

# Christians, Money, and Hard Times

## A Christian's Guide to Adjusting Finances during Crisis

When a disaster strikes, then our true status comes to the surface. That is true for our spiritual maturity, or lack thereof, but it is also true for our financial maturity, or lack thereof. Already our current pandemic has exposed those among Christians who have saved up for the day of trouble and are able to help others, and those who have not done so and are now in need. The reasons for struggling financially more than others can be anything from wastefuliving, to good-intentioned but mis-guided financial decisions, to genuine poverty in spite of a diligent work ethic and frugal spending habits. Either way, now the financial state of every Christian is being made evident, and now is time to renew our mind on Biblical money sense.

There are two ways to attack the money problem when disaster strikes, 1) free up as much money as possible, and 2), pay your dues in the right order.

### Free up as much money as you can

The most basic financial policy is simply "Spend less than you earn". Now that your income has been reduced, reduce your expenses or increase your income. "But I can't change anything!" we bewail, settling for a passive hope that things will somehow fix themselves. It is time to be drastic and decisive, but not proud and foolish.

Here are some drastic decisions to make wisely to relieve your financial situation for the time being.

1. **Reduce non-essentials that costs money:** cancel all entertainment related accounts (Pro 21:17), reduce phone data usage and calls, drive less frequently, shop less frequently, shop only for necessities and make use of the specials, reduce usage of water and electricity

2. **Draw from your savings:** Give notice on your saving and short-term investment accounts to be able to access the money to see yourself through the time of crisis. Dedicated available funds need to be rededicated to matters of greater importance and need. (Luke 12:13-21)
3. **Enquire about extension on debt repayments:** contact all store accounts and bank loans and see if there are ways to postpone repayments by a few months
4. **A note on having more time but less money:** Use your time, if you cannot use it to generate income, to reduce present and future expenses. Learn to cook and bake better to spend less money on shopping. Do things around the home that you would otherwise have paid someone to do. Use what resources you have lying around to prepare for future savings or even income. (Pro 24:33-34)

## **Fill one bucket of financial responsibility at a time**

Your salary got cut, your income is less, but the bills still need to be paid. In what order do you pay them, and how does giving to the church fit into times like these? Fill each of the following financial buckets in this order, and for every bucket that is full, let the finances flow over to the next one until it is full, then only to the next one, etc., etc..

1. **Pay your bills and debts.** If you owe someone money, then make that the first things you pay (Ps 37:21). By opening an account or using a service without paying up front (including utilities), you have morally bound yourself as a slave to them and are obliged to pay (Pro 22:7).
2. **Fulfill your own immediate and extended family's responsibilities.** Use whatever money you do have to meet your own needs and those you are primarily responsible for (1 Tim 5:4, 8). If you are in serious need, contact your family for help.

3. **Give to the work of the Church.** Once you have paid all whom you owe and have fulfilled your family responsibilities, then only give to the church. Remember that giving is not under a 'tithing' law, but prompted by freewill as you are able (2 Cor 9:7-8). Give for the normal spiritual ministry of the church (Pro 3:9 "firstfruits" concept) and give for the specific needs of those in the church (1 Cor 16:2; 2 Cor 8 and 9; Gal 6:10). If you are in serious need, contact your church for help.
4. **Always share with the destitute.** I use "destitute" instead of "poor" to differentiate between those with little and those with none (James 1:27). Even though those in your own physical and church family are a higher responsibility than the poor in society in general, we need to maintain a generous spirit, and can do so by giving, even if only a little bit of food (Pro 22:9), to the hungry in society and to those who are working basic jobs to feed large households.

## Further Resources

Lest you are in a similar position next time some crisis, national or personal hits, use this as a wake-up call to rethink your financial principles (Pro 22:3). Here are some resources that might be of help

- Start now to get a clear perspective of your finances. Write down every expense and every income and every potential financial source or burden. Share your specific money matters with someone who not only understands finances somewhat, but more importantly, with someone who is mature with money on a financial and Biblical level. What you are well informed of today will provide the knowledge you need to make good decisions tomorrow. (Pro 27:23-27)
- Dave Ramsey, *Total Money Makeover* book or youtube videos (adjust to SA setting, but still very valuable)