

Pastoring in the Red:

Lessons I Learned
In Financial
Collapse

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About The Author



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**Pastoring
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I've been a pastor for six years, and in church leadership for more than twenty.

Bible college didn't prepare me to manage unpaid bills, panic attacks, and financial collapse.

In 2023, the ministry I'd poured a decade of my life into began falling apart. It wasn't just my calling — it was how I paid the mortgage.

As the math got uglier & uglier, I prayed harder & harder:

"God, what is going on? This cannot be what You want for me right now."

I eventually recognized the truth:

I wasn't under pressure for no reason. I'd helped create the collapse.

I prayed for provision while running my ministry like a passion project with no guardrails. God had trusted me with something — and I hadn't led it wisely.

My season of lack exposed ugly truths I needed to face:

- I ignored numbers and financial reports — because I was afraid of what they'd reveal.
- I procrastinated on financial decisions — because I felt small and unqualified.
- I downplayed the pressure I was under — because I was scared to appear needy.

Your story's different. But the principles still hold:

- When we lead alone, we're especially vulnerable.
- Concealment is a fast-track to collapse.

I've lived that story. I'm done with it. And I don't want you to go through it alone.

You're not the only one.

What I went through isn't rare. It's just rarely talked about. Thousands of pastors are carrying the same crushing weight — silently.



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1 in 3

1 in 3 pastors has no one to talk to
about their financial stress.¹

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50%

50% earn less than \$50,000 a year.²

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60%

60% get no retirement or health benefits.³

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1 in 3

1 in 3 has under \$10,000 saved
for retirement — some have nothing.⁴

60%

60% get no retirement or health benefits.³

50%

50% earn less than \$50,000 a year.²

1 in 3

1 in 3 pastors has no one to talk to
about their financial stress.¹

Every pastor knows
the tight grip of
financial pressure.

Even as we carry the weight of
ministry, we keep showing up,
holding the church together,
pouring into others lives, and
choosing to walk by faith.

We were trained to preach,
pray, and shepherd. But no
one taught us how to lead
through financial collapse —
let alone survive it.

If you see yourself in any of
this, hear me clearly:

The pressure
you're under isn't
just financial;

It's emotional.
It's spiritual.
It's personal.

It's attacking your identity,
your health, your hope. And it's
doing it quietly.

Pressure Increases If You're Lonely.

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"Financial stress is a pressure cooker. It's a vice. And it was all made worse because I was carrying the whole church on my shoulders – alone."

– Pastor Jim Gordon

Jim Gordon is the senior pastor at Elora Road Christian Fellowship, a church in Ontario, Canada. He's led through it all: growth, collapse, debt, surplus, and legal storms.

In a recent interview,
Pastor Jim and I talked all about surviving ministry pressure, and a few things came through loud and clear:

- Stress isolates.
- Isolation breeds shame.
- Shame keeps us silent.
- Silence withers us.

That's the sequence – and so many of us are caught up in it. We 'fake it' on Sunday mornings, while unraveling on Saturday nights. We lie with our faces "Oh, I'm fine today!" while we quietly fall apart inside.

But pressure doesn't mean
God's unhappy, angry, or
distant.

Scripture is full of leaders
refined and shaped by
scarcity and pressure. The
prophet Habakkuk's
declaration still reminds us
today of God's goodness, even
in the midst of pressure and
challenge.

**“Though the
fig tree does
not bud...
yet I will rejoice
in the Lord.”**

Habakkuk 3:17–18

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Never Struggle in Secret.

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1

Action Step: Share the Load

Early in his ministry, Pastor Jim was drowning in personal debt as a result of the low pay he received. His turning point?

"I told a few close friends what I was going through. They knew the truth about me – and that's when God started showing up — through people."

You don't need a crowd.

You need one trusted elder, mentor, or peer. Tell them you're not okay.

Moving stress out of the shadows breaks shame — and opens the door to peace and clarity.

2

Action Step: Get Outside Perspective

Years later, when a series of lawsuits threatened the church, Pastor Jim brought in outside voices – wise, trusted, unentangled voices.

The miracle you think you need may actually be a simple change of vantage point. Someone not drowning with you can often spot the shoreline.

“The right outside perspective gave me the clarity and strength I needed. They helped to identify the steps we need to take in order to move towards health.”

You Can't Lead When You're Panicking.

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I learned this the hard way.

Financial hardship isn't a detour from discipleship — it may be the very ground God's using to form you. Not in spite of the pressure – but because of what He wants to do through it.

This isn't
about provision.
It's about formation.

When pressure rules
your mind, peace,
joy and wisdom stay
out of reach.

God wants to prove Himself reliable, yes as your financial provider, but as even more than that! He longs to be your source of:

- Peace that doesn't make sense.
- Joy that defies your circumstances.
- Wisdom that cuts through the fog.

When we allow Him to provide THOSE things, the confusion and chaos drop away, and discerning the path forward becomes much simpler.

*"It doesn't matter
what it looks like, it
doesn't matter what
it feels like... God's
grace is flowing over
me like a waterfall."*

– Pastor Jim Gordon

Before I could lead well again, I had to stop spinning out, and start seeking God for peace, not solutions.

1

You Can't Lead When You're Panicking

Action Step: Ask The Right Questions

Am I pastoring alone?

Do I know what our church needs for
next year – not just this month?

Am I carrying pressure someone else
should shoulder?

What condition is my soul actually in?

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You May
Not Need a
Breakthrough.
You May Need
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Pastor Jim told me:

“Over the first 10 years of pastoring, I accumulated over \$50K in consumer debt – not because I wasn’t praying, but because I wasn’t disciplined. Getting free meant humbling myself, asking for help, making a plan, and sticking to it.”

– Pastor Jim Gordon

Same goes for me.

I was exasperated at God for not showing up... when I wasn’t doing well with what I already had.

I wasn’t running my ministry well. I wasn’t taking care of the small administrative tasks that can snowball quickly. I wasn’t taking good care of the finances.

I was praying for God to provide... but ignoring the fact that I was not a good steward of the things He’d already entrusted to me.

1

You May Not Need a Breakthrough
You May Need Follow Through

Action Step: Take Inventory

Remember the widow in 2 Kings 4. Facing a desperate situation, she asked the prophet Elisha for help. He asked “What’s in your house?”

Do you remember her answer?
“Nothing... except a bit of oil.”
The rest of her story is a miracle.

You don’t need to fix everything
– just start with what you’ve
already got.

*“We often say,
‘I have nothing.’
But maybe, like the
widow, you have a
little bit of oil: a
connection.
A donor. A skill.
A story.”*

– Pastor Jim Gordon

Don’t overcomplicate it.
Write it down.

2

You May Not Need a Breakthrough
You May Need Follow Through

Action Step: Get Back to Basics

You don't need genius. You need obedience:

- Do the small things well.
- Simplify your systems
- Gather your team.
- Stop trying to fix this alone.

Remember:

Jesus builds the church (Matthew 16:18).

You're responsible for faithfulness, not outcomes.

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Sometimes,
You Have to
Lay It All Down.

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I had to shut down a ministry I'd spent a decade building in order to stop the financial bleeding. It felt like death. But in that surrender, God proved Himself faithful.

Pastor Jim went through the same thing during COVID. Attendance and giving dropped 50%. It forced painful decisions.

But we found grace on the other side.

"God's faithfulness is bigger than my crisis. His ways are deeper than my perspective."

– Pastor Jim Gordon

May you feel the weight begin to lift. May you find the courage to ask for help. May you rediscover the joy of trusting Jesus not just with your theology—but with your budget, your burnout, and your very breath.

You're Not Failing... You're Being Formed.

God is so faithful to heal and restore. I've lost count of the blessings and opportunities that have grown up from the ashes of my ministry. Pastor Jim Gordon's church has come out the other side of their financial struggles stronger, and more vibrant than before.

Whether you're facing debt, burnout, or legal stress — you're not alone. Others have walked this road. And there is a way forward. Best of all, we aren't operating without a safety net.

Romans 8:28 still holds: God doesn't waste anything.

If you need someone in your corner, I'm here. Let's fight for health together.

In Christ, Who is our Life,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JG' or 'Joshua Gordon'.

Joshua Gordon

Senior Editor, The Lead Pastor
Pastor, New Life Fellowship

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