

How to Prepare the Church for Recession

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When the Government Has No Answers, You're Still God

How to Prepare the Church for Recession

Kevin Russell

How should the church prepare for the impending recession? As a chartered accountant, you would perhaps expect me to come up with the usual cost cutting tips. Indeed, this morning I have received an invitation to subscribe to a *brand new* monthly publication 'Tips and Advice Cost Cutting'. However, my sneaking suspicion is that God is bigger than all of this!

Godfrey Birtill and others penned the words of the title to this article as long ago as 2004 in the somewhat prophetic worship song "Where O where's Your presence O God?" As global economic crisis strikes our world, the first statement to be made then is "You're Still God" and the first question to ask is "What are you doing Lord?" As I prayed through this question, I was led to Haggai 2:6-9. A sense that God is shaking the world and with it, the complacency of the church: "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, ... I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty. 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty. 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house ... and in this place I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty."

As the general public is 'shaken' and begins to ask the bigger questions of life, I believe that we, the church, will be presented with an unprecedented time of real opportunity. An opportunity to shine above the gloom and doom and to bring mental and emotional peace to our communities amidst the economic turmoil. Is your church ready?

If we are honest with ourselves, we have so often built comfort for ourselves rather than focussing on the poor and marginalised of our society – those that are so much at the centre of God's heart for people. Chapter 1 of Haggai warns that "You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it." The Psalmist neatly complements these sentiments by saying "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labour in vain" (Ps 127:1).

What does this all mean in practice for our churches today? I believe that recession proofing our churches means:

- Repenting of our complacency towards our communities, where complacency exists.
- Re-considering how we as a church and as individuals live out the two **greatest** commands to love God with all our hearts, souls and mind **and** to love our neighbours as ourselves (Matt 22:36-40). As Jesus himself said, **all** of the Law and the Prophets hang on these two (v40).
- Giving priority and profile to persistent and focussed corporate prayer.

- Seeking God's help and leading to address the immediate financial, emotional and physical needs of those around us - in real and tangible ways.
- **Not** cutting back on activity that expresses God's love and glory.
- Identifying activities that may be less fruitful or that we do because we always have! Should these be cut out?
- Trusting Him for our finances (Proverbs 3 is so instructive in the present context).
- Boldly teaching the principle of tithing from our first fruits and bringing the whole tithe into the storehouse and expecting to see God bless us as a result – Mal 3:10 (noting that this 'blessing' is a much wider than just financially).

What trends can we expect to see in our communities that will need addressing?

- Increasing debt;
- Increasing despair amongst those already in debt;
- Loss of self esteem and self confidence of those who have lost their jobs or whose jobs are threatened;
- Pressures on marriage and relationships as economic stresses and strains rise;
- Increasing drug and alcohol abuse,

... and so on.

It will be evident that these outward symptoms will often hide much wider issues. Issues that a Godly, loving church can help solve in a holistic rather than compartmentalised way.

Yes, we may see our finances come under pressure. But surely as we bravely reach out to a hurting world on our doorsteps with the radical love of Christ burning within us, we will see the 'lost' finances replaced and exceeded by an new influx of hearts grateful for how God has come to their rescue in their time of need.

Yes, let's be credible, but expect God to be *incredible* in meeting the needs shaken people. And in doing so "the glory of the present house will be greater that the glory of the former house ... and in this place God will grant peace".

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