

Fear of Scarcity: Will You Give Me Any Marbles?

Matthew 10:8 ...freely you received, freely give.

God commands generosity in all aspects of life – not just with material things like possessions or money, but with more personal things like time, kindness, grace, forgiveness, and love. His command, at least in theory, seems a good thing. In practice, however, generosity seems risky and we hesitate. What if we give to others and there's not enough left for us?

Ebenezer Scrooge Lives On

Most of us like receiving – praise, attention, gifts, courtesies, food, love, personal thank-you notes. Lots of things. Receiving is generally not a problem. Giving is.

When it comes to giving – freely and generously giving – we get stuck. If we give too much won't we end up with too little? Won't being generous deprive us? If we feed others, who is going to feed *us*? Every one of us, at least sometimes, hesitates giving because we fear we'll get the short end of the deal. Our fear of scarcity is an up-front fear, easily recognized and often voiced. Scrooge wasn't alone in his stinginess – we're misers too. Fear of scarcity is quite common.

Marbles (A Ted Wise Story)

My friend Ted told a great story about marbles. He used it to show what happens in relationships when one (or both) won't give any “marbles” to the other. I've used his story many times and it always gets its point across.

Say we're sitting opposite each other with a box of marbles on the table between us. Some are yours. Some are mine. You take hold of one end of the box and I take hold of the other end. You tilt up your end of the box and all the marbles roll over to my side. *I* get all the marbles. Then I tilt up my end of the box, and all the marbles roll over to your side. Now *you* get all the marbles. So far so good. Back and forth and we're both happy. But what if I never tilt up my end of the box? Then all the marbles stay on my side ... and you? You get none.

You could, I suppose, just give up and let me have all the marbles, but that doesn't seem fair. Or you could yank your end of the box down and get some marbles back, but now we're fighting and even if you win it still feels crummy because I should *want* to give you some marbles and I didn't do it. You start to wonder about my character. Am I just plain selfish? Haven't I noticed that you don't have any marbles? Don't I care? Maybe I don't trust that you'll give *me* any marbles. (Maybe I fear scarcity too.)

Fear of scarcity makes us reluctant to give. Nobody wants to be left holding the empty end of a box of marbles.

How Giving Really Works

Giving seems risky because we don't understand how it works. We think that giving will deplete our own supply. No, no. It doesn't work that way. Nursing moms learn that the more milk their baby drinks the more milk they produce. Giving doesn't lessen their supply; it increases it. That's the way nursing works. It's also the way God works. Giving increases our supply as well.

Malachi reassures us. So does Luke.

Malachi 3:10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.

Luke 6:38 Give and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.

Ted's marbles story highlights our fear of scarcity, but God's marbles story has a different ending. If another person won't give us any marbles God simply produces a different box with His own marbles and makes sure we have an abundance. God, unlike people, never holds back on marbles.

- People may hold out on us. God never does. -

Putting "Freely Give" in Context

Look at what's said right before this disturbing command: "freely give" is preceded by the phrase "freely you received." Received ... that's past tense – it's already happened. Our sense of deprivation is an illusion.

Will opening our hands to give to others deplete the "possessions" we've hoarded in clenched fists? Not according to God. He knows that giving doesn't lessen our supply. We give ... He provides. That's the way God works. Those who belong to Him have no need to fear scarcity. Freely giving just feels risky ... it isn't.

So why do we feel deprived? Two reasons: inattention (we fail to notice what God is giving us) and ingratitude (we think He's selected a poor gift). We don't suffer from scarcity; we suffer from inattention and ingratitude.

- What's the remedy for feeling deprived? A thankful, receptive heart. -

Missing Your Marbles

Sometimes we think we're not getting any marbles because we don't notice the marbles God is giving us.

Where is it written that our marbles have to come from the person who's holding out on us? God may arrange for a different person to give us marbles. Or He may simply hand us some marbles Himself. Marbles often come from unanticipated sources. We miss seeing our marbles if we look in the wrong place.

We make another error: we think we know which marbles we need and what they ought to look like. God (knowing best what we need) sometimes substitutes other marbles for the ones we've chosen. We miss seeing our marbles because we're expecting something else.

Take care lest you overlook the marbles God gives you.

A Challenge

Test God out. Will He actually pour out blessings that overflow heaven and spill over the edges of our lap? Try giving generously and discover (to your delight) that you end up not with less but with more. Giving didn't lessen Jesus' supply; it won't lessen ours. We (as did He) are to give freely. That means giving without cost (not asking someone to pay us back) and without cause (not asking them to earn our gift). Freely we have received from God. Freely we must give to those He puts into our lives.

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