



Economic Crisis Reminder: It Isn't Yours Anyway

Greg H. Parsons



During economic “crisis,” or any crisis, believers should be the calm ones.

Jesus said,

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or your body, what you should wear. Isn't there more to life than food and more to the body than clothing? (Matthew 6:25, NET Bible)

Simple truth. Difficult to apply.

It could be more difficult to apply if someone really doesn't have enough—such as our brothers and sisters in certain parts of the world. But many I've met around the world seem to have an easier time trusting God from day-to-day than those of us in the West, who have and expect so much more. We've all seen images of a happy boy in Africa rolling a used bike tire or a small dirty ball around as a toy (he doesn't seem to need a room full of electronics or a cell phone with “txt mss inc”).

But often, our Western systems and ideas get out to the rest of world and shape the expectations of believers sooner or more than Jesus' words do. Just the other day I read about a single mom my age who made almost twice as much as our family, with a son in college (we have a daughter in college) and with a home with equity (we rent our home), who can't afford to save for her retirement and already has a second mortgage on her home. The financial advisors told her to *stop* giving her son money for college (they “advised” her that he can earn enough when he gets out to pay off his loan) and start saving seriously for her future.

We've built up the expectation that large, continued spending is the norm for our economy and for most people. We have developed an economic system here where we “have” to have retirement accounts to take us into a distant future that actually increases purposeless, wasteful lifestyles and shortens our life expectancy. About ten years ago, the average time an employee lived beyond retirement from work with the County of L.A. was 18 months! Rick Wood told me it was the same when his father retired from Boeing. People need something important to get them out of bed.

Perhaps a consumption-based economy, with ever-increasing lifestyle expectations and debt to keep it all going, is not possible to sustain. It certainly isn't wise.

How does all of this impact missions? I am hoping to track what happens with missionaries during this season. (Email me if you have some information that might be helpful.) My guess is that if unemployment is 10%, Western missionaries will lose 5% of their support (since 5% unemployment is more “normal”). If unemployment increases, it will likely trickle down to missionary support. Right now, I know of churches that are doing fine and meeting budgets. We don't know how long that will continue. I'm sure some have been hit hard. I know of agencies that have had to cut back—with rumors of a couple closing down—usually because they are small and dependent on investment income.

Yet even though the cable news shows might want you to believe otherwise (to keep you watching their shows to hear the latest “news”), it is helpful to remember that, right now, more than 90% of the people in the U.S. are still employed. Of course, others have had hours cut back and people are hurting. Perhaps the best thing each of us can do is to give more! Strange as that sounds, it seems like the best way to follow what Jesus said at the end of the passage I started above:

For the unconverted pursue these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But above all, pursue his kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:32-33 NET Bible)

How are you “pursuing His Kingdom and righteousness” by your faith and actions today? How can you encourage others in your fellowship to exercise faith? f

Email me your stories: greg.parsons@uscwm.org.



Rev. Greg Parsons is General Director of the U.S. Center for World Mission. He and his wife have been on staff at the USCWM since 1982.