? I'm pretty sure he's finding giving like that to be addictive, because last year he did the same thing to the tune of \$50,000. He wanted more, more giving.

God's nature is to give generously. When his character begins to be reproduced in our hearts generosity will be an inevitable result. And generosity is a powerful defense against the pull of our native greed. That's important, because if we let greed take over we will be bound to experience its terrible side effects.