



## Abundant Living!

by Mark Brunner

### *A Spiritual Money Tree?* (John 3:21)

Are you looking for that proverbial money tree? Often have been the times when my wife Holly and I have lamented that such a thing doesn't really exist. As I was doing the bills the other day it struck me that, despite the fact that the bills needed to be paid, those pieces of paper with due dates and "fill in the amount paid" blanks, although important, really had little to do with defining how rich I was or wasn't. They may define a balance in my bank account, but they don't define the balance of spiritual riches God has deposited into my heavenly account. Therein lies true abundance in life and no amount of spending can ever deplete the account. In fact, the more I draw on it, the richer it becomes. I put down my pen and relished the "spiritual" money tree I truly own; all I needed to do is reach out and pick all the fruit I wanted.

Living the abundant life. Perhaps for far too long we've equated abundance with material things?

John Stuart writes: "Christy Blanchard suffered from cancer and went through a lot of treatment programs. She had a great love of other people and even in the midst of all that she was going through, she kept thinking, praying for, and encouraging other people whose circumstances were less serious than her own, but who needed a shoulder to cry on, a listening ear, or a kind word

and a smile. I constantly felt blessed each time I was in her company. I know that she was weary and anxious at times, and could have been overwhelmed by all she experienced, but she didn't want the cancer to determine who she was. She wasn't wealthy or successful according to the world, but she had great riches in her life – family and friends, colleagues and neighbors – whose lives were touched and greatly enriched by her courage, compassion, and care.” (John Stuart)

We enrich this earth when we display our faith, and offer others friendship as a part of the everlasting joy and abundant life that Christ deposited in our spiritual accounts. If we're looking for abundance, it all starts with our willingness to enrich the earthly journeys of others through our smile, our warm touch and our concern for others before ourselves. Abundance has little to do with riches and everything to do with how we live our lives, no matter how meager they are.

*“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:34)*

## *Get On The Ride!* (John 10:10)

“Could of, should of?” How often had you found yourself doing that little number? “Boy, if only we had realized that, we wouldn't have done this?” That's another of my favorite sayings. I found myself thinking that just the other day as I filled out a scholarship application for my son. It was a scholarship offered by a car club that I've belonged to for years. But, I never took advantage of applying before. I own the club jacket and cap and I've paid my dues annually and faithfully for years. Yet, it never occurred to me to take advantage of all the opportunities that club membership had to offer. I should have taken a closer look at the newsletters and magazines that have advertised the scholarship over the years. I've seen the ads but the lights just never went on in my head; another case of not being able to see the forest for the trees?

Similarly, we often miss the blessings God is waiting to give because we overlook His promises to bless us abundantly.

Here's a thought from Jimmy Brown: "When I was a kid my dad took me and a friend to the carnival. We purchased an armband and entered the gates. Each ride that we came to looked so exciting. But, without any money, we were left to just sit and watch. We were standing around, miserable, wishing my father would come and get us out of that place, when we heard him say to us, "Hey you two. What are you doing? Why aren't you riding?" "We don't have any money to buy tickets," I continued. "Son, don't you know that the rides are included in the price I already paid. Your armband gets you access to all of the rides." We were stunned. We had no idea that we could have been enjoying the carnival to its fullest extent by just taking advantage of what my father had given us. Sadly, there are many Christians like that. They walk around miserable, seeing others at peace, seeing others filled with joy, seeing others content and free. They are miserable as they watch others full of assurance and victory and blessing. (© Jimmy D. Brown)

Many Christians walk around with a brightly colored spiritual armband on, never realizing that it gives them access to all of the blessings that Christ offers. Jesus died to give you abundant life. He promises you peace, joy, contentment, assurance, victory and confidence. Don't be satisfied to simply wear your armband; get on the ride!

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## *Burned Over!* (Psalm 37:7)

Recently Holly and I were shopping for furniture in a local, family furniture store and I took notice of some rather interesting styles on the floor. One type struck me in particular; an antique looking style with a pretty high price tag to boot. I remarked to Holly that it seemed kind of odd that end tables with ruts and holes in the surface could fetch such a high price. That's when the salesperson overhead me. She added that the same table without the holes and

ruts would probably never sell as well. “People want that antique look;” she said. “so they literally pound out the surface of the furniture to make it look worn.” If it wasn’t destroyed, so to speak, it wouldn’t be worth as much.

When we look at how God often puts you and I through the ringer, perhaps He’s just trying to make us more “worth it.”

Here’s a thought from Judy Miller: “A few years ago, a forest fire went through the area and many of the blueberry patches were burned over. I’m not sure how long it took, but eventually the bushes did grow again. The blueberries were even bigger and sweeter and more plenteous than previously. I have asked the old-timers in our area what caused this. They say that it was on account of the fire that the bushes produced so much better. We don’t understand the principle, but it’s true. I think it is true in our lives as well. As Christians, we do produce fruit. It is a given, according to our verse for today. In people’s lives, I have also seen more fruit, more plenteous and sweeter fruit being produced. It most often comes because the beloved Christian has gone through some fiery trial – like the blueberry bushes. Sometimes it takes a short time to produce more fruit; sometimes it takes a long time. God is working all of it for good. (Judy Miller)

When we’re going through the fires of life, we need to cling to God’s promises, trusting Him to produce more abundant, sweeter fruit in our lives. But sometimes that fruit can only be realized after God has “worked us over”, so to speak; improving us through test and turmoil, making us an even better value in His plan to get us where we’re going. When God is looking for abundance, the getting there may not always be pleasant. But, when it comes to determining value, who better than God to know the difference between good and better?

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## *Where To Find Enjoyment!* (Ecclesiastics 2:24-25)

Recently Holly and I went to see a play and went out to eat after the performance. We'd anticipated our little date for quite some time but, after all was done, felt a little let down. The drive there was tedious and the parking when we got there was distant. The play was good but we did have a hard time hearing the performers in our seating section. The crowd was tight and pushy as there was a mad rush to get to your car when it ended. Dinner was good, but not great. The waitress spilled a bit of it on Holly. When we got home, we fell into our easy chairs and exhaled a sigh of relief. We were glad to be home. For the next hour we watched our four dogs play and chatted idly. As the evening slowly ticked away, Holly and I found that the real enjoyment had finally begun.

Enjoyment; how often do we really find what we're looking for and feel we've gotten what we've pay for?.

Here's a story: Marvin Lacy teaches calligraphy. What makes that special is the great-grandfather of five suffers from Parkinson's disease. The disease often makes his hands tremble. Though he has this disease, when Marvin sits down to create his works of calligraphy, his hands are suddenly stable and become still. Marvin says, "It's a gift from God." Lacy's faith influences all that he does. He says, "The Lord is important in my life. I wouldn't want to leave out that aspect of my life. One of the sayings I've put into calligraphy is a philosophy I picked up. 'I will make that which I do today important. I am exchanging a day of my life for it.'" (Peter Kennedy, Copyright 2006)

Put Jesus Christ in the center of all that you do and you'll never want for enjoyment. Thank God that He truly wants to give us an abundant, joyful life. William Law writes, "Receive every day as a resurrection from death, as a new enjoyment of life." (William Law God's Word)

These days are always with us; they are resident in our souls. Often we look so hard for satisfaction in life that we ignore the fact that it is always within our grasp. It's in the people and things around us; the simple things in which Christ dwells. Every day is an opportunity to rise above our problems and

worries and explore the enjoyment God has put into each simple, Christ-blessed day.

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## *No Free Lunch?* (Psalm 12:11)

We received one of those promotions in the mail the other day. You know, “Make no investment now. Simply write for this free kit and we’ll show you how to make a fortune by simply doing nothing.” I believe the offer had something to do with buying and selling properties. Usually I throw these things away without even opening them. But, whether it was just a sense of curiosity or, deep down, I was really hoping it would be true, I slipped my finger under the seal and opened it. I read through the promotion and quickly discovered that my “free lunch” had a price tag. The “educational” materials that went with the “kit” were pricey. The odds of making money were slim or none. Lunch wouldn’t be free.

If we’re looking for happiness in this life, is it right to want things we don’t have?

Here’s a thought from Ivy Bozeman: “A whale had followed a delectable small fish called a Capelin into a nearby inlet. The lighthouse keeper told us that he was “beached” in shallow water for now. Our tour group stood watching the poor whale as he struggled in the shallow water, wondering what would happen if he didn’t find his way back out into the deeper waters of the Atlantic. The shallow water of the inlet wasn’t his natural home. Life was far from complete near the shore. In the deep waters of the Atlantic Ocean, the whale had been free, but the desire for the glittering and tasteful little fish had led him astray. The whale’s predicament reminded me of times in my life when I’d followed something that seemed extremely important at the time, and later, I found that I was trapped.” (Ivy Bozeman)

How many times do Christians follow personal desires that lead them into shallow places, and then feel that God has abandoned them? It's not intentional. Like the whale, we're caught up in the moment. Sometimes we follow the shining and tasty things of this world and lose sight of the real abundance God has promised us within the safe confines of his love. And, before we know it, we find ourselves floundering in the shallows of temporary pleasures. A good rule of thumb is if it seems too good, it probably is. Life in abundance is waiting for us if only we're willing to wait on God to deliver it in His time and within His purposes. There is a free lunch, but only God knows how and when to serve it.

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