

Friends, it's stewardship season at Covenant. It's the time of the year we ask you to consider making a financial commitment to this church, so that we can budget for what's to come. By a show of hands, how many of your favorite sermons are ones in which the pastor spoke about giving and generosity? What a shock, and I think I would answer the same way. You see there are certain taboos that pastors aren't supposed to preach on, namely politics, sex, and money. I'm sure there are other topics, but those are the big three that pastors usually avoid, but there's a problem with that, isn't there? Our faith has a lot to say about all three topics, doesn't it?

So, while it may not be your favorite topic to hear, nor mine to preach, the truth of the matter is that God is interested in all of who we are, even those parts of our lives we consider private, and today we're going to consider money. There are few things that touch our lives more than money. Money affects how we do almost everything in our world. It affects how we treat other people and how they treat us. Though we may not be used to thinking of money in this way, we all have a relationship to money, one that we learned from our upbringing.

What kind of relationship were you taught to have with money? What kind of conversations did you have as a family? Were they anxious, angry, hopeful, or content? Was money a source of shame for you? When I was a kid in the 1980s, all I wanted were clothes from brands like Guess or even **cooler Z Cavaricci**. I think we can all agree how much better my childhood would have been if only I could have worn these high wasted, multi-pleated jeans. Why couldn't I? Because our family couldn't afford it. That experience taught me something about money. Having money helped you fit in, and I didn't. But the story I learned was more complex than that. While we had less than others materially, spiritually, I learned I might just be superior to those who value such material things. You see, the stories we learn about money end up shaping our entire outlook on life. So, here's the question: whether you've had an abundance of money or if you've had to scrape by, what would a healthy relationship to money look like?

Let me suggest this, "The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing." Though you may have heard this verse thousands of times, the reason it resonates with us is because we are assaulted by messages of scarcity from the moment we wake up, until we go to bed at night. Though we live in the wealthiest country in the history of the world, **we live in a scarcity culture**. What do I mean by that? Lynne Twist is a hunger activist and global fundraiser who describes scarcity in her book *The Soul of Money* in this way:

For me, and for many of us, our first waking thought of the day is, "I didn't get enough sleep." The next one is, "I don't have enough time." Whether true or not, that thought of *not enough* occurs to us automatically before we even think to question or examine it. We spend most of the hours and the days of our lives hearing, explaining, complaining, or worrying about what we don't have enough of...Before we even sit up in bed, before our feet touch the floor, we're already inadequate, already behind, already losing, already lacking something. And by the time we go to bed at night, our minds are racing with a litany of what we didn't get, or didn't get done, that day...This internal condition of scarcity, this mind-set of scarcity, lives at the very heart of our jealousies, our greed, our prejudice, and our arguments with life.

I wonder if that sounds familiar to any of you? Scarcity is the water in which we swim, and that's true for the rich and poor alike. You can have more money than you can ever spend and still feel like you don't have enough. And perhaps even more insidious is that sense that you are never enough. Is it too much of a stretch to say that our entire consumption economy is built on convincing everyone that no matter what you have or who you are, you are never enough? Here on Mother's Day, how many of you mothers feel like no matter what you do, it's never enough?

That's the scarcity culture in which we live, and it's completely counter to the life God intends for us. God invites us to live in the trust that no matter what happens, there's always enough. And this life of trust isn't naive optimism. It's a trust that acknowledges the real dangers that are present in our lives. That's what makes this Psalm so powerful, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil. Why? Is it because nothing bad will ever happen to me, and I'll only succeed at everything I do? No, it's because, you are with me, God. If I know that you are with me, then when danger comes my way, I need not fear. I can say, "What's up danger? Don't be a stranger." We know that danger is not optional in our lives. It seems like every day we learn of something else to be afraid of, and while some of it is overhyped, some dangers are all too real. So, **while danger is not optional, fear is.**

When we learn to live in the blessed assurance that we belong to God and nothing can ever snatch us from God's hand as Jesus says in John 10, then we are free to live with an open hand instead of a clenched fist. We are free to be generous with ourselves and others because while we may not have everything we will ever want, we have enough. If we are converted from the world of scarcity to the world of generosity, we'll come to see that our cup is full to the brim. If God is with you, that means you have within you infinite resources to deal with the struggles in front of you, whatever they may be.

There's another story about money that my Grammy Esala used to tell. When she was a little girl, her father Emil was going to chiropractor school in Texas, and they lived in a small trailer that Emil built. One evening, Grammy and her brother Donald wanted a to go buy a quart of milk to have with a bowl of cereal as an evening snack. The problem was they were down to their last dime as a family. Her mother and father talked it over. Perhaps they should wait until morning to buy milk so they could use it for breakfast. And Emil reminded his wife Anna that the Bible tells us to give not worry about tomorrow, for God promises to care us. So, they literally spent their last dime that night. Little did they know, their friend Arvid was listening to this conversation through the window of the trailer, and slide an envelope with \$10 under their door, with a note saying he would not hear of them paying it back. It was enough to get them through the month. Grammy said the family learned that night what it means that the Lord provides.

Stewardship and generosity are not onerous obligations. They are the privilege of those who trust that there is always enough. Because there's always enough, we can give sacrificially, not begrudgingly or out of guilt, but as a spiritual practice of trust. We give not the leftovers of what we have but sacrificially, just as God does. For my part, I give ten percent of my gross income right back to Covenant. And 10% isn't a magic amount that earns you special points with God. It's just a good, biblical guideline that I follow, and part of the reason I do it is because it is a real sacrifice but one that's well worth it. It's worth it to me because I believe in this place and the work we are doing here. Our city needs an accepting, loving community

sharing the glory of God's love with all, and I'm proud of all the ways we do that and how we are looking to expand our welcome.

As you consider your giving this year, know that we don't live in a universe of scarcity. **We live in a generous universe** where there's always enough. Whatever challenges and dangers you may face in a given day, even if you are down to your last dime, know that God is with you always and forever. That means when you wake up in the morning, you are enough. When you lay your head down at night, though you are imperfect and at times fearful, you are still worthy of love and belonging. You have infinite resources within you to meet whatever comes, because in whatever comes, you belong to God, and nothing can snatch you from God's hand.