

If you are like many ministry leaders, you may be wondering how bad the recession is going to be. One of our friends found his ministry's October reserves fall by 50% of last year's. They have had to lay off a significant number of their staff. He is not alone, as you know from your experience these past few months.

Where is God? What if our year-end contributions tank?

It often takes faith to reconcile how our immutable God reveals himself in ever new ways in this world. He is Jehovah-jireh, our provider, and yet there are times of plenty and there are times of famine—how do we reconcile this?!

As Christians living in the west, we have been blessed with times of plenty. We have seen God's provision for our lives and our ministries come so faithfully that believing in God's goodness to us took little faith on our part.

Times are changing. The economy is giving our souls a grand new opportunity to trust in our King.

In 1 Kings 17 we see a picture of God's provision in time of want. It is a beautiful portrayal of how God is faithful even in the most desperate of situations. And I

believe that it is His grace to us that we are taken to desperate times like that of Elijah and the widow in order to see the extent of God's goodness to us. You see, we are always living completely dependant upon our Lord, but sometimes it's easier to see than others.

Elijah, one of the few who stood faithful to God during his time,

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found himself living in the wilderness with no apparent source of sustenance. However, God provided by sending ravens with bread and meat and he drank from a nearby brook. It was a miracle, but really no more under God's control than had he been dining off of the harvest of his family farm. Indeed the famine that God had Elijah proclaim over the land was a sign to all that He was ever in control of the bounty of the land and the sustenance of its people.

God's control over the initial famine was striking. His

provision for Elijah in the wilderness was further emphasis. But God goes one step further to reveal Himself as the great provider, even though it looks at first like He is failing Elijah.

The stream dried up. It looks like God is failing as a provider. But wait, God tells Elijah to go stay with a widow who would supply him with food—an unlikely source, but then again so were ravens. But when he arrives at the widow's home he finds her using the last of her flour and oil to prepare one final meal before she and her son die of hunger. Again, it looks like God is failing as a provider. But we must believe that God is who He says He is! Elijah did.

Elijah promised the widow that God would not allow her flour or oil to run out until the draught was over. God kept His promise.

We are told that because God didn't even hold His own Son back, but sacrificed Him on our behalf, we have assurance that He won't hold back any other good thing for us (Romans 8:32). This truth must shape the way we interpret times of hardship.

An amazing thing happens when a Christian suffers! Rather than

suffering producing it's natural outcome of despair, it is transformed within the Spirit-filled heart of a believer from suffering to perseverance, perseverance to character and character to hope (Romans 5:3-4). How incredible is it that instead of despair suffering brings hope for a believer. How is this? Because God loves us, the suffering He allows in our lives must be for our good.

God cares more about the refining of our souls than He does our happiness—or in other words, He cares about our ultimate happiness so much that He is willing to sacrifice our momentary happiness in order to secure it. May this be a comfort to us during these trying times. God is doing a good work in this economic crisis. God is giving us both a clarified view of how He is the source of our well-being and also an opportunity to trust in Him that was impossible during the time of plenty. Indeed we have reason to rejoice in our suffering! For He is mutually sovereign and loving, and therefore all that comes to us is for our good.