

Joyful Generosity: God's Generosity Abounds!

A sermon based on 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Can you name the richest American ever? Any guesses? You're probably thinking of Bill Gates. It's not him! Without a doubt, the richest American ever was a man named J.D. Rockefeller. Ever heard of him? I think I've mentioned him before. He lived around the turn of the century and 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...at least four times the amount Bill Gates has today! One day, 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."

"Just a little bit more." Does that describe your life? Whether you have hundreds of billions of dollars or a little less, doesn't it always feel like we just need a little bit more? There aren't enough hours in a day. There's not enough time to finish projects at work. There's not enough energy to finish projects at home. Not enough money to get what we really want. Not enough friendships to feel like we're truly loved. We're close, right? But we're always just a little bit short. I think that's our default human condition. Never quite satisfied. "Just a little bit more!"

I'll admit I feel that way too often. There just isn't quite enough of just about anything to stretch as far as you'd like it to go. And the perfect word for that 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 one problem with that mentality: It's not true! In fact, it's an absolute lie coming straight from the devil. Because if I don't have enough, that can only mean one thing: God hasn't given me enough. What a lie! If you want to see where that started, just go back to the Garden of Eden. Remember how that all went down? Adam and Eve were in the perfect Garden of Eden surrounded by everything they could have possibly desired, yet the devil somehow convinced Eve and Adam they didn't have enough. "I need that one more fruit...I'd like to know a little bit more...God hasn't given me quite enough . . ." And scarcity entered the world with devastating results.

And what was the result of that mentality? For us, we're never content. In fact, contentment can even seem like a bad thing. Could you imagine a presidential candidate standing on the debate stage and saying, "I am content. Our economy...fine where it is. The military, no need to change there. All the questionable laws, lawmakers, special interest programs...status quo is fine"? What would the reaction be? "What! He's crazy! How can you be content? We're short on...We need more of..." We're never content. And we're always frazzled. Always running. Always struggling. Always searching for that one more thing. For just a little bit more. And here's the worst part: God begins to seem like he demands more than he gives. Ever feel that way?

Friends, here's one more clear result of this scarcity lie: It hurts to give. You ever feel that way? Where 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 this whole scarcity lie. How hard it is for you to give your money away? And I don't only mean for church...but other places/organizations like maybe a WELS organization you gave money to once a long time ago, but you keep getting mailers from them. Another organization in need around town. A friend or relative who's fallen on some hard times. Or...maybe not so much money, but the food and supply drives we've been having here. How hard is it to give your money away? If it's hard

and painful to give your money away—to anyone—you’re living with an attitude of scarcity! I think I always need just a little bit more. The devil has convinced me I’m always just a little bit short. Scarcity.

I’m so glad you’re here today, because God wants to completely change your mindset...that mindset! He shares something amazing with us that will free you from this attitude of always being short. He starts by taking us out to a farm. **“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”** Think of a farmer: If you don’t sow, you won’t reap. 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. That takes tremendous trust, but it works! God says it works the same with him. He who gives, receives. He who sows generously, reaps generously.

So, what it all comes down to is trust, right? Is God good for it? Can I count on him? Check out this promise: **“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.”** The devil wants to fill you with this “just a little bit more” disease. In contrast, I want you to count how many times God says “all” or “every.” **“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.”** We don’t have a God of “just a little bit more.” We have a God of “all.” God is not a God of scarcity. He’s a God of abundance.

And it starts with this: **“God is able to make all grace abound to you.”** Whenever you hear the word “grace,” I want you to think of Jesus. God’s grace is his undeserved love for us in Jesus. How much of that love is there? God describes it like a flood—it’s abounding and overflowing. **“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”** (Romans 8:32). Even one of our hymns gladly proclaims **“What grace is this! My Lord and King has set his face to suffering. My God eternal dies to bring eternal life to me. What grace is this—that very God would stoop to lift a cross of wood and walk a road of rock and blood, a sinner’s road, for me.”** How do we get past the “I need a little more” thinking? Grace!

You don’t need a little bit more. You have it all! **“You will be made rich in every way.”** In the previous chapter of 2 Corinthians, Paul wrote, **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich”** (2 Corinthians 8:9). Everyone who goes through life thinking they don’t have enough is missing the big picture. Jesus died for you. Jesus has forgiven you. Jesus saved you. Jesus loves you. You are rich—right now! We have a God of abundance!

Because 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. It’s the gift of God’s grace. You have something even Bill Gates with all of his money doesn’t have. You have God’s peace in your heart. 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. You are rich! You’ll leave church today without a single dollar more in your pocket. You’ll leave without a single hour more in your day. But you’re not one bit short, because you have what you need most. 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 neither is right. The glass is full! **“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.”** The glass is full! Whenever this scarcity nonsense creeps back into your mind, 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. And he’s blessed you!

Yet God’s abundance isn’t meant to stop with you. Here’s how he puts it: **“You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion.”** God has blessed you with all you need for a

purpose. God wants to make you the greatest possible blessing to others. God's blessings are not meant to come to you and stop. He's got a much bigger purpose for you than that! Isn't that what we want to hear? We want a purpose in our lives. Well, God gives you one: You exist to be a blessing for others. God wants his abundance to flow through you.

Have you ever heard of "seed money"? It's money used to start something bigger. 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 aren't ends in themselves. They're like "seed money." The money and time and possessions and talents God has given you are seed money to sow 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 they grow and flourish and bless even more people with God's abundance.

We're going to spend some time over the next couple of weeks talking about some practical advice God gives us for giving to him and others...with our money, with our hours, with our abilities. But here's a start today: ***"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."*** Giving is connected to your heart. It's a decision that reflects your faith in Jesus. That's why I can't ever tell you how much to give! But as you decide, ask yourself: Do I have a God of abundance or scarcity? Do I have a God who leaves me a little short or gives me all?

The truth? There is not a hint of scarcity in our lives. God has given you exactly the right amount of time to serve him. God has given you exactly the right amount of money to serve him. God has given you exactly the right talents to serve him. Don't wish you had a little bit more. Rejoice in what he's given you.

This Rockefeller guy I told you about—he was actually a very generous man. He gave away hundreds of millions of dollars in his lifetime. His desire to give led him to develop a habit: He gave a dime to every single person he met—from a tiny baby to the president of the United States. Everywhere he went, he gave out dimes. It's estimated he gave away \$35,000 in dimes. If you do the math, that's 350,000 people he gave a dime to. That's a lot of seed money. And he smiled all the way!

You have Jesus. You have God's grace. And that alone would be more than enough. But our God is a God of abundance. Take stock of your life and you'll see. And don't stop there. We can't. We won't. God's blessings overflow so we can seed those blessings in others. And we will. Friends, may God continue to bless you – and even bless you more – as you find your contentment in Christ and grace and as you respond to our God of abundance...with joyful generosity. Amen.