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Presentation Transcript
Abundance
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Today's presentation is for LifeResource Ministries and the title is *Abundance*.

I was talking to my boss two weeks ago and a year and a half ago he started a mental health clinic in Albuquerque called Southwest Family Guidance Center. Since then he's been busily expanding his business all across the state of New Mexico. I've been watching this take place and everything just seems to work for him. His business is growing so fast he can't keep up with all of it. He's hired some really great people and he keeps hiring more. Working at that clinic is really a dynamic experience. It's really an exciting place to be for everybody. Everybody there feels like they're a part of something good – doing something good in the community.

While we were at lunch last Tuesday, I told him that I wanted to continue to work for him because I like everybody I was working with and I was learning a lot from him and the rest, but I also, at the same time, wanted to continue to develop my own private practice. Now, my private practice currently is in an office that's very close to his clinic. It's so close that I can see clients at both locations through the day simply by hopping back and forth from office to office. But the drive to his clinic and my office are so far from my house the commute has become burdensome to me. And I told him that I was hoping to move my practice to the west side of town nearer to where I live. He said, "It's interesting you should mention that." Then he told me that he was going to open another clinic on the west side of town – not far from where I live. And he said, "Here's what I'd like to see you do. Why don't you work at the clinic near your office" – that's the one that's a long way from my home – "one day a week? You can drop your own office, and that way you won't have to pay rent, and you can see any of your private clients at my clinic until you're done with them – while you're transitioning over." And I said, "Wow! That would really be great! I'd be happy to pay you a per-session fee for the use of your office." And he said, "Oh, that won't be necessary. We have the space. We'll just do it. You can have it for free. That'll save you rent as you transition." He said, "The rest of the time I'd like you to start working at the clinic that's closer to you. And you can see your private clients there without a charge as well." And he said – and this really just floored me – "I will give you one of the offices to be your own. And I'll even furnish it for you,

if you like. That'll save you time driving and, also, money on the rent there, too. Plus, you can transition your practice to the west side without having to maintain an office at all – let alone in two places.”

So, I think that saves me about – oh, I have really cheap rent on the east side, but the west side I don't think was going to get away with it – it probably saves me six hundred dollars a month, I would think. So, I mean, he's a very generous person.

Now, just to show you how unusual this is, let me tell you another story to compare it with. Two years ago the most prestigious counseling clinic in town, which is a Christian counseling center, asked me to interview with them. I didn't ask to interview. They asked *me*. And when I got to the interview, once they found out that I had a private practice, they suddenly weren't interested in me any longer. I asked them, “Why?” And they told me that they'd hired people before and then trained them, and after they got them trained, these people had taken what they'd learned from them and then used it to go into competition with them. So they were afraid that I would do that and that I would wind up hurting their business. They were under the impression that if somebody opened another clinic, there wouldn't be enough people in need of counseling to keep them both busy. They believed that there was a *scarcity* of clients. So we could say that they hold the scarcity mentality.

My boss, on the other hand, has what is called the *abundance* mentality. He believes that the more you do for others, the more comes back to you. In thinking about all of this, it's really interesting that this very prestigious Christian clinic has to turn people away by the dozens every week. They can't see all the people they have. But they're still afraid that somebody's going to cut into their business.

And it's also interesting to note that most of the time, when I do receive a call from somebody looking for help, they tell me that I was the tenth, the twelfth, the fifteenth clinician they called before they found somebody who had any open time for them. So these facts caused me to believe that there really is a shortage of helpers in our town and a surplus of those needing help. There are not enough clinicians to take care of all the people that need help. When people try to call for somebody, it's very frustrating because they can't find people that have any openings.

So, I think it's safe to say there is something about the mindset of the people that run that clinic that causes them to think inaccurately about the way things really are. We're going to examine the cause of this inaccuracy later in this presentation.

I want to ask you a question about this issue. Which of these two approaches – the scarcity mentality or the abundance mentality – do you think is more in line with God's way of thinking about everything? Let's examine that.

Is God an abundant God? There's an organization that I know – it's a church – and they tell their members that they should not have anything to do with other churches. They tell them that the other churches are wrong and will corrupt their understanding. I think the

real reason they tell this to their members is that they're afraid that their members will leave them if they go to other places to visit. And I think they're afraid because they believe there are a finite number of people that God is calling and they don't want anybody stealing theirs. I think they view other churches as sheep rustlers, or aquarium dippers. So I believe that this organization has a scarcity mentality.

But what does God really say about that? I mean, it's fine for them if they want to take that approach. It doesn't affect me any, but are they thinking accurately? Let's go to John 4, and verse 35.

Jn. 4:35 – *Do you not say, “There are still four months and then comes the harvest?” Behold, I say to you, “Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they already are white for harvest.”* It's not that there are not enough people to harvest, but that there are not enough harvesters to bring them all in.

If you think about our experience, in our little corner of Christian life, why do you suppose that Jesus' statement doesn't seem to be our experience? It seems to many of us that God really isn't calling very many people and we aren't growing very fast. Well, I believe that what Jesus said is true – I hope you do, too, since He did say it and since He is God – but I believe that it doesn't *feel* like that to us because we don't have enough of the abundance mentality in a very specific area of our Christianity. And we're going to talk more about that in a little bit, as well.

God *is* abundant in His calling. He's calling a lot of people. He's not just calling just a very tiny portion of people right now. It says that there are so many people that He wants to call there aren't enough of us to bring them all in. So He's abundant that way.

But there is more. One of the things about God is that He is a God of lovingkindness. He is kind. He is patient. He's merciful. He's forgiving. And He takes care of people – even the people who are unthankful, unappreciative, and even those who He calls evil – you know, people who are mean, punitive and judgmental. He takes care of everybody. He is *abundant* in care. And He even tells us that we should be like Him in that – that we should do the same.

Let's go to Luke 6, and verse 35.

Lk. 6:35 – *But love your enemies. Do good and lend, hoping for nothing in return, and your reward will be great. And your reward will be great! And you will be the sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the unthankful and the evil.* So, if we're going to be like God, then He tells us that we have to do that, because that's how He is. *Therefore be merciful, just as your Father, also, is merciful* – abundant in mercy.

So God tells us that if we take care of everyone, He will take care of us. Let's go to 1 Peter 1 and look at another scripture.

1 Pt. 1:3 – *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy, has begotten us again to a living hope. So God is abundant in mercy, isn't He? ...has begotten us again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.* Being merciful to other people, being kind, taking care of people that aren't nice to us – that's all a part of the abundance mentality.

Now, one of the things that happens to us when we think about taking care of people that don't have enough is, we think we don't have anything to give them. We don't have *enough* to take care of other people. Well, there's a scarcity of stuff with us to give away to people, rather than an abundance. And we don't have enough time to help the poor either. We're busy. But what God is telling us is, that if you take care of those people, I'll take care of you.

Okay, well, how can God give us more time? How could He possibly do that? Well, you know, I was thinking about that. You know, by moving my office closer to my house, do you know how much time God gave me each year? He gave me a hundred and four hours per year. That's a bit over four days, if you add it up. And yesterday, when I was going over these notes, I realized that Camp Outreach West, where we helped the hungry and the poor, lasted four days. So I just got all that back. Isn't that interesting how that works?

And if we don't have the money to take care of the poor and we do it anyway, He says He'll make that up to us. If we do kind things for people who don't appreciate it, He will express His appreciation to us in ways that humans can't even approach – because with God, there's plenty to go around and He's generous with it. He's abundant.

There's something about this abundance mentality – and this is where I want to talk about how it's not been our experience that we grow quickly and contact all those people that God is calling. I was thinking about Guy Swenson's group in Indiana. They've started doing something where they reach out into the community. I don't know how often they do it. I think it might be once a month, or every two weeks – something like that. They have a little home fellowship. I guess they just recently moved into a building where they're meeting. Now, they're growing. And there are new people coming to their group. And what's attracting the new people is the fact that they provide an opportunity to help the poor. It's really interesting how that works, isn't it?

If you found a church on prophecy, and make that the big focal point, then you end up with a lot of people who are intent on saving their own hides. And if you found a church on being doctrinally correct, then you have a church that is filled with self-righteous people who enjoy being right all the time – think it's really important to *be* right. And if you found a church on taking care of the poor, then you attract loving, generous people to you – that value that. The abundance mentality tends to attract people. It's a value that some people hold. They also have that abundance mentality, and when they experience it with someone, they're drawn to it.

I want you to think with me about this. Which clinic do you suppose I would like to be loyal to? The one that saw me as competition? Or the one that's generously helping me build my own private practice? I just kind of feel an obligation – I mean, he didn't hold me to anything – but I feel a sense of responsibility to my boss because he's been so good to me. We moved into that office, by the way, this week. It's up and running now. Elaine and I have been out furnishing it – at his expense.

Let's think about some other examples of the abundance mentality. When I was in training to be a counselor, I realized that I was learning things that the church generally didn't know and would profit from, especially in relationship to children, teens and young adults. So I was just thinking about how I could pass this information on to the entire church. So I contacted somebody that had an independent ministry – who had reached a lot of people – and I introduced myself to him. I told him that our paths had crossed in the past many years ago and I'm not sure if he really remembered me or my wife, Elaine, at the time, but he was very polite and very friendly. I explained what I wanted to do and asked him if he thought it was doable? He said several things that really impacted me.

One of them really was about the church. He said, "The church needs what you have to offer." And he said, "Most people in the church know that the church is weak when it comes to children. If you let it be known that you have information about what can be done, then they *will* support you." And then he said this – and he kind of said this in italics – "And they will support you in a *most generous manner*."

It took me another six years to get my education and some experience so I could talk from a position of experience, but when I thought I was ready, and when it came time to get started a few months after we had resigned and were short of cash (I had to resign my ministry to do this), I assumed that we would have to go into debt to get started. But then my wife informed me that various people had sent us funds sufficient to purchase everything we needed without borrowing anything – that before we'd even produced a single bit of material to give away to people, people had sent us enough money to get started. They had just heard what we were *planning* and they sent money to help. I was dumbfounded! I was just shocked and humbled because people were counting on us and had confidence that we would use the money they'd sent wisely. You know, money that people earned is *hard-earned* money. So it was humbling and it was encouraging all at once.

So what I learned from this experience was that, just as this minister told me, the people of God, who want to see the church grow stronger and are committed to the children in the church, are willing to support efforts in that direction and they're willing to do it generously. The brethren in the Church of God are my first example of the abundance mentality. Most of them believe in tithing. And tithing, actually, is an exercise in the abundance mentality. You give things away – to God – and then it comes back – in fact, *more* comes back than went out! That *is* what God tells us, isn't it? You know, in Malachi 3, He says, "Test Me and see! Tithe and see Me open the windows of heaven and shower you with blessings. Just try Me out!"

The second example that I'd like to give of the abundance mentality happened just a few minutes later in my discussion with this other minister. Right after he told me that all of the brethren would be generous, he said, "If you're going to do this, you're going to have to let people know that you're around. You're going to need a Website. And we have the people who can help you with that. And you're going to need to form a non-profit corporation, and we have the people who can help you with that." I said, "Whoa, whoa, wait minute! I really appreciate all your help, but I'm not even ready to start up yet." And he said, "Well, you just let me know when you are ready, and we'll be on it." As it turned out, I didn't actually have to use their people to do any of those things, though I did consult with them, but they were willing. And that's the important part. That was my second example.

The third example is actually this minister's wife, who invited Elaine and I to come to their youth education training classes. We said, "Well, we don't teach youth classes." And she said, "But you never know when you might want to start a Feast site and need to know how to do this." I want you to think about that. I mean, their goal is not to have everybody in their orbit and just circulating around them. It's to train people to branch out and grow exponentially and make the Feast bigger. That *is* the abundance mentality.

So these two people – this husband and wife – have just graciously offered to help us get started in a new ministry. And really, ours is modeled after theirs in many ways, because we believe that if we give everything away, everything will take care of itself. They don't seem to think of us as competition at all. We believe, in fact, that we are not – that we're all complimentary of each other and to each other, and we're all trying to do the same thing. If one of us is successful, then all of our mission is advanced, because we're all working together in the same thing.

Another example is the man who works for this minister – who handles a lot of their financial stuff. I mean, we have sent him so many emails in the last couple of years asking him all sorts of detailed questions about tax and non-profit issues. I kind of get embarrassed, because we send so many and his answers are so long. and detailed and helpful. It's obvious he puts a lot of time into it and he's really trying to take care of us and help us.

It's astounding, really, when you think about it. They're doing everything they can to help us be successful. Perhaps more inspiring than the help is the example they set of gracious support. And it really has been the guiding light to show us how to treat other people that we see, who are also trying to accomplish the same goal we are. What we've learned is, the more the merrier. There's not a finite number that want to go to the Feast.

So let's talk a little bit about this abundance mentality. It's one thing to talk about it. It's another thing to *have* it. When we talk about it, we're actually taking on Godliness, because, as we've said, God is that way. And when we become more Godly, then we are blessed more. And as we are blessed, then we are able to take care of others. And that blessing, and that taking care of people, attracts other people who are like-minded. So it's

very important that we *all* project this abundance mentality. We treat each other as Christians this way, because that's what attracts others, who also want to be like that.

So how does one adopt this mental stance of abundance? Let's look at Matthew 6, and verse 24. Jesus said:

Mt. 6:24 – *No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore, I say to you, “Do not worry about your life – what you will eat, or what you will drink – nor about your body – what you will put on.” Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?* A lot of the abundance mentality has to do with what we *think* about. Do you worry about your life, or about what you're going to eat, or whether you'll have clothes to wear. Think about what *God* is going to do for us. Are we thinking about God and having faith, or are we just looking at the physical?

Elaine and I were watching *Larry King Live* one evening, and he was interviewing Stedman Graham. Do you know who he is? He's Oprah's boyfriend. And Larry asked him if he was bothered by all the tabloid trash that was out there about him and Oprah. And he said, “No.” And Larry King said, “Have you read any of it?” And he said, “No.” And he [Larry] said, “Why not?” He [Stedman] said, “Because if you focus on it, it gets bigger.” He said, “I would rather spend my time focusing on things that are productive, and on the people I love, because that will also get bigger.” And Larry King said, “Well, doesn't it hurt you when you hear about those things?” And Stedman Graham said, “If you focus on it, it gets bigger.” And Larry King said, “But...” Stedman said, “If you focus on it, it gets bigger.” So, at that point, Larry got it, and quit asking him those questions.

So, the point for us is, if we focus on *God* and on the *promises* that God makes to us, and the things God tells us to *do*, then *He* gets bigger in our lives. And if we focus on all the negative things – all the stuff that we *don't* have, and all things that *could* go wrong, and all the bad things that people have done to us – then *that* gets bigger. If we focus on doing good for other people, *that* gets bigger.

I was talking to a very nice lady that I know just a few weeks ago, and she was telling me how excited everyone was in her congregation, because there are now so many wonderful choices of where to go to the Feast. And I said, “Well, where are you going?” She said, “Oh, we're going on the cruise this year.” The Cincinnati congregation sponsored a cruise in, I guess, the Caribbean this year. She said, “We're going on the cruise.” And she said, “I know people who haven't attended in years who will be on that cruise.” The more Festival sites you create, the more interest in the Feast, and it just gets bigger.

I was thinking about how this works. It's not just in spiritual things that this works. This is just a *principle*. Young people of five years ago know that Napster was shut down, because people were swapping copyrighted music over the Web and not paying for it. So the government got involved. They shut down the Website. I think they even prosecuted some people and levied some heavy penalties against them. Of course, all the musical groups and performers were complaining because they weren't making enough money.

There were not enough listeners to go around. It was a scarcity mentality. What most people, who were young and involved when Napster was closed, don't know was, that was not the first time this has happened. Back in the seventies, for the first time, people had the ability to easily record music when cassettes came out. It became popular. People would tape off the radio. They would borrow other people's records and copy them – make their own playlist, just like they're doing with Ipods now – and computers. Do you know what happened? Because of the interest generated by all the swapping and copying, recorded music became more popular and more profitable than ever before. That's true! It's a much bigger industry now than it was then.

This year at the Feast – I went to the CEM festival site – and I just happened to run into Ron Dart on the way over to the auditorium one morning. We were walking down through all these big, huge, open meetings rooms, of which, I think, the CEM was the third one – something like that. Big place there in Chattanooga. And he mentioned that this building could hold a Feast of 3,000 people. And I said, “You may fill it up one of these days.” And he said, “If we keep meeting people's needs, we may.” See, it's all about taking care of people. And if you focus on *that*, it gets bigger. It gets bigger. You take care of people, people will come.

Okay, so that's the first point – if you focus on it, it gets bigger. Here's the another thing that we have to do if we want to have an abundance mentality.

I asked my boss, while he was training me and supporting me in becoming independent from him, *why* he was training me and supporting me so that I could become independent from him. He said, “Well, for one thing, there are not enough therapists in this town.” (See, he has the scarcity mentality, too. [Laughter] He thinks there aren't enough therapists to take care of all the people. I'm just kidding.) He said, “For another, my goal is not only to make money, but it's also to enhance the mental health of this community. So, as your practice grows, and as I train you more, you will become part of many that will help make my goal become a reality.” That's the abundance mentality, isn't it? He just wants to reach out into the community, train other people, send them out. They'll train others. He wants to enhance the community in that way, using the talents that he has.

Besides calling it the abundance mentality, do you know what this attitude is called? It's actually called Godly love. My boss is committed to giving to others and taking care of people. And as he focuses on that goal, it gets bigger. I mean, didn't I tell you earlier that it's growing so fast he can't keep track of it all?

Now that other clinic, which is also Christian, is not really committed to that approach. So they're sense is one of being competed with and that's getting bigger. They're feeling more and more competition. And that makes them feel like they need to circle the wagons and protect themselves. They're getting more defensive and kind of paranoid and insecure. With them, that's getting bigger, because they're not committed to focusing on what God says we should focus on. So they're getting tighter, and more anxious, and

more protective, and more paranoid even, I think, while my boss just keeps expanding out.

We have to be committed to thinking about this God's way. We have to be committed to Godly love.

And the third thing I want to mention is, that in every example that we have seen today, of those who carry that scarcity mentality, somewhere in it, there's an element of *fear*. You know, they're afraid of the competition. Or they're afraid they can't produce something that's useful. Or they're afraid that somebody else is going to produce something that's better than theirs and they won't be able to keep up or compete. They're afraid they're aren't enough people to go around. So it's an attitude that's based on insecurity and anxiety.

So we have to find a way to be secure. If we want to experience this amazing *blessing* called the abundance mentality, we need to find our security in Jesus Christ, because all of us do, of ourselves, lack. We only have so much time. We only have so much money. We only have so much knowledge. But Jesus Christ owns *everything*. And He is outside of time. He's made everything. And He promises, out of all that abundance that He has, to take care of us – that He's going to look after us.

Let's look at one of the places where He makes that promise. It's in Hebrews 11, and verse 6. It says here:

Heb. 11:6 – *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

That part – that part about diligently seeking Him – worries some people. They think, “I don't diligently seek Him.” Well, here's what I think about that. I think that if God said, “I am a rewarder of all those who are over seven feet tall,” or if He said, “I am a rewarder of all those who have an IQ of 180,” then we would have something legitimate to worry about, because we can't do anything about either of those. But He *doesn't* say that, does He? He says that He will reward those who diligently seek Him. We all get to *choose* whether we're going to seek Him or not. Consequently, we get to choose whether we're going to be rewarded abundantly or not. We get to choose! Isn't that just the *best* thing you've ever heard? God's standing there with His arms out, saying, “Come to Me so I can bless you *more* than you've ever imagined!” We can't be secure in our own abilities, but we can be secure in our relationship with Jesus Christ, because He is a *savior* who is abundant in gracious forgiveness. All we have to do is focus on moving our life in His direction. And if we do, it'll get bigger!

Last example. Let's go to Psalm 1:1 – my favorite psalm – the very first one.

Psa. 1:1 – *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful.* Who is that – the scornful? Well,

that's the negative, the anxious, the paranoid that we've been talking about, the sarcastic, the critical – those people.

My father was born in 1902 and he grew up plowing with mules on the farm. He told me when I was teenager, "Bill, it takes a real skilled carpenter to build a good barn, but any jackass can kick it down." And his point was – I think I'd been critical – was that it was easy to criticize and take a sarcastic tone and be negative. Anybody can do that. But to do something productive – to produce something good for people – well, that's something else altogether. That's a lot harder. I always remembered that. I haven't always been able to follow through with it, but I know I should.

V-2 – *But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. If we focus on it, it gets bigger. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither. And whatever he does shall prosper. Remember my boss? He's like a tree planted by a river. The ungodly are not so, but like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore, the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous, for the LORD knows the way of the righteous. But the way of the ungodly shall perish.*

I keep coming back to my boss, but he's moving his life in God's direction, and everything he does just falls into place for him. He's being blessed and supplied with the things that he needs. He's drawn all these really good people to him – that help him – that know things that he doesn't know even. So he's getting the nourishment that he needs to pull it off. It's just taking off.

I once planted a weeping willow tree in front of a house that we lived in. It was a lot that was on a depleted cotton farm in Arkansas – couldn't even grow good weeds. It was terrible to try to raise a lawn on that soil. But this weeping willow that I planted – it was just a little...about the size of your little finger when it started out – it was lush, rich, green tree in no time at all. I was amazed! It was just...there it was! I just couldn't figure out how it happened. Then I realized that I'd planted it over the septic field. So there was an unseen source of nutrients and water all the time. I told Elaine that one day we'd get up in the morning, go in the bathroom, and see a willow shoot growing out of the toilet. But that tree was supplied by an unseen source. The psalms tell us that that's what will happen to us when we move our life in God's direction. We *can* be abundant, because we *know* God will take care of us – even if other people can't see where it's coming from – out of His abundance. No need for insecurity, fear, anxiety or doubt, because when we are with God – when we're going God's direction – it's all good.