

FIVE FORKS BRETHERN IN CHRIST CHURCH
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SCRIPTURE: Matthew 15:32-38, Genesis 3:1-4

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SUBJECT: Scarcity Mindset

Series: Drinking Deeply

THEME: Unmasking a Scarcity Mindset

SERMON: "Breathe In, Breathe Out"

Good morning. So good to be with you this morning. Welcome to those on line. Thanks for joining us.

Introduction

I want to ask you all to do something simple for me. Here it is:

Breathe in, breathe out. Breathe In, breathe out. (Now don't fall asleep.) As we sit here in the room, or if you are home in your living room – are you concerned about running out of air? No. There is plenty for all of us.

Now imagine you and I go Scuba Diving. Each of us have an air tank with plenty of air for the time we will be under water. But then my air tank begins to malfunction. I swim over to you and communicate that I am running out of air. I hope you will be willing to share. But how does the situation change for us? Now, are you concerned about running out of air? Yes. Air is a scarce commodity now.

This is the beginning of a 4 week series we have called **Drinking Deeply: from the spigot of God's abundance**, (series graphic). I came across the topic, during some of my devotional reading. And as I thought about it more, I came to discover that I, and perhaps many of us are living life, missing out on the abundance, a very generous God is offering us. Our missing out seems to stem from a mindset that so easily controls how we think, feel, act and respond. Some have called it **A Scarcity Mindset**. We'll explain it in a minute.

Many of us, as individuals, tend to approach life from this mindset. Then it creeps into our families, into our work environments, and even into the way we do church or community

together.

We talk about a God, who we say has limitless resources. We are learning to follow Jesus, who said he came so that we might live life abundantly. And yet we often approach life and make so many decisions as if there is a constant scarcity.

This is not new for followers of Jesus. Let's go to Matthew's gospel.

Matthew 15:29-39 Jesus returned to the Sea of Galilee and climbed a hill and sat down. ³⁰ A vast crowd brought to him people who were lame, blind, crippled, those who couldn't speak, and many others. They laid them before Jesus, and he healed them all. ³¹ The crowd was amazed! Those who hadn't been able to speak were talking, the crippled were made well, the lame were walking, and the blind could see again! And they praised the God of Israel.

³²Then Jesus called his disciples and told them, "I feel sorry (have compassion) for these people. They have been here with me for three days, and they have nothing left to eat. I don't want to send them away hungry, or they will faint along the way."

The meaning of the word 'compassion' is more than just feeling sorry for someone. It includes, noticing their plight or suffering, loving them and deciding to act to relieve the suffering. I think the disciples knew Jesus was implying, "Hey, we need to do something, to help these tired, hungry people." But the disciples were on to Jesus. And, they operated out of a "scarcity mindset." They are thinking, "Jesus, there is not enough food for what you want to do." "We will nip your crazy idea in the bud right now." Notice what they say.

³³ The disciples replied, "Where would we get enough food here in the wilderness for such a huge crowd?"

They were being honest. They were being realistic. They were being who most of us would be – doubtful that they could do anything in this situation. In another account similar to this one, Jesus says to the disciples directly, "You feed the crowd."

Doesn't it make you uncomfortable when Jesus asks you to do something impossible? Well, this time Jesus lets the disciples off the hook.

³⁴ Jesus asked, “How much bread do you have?”

They replied, “Seven loaves, and a few small fish.”

³⁵ So Jesus told all the people to sit down on the ground. ³⁶ Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, thanked God for them, and broke them into pieces. He gave them to the disciples, who distributed the food to the crowd.

³⁷ They all ate as much as they wanted. Afterward, the disciples picked up seven large baskets of leftover food. ³⁸ There were 4,000 men who were fed that day, in addition to all the women and children.

Scholar FF Bruce commenting on another occasion where Jesus fed 5000 men at one time, with five loaves of bread and two fish, Bruce writes:

“However plentifully the Lord bestows his grace, he always has enough and to spare for others. He is never impoverished by the generosity of his giving. In the same way, when his followers imitate his generosity, they prove the truth of the Proverb: “One man gives freely, yet grows all the richer.” Proverbs 11:24

Have you ever been asked to give towards some worthy cause, and wrestled with, “How much can I afford to give?” Bruce is suggesting, giving more does not leave us poorer, rather, when we give freely, we find ourselves richer!!

What we see in the story of Jesus and his disciples, is two different mindsets. One belongs to Jesus, who looks at the situation and sees **Abundance** – **“There will always be more.”** The other mindset is that of the disciples, who look at the situation and see **Scarcity**. **“There will never be enough.”** Those of us who are His disciples today, can fall into the same trap as the first disciples.

So for the next four weeks, we want to tackle this topic of learning to live life abundantly. Someone commented, “Many of us fail to dance and drink deeply from the fountain of God’s abundance.”

Today, let's become more familiar with a scarcity mindset.

I. A Scarcity Mindset – simply put is thinking - **“There will never be enough.”**

When we exhibit a scarcity mindset: **“We see life as having only so much, as though there is only one pie out there. And if someone were to get a big piece of the pie, it would mean less for everybody else.” (Covey)**

This mindset has been around as long as the human race. The snake in the Garden of Eden suggested to Adam and Eve, that God operates out of a scarcity mindset.

Genesis 3:1-7 The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day he asked the woman, “Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?”

Remember when God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden? God told them they could eat from every tree in the Garden, except one. The author of Genesis reveals right from the beginning that God is an abundantly generous God. “You have this whole lush garden to live in. Everything you need.” (We will talk more about God’s amazing generosity next week.) God is exceedingly generous, but the snake plants a seed in their minds, that God is not generous, but rather is a stingy God.

Eve refutes that idea.

² “Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,” the woman replied. ³ “It’s only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, ‘You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.’”

⁴ “You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman. ⁵ “God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”

The serpent now presents God as being stingy with **knowledge**. God doesn’t want Adam and Eve to know, or have the wisdom to make decisions about what is good and right. God is keeping wisdom and knowledge to himself and people will miss out. The serpent says

God has a scarcity mindset and the serpent invites them to disobey.

Adam and Eve succumb to the temptation and disobey.

⁶ The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too.

The serpent raises the question of whether God is on our side. Whether God has our best interests at heart and whether God has the resources we need to live and thrive. It creates a scarcity mindset in the humans that entice them to disobey. One author suggests a scarcity mindset regularly entices disobedience to what God says.

E.G. If you remember the story of king Saul and David after David killed Goliath. The women were praising Saul and David.

1 Samuel 18:5-9 Whatever Saul asked David to do, David did it successfully. So Saul made him a commander over the men of war, an appointment that was welcomed by the people and Saul's officers alike.

⁶ When the victorious Israelite army was returning home after David had killed the Philistine, women from all the towns of Israel came out to meet King Saul. They sang and danced for joy with tambourines and cymbals. ⁷ This was their song:

**“Saul has killed his thousands,
and David his ten thousands!”**

⁸ This made Saul very angry. “What’s this?” he said. “They credit David with ten thousands and me with only thousands. Next they’ll be making him their king!” ⁹ So from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.

Saul's scarcity mindset was about recognition and fame – “There is not enough fame or recognition for everyone. It caused him to become jealous of one of his most loyal followers.

The early church in Jerusalem struggled with a scarcity mindset in their community, that led to some people receiving more food than others.

Acts 6:1 As the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food.

Some were afraid there would not be enough food to go around and they took extra. As a result, others were not receiving a fair share.

Look what had developed in the church in Corinth. Paul writes to them about getting together for the Lords supper. It was more like a meal than the way we do it now. Paul writes:

I Corinthians 11:20-22 When you meet together, you are not really interested in the Lord's Supper. ²¹ For some of you hurry to eat your own meal without sharing with others. As a result, some go hungry while others get drunk. ²² What? Don't you have your own homes for eating and drinking? Or do you really want to disgrace God's church and shame the poor?

Some people were going to church early to get food to eat and eating more than they should and it resulted in others going hungry. I can hardly imagine behaving like that. Until I started thinking of times that I have rushed to get my share first, because I thought there would never be enough for everyone. Perhaps others may have gone without.

A Scarcity Mindset: It is the perception that "There is only so much to go around – there's not enough for everyone. If I don't get mine first, I might miss out."

And our perceptions of a situation shape our beliefs, our attitude, our words, and ultimately our behavior.

If we have an abundance mentality, we expect to find whatever we need whenever we need it. That is what we believe – and we act that way.

Have you noticed how some people, when there is talk of a shortage of something, they don't seem phased or worried or anxious. They just go on with life as usual – laid back and carefree. “Hey, there will always be enough.” That's how they think.

However, if we have a scarcity mentality – if we believe there are **limited resources** - like food, toilet paper, gasoline, money, opportunities, etc. – we begin to feel **threatened and nervous** about our own lack of options. (Connor)

When we operate with a scarcity mindset, we fear **losing what little** we have and we believe we must protect it. So we try to hold it close or hide it from others. We find it difficult to share with others. We are often jealous or resentful when others experience success.

We can be crippled with a scarcity mentality and we begin to believe we must **compete for everything** – even when resources are readily available to us. We can't see beyond our perceived lack, because our perceptions are distorted.

And then it affects our **relationships** with others. Scarcity thinking leads to fear and suspicion of others. (**Remember Saul and David**) We feel threatened. We feel **unsafe**. We believe we must be vigilant and **protect ourselves** because others will hurt us or take what rightfully belongs to us.

A scarcity mindset sees **limitation and shortage** at every turn. It's a mindset that is easy to gravitate towards, but one that needs to be guarded against. A scarcity mindset contributes to an **unfulfilled life**, one that constantly is concerned about not having enough for ourselves, and others having too much.

Interestingly Jesus teaches about this mindset in his Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 6:25-26 “I tell you, do not worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are?”

Scarcity thinkers tend to go after acquiring things and achievements for **themselves** - such as money, recognition, or power, instead of focusing on life-giving practices for the **whole community** - such as collaboration (let's work at this together), generosity, sharing and being open to change and new ideas.

When a scarcity mentality permeates a community, people become anxious and lose faith in **one another**. We no longer see possibilities because we're focused on dangers around us. We want to protect what little we have.

We might hear statements like these. "We can't welcome outsiders because they take away opportunities that belong to us." Or "We need to make sure there will be enough for us first." "We must save our money. We can't afford to give too much away."

The good news this morning is, there is another option available to followers of Jesus. It is:

II. An Abundance Mindset – "There will always be more."

Even as I say that to you, inside, I find myself raising all kinds of objections. And I find myself thinking, "That can't always be true." Because I have lived through some situations where there wasn't always more."

But Walter Brueggemann, whose devotional book introduced me to this whole concept, invited me to read the bible story I read to us at the beginning and then writes:

Where Jesus governs, there is an abundance for all, more than enough. This gospel claim contradicts the greedy anxiety of economic policies that imagine that we will soon run out and we must get and eat all that we can now.

An abundance mentality flows from a deep sense of personal self-worth and security as one of God's beloved children. It is a sense that "**God loves me and keeps me.**" When that mindset is embedded deeply in my soul, it transforms who I am becoming. An abundance mentality welcomes possibilities and new opportunities.

An abundance mindset envisions endless possibilities and sets lofty goals.

I remember when we were building the gym and the church seemed strapped for money, and we weren't sure how big of a building we could afford, one gentleman with an abundance mindset said, "However big you think you can afford, make it 50% bigger. God will provide the funds."

An abundance mindset believes the best is yet to come. It is one that believes that ideas, resources, and love are unlimited. It creates a zeal and passion for life that is contagious.

Mark Twain described it this way, "Dance like nobody's watching; love like you've never been hurt. Sing like nobody's listening; live like it's heaven on earth."

I must admit, on the one hand it feels like reckless, irresponsible abandon. But on the other hand it sounds like worry free living – abundant living.

Jesus said, when he taught his disciples to pray: pray this:

"Father in heaven, your kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven."

We do not have to wait for some future time to have an abundance mindset. An abundance mindset is available now.

It's a mindset that is honoring to God. We see this mindset being taught by God throughout scripture,

John 10:10 "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." (NASB)

1 Timothy 6:17 "Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment." (NLT)

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 “Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. ⁷ You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don’t give reluctantly or in response to pressure. “For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.” ⁸ And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others..”

Understand, living with an abundance mindset will take real trust that God will come through with what we need.

Perhaps you remember the story in the gospels of Jesus watching people put money into the offering box at church. Rich people put in large sums of money and then a poor widow came and dropped in two tiny coins. Jesus says to his disciples:

“This poor widow has given more than all the rest of them. ⁴ For they have given a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has.”

I think she was displaying an abundance mindset. Have you thought about how much faith and trust in God that must have taken for her? She must have believed that God had more for her somewhere, somehow. You see that is at the heart of an abundance mindset. **“God has more for me if I need it. So I can freely give this away.”** And it has nothing to do with how much you have. It has everything to do with how much you think God has and makes available to you to meet your needs and to give away to others.

We can’t help but develop an abundance mindset as we steadily increase in our personal understanding that our God is limitless. God is for us, and God cannot be contained. (We will learn more about this next week.)

Some of the most powerful words that reflect an abundance mentality are found on the Statue of Liberty. In 1883, Emma Lazarus wrote:

**Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,**

**The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.**

These words welcomed immigrants, desperate for a place of refuge, as they passed through Ellis Island, looking for a new home in the United States. The thinking was, “We have been blessed so greatly, that this nation has more than enough for everyone. So, Welcome everyone.” If we possess abundant thinking, we believe there is plenty available and plenty to be shared.

As followers of Jesus, we believe the invitation is, in following Jesus, to become part of his body – the church. And in that context we become part of the abundance that God uses to supply the needs of others.

Isn't this who we want to be as the church that meets at Five Forks? We want to be that refuge for the desperate. We **can't** do it with a scarcity mindset. We **can** do it with an abundance mindset – that relies completely on God, trusts Jesus as our model, and listens to Holy Spirit directing our decisions.

This week I invite us to uncover the mindset we have.

III. Uncovering My Mindset

One way that can be helpful in thinking through which mindset you have is by reflecting on how you view different parts of your life or how you have responded in different situations.

I must confess, I went out and secured almost as much toilet paper as I could as the pandemic began and we feared scarcity. I soothed my conscience by giving away a few rolls from the cartons I had found.

Just two weeks ago I was standing in Tractor Supply and over heard someone say, “No gasoline from Winchester to Blue Ridge Summit.” I had heard about the pipeline being shut down. 70% of the gas stations in NC were out of gas. I immediately left Tractor Supply and went out and topped up my gas tank – thinking how wise and shrewd I was. Plus I texted my

family to say, quick, go and fill up your gas tank. There is a shortage looming – and we may not have enough for us.”

I also lived through gas rationing in the 70’s. We lined up for as much as 2 hours to get gas, and only certain days of the week. It is not fun. But what those two instances showed me was the real state of my scarcity mindset. It is alive and well.

After being personally convicted and mentally chastised by my devotional reading about a scarcity mindset, I went home and looked in my closet and noticed how many clothes I have – that I might need someday. I looked in my shop and sheds and noticed how much stuff I have kept – just in case I might need it.

I am getting rid of a bunch of stuff because it reveals my scarcity mindset and it fuels a scarcity mindset in me. And I want, with Holy Spirit’s help to be different. I want to learn to give more away and trust God and God’s abundance – and it is not just things, it can be time, accolades, and other areas of life.

Here are some questions I invite you to consider to evaluate your mindset.

Do you share opportunities, ideas, your time, and resources? Or are you more apt to keep those things to yourself?

Do you find it easy to celebrate when a co-worker receives a promotion or a raise? Or do you tend to feel a bit of resentment and that you are more deserving of a promotion?

Regardless of which mindset you feel that you are currently more aligned with, developing a stronger **abundance** mindset is a wise use of time.

I’d like to close this message by providing you with a little table that hopefully will keep you thinking about this throughout the coming week. It helps to reveal the difference between a mindset of scarcity vs. a mindset of abundance.

Scarcity Thinking

“There will never be enough”

Competes to stay on top
Hoards things from others
Won't share knowledge
Won't offer to help others
Suspicious of others
Resents competition
Afraid of being replaced
Believes times are tough
Believes the pie is shrinking
Thinks small and avoids risk
Fears Change

Abundance Thinking

“There will always be more”

Collaborates to stay on top
Generous with others
Shares knowledge
Freely offers to help others
Trusts and builds rapport
Welcomes competition
Strives to grow
Believes the best is yet to come
Believes the pie is growing
Thinks big and embraces risk
Takes ownership of change

Take some time this week and test your thoughts in various areas of your life and in the life of our church. Do I/we primarily have a Scarcity mindset or an Abundance mindset?