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THE PROBLEM WITH PLENTY

I once read a true story that has stuck with me over the years. It was about a young boy named Johnie and his well-intentioned neighbor, Bill.

Bill noticed that day after day the little boy sat on his front stoop playing incessantly with three little beat-up matchbox cars. It was obvious that Johnie's large family was struggling financially, and these three battered cars were the only toys the child had to play with.

Not long after this, the neighbor was excited to learn that a local gas station was running a promotion. They were offering a free matchbox toy with each fill-up. He decided to fill his tank as often as possible and to get his friends to do the same. Over the course of a couple of months, Bill acquired a shoebox full of brand new, shiny matchbox cars.

With great anticipation, Bill delivered his gift to Johnie, and was thrilled to watch the little boy's eyes light up as he opened the box. The neighbor smiled every time he drove or walked past the house after this as he saw little Johnie sitting with the shoebox nestled by his side playing with some of the shiny new cars.

One day, however, his smile turned to a frown. Bill saw that the

shoebox was nowhere in sight, and Johnie was once again playing with his three original beat up cars. Alarmed, Bill asked the boy why he wasn't playing with the cars he had collected for him, and this is what Johnie replied. "There were too many. I just couldn't love them all."

This story perfectly illustrates the problem with plenty. It is something God warned his followers about way back at the time when Moses was leading the Israelite nation on a very long journey to the "promised land." Despite protecting the people as they fled Egypt, and even providing them with daily food in the form of manna along the way, the people grumbled and God knew that they needed something concrete to look forward to. He instructed Moses to give the people some specific information about this land they were going to. "Tell the people it is a good land of flowing streams and pools of water ... a land of wheat and barley, of grapevines, fig trees, pomegranates, olives, and honey ... a land where food is plentiful and nothing is lacking." With a few substitutions, he could have been describing **our** land in northern Michigan with its abundance of fresh water lakes, artesian wells, orchards, fields, and gardens.

While God always wants his people to rejoice in the abundant life he has prepared for them, he also cautions us. **"When you have eaten your fill, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. ... Beware that in your plenty you do not forget the Lord your God."** (Deuteronomy 8:7-11)

It is easy in our lives of plenty to gorge ourselves on the pleasures provided by fresh water drinks and swims, tree-shaded hikes, and an abundant supply of locally grown fruits and vegetables, while at the same time forgetting the source from which all such things come.

In addition to God's warning — "beware in your plenty" — , we would do well to remember Johnie's message as well. Too much of anything — be it matchbox car, shoes in our closet, or toys in our garage — creates a problem. We just can't love them all.

~Written by Bonnie Garbrecht

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