Money

Q My income just went down. Is it OK if I stop tithing until things get back on track?

A The short answer is no—and let me share why with three powerful principles from God’s Word that have guided our family through times of financial uncertainty. I think they’ll be a blessing to you too.

1. Keep giving God your very best. We need to remember that everything we have belongs to God and should be used to further his kingdom. Treasure Principle author Randy Alcorn acknowledges it’s easy to rationalize giving less, but compares that temptation to robbing six convenience stores last year and then hoping by God’s grace to rob only three this year. The point, he says, is not to rob God less, but to not rob him at all. It’s better to live on 90 percent or less of your income inside the will of God, Alcorn reminds us, than to live on 100 percent of your income outside of it.

2. Praise God for what you do have. The Bible offers a new way of looking at things that’s radically different from what we see and hear in the news. Barnabas Foundation conference speaker Mark Vincent recently pointed out that a biblical perspective moves us from a “scarcity” mentality to an “abundance” mentality. That means we can find joy in difficult times by counting the many blessings we do have, rather than fixing our minds on what we may not have or might not be able to get. The Bible is full of examples of people who lived with an “abundance” mentality, such as the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17. Although she had very little, she gave what she had, trusting God to provide for her in the future. One very practical tool that has helped me develop an abundance mentality is a website called www.globalrichlist.com.

It will give you an immediate picture of how your abundance compares with the rest of the world.

3. Replace fear with focus. The fear of the unknown is a powerful force in our lives and makes us want to protect ourselves financially and withhold from God. This is a natural reaction, but it can be toxic to our walk with God. As Pastor Andy Stanley pointed out in his book Fields of Gold, believers need to develop an attitude in which “God’s voice is louder than the soundtrack of ‘what-ifs’ in our lives.”

A biblical perspective moves us from a “scarcity” mentality to an “abundance” mentality.

To do that, we need to ask God to help us replace our fears with a focus on “the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” boldly trusting Jesus that as we follow him with our finances, “all these things will be given to [us] as well” (Matt. 6:33) and he will “increase [our] store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of [our] righteousness” (2 Cor. 9:10).

—Mike Buwalda

Mike Buwalda serves as a stewardship consultant for the Barnabas Foundation (mike@barnabasfoundation.com).

Environment

Q Why should I care about the environment when the mission of the church is to share the gospel with the world?

A The gospel message is threefold: creation, fall, and redemption. God created the world and saw that it was good, human sin caused a break between humanity and God, and Jesus came to redeem that relationship through his death and resurrection.

So where does creation care fit into all of this? First of all, God created the world, and it was good (Gen. 1-2). Psalm 104 beautifully illustrates how God sustains his creation daily. And Psalm 19:1 says that the heavens declare the glory of God. So God created and sustains creation, and in turn creation points us toward God. That in itself is reason to work to keep the world healthy.

But there’s more to the story. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and the ground is cursed because of it (Gen. 3:17). The land mourns and is destroyed because of our sin (read Rom. 8, Hosea 4, Jer. 12, and Isa. 24) This is where the hope of the gospel breaks through. Jesus came to “to reconcile to himself all things”—not just humanity but “all things” (read Col. 1:15-20).

When we care for God’s beloved creation, we are walking as disciples of the One who created the world and declared it good, sustains it daily, and redeemed it by his blood on the cross. And when we ensure that the water is clean, the air is not polluted, and the land is healthy, we are better able to do as Jesus commanded us when he said to love God with all our hearts and to love our neighbors as ourselves. After all, what kind of love can we show when the water we extend to the thirsty is polluted and the land that is to grow food to feed the hungry is destroyed because of our greed?

—Cindy Verbeek

Cindy Verbeek is the church and community group liaison for A Rocha Canada—Christians in Conservation and an active member of Houston Christian Reformed Church, British Columbia. For more ideas contact her at cindy.verbeek@arocha.org.