

Ten Benefits of Difficult Economic Times

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For many ministries, financial challenges come from time to time. However, these are not bad times from God's perspective. In fact, God's Word is filled with examples of difficult times (Ps. 37 & 2 Cor. 8) that, from God's world view, rather than being bad times, can be times that are actually beneficial for us. God gives us challenging times to (1) deepen our own personal faith, (2) improve our ministries' long-term effectiveness, and (3) focus on our call to fulfill the Great Commission of winning the world to Christ.

No matter how bad our situation, personally or in ministry, God is with His people, and He provides a way for us to find joy and contentment within the circumstance in which we find ourselves. This article is to help you focus on ten possible benefits of challenging economic times.

1. **A time for counting our blessings.** Because we will always have an abundance in Christ, there will always be an overflow of blessings for which to be thankful. The hymn's call, to "Count your blessings/Name them one by one" is a good exercise for us all to do. (Prov. 10:6, Gen. 49:25)
2. **An opportunity for trusting God.** God, as Creator, owns all in the created world. When our earthly resources dry up, we are reminded that we should trust God. All we have, we are managing for Him as stewards. The recession should bring us back to relying first and foremost on God, and not trusting in our own power. Tougher times are when God shows up even more (Ps. 115:9, Ps. 56:11).
3. **A time to rejoice.** While the watchword of today's world may be fear and panic, Christians can rejoice because their security is not in their bank accounts. With people tending to fortress themselves in their savings and homes, Christians can make themselves available to the needs of others, knowing that they don't risk their real treasure in recessions. This will set Christians apart, making them a powerful witness (Ps. 35:9, Phil. 1:18, Phil. 4:4).
4. **A time for renewal of prayer.** The uncertain times and light wallets of a recession remind us of what has always been true: all our needs are supplied through Christ in prayer. Repentance, wisdom and contentment will result (Phil. 4:19, 2 Cor. 8:10, Pr. 11:2, Eph. 4:32, 1 Thess. 5:16).
5. **An opportunity for ministry collaboration and hospitality.** This is a time for the uniting of focus and effort. Opportunities will abound to reduce ministry overlap, sharing costs, remove duplication, and fostering an overall spirit of unity. Ministries will be able to open their doors and have a major impact in just providing basic needs. Romans 12:13 commands us to pursue hospitality, and a recession will give us a multiplicity of options to follow that command.
6. **A time for the renewal of the work ethic.** Economic downturns also bring a renewal of working with our hands. In the absence of pushing papers and non-existing finance

office jobs, many will be doing work that they never thought they would do. This is not all bad for us. This will produce a renewed sense of accomplishment in our work and respect for the world around us. When material resources are low, people will be led to give their time and talents. A recession brings a greater awareness of the needs around us, and reminds us of what we have that we can give, even if its not money (2 Cor. 8:1-7, Rom. 12:4 & 9, Neh. 4:6, 2 Cor. 9:10, 1 Tim. 4:8, 1 Thess. 4:11).

7. **A time for the renewal of simplicity and common wisdom.** Economic challenges will and should lead us into a thinking that is not controlled by greed. The downfall of Wall Street should warn us that worldly knowledge undergirded by a lack of morality and ethics is not appropriate for Christians. With resources tightening, we will become less cavalier about the resources we have and strive to care for them and extend their usefulness. The value we place on the lives of others and on creation will be increased as we witness their fragility and vulnerability (Prov. 4:5, 1 Cor. 1:19, Ps. 19:7, Prov. 1:4, Jn. 16:23, Rom. 5:3, Gen. 1:28-30, 2 Tim. 3:15, Matt. 5:13, Prov. 3:19, Gen. 1:7).
8. **A time for the flowering of spiritual gifts.** God has given unique gifts to each of us intended to glorify His holy name. Hopefully, in challenging times, these gifts will be honed and matured. The Church can use this opportunity to teach on the prevalence of gifts and re-ignite their importance in the lives of Christians, as Ephesians 4:15-16 instructs us (Eph. 4:9-16, Rom. 12:3-6, Gal. 5:13, 1 Cor. 12:5-7, 1 Tim. 4:14, 2 Tim. 1:6, Prov. 25:28, Col. 3:12).
9. **A time for revival in the church.** Challenging times bring a new sense of brokenness and forgiveness that can only come when we have nothing left to hang onto. The world will often respond with despair which leads to bitterness. The Christian with his or her foundation of biblical teaching has much hope if he or she accepts hardship with a repentant spirit of humility and truth. Recall the impact of the churches in Macedonia who gave from the bottom of their hearts. Today's church can exemplify the same generosity, but we must first of all give our hearts to what the Lord would do. Furthermore, there will be a generational revival. Younger generations will be able to reap the benefits of hard work and see materialism take a back seat. The example we set for them in this time will be an example for them as they grow up (2 Cor. 8).
10. **A time for generosity.** This is an amazing opportunity for a revolution in generosity. The times ahead can be a wakeup call—a call to the Church and to Christians everywhere to be transformed from owners into stewards rich toward God who give from blessed hearts. As we seek to trust God and follow His will in all things, we will learn His heart and our calling to be generous in all things and in all areas of our lives (2 Cor. 9:11, Luke 6:23, Luke 12:21).

The time-tested statement, "When times are tough, the tough get going," is most appropriate. As Christians, we have a hope that is time-tested and enduring. May this economic downturn be the beginning of a revival of the heart for Christians. It can be a time for the renewal of faith when we are forced to rely on God, and we will remember the hope that we have in Christ. This narrowing of focus will spur us on to do the work of the Great Commission as we are reminded of what our lives are for on this earth.