"Treasure: The Myth of Scarcity"
Malachi 3:10

In the movie *A Bug's Life*, there is a great scene where Hopper explains to the grasshoppers why they must control the ants: *"It's not about food. It's about keeping those ants in line."* https://youtu.be/8jkNNNRkYlM.

Did you notice what drove the panic in that scene? It wasn't that there wasn't enough to go around—it was the fear that someone else was going to take theirs first. We live in a world that trains us from childhood to look through a lens of 'never enough': never enough time, never enough money, never enough security. But what if the scarcity we feel isn't a problem of resources, but a problem of vision?

The scripture we read from Matthew 6 last week addresses this very issue about vision: "The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then, the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" — Matthew 6:22-23

At the time of Jesus, the eye was seen as either generous or stingy. One could see the world as connected and choose to be a part of the flow cycle of love and resources. Or one could see the world as hostile and scarce, where one has to hoard as much as possible. Having a "bad eye" (*ayin ra'ah*) was a well-known idiom for greed, stinginess, and envy. If you travel to the Middle East today, you will still see signs and amulets designed to ward off the evil eye.



The belief is that people who envy your success, health, or possessions look at you with such jealousy that they can influence your well-being in negative ways.

This entire mindset is built on the myth that there is not enough for everyone. It is so pervasive that it becomes our internal narrative. As Dr. Alex Howard notes regarding the mindset of scarcity: https://youtu.be/0uy1-moBTcQ.

What is the remedy for such a perspective? How do we heal from this cultural trap? Through God's guidance, our ancestors in faith knew that the way to heal this mentality is to put ourselves back into the flow of the cycle of blessings. This is about putting our treasure where we want our hearts to follow. By giving generously, we counter the internal narrative of scarcity.

We hear about this practice in the book of Malachi. It is amazing how a book written some 2,500 years ago can give us such profound wisdom for today. The book of Malachi is a collection of sayings given to the people of Israel about 100 years after their return from exile in Babylon. Though they had rebuilt the temple, life and faith were not as vibrant as they had hoped. They were still ruled by a foreign power and felt that God's presence was missing in the way it once was: https://youtu.be/HPGShWZ4Jvk?si=nqo6tP8hzE0ExICI.

In our scripture for today, God addresses a key component of their spiritual health: tithing, or bringing a tenth of their produce and resources. The tithe was established in the Torah (Leviticus 27:30; Numbers 18:21-27; Deuteronomy 12:6, 14:22-29) to support the priests, Levites, and community meals shared with the poor, foreigners, and those without land.

This was the economic and spiritual practice designed to help them live out their calling as a nation blessed to be a blessing. Sharing generously might seem counterintuitive, but it fundamentally transforms our relationship with money and resources, aligning our lives with the heart of God.

Most of the time, people think we give from our excess—the money we won't miss. But giving that helps achieve kingdom alignment goes deeper. It reminds me of what Dorothy Day once wrote: "If you are rushed for time, sow time and you will reap time. Go to church and spend a quiet hour in prayer. You will have more time than ever and your work will get done. Sow time with the poor. Sit and listen to them, give them your time lavishly. You will reap time a hundredfold."

It may seem counterintuitive to spend more time in prayer when pressed for time, but prayer is an investment in realigning our schedules to God's vision. The same is true of our finances. When we invest in giving, our priorities are realigned with what matters most.

As Jacob Armstrong writes: "The way to find enough is not in storing up things for ourselves, but in giving to God first to demonstrate our trust and confidence. When we give to God, we are reminded that God is our source, the one who truly takes care of us. When we hold back, we put the burden and pressure firmly on our own shoulders. This leads to anxiety and unrest."

Most of us grow up carrying fear, shame, or anxiety around money. Even those with substantial material wealth are not immune to the air of scarcity we breathe. Money remains one of our most guarded taboos. But Jesus invites us to live with a sense of joy and freedom in all aspects of life, especially our finances.

Think of two famous bodies of water in the Holy Land: the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. Both are fed by the very same source—the Jordan River. The Sea of Galilee receives water from the river, but it doesn't hold onto it. It drinks, and then it pours that fresh water out into the valleys below. Because water flows *through* it, the Sea of Galilee is vibrant, bursting with fish, surrounded by lush gardens and bustling life. Then there is the Dead Sea. It sits at the lowest point on earth. Water flows into it, but there is no outlet. It holds onto every single drop it receives, hoarding its water under the blazing desert sun. Nothing leaves. And because nothing flows *out*, nothing can live *in* it. It is stagnant, heavy with salt, and entirely devoid of life.

The difference between a thriving soul and a stagnant one isn't the amount of water they receive—it's whether they choose to be a reservoir or a river. Scarcity tricks us into becoming reservoirs. It whispers, *"Hold tight. Save it all. What if there isn't enough tomorrow?"* And in our clutching, we inadvertently create the very deadness we feared. But generosity invites us to be rivers. God never intended for blessings—whether time, talent, or treasure—to stop with us. We are meant to be conduits, letting the goodness of God flow through our open hands to a world in need. And the promise of Malachi is simple: when you let the river flow, the Source will never run dry.

So, where are you holding your breath? Where are you acting like a reservoir when God called you to be a river?

I invite you to take time this week to sit with God and have an honest conversation about your finances. Write a letter to Jesus telling him about your experiences with money, your lingering fears, and where you find yourself today. Write a letter of gratitude for the streams that have nourished you, or a letter asking for the courage to unclench your fists. Then, listen for the gentle quiet that follows—the voice of the One who promises to open the floodgates of heaven and make your life a river of life. Amen.