

## **A mindset of abundance** – Culture of Honour series

Readings: Genesis 12:1 – 7, Ephesians 1:6 - 12

A few weeks back, Kevin and I visited a friend to take back his trailer. He had dropped off a load of firewood on the trailer. When we finished stacking the wood we took his trailer back.

When we got to his place, he said “Can I give you a pumpkin?” We had grown pumpkins at home so didn’t need a pumpkin.

“Would you like some feijoas?” was the next offer. We have a feijoa bush.

“How about some pine cones for the fire then?” We said “yes” to the pine cones. Kevin drove the car, to where the pine cones were all bagged up in a shed already.

“Susan, while Kevin’s doing that, you could pick some kiwi fruit to take home” our friend urged. “Pick the biggest ones you can.”

So we came home with a boot full of pine cones (yay, no kindling to cut for a while) and a bag of large kiwi fruit.

Kevin and I came home overwhelmed by that man’s generosity! He truly modelled the amazing generosity of God’s love for us.

My question today: Do we have a mindset that focuses on the lavish love and provision of God or is our mindset one of scarcity or poverty?

The apostle John wrote:

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! 1 John 3:1a

And of course our reading from Ephesians v7:

In Jesus we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us.

God loves us so much. He wants to lavish on us all the things we need practically, spiritually, and emotionally. God is the creator and owner of all things. There is an abundance of resources and people the Lord can call on. Do we believe that?

I grew up in a single-parent home in the days when the benefit system was not well known. My mother cleaned houses in order to keep me and my three brothers fed and clothed. We lived in a two storey state house. We had very little in the way of material provision. Because of the strain of all of this, we also had very little in the way of emotional support or nurture. This was no-one’s fault. It was just the way things were.

My mother's favourite saying was "Waste not; want not." Much of my mother's frugality has shaped me. My kids give me heaps because I still use old towels for dish cloths. Frugality is not a bad thing; it leads to less rubbish in the landfill and greater care of the earth generally.

However I have to be very careful that my childhood does not limit my view of God. God is not some kind of heavenly miser, sitting on the clouds, eking out what he gives to his people. Rather, the Lord wants to bless us with generous provision including financial provision.

Who remembers singing "My God shall supply all my needs, according to his riches in glory." That is taken from Paul's letter to the Philippians (4:19) and is written in the context of being content with wherever we find ourselves. Paul could say "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."

The reason he can be content is that he does it through Christ strengthens him. You see, even when Paul was hungry, or in want of something in particular; the Lord was still providing for him. The Lord was with Paul providing strength for the current circumstance.

The Bible is full of stories of God providing for ordinary people in miraculous ways. We've considered the story of Abraham and Sarah before. This couple were making the best of a seemingly bad deal. They had no children so were looked down on by many whose world view was that childlessness was a punishment for sin.

You know the story. The Lord intervened. At one point Abraham was told to go out and count the stars – then the Lord promised him "So shall your offspring be." Imagine what that would have been like for him as he gazed into the heavens.

Sarah and Abraham wanted one child; they would have been happy with one. But the Lord wanted to provide for them beyond their wildest dreams. God wasn't going to be limited by their thinking. He wanted to bless them but was also thinking beyond their immediate needs way into the future. God's provision is for them and for all the nations of the earth.

Now let's take a closer look at the passage from Ephesians. The language is over the top really – it's so full of superlatives. You can feel the love pouring from the page!

The whole chapter is worth chewing over at home. In it you see God's generous provision in so many ways. The first few verses talk of God's grace in choosing to adopt us into his family. For someone like me, whose family was a bit of a mess, this means a great deal.

In the interests of time I have only begun at verse 6.

So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

There is no doubt that we serve a generous God.

Why then do we often lament the apparent lack of resources available to us? I know I do.

I believe I need an assistant. There don't seem to be the young people coming through for training that we need.

Our church needs to be discipling our young people and intermediates. There doesn't seem to be the available volunteers who share this same vision.

I want to get started on the new building asap. In fact I believe that we must do so for the health of our church as well achieving our goal of reaching the wider community. We don't yet have enough money.

If we serve such a generous God, then why don't we seem to have all the resources we need?

What do you think?

Here are some of my ideas:

- God knows what we want or think we need is not actually the best thing for us.
- It is not God's time right now.
- The provision is there; we just aren't looking in the right places.
- Someone is not listening when God is calling them to volunteer to help or to give financially.
- We are afraid to trust God for something outrageous in case we are wrong and end up looking silly. We don't want to take a risk.
- Our faith is not big enough.
- We are a bottleneck, not passing on the blessings God has already given.
- Our motives are wrong. 'You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.' James 4:3

All of those are possibilities. I suspect the biggest reason though is that we have a mindset of poverty or scarcity, rather than a mindset of abundance.

The Lord encourages us to ask for what we need.

Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. John 16:24

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. Matthew 7:7

Sure the Lord prefers that we have faith.

If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask in prayer. Matthew 21:22

Never-the-less the Lord's generosity extends to the weak in faith. I identify full with the father whose daughter needed healing when he responded to Jesus with "Lord I believe; help my unbelief." Mark 9:24

The Lord wouldn't tell us to ask if he didn't want to give. People who love each other are generous with each other. Jesus said:

If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

If we are abiding in Jesus, the things we ask for will be the things we know he wants for us. When we ask in the Lord's will, of course he is going to provide for us. And he will provide – lavishly.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us ... Ephesians 3:20

There is that over the top language again!

It is time we got over our scarcity thinking. There are more than enough resources to go around and our Lord will always be generous to us. He wants to pour out blessing upon blessing.

Hudson Taylor, missionary said this: God's work, done God's way, will not lack God's supply.

The mission society founded by Taylor sent more than 800 missionaries to China. 18,000 or so people came to know Christ through that society. His life, mission work, and legacy, declared him without a doubt 'a success'.

He was only a success because he had experienced the generosity of God. He knew the Lord loved to give and give abundantly and so he, and many others, asked God for the things the mission society needed. And God provided abundantly.

And the Lord wants to provide for us, just as much as he did, for Hudson Taylor!

Let's pray:

Generous God, help us to look to you to provide all we need as individuals and as a church. Shift our mindsets from scarcity to abundance. Make us people of persistent prayer as we put our trust in you. We pray this in the name of the One who has given us so much, Jesus Christ. Amen

Reflection questions:

1. Where do you see evidence of God's generous provision?
2. In what circumstances do you feel is a lack of resources?
3. Thinking and praying laterally, what resources might be as-yet untapped?
4. How might you be part of God's provision for someone else?