It was an unusual slow weeknight at a local bar in Wake Forest, NC. Bartender Chrisi Kemp was having a bad day both personally and professionally until a man walked up to her bar and asked for a drink. The bill came out to $14.01, so she handed her customer his credit receipt for his signature. After she received it back from him, she was taken by the surprise of her life. Upon closer inspection of the signed receipt, she realized that the customer had just left her a $1,000 tip. That’s right, a $1,000 tip. She went over to the customer and wanted to make sure if that wasn’t a mistake, or maybe he had one drink too many. But no, he was totally sober and that was his gift to this bartender, who was also a mother of 2 children.   
 “What is this?” she said to the customer who just left her this VERY generous tip. What is it, is that somehow this generous customer, who wished to remain anonymous, had heard Chrisi’s story and wanted to help her out a bit.

It turned out, one of Chrisi’s daughters had recently fallen ill and she has been back and forth to the doctor. The medical bills have been compiling and she had no idea of how she would be able to pay for them. As much as she loved to stay home to take care of her sick children, she must come to work. Furthermore, an appliance broke at her home and needed to be replaced. She wasn’t even trying to complain or to beg for sympathy, but just simply sharing about what’s going on in her life these days….and it was difficult and rough.

She and her husband had prayed that somehow things would hopefully get a little better and that their daughter would feel better soon. Each month, they earned just enough money to pay their rent and to make ends meet…and then this mysterious and generous customer came along.

Instead of keeping the generous gift entirely to herself, Chrisi decided to share her blessings with some of her fellow co-workers who were also experiencing other challenges in life. **Instead of complaining about the hardship and difficult circumstances that she was being dealt with, each day she recounted God’s blessings and passed them along to others**. Freely one has received, freely one shall give. This was her way of **Paying It Forward**.

In our Old Testament reading earlier from the book of Exodus, the Israelites were contemplating about life’s hardships while wandering out in the desert. Under the leadership of Moses, they had been led out of Egypt and liberated from the bondage of slavery. For the first time in over 430 years, they were now a free people but living a simple and nomadic lifestyle.

The LORD had led them out of the pursuit of the Egyptian army and had landed safely on the other side of the Red Sea. So they should be home-free and ready to march into the Promised Land the rest of the way, right?!? Wrong! There was, however, one problem though. They didn’t know where they had to go in order to reach the land that was promised to be filled with milk and honey.

Imagine yourself being Moses and Aaron, with millions of people following you, screaming behind you saying *“Are we there yet? Are we there yet? It’s hot out here! The kids are crying and we’re running low on food and water, when are we going to get there?”*

40 years of wandering out in the desert with no end in sight, was no fun at all. Some perhaps may had reached a “boiling point”. The bubbles were about to burst. They were sick and tired of not knowing where they are going, not having enough to eat or to drink. Something needs to happen soon.

**Many biblical scholars believed that the 40 years that the Israelites spent out in the wilderness was orchestrated by God in order to test the people’s faith, obedience and readiness to enter into the Promised Land.**

It would take a whole new generation of leaders among the Israelites, those who were born out in the wilderness, not in Egypt, before they were able to set their feet into the Promised Land. None of those who left Egypt, including Moses and Aaron, set their feet into the Promised Land.

Many began to complain and grumbled about their displeasures. Who can blame them? Many would wish they were going back to Egypt and be slaves once again rather than to die out there in the wilderness. To them, **it was better to be slaves under the Egyptian’s hands than to be free in the no-man’s land.**

One thing about human nature is that it is very natural for us to make complaints and to show signs of displeasures, rather than to give commendations and praise to someone. Nowadays especially, people can easily vent out their frustrations and lash out strong criticisms and critiques on someone, behind his/her back and across social media. Back in the days of the Israelites, they also made sure that their voices were heard. They went straight to Moses whining and complaining to God about food, water, shelter or just everything in general.

In a surprising move, God appeared to Moses and Aaron and said to them, *“I’ve heard enough of the people’s complaints. At twilight they shall eat meat, and in the morning they shall have their fill of bread, then they shall know that I am the LORD their God.”*[[1]](#footnote-1)

This was, believe or not, a momentous occasion even in a Biblical magnitude. God rarely speaks to the people but when God speaks, the people better listen!!! Was God yielding to the people’s demand and granting them whatever they wish for? Certainly NOT! God, out of God’s benevolence and grace, demonstrated His compassion upon hearing the people’s cry. Their physical needs (of food, water and shelter) were just as vital as their spiritual needs. God remained as their sovereign God, whether in Egypt, in the wilderness or in the Promised Land. God was still their God during the good times, as well as the bad.

God promised to rain down these flaky powdery substances called “Manna”. In Hebrew it literally means **“What is it?”** It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey.[[2]](#footnote-2) It was a little hard to imagine how they would taste like. I suppose you can make them in to dough and bake bread out of it.

However, these manna were specifically designed to last for a day. If they were to be store for more than a day, they would go spoil and be full of maggots and began to smell. So you cannot stock up and save it for the “rainy” day (well, after all there are few rainy days when you are out in the desert!!!)

Each morning the women would go out into the field and gather as much (or as little as they need for that day), except for the Sabbath Day, because they were not allowed to gather from the field. On the 6th day, there would be double portion, on those special manna would last for two days instead of just one. Again, nothing more and nothing less but just enough and as much as they needed. And they would go on the same cycle every day, trusting that God will provide for their needs every morning. The LORD provides!

From a theological perspective, we can look upon this daily feeding of quail and manna as a matter of **obedience** and **spiritual discipline** – **a** **discipline of developing trust and nurturing faith into a more intimate relationship with God each day.** We bear witness to the truth that God will provide what we need, out of God’s providence. God hears our cries even though God’s presence may seem distanced or at times when God’s voice remained silent.

How often do we react like those Israelites, complaining and whining about our displeasures in life. We become anxious about our physical inadequacy while neglecting to count God’s blessings upon what we already have. We’ve become jealous of what our neighbors have and their successes and complain to God about how “life being not fair!” and we deserve and entitle to receive more!

Come to think of it, we don’t! We haven’t done anything that merit God’s abundance of grace. God’s grace is sufficient for all of us to use[[3]](#footnote-3) and God’s faithfulness remains steadfast in spite of our trails and earthly challenges.

In the New Testament lesson that we read earlier from the Gospel of Matthew, we also read about a group of disgruntle workers who felt cheated in a sense that they were not getting a fair share of compensation for their labor. Many of the workers were hired at different time of the day. At the end of the day, the landowner would come to pay their agreeable wages, whether someone had worked for the entire day, ½ a day or only a few hours, they all received the same amount.

Those who had worked the entire day cried foul for the equal pay for the unequal amount of work, even though that was what they all had agreed upon. They confronted their owner and cried out for justice and their displeasure, but the owner responded back saying, *“Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am a generous God?”*[[4]](#footnote-4)

This passage appears to be a very difficult text to accept in a capitalistic society that calls for proper pay for proper work. In light of the earlier wilderness passage that we read in Exodus, we must take a step back to identify a “big-picture” sovereign God who also pays attentions to the simplest details of our human struggles and experiences. **We do not necessarily see what God sees, yet through God’s faithfulness, God lives up to what God has promised.** God’s covenant with the sinful and rebellious people remains steadfast. **God continues to provide generously to the people while demanding loyalty, faithfulness and obedience in return. Even still, we fall short of God’s demand and expectations.**

Perhaps instead of asking God the question “What is it?”, we ought to be grateful for **“Whatever it is”.** We trust that **“Whatever it is”** is part of God’s blessings and providence for us, at the right place and at the right timing. **“Whatever it is”** that we are dealt with in life, it would be pleasing and acceptable in God’s sight. **“Whatever it is”** that we have, we are gracious with and generous in sharing with others. We pray that **“Whatever it is”** may be used fully for God’s glory, purpose and mission. None of what we store up here on earth matters, if they were not given to us by God and dedicated for God’s use.

As the Apostle Paul reminded us in his letter to the early church in Philippi that “***I have learned to be content with whatever I have****. 12 I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.[[5]](#footnote-5)*

Jesus said, *“I am the bread of life that came down from heaven. 49 Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."[[6]](#footnote-6)*

Whenever, wherever, and however often we come before the LORD’s table, we remember that it is the LORD who provides the daily bread of life. With a grateful and a thanksgiving heart, we recount God’s saving grace and God’s faithfulness towards God’s people.

What is it? It is what it is! I AM who I AM. Let us give thanks and praise to our God in all circumstances. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Exodus 16:12* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Exodus 15:31* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *II Corinthians 12:9* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Matthew 20:15* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Philippians 4:11-13* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *John 6:48-51* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)