



"When you help someone else up the hill, you reach the top yourself."  
—Anonymous

05-Jun-09

## How Big Is the Pie?

In his bestselling book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey observes that most people are entrenched in what he calls a "scarcity mentality":

They see life as having only so much, as though there were only one pie out there. And if someone were to get a big piece of the pie, it would mean less for everybody else. The Scarcity Mentality is the zero-sum paradigm of life.

People with a Scarcity Mentality have a very difficult time sharing recognition and credit, power or profit—even with those who help in the production. They also have a very hard time being genuinely happy for the successes of other people—even, and sometimes especially, members of their own family or close friends and associates. It's almost as if something is being taken from them when someone else receives special recognition or windfall gain or has remarkable success or achievement.

Although they might verbally express happiness for others' success, inwardly they are eating their hearts out. Their sense of worth comes from being compared, and someone else's success, to some degree, means their failure. Only so many people can be "A" students; only one person can be "number one." . . .

Often, people with a Scarcity Mentality harbor secret hopes that others might suffer misfortune—not terrible misfortune, but acceptable misfortune that would keep them "in their place." They're always comparing, always competing. They give their energies to possessing things or other people in order to increase their sense of worth.

They want other people to be the way they want them to be. They often want to clone them, and they surround themselves with "yes" people—people who won't challenge them, people who are weaker than they. It's difficult for people with a Scarcity Mentality to be members of a complementary team. They look on differences as signs of insubordination and disloyalty.

[Helel](#) (typically called [Lucifer](#)) had a scarcity mentality—in essence, not being able to "see" [God](#) and His abundance—that led to his downfall and transformation into [Satan](#). His spirit of competition, infused with prideful comparison, caused Helel to begin nursing the thoughts that led him to challenge God. Rather than giving God credit for his marvelous existence and being content with the abundance where God had placed him, he started down a path of wanting to have or be more than God had given him—and the biggest obstacle to his fulfilling his desire was God Himself. After his rebellion failed, Satan used this same mentality in his spiritual assault on Adam and Eve, implying that God was withholding something good from them—that He was causing scarcity in their new lives. The rest, as we say, is history.

We in the church, despite coming out of [the world](#) and beginning to experience God's abundance, are not immune to this frame of mind. While still spiritually immature, the twelve disciples showed such a mentality when they focused on their positions in God's Kingdom. Several times, their conversations centered on "Who would be greatest?" Matthew records that they came to Christ to ask, "Who then is greatest in the [kingdom of heaven](#)?" ([Matthew 18:1](#)). On a separate occasion, [Jesus](#) approaches *them* and asks, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?" They refuse to answer because they do not want to admit that they had been debating their future statuses ([Mark 9:33-34](#); see [Luke 9:46-47](#)). In both instances, Jesus points them to the example of humility in *small* children.

At another time, when they are again disputing "which of them should be considered the greatest," Jesus advises them not to emulate Gentile leaders who exercised lordship, but instead to follow His example in serving those over whom He had authority ([Luke 22:24-27](#)). It is natural to assume that the question of "who is [or would be] greatest" came up only once during their time with Him, but a careful reading shows significant differences that indicate that this came up several times. Apparently, the disciples were susceptible to this scarcity mentality—that there is a limited amount of success, achievement, and blessing, and thus we must compete for what exists. This even carried over into their view of God and His Kingdom!

We can see something similar occurring today. When Jesus says, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations" ([Matthew 24:14](#)), He is not establishing a prize for which His Body should compete, but prophesying of a future event. That God records something in advance proves that *He* will abundantly supply all that is needed for it to come to pass. Given that He will bring it to pass, it does not glorify Him when parts of His Body squabble over their respective roles and opportunities in serving Him. Rather than competing for the biggest piece of the pie, should we not be thankful to God that He is proclaiming His truth, and that we have a small part to play in it?

There is no scarcity with God. He is not a man, who only has so much to give. If He gives to one part of the Body, it does not mean the rest of the Body is missing out. His blessing, reward, or recognition of others does not mean that we are somehow losing, nor does His blessing or reward of us indicate that we are somehow winning. If the organs in a human body were to become jealous and competitive toward each other—that is, if they began to behave as if there were scarcity—sickness and confusion would be the result. So it is with the spiritual Body.

The night before His death, Jesus tells the disciples, "In My Father's house are *many* mansions [offices; dwelling places]; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (

[John 14:2](#), emphasis ours throughout). There is room enough for everyone! Paul tells the Athenians that God "gives to *all* life, breath, and *all things*" ([Acts 17:25](#)). To the Philippians he writes, "And my God shall supply *all your need* according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" ([Philippians 4:19](#)).

There is no scarcity with God. Mankind, disbelieving God's ability to provide, easily falls into the trap of believing that there is only so much to go around, and every last bit of money, praise, attention, affection, recognition, or any other form of physical or emotional wealth must be fought over. While on a job or growing up, we may have experienced an environment of scarcity, but if we perpetuate it in our relationship with God and His children, it demonstrates that we lack trust in God.

Those with a scarcity mentality do not grasp God's "bigness"—His sovereignty, providence, and ability to supply every spiritual, physical, and emotional need. Just because one person or group is doing something well does not mean that everyone else is somehow "losing." We have no need to compete for God's favor; indeed, competition—comparing ourselves among ourselves and striving to be better than another—will *separate* us from Him and keep us from His favor!

As sovereign Creator and the source of everything, God is manifestly able and willing to supply every need of His children. There is no scarcity with God. If we believe this, it will be evident in our lives because they will be free from competition, from futile comparisons, and from a feeling of loss when another part of the Body is blessed. Thus Paul was inspired to write, ". . . if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" ([1 Corinthians 12:26](#)).

- David C. Grabbe

---

## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [How Big Is God?](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Richard Ritenbaugh cautions us not to have a one-dimensional perspective of God, pointing to the multi-faceted aspects of His personality and His vast works. Our puny minds can only grasp a tiny sliver of what God really is. Far less than a toddler to an adult is our understanding compared to God's. As a meticulous micro-manager of His universe, calling every star by name, numbering every sparrow and every hair upon our head, God is active in every aspect of creation, including scrutinizing every detail of our lives. We desperately need to bring to our lives a sense of awe of the Creator, coupled with a sense of our own humility—grateful for His creative work in us, transforming us from maggots to members of His family.

---

## From the Archives: Featured Article

### [All in All](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Have you ever wondered what "all in all" means in relation to God and Christ? John Ritenbaugh explains how this term has great significance to us today!

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).

---