

LIVES OVERFLOWING FROM THANKFULNESS

2 Corinthians 9:6–15 (NIV) Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written: “They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.” ¹⁰ Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. ¹² This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. ¹³ Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. ¹⁴ And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

1 Corinthians 15:58 (NIV) ⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

1 Kings 17:13–16 (NIV) Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.” ¹⁴ For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: “The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.” ¹⁵ She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. ¹⁶ For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.

TEACHING POINTS:

- Our thankfulness leads us to spirit of generosity.
- God has called us to be generous with our time, our talent, and our treasure; He even promises to enable our generosity.
- Investments in God’s Kingdom always pay off.
- Because of God’s promises, we can live in an attitude of abundance rather than scarcity.

DISCUSSION:

1. Some preachers have referred to 2 Cor 9 as the “one law you can’t break.” Would you agree?

I stole this from Clay Cladwell. It’s a good saying. God will always give you enough to do the good works he has prepared for you to do. Spending time, emotional effort and your talent on good works may *seem* like it will deplete you. He promises that He will give you enough.

2. Discuss the concept of scarcity vs. abundance in Scripture. What is the default view of the world? What is God’s view?

This is a really great concept. Please read the attached short article from Walter Brueggemann (OT Scholar). Brueggemann’s social views sometimes seem to overtly drive his interpretations of scripture, so I don’t endorse everything he says, however on this general concept I think he has an excellent point. Once you see that ideas of scarcity vs. abundance you notice them all over the place. Why don’t I want to pay my taxes? Because I’m scared I won’t have enough. Why do I want to spend time at the beach instead of at church? Because if I go to church I won’t have enough time left over to do what I want. And so on. Read the article, it’s worth your time.

	World (scarcity)	God’s Kingdom (abundance)
Time	The clock is ticking and you have only so much time to extract whatever you can. You’ve got to go hard to defeat the other guy. Right now there is a Chinese kid studying hard who’s going to eat your kid’s lunch someday.	You have an eternity to spend with the Creator. You trust God enough to practice Sabbath. You already know how this story ends, you’ve seen the back of the book.
Abilities	You have to prove your worth by being greater than someone...unfortunately there’s always someone a <i>little</i> better at whatever it is.	You are a child of the king being remade in God’s image, seated with him (already) in the heavenly places. (Eph 2:6)
Money	There’s only so much to go around. Make Hay while the sun shines. Who knows how much you’ll need—so better get more. Money is a convenient scorecard.	Jesus made all things and sustains all things (Col 1:16-17). Material value in the present age is fleeting, the dollar could be devalued tomorrow. At his right hand are pleasures forever more (Psa 16:11). There’s some good in the present Creation but it pales in comparison to what will be in the New Heavens and New Earth.

Body	Your good looks and atheltic abilities are fleeting. Spend more time in the gym! Adopt that crazy diet. Call the plastic surgeon. Do whatever it takes to defeat that disease and live just a little while longer—regardless of what that looks like	You will be raised from the dead and given a new perfect body, not powered by the flesh but powered by the Spirit (<i>soma pneumatikon</i>), 1 Cor 15.
Sex	Sexual fulfilment is one of the most important “needs” that you have. You need to be a complete person, so whatever desire you have, it must be fulfilled for you to be complete. There may not be enough, so you have to get more...more partners, more experience, more younger spouse.	It’s great, but the God of abundance has more in store for me than those false promises. If He gives me a spouse, they are enough. If He calls me to a life of celibacy and singleness, it is enough because He is enough. He fulfills all my core needs in a way human relationships can only copy.

3. How do you view time from a viewpoint of scarcity versus abundance?

As above.

4. How do you view money from a viewpoint of scarcity versus abundance?

As above.

5. How do you view your talents (gifts) from a viewpoint of scarcity versus abundance?

As above.

6. Last Wednesday Devin discussed Rom 12 and using our gifts. In the original Greek Paul’s statement “let us use” our gifts is not a general saying (i.e. “*it would be nice if you would use your gifts*”), rather it is a imperative command: Use your gifts! What keeps us from fully mobilizing our individual talents for the Kingdom?

Sometimes it’s a mindset of scarcity (if I spend my energies there will I have enough to use at work, in my social networking, etc.). Sometimes the church isn’t good at identifying strengths and deploying them.

7. Would you agree that investments in God’s Kingdom always pay off? How? Do you always get to see it?

We have to be careful about this statement because at times it can sound like we’re in it for the payoff. I would say yes. God’s kingdom is the only thing of lasting value. This isn’t to say that only “spiritual activities” matter either—sometimes seemingly trivial things like a glass of cold water are important to God. In some way, in God’s economy, all that is

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Westgate Church of Christ

beautiful and right and good will have echoes on into eternity. Do we always see it in our lifetimes—by no means, although we see it often enough to be encouraged.

8. “If you have Jesus, you have enough.” Would you agree that is true? Why? How does that affect times where you feel like you don’t have enough?

Yes! He that made the universe and hold the atoms together who can make anything He wishes out of nothing, that very God knows the numbers of hair on my head and loves me more perfectly than the best human father ever could. His promises are eternal and everlasting and who can threaten Him. At his right hand is joy forevermore and better is one day in his courts than thousands elsewhere. This is good news!

We have to continually preach the gospel to ourselves. When confronted with scarcity of any kind (material, emotional, health, time) we have to remind ourselves of the balance of our “real” bank account in Him.

9. The Andersonville National Historic Site is located just north of Americus, GA, 120 miles from Dothan. On-site there is a free Prisoner of War museum that chronicles the adversity faced by POWs in the civil war and many other conflicts. Faced with extreme deprivation, some prisoners snap or lose hope, many give up and die. Others in the exact same conditions maintain their optimism and survive. How does your position in Christ allow you to realistically tackle even the worst conditions with a mindset of abundance, hope and optimism?

As above. He is enough!

10. How are lust and covetousness just byproducts of the “mindset of scarcity?”

As above.



AT WORK

Moving from Scarcity to Abundance in a Biblical Manner

Jesus Fed the Five Thousand with a Scarce Amount of Physical Resources, but He Had All the Resources of the Kingdom at His Disposal.

*Gisle Sorli
May 6, 2016*

Most of the time I operate through the lens of scarcity. I'm afraid of not having enough time or resources. *Will I have enough time to do what I desire? Will I have enough money to provide for my family?*

Walking alongside families managing their wealth, I frequently see this scarcity mentality.

I was sitting recently in the kitchen of a couple in their 80s. They have a net worth of over \$20 million. We had spent many hours together getting clarity on many questions: How much was enough for them? How much is enough for their heirs? What should they do for others?

I felt satisfied with helping them and their family answer these questions. We'd eliminated their estate and capital gains taxes. Now they were in a position to give away more money to charitable causes than they ever dreamed of. It was just a matter of implementing the plan.

Suddenly the wife blurted out, "What if I get a chronic illness?"

Hours after being confident in having enough money for the rest of her life, fear took over. She was worried about running out of money.

Paradoxically, this scarcity mindset often *increases* as wealth increases. Families with massive resources start placing their trust in the provision, not the provider.

An Incomplete View of Scarcity – and God’s Capacity to Act

The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, in his book *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*, observes that scarcity is the overriding rule of life. Reflecting on the philosophy of Marx, Aristotle, Plato, and Kant, he concludes that the fundamental issue of human existence is scarcity when you examine it from a purely physical realm.

But as Christians, we’re not looking at life from a purely physical realm.

In Matthew 14:13-21, the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand, the disciples view life through the lens of scarcity: “We **only** have five loaves and two fish” (emphasis added).

Most likely the site of this miracle was the Plain of Bethsaida, a flat piece of land in the Jordan Valley at the north end of the Sea of Galilee. There were two main cities proximate to this plain, Bethsaida itself and Capernaum. Bethsaida would have been seen as a Hellenistic city, making it off limits as a place to buy bread for observant Jews. That left Capernaum, about four miles away, as the nearest option for buying bread. Capernaum is thought to have had a population of around 7,500 at the time of Jesus. So almost by definition, there would not have been enough extra bread produced that day in Capernaum to feed 10,000 or more people. Plus, we are told it is also late in the day. The disciples’ resources appear scarce compared to the need.

A similar story is told in I Kings 17:7-16 where Elijah encounters the widow of Zarephath. She is about to run out of food, but because she submitted to Elijah’s request to feed him, her small amount of flour and olive oil never ran out.

The disciples would have surely known of this story. Observant Jewish boys started their education at age five, memorizing their Hebrew Scriptures. By the time they were bar mitzvahed at fourteen, they would have memorized much, if not all of their Scriptures. Thus, they failed to remember what God had done in the past and therefore failed to see why Jesus was capable of dealing with this situation in the here and now.

Moving from Scarcity to Abundance

If we view life through the lens of scarcity, we will always be fearful and anxious. So how do we live the abundant life Jesus promises?

The Father invites us to a share in his kingdom where there is a different mindset, where there is abundance. A scarcity mentality is not for a disciple of Jesus. He wants us to have a *stewardship* mentality of all that the Father has generously put into our hands. If we are able to lift our eyes above the physical realm, then we’re able to look at a world beyond.

We are human. We fail to remember what God has done and therefore what he is capable of doing presently. It is important to remind ourselves over and over how God has provided in the past. That could be why “remember” is one of the overarching themes of Scripture, occurring some 269 times because God knows how easily we forget. Our definition and

understanding of whatever “scarcity” and “abundance” means is shaped by remembering who God is, what God cares about, and how God does things. And that shapes our trust and confidence.

Jesus says: “Put the resources in my hand and see what I can do with it.” Scarcity becomes abundance. The disciples transition to this insight. So should we!

If we set our minds on things that are above, if “May your kingdom come here in our experience, right now” is the prayer on our lips, the attitude of our hearts, and the perspective of our gaze, then we will live in abundance. We will enjoy our lives differently than other people. We will be fearless. How does that sound?

The True Meaning of Abundance

We are serving a king who has abundance at his disposal. After the feeding of the 5,000, there are twelve baskets full of food. The leftovers of the abundance of the kingdom are far greater than the scarcity the world offers.

Often times abundance is confused with having all our material desires met. Scripture seems to indicate that abundance is not that, but being close to Jesus, giving him what we have, and trusting him to provide for what we need. Abundance is sufficient, enough.

This truth of abundance is difficult to apply to daily life. However, I am starting to think more about my daily bread and not worry whether I will have enough money for a nursing home. I am starting to think about being a spiritual being that will always exist, rather than thinking about dying. I am focusing on staying close to Jesus, listening to him, and obeying what he tells me to do.

Jesus, I want to believe more in abundance! Help me with my unbelief.

From a steward in progress.

GISLE SORLI

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The Liturgy of Abundance, the Myth of Scarcity: Consumerism and Religious Life

Pharaoh introduces the principle of scarcity into the world economy

by Walter Brueggemann

The majority of the world's resources pour into the United States. And as we Americans grow more and more wealthy, money is becoming a kind of narcotic for us. We hardly notice our own prosperity or the poverty of so many others. The great contradiction is that we have more and more money and less and less generosity—less and less public money for the needy, less charity for the neighbor.

. . . Though many of us are well intentioned, we have invested our lives in consumerism. We have a love affair with “more”—and we will never have enough. Consumerism is not simply a marketing strategy. It has become a demonic spiritual force among us, and the theological question facing us is whether the gospel has the power to help us withstand it.

The Bible starts out with a liturgy of abundance. Genesis 1 is a song of praise for God's generosity. It tells how well the world is ordered. It keeps saying, “It is good, it is good, it is good, it is very good.” It declares that God blesses—that is, endows with vitality—the plants and the animals and the fish and the birds and humankind. And it pictures the Creator as saying, “Be fruitful and multiply.” In an orgy of fruitfulness, everything in its kind is to multiply the overflowing goodness that pours from God's creator spirit. And as you know, the creation ends in Sabbath. God is so overrun with fruitfulness that God says, “I've got to take a break from all this. I've got to get out of the office.”

. . . Psalm 150, the last psalm in the book, is an exuberant expression of amazement at God's goodness. It just says, “Praise Yahweh, praise Yahweh with lute, praise Yahweh with trumpet, praise, praise, praise.” Together, these three scriptures proclaim that God's force of life is loose in the world.

Genesis 1 affirms generosity and denies scarcity. Psalm 104 celebrates the buoyancy of creation and rejects anxiety. Psalm 150 enacts abandoning oneself to God and letting go of the need to have anything under control.

Later in Genesis God blesses Abraham, Sarah, and their family. God tells them to be a blessing, to bless the people of all nations. Blessing is the force of well-being active in the world, and faith is the awareness that creation is the gift that keeps on giving. That awareness dominates Genesis until its 47th chapter. In that chapter Pharaoh dreams that there will be a famine in the land. So Pharaoh gets organized to administer, control, and monopolize the food supply. Pharaoh introduces the principle of scarcity into the world economy. For the first time in the Bible, someone says, “There's not enough. Let's get everything.”

. . . Pharaoh hires Joseph to manage the monopoly. When the crops fail and the peasants run out of food, they come to Joseph. And on behalf of Pharaoh, Joseph says, “What's your collateral?” They give up their land for food, and then, the next year, they give up their cattle. By the third year of the famine they have no collateral but themselves. And that's how the children of Israel become slaves—through an economic transaction.

By the end of Genesis 47 Pharaoh has all the land except that belonging to the priests, which he never touches because he needs somebody to bless him. The notion of scarcity has been introduced into biblical faith. The book of Exodus records the contest between the liturgy of generosity and the myth of scarcity—a contest that still tears us apart today.

. . . By the end of Exodus, Pharaoh has been as mean, brutal, and ugly as he knows how to be—and as the myth of scarcity tends to be. Finally, he becomes so exasperated by his inability to control the people of Israel that he calls Moses and Aaron to come to him. Pharaoh tells them, “Take your people and leave. Take your flocks and herds and just get out of here!” And then the great king of Egypt, who presides over a monopoly of the region's resources, asks Moses and Aaron to bless him. The powers of scarcity admit to this little community of abundance, “It is clear that you are the wave of the future. So before you leave, lay your powerful hands upon us and give us energy.” The text shows that the power of the future is not in the hands of those who believe in scarcity and monopolize the world's resources; it is in the hands of those who trust God's abundance.

When the children of Israel are in the wilderness, beyond the reach of Egypt, they still look back and think, “Should we really go? All the world's glory is in Egypt and with Pharaoh.” But when they finally turn around and look into the wilderness, where there are no monopolies, they see the glory of Yahweh.

In answer to the people's fears and complaints, something extraordinary happens. God's love comes trickling down in the form of bread. They say, “Manhue?”—Hebrew for “What is it?”—and the word “manna” is born. They had never before received bread as a free gift that they couldn't control, predict, plan for, or own. The meaning of this strange narrative is that the gifts of life are indeed given by a generous God. It's a wonder, it's a miracle, it's an embarrassment, it's irrational, but God's abundance transcends the market economy.

Three things happened to this bread in Exodus 16. First, everybody had enough. But because Israel had learned to believe in scarcity in Egypt, people started to hoard the bread. When they tried to bank it, to invest it, it turned sour and rotted, because you cannot store up God's generosity. Finally, Moses said, “You know what we ought to do? We ought to do what God did in Genesis 1. We ought to have a Sabbath.” Sabbath means that there's enough bread, that we don't have to hustle every day of our lives. There's no record that Pharaoh ever took a day off.



People who think their lives consist of struggling to get more and more can never slow down because they won't ever have enough.

When the people of Israel cross the Jordan River into the promised land, the manna stops coming. Now they can and will have to grow their food. Very soon Israel suffers a terrible defeat in battle, and Joshua conducts an investigation to find out who or what undermined the war effort. He finally traces their defeat to a man called A'chan, who stole some of the spoils of battle and withheld them from the community. Possessing land, property, and wealth makes people covetous, the Bible warns.

We who are now the richest nation are today's main coveters. We never feel that we have enough; we have to have more and more, and this insatiable desire destroys us. Whether we are liberal or conservative Christians, we must confess that the central problem of our lives is that we are torn apart by the conflict between our attraction to the good news of God's abundance and the power of our belief in scarcity—a belief that makes us greedy, mean, and unneighborly. We spend our lives trying to sort out that ambiguity.

. . . What we know about our beginnings and our endings, then, creates a different kind of present tense for us. We can live according to an ethic whereby we are not driven, controlled, anxious, frantic, or greedy, precisely because we are sufficiently at home and at peace to care about others as we have been cared for.

But if you are like me, while you read the Bible you keep looking over at the screen to see how the market is doing. If you are like me, you read the Bible on a good day, but you watch Nike ads every day. And the Nike story says that our beginnings are in our achievements, and that we must create ourselves. . . .

According to the Nike story, whoever has the most shoes when he dies wins. The Nike story says there are no gifts to be given because there's no giver. We end up only with whatever we manage to get for ourselves.

This story ends in despair. It gives us a present tense of anxiety, fear, greed, and brutality. It produces child and wife abuse, indifference to the poor, the buildup of armaments, divisions between people, and environmental racism. It tells us not to care about anyone but ourselves—and it is the prevailing creed of American society.

. . . What we know in the secret recesses of our hearts is that the story of scarcity is a tale of death. And the people of God counter this tale by witnessing to the manna. There is a more excellent bread than crass materialism. It is the bread of life, and you don't have to bake it. As we walk into the ~~new millennium~~, we must decide where our trust is placed.

New Heavens and the New Earth

The great question now facing the church is whether our faith allows us to live in a new way. If we choose the story of death, we will lose the land—to excessive

chemical fertilizer, or by pumping out the water table for irrigation, perhaps. Or maybe we'll only lose it at night, as going out after dark becomes more and more dangerous.

Joshua 24 puts the choice before us. Joshua begins by reciting the story of God's generosity, and he concludes by saying, "I don't know about you, but I and my house will choose the Lord." This is not a church-growth text. Joshua warns the people that this choice will bring them a bunch of trouble. If they want to be in on the story of abundance, they must put away their foreign gods—I would identify them as the gods of scarcity.

Jesus said it more succinctly. You cannot serve God and mammon. You cannot serve God and do what you please with your money or your sex or your land. And then he says, "Don't be anxious, because everything you need will be given to you." But you must decide. Christians have a long history of trying to squeeze Jesus out of public life and reduce him to a private little Savior. But to do this is to ignore what the Bible really says. Jesus talks a great deal about the kingdom of God—and what he means by that is a public life reorganized toward neighborliness. . . .

Telling parables was one of Jesus' revolutionary activities, for parables are subversive reimaginations of reality. The ideology devoted to encouraging consumption wants to shrivel our imaginations so that we cannot conceive of living in any way that would be less profitable for the dominant corporate structures. But Jesus tells us that we can change the world. The Christian community performs a vital service by keeping the parables alive. These stories haunt us and push us in directions we never thought we would go.

. . . Everywhere Jesus goes, the world is rearranged: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are freed from debt. The forgiveness of debts is listed last because it's the hardest thing to do—harder even than raising the dead to life. Jesus left ordinary people dazzled, amazed, and grateful; he left powerful people angry and upset, because every time he performed a wonder, they lost a little of their clout. The wonders of the new age of the coming of God's kingdom may scandalize and upset us. They dazzle us, but they also make us nervous. The people of God need pastoral help in processing this ambivalent sense of both deeply yearning for God's new creation and deeply fearing it. The feeding of the multitudes, recorded in Mark's Gospel, is an example of the new world coming into being through God. When the disciples, charged with feeding the hungry crowd, found a child with five loaves and two fish, Jesus took, blessed, broke, and gave the bread. . . . He demonstrated that the world is filled with abundance and freighted with generosity. If bread is broken and shared, there is enough for all. Jesus is engaged in the sacramental, subversive reordering of public reality.

The profane is the opposite of the sacramental. "Profane" means flat, empty, one dimensional, exhausted. The market ideology wants us to believe that the world is

profane—life consists of buying and selling; weighing, measuring, and trading; and then finally sinking into death and nothingness. But Jesus presents an entirely different kind

of economy, one infused with the mystery of abundance and a cruciform kind of generosity. Five thousand are fed and twelve baskets of food are left over—one for every tribe of Israel. If bread is broken and shared, there is enough for all. Jesus transforms the economy by blessing it and breaking it beyond self-interest. From broken Friday bread comes Sunday abundance. In this and in the following account of a miraculous feeding in Mark, people do not grasp, hoard, resent, or act selfishly; they watch as the juices of heaven multiply the bread of earth. Jesus reaffirms Genesis 1.

When people forget that Jesus is the bread of the world, they start eating junk food—the food of the Pharisees and of Herod, the bread of moralism and of power. Too often the church forgets the true bread and is tempted by the junk food. Our faith is not just about spiritual matters; it is about the transformation of the world. The closer we stay to Jesus, the more we will bring a new economy of abundance to the world. The disciples often don't get what Jesus is about because they keep trying to fit him into old patterns—and to do so is to make him innocuous, irrelevant, and boring. But Paul gets it.

In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul directs a stewardship campaign for the early church and presents Jesus as the new economist. Though Jesus was rich, Paul says, “yet for your sakes he became poor, that by his poverty you might become rich.” We say it takes money to make money; Paul says it takes poverty to produce abundance. Jesus gave himself to enrich others, and we should do the same. Our abundance and the poverty of others need to be brought into a new balance. Paul ends his stewardship letter by quoting Exodus 16: “And the one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.” The citation is from the story of the manna that transformed the wilderness into abundance. It is, of course, easier to talk about these things than to live them. Many people both inside and outside of the church haven't a clue that Jesus is talking about the economy. We haven't taught them that he is. But we must begin to do so now, no matter how economically compromised we may feel. Our world absolutely requires this news. It has nothing to do with being Republicans or Democrats, liberals or conservatives, socialists or capitalists. It is much more elemental: the creation is infused with the Creator's generosity, and we can find practices, procedures, and institutions that allow that generosity to work. Like the rich young man in Mark 10, we all have many possessions.

Discussion Questions for Brueggemann's “The Liturgy of Abundance, The Myth of Scarcity”

1. In what ways do you feel that there is not enough (resources, money, knowledge, skills, etc.)?

2. Does God give us enough at creation? (Genesis 1)
3. What does the psalmist teach us about abundance? (Ps. 104 and 105)
4. Outline the liturgy of generosity and the myth of scarcity in the book of Exodus.
5. Why does choosing to follow God help us to live in abundance? (Joshua 24)
6. How do the parables of Jesus change our reality concerning scarcity and abundance? (See the Gospels)
7. Using Paul's teachings, how would you go about planning a financial stewardship campaign? (2 Cor. 8; 1 Tim. 6)