

Generosity E1 Final

Abundance or Scarcity

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Tim: Hey, everybody. I'm Tim Mackie and welcome to The Bible Project podcast. Today on the podcast, we are starting a new series that's connected to a brand new Bible Project theme video that we're working on. It's about a topic that is actually really important in the biblical story but it also is a vital part of our everyday lived experience. The theme is Generosity, and it's connected to the experience that most of us know, which is that of scarcity and abundance.

Scarcity causes a lot of anxiety in the human psyche. Jesus knew a lot about anxiety through his own personal life experience, and he talked about it a lot too. He said famous lines like this from Luke 12. "Therefore, I tell you, don't be anxious about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear for life is more than food and the body is more than clothes. Consider the ravens, they don't sow or reap, they don't have any storerooms or barns, and yet God feeds them. How much more valuable are you than birds? Who of you by worrying could add a single hour to your life? And since you can't do this very little thing, why do you worry about all the rest?"

Now if you're like me, when you hear those words of Jesus, your first reaction might be that this sounds like somebody who's a hippie or carefree. So what's happening here when we hear the words of Jesus, but actually want to resist or come up with objections to what he's saying? This isn't a unique experience to us. This is what happens to lots of people when they hear Jesus' teachings about anxiety and the freedom from being a slave to your possessions and your money. What's happening is a clash of worldviews. I simply don't hold the same view of the universe that Jesus does when it comes to thinking about money, possessions, resources, scarcity, and abundance.

So in this episode, we're going to dig into this teaching of Jesus. And what we're going to discover is Jesus is actually articulating a mindset, a whole view of the world that has been soaked and immersed in page 1 of Genesis. Jesus has a conception of the universe, that it's a beautiful creation packed with an overabundance of resources and opportunities and potential, and that it's a generous gift of the creator to us. Jesus believes that we are all being hosted by this generous creator, and if we can just tune in to that creator's love and overwhelming generosity, it will change how you live and experience all of life.

So how did Jesus get this mindset? How did he hold this mindset of generosity with all the pain and suffering that he saw around him? How did Jesus believe all these ideas when he was suffering and being killed on the cross? These are some of the questions that we're going to ask today as we begin to trace the theme of generosity throughout the storyline of the Bible. You guys, thank you for joining us on The Bible Project podcast. Here we go.

Jon: We get to start a new video on the topic of generosity. This is a video that we've talked about doing for a while. It wasn't on your original list of videos.

Tim: It was not. That's correct.

Jon: You brought like a master list five years ago, and we've deviated from that list many times.

Tim: But mainly by adding things.

Jon: Yeah. I don't think we've taken anything off of the list.

Tim: No. It was a big list of biblical theology videos and biblical book videos, but we've added some that we've come to call topics. Some of these have taken the form of word studies. They're important topics, words or ideas in the Bible. They don't necessarily stretch from cover to cover and get a full-scale development. But some do.

Jon: This was a new paradigm for me of thinking of the difference between a theme and a topic. So you had about two dozen themes. And a theme for you is an idea, a motif that usually begins in the first couple pages of the Bible.

Tim: Correct. Usually connected to a word image or motif that's introduced in the first narrative of Genesis.

Jon: So you see it the beginning of the narrative, and then you can actually follow it like a melody throughout the entire storyline of the Bible.

Tim: Correct.

Jon: And it has its climax in the person of Jesus and his life, death, and resurrection, and then continues on to its final resolution in new creation. So we've done a lot of those, and we've stayed away from more what you would call topic videos or topics, which the Bible might speak to - it might even speak to a lot - but it doesn't necessarily get developed in the same way.

Tim: Well, it doesn't mean it's a theme that just keeps popping up. Once you see a theme, core biblical themes that are weaving the whole narrative together, once you see the core ones you just start to see them everywhere. They're everywhere. However, there are also important ideas in the Bible that are repeated in many places though maybe not as prominent as themes.

Jon: It's not just about prominence though.

Tim: It's not just about prominence. I should be honest and say it's also just there's a matter of judgment call.

Jon: Yeah, seems like it.

Tim: Because the themes that we've covered are also themes that I think are underrepresented in the Christian tradition, but that are really important in the Hebrew Bible and in Jewish tradition. And it turns out in the New Testament we just don't always have eyes to see them.

Jon: Even though they're all over.

Tim: Even though they're all over. Certain traditions of Christianity haven't equipped us to notice these things in the Bible. So those are the things I try and move towards. The

theme of generosity which overlaps with the concept and theme and word of grace in the Bible, it's actually really a big deal. It's a really big theme.

Jon: Have you moved then from topic to theme on this topic?

Tim: I don't know. Let's see. I've been pondering this for a while and...

Jon: Our good friend who's been a big part of the organization is a massive champion of biblical generosity - is a term that he likes to use.

Tim: That's right. He influenced a part of why The Bible Project is free.

Jon: Totally.

Tim: The resources are free because of his influence.

Jon: He was at ground level on how we were going to develop resources for this and the model of being free kind of a pay it forward.

Tim: Nonprofit animation studio.

Jon: Crowdfunding.

Tim: Crowdfunding, yeah.

Jon: And so he's been just every year just like, "Hey, when are you making a video on generosity?"

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: "It is a theme, right?" And then you'd be like, "Well, it's a topic."

Tim: Let's just say it's important. It's talked about all over the Bible, and we're going to make a video about it. I trust it's going to be awesome.

[00:08:04]

Tim: We usually start in Genesis, and of course, we will spend time talking about Genesis 1 and 2, but I thought we should first ponder a teaching of Jesus where he puts a number of things together, namely the concepts of freedom from anxiety, watching and paying attention to flowers and birds, and generosity especially towards the poor. For Jesus, those three things are closely bound together.

Jon: Generosity for the poor, anxiety about life and...What was the other thing?

Tim: How well you pay attention to birds and flowers. In Jesus' mind, these are three things that just go together really.

Jon: Like how good of a birdwatcher you are, a botanist?

Tim: Yeah, Luke 12. He said to his disciples, "For this reason, I tell you, don't be anxious about your life, what you will eat; don't be anxious about your body, what clothes you put on for life is more than food and the body more than clothing. Ponder the ravens, they don't sow seed or reap a harvest, they have no storerooms or barns yet God feeds them. How much more valuable are you than birds? And which of you by worrying can add an hour to his lifespan? And if you can't do even a very little thing, why then do you worry about other matters?"

Ponder the lilies how they grow; they don't toil or spin clothes - like material fabric - but I tell you not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. And if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more will He clothe you. You who trust God so little! And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink. Don't foster your anxiety. For all of these things, the nations of the world eagerly seek. And your Father knows that you need these things, but seek His kingdom and all these things will be granted to you. Don't be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, give to the poor, make for yourselves money belts that don't wear out in unfailing treasure in heaven where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also."

Jon: Classic Jesus.

Tim: Totally. So good man. Just like the ultimate sage and like weave together things that you normally wouldn't put together into one place. Anxiety, ravens, flowers, ancient kings, and generosity to the poor. This is Luke's version of this teaching. Matthew has packaged it a little bit differently in the Sermon on the Mount.

I'm actually just curious, I have my own things that occurred to me and challenges that I've had with this teaching over the years, but I'm curious - I've been thinking about this in the context of our conversation - but what strikes you as either thoughts or potential objections that one might have to Jesus?

Jon: Sure. It feels very hippie, which makes it feel a little naive.

Tim: Irresponsible.

Jon: Well, irresponsible. Like if you just went around, never worrying or never concerning yourself with even making sure you had clothes on your back, and you're just like, "Yeah, well, the flowers don't worry about it," it's like, "You're not flower."

Tim: You're human.

Jon: You're a human being.

Tim: You don't have feathers like a raven.

Tim: Right. You don't look at a flower and go, "Hey, put some clothes on." Maybe Jesus is trying to be provocative here.

Tim: He seems to have had a habit of doing that kind of thing.

Jon: But you want to take him seriously, and you want to say, "Okay, should I not ever worry?" He probably did have to worry like, "Do I have a cloak this winter?"

Tim: Yeah, that's right. "Where's my cloak."

Jon: And I guess in a different socio-economic status, you're going to have to worry about that. I am a middle-class Westerner, and it's like, "Do I have a coat this year that I think is cool?"

Tim: That's your question.

Jon: That's my question. So obviously, that's a different level of worrying. It's a little easier to get there.

Tim: Well, let's focus on that. So what you're saying is, you live in a very different cultural setting than Jesus, so the way you conceive of food availability, and clothing is totally different.

Jon: Totally different. Those aren't the things I worry about. I worry about other things.

Tim: That's right. Let's just place Jesus in this setting. 1st Century Galilee, this is a people group living on their ancestral land, the Israelites, under military occupation by the Romans. Tax burdens are insanely heavy, which is why taxes feature so much in Jesus parables because his day-to-day life is how...

Jon: What percentage of your income?

Tim: Oh, I don't know off the top of my head. I'd have to do some homework. But the fact that it features a lot in Jesus' teachings, and the way that the Romans profited from the subjugated people groups in the empire was through taxation. And in that region, it's just all agriculture. Think of all of his parables filled with day laborers, or people who have to sell their land or dream of finding treasure. Jesus parables are filled - you can see with the stories and anxieties with the people that he's talking to. So in that setting, worrying about food and clothing...many people live on subsistence wages and that kind of thing.

Jon: Which many people today still do.

Tim: And many, many, many large percentage of the human race still. So there, it's important to translate, to imagine what in every different person's cultural setting is the equivalent of the kind of anxieties he's talking about. But even then, that doesn't relieve the tension that you're placing your finger on, which is, is this a carefree Jesus? Is this a care less Jesus? Is he doing what he often does, which is, say something hyperbolic on one extreme to force you awake and to really think about the heart of what he's getting at?

My mind is often gone to another aspect of this, which is what about...like the Ravens, I typically see are either flying and trees or they're like squashed on the road.

Jon: The road kill.

Tim: Yeah. Actually, ever since I started following Jesus and I read the saying, I would see a dead crow squashed over getting picked on by other crows, and I'm just like, "Hmm."

Jon: "That one wasn't worrying."

Tim: And was God paying attention to that one?

Jon: All right.

Tim: The whole thing is God cares about the birds. You're more valuable than birds, so God cares more about you. And I'm like, "Well, what about the dead crow and what about the wildflower field that gets caught by a wildfire?" That's where my mind goes is all the instances where nature gives you the opposite of superabundance, it gives you devastation and death. And what is God's role in that? You know what I'm saying?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Well, what we typically go towards, what we just did was go towards the exceptions to what he's saying instead of focusing on the point that he is making, which is actually a good point.

Jon: Does Matthew's version of this say ravens? Just "ravens" feels like a new detail to me. I'm more familiar with the Matthew saying.

Tim: Got it.

Jon: I just never pictured ravens. Ravens are scavengers.

Tim: They are so are crows

Jon: But I think Matthew says birds of the air or something like that.

Tim: Got it here. I'm going to look it up.

Jon: And so I always pictured like bluebirds.

Tim: Oh, like Robin?

Jon: Humbird.

Tim: Oh, you're right. In Matthew 6, it's just the birds of the...it's the generic word for birds. Not a species word, but a higher-level category word. Whereas Luke gives us the specific a word for raven or crow.

Jon: Crows are fighters.

Tim: Yeah, they are scrappy.

Jon: They are scrappy animals.

Tim: That's right. Actually, that's fascinating. I actually hadn't pondered that before this moment, but in Luke's version, he retains the word crow. A crow is non-kosher precisely because it's a scavenger. It's the birds of prey, the carnivorous birds that are the unclean ones - the impure...

Jon: You don't eat them.

Tim: ...that Jews don't eat. That's interesting. God provides for them.

Jon: With other animals.

Tim: By carcasses of other animals.

Jon: But also, I mean, they eat anything.

Tim: That's right. They'll eat berries or whatever. "There's lots of exceptions," you could say to Jesus. My hunch is that we would "But Jesus, what about the crows that die in a famine or whatever?" He might have a response to that. But I think his point would be, "But didn't you hear the point that I was making, which is, the ravens and these flowers exist as a form and they experience a form of abundance. They are a sign of abundance. Creatures out there, they don't spend their time investing in food prep and food storage. But they're beautiful. And they seem to always have enough food."

Jon: Well, I mean, I think if crows had enough of a prefrontal cortex, they might store food.

Tim: Oh, that's a good point.

Jon: I don't think they know how to.

Tim: Well, totally. And I think that's part of his point though is there are many creatures that exists in the world, they have enough, or they're just splendorous like flowers, and they are a witness to the overabundance that God has packed into creation.

Jon: Interesting.

Tim: And he says, "If you ponder the existence of a bird or a lily long enough, it will free you from anxiety." That's his point.

Jon: That's his point.

Tim: That's his point. Don't you be anxious! Ponder the ravens. Ponder the lilies. Somehow the lilies are just beautiful.

Jon: Do you think Jesus wants you to stop and just hang out and think about birds?

Tim: I mean, what else does he mean? Ponder the raven.

Jon: Well, he might just mean, for example, for a moment, for this moment, I don't want you to go home and spend the rest of the afternoon thinking about birds.

Tim: Well, no, no, man. He's a wisdom sage.

Jon: Yeah, he wants you to think about birds.

Tim: He wants you to stop and think about the birds for an afternoon.

Jon: He just wants you to be a bird watcher.

Tim: Just like as we'll see a little bit later, he wants you to ponder a rainstorm and what that says about the character of God. Here it's a flower and a bird tells you about the character of...

Jon: I thought before that bird watching would be a good activity for me.

Tim: Oh, really?

Jon: Yeah. Because it forces you to be very present and...

Tim: Yeah, to pay attention to things you normally ignore or overlook.

Jon: Yeah. And just to be very embodied in nature and be observing. And then there's a gamification aspect of it where you're checking off birds turns into like a...

Tim: You can make it an adventure.

Jon: Yeah, make it an adventure. So as you ponder nature, birds, flowers and the abundance that they kind of thrive within, it's like there's this ecosystem and it spins off so much value that we could have these creatures and these flowers that just spring to life and flourish, and they don't have anxiety the way that humans have anxiety.

Tim: Correct. What kind of creature seems to be free from anxiety yet experiences abundance?

Jon: Ones that are conscious of their own self?

Tim: Totally. Yeah, that's right. There are...

Jon: Is there crow self-awareness, or self-consciousness?

Tim: Well, or he thinks that there are certain advantages to not being that self-conscious. That's interesting.

Jon: That is interesting to think about.

Tim: The crows have one up on us because they're free from a whole...Their brains just don't have to do all of this.

Jon: But they're very intelligent creatures.

Tim: Yes, they are. Yes, they are. They use tools. There was one by my house dropping nuts from the telephone wires above.

Jon: To break them?

Tim: To break them open. I watched him do it.

Jon: Crows can remember human faces. If you mess with the crow, it'll remember you and you'll make an enemy.

Tim: We're pondering crows right now.

Jon: We're pondering crows.

Tim: We're doing what Jesus told us to do. So while I look at the birds and these lilies, I see living things that don't stress out about their subsistence and their needs, and they always seem to be provided for. And in the case of flowers, they're just drop dead, gorgeous, just beautiful, mind-blowing. Jesus draws from that conclusion about God's generosity, and care that humans would do well to pay attention to. Because look what he goes on to say.

He goes on to say, "Why do you freak out about clothes and food? You trust God so little." He equates their inability to worry as this model of trust. So fascinating. Then in vs 29, he goes on to say, "Listen, this is how the non-Jews see the world. All they think life meaning is about food and drink and clothing and security. Your Father knows these things. Here's what I tell you to do, seek the kingdom, which is a phrase that's been almost Christianized out of having any meaning." You have to imagine yourself into what Jesus meant when he said, "the kingdom of God is here. So follow me."

Jon: I don't know if I appreciate it.

Tim: It's almost you have to upload how many other hours of conversation we've had over the last five years. Well, if you prioritize loving your neighbor as yourself...

Jon: You're using kingdom here in a nonliteral sense, where a 1st-century Jewish person would have heard that and be like, "Yeah, when Israel gets its own freedom from any other empire and we have a kingdom."

Tim: That's how some people might have heard him on day one when he's going around announcing. But if you're following Jesus around the hills of Galilee, and you've been listening to him teach, you know that living under God's reign means God's kingdom as defined by Jesus. Jesus is restarting the Genesis 1 Eden project of humans living in partnership with the reign of God. It's about a different way to conceive of human relationships, a different way of conceiving of power and status relationships. Sermon on the Mount -all that stuff.

Jon: Right.

Tim: Transformation of the heart, Jeremiah 31, Torah written on the heart. New humans. So if you seek to live by the Sermon on the Mount, essentially what you'll find is that

your needs will be provided for. All these things will be granted to you. It's sort of like your needs are provided for precisely when you stop stressing out about them as your goal. That's what Jesus' point is here. Then look at what he says. The final line is "Sell your stuff. Sell stuff."

Jon: And give it away.

Tim: And give it away. Here's what you'll paradoxically find your money belts won't wear out because you're participating in the new creation - what he calls unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief can come near or moth destroy it.

Jon: The very Christianization of this is like jewels in your crown. Like bonus points, bigger mansion in new creation. It doesn't seem that but I got a man that's not what he's thinking about.

Tim: No. I think you can make it way more practical and realistic. What he's talking about in his day is, think is the day before you have digital currency or virtual currency. Like what is the savings that me and my wife save up? They're just like numbers on a computer in a bank. Like what is that? In a time when all your currency is an actual hard material, how you create structures for saving and investment and long-term security. It's very different setup.

So Jesus' whole point is if you make your own personal security the main focus of your life goals, what you'll paradoxically find - This is Ecclesiastes. This paragraph has Ecclesiastes all over it - it'll actually ruin you, destroy you through anxiety, and more than likely the structures, the system's going to break and it won't be there when you need it.

Jon: Or you'll die and you'll give it to someone else.

Tim: And then they'll waste it. So his whole point is if you're living by the Sermon on the Mount, what you're doing is you are investing in new creation. You are living in the present as if you're living in the new creation. And when you live in that way, you are creating realities that last on into the future.

Jon: The reason why we like money is because you can exchange it for stuff that you need and want. So it's about value. But there's something about a way of living, which is the way of the kingdom, where there's a different type of currency, a different type of value.

Tim: That's right, that doesn't wear out.

Jon: It doesn't wear out.

Tim: It doesn't wear out. That's right. I can spend a lot of money on a great meal, and in 24 hours that's...

Jon: It's past.

Tim: Literally a metaphorically past. But if I love my neighbor as myself and if I choose to use some of those resources to help out somebody I know who's going through a

really hard time, the love and the generosity and now the bond, the relational bond, there's something there that's an investment, according to Jesus, and something that last on into the new creation. In the Sermon on the Mount, healthy, whole relationships is one of the greatest values of the kingdom of God according to Jesus. And generosity creates those types of bonds between people that apparently are more enduring than a good meal, or the stock market.

Jon: And you can get there pretty easy. Like it doesn't take too much imagination to realize, "Yeah, I'll find more joy and abundance out of a network of people who experience this kind of radical level of generosity towards each other, than I will in whatever New Tesla model that's coming out. But in the day-to-day experience, it's not usually where my psyche is.

Tim: That's right. To me, it's significant that this thing about the birds and the flowers and anxiety is placed next to this teaching. It's all part of one teaching about your priorities, what you really value and valuing the kingdom such that you begin to treat other people according to Jesus's value set. And for Jesus, those just go together.

You could put it this way. The whole thing began with "Don't be anxious - freedom from anxiety." So Jesus apparently conceives of the universe that he's living in as a place that should free us from anxiety.

Jon: Has he been around?

Tim: Totally. So it's a place where...

Jon: In the city, I feels like birds are kinda scrapping it out.

Tim: Oh, sure.

Jon: But an agricultural society...

Tim: Yeah, in rural outdoors.

Jon: ...rural, the birds have it made.

Tim: I think it got to work hard.

Jon: But I mean, he's flying around enjoying life while you're digging trenches.

Tim: Exactly. Again, we're going to see this paragraph from Jesus is rooted entirely in the Hebrew Scriptures. Every bit of this is leaking from the Psalms and the Proverbs. Jesus views the world as a stable place where we're being hosted by a very generous person.

Jon: That's cool. That could be different than atheistic...

Tim: Sure. Yeah, modern materialist.

Jon: ...materialist. It's like the world is a cruel place and we're banging out our niche as best we can.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Nature is red and tooth and claw as some poet said.

Jon: That's a good line. Which is easy to adopt that mentality. It feels very counterintuitive to sit back and go, "No, the world is a stable place that is saturated in God's generosity."

Tim: And this and the same overabundance that Jesus saw at a field of wildflowers is the same overabundance that the creator wants to show towards me and that if I foster that mindset, it can free me from a scarcity mindset. And maybe that's the core difference here. Jesus looks at the world and sees abundance. And he sees that abundance as pointing to someone who loves us and has provided this environment for us to flourish as opposed to a scarcity mindset that says, "From the beginning, there's not enough for everyone."

Jon: "Find your niche."

Tim: "Find my niche, prioritize me and my own."

Jon: And survive.

Tim: And survive. Two very different approaches to the universe. And it's clear what Jesus is advocating.

Jon: I think I'm realizing I live out of a mix of those two.

Tim: I think I do too.

[00:32:31]

Tim: Jesus is articulating a mindset he's a mouthpiece for the whole biblical approach, the whole biblical story. Actually, it does begin on page 1 and 2. It's a conception of the universe as a beautiful creation that is packed with opportunity and resources and potential. And if I can cultivate the mindset that I'm being hosted by a generous creator in my day to day life, that will free me into whole new levels of life experience that I haven't experienced before.

Jon: You know, we got to experience that. We got to go hang out at a ranch that we were hosted, and there's just all this abundance.

Tim: That's a good point.

Jon: Here's like, "Choose one of these six vehicles."

Tim: This is a good story. A generous supporter of The Bible Project invited Jon and I up to a ranch in Eastern Oregon with our families.

Jon: He's got this beautiful piece of property.

Tim: I mean, there's some alfalfa fields and a lot of cattle, but it's a ton of just wild property.

Jon: And just deer and elk and mountain lions and lakes. It's a place of abundance.

Tim: It is.

Jon: He gave us a chef. So it's like you're not thinking about what you're going to eat.

Tim: This is like so not my day-to-day reality.

Jon: No, it was my wild.

Tim: That's right. Pick your four-wheel-drive vehicle for the weekend.

Jon: The keys are in all of them just scrambling.

Tim: Here's the building where all the bottled water is, and the candy for the kids, and a couple of cabins. It's just like, "What?" Yeah, rare. Very rare. To me, that's the challenge of what this teaching is...

Jon: Am I supposed to always feel that way? I'm supposed to always feel like...

Tim: You look at his words and you tell me. He wants us to live and really believe... He calls it an act of faith. Because he says, "Look at the flowers and the ravens, you who trust God so little." If there's anything getting in the way of me experiencing abundance is probably a human problem, human-caused problem. It's not God-caused problem. God's just packed creation full of potential. And if I can grasp that, I cannot only be freed from anxiety, it can begin to become second nature, that I release my stuff out to other people who don't have as much as I do.

Jon: There was something about being on that property that made me, I felt like, "Cool, I'm going to hang out with my kids. I'm hanging out with..." It just felt like I could be more generous in my time and whatever. Because there's something about feeling like you live within the scarcity that makes you want to pile things up. And when you live within an abundance, you would think that's another opportunities to pile things up.

Tim: Yeah, totally.

Jon: Because it's just like, "Look at all this abundance. Let's just grab as much as I can." Which might be an initial instinct with abundance.

Tim: Sure.

Jon: But eventually you kind of realize, you're like, "Why am I spending all this time piling all this stuff up? It's just always there. When I need it, it's there. Why am I wasting all this time and energy?"

Tim: Jesus is advocating a mindset that says, "There's enough." There's enough so I can share. Of course, I can share. It's not mine, to begin with, and there's always enough.

Jon: Is there always enough?

Tim: That's the point.

Jon: There's always enough. Or there should be.

Tim: There should be.

Jon: The earth has the ability to produce enough.

Tim: The earth has enough. If humans are creative enough and love their neighbor as themselves enough, there is enough.

Jon: Yeah, there's enough.

Tim: I think that's his point.

[00:37:03]

Tim: So I've got a question. We've already proposed a lot. What kind of tradition forms a person who talks and thinks like this? Like in what kind of culture and story do you have to grow up to actually believe these words and say them to other people? And you can't just say, "Oh, he's Jesus. He can say stuff like that."

Jon: He was brought up within a culture and a perspective.

Tim: Somebody who draws conclusions about God's character thinking about both the texts of Scripture, but also looking at birds and flowers, and as we'll see later rainstorms, and someone who truly believes there's a beautiful, generous mind behind the universe.

Jon: It seems like what you're digging at is if you read the Hebrew Scriptures and you look at the stories of creation and the stories of God that you will have the mindset of an abundant world.

Tim: Yeah. The reason you and I come up with all these objections or think of all the exceptions to what he's saying here is because we have been raised in a culture that has a fundamentally different view of the universe than how Jesus saw the world. And what kind of way of seeing the world produces a person who can say a paragraph like that, and everybody looks and goes just like, "Yeah, good point. Yeah. That's right."

Jesus is here a mouthpiece for the view of God and God's generosity and creation that you find in the storyline of the Hebrew Scriptures. So to me, if there's like a light bulb or some moment, we haven't even talked about what language we want to use for it yet in this video, but there's a foreign way of seeing the world, there's enough, an abundance mindset that's foreign to how most of us think about the world. What can we do in a five-minute video experience that can just open up a different way of seeing the world to somebody, including ourselves? To me, that would be the win for this video. That's why I love this paragraph of Jesus' teaching so much.

Jon: It's a great teaching.

Tim: I would propose that the first place we ought to look to think of what would form a person to talk like this about the universe is explicitly stated as Jesus's cultural tradition, which is the Jewish scriptural heritage. Jesus was raised on the Torah, the prophets and the Psalms. It's amazing to think about how some of his first memories would be hearing his mom or dad sing the poetry of the Psalms.

So, what you find, for example, in the book of Psalms is all these poems - they are often called the creation poems in the book of Psalms - and what you find in them is exactly the worldview that Jesus is expressing right here.

Jon: The abundant worldview?

Tim: Yes, this abundance mindset, creation as these people experience it is just the experience of God's generous abundance everywhere they look. So Psalm 104, for example.

Jon: Psalm 104.

Tim: Psalm 104 - this is epic psalm - it's an entire meditation on page 1 of the Bible. It's a poetic meditation on page 1.

Jon: It's a poetic meditation on the creation story.

Tim: On the creation story, yeah. And what this poet does is he systematically works through the three tiers of the universe: the heavens, and then the land, and then the sea. Then he ponders the objects or the inhabitants. The thing in Genesis 1, the environments of order and the inhabitants...

Jon: And creatures.

Tim: And its creatures. And this is worked through, and he, like Jesus, just draws conclusions or forms these meditations based on observing and pondering everything in every realm.

Jon: It's a pondering tradition.

Tim: Totally. It's Jewish meditation literature. So notice how Psalm 104 works. It begins with an opening call to praise. "Bless Yahweh O my...

Jon: Nephesh.

Tim: O my nephesh. My being, my life. And we get a soul in most English translation. "Yahweh my God, you are very great. You're clothed with splendor and majesty." That's some similar to Psalm 8.

Jon: Yeah, That's this whole idea of the heavenly bodies having a different kind of clothing.

Tim: You cover yourself with light. So the heavens form their language for the spiritual realm in different kinds of beings and bodies. Here what their body is clothed with is splendor and light.

Jon: Clothed with splendor and majesty.

Tim: Covering yourself with light. So good.

Jon: So good. That's good outfit.

Tim: Totally. He's pondering up in the heavens. He's envisioning the dome, the beams of the upper dome, the clouds of his chariot, wings of the wind. And he makes the winds his angels - his messengers. That's the word "angel" in Hebrew.

Jon: He makes the winds His messengers. He's not talking about spiritual beings there. He's talking about creation being like a way that he speaks.

Tim: Yeah. Just like you have spiritual beings that are His messengers, the winds and lightning are also his servants and messengers. Then he moves on to talk about the land - its foundations. He established the pillars so the land sits on pillars so that it won't sink into the abyss below. He covers the deep as with a garment.

Jon: And that's the earth?

Tim: Yeah. He establish the land on...

Jon: A garment on the watery depths.

Tim: You covered it, that is, the land with a deep as with a garment. So he's imagining actually here the pre-creation state of the waters over the land. The waters were standing above the mountain.

Jon: Oh, the watery depths were a garment.

Tim: But at your rebuke, the waters fled. This is when God says let the waters draw back and the dry land emerge. He imagines this is God rebuking the waters. This is the phrase the gospel authors use when they depict Jesus calming the waters in the Gospels. They use the same word "rebuke." He rebuked...

Jon: Oh, it's from Psalm 104?

Tim: Yeah. That's a cool little nugget. Then he thinks about how the dry land is watered. God tamed the chaotic waters so the dry land can emerge. And then vs 10, he releases the waters back from the deeps into the land, but it comes forth. It comes up in the form of springs in the valleys. We'll talk about this one when we get into the Genesis 1 and 2 series. But the idea is that the chaotic waters that began with, he stilled them by a spirit and rebuked to them so that they draw back so dry land can emerge. Then now God's master of the waters. So anytime those waters pop up from the great deep below through in a spring or a well that's seen as a gift of God showing His mastery over the chaotic waters.

Jon: Oh, so that's connected then with Moses bringing water from rocks and stuff?

Tim: All the waters and wells in the wilderness become little gifts of Eden in the midst...

Jon: That's cool.

Tim: Totally. It's all connected.

Jon: Hey, and by the way, in vs 7 where he says, "at the sound of your thunder they took flight," that's the word that's also voice, right? Thunder voice?

Tim: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Jon: "You rebuked the waters, they fled. The sound of your voice."

Tim: Yeah, you're right. You're thinking of our conversation about Psalm 29.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: The voice of your thunder. That's right. That's exactly right. Then he start talking about the creatures. Here's where we're going to pick up. I think this is where we get into a text that's forming the mindset of Jesus.

Jon: Oh, cool.

Tim: He causes grass to grow for the cattle and vegetation for the labor of humans, so that he may bring forth food from the land.

Jon: Are you reading a translation or are you just reading Hebrew?

Tim: I'm reading from the new American. The NAS.

Jon: Vs 14 he causes the grass to grow for the cattle and vegetation for the labor of man. So that he, the man may bring forth fruit from the earth.

Tim: The word for food is actually the word "bread" in Hebrew. Léchem.

Jon: Léchem.

Tim: Which can be a generic word for food of any kind. So this is reflecting on that line in Genesis 1, where I give you the...

Jon: You get to eat all the stuff growing out of it?

Tim: Yeah, the vegetation. And the beast, they get the wild vegetation out there.

Jon: Nebuchadnezzar turns into the beast.

Tim: That's the whole thing. But in Genesis 1, it's God giving. It's the word "give." To you, I give and to the animals I give. Now it's a poetic meditation on that verse in Genesis 1. He causes the grass to grow for the cattle. Again, back to Luke 12, Jesus thinks of a raven picking berries or whatever off a bush and he says, "God is giving that creature food." That's how he would view that situation.

Jon: Or he would see a cow grazing, or a deer grazing and he would...

Tim: He would say, "God's providing food for that creature." It's not because they're ignorant the grass grows up out of the ground from seed. They are way more familiar with those things that most of us are.

Jon: They know how it works.

Tim: Yeah. Because that's their life, farming and so on. But it's their view of the universe. That the universe we are being hosted by a generous host, and so there's no distinction between the grass growing by itself or God giving it to the creature. It's the same thing.

Vs 15, the grass and vegetation as a gift and wine that makes the human heart glad, so that he may make his face glisten with oil and food that sustains man's heart. This too is a gift from God. Vs 16, the trees of Yahweh drink their fill. So they're rooted in the ground and they can access that water below that we don't sink into because of the pillars Yahweh put there. But the trees go down. Vs 17, the birds build their nest in these trees of Yahweh. Trees of Yahweh. Like the poet looks out and any tree is like, "That's Yahweh's tree."

Jon: He's the host.

Tim: Yeah, he's the host so he put on this event. Vs 18, the high mountains are for wild goats. The cliffs are the refuge for the kind of rock badger-like creature. So you can just see what he doing. He just sees all of what we call nature. He sees it as the expression of a generous being. He's just given the right provision and homes for all these different kinds of creatures. It's what working together as a harmonious system. Vs 21 the young lions roar after their prey and they seek their food from God.

Jon: So even the lions are being provided by God.

Tim: Yeah. It's like their roaring is their...

Jon: Oh, they're like petition?

Tim: The prayers of petition to God.

Jon: They're praying. Prayerful roarer.

Tim: Prayerful lions. When the sun rises, they withdraw because they hunted the night, I guess. They lie down in their dens, and that's when the humans go out to work. And they labor until the evening. So you got the humans to go out in the day and they work the land, and then the lions come out. And humans, they pray for rain and good weather.

Jon: We have your own roar.

Tim: That's right. And then the lions do the night shift.

Jon: And there's enough for everyone.

Tim: That's right. That's right. So going towards the moment, "O Yahweh, how many are your works in wisdom?" It's all expression of God's wisdom.

Jon: Not only is there an abundance, but because it came out of a well-devised schema.

Tim: It works. It all works together. "The earth is full of your - some translations have creations, others have possessions. The sea is great and broad swarms without number, animals...Oh, this is a good. Animal small and great. There the ship's move along. This section of poem opened up with "O Yahweh, how many are your works. In wisdom, you made them all." There's the sea and then vs 26, "and there's ships."

Jon: Even the ships are His work.

Tim: That's right. Clearly, the ships are human-made. In this worldview, they are ultimately Yahweh's work.

Jon: Because we're co-created.

Tim: That's right. Also, don't forget the ships move around in that great deep with Leviathan who you formed to play in it.

Jon: Just because.

Tim: Totally. They all wait for you to give them their food in due season.

Jon: That's the sea monster.

Tim: Yes, leviathans, for your Canaanite neighbors, it's like these are deified chaos monsters. In the biblical worldview, they are monsters, but they're under Yahweh's authority.

Jon: And they got a big playground.

Tim: Huge. Actually the hugest playground. "They wait for you to give them food in due season. You give it to them. They gather it up. You open your hand, and they're satisfied with it." You get the idea here. This is just one. We could go to other poems. But this is biblical, that is, Jewish creation theology. Its wisdom, creation theology, that the superabundance of creation is an expression of God's own generosity.

If you grew up on that kind of poetry, from your earliest memories, you can see why Jesus could say what he says in Luke 12, and everybody be like, "Oh, yeah, that's right. I forgot that." Or when the Romans are crushing us through taxation and taking all of our farmland, it's easy to forget that this is what's actually true about the world.

Jon: Now, someone in that context, even though they have these stories, if they're suffering, I mean, that's got to create some sort of conflict for them. Right?

Tim: Yes.

Jon: Like, "Okay, I believe in the generosity and abundance of God or what He gave us, He's hosting us, but I'm suffering." It's not like everything's going to be great.

Tim: No, that's right. We are in a worldview shaped by the biblical story. That's God's wise design and purpose for the ideal of how the world operates. It's all given as a gift to humanity and its creatures - the creatures of the world. But of course, there's a conflict in the story. And that conflict is actually one way to think about the storyline of the Bible is its people abusing Yahweh and his generosity.

Instead of seeing Yahweh give, and give and give and give generously in creation and then imitating that, what the humans do in Genesis 3 is desire and take what is not rightfully theirs, and then take. So taking versus giving is a simple way to think about the storyline in the Bible is Yahweh gives and what humans do is desire and take.

[00:53:45]

Jon: There was one conversation we were having, maybe it was Day the Lord or something, but one takeaway I had was how you can frame the whole story of the Bible in terms of what do humans do with power.

Tim: Oh, yes, yes.

Jon: And what I'm hearing from this conversation is you can frame the whole story of the Bible of what do humans do with abundance. Because you can thrive in abundance, but then paradoxically, you can create chaos within abundance when you seize it, and try to control it.

Tim: That's right. It is. It's the paradox of wealth and abundance that has explored in every part of the biblical story and collection. Because it's the truly a paradox. That to be given these gifts of rich abundance, that's what's going on and in the Eden story. That's what the Eden story is. Yahweh plants a superabundant garden, and then just the human...

Jon: I love the details of the story where it's like, he gives them food, but he also gives him trees that is good to look at.

Tim: That's right. Some are just beautiful. That's just what they're there for.

Jon: So He got fruit trees and then He got cool trees.

Tim: Humans wake up in their existence into a world that's just flooded with resources. And what does that opportunity do to them? It's actually not great.

Jon: That's a great way to frame the human condition as we experience it right now this time in history as not knowing what to do with abundance.

Tim: And abundance that both is just there like latent or potential, and then with the abundance that's created from the stuff that we make off the earlier abundance. Then we make new stuff and creates a new hybrid abundance that's both from

creation and then whatever it is, like a fork, something or a car. Tesla. That's right. That's exactly it.

So for someone sitting there listening to Jesus speak in Luke 12, they also have a category for "why is it that I don't experience that carefree existence of a raven or of a lily?" It's because I'm screwed up and my neighbors are screwed up, and the Romans, oh, man, they are really screwed up. That's why I don't experience the world as Psalm 104. But...

Jon: There's no like faction of ravens that have all teamed up and built some sort of power structure that's going to oppress the other ravens.

Tim: It's just kind of one on one with the Ravens, isn't it?

Jon: Yeah. They might fight it out over some roadkill, but other than that, they're all getting along.

Tim: Yeah, for the most part, they work in packs. Humans, we use both our potential and opportunity and then we devise, we create all kinds of horrific ways to deprive each other of abundance or hoard it for certain groups. Right?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Again, within the biblical story, this was the explanation for why the world is the way it is. It's not God's fault. It's humans participating in something horrendously evil to turn the world into an anti-Eden. Where it's an Eden for some. Like the king of Babylon, he gets to live in Eden and not anybody else.

Jon: I got to imagine that most secular philanthropists would agree with this.

Tim: I think so. Sure.

Jon: They wouldn't go like, "That's a weird ancient, strange, religious way to rule." They'd be like, "Oh, yeah, that's a really astute anthropology that you got there of why..." Because I think there's a sense amongst those who are leaders in philanthropic efforts, that there is enough if we can work out the details. If we're like smarter and not as mean to each other. And of course, they aren't king into that with other thing you said, which is connected to this evil if you're doing it from a completely secular point of view.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Well, I mean, essentially, what that worldview you're describing is doing is just taking any sense of another parallel spiritual realm out of it. So both the abundance and goodness doesn't need to have come from another being.

Jon: It just happened.

Tim: It's just "here we are." Therefore, all of the horrible ways that we...

Jon: Our problem with dealing with abundance.

Tim: Yeah. And all of the lack of abundance because of human power structures. We also don't need to horn on that off on to some other being.

Jon: Some weird mystical evil.

Tim: It's stupid humans who need to get better education or learn how to be nice to each other. That is one way of explaining the human condition. Who knows how we got here? But we're here for no particular reason with all this abundance, and let's learn how to be nicer to each other. I don't know what can you say except does that really honor the complexity of the human condition, that education doesn't seem to solve the problem of the selfish human heart. It just doesn't. It can improve things, but it doesn't seem to get to the core of the problem. And certainly not according to Jesus. He would say the problem is much deeper and complex.

Jon: The problem that prevents us from living generously with an abundance?

Tim: Correct. Jesus would locate it at where David and Moses locate it in the problem of the human heart, which remember is the center of will, and volition, choice, and emotion. Their diagnosis is that our hearts are hijacked by an animal-like form of selfishness and chaos that we don't fully understand. In Genesis 4 it's just called sin and in Genesis 3 it's depicted as some kind of other being. And that's where moderns get hung up. But anyhow, we digress, perhaps. But this is the worldview.

I like that idea of the problem of power that we talked about in the Day of the Lord is in this frame the problem of abundance.

Jon: Because power can be good.

Tim: That's right. Abundance is awesome.

Jon: Abundance is awesome and it can be good. It's a lot easier to see how power can be misused, but it's interesting to think about how abundance is misused.

Tim: Correct. This is why the Bible's view of wealth and abundance is actually aside from these bigger picture creation perspectives, what wealth and abundance does to people in the Bible is almost always negative. Actually, the Bible has an extremely negative...

Jon: Very suspicious of wealth.

Tim: ...portrait of wealth and abundance. That actually is really off-putting to modern people who live in capitalist societies. I have found that to be true in many contexts. Just reading the Bible aloud in settings, where there's lots of different kinds of people, I find that the view of wealth doesn't resonate with people who are really invested in certain economic systems. It's fascinating. I mean, look at Jesus. We just read Luke 1. Just like sell your stuff and give to the poor because money is going to corrupt you.

Jon: I've heard that Jesus talked about money more than any other topic. Is that in the gospels?

Tim: Yeah. If you just count up how many verses or sentences are into what topics, yeah, money and wealth is in the top three of just amount of times he talks about this. Totally. Especially in the Gospel of Luke, which is where we started.

Jon: The biblical story gives you this abundance mentality. It's beautiful. That doesn't necessitate then that the story of the Bible and the scripture should also have this suspicion of wealth. It almost seems like the opposite would be true. That if there is an abundance mentality, the Bible wouldn't be suspicious of wealth, it would be celebrating it.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. And it often does. Actually, you know what, as I think about it, maybe a better way to say it is, the Bible is suspicious of what wealth does to humans, especially humans who aren't following the way of Jesus, or who are connected to Jesus and how he renewed the human story. That's a better way to say it. Humans in our current condition it's a toxic cocktail.

Jon: Because Psalm 104, I mean, he's celebrating wealth.

Tim: He's celebrating the wealth that God is loaded in his creation. That's a great point.

Jon: And also very specifically, he's celebrating the wealth of food and drink.

Tim: Totally. That's exactly right. If you look at all the depictions of the new creation in the prophets or in the revelation...

Jon: Wine flowing.

Tim: Yeah, wine flowing from the hills.

Jon: That's abundance.

Tim: Yeah, exactly. All this stuff, you know, the gold and the jewels of the New Jerusalem and the abundance. Totally. So you're right. It's more than in the present age with the broken human condition - the Bible is suspicious of wealth in the hands of those kinds of people.

Jon: And that's where I find maybe the corollary to power in that it's the same thing. It's like power to rule that was a good thing. But then, if you actually just pull out all the places where people have power, you find all these warnings of people, like, don't let them mess you up.

Tim: Think about Psalm 104, which is itself just reflecting on Genesis 1. Genesis 1 and 2, same portrait of just order brought to chaos and then all this potential packed into creation. Genesis 2 it's in the image of God planting a garden in the midst of a wilderness puts the humans in there.

Jon: Garden from wilderness.

Tim: Garden from wilderness.

Jon: Generous act.

Tim: "And from any tree, you can eat except this one that will kill you." And the one that will kill you is the one that represents you taking moral discernment to define good and evil by your own wisdom instead of trusting that I will teach you how to define good and evil.

Jon: "Eat from any tree but the one that will prevent you from being a generous person."

Tim: Wow. Yeah, because the moment you define good and evil by your own wisdom, you're going to start defining as good so that you have a little bit more than that person.

Jon: Totally. It makes perfect sense. It feels very good to have enough even if...

Tim: Maybe not just for me. Maybe...

Jon: For me and my family.

Tim: For me and my family, or me and my tribe. And surely that's a good thing that I provide for my tribe. "Oh, but what if it's at the expense of that tribe?"

Jon: They got take care of themselves.

Tim: They go to take care of themselves. There should be enough for them maybe. Here you go.

Jon: You almost kind of have to live that way when you're limited by your own understanding. Because you're kind of stuck.

Tim: It's a great transition for what we can talk about next. If the biblical story can be framed as God's gift of abundance to humans, the plot conflict is how they distort abundance, which is to desire according to their own wisdom, and then to take.

Thank you for listening to this episode of The Bible Project podcast. Next week, we're going to keep diving into the theme of generosity in the storyline of the Bible. We're going to look as always at the Garden of Eden stories and explore how they demonstrate God's generosity, His generous overabundant character. It's going to be awesome.

Today's show was produced by Dan Gummel theme music was by the band Tents. We are a crowdfunded animation studio in Portland, Oregon, and you can find all of our resources at thebibleproject.com. Everything we make is because of your generous support. So thanks for being part of this with us.

Allover: Hi, my name is Allover and I'm from Selah, Washington. My favorite part is watching the videos before I go to bed.

Man: And what your favorite video?

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