

The Trees: Scarcity of Abundance

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The Trees

The Tree of Life represents the connection between God and humanity. When you choose to yield to God's definition of what is good and what is bad, you are choosing to live in the Tree of Life. However, when we choose to depend on our own strengths and ideas, we are choosing to live out of the Tree of Knowledge Good and Evil (aka... the DIY Tree). Where we place our trust (either in God or in ourselves) becomes our subconscious motivation for the actions we take in life. What motivates your actions? A scarcity or abundance mindset?

Abundance in the Garden

At the beginning of Genesis, Adam and Eve are living in abundance (Genesis 2). They had everything they could ever need. Food, resources, peace, companionship... They were never lacking anything they could ever need until the Serpent whispered in their ear and told them that there was more that God was withholding from them (Genesis 1-5). When they ate from the tree of Knowledge Good and Evil (Genesis 3:6-7) they begin to see things in a new way... not in a better way, just different.

Seeing Scarcity

When Adam and Eve were being fed by the Tree of Life, they could see God's abundant provision. They lacked for nothing. They did not even know what it meant to lack. However, when they ate from the Tree of Knowledge Good and Evil, the desire to want more than what they needed was unlocked. Now they saw what they did not have and knew the feeling of lack

for the first time (Genesis 3:8-11). Genesis begins with humanity living in obvious abundance in the Garden of Eden and ends with them living in the scarcity of the desert (Genesis 47:13). Yet, God's provision for them is still enough to sustain their needs.

Manna from Heaven

The first fifteen chapters of Exodus tell the story of the Israelites being delivered from slavery in Egypt. God carved the path for their freedom through the sea and into the desert toward the promised land. However, on the way, they grew frustrated, tired, and hungry. They easily forgot who was guiding them on their journey and began grumbling (Exodus 16:1-3). Their scarcity mindset blocked them from seeing God's abundant provision.

God heard their distress and responded generously. He sends them *mana* (a grain used to prepare bread) each morning and quail every evening. He is providing all of their needs, but He wants them to trust Him, so He instructs them to not take more each day than they need and to not store any extra for the next day (Exodus 16:4-19). God answers scarcity with abundance but makes it very clear that abundance depends on their ability to practice restraint and trust. God did not allow them to hoard the blessing (Exodus 16:20).

Enough is Enough

God still invites us to live out of the Tree of Life. The Tree of Life says that we have all that we need while the Tree of Knowledge Good and Evil tells us that we never have enough. When we trust in God's provision we are able to release our fear of not having enough. In order to adopt an abundance mindset, we have to be able to overcome the social conditioning that we need more money, more stuff, and more followers to survive and be happy.

The Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann says it like this: “The fundamental human condition continues to be anxiety, fueled by a market ideology that keeps pounding on us to take more, to not think about our neighbor, to be fearful, shortsighted, grudging... Whether it’s global policies or local poverty-wage jobs, **those who fear scarcity refuse to acknowledge any abundance that extends beyond their own coffers.**”

Abundant Generosity

Trusting in God’s abundant provision allows us to embody generosity, even in scarcity. Like the story of manna in the desert, the reality of abundance for all requires that we participate in justly redistributing everything that God provides (2 Corinthians 9:8). We have a part to play in keeping the blessing flowing. We are called to become a conduit, not just a recipient, for God’s abundance.

Further Study:

- Watch this short video to better understand how scarcity and abundance mindsets can affect your perspective and generosity.
 - Bible Project Video: Generosity - <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/generosity/>
- Paul wrote a lot about generosity in his second letter to the church in Corinth. He challenges them to consider their mindset and encourages them to remember the abundance of God’s grace and provision.
 - In 2 Corinthians 8-9 Paul shares about the churches in Macedonia and commends them for their grace and generosity. Macedonia was not a wealthy region, yet out

of their poverty, they displayed an abundance mindset by generously giving to the church in Jerusalem which were in need due to famine (8:1-5).

- Paul is reminding the Corinthians of God's abundant grace by telling them the Gospel through financial metaphors (8:6-12).
- The Macedonians are an example of how generosity grows from an abundance mindset. Yet the scarcity mindset of the Corinthians had caused them to focus on their own needs and desires rather than sending help to others.
- Paul points out that God has provided all their needs and that from their excess they can bless others (8:13-14).
- He also reminds them that God's provision has always been enough by referencing God's provision in the desert from Exodus 16 (8:15).

Discussion Questions:

- We are constantly surrounded by advertisements that target our scarcity mindset. How can we keep our focus on God's abundance in a 'never enough' society?
- What practical steps can we take to shift our mindset from scarcity to abundance?
- How does living from the Tree of Life help us to be generous?