

Lesson 1

Introduction & The Generosity and Abundance of God

1. Some Preliminaries

a. Purpose of the Class:

- To deepen our understanding of generous Biblical stewardship, with the hope - through God's grace – of growing personally and corporately in this spiritual discipline to the glory of God and the good of others
- Outline and Format of the Class
 - February 8 – The Generosity of God
 - February 15 – The Generalities of Generous Stewardship
 - February 22 – The Generous Church Member
 - March 8 – Some Practicalities of Generous Living

b. Some Definitions of Stewardship

- CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP is the free and joyous activity of the child of God and God's family, the church, in managing all of life and life's resources for God's purposes – The Lutheran Church: Missouri Synod
- CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP is grateful and responsible use of God's gifts in light of God's purposes revealed in Jesus Christ – Episcopal Church USA
- GENEROUS CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP is joyfully giving away in abundance our time, talents and treasures for God's glory and his Kingdom purposes in the world. It is about living generous lives in response to God's overwhelming generosity to us in JESUS – adapted from 'Stewardship: Planting a Church with a Generous Culture' BY Tom Wood

2. **Objective:** To consider and meditate upon the generosity and abundance of God that has been and is revealed to us in creation and redemption...for the generosity and abundance of God is the only true and lasting foundation upon which a solid view and outworking of Biblical stewardship can be built. Simply put, the generosity and abundance of God is the only true power and motivation for generous giving and living.

3. The 'Scarcity' of Our Present Situation

a. Some Current Headlines

- 'Stocks Drop Sharply and Credit Markets Seize Up' – Nov. 20, 2008 (NYT)
- 'Car Slump Jolts Toyota Halting 70 Years of Gain' – Dec. 27, 2008 (NYT)
- 'Layoffs Spread to More Sectors of the Economy' – Jan. 27, 2009 (NYT)
- 'Jobless Rate Hits 7.2%, a 16-Year High' – Jan. 10, 2009 (NYT)
- 'U.S. Loses 598,000 Jobs; Jobless Rate Hits 7.6%' – Feb. 6, 2009 (MSN)

b. A Fundamental Economics Principle – The Story Scarcity

- 'Economics is the study of choices consumers, business managers and government officials make to attain their goals, *given their scarce resources*'
- Economics is the study of how people make choices *under conditions of scarcity* and the results of these choices
- Economics is the study of how society manages *its scarce resources*

- Definitions quoted by Michael Mandel

c. There just simply isn't enough, not enough....

- Food
- Land
- Water

- Oil
- Money
- Stuff

And as a result people either hoard, covet, live in fear, anxiety or even despair – each of which are forms of death

4. The Abundance and Generosity of Our Eternal God

a. The Abundant and Overflowing Goodness of God

- ‘YHWH, YHWH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and *abounding* in steadfast love and faithfulness...’ (Ex. 34.6)
- You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; *my cup overflows*’ (Ps. 23.5)
- ‘How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. *They feast upon the abundance of your house*, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light’ (Ps. 36.7-9)
- ‘We shall be *satisfied with the goodness* of your house...’ (Ps. 65.4)
- ‘*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above*, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change’ (Jas. 1.17)

b. The Story or Liturgy of Abundance and Generosity

• Creation

- Creation is to be understood as the result of God’s overflowing love, an overflowing and abundant love that exists within God himself and is in turn given to humanity

‘The very life of God is one of goodness expressing itself generously, fully. This divine goodness lives in personal (Triune) communion. God is interpersonal and relational...God’s desire to share goodness is expressed as creation. But creation is not merely to receive some partial, limited sharing in God’s goodness and life...In all his work of creation God shows one of the divine characteristics – outpouring of what is within, giving away all that is inside. This we may call the bowing over of God, the gesture typical of one who offers. We may call this the humility of God, divine condescension. God gives away all, holds nothing back...showing in the visible things of creation the invisible and constant self-giving which is the life of the Trinity’ (Short, William J. The Franciscans, p.5)

‘The impulse (to create) was not some deficiency of delight (within God himself) but a spilling over of mutual joy...So creation is an expression of the overflow of that life and joy that the Father has for the Son’ (Piper, John. The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God’s Delight in Being God, p.87)

‘All that exists is God’s gift to man and all that exists is to make God known to man, to make life communion with God. It is divine love made food, made life for man’ (Schmemmann, Alexander, For the Life of the World, p.3)

- God takes great delight in blessing and filling his creation with abundance

‘The Bible starts out with a liturgy of abundance. Genesis 1 is a song of praise for God’s generosity. It tells how the world is ordered. It keeps saying, “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 (Brueggemann, Walter. ‘The Liturgy of Abundance, The Myth of Scarcity’ p.1)

- This divine abundance is celebrated (Ps. 104.10-28)
- One way of understanding humanity’s first sin would be to see it as ‘buying into’ the story of scarcity...God’s holding back, you haven’t got enough!

• Redemption (God’s abundant provision in the midst of scarcity)

- At the Fall

‘I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel’ (Gen. 3.15)

‘And the LORD God made for Adam and his wife garments of skins and clothed them’ (Gen. 3.21)

➤ In the call of Abraham

'Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed' (Gen. 12.1-3)

➤ In Egypt

'But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them' (Ex. 1.7)

➤ In the Wilderness

'And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into the wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain down bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day...In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it (man hu, or manna)? For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is bread that the LORD has given to you to eat." (Ex. 16.2-4; 13-16)

➤ In the Promised Land

'And I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey...' (Ex. 3.8)

➤ In Jesus

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it...The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as from the only Son from the Father, *full of grace and truth...And from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace...*' (Jn. 1.1-5;14, 16)

'When the wine ran out...Jesus said "Fill the jars (180 gallons, an inordinate amount!) with water." And they filled them to the brim...When the master of the feast tasted *the water now become wine...*(he said), 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.' (Jn. 2.3, 7, 9, 10)

'Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks from this water (from the well) will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. *The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*' (Jn. 4.13-14)

'Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world...*I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*' (Jn. 6.32-35)

'I came that they may have life and have it *abundantly*' (Jn. 10.10)

'After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst."' (Jn. 19.28)

'For God so loved the world that *he gave* his only Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.' (Jn. 3.16)

'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.' (2 Cor. 8.9)

'What shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously (or freely or abundantly) give us all things?' (Rom. 8.31-32)

5. A Challenge to Hear, Questions for Reflection, a Prayer to Pray and Benediction to Receive

a. A Challenge to Hear

- 'Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am *to be content*. I know how to be brought low, and how to abound. In any and every circumstance, *I have learned the secret* of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.' (Phil. 4.11-13)

b. Questions for Reflection

- Do you order your life according to the story of scarcity or the story of abundance?
- What causes you to forget God's loving abundance toward you?
- Have you/Are you learning the secret of contentment?

c. A Prayer to Pray

- You are the giver of all good things. All good things are sent from heaven above, rain and sun, day and night, justice and righteousness, bread to the eater and seed to the sower, peace to the old, energy to the young, joy to the babes. We are takers, who take from you, day by day, daily bread, taking all we need as you supply, taking in gratitude and wonder and joy. And then taking more, taking more than we need, taking more than you give us, taking from brothers and sisters, taking from the poor and the weak, taking because we are frightened, and so greedy, taking because we are anxious, and so fearful, taking because we are driven, and so uncaring. Give us peace beyond our fear, and so end our greed. Give us well-being beyond our anxiety, and so end our fear. Give us abundance beyond our drivenness, and so end our uncaring. Turn our taking into giving...since we are in your giving image: Make us giving like you, giving gladly and not taking, giving in abundance, not taking, giving in joy, not taking, giving as he gave himself up for us all, giving, and never taking. Amen.
(Brueggemann, Walter. Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth, p. 33)

d. A Benediction to Receive

- 'Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we could ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.' (Eph. 3.20-21)