



# climate of change

The following was printed in the Evangelical Alliance magazine 'IDEA' in January 2009. It is an extract of a longer essay showing that generosity shouldn't just be a response to financial need.

In October 1987 BBC weatherman Michael Fish famously assured viewers there was no hurricane on the way. In fact Britain experienced our biggest storm since 1703. Twenty years later the first run on a British bank in 100 years warned of the worst financial storm for many years. Given a new mood of critical reappraisal the Church can speak a contemporary, even prophetic word within society, a word of hope in challenging times.

But to do so with conviction and integrity requires change for the Church. We need our thinking about, talking about and our use of money to be biblically shaped and directed, so that we act as followers of Christ and not just consumers.

We should start by recognising that we have spoken far too little on topics about which the Bible has plenty to say.

It is often said there are over 2,350 verses on wealth and possessions. Among them Deuteronomy 8 suggests three essential perspectives on wealth which can help us in this: money as gift, temptation and as a covenant obligation.

When God gave us bodies he also gifted to us the material things we need. Deuteronomy tells of the abundant *gift* of land. Gift means practising gratitude. If we are privileged to work we should hold our payslips thankfully when millions receive benefits or minimum wage. Gift means joyful generosity, knowing that in giving we reflect the heart of the Giver, his heart for mission and for the poor.

But Deuteronomy also knows that our sense of gift is undermined by our casual language of owning, earning and deserving. Herein lies temptation. We focus on today,

often sharing a commonplace dissatisfaction with what we have and end up wanting more. Wealth can capture our hearts. The credit crunch and recession may be the discipline we need to think again about our attitude to credit.

Thirdly, Deuteronomy teaches that the gift brings covenant obligations: lend generously to the poor, protect the weak, lend without interest, release economic slaves, cancel debts. Of course these things need thoughtful modern application but the principle that gift creates social obligations remains true. If around the world we can rescue banks to the tune of £5,000 billion<sup>1</sup> and nationalise a building society in a weekend why is it so difficult to find the £150 billion to meet the Millennium Goals for the poorest people on earth?

Authentic, biblical stewardship knows God as both owner and giver of all. It knows that we must be responsible and accountable stewards. Our lifestyle must be sustainable, characterised by celebration, contentment and gratitude. At the heart of biblical stewardship is the practice of generosity. Such generosity, in both individuals and society, is an effective antidote to the desire for



more. It honours God and not our chosen lifestyle. Generosity acknowledges that Jesus is Lord of our money and generosity practises our obligation to be open-hearted and open-handed to the poor.

How then can churches take action? Christians will feel the effects of this global storm. Do we simply batten down the hatches, pray for shelter and hope to ride out the storm? Or does our faith have something to say, something to offer not

just to our congregations but to the communities of which we are a part? There is a window of opportunity to prepare now before the effects of recession bite hard.

We would encourage each church to be “recession ready”, to think about, adapt and develop our list of strategies below so you are ready to serve the vulnerable in both your congregation and community in the coming days.


Economic hardship is not the time to stop giving. “If you close your ears to the cry of the poor you will cry out and not be heard” (Proverbs 21:13). This is the time to stand out as different.

Yet, generosity is not simply a response to growing financial needs. The point is to glorify God, and this concerns how we are more than what we do. The current climate is an opportunity to teach and model stewardship. The primary purpose is to change who we are and how we are around money as an integral part of Christian discipleship and to glorify God in our lives and lifestyles.

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With grateful appreciation to Tom Sine of Mustard Seed Associates who included these recession readiness ideas in a presentation to the Evangelical Leadership Council in September 2008.

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1. Start talking money in different ways within the church
  2. Train a crisis response team who can offer support
  3. Know where to point and how to support people in debt
  4. Offer training in financial literacy and managing a budget
  5. Identify underutilised resources in your congregation and community
  6. Establish a hardship fund for emergency situations
  7. Covenant to maintain or increase giving to the world's poorest people
  8. Co-operate locally with churches and community groups and networks
  9. Establish practical and emotional support for the newly unemployed
  10. Make it a point of corporate church prayer