



A LIVING WAGE

Breaking the cycle of poverty, one family at a time

What is a living wage?

A living wage is a wage that is high enough to meet a person's basic needs, so that they don't have to struggle to maintain a decent standard of living. In South Africa, the minimum wage is not even half this amount and, sadly, many workers are illegally exploited for less.

How do we respond?

Turning the tide on poverty in our nation may seem like an impossible task, but we all have the potential to effect meaningful change in our personal spheres of influence. Starting in our own homes, with our own employees, we can begin to address the social injustices of our past.

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Unfortunately, it is human nature to use other people's behaviour as our benchmark. We quickly settle for 'the going rate' without considering whether it is sufficient to live on, and we forget that most of the working poor are the sole source of income for their families. The result is that we unwittingly contribute to an ongoing cycle of hardship instead of offering a way out.

We need to see that paying a living wage isn't an act of charity, it's justice. It requires a complete change of mind-set that says, "I am no more important or deserving than any other human being. I can gladly give out of what I have because I believe that God provides not only for me, but for my workers too". As followers of Jesus, this attitude is a significant part of our journey to righteous living, and a decision that brings joy and freedom to both the giver and the receiver.

Why should we pay a living wage?

The gospel reaches into every sphere of our lives, including our roles as employers. Our response to the living wage should therefore be informed by our faith. Prayerfully consider the following motivations, which are just four of the many reasons in favour of the living wage:

- **God is generous.** He delights in moving us from "how little can I pay?" to "how can I bless someone?"
- **Fair remuneration brings dignity.** All people are created equal and are worthy of a decent wage.
- **Exploitation is an injustice.** My preferred lifestyle should never come at the expense of another.
- **I can be a catalyst for change** and be part of helping a family break out of the cycle of poverty.

Pray that God would guide you as you seek to respond to this important issue. The following practical resources will also help you on your way.

watch & read

- VIDEO: A Living Wage: Breaking the cycle of poverty, one family at a time**
"My friend's conviction to pay his employees a living wage had a huge impact on me. I realised that as a family we weren't doing all we could for our domestic worker. We had to make some sacrifices, but it was a no-brainer."
<http://www.commongroundchurch.co.za>
- The living wage as a biblical imperative**
Isaiah 1:17 *"Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause."*
 Also see James 5:1-6, 1 Thess 4:6, Jer 22:3, Prov 22:16
- One family's journey to justice**
How we came to pay a living wage by Nigel Branken
"I honestly believe, that paying a living wage to workers is not only just, but is probably the single most important thing we can do to address poverty and inequality in our country."
<http://transforming.org.za/2013/06/11/how-we-came-to-pay-a-living-wage>
- National stats and context**
GroundUp: South Africa's 5-million working poor by Gilad Isaacs
"... should we be satisfied with a status quo in which 41% of workers, working at least 35 hours a week, cannot lift themselves and their dependents out of poverty?"
<http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-08-26-groundup-south-africas-5-million-working-poor/>
- Answers to common points of criticism**
11 Excuses people give for not paying a living wage
"If you truly value your domestic worker but can't afford to pay her a decent salary, employ her for fewer days per week and give her the opportunity to earn more elsewhere."
<http://code4sa.org/2015/04/08/pay-a-living-wage.html>

do the numbers

- Living wage calculator**
 Use this handy calculator to estimate what a living wage is for your employee(s). Everyone's circumstances are slightly different, so sit down with them and discuss their monthly financial needs.
<http://living-wage.co.za/>

make the change

- Ask tough questions**
Ask yourself: Am I contributing to South Africa's poverty crisis by paying too little? Am I prepared to adjust my personal budget or lifestyle to ensure that my employee(s) are paid a living wage? Do I really believe that all people are created equal and deserve a fair wage?
- Take action**
Have a frank conversation with your family and get everyone on board. If you can't afford the increase, what luxuries or privileges could you go without in order to free up the necessary finances? Then do it!
- Share your story**
Tell others what you've learned. Share your convictions with them. Be a catalyst for change.