

2 Corinthians 9:6-11

Joyful Generosity Week 2, September 24, 2017

Theme: Abundance vs. Scarcity

INJ We tend to envy rich people. How would you behave differently if you were wealthy? An interesting bit of history: The richest American ever is not Microsoft's Bill Gates. You have to go back to J.D. Rockefeller in the early 1900's. He founded the Standard Oil Company right as cars and gasoline and the need for oil was beginning. He amassed a personal fortune that in today's dollars is estimated at between 300 and 400 billion dollars. That's four times what Bill Gates is worth!

Once J.D. Rockefeller was asked, "How much money is enough?" With his hundreds of billions in the bank, do you know what he said? "Just a little bit more." Whether we have billions of dollars or a little less, doesn't it always feel like we need just a little bit more? There aren't enough hours in a day. There's not enough time at work. There's not enough energy at home. Not enough money to get what we really want. Not enough friendships to feel like we're truly loved.

We're close, though, but just a little bit short. This is our sinful human condition: Never satisfied. "Just a little bit more!" There isn't enough of just about anything to stretch as far as we'd like it to go. The word for it is "scarcity." We go through life with a scarcity mentality. If I just had a little more time If I just had a little more energy If I just had a little more money If I just had a few more friends But I'm always a little short. Scarcity.

There's just one problem: It's not true! In fact, it's an absolute lie that comes from the father of lies, the Devil. Because if I don't have enough, that means God hasn't given me enough. What a lie! It all started in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were in the perfect Garden surrounded by everything they could have possibly desired, yet the Devil somehow convinced Eve and Adam that they didn't have enough. "I need that one more fruit... God hasn't given me enough... I want more!" Sin entered the world, and death through sin.

A mentality of scarcity has devastating results. We are never content. In fact, contentment can seem like a bad thing. How can we be content when we don't have enough? And we're always frazzled. Always running around. Always struggling. Always searching for that one more thing. Just a little bit more. Here's the part that hurts our soul: God begins to seem like he demands more than he gives. Do you ever feel that God expects too much from you? More than you can possibly give?

Here's another result of this scarcity lie: It hurts to give. Generosity has become painful. Giving has lost its joy. In fact, you could use that as a test for how hard you have fallen to the scarcity lie. How hard is it for you to give your money away? If it's hard and painful to give your money away — to anyone — you are living with an attitude of scarcity! How did talking about giving our thank offerings to God — our money and more — become a touchy topic? Because I think I always need just a little bit more than what God has given me. The Devil has convinced me that I'm always just a little bit short. Scarcity.

God wants to completely change the way we look at things. He proclaims something amazing that frees us from this attitude of scarcity. He starts by taking us out to a farm. "The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. The one who sows generously will also reap generously." A farmer must give to receive. In fact, the more seed he gives up and plants in the ground, the greater his harvest will be. Planting takes tremendous trust, but God says that it works the same with him. He who gives, receives. He who sows generously, reaps generously.

Joyful Generosity comes down to trust. Can I count on God? Will he really give me what I need? This is what Paul says: "God is able to make all grace overflow to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will overflow in every good work." The Devil wants to fill you with this "just a little bit more" disease. In contrast, count how many times God says "all" or "every." "God is able to make all grace overflow to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will overflow in every good work." We don't have a God of "just a little bit more." We have a God of "all." Not a God of scarcity, but a God of abundance.

The Good News is for you: "God is able to make all grace overflow to you." When you hear the word grace, think of Jesus. How much grace does he give? All of it! God describes it as abundant: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also graciously give us all things along with him?" How do we get past the "I need a little more" thinking? God gives all grace.

You don't need a little bit more. You have it all! Paul says, "You will be made rich in every way so that you may be generous in every way." In the previous chapter Paul wrote, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich." When we go through life thinking we don't have enough, we are missing the Good News. Jesus died for you. Jesus has

forgiven you. Jesus saved you. Jesus loves you. You are rich — rich right now. We have a God of abundance. His generous grace makes us overwhelmingly joyful!

Being rich isn't about a number. You could have all the money in the world, but still be poor. Being rich is an attitude — the attitude of faith. It is the gift of God's grace. You have something that even Bill Gates with all of his money doesn't have. You have peace with God. You are his dear child. Your worth isn't determined by your bank account. It's determined by Jesus' blood. Your freedom isn't a result of your constant struggling. It's the result of Jesus' forgiveness. Because you are baptized into Christ, you are rich! You will leave church today without a single dollar more in your pocket. You'll leave without a single hour more in your day. But you are not one bit short, because you have all that you need in Christ. You are rich with the overflowing love of God!

Sometimes people talk about different perspectives in life. Are you a glass half-empty or glass half-full kind of person? I hope you're neither, because the glass is all the way full! "God is able to make all grace overflow to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will overflow in every good work." Whenever this scarcity nonsense pops up, tell yourself, "God is able... God is able... God is able... All... All... All... I am rich! I am rich! I am rich!" We don't have a God of scarcity. We have a God of abundance. He has blessed you!

God's abundance isn't meant to stop with you. Here's how Paul puts it: "You will be made rich in every way so that you may be generous in every way." God has blessed you with all that you need for a purpose. God wants to make you the greatest possible blessing to others. You are not an end in yourself. God's blessings are not meant to come to you and stop. He's got a much bigger purpose for you than that! Don't you want purpose for your life, a mission or a goal? God gives you one: You exist to be a blessing for others. To tell them about Jesus and to pass on the Good News. God wants his abundance to flow through you. This is what we call Joyful Generosity.

Seed money is money that used to start something bigger — like the farmer who sows seeds into the ground so they will grow. You might put some seed money into your child's college account — and hope it grows. You might invest seed money in a business and hope it pays dividends. God's blessings to us are like seed money. The money and time and possessions and talents that God has given us are for scattering and sowing generously. He doesn't want us to keep our blessings to ourselves any

more than a farmer keeps his seeds to himself. He gives us blessings to plant them so that God's abundance grows and flourishes for others.

We're going to spend some time in future weeks talking about practical advice God gives for Joyful Generosity - our giving thanks to God and our serving one another. Paul gives us a start today: "Each one should give as he has determined in his heart, not reluctantly or under pressure, for God loves a cheerful giver." Giving money is connected to your heart. It's a decision that reflects your faith in Jesus. This is why no one can ever tell you how much to give! But as you decide, ask yourself: Do I have a God of abundance or scarcity? Do I see God as demanding too much from me, or as giving me more than I can measure? Do I have a God who leaves me a little short or who gives me all?

Another Bible passage gives us similar encouragement. Jesus said, "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure pressed down, shaken together and running over will be poured into your lap. In fact, the measure with which you measure will be measured back to you." God gives like brown sugar. When I make chocolate chip cookies, I measure out a cup of brown sugar like this: Fill the cup full, and then pack it down. Fill it back to the top and pack it down again. Then fill it up and pack it right to the top. And then, just because, heap some on top and dump it all into the cookie dough. "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure pressed down, shaken together and running over." Trust your God of abundance to bless your Joyful Generosity!

Jesus accomplished more than anyone in the history of the world. But out of all the things Jesus did, do you know something that you don't ever hear Jesus doing? Running. Jesus is never recorded in the Bible as running. In fact, Jesus had 24-hour days, just like you do, and they were filled with important things to do. Jesus only lived 33 years on this earth. But he had enough time to accomplish everything the Father sent him to do. All grace is accomplished in him, and he overflows it to you.

Let's be honest, there is not a hint of scarcity in our lives. God has given us exactly the right amount of time to serve him. God has given us exactly the right amount of money to serve him. God has given us exactly the right talents to serve him. Don't wish you had a little bit more. Rejoice in the overflowing riches that God has given you. Use them energetically and faithfully. You have all things in Christ Jesus! Joyful Generosity is our response to a God of abundance. SDG Amen.