

Abundance Mentality
By John Blackwell, Ph.D.

It was 5:30 a.m. Copper wanted to be fed and to go outside. Copper is our new bloodhound. Eighty-five pounds of enthusiastic sweetness. Lots of skin, too. This particular morning, I was pretty tired, but I pulled myself out of bed to meet Copper's desires (or were they demands?).

I took Copper and Madeleine (our French Bulldog) to the kitchen and fed them. I then made coffee. When the coffee was ready, I poured myself a cup and took Copper and Robert Fagles' translation of Homer's *Odyssey* into the backyard, where I sat under the walnut trees and read. One of the nice things about living here in Kansas is that the trees in our backyard are not only majestic, but the squirrels play on them during the wee hours of the morning. I look up not only to see the squirrels chasing each other. I look up to the tops of the trees, where the rising sun bathes them in light, and I am aware that although I wasn't enthusiastic about getting out of bed on this particular morning, the dogs, the squirrels, the trees, the rising sun, that first cup of strong coffee, and Homer have all made me incalculably rich. Moreover, the trees, the squirrels, and the sunlight are all free. I haven't paid one nickel for them, and yet they have made me a wealthy man.

This wealth can enrich our children as well. It doesn't cost a cent, and it's there every day—twenty-four—seven, as we say.

Neil Postman wrote a book entitled *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. One of the things Postman talks about is how we have become so saturated with entertainment that we demand to be entertained. We can't get enough of it. He argues that the whole world is becoming more and more like Las Vegas.

I don't consider myself an expert on Las Vegas culture. However, I was a pastor there, and I have witnessed what a culture of entertainment and avarice can do to people. The Las Vegas industry is designed to lure us into giving away our money. It's built on the idea that we not only *can* get something for nothing, we *should*. Why? Because we deserve it!

One of the problems with this kind of thinking is that the whole industry is built on a culture of superficiality. I can remember asking myself the question, *When someone visits Las Vegas (for the purpose of gambling or being entertained), does that person leave Las Vegas any better off?* When we habitually indulge ourselves, do we improve ourselves as human beings? Do we become better people?

I'm not suggesting that we never seek entertainment. I wish I could remember who it was that defined a puritan as a person with a gnawing fear that someone somewhere might actually be happy. Happiness is a virtue, but I wonder if it can be sought directly. The problem I am talking about is when we demand to be entertained. This demand for entertainment makes us demanding people. This leads to the curse of insatiability. When we become insatiable, we can't get enough—ever. We always want more and more, and we want it now!

Adding injury to the assault on our humanity, we can also plunge ourselves deeper and deeper into debt. This can force the entire family into a straightjacket of stress leading to hopelessness and despair.

If the problem is insatiability, what is the solution? I didn't invent the term *abundance mentality*, and I'm not even sure that the way I am using the term is the same as those who have coined the phrase. What the trees and the squirrels and the sunlight tell us is that we are already rich. The riches are in our backyard. If my memory is correct, that's the lesson that Dorothy had to learn in the land of Oz.

What if our children were to witness our awareness and enjoyment of the wealth that is in our own backyard? What if we were to take responsibility for embracing an abundance mentality? What if we were to hold our own demanding insatiability in check and to turn our awareness to the riches in which we are bathed?

The biggest influence we have with our children is in the examples we set. Our young people watch us. In many respect, they become like us. What if they were to catch the mentality of abundance in what we willingly embrace?

There's more. Suppose we find it difficult to relinquish our own demanding habits and insatiability. Would not our children benefit from witnessing our honest efforts to grow and enjoy the riches in which we live and move and have our being?

Richard Rohr has a wonderful observation: God blesses what we are trying to say yes to. I experienced such a blessing in a way that I did not expect and certainly would not plan for. While I was sitting in the backyard under the walnut trees enjoying my coffee, Copper, and Homer's *Odyssey*, I felt something land on my head. It was a walnut shell. I looked up, and twenty-five feet above me, a squirrel was enjoying a nut. A moment later, a second shell landed on my head. Then came the kicker. I'm not quite sure how to convey this. I certainly want to do so in good taste. I hope you won't be offended, so here goes: The squirrel pooped on Homer and me. Some of it landed on the page I was reading. The rest landed on my bald head.

What immediately came to mind was something that happened to John Wooden. He is the legendary basketball coach who took U.C.L.A. to several national championships. In one of his books, he writes that he won his first championship as a coach on Holy Saturday. As the next morning was Easter Sunday, he and his wife went to church in the city where they won the championship. As they walked out of the hotel lobby, a bird did the same thing to Coach Wooden that the squirrel did to me. The coach laughed. He couldn't help but feel that God was making sure that winning a national title didn't go to his head!

What the squirrel did to me gave me a good laugh. It gave my family a good laugh as well. *And it didn't cost us a cent! The entire experience was free!* It also gave me another chance to laugh at myself, and helped me to remember the importance of humility—of not thinking too highly of myself, of remembering my place in the world. The truth is that I treasure the memory of that morning. I am all the richer for it.