



By Jolene Fenwick

At times I have the privilege of hearing stories from Highland attenders of how the church, or the staff, or Highland's many volunteers have impacted their lives. I usually only hear a snapshot of the whole story when they tell me. I decided to follow up on two such accounts recently and learned so much more. I trust you will too.

I first became aware of Tony's story when he, a young father, approached me a couple years ago near the Wausau Specialty Coffee area. He told me that he and his wife had struggled with tithing when they initially attended Highland because money was so tight. They had decided that they would forgo one specialty coffee per week and give that money instead to the Lord. That story has always been an encouragement to me, but when I asked Tony if I could share his story I found out so much more:

*Melody and I have had an interesting couple of years since that day. Perhaps like many families today, we needed to make cuts to our budget just to break even. What I was making at Shopko turned out to barely cover the basics (mortgage, electric, water, etc.). We even talked about not having a vehicle, to help shave expenses. It was becoming more and more difficult to give, especially since we already committed to sponsoring a child through World Vision (her name is Ruma, a 9-year old girl from India). We decided that we would continue to give whatever was possible. However, God provided the means to make it through every circumstance that came along. Just a couple weeks ago, I started a new job as a custodian for DCE Junior High. I now have amazing benefits, better pay, weekends/holidays off and a consistent schedule. We can now comfortably make our budget as well as giving more. We thank the Lord for giving us such a wonderful church family to help us in the good times and bad. I hope that our story brings encouragement to this Next Generation of young Christians that have been hit with the realities of this world. - Tony Marcellino*

I recently met a retired gentleman of the congregation and in speaking about the capital campaign I happened to share the Marcellino's story with him. He then shared that he had also struggled financially as a young man and that his wife and he had tithed despite having little with a growing family. That is where his story took a twist:

*One day I got a really good job. It was a gift from God in no uncertain terms. We were making three times the income we had ever made and were living well.*

*Then we quit giving. No one knows why. Material lust, I suppose. I am not sure I know why we did it even now. But shortly after we quit giving our entire financial picture went south and we watched my paychecks swirl around the drain every week. We were making more money than ever before and had nothing to show for it.*

*So my bride and I had a sit down meeting and began giving again. Life went on unremarkably. But, our clothes did not seem to wear out. Our old car just did not seem to break down like it had. Our children stayed healthy and what doctor bills we had incurred, got paid on time. Our creditors were satisfied and we continued to have everything we needed and it continues to this day. It is important to note here that we do not think we are comfortable financially today simply because we gave to the church (a health, wealth and prosperity gospel that is not Biblical). God is not obligated to bless us, yet He graciously did. We trust him to do all things well and we are deserving of nothing.*

Christian financial advisor Ron Blue once made a statement that mirrors this family's story so well. "Prosperity leads to fear of loss. Fear of loss leads to loss of faith. The remedy for loss of faith is giving."

I greatly appreciate how these stories, and Mr. Blue, remind me of the importance of trusting God's provision in my life and of how easily my faith, and financial stewardship of all He provides, can drift if I do not take the next step in my relationship with God. What is your next step?