

A Stop by Quiet Waters
“Being content in the midst of discontentment.”
Dick Germaine

Dear Friend,

The headlines of Barna's latest research project, "**Churches Stand to Lose Several Billion Dollars in Lost Donations Due to Economic Downturn,**" is enough to strike panic in the heart of nearly every pastor. The article goes on to say, "During the past three months, one of the ways that adults have adjusted to their financial hardships has been by reducing their charitable giving. In total, one out of every five households (20%) has decreased its giving to churches or other religious centers."

Pastor, what do you do at a time like this when it appears that you are not going to receive enough income to meet the budget for the year? During my decades in pastoral ministry our nation experienced three significant recessions, one in the 1970s, one in the 1980s, and one in the 1990s. I would like to share some insights the Lord taught me during those times.

First, don't panic and fear that your ministry is going to fail and your church is going to go under. These are not times for sleep-robbing fear but for heart-strengthening faith. Remember, from beginning to end your ministry is, "*Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty.*" Though the money for ministry may have been coming in much more readily in the past that it is now, it was coming in because of the influence of the Spirit of God. If support for your ministry is dependent upon you and your personality then you are truly in trouble for you are building with wood, hay, and stubble, and such materials will never endure.

Second, remind yourself afresh that if God has truly called you to what you are doing then he will also give you everything you need in order to fulfill that ministry. Our Father in heaven never calls us to do anything for which he does not equip us and for which he does not provide the money, personnel, time, etc. to fulfill the task. If you need a certain amount of money to do whatever God has called you to do then he will provide that money. When the disciples needed money to pay the temple tax Jesus sent Peter fishing and even told him ahead of time where the money would be and how much. If God could literally put needed money in the mouth of a fish is it any more difficult a thing for him to put it in an offering plate. Our Lord has promised us that he would, "*Supply your every need according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*"

Third, remind yourself also that economic setbacks are an inevitable part of life in this sinful world. I would hazard a guess that if you are less than 50 years old this is not the only economic recession you are going to experience. There are no such things as economic recessions in the kingdom of heaven, but there are in the kingdoms of men because of our ignorance, greed, and other sinful and selfish motives. Selfishness and greed, whether in the life of an individual or in a culture, will inevitably produce the consequences we are presently experiencing.

It is easy for us to learn how to live in a prosperous nation with a growing economy, but it is another thing to learn how to live when money becomes scarce. Our present economy is presenting us with an opportunity such as the apostle Paul had which caused him to say, "*I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty, I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want, I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*" Our present situation is presenting us with an opportunity to learn how to be content whatever our circumstances, a lesson we need to learn but which can never be

learned in times of economic prosperity. This gives us the opportunity to ask ourselves the question, what is the source of my peace, joy, satisfaction, and significance? If we lose these in times like these it is a clear sign that their source is not in our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, but rather in money and what it can do.

Fourth, take the time to carefully examine all you are doing in your ministry to see whether each thing is an absolute necessity at this time or just a desirable thing because it would produce good consequences. It's so easy for us to become involved in good things which God has not called us to. If the cost of doing your ministry continues to be higher than the income to support the ministry then you have to draw one of two conclusions: first, God is no longer honoring his own promises to us; or, second, we are budgeting for and doing some things which God has not called us to and therefore does not feel obligated to financially underwrite. Let's embrace afresh the truth that the kingdom of God is not built, "*...by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty.*"

Finally, accept the fact that setbacks are just that, setbacks, not the end. Look to the Lord for guidance, use sanctified common sense in your decision-making, and don't tie your significance and success to numbers, dollars, and buildings, for this is not how God measures the significance and success of our lives. Jesus said, "*I am the real vine, my Father is the vine-dresser. He removes any of my branches which are not bearing fruit and he prunes every branch that does bear fruit to increase its yield. Now, you have already been pruned by my words. You must go on growing in me and I will grow in you.*" (J. B. Phillips translation) Our significance and success in life comes out of our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ and our becoming increasingly like him in the way we think, speak, act, respond, relate, etc. These are the things the pruning work of the Lord God is designed to produce in us.

Peace and joy in Christ,
Dick Germaine

PS. If the Lord spoke to you with these words, please send them along to your fellow pastors, friends, and lay leaders for their encouragement. How to have your name added to the regular distribution list is explained below.

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