

# **Inflation Likely to Be a 'Major Headwind' for Consumers This Summer**

*The Wired Word for the Week of June 19, 2022*

## **In the News**

Recently, a TWW team member, awaiting his turn at a local barbershop, overheard a conversation between the barber and the man in the chair. The barber asked the man, "Where are you going on your vacation this year?"

"Vacation?!" the man replied. "We aren't going anywhere! It now costs \$100 to fill my car with gas. We're staying put."

The man probably had a large car, but even many smaller ones are now racking up \$75 at each fill-up. For the first time in history, a gallon of regular gas now costs \$5 on average nationwide, according to AAA, and experts predict gas prices could average \$6 a gallon by August.

The current inflation is ruining more than one family's vacation, but it's not bad news for everybody. A recent analysis from Accountable.US showed that top oil and gas companies raked in a staggering \$41 billion during the first three months of 2022.

U.S. consumer prices have surged 8.6% in the last year, the highest jump in 40 years. And the increases are seen not only in fuel, but also in the cost of food, housing and even incidentals. (After our TWW team member got his hair cut, he noticed that the price had jumped by \$2 over what he paid for it the previous month.)

When it comes to groceries, the current inflation is sometimes played out in "shrinkflation," where instead of raising prices, manufacturers cut costs by reducing the size of containers so that buyers receive fewer ounces of a food product, fewer sheets of toilet paper per roll, or some similar quantity reduction in other items.

Observers say that the pandemic was an early culprit in the current inflation. The actions in 2020 to combat Covid, with many businesses closing their doors, led to significant pauses in the global supply chain, hampering the availability of goods. Then, as demand began again with the reopening of the economy, the whole supply-and-demand chain became distorted.

All of this has been exacerbated by lockdowns in China, which has been a major manufacturer of consumer goods, increased business regulatory costs (up over \$200 billion in 2021 on the federal level alone), and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has affected world grain and fuel supplies.

Though not all economists agree, many say that the amount of stimulus money the federal government injected into the economy has also contributed to the current inflation in the United States.

The Federal Reserve has raised interest rates in a move to slow inflation, and did so again this week, but prices are not yet dropping or stabilizing. Inflation "will likely be a major headwind for consumers this summer," says CNET.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Inflation Surges to Its Highest Point in Decades. Here's What That Means for You.](#) *CNET*  
[Sizzling Prices Complicate Fed's Inflation-Fighting Strategy.](#) *The Wall Street Journal*  
[Global Stock Selloff Gains Steam as Inflation Fears Spread.](#) *ABC News*  
[Shrinkflation/The Inflation You're Not Supposed to See.](#) *Yahoo! Finance*  
[Big Oil Posts Massive \\$41B Profits in Q1 Thanks to High Consumer Gas Prices.](#)  
*Accountable.US.*  
[Why Is U.S. Inflation Higher Than in Other Countries?](#) *FRBSF Economic Letter*

### **Applying the News Story**

There are two occasions when churches are apt to deal with the topic of money. One is during stewardship campaigns to support our church budgets, when from the pulpit comes "The Sermon on the Amount." The other is when dealing with texts such as "... it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24), where we want to teach that pursuit of wealth as a primary goal is not healthy for us spiritually speaking.

But high inflation falls into neither of those categories. For some people, it's an inconvenience. For others, it's a bump on the road to greater wealth. For still others, it's a matter of dealing with hard decisions about what necessities to do without.

This lesson gives us an opportunity to consider what the Bible might say to us in the current circumstances.

### **The Big Questions**

1. In what ways, if any, has the current inflation caused you to revise your plans or other facets of your life for this summer?
2. What might it mean to "keep the current price inflation in perspective"? What previous life experiences might help in that regard? What spiritual understandings might help?
3. What circumstances do you know of where the current inflation is negatively affecting someone's ability to make a living? Is this something the church should address? Why or why not?
4. What human activities or behaviors contribute to inflationary prices?
5. Why is much of daily living like facing a "major headwind"?

## **Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope**

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

### **2 Kings 6:25**

*As the siege continued, famine in Samaria became so great that a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver and one-fourth of a kab of dove's dung for five shekels of silver. (For context, read [2 Kings 6:24-30](#).)*

This verse refers to a siege of Samaria, the capital of the Northern Hebrew kingdom, by the Arameans. As the siege began to limit food supplies in the city, the cost of what food there was inflated rapidly. Even a donkey's head, which to Jews was normally an unclean food ([Leviticus 11:26](#)), now fetched 80 shekels of silver, and a small portion of dove's dung (possibly used as a salt source) cost five shekels. Later in this passage, when things became even more desperate, two women entered into a pact to eat each other's children on consecutive days.

**Questions:** How supply shortages with constant demand lead to higher prices or to rationing? Is it something the church should address or is this the responsibility of individual Christians rather than a church position? Does the church have any special knowledge of economics that would enable her to address economic issues?

### **Revelation 6:5-6**

*When [the Lamb] broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature call out, "Come!" I looked, and there was a black horse! Its rider held a pair of scales in his hand, and I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a day's pay and three quarts of barley for a day's pay, but do not damage the olive oil and the wine!" (For context, read [Revelation 6:1-17](#).)*

This is part of the vision John of Patmos saw regarding what was to come. A voice "in the midst of the four living creatures" declared a time of inflation when a small measure of wheat -- enough to feed one man one day -- would cost a whole day's wages. Three times as much barley, an inferior grain, would also cost a day's wages, and with the larger quantity, the man could also feed some family members in addition to himself, but there would be nothing left from his wages for any other necessities.

Ironically, the supplies of olive oil and wine, which under the circumstances were luxuries and had only limited value for nourishment, would remain plentiful (a not unrealistic situation during a famine, where grain crops would dry out and die quickly but olive trees and vines, which were rooted more deeply, could better tolerate a drought).

**Questions:** Why are some people more impacted by inflation than others? What, if any, aspects of inflation affect everyone? Why?

### **Isaiah 55:1-2**

*Hear, everyone who thirsts;  
come to the waters;  
and you who have no money,*

*come, buy and eat!*  
*Come, buy wine and milk*  
*without money and without price.*  
*Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread*  
*and your earnings for that which does not satisfy?*  
*Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,*  
*and delight yourselves in rich food.*  
(For context, read [Isaiah 55:1-7.](#))

Isaiah 55 invites the Israelites to come and sustain themselves on God's nourishing word. The "meal" in the passage is God's covenant, and it's pictured as a magnificent banquet of which they can freely partake. There's no price inflation for this meal because there is no price charged at all; it's God's free gift.

**Questions:** This passage is using both the meal and money in a metaphorical way. How, if at all, are the images in this passage related to what we actually spend our money on? What is it that God wants us to hear from these verses? What, if any, are the dangers of spiritualizing our needs when we have concerns about the actual costs of the daily necessities of life?

### **Acts 4:36-37**

*There was a Levite from Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"). He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. (For context, read [Acts 4:32-37.](#))*

These verses introduce the first-century follower of Jesus called Barnabas, who would later travel with Paul on a missionary journey. Barnabas was a believer long before Paul was on the scene, but he's eventually overshadowed by Paul. But Barnabas was the person who brought the newly converted Paul to the larger church community.

"Barnabas" actually was a nickname. The man's given name was Joseph. But the apostles called him Barnabas, because it meant "Son of Encouragement."

What a great name! Barnabas must have really had a gift for encouraging people when they needed it. In fact, this passage tells us that Barnabas sold a field he owned and gave the money to the church to help those members who were in need.

That this Joseph was given this nickname suggests that the ability to encourage others is a gift that not everyone exercises. If they did, nobody would have bothered nicknaming Barnabas, because his ability would have been so common. No, he was noted as an encourager precisely because it's fairly uncommon to hear an encouraging word.

Some time later, after active persecutions caused many followers of Jesus to leave their hometowns and settle elsewhere, these believers started telling their new neighbors about Jesus, and some were converted. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard of this, [they sent Barnabas to help](#), and the Bible points out that he encouraged these new converts to remain true to the Lord.

While not everyone in our economy is impacted the same by the rapid inflation, there is a sense that we are all in this together since we live in the same economy. Perhaps the least we can do is encourage one another.

**Questions:** When have you been helped by a timely word of encouragement? In what ways can we notch up our ability to encourage others?

### **For Further Discussion**

1. Respond to this, seen on Facebook: "Prices for everything are going up but Jesus still offers salvation for free."

2. Discuss this, from TWW team member Frank Ramirez: "Although very high inflation was a fact of life when I started out in ministry in the late '70s and early '80s (interest rates over 20% besides) no one thinks about that nostalgically. We remember the fashions and the music. The world was falling apart all around us (daily updates on the hostage crisis), but memes on Facebook point to the hairstyles for men and women with laughter but also fond pleasure. Who wears their hair that high? I see no memes that call to mind the inflation we lived with for many years before things began to calm down."

What's something fun, positive or pleasant that you think you will remember from this period?

3. What is your reaction to "shrinkflation" where the amount of a product is reduced but the price is not?

### **Responding to the News**

This is a good time to think about how we can encourage one another.

### **Prayer**

O Lord, let the encouragement of your word and the free banquet you provide nourish our souls as we deal with the daily cost of living. Help us to love our neighbors as ourselves. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Other News This Week**

## **Companies in the UK Exploring Four-Day Workweek**

*The Wired Word for the Week of June 19, 2022*

### **In the News**

This month, the United Kingdom began a six-month experimental program to test the concept of a four-day workweek. According to *The Washington Post*, more than 3,300 workers from 70 companies will be given the chance to work "80 percent of their hours for 100 percent of their pay." The caveat? The employees must "commit to maintaining 100 percent productivity."

This isn't the first time governments, businesses and others have attempted to reimagine workplace strategies such as four-day workweeks, which have been conducted in Belgium, Iceland, Spain, Japan and New Zealand, but it is the largest project of its kind thus far.

Alex Soojung Kim Pang, author of *Shorter: Work Better, Smarter and Less*, said many companies are more open to try different work styles because of the way the pandemic impacted the labor force.

"I think lots of companies now have to ask themselves, why do we do things this way? Can we do things differently? And certainly lots and lots of employees are insisting that it is possible to work differently and to work better," he said.

*The Wired Word* consultant, James Gruetzner, wrote: "Where I worked offered several work plans: a standard eight hours per day plan, a '9/80' plan (nine hours per day Monday through Thursday, eight hours per day on every other Friday, with the alternate Friday off, and a '10/40' plan (ten-hour days, Monday through Thursday, with every Friday off). My son-in-law loves the 10/40 plan and three-day weekends, but at my age, the 9/80 was about all I could handle."

Scholar Will Stronge, who co-wrote the book *Overtime: Why We Need a Shorter Working Week* with Kyle Lewis, says being at work for eight consecutive hours of the day doesn't guarantee that workers function at peak productivity during that time.

Researchers have discovered that shorter workweeks can produce several benefits: greater ease in attracting top talent; greater worker satisfaction, morale, efficiency and retention; stress reduction and improved mental and physical health; and less burnout.

Economist Juliet Schor said that her research revealed that shorter workweeks "improve ... [employee] work-life balance, ... overall health and wellbeing ... There are fewer sick days taken. There's less absenteeism and personal days." That can translate into greater productivity and profitability for employers.

But *Post* journalist Christine Emba learned that shorter workweeks allow people to grow as humans with fuller, richer lives beyond the workplace.

According to a 2020 McKinsey & Co. survey, 70% of more than 1,000 American workers said they found their sense of purpose in their jobs. A 2018 BetterUp survey of more than 2,000 employees in 26 industries revealed that 90% would take less pay for more meaningful work.

Elan Babchuck, a rabbi and entrepreneur, said, "Burnout happens not just because you work too much, but because you can't show up whole. You're not seen as a whole person," said Babchuck. "You are treated in a utilitarian way. You are objectified."

Emba's investigative reporting revealed that people who worked fewer hours for a living wage were able to pursue hobbies or avocations, spend more time with friends and families, travel and recreate, volunteer in their communities, etc. She acknowledged that such activities "are unlikely

to be recognized as creating economic value," but argued that they are "obviously rich in human value."

*Bloomberg's* columnist Sarah Green Carmichael wrote that tweaking workplace patterns only works when employees actually work fewer hours for the same pay, rather than being forced to "cram ... a 40-hour schedule into four days."

Not all segments of the economy may find a shorter workweek feasible, however. Brent Orrell, an American Enterprise Institute senior fellow, noted that a shorter workweek could result in "significant financial burdens on employers and create new barriers and rigidities in scheduling and working arrangements."

Prior to 1938, when the Fair Labor Standards Act established the 40-hour work week as the new standard for most American workers, a six-day workweek was the norm. Reimagining how and why we work happens periodically, as economic and social conditions change and in response to worker demands and needs.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Why the 4-day Workweek Is Still Controversial. \*The Week\*](#)  
[Work Has Changed. Is Your Company Ready? \*Four-Day Workweek\*](#)  
[Could We Ever Really Get a 4-day Work Week in the U.S.? \(includes 27:30 podcast "Return to Office Is Here. Could the 4-day Work Week Be Next?"\). \*MarketWatch\*](#)  
[The 40-hour Workweek Isn't Working. Reducing It Could Help With Productivity. \*NPR\*](#)  
[The Case for a 4-Day Workweek. \*Kellogg School of Management\*](#)

### **Applying the News Story**

From the beginning of [creation](#), God provided human beings with meaningful work as well as the structure for rejuvenation. [Jesus took up the theme](#) when he invited his listeners to find in him rest for their souls as well as a sense of community and purposeful labor. Since work occupies so much of our time as humans, we would do well to consider biblical principles that can guide the way we think about labor and how we conduct ourselves on the job.

### **The Big Questions**

1. Is every job in some sense a "calling" of God? Why or why not?
2. Should work provide employees with a calling as well as a paycheck? Why or why not?
3. How do you decide whether to stick with a traditional, established approach or to try something new in how work patterns are structured?
4. If you went to a four-day workweek, do you think others would consider you just lazy? If so, could you find a way to explain that you're motivated, instead, by a desire for more control, better life balance or something else?

5. What is the difference, if any, between "the work of the Lord" ([1 Corinthians 15:58](#); [1 Corinthians 16:10](#)), "the work of the gospel" ([Philippians 2:22](#); [Philippians 4:3](#)), or "the work of ministry" ([Ephesians 4:11-13](#)), and "working for a living" ([1 Corinthians 9:6](#))?

### **Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope**

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

#### **Exodus 5:6-9**

*That same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people, as well as their supervisors, "You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as before; let them go and gather straw for themselves. But you shall require of them the same quantity of bricks as they have made previously; do not diminish it, for they are lazy; that is why they cry, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' Let heavier work be laid on them; then they will pay attention to it and not to deceptive words." (For context, read [Exodus 5:1-19](#).)*

When the Israelites lived in Egypt, Pharaoh forgot that generations before, their ancestor Joseph had saved the nation from starvation by creating a grain collection and storage infrastructure to tide them over during an extended time of famine and unproductivity. Instead of viewing the Israelites as an asset, Pharaoh saw the growing ethnic minority as a threat. He feared that they might become so strong that they would replace the Egyptians.

So when Moses came before Pharaoh, requesting that the Israelites be granted a few days off to celebrate their God, the ruler pushed back. Not only did he refuse to grant Moses' request for a break from their hard labor, but he ordered the overseers not to provide the supplies needed to produce the same number of bricks they were required to make. They still were supposed to reach the same quota as before, but now they also had to scour the country for the raw materials they needed for production as well. When they failed, they were accused of laziness, beaten and blamed.

Eventually, God delivered the Israelite slaves from bondage.

**Questions:** Under what conditions can labor become a curse instead of a joyous calling?

What is God's role in delivering people from work that feels more like slavery, and what is the role of God's people in fighting oppressive systems of injustice in work environments?

#### **2 Chronicles 10:4, 13-14**

*"Your father made our yoke heavy. Now, therefore, lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke that he placed on us, and we will serve you." ... The king answered them harshly. King Rehoboam rejected the advice of the older men; he spoke to them in accordance with the advice of the young men, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to it; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions." (For context, read [2 Chronicles 10](#).)*

After King Solomon died, his son Rehoboam succeeded him. During the transition, it was initially unclear whether Rehoboam could unite all 12 tribes under his leadership.



As he worked to consolidate power, the ten northern tribes came together under the leadership of Jeroboam to assess what kind of administration they could expect from Rehoboam. They requested that Rehoboam lighten the load the people were required to carry.

Rehoboam's older advisors recommended that he agree to their terms and show kindness to the people, but he rejected their advice, and followed that of his peers, who were closer to him in age. They recommended that Rehoboam increase the burdens on the people.

When Jeroboam and the people of the northern tribes heard this, they revolted, and the kingdom split in two. Because of his foolishness and cruelty, Rehoboam was left with only two tribes which became the southern kingdom of Judah.

**Question:** What lessons might modern-day employers and government officials take from this incident?

**Matthew 20:11-15**

*[Jesus continued,] "And when they received [their wages], they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?'"* (For context, read [Matthew 20:1-16](#).)

In this parable, Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who needed to hire laborers to work in his vineyard. Throughout the day, the landowner kept recruiting workers, since there was a labor shortage.

It's clear from the description of the laborers that those who came late to the work were not lazy. Some of them had waited for hours, hoping someone would hire them even for an hour or two, just so they could afford to buy the basics they needed that day.

Some workers toiled all day long, while others who were hired late in the day only worked an hour. But when it came time to pay the workers, the landowner gave them all the same amount, regardless of how long they worked in his vineyard.

This caused those who had worked all day to grumble about the perceived injustice of it all. They were aggrieved because they thought the landowner should have paid them more, even though they had agreed to work for the amount he gave them.

**Questions:** How does this story of the landowner and the workers illustrate what the kingdom of heaven is like? Which workers do you identify with the most? What might your answer reveal about the state of your relationship with God? About your attitudes toward others?

## **Ephesians 2:10**

*For we are what [God] has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them. (For context, read [Ephesians 2:1-10](#).)*

James says our faith is seen in the good works of compassion, kindness and charity toward those among us who are in need ([James 2:14-18](#)).

**Questions:** For what good works did God in Christ Jesus create us? What evidence have you seen that God prepared these good works beforehand so that we could "walk in them"?

### **For Further Discussion**

1. Discuss this, from sociologist and ethnic studies professor, Carolyn Chen, who wrote in her book *Work Pray Code: When Work Becomes Religion in Silicon Valley*: "We're seeing that high-skilled professionals are turning to work for belonging, identity, meaning, purpose and fulfillment. And these are the very things that Americans once turned to religion for." How might this trend be positive? How might it be negative? How can workers find fulfillment in work without "making the brand a religion or the CEO a messiah" to be worshiped?

2. Comment on this as it relates to the value of labor: The late Edward Kennedy liked to tell the story of how, during his first campaign for the Senate, his opponent said scornfully in a debate, "This man has never worked a day in his life!" Kennedy says that the next morning, as he was shaking hands at a factory gate, one worker leaned toward him and confided, "You ain't missed a [expletive] thing."

3. Respond to this, from [Roland Heersink](#), the founder and chairman of God & Work: "As working Christians, we are deeply aware of the gap that exists between Sunday and Monday. Although the two days are next to each other on the calendar, they seem miles apart.

"On Sunday we hear that we are children of God, saved by grace in Jesus Christ. On Monday, there are endless emails to be answered, spreadsheets to be completed, people to be hired and fired, meetings to attend, and important decisions to be made.

"How can we better think about the relationship between our faith life and work life?"

Heersink uses the acronym, NICER, to define five essentials every Christian needs to practice on the job:

N - No Compromises

I - Integrity

C - Compassionate in Relationships

E - Excellence (Do your best, and let Jesus do the rest.)

R - Responsible to Others

How are you doing in these five areas of your work life?

4. React to this, from TWW team member Bill Tammeus: "This lesson reminds me of something people in an office in which I worked used to say about one of our fellow employees: "To compensate for never being paid overtime, he works a lot of undertime."

5. Today is the national celebration of Juneteenth. President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. Applying only to the states in the Confederacy, it declared "that all persons held as slaves are, and henceforward shall be free." But news of freedom didn't come to Galveston Bay, Texas, until June 19, 1865, when 2,000 Union troops arrived to enforce the decree. The Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, making the abolition of slavery official, was adopted December 18 of that year.

Just as freedom and justice came in fits and starts to the Israelites, so it comes to our own country and around the world, where the struggle for justice continues. At times, before liberation is achieved, burdens are not lightened but are made heavier.

### **Responding to the News**

How would you answer this question, from Andy Mills, co-chair of the [Theology of Work Project](#): What difference does being a Christian make for my work?

**Prayer** suggested by [Genesis 2:1-9, 15](#); [2 Corinthians 9:8](#); [Colossians 3:23-24](#); [Matthew 4:18-22](#); [Acts 13:1-3](#); [2 Timothy 2:21](#); [3:16-17](#); [1 Thessalonians 2:9](#); [4:10-12](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:16-17](#); [3:11-12](#); [Titus 3:1, 8](#); [3:14](#); [Philippians 1:6](#); [2:12-13](#)

Creator God, from the beginning of time, you gave humans the responsibility to care for your creation, and blessed humanity with the Sabbath day to establish the rhythmic balance of rest and labor.

Make us ready, strong and equipped for every good work you give us to do. Whatever our tasks, help us to work for you and not for humans, since we serve the Lord Christ.

Empower us by your Spirit to work cheerfully and diligently, so that we can earn our own living and not be a burden to anyone.

Thank you, God, for providing us with abundant blessings to share abundantly with others in every good work, meeting urgent needs and living productive lives that benefit everyone.

Thank you for your promise to complete the good work you began in us, enabling us both to will and to work for your good pleasure. Amen.