

Giving

A Five Day Devotional

Shark Tank

On the hit television show Shark Tank, aspiring entrepreneurs who believe they have great ideas make presentations to a panel of investors (sharks) who then choose whether to invest as business partners. If a deal is struck, the sharks come alongside the entrepreneurs and invest their own time, talent, and financial resources in hopes of a great return on their investment.

In the chapters leading up to today's verse, we learn that God had given Solomon the massive responsibility to build the first permanent temple. However willing Solomon was, he was also young and inexperienced. Much like the investors on Shark Tank, David came alongside the young Solomon, counseling him to be strong and courageous. David helped him by providing the plans, pouring in his own financial resources, and encouraging Solomon to begin the work. David took it a step further by calling the leaders of Israel together and making his own presentation, explaining the importance of the project and challenging them to invest their time, talents, and financial resources. In response to their leader's generous investments, the people of Israel rejoiced and joined in to finish the temple. Early acts of selfless leadership and generosity can be offerings God uses to lead others to join in.

"God is still at work, calling modern-day Solomons to tasks that are much greater than they can accomplish on their own. Pray and ask God to show you where your leadership, your time, your money, and/or your wisdom might inspire others to join in what God is already doing." — Joe Park

The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the LORD. David the king also rejoiced greatly.

1 Chronicles 29:9 (NIV)

The Myth of Scarcity

A few years ago, when my youngest daughter was about ten, we went to see a movie as a family. The theater had a self-serve concession area with candy bins. My daughter loves sour gummies, so I filled a bag with an appropriate amount of candy for her, then added some extra because I like them too. We settled into our seats and as the movie started, I put my hand out for a sour gummy. My daughter looked right at me, clasped the bag and pulled it away. You can imagine my response. I was incensed! I paid for the treat, and I had purchased extra expressly for her to share. The moment was such a transparent analogy, hitting me like a ton of bricks: I do this every day with God. God provides me with abundant blessings. Enough. And yet I approach life with a scarcity mind-set, as if I might run out of _____ (fill in the blank: time, money, ideas, energy, love).

Lynne Twist, in her book *The Soul of Money*, reminds us we live in a culture held hostage by the myth of scarcity. She describes that when we wake up in the morning, our first thought is “I didn’t get enough sleep.” When we crawl into bed at night, our last thought is, “I didn’t get enough done today,” and everything in between is a litany of scarcity. She points out that the antidote to scarcity is not abundance as we might assume. In our desire for abundance, we find ourselves captive to a constant cycle of needing more. The antidote for scarcity? Sufficiency. Isn’t that what we find in God’s abundance? God who provides enough ... enough manna, enough grace, enough blessings ... enough of everything so that we may share abundantly.

An inconsequential moment in a movie theater has become a tangible reminder for me about the notion of sufficiency and generosity. In God’s image, we were all born to be generous, but often the myth of scarcity compels us to hold tight to our stuff, like my daughter to her candy.

*How do you demonstrate the myth of scarcity in your life?
In what ways have you experienced God’s sufficient blessings?*
— Lisa Greenwood

**And God will generously provide all you need.
Then you will always have everything you need
and plenty left over to share with others.**

2 Corinthians 9:8 NLT

Day Two

Relying on God

Most of us have experienced that feeling of relief when, after a time of hard work, we can finally take a breath. Our work is done, and now it is time to enjoy the fruits of our labor. We look forward to taking a drive in our new car, treating ourselves to a fancy dinner, and being able to eat, drink, and be merry, much like the Rich Fool of the parable found in Luke 12.

This idea sounds great, right? But Jesus tells the crowd, with harsh criticism, God's thoughts on greed:

“But God said to him, ‘Fool, tonight you will die. Now who will get the things you have prepared for yourself?’ This is the way it will be for those who hoard things for themselves and aren't rich toward God.” (Luke 12:20-21 CEB)

The Rich Fool will die, and the stuff he has accumulated will be worthless to him. Ouch! Seems that although the Rich Fool had amassed substantial wealth, he forgot to acknowledge God's role in his success. Instead of expressing gratitude to God for his abundance, he became complacent. He had become self-reliant rather than relying on God.

The journey of generosity begins with a fundamental understanding that God is the source of everything. Our relationships, skills, and even our wealth are blessings from our Creator. Being sealed by faith means we understand we are not self-made, but God-made. Finding our way home involves giving the glory and thanks to God for his eternal generosity.

Try spending an entire day being attentive to all the ways in which God has provided for you. Keep a list and reflect on each one. Did you notice that while you're listing your blessings, they keep coming? How can you express your gratitude to God? —Kristine Miller

Then Jesus said to them, “Watch out! Guard yourself against all kinds of greed. After all, one's life isn't determined by one's possessions, even when someone is very wealthy.”

Then he told them a parable: “A certain rich man's land produced a bountiful crop. He said to himself, What will I do? I have no place to store my harvest! Then he thought, Here's what I'll do. I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. That's where I'll store all my grain and goods. I'll say to myself, You have stored up plenty of goods, enough for several years. Take it easy! Eat, drink, and enjoy yourself.”

Luke 12:15-19 CEB

Day Three

What's in Your Cup

Jesus had already had a busy day. He'd performed an exorcism and spent time teaching. While he'd been speaking, a Pharisee had invited him to eat dinner. But Jesus ignited a controversy when he didn't wash up before taking his seat at the table.

Being "pure" was a big deal to the Pharisees, so they would wash both themselves and their eating utensils in ritual baths. Some taught that it was important to keep the outside of the cup clean, while others focused on the inside.

Jesus sidesteps their debate altogether by shifting the focus to the contents of our cup. It's not just about being clean, inside or out, but it's about the quality of what's inside. In the comparison, he leaves open the question whether he is talking about what's within our cup or within our heart. One is tied to the other. You can't have good wine and a sour heart.

Jesus then says, what matters isn't the condition of your cup but your willingness to share what's inside. What defines our cleanliness isn't the state of our cups, inside or out, but the abundance of our generosity. Instead of focusing on keeping yourself clean, what matters is giving away your good wine, just as he demonstrated earlier at the wedding at Cana. This is the best antidote to the greed that leads to death. What is within our cup reflects what is within our heart. An empty cup equals a full heart. Surprisingly, when the cup is empty, we arrive home and find our best self: the very person God created us to be.

In what ways do we allow our faith to become focused on keeping ourselves clean? How might you change your focus to the contents of the cup instead of the cup itself? —Len Wilson

But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

Luke 11:41 NIV

The Voice

Sometimes the voices overwhelm us, voices calling for us to buy this or do this; voices calling for us to be fearful or angry; voices reminding us of our failings and sins; voices telling us we are not worthwhile or lovable. One pastor I know refers to these voices as the committee meeting in our minds.

There is, my friends, another voice. A Voice quiet but persistent, a Voice whispering in our ears, “You are mine ... you are loved ... you are forgiven ... you are of eternal worth.” In the midst of the committee meeting going on in your head, can you hear that Voice? In the midst of other voices, can you dare to believe in the other Voice? Can you dare to believe you are both known and loved?

Parents called their rabbi and asked him to please come to their home and straighten out their willful and disobedient child. When the rabbi came to the house, much to the parents’ chagrin, he simply held the boy close to him and never said a word. The boy grew up and became a famous rabbi, known for wisdom and compassion. When asked how he came to be so wise and compassionate, he said, “As a boy, I put my ear close to the chief rabbi’s heart, and in that moment, I heard the heartbeat of God.” Hear the heartbeat of God, whispering “I love you.” And when we hear the heartbeat of God, when we believe in the voice of God whispering “I love you,” then we are home; then we are whole.

At the end of the day, sit down for a few minutes and ask, “What voices did I listen to today?” When do you most often hear God’s whisper? – Scott McKenzie

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

John 10:27 NIV