

**“More, more, more!”**

*Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. <sup>2</sup>And as they migrated from the east,\* they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. <sup>3</sup>And they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.’ And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. <sup>4</sup>Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.’ <sup>5</sup>The Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. <sup>6</sup>And the Lord said, ‘Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup>Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.’ <sup>8</sup>So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. <sup>9</sup>Therefore it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused\* the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. -- **Genesis 11:1-9 (NRSV)***

More, more, more, like skyscrapers looming over us casting long shadows, our desire for more power, prestige, wealth, and domination has created a culture of oppressive “not-enoughness.” We are over-whelmed, over worked, underpaid, and over stressed. Our perspective of how much we actually have is skewed by the immensity of images of what we “ought to have.” Why is that?

And how do we confront this myth of scarcity and focus on abundance – How can we maintain an attitude of gratitude in these times of scarcity, an attitude which these nomads apparently were not able to muster...

What’s the sin here? Working together for a common goal? Building a great city? A giant tower reaching to the heavens? If that’s the case we are really in trouble! Look at New York, Chicago, have you seen that new tower in Dubai – what about the international space station? Talk about reaching to the heavens! I just read that some 11-year old kid has come up with an experiment to test the effects of micro-gravity on beer brewing and they’re doing it ON the space station!

No – I think the main thing that God had an issue with is the fact that these people didn’t trust God’s promises enough, so they were so insecure that they deliberately went against God’s commands.

From the very beginning – day six of creation – in *Genesis 1:28*, “God blessed them, [Adam & Eve] and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth ...”

Then God commanded Noah and his family twice – once in Gen 9:1 and again in 9:7, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.”

These people at Babel couldn't conceive of the fact that their dispersion around the earth could possibly result in security, let alone abundance! They only felt safe living in groups – after all think about the times they were living in; probably around 4000 BCE, the very start of the Bronze Age

According to Wikipedia, I love Wikipedia, this is about the time we begin to see advanced, urban civilizations – cities, the ability to work with bronze expanded the productivity of agriculture, and the latest invention, writing, would also change the world. In the 3rd millennium BC, the growth of these riches became a source of contention in the political world, and rulers sought more wealth and more power. We also see the first appearances of mega architecture, imperialism, and, of course... internal revolution. Insecurity.

The richer they got, the more insecure they felt. Scarcity in the midst of abundance...

Here was a community – an entire society so worried that they won't have enough that they spent all they had trying to get more, to build higher, to make a name for themselves that they completely forgot what they were supposed to be doing in the first place. Wow. Sound familiar? I wonder if they had some kind of advertising and marketing going on...

Consumerism is what it looks like today. We all might be fine – secure comfortable happy – if only Madison Avenue and would quit telling us we aren't rich enough, fast enough, smart enough, strong enough, young enough, OLD enough, handsome enough, pretty enough, manly enough, girly enough, skinny enough, sweet-smelling enough – Oh My Gosh! ...and that's just a partial list! No wonder we always feel insecure! Nothing is ever "enough."

Who here is familiar with the term mid-life crisis? And yes – women get it too! On the plus side, I think it played a part in my finally getting sober. But more often than not – and I'll be talking about men, here – more often than not a man starts feeling a little insecure that he's not attractive or athletic or rich enough and he thinks he needs to do something to prove that he's still got it. – And he doesn't even know what "it" is! Picture the gray haired guy in the red shiny red sports car.

Better yet – picture me, visiting my youth group in Denver, instead of renting a sensible economic car like a Toyota or a Ford Taurus or something – I spend 20 bucks a day extra to rent a Dodge Charger because I think it'll impress the teenagers! It did btw 😊

That's what these people at Babel were feeling! Insecurity. My Dodge Charger was a smaller version of their Tower. That new outfit, that gym membership, or that 2000 dollar exercise machine – most expensive clothes rack ever! That's our tower of Babel. That's us, succumbing to the feeling of scarcity and "not-enough-ness" rather than trusting and obeying God.

And get this: God almost missed this whole tower-building, mid-life crisis. Not because God couldn't keep track of what was going on, but because of just how insignificant it really was. The Tower of Babel, after all the work they put into it, with the brick making and the masonry and the cooperation – we know that's not easy – Their giant tower was so insignificant that God had to DESCEND – God had to stoop down just to see it!

We pray in the Lord's prayer, "...for thine is the glory." The glory goes to God – not to us!

That means that when we start feeling those feelings of "not-enough-ness," we should do something that brings glory to God – not to ourselves.

Who doesn't feel better after doing something for someone else? And yet, we never think of that at the time do we? What we do for the least of these we do for God – For Jesus himself.

Generosity from scarcity.

A small group of women from Uganda, after hearing about the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, raised almost \$1,000.00 for the people of New Orleans. Women who were refugees of war in their own country; women who had lost everything – livestock, homes, husbands, children, fathers, even their own health – heard about the plight of the people of New Orleans and were moved to give. These women sat down to their trades and made jewelry and beads and sent the profits to the people of New Orleans who were also refugees – and maybe that's the key. The losses of the victims of Katrina mirrored the losses of these women and so they were moved to do something – not for their own benefit – but for the benefit of someone whose suffering was similar to their own.

So how do we turn our feelings of scarcity – our "not-enough-ness" – our "crisis" – even if it's not really a crisis, it's crisis enough to make us spend money we shouldn't on things we don't need, right?

How can we find that urge to spend and change it into an urge to do something for someone else?

What could the people of Babel have done to stave off the fear and insecurity instead of building a giant monument to themselves? One idea that comes to my mind right away is that they could've built the exact same tower – to house and feed the homeless. They could build the same exact thing; only not for the glory of the people but for the needs of the people, which is the work of the kingdom.

Why do churches build new buildings? Why do they have stewardship campaigns like Public TV?

Sometimes a church thinks that need to build a new sanctuary – a very expensive proposition – in order to make a name for themselves; to leave a legacy of what a marvelous church they were.

OR... they can build the same thing with eye toward the community. It's the great work of the Kingdom. It's meals for the hungry. It's an after school program. As poor as we all feel in this economy, we can remember those who are feeling the scarcity even closer to home – right here in the Valley; those who wonder where their next meal is coming from. Those who skip dinner so their kids can get one pair of shoes that fits...

I'm really preaching to myself here.

I came upon an article called; “How to Create an Abundance Mentality.” I’m just going to give you the 9 points but it’s all pretty simple.

1. Look for symptoms of a scarcity mentality – these people take things a little too seriously. You know, “If I fail, everything will come crashing down...” It won’t, and we need to remind ourselves of that.
2. Focus on our abundance.
3. Appreciate. Huge one. This one is Gratitude and gratitude is humility.
4. This one is especially hard for some of us – get organized. Clean home, folded clothes, you know...
5. Replace the “scarcity vibe” that you get from advertising and media. That means less tv. Hang out with actual people. Do stuff at church!
6. ...and this is perfect for stewardship season – Share the wealth! Feeling like you don’t have enough money? Give some away!
7. Create “win-win” situations. Remember there are very few actual win-lose situations. Scarcity mentality tells us it’s my way or I lose. Abundance mentality creates situations where both parties come out ahead; Consensus. Most situations are really “Win-or-break even” anyway!
8. Lots of little reminders. It’s easy to slip back into old behaviors. Tape up some easy affirmations where you’ll see them – everywhere! My mother had them all over the house!
9. Your greatest loss might be your greatest opportunity. Tell that to the family about to lose their home. Starting over might be what they really needed anyway. I don’t teach dancing anymore – I can’t really because the worst thing I could imagine happening, happened. I broke both my feet at the same time - Pretty bad news for a dancer; but I wouldn’t be here if I was still trying to make a living in the dance studio!

One more tip and it’s something my grandmother used to say: “Comparisons are odious.” *Hateful; extremely unpleasant; repulsive*. Don’t compare what you have – or what you don’t – to what other people have. You are not them.

That’s ultimately what these people were doing, isn’t it? Comparing themselves to others? We’ll build this tower to make a name for ourselves and we’ll be remembered. Well they got what they wanted. We remember them. But for what?

The bottom line lesson? Trust God and obey. Imagine how we’d remember these nomads from the plains of Shinar if only they’d done that.

Amen.