

THE SCARCITY MENTALITY

Series: Gracenomics
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Grace, Forgiveness, Judgement
Matthew 7:1-5

Church people are weird, aren't they? If you grew up in church, you might not realize this, but if you didn't grow up in church or if you haven't been in the church scene for a while, you know what I'm talking about. Not only do church people *say* weird things - like words that no other human being on the face of the planet uses (hosanna, hallelujah, Jehovah Jirah) - but they *act* in strange ways, too.

One of the things you'll discover if you hang out around here is that we try not to be so weird - that we try to use normal language and not make assumptions about what someone knows or doesn't know, or what someone's background is, but even though we try, there will still be times we're weird. We just can't help it!

There are things that are wired into us culturally that somebody who's new to this whole church thing isn't going to get right off the bat. That's OK. That's our problem, not yours.

But it's not only the weird rituals and odd words, there are actually problems with us church people. (All the church people gasp! Surely not!) No, there are! And one of the biggest problems is that there seems to be something just built into church people that causes us to become judgmental.

I don't know what it is. Maybe it's because we spent all those years sitting and listening to people tell us the right things to do and the wrong things to do. Maybe we think we've heard so much about right and wrong that we now have the ability to *judge* right and wrong. (By the way, you know that was the original sin, right? The desire to be the arbiters of right and wrong.) We *want* to make that decision, even though God would rather us not.

Maybe that's what it is, or maybe it's something more introspective. Maybe the reason we judge other people so much is that we judge *ourselves* or in some way *we* feel judged, then we pass that on to others. Whatever the reasons, it seems like church people can be some of the most judgmental people in the world.

If you're sitting here and you aren't a church person, you're probably like, "Right on!"

But why is that? I mean, we've been talking around here over the past few months about grace - about loving people and forgiving people and encouraging people, even when they might not have done anything to deserve it. That's the kind of thing that Jesus talked about all the time. That's the way he lived his life. So, why are so many church people, so many Christians - people who identify themselves with Jesus - why are so many of them so stinking judgey?

Today is the third part of our series called *Gracenomics* where we've been looking at the currency of grace in an unforgiving world - how grace has the power to transform *our* lives and the lives of those around us.

Back in November, I talked about *Our Great Grace Deficit* - this idea that we have all received second and third and 123rd chances. How we've all messed up, and none of us have suffered the full consequences of our actions. How God offers us unending grace and forgiveness, how he welcomes all and loves all and accepts all.

Last month, I talked about *Grace on Loan* - how once we've recognized just how much we've been forgiven, just how much grace we've received, we should respond accordingly. We looked at this story of a servant who had been forgiven 160,000 years wages, but who was unwilling to offer debt forgiveness to his friend for a meager amount.

Today, I want to look at what I think may be a key driver in our judgmentalism and our lack of grace. Today, we're going to look at *The Scarcity Mentality*, and how it can drive our lives in ways we're not even aware of, and into directions that cause harm to us and to others.

But first, I want to pray that God will open our eyes and ears to what he has for us this morning.

Pray

In his best-selling book called *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey says:

Most people are deeply scripted in what I call the 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 success of other people.

The Abundance Mentality, on the other hand...is the paradigm that there is plenty out there and enough to spare for everybody. It results in sharing of prestige, of recognition, of profits, of decision making. It opens possibilities, options, alternatives, and creativity.

According to Covey, the scarcity mentality actually holds people back, while an abundance mentality propels us forward. And his ideas have found their way into a broad spectrum of both business and personal applications. Since the book's publication, research studies in various fields have proven Covey's thesis over and over.

In one Princeton University study, students were divided into two groups and asked a series of questions. One group was given 10 seconds to answer each question. The other was given 50 seconds. The group with 10 seconds - and the scarcity mentality produced by *knowing* they only had 10 seconds - scored far worse in their answers to the questions. They also took longer to answer the questions.

In fact, the 50 second group didn't need 50 seconds, or even 10 seconds to answer most of the questions. But knowing that they had plenty of time caused them to relax, and to take the necessary time to answer the question. Sometimes that was 3 seconds. Sometimes it was 8. Whatever the case, they knew they had plenty of time to spare.

You see, the scarcity mentality is as much about psychology as it is resource availability. Have you ever known someone who has a scarcity mentality when it comes to finances, and they're a hoarder? Like, when you go to their place, they have stuff piled everywhere? They keep everything. I have a friend who is this way. She doesn't have much money, but she always has a pantry full of food, because she's so afraid that her money is going to run out that she stockpiles food just in case.

That's a scarcity mentality. It says, "There may not be enough for me tomorrow, so I'm going to take what I can get today." Unfortunately, it causes us to make bad decisions and adds unnecessary stress to our lives.

But what does that have to do with grace? I mean, if we were talking about money that would be one thing, but we're talking about grace - about loving, accepting, and forgiving people. How does a scarcity mentality come into play there?

Well, I think there are a couple of different ways:

First, there's this fear of not enough. We fail to give grace to others because we're deathly afraid we won't receive grace - that if I forgive you, if I give you a second chance, if I give you the benefit of the doubt, that somehow that puts me in a place of weakness - that it takes something away from me that I could use to my advantage.

As Covey says, the scarcity mentality sees life as one big pie. And the more of that pie *you* receive, the less there is left for me.

But that's a false view of how grace works. Grace, after all, is an endless pie. There will always be enough. When I offer grace to you, it doesn't take away anything from me.

But when I fear there won't be enough grace to go around - when I fear that loving you, accepting you, forgiving you will put me in a place of weakness, then I'm less inclined to offer you that gift of grace.

So that's one way the scarcity mentality of grace affects us.

The second is this: The Desperation Grab. When we're in the most desperate need of grace, we gobble it up for ourselves and don't offer it to others. Like someone stranded in the desert, we suddenly become greedy for the food we need - for the grace we require.

We fish for compliments, provide disclaimers to all our conversations, and hope against hope that we might be able to glimpse just a little bit of grace. And we are so focused on receiving that we fail to give.

Have you ever known anyone like this? Maybe you're this way. Every conversation starts with a disclaimer. "I know you'll think I'm an idiot, but..." "I hope you'll forgive my intrusion, but..." "I don't normally do this, but..."

What are all those disclaimers about? They're pleas for grace prior to saying whatever you want to say. Now, there are occasions where that may be appropriate, but I know people for whom the disclaimer is one of the primary building blocks of their communication?

They're desperate for you to say, "No, it's OK," or "I don't think that about you at all." They're fishing for grace. And if they receive a bit of grace, they hold onto it tighter than Gollum with a gold ring. They stockpile grace in the recesses of their heart and mind, because they are so desperate for it. And there's often no thought of extending that kind of grace to others.

You know, Jesus had some things to say about this scarcity mentality of grace. In the book of Matthew, the first book in what we call the New Testament of the bible, Jesus says this: Matthew chapter 7, starting in verse 1:

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.
Matthew 7:1-2

Most people know the first part, right? *Judge not, lest ye be judged* is the way I heard it growing up. Even people who know nothing about Jesus, nothing about the bible still know that somewhere in there, the bible says not to judge.

But did you catch that second part? *For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.* In other words, the scarcity mentality doesn't apply.

Jesus flips it on its head. He says that with the measure you use to judge, it will be measured to you. That the more you judge others, the more you'll be judged. And, implicitly, that the more grace you offer to others, the more grace will be offered to you. With the same measure.

This is really the closest Jesus comes to teaching the concept of karma. You know karma, right? This idea that there is causality in the world - that the actions you take, positive and negative, come back to you in some kind of like way.

As a general rule, the idea of karma actually stands in contrast to the teaching of the bible. The whole point of Jesus is that you actually *don't* have to pay for all your negative words and actions, but instead, you are given a gift of grace that frees you from the full consequences of those actions.

But here, Jesus offers an admonition. He says, "Yes, there's this gift of grace, but only if you are willing to offer that kind of grace to others." You don't have to be the perfect person, he says, but you have to be willing to allow others not to be perfect, either.

That's what he's talking about when he says, "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you." He says, "You know, if you want to judge people and hold them to a certain standard of perfection (as defined by you), then OK, but be prepared to be held to that same standard."

By who? By God? Maybe. By other people? Maybe. Jesus doesn't say. He just kind of leaves it hanging. He says, "Don't judge unless you want to be judged. The measure you use to judge people will be used against you." Then he just kind of leaves it there for us to stew on.

And when you think about it, you know this is true, right? If you've ever known anyone who was really judgmental - who always points out what is wrong with other people - what happens when you see a flaw in them? You think, "Oh, mister high and mighty..." Right? Let's give him a dose of his own medicine!

Isn't this exactly what happens when outspoken religious and political leaders fall? How often have we seen a politician or church leader who holds people's feet to the fire over some specific issue, only to find himself or herself caught up in that same issue. Whether it's financial accountability, sexuality, issues of honesty and integrity...whatever it is. So often, a person's pet issue also becomes their destruction.

Now, we'll discuss why that happens in a minute, but when it happens, what's the response?

Everybody points fingers! Not just people across the political aisle. Not just people from the opposite religious perspective. EVERYBODY. And we do that because somehow we think that person deserves it. With the measure they used to judge others, they are now judged. Just like Jesus said.

So, here's the question. What measure do you want used against you? How do you want other people to judge you? How do you want God to judge you?

I know how I would answer that questions for myself. If I were to sit down in front of some grand inquisitor who wanted to look into my life, here's what I would want. I would want them to understand the whole story. I would want them to take into consideration every factor. I would be saying, "OK, look, I know I'm far from perfect, but you should really consider that I grew up in a blended family, we were middle class, so I had some opportunities, but not as many as other people might have. I wasn't the most popular kid growing up, so when I saw a glimpse of getting in with the cool kids in high school, I jumped at it, and I know I may not have always made the best decisions, but I was generally a good kid. In fact, I wasn't nearly as bad as some of my friends. Man, I could tell you stories about some of them! You really should be proud of me for not taking things as far as they did..."

You see, if I were being judged, I would want that judgment to be loaded full of grace and understanding and love. I would want people to say, "Yes, Adam is kind of messed in some ways, but you know, there are probably reasons for that. There are probably things we don't know. There's probably another side to this story." That's the measure I would want someone to use with me.

Jesus says, "OK. Then use that measure with other people. Give people the benefit of the doubt. Seek to understand all the factors. When in doubt, offer grace upon grace. If that's how you want other people to treat you, then go do that with other people. That's how this thing works." That's not what I say, that's what Jesus says.

Then, he goes on to give this ridiculous example of how misguided our attempts at judgement are. Still in the book of Matthew, chapter 7, starting in verse 3, he says:

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

Matthew 7:3-5

Now, this is one of my favorite Jesus moments, because it’s so ridiculous - so absurd. In this example, there’s a person with like a little speck of sawdust in his eye. Have you ever gotten something like that in your eye?

The other day, I was cutting up some firewood. I had a friend’s electric saw, and I was powering through a whole pile of wood. One by one, I cut the wood into pieces of a usable size. But as I was cutting, a little speck of sawdust flew up into my eye.

You see, I’m used to wearing glasses. My glasses broke a couple of months ago, and I haven’t replaced them. But when I wore glasses, I rarely got things in my eyes. But on this day, when I was cutting wood, I didn’t have glasses. I also failed to put on the safety goggles that were, like, three feet away. So I got this sawdust in my eye.

Isn’t it remarkable the kind of discomfort a little speck of dust can cause? Once that speck flew into my eye, it became the top priority in my life. Nothing else mattered. I blinked. I rubbed. I stumbled around the garage half blind, eyes watering, mumbling something about how stupid I was.

Then I thought I got it out. You know what I’m talking about? It’s like the eye of the storm. It hurts, it hurts, it hurts, then it’s like, “Ah, I think I got it...aaaahhh, no I didn’t!”

Now, I don’t know about you, but I’m a pretty independent person. I don’t like to ask for help. But if there’s something in my eye long enough, I’ll break down and ask. And you know what it’s like when you ask someone, “Do you see something in my eye?”

You pry your eyelids open and look freakishly from right to left, up and down, and most of the time the other person doesn’t see anything. But eventually, you get the dumb speck out.

Now, imagine getting that speck in your eye, and somebody recognizing your struggle, and offering to help. And you look up, glad there’s somebody to offer a hand, and through your blurry, watery eyes, you see that this person that came to help you has, like, a log sticking out of their head. Like, somebody has literally speared them right through the eye with a big ole’ piece of wood. Gruesome, right?

Now this guy with a board sticking out of his skull is all, “Hey, let me help you with that dust in your eye.” How would you respond? Like, “Dude, I think you’ve got bigger problems. And I think if I get much closer to you, I might get speared with that thing, too. No thanks. I don’t need your help.”

This is the picture Jesus is painting here. It’s ridiculous, but it’s true of the way we tend to judge other people. We look at somebody and we go, “This person has a problem. I’m going to remedy that.” And so we cruise on over with this giant log sticking out of our head, and

we're like, "Hey! Let me help you with your speck. Here, I see you have a little tiny something to fix, let me give you a hand."

I have a friend back in the U.S., and this guy is an expert in everything - or at least he thinks he is. And he got on this health kick for a while. And it wasn't like a normal health kick. He wasn't really, you know, changing his diet or exercising or anything like that. Instead, he was trying to find ways to justify what he was eating.

So, he would talk all the time about how fat isn't really bad for you, how bacon is healthy, and how if you just eat the right balance of foods, you can live long and prosper. But here's the thing: my friend wasn't exactly a specimen of physical fitness. He was overweight. He had poor posture. Nothing about him said, "You should take care of your body like this guys does."

And I look at a guy like that and even if he was offering very sound advice, I look at him and think, "Dude, you've got a plank there. Loose 50 pounds and stand up straight, and I might listen to your health advice."

What does Jesus say?

"You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

If there's one charge consistently leveled against church people, it's this one: YOU HYPOCRITE. And it's a well-earned criticism, because somewhere along the way, church people have decided that they should be the morality police for the world.

Look, I know I might get in trouble with some people for saying this, but I'm sick of church people trying to legislate morality. I'm tired of church people trying conform laws to their particular interpretation of certain passages of the bible. I'm tired of church people trying to hold non-church people's feet to the fire - to try to force them to follow some set of rules that are supposedly taught in the bible.

First off, your interpretation of certain passages may not be the same as someone else's. And they don't want to be held to your theological conclusions any more than you might want to be held to theirs. (With the measure you use, it will be measured to you.)

Secondly, even if your interpretation is "right", not everyone has agreed to follow the ways and teachings of Jesus, so you're trying to hold them to an agreement - or to use one of those weird church words, to a covenant - that they never agreed to.

The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians, "What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church?" It's not, right? If you want the world to be a better place. If you want the morality of the bible to be the norm, what does Jesus say?

You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye

Start with yourself.

As Michael Jackson sang over 25 years ago,

*I'm starting with the man in the mirror
I'm asking him to change his ways
And no message could have been any clearer
If you wanna make the world a better place
Take a look at yourself
And then make a change*

That's Jesus. That's what Jesus is saying. And somehow, Michael Jackson got it right, and the church got it wrong.

And I think it comes back to that scarcity mentality. You see, when we look in the mirror, we see our flaws. In fact, some of us look in the mirror, and it's like one of those magnifying mirrors - you know, the ones that make everything bigger so you can see, like, your brain through the pores of your skin.

And we look in that mirror and see our flaws, and we say, "Nobody could have grace for that. That flaw, that blemish, that scar is too big for anyone to accept." And so, we turn our magnifying glass on others.

Those politicians and political leaders - the ones who get caught doing the very thing they've been railing against - why does that happen? It happens because somewhere in the recesses of our brain, we decide to judge most harshly those who have the same weaknesses we see in ourselves. The plank in my eye is made up of the same wood as the speck in yours.

So, we look for our own flaws in other people. Maybe what starts out as a desire to fix ourselves ends up as a crusade to expose others. We want to find others who are as bad or worse than we are. If we can just find someone else to judge, then maybe we can deflect some of the judgement from ourselves. If we can dish out enough of that judgement pie to others, then maybe there won't be any left to come back on us.

And you say, "Yeah, but I'm right! That person *does* have an issue that needs to be addressed." And yeah, they probably do. They might even recognize that they need help, but they don't want it from you plank-eye! They don't want it from you, log-head! They don't want help from you, hypocrite.

You see, it's not that people don't want help. It's not that they don't recognize that they have a speck in their eye. It's that they realize that you and I have an unwillingness to deal with the plank in our own eye, and they're so repulsed by our hypocritical, judgmental attitude that they run away from the church and away from Jesus, and it's our fault. Not their fault. Ours.

But if we listen to Jesus, he says it shouldn't work that way. He looks at your flaws and says, "Yeah, I know you're not perfect. I love you anyway. Now, why don't you try offering grace to people and you'll find that you receive a lot more grace, too. Why don't you offer the kind of love that God offers to people, and you'll find they come closer to you rather than being repulsed by you. There's no shortage of grace available. There is no end to the grace pie. There's no reason to have a scarcity mentality."

The other day, I saw a quote floating around on Facebook, and here's what it said,

"The more chances you give someone, the less respect they'll start to have for you. They'll begin to ignore the standards that you've set because they'll know another chance will always be given. They're not afraid to lose you because they know no matter what, you won't walk away. They get comfortable with depending on your forgiveness. Never let a person get comfortable disrespecting you."

I read that and I thought, man, I'm glad God doesn't take that advice!

That's rubbish. It's a reflection of a scarcity mentality. It says that if I offer you grace, if I give you a second chance, I automatically lose something - something that I scarce have enough of as it is - RESPECT.

That's garbage!

You know what? I have the utmost respect for someone who can forgive me when I'm an idiot, love me anyway, and help me improve as a human being. Offering grace doesn't mean that we don't help the other person improve. It means that we continue to love them throughout the process of improvement.

That's the measure I want people to use with me. So that's the measure I need to use with other people.

So let me leave you with this question: What if the people you think are the worst, are people who God doesn't really have much of a problem with? What if the people you judge most harshly, are not the ones God takes issue with. What if *you* are the one God wants to deal with? What if, yeah, he cares about the speck, but he wants you to work on that plank for a while?

I want to pray that God will turn a mirror to us, but that he'll do so in the way that only he can do - a way that's full of love and grace and acceptance - where we can see our flaws without feeling condemned for them. And I want to pray that he'll help us work on our planks, rather than focusing on other people's specks.

Pray