

I've come to believe that scarcity and abundance are lenses through which we see ourselves and the world around us. If people have a lens of scarcity it generally leads to fear and that sense of fear reduces a person's sense of power or possibilities. They don't have the same sense of "this could happen" or "this is possible". They're in a very fearful place and from that stance we often make really poor decisions, decisions that sometimes hurt us or would hurt others.

The sense of abundance, on the other hand, opens us and leads us to a sense of possibility, a sense of hope, a sense of generosity. We see people being more caring from that sense of abundance, as opposed to the place of fear. They stand in a place that's empowered and it leads them to life-giving decisions, very often.

Scarcity and abundance, I think of as lenses. I am a firm believer that we get to choose. We choose whether our lens is going to be scarcity or abundance.

I need to give some qualifiers to this because if you're hungry or if you're in danger, or if you're living in a space of great disparity where others around you have assumingly much greater abundance than you do, if you're living in an oppressive system, if you're living in a real space of injustice, it's way harder to believe that you have that choice, that you have a choice. Also if you're personally experiencing struggles, if you're exhausted, if you're experiencing health issues or stress, we often need others to help us make that shift in the way that we're seeing things.

I will also say that that shift, even in those difficult circumstances, those shifts are a little more likely or possible if we've been practising using a lens of abundance.

Thinking of that led me also to remembering a first hand experience I had of this, an "Aha", a wake-up call about scarcity and abundance. When I was a student we travelled in Guatemala for eleven days. I was thinking about this day that we visited a Mayan village. The houses were the size of a typical Canadian bedroom. People were cooking in the corners of the houses. Children running in bare feet in rough areas. The community had a single tap in the centre of the community as the running water source for the whole community.

We got to share a Bible study with a women's group that gathered regularly there. The passage for study that day was Matthew 25. We know that passage: when I was hungry you fed me. When I was thirsty you gave me something to drink. When I was a stranger you welcomed me; naked, you clothed me.

There was a classic practise of saying "So what is this passage saying to us today?" The women went down through the list of who's hungry, who do we know that's hungry? Who do we need to help that's hungry? Who do we need to feed? Who do we need to get water to? It turned out there was a community up the road that didn't have even a single spigot of water. They were going down a steep slope to a stream way below their village and hauling water up for everything they needed. They thought they were extending welcome and food to us so we were affording them this opportunity to us, the strangers. And they went through and they decided to write some letters to someone's son who was in prison. It went on.

We were moved that our lenses saw them as having a scarcity of resources but their lens saw them as having strength, as having community, as having good soil that grew food. They were grateful for the water that was running in their community and out of that they were empowered.

It just takes me back to this notion of the lens of scarcity or abundance as being a choice and I don't mean it in any kind of Pollyanna approach. I don't see it as denial. I believe that this approach takes work and think one of the best ways of practising this is giving time and space and money. These are standard things that are available to us in congregations and churches that we have to give.

I heard someone use a practise for inviting in a Sunday worship service. Instead of saying "give as you are able" instead they were saying "give from your abundance." To me that's calling us to that inner place of what is that motivator for our giving. What is that sense we have of our relationship to our stuff, to others, to the world. What makes us give and how do we give?

Another thing that I really like is, I'm really fond of Eric Law's model called "holy currencies". He uses this with churches, that has us see our assets as a currency to be exchanged. He would have us look at not just our money or our space as our assets, in a congregation, for example, but he would have us look at things like the relationships that we have, the opportunity we have to build relationships, wellness as an asset, leadership, truth telling, the whole gamut: money, space, time, leadership and relationships all as assets.

He likes to call them currency and I really like this because he says it's like water. If it's not exchanged, if it's not flowing then it becomes stagnant. We might have an abundance of money in a congregation, for example, but if we're not exchanging that money into some of those other things like relationships, like leadership, like wellness, then it will become stagnant. The language is a little bit different but it helps us change our stories and our narratives about what we have and what our abundance might be.

One of the themes you're looking at is release. What are the things that we need to release in order to make that shift from feeling the fear of scarcity into the place of possibilities, of abundance? I would say that releasing the fear is one thing. We have to release ourselves from certain stories or narratives that can keep us locked in, just to be reminded of the slight shift we can make, from seeing ourselves in a place of scarcity to the power of coming from a place of abundance.