

Empower  
Session 3

An Alternate  
Lifestyle

Updated: 10/24/09

## Alternate Lifestyle

In this section, we will discover how the early believers lived together. We will see how a new lifestyle sprang up ... an alternate lifestyle.

The key to this lifestyle was **WE ARE HIS WITNESSES**

*Jesus said, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." ActS 1:8*

This verse was to be the marching orders for the early disciples.

1. They witnessed day and night, creating a stir wherever they went, for they were empowered with the Holy Spirit.
2. They had good results in Jerusalem, (5,000 saved, 3,000 saved), and they were learning so much from the apostles, they didn't want to leave. Jesus wants to put a world-consciousness in our hearts.
3. But the Lord wanted them out in other places. So He brought down the boot of persecution on them and they scattered. Everywhere they went, they started new fires.
4. So they began in Jerusalem, but they also were to go beyond that city. For us, that would be going beyond our home town.
5. It starts with our family and relatives, and spreads to our neighbors and fellow workers, and then to neighboring cities and even out into our state and our nation, and then to the ends of the earth.

Let's look carefully at the description of how the church lived out this New Testament witnessing lifestyle.

We discover four basic elements of this lifestyle that we see in Acts 2:42-47.

- Declaration
- Demonstration
- Stewardship
- Composition

### AN ALTERNATE LIFE-STYLE

**THE KEY =** **We are His witness**

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*“But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power to preach with great effect to the people in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, about My death and resurrection” — Acts 1:8*

It is to be the outstanding characteristic of the Life-Style to which Jesus commissions His followers.

in Jerusalem  
throughout Judea  
in Samaria  
to the ends of the earth

#### FOUR BASIC ELEMENTS OF THIS NEW TESTAMENT LIFE-STYLE

Acts 2:42-47

- (42) *They joined with the other believers in regular attendance at the apostles' teaching sessions and at the Communion services and prayer meetings.*
- (43) *A deep sense of awe was on them all, and the apostles did many miracles.*
- (44) *And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything with each other.*
- (45) *Selling their possessions and dividing with those in need.*
- (46) *They worshiped together regularly at the temple each day, met in small groups in homes for Communion, and shared their meals with great joy and thankfulness.*
- (47) *Praising God. The whole city was favorable to them, and each day God added to them all who were being saved.*

**1. DECLARATION :** **They witnessed with an earnest boldness**

Their tongues were truly loosened!

*If anyone publicly acknowledges Me as his friend, I will openly acknowledge him as My friend before My Father in heaven. But if anyone publicly denies Me I will openly deny him before My Father in heaven*  
— Mathew 10:32-33

1. The first element is Declaration. **THEY WITNESSED WITH AN EARNEST BOLDNESS.**

1. Their tongues were unloosened to give a bold witness.
2. The Holy Spirit, as He comes upon us, will open our mouths, too.
3. If we can talk about other things (the weather, our grandchildren, our work, what's happening in our city or our village) then we can talk about what Jesus has done, and is doing, in our lives.

**AN ALTERNATE LIFE-STYLE**

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**FOUR BASIC ELEMENTS OF THIS NEW TESTAMENT LIFE-STYLE**

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4. In Acts, chapters 1-5, we can see how their witness progressed.
  - On the day of Pentecost they were filled with the Holy Spirit and their fear vanished
  - A few days later, Peter and John went up to the temple, and God used them to heal a blind beggar. A crowd gathered. They were arrested, then released. Immediately they prayed earnestly in Acts 4, not for protection, but for more boldness, more power.
  - In Acts 5, they were arrested again. An angel got them out. The jailer could not find them. They were back in the temple witnessing to Jesus. What was the result ... not self-pity; they were glad to suffer for Jesus. They kept on witnessing. They could not be stopped.
  
5. From Jerusalem the witness spread afar. Within one generation the known world had begun to hear about Jesus. Within one century the world was shaken to the core by these Christians. A fire had been lit in them. They could not stop telling the world about Jesus.
  
6. The Holy Spirit wants to put the same fire in us, and fill us with the same boldness. We should encourage our people to pick out at least one person to whom they can witness to and pray for opportunities to do that this very week. The Holy Spirit wants to provide us with a boldness to witness about Jesus.

## 14 F.L.C. — “EMPOWER — Adopting the Lifestyle”

Survey Acts 1-5

2:42-47

4:29-35

5:40-42

When this bunch was let loose into Jerusalem things would never be the same again. Within one generation the known world began to hear about Jesus and within one century it was shaken to its core by these people who were called Christian.

### 2. DEMONSTRATION: They exhibited an expectant faith

Mark 16:15-20

*And then He told them, “You are to go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone, everywhere. Those who believe and are baptized will be saved. But those who refuse to believe will be condemned.*

*And those who believe shall use My authority to cast out demons, and they shall speak new languages. They will be able even to handle snakes with safety, and if they drink anything poisonous, it won’t hurt them’ and they will be able to place their hands on the sick and heal them”.*

*When the Lord Jesus had finished talking with them, He was taken up into heaven and sat down at God’s right hand. And the disciples went everywhere preaching, and the Lord was with them and confirmed what they said by the miracles that followed their message.*

Acts 2:43

*A deep sense of awe was on them all, and the apostles did many miracles.*

Acts 4:30

*“And now, O Lord.... send your healing power, and may miracles and wonders be done by the name of Your holy servant, Jesus”*

2. The 2nd element of the lifestyle is Demonstration. **THEY EXHIBITED AN EXPECTANT FAITH.**

Mark 16:15-20. (Read)

*"And then he told them, "Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone. <sup>16</sup> Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. But anyone who refuses to believe will be condemned.*

*These miraculous signs will accompany those who believe: They will cast out demons in my name, and they will speak in new languages. They will be able to handle snakes with safety, and if they drink anything poisonous, it won't hurt them. They will be able to place their hands on the sick, and they will be healed."*

An example of what Jesus meant by "taking up serpents" can be found in Paul's experience in Acts 28.

Sometimes those that hate and oppose them will even try to poison them.

*"When the Lord Jesus had finished talking with them, he was taken up into heaven and sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand. And the disciples went everywhere and preached, and the Lord worked through them, confirming what they said by many miraculous signs."*

Jesus speaks to His disciples about the signs that will follow those who believe – they will demonstrate God's power. Jesus said that if they believed, it would happen.

Many wonders were done through the disciples.

- In Acts 4, they prayed that God would stretch out his hand to heal and that many signs and wonders would be done in Jesus' name.

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- They believed that a supernatural God was in their midst and that He would do supernatural things. If we lose that expectation, what do we have to offer people?
- It's great to hear things from the bible and to believe those things, but if a baby is sick, or a person is addicted to drugs or alcohol, or a person is troubled by an evil spirit, or a lust they can't shake free from, or their personality is all twisted up ... if what we tell them isn't backed up with the power to meet their need, what good is it?
- In Tanzania, Islamic evangelists, financed by Iranian Muslims, go door to door and hold open air meetings and dramas. Imposing mosques built with Middle Eastern money give away food and cash to converts. Poor Christian workers try to counter this onslaught with the truth that sets men free. How can they compete against this type of buying of converts? With just a true message? No. There must be supernatural power along with the message that can transform people's lives. If they demonstrate a power that heals bodies and can straighten out lives, then their message will be listened to.
- For centuries, many churches lost this expectancy for the supernatural. Praise God that we live in this day when God is moving once again through the world with a great and mighty stream of His supernatural power.
- We see that throughout the book of Acts, God used signs, wonders, and miracles to attract the attention of unbelieving people and bring them to Christ.

Acts 2:1-12	Tongues	3,000 saved
Acts 3:1-11	Healing	5,000 saved
Acts 5:12-16	Miracles	Many believed
Acts 8:6-13	Miracles	Many baptized in Samaria
Acts 9:32,35,42	Dead Raised	Whole town believed
Acts 13:4-12	Miracles	The governor believed
Acts 14:3	Great miracles	Proved the Lord's message

They believed that a supernatural God was in their midst and that He would do supernatural things! If we ever lose that, what we have to offer the world is about as effective as “Rice Husks”

— Miracles and wonders

— The fear of the Lord (holy awe)

Throughout the book of Acts, God used signs, wonders, and miracles to attract the attention of unbelieving people and bring them to Christ.

2:1-12	Tongues	3000 saved
3:1-11	Healing	5000 saved
5:12-16	miracles	Many believed
8: 6-13	miracles	Many were baptized
9:32. 35.42	dead raised	Whole town believed
13:4-12	miracles	The governor believed
14:3	great miracles	Proved the message of the Lord

*“God always... has shown us that these messages are true by signs and wonders and various miracles and by giving certain special abilities from the Holy Spirit to those who believe; yes, God has assigned such gifts to each of us.” —Hebrews 2:4*

“expectant faith” produces — “unbelief” prohibits

*I dare not judge how effectively He has used others, but I know this: He has used me to win the Gentiles to God. I have won them by my message and by the good way I have lived before them, and by the miracles done through me as signs from God—all by the Holy Spirit’s power. In this way I have preached the full Gospel of Christ all the way from Jerusalem clear over into Illyricum. —Romans 15:18-19*

AND SO, the contagious witness of the early church went forth with a bold declaration and a powerful demonstration. God’s presence truly was being manifested in the midst of a pagan world.

- The early evangelists were people just like us. They went out accepting the promise, “I’ll baptize you with the Holy Spirit, so you can be my witnesses.”
- As retail clerks, garbage collectors, tent makers, fishermen, brick layers, carpenters – no matter what, they witnessed. And as they did, see what happened - lives changed, bodies healed, needs met, raging tempers stilled, vicious foul mouths cleansed, demons cast out, anxiety and frustration quieted, prayers answered, and the wonderful power of God displayed.
- Unbelief prohibits. Expectation releases the power of God.
- We learned that even in His own hometown, because of their unbelief, Jesus himself could not do many miracles. Many churches don’t expect God to do miracles anymore. And so He doesn’t.
- We need to encourage our people to expect God to respond with signs and miracles as they witness.
- Hebrews 2:4 says that God has always shown His message to be true through signs and wonders. And, He has assigned such gifts to “each of us”.
- When these signs are displayed in the midst of human need, people sit up and take notice. People are looking for something real. They need to see that God is alive and moving among His people today!
- In Romans 15:18-19, Paul testifies that he has fully preached the gospel ... with the word (the message he gave) and with his deeds (the good way he lived before them) and with many signs and wonders – all by the Holy Spirit’s power.

So, there are three elements of the “fully preached gospel”:

- We need to declare the truth
- We need to be living the truth
- And we need signs and wonders to accompany the truth

So, the contagious witness of the early church went forth with bold declaration and powerful demonstration. God’s presence was truly manifested in the midst of a world that did not know Him.

It’s exciting that in this day and age the Lord has quickened and renewed all of this to His Church once again. We also can bring to the world around us this same message with the same empowering – the “Full Gospel of Christ.”

## F.L.C. — “EMPOWER — Adopting the Lifestyle” 15

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### 3. The 3rd element of the new lifestyle we call Stewardship: THEY EXPERIENCED A FINANCIAL REVOLUTION

- It was a new kind of economics among them ... not capitalism or communism, but kingdom economics.

*Acts 4:32 "... they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had."*

*Acts 4:34 "There were no needy people among them ..."*

*Acts 2:44-45 "And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need."*

- This was soon after the day of Pentecost. There were many pilgrims that were visiting, but now they stayed to learn from the disciples. Their money was running out. So people who had money or who had items they could sell gave it to the disciples so everyone's needs could be met. They used whatever material things that God had given them to bless and care for one another.
- Private ownership is the norm, and we don't have to all live together, or pool our funds, but the church began with people sharing in the needs of others.
- God wants us to work and prosper. He wants us to work with our hands so that we have to give to others. He does not want us to be grasping and materialistic.
- Some church people equate God's blessing with material possessions; they judge success by the things we accumulate. There is a false prosperity teaching that infects the church. "If you have enough faith, you can be rich." That's not of God.
- In contrast, the New Testament lifestyle showed that God's kingdom produces a sharing society. Jesus is Lord of all that they have. So they put care and loving of others above all else.
- The Holy Spirit wants us to live in such a way that whatever you have you are willing to use it for God and to distribute it however God directs.
- The people who observed and interacted with these early believers knew something amazing was going on. The love Jesus' followers showed for one another extended to their last rupee if was needed.

**3. STEWARDSHIP: The experienced a financial revolution**

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Acts 4:33 “...no one felt that what he owned was his own”

Acts 4:34 “There was not a needy person among them.

A new kind of economics!

*And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything with each other.  
Selling their possessions and dividing with those in need – Acts 2:44-45*

This world produces—a “grasping” society

Christ’s Kingdom produces — a “sharing” society

A powerful witness was given by a people who put love and caring for each other above their own personal possessions. The Kingdom of God became their first financial priority. They would care for each other even if it took their last nickel to do so — “See how they love each other!” the non-Christians cried. .

**4. COMPOSITION: They formed into a committed Community**

Their hunger for God and for each other’s fellowship led to:

— **Eager study**

They were a “hungry bunch!”

*They joined with the other believers in regular attendance at the apostles teaching sessions —Acts 2:42 (see also 5:42)*

— **Regular worship**

“each day”—a misprint???

*They worshiped together regularly at the temple each day —Acts 2:46*

— **Agape feasts**

intimate times of love

*They met in small groups in homes for communion —Acts 2:46*

4. The fourth element we will call Composition ... **THEY FORMED INTO A COMMITTED COMMUNITY.**

- They realized that God had put them together. And that He would reveal Himself in the midst of their togetherness, not just individually. They would need each other.
- Their hunger for God led to:
  - **EAGER STUDY** (they were very hungry for a knowledge of God!
  - **REGULAR WORSHIP** (daily! ... not a misprint!)
  - **INTIMATE TIMES OF LOVE** - Agape feasts (to love on Jesus and to love on one another). They prayed for one another, forgave one another, encouraged one another and celebrated the Lord's Supper together regularly and often.

## 16 F.L.C. — “EMPOWER : Adopting the Lifestyle”

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- **SUPPORTIVE FELLOWSHIP** - In the early days of the Church, Christians were such a small minority. They were looked upon as the off scouring of the earth. How they needed one another! They were discriminated against and persecuted continually. So they sought each other out, shared their food, shared their hurts, prayed for each other, worshipped together, and experienced the renewing presence of the Lord. Their time with the Holy Spirit was so supportive, dynamic, powerful - they were ready to go back at it the next day. The world couldn't hold them down!
- When this type of fellowship gets going in the midst of the world, it produces an **AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY**. That's what the baptism in the Holy Spirit is intended to produce is "authentic Christianity" - powerful, real, vital, loving, committed Christianity.
- Larry Tomczak defines Authentic Christianity in this way, "Coming under the loving Lordship of Jesus Christ and being joined to a company of imperfect people who are learning to live life in a new way!"
- The Holy Spirit wants to begin building that kind of a committed fellowship in the place where you live. As He does so, people will see what the "authentic" gospel of Jesus Christ is really like and many will want to become a part of this fellowship.

There were three basic results to this contagious witness.

Read the paragraph in participants notes ... "*Christ told us ...*"

The witness created a **HEALTHY SENSE OF AWE**

- When God is moving, the result is a "healthy" awe. People are saying, "Have you heard?", "Can you believe it?", "Is it real?" ... that's healthy!
- It was the kind of "awe" in God's presence that makes you not want to think unpure thoughts or act in ways that are displeasing to our mighty God

— **Supportive fellowship**

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how they needed each other!

*They shared their meals with great joy and thankfulness...and there was warm fellowship among all believers —Acts 2: 46 and 4: 33.*

WHEN THIS FELLOWSHIP GETS GOING IN THE MIDST OF THE WORLD IT  
PRODUCES AN:

**“Authentic Christianity”**

*“Coming under the loving Lordship of Jesus Christ and being joined to a company of imperfect people who are learning to live life in a new way.” Larry Tomczak*

**THREE BASIC RESULTS TO THIS CONTAGIOUS WITNESS**

*Christ told us we were to be His witnesses. The early Church burned like a fire, and spread rapidly, because of the contagion of its people. They had found a risen Christ, and they were excited about Him. They couldn't keep quiet. They witnessed by what they were, what they did, and what they said. People saw a change in them because of Christ—a change for the better—and they wanted this faith and new life. These early Christians had somehow learned how to get their faith over to others. They met a pagan world, they met daily life, they met martyrdom—all with a radiant faith. They were different from any other people on earth.*

*If what you love is horse racing, or clothes, or the stock market, or your grandchildren, that is what you 'll talk about. If what you love is Christ, you will find ways to talk about Him to other people. You can't make half-dead church members enthusiastic witnesses and you can't keep people who have begun to know Christ from beginning to live for Him and talk about Him. So does the great contagion grow and spread (Dr. Howard Keeley, “Groups That Work,” Zondervan, 1967)*

1. **A healthy sense of awe**

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*A deep sense of awe was on them all, and the apostles did many miracles.  
—Acts 2:43 (See Acts 5: 12-13 as well)*

The second result of this contagious witness was **A POSITIVE IMPRESSION ON THE CITY**

- Christians were displaying Joy - a sense of peace and well-being. It spilled out and flowed from their inner lives. It gave evidence to all that life can truly be rich and full. You are attracted to people who are joyful.

*“But thanks be to God who through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him. For we are the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.” II Cor. 2:14-15 NIV*

The Living Bible states, “... a sweet, wholesome fragrance of Christ within our lives ...”

- There also was a social miracle taking place. The world had never seen anything like it before: People of all classes and backgrounds - loving, trusting, caring, and treating each other as equals. So they had a “good testimony with all the people.”

The third result was **EVERYDAY PEOPLE WERE BEING SAVED**

- It's was contagious!
- Review the characteristics: A Bold Declaration, a Demonstration of His Power, a Financial Revolution, and Supporting Fellowship. When you get that combination together, you produce a powerful witness.
- It's like the “measels” - it's infectious! It's passed on and you can't stop it.
- Do you know how the Church of Jesus Christ grows? By getting people infected!

The fear of the Lord is constructive  
It brings out the highest and the best

2. **A positive impression on the City**

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*Praising God. The whole city was favorable to them, and each day God added to them all who were being saved —Acts 2:47*

Their joyous testimony was compelling  
“The smile of God deep down inside”

They created a “social miracle”

3. **Everyday people were being saved**

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*Each day God added to them all who were being saved — Acts 2:47*

*And more believers were added to the Lord, crowds both of men and women  
— Acts 5:14*

*And the number of disciples increased vastly in Jerusalem; and many of the  
Jewish priests were converted too! — Acts 6:7*

They were “infectious!”

God’s people living His life in this world of hungry, needy, searching people will always produce this result!

YES, GOD HAS A PLAN for evangelizing this world. It is a simple, powerful and effective plan when rightly carried out.

**GOD’S PLAN IS: US!**

## God Has a Plan

- I can't tell you how important it is that we understand God's plan for evangelizing the world.
  - It's not left up to Billy Graham or some world famous evangelist
  - It's not just up to pastors and missionaries
- But God's Plan Is **US** !
  - Filling us with His Spirit
  - Building us into a family - a community of God on the earth
  - Releasing us out into society to be contagious
- That's the way the Kingdom of God will grow
- That's why He has brought us into the Supernatural empowering with the Holy Spirit!

## 18 F.L.C. — “EMPOWER : Adopting the Lifestyle”

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**GOD’S PLAN IS: US!**

1. **WRITE YOUR OWN LETTER OF TESTIMONY.** The Lord may lay on your heart a specific person to whom you will send this letter. If so, make a copy of the letter to mail and a copy to hand in next week along with this question sheet.

In your letter discuss such subjects as:

- The events surrounding your commitment to Jesus as Savior and Lord.
- The evidences of “New Life” which have been manifested in your daily experiences.
- The aspirations you have for your continuing walk with Christ.

2. A balanced witness must include accompanying signs to demonstrate God’s power in order to be effective. In what ways do the following scriptural accounts prove this to be true?

- Mark 16:14-20
- Acts 9:32-42
- Acts 13:6-12
- Acts 8:4-8

3. What attitude toward our material possessions do you think Christ desires in His followers today?

4. What do you feel is “contagious” about the bunch of Christians you are currently associated with? In what ways do you feel they could become even more “contagious?”

## ***A NEW ATTITUDE TOWARDS MONEY***

*(excerpts taken from "New Life, New Life Style" by Michael Green)*

Money is god for a great many people. It is taken for granted that we should get as rich as we can, and that the more we have the happier we shall be. An improved standard of living is the goal of political parties of the Right and of the Left. What difference is being a Christian going to mean in this highly sensitive area of money?

The Jesus we follow was remarkably unconcerned to acquire money. He appears to have been so poor that He had to borrow a coin when asked a question about tribute money: when required to pay it, He was glad to find a coin wedged in a fish's mouth. He was prepared to trust His heavenly Father for His needs. This did not mean that He was not equally prepared to work as a carpenter for His pay, and no doubt, to live off the proceeds of the catch when He went out with His fisherman friends. There was no doctrinaire opposition to money in Jesus of Nazareth; but no slavery to it, either. To be sure, He advised one rich young man to go and get rid of his cash: but He did not ask that of everybody. It is clear that money was standing between that man and discipleship. He was unwilling to let Jesus touch his pocket. And until he was allowed in there, Jesus could do nothing with that rich young ruler. *"No man can serve two masters"*, as He said on another occasion: *"You cannot serve God and money"*. (Matt. 6:24)

No, there is nothing wrong with money: but there is a great deal wrong with the love of money. The song was mistaken when it said, *"Money is the root of all evil"*. That is a misquotation from the New Testament which says, *"The love of money is a root of all evil."* (I Tim. 6: 10) A root, mark you: not the only one. And the love of money, not money itself But think what a root of evil it is. Greed, oppression, avarice, dishonesty, fraud, robbery and often murder as well, all spring from this love of money. And there's a curious, twofold irony about it. First, money does not satisfy. As the Romans recognized long ago, money is like sea-water: the more you have of it the thirstier you get. And second, money does not last. Jesus spoke of the moth and rust that spoil the possessions of those who go for money on earth: today, income tax, inflation, and the vagaries of the stock market replace moth and rust! But even if our fortunes survives those hazards it won't survive death. It is very short-lived. I remember talking to a woman who had nursed a man so rich that the ordinary cups in his house were made of silver. She discovered that it did not make him any the less miserable as he lay dying. The one certainty about our wealth is that we shall leave it all behind.

What, then is to be a responsible attitude for followers of Christ as regards our money?

FIRST, WE SHALL NOT MAKE MONEY OUR GOAL. We shall remember the rich fool whose barns were so full that he could not get everything in. *"I know what I'll do," he said, "I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones! Then I'll have room enough. And I'll sit back and say to myself, 'Friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Wine, women and song for you!'" But God said to him. "You fool! Tonight you die. Then who will get it all?" Jesus concludes, "Yes, every man is a fool who gets rich on earth but not in heaven"*. (Luke 12: 16-21)

Don't be a fool, will you? It is not crucial that you make that extra pile, or get that second car. It doesn't matter that Mrs. Jones has got a deep-freeze and you haven't. And please don't envy Bill's Jaguar: it is only a status symbol. Surely you aren't in need of any such boost to your ego. You may be poor all your days, but you are RICH: you're an heir to a kingdom!

**SECOND, WE SHALL NOT TRUST IN MONEY.** This is one of the most insidious dangers in wealth: it tends to make men arrogant, independent and unwilling to rely on God for their needs: they have such a big bank balance they don't feel they need to trust anyone. And you don't have to be rich to trust in money. It's just as big a danger to the poor. They are tempted to feel that if only they had money all would be well, and they would have the security they have always lacked. Poor and rich alike need to remember that the Christian has one security only, God. In poverty or wealth I am his and he is mine, and that is enough "*Don't always be wishing you had more money,*" writes the unknown author of the Letter to Hebrew Christians. "*Be satisfied with what you have. For God has said 'I will never, never fail you nor forsake you.'*" (Hebrews 13:5) One Christian friend of mine, himself very poor, had his few choice possessions stolen from a friend's locked car. "No matter," he wrote. "They are welcome to my stuff. But praise God, they cannot take Jesus from me." And he meant it! I believe that if Christians were less attached to their possessions and more ready to trust God over their finances, the effect on society would be tremendous. It would stand out in such striking contrast to the prevailing attitudes on both sides of industry, and also to those of the man in the street.

I well remember a couple who came to Christian faith a few years ago. The man had just lost his job. The wife was unable to get Local Authority permission to start of play school, and they had a daughter who was declared to be dying. In addition they had to get out of their house. Their peace of mind, their trust in God over all this made an enormous impression on those of us who knew them. The sheer joy they displayed as they trusted God in the dark was wonderful to see, and they were not disappointed. The daughter recovered; a new job was found; and they are happily engaged in helping to run a Christian's Church. They have, in changed circumstances, proved the truth of the promise "*My God shall supply all your needs.*" (Phil. 4:19)

**THIRD, WE SHALL WANT TO GIVE.** This is all part of the inner revolution begun when the Spirit enters our lives. When Jesus was asked into the home of Zacchaeus, the notorious tax gatherer, the effect was electric. Zacchaeus was so magnetized by Christ's generosity that he said, "*Sir, from now on I will give half of my wealth to the poor and if I find I have overcharged anyone on his taxes, I will penalize myself by giving him back four times as much.*" Jesus' comment is instructive: "*This shows that salvation has come to this home today.*" (Luke 19:1-9) One of the yardsticks of a man's conversion is the change in his attitude to possessions.

That, I suppose, is what Paul had in mind in these very illuminating words of advice to recent converts at Ephesus. "*If any of you have been stealing he must stop it and begin using those hands of his for honest work, so that he can give to others in need.*" (Ephesians 4:28) The man whose philosophy had been "get" now begins to "give". The man who stole from others because he had been too idle to work, now works in order to be able to give to others. How about that for a new attitude?

**FOURTHLY, WE SHALL SEE OURSELVES AS ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD FOR OUR USE OF MONEY.** Hear Paul on the subject, and he must have been rich at one stage or he could not have been a Roman citizen.

*"Tell those who are rich not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which will soon be gone, but their pride and trust should be in the living God who always richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and should give happily to those in need, always being ready to share with others whatever God has given them. By doing this they will be storing up real treasure for themselves in heaven — it is the only safe investment for eternity! And they will live a fruitful Christian life here as well."* (I Tim. 6:17-19)

Whether I have a lot of money or a little is immaterial. As a Christian I ought to give a proportion of my income to God: the Jews used to give ten percent and I do not see how a Christian can give less (even if he is a pensioner or a student on a grant!). Giving is not so much a duty as a highly personal demonstration of our love to the Lord. Paul could write of the Christians in Macedonia, *“Though they have been going through much trouble and hard times, they have mixed their wonderful joy with their deep poverty and the result has been an overflow of giving to others. They gave not only what they could afford, but far more; and I can testify that they did it because they wanted to, not because of nagging on my part.”* (II Cor. 8:2-3) Naturally enough: *“for you know the love and kindness of our Lord Jesus: though He was rich, yet to help you He became poor, so that you, through His poverty, might be rich.”* (v.9) That was Christ’s attitude. Not surprising that it rubbed off on His followers. It still does.

Jesus had a special concern for the poor and needy. He told His followers that when they were meeting the needs of the sick and poor, the outcasts and the prisoners, they were in a very profound sense ministering to Him. (Matthew 25:35-40) The disciples took this to heart. The first Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were not too busy preaching Jesus as a Messiah to organize relief for widows and orphans. The first Gentile Christians in Antioch were not too preoccupied with their extensive missionary work to mount a famine relief fund for their stricken brethren hundreds of miles away in Jerusalem.

It is an interesting and significant fact that the New Testament writers use the same word *Koinonia* for “fellowship”: and for “financial contribution.” The two are not unconnected! One of the most moving examples in recent years of Christians giving in order to express fellowship was in West Africa. The Christians in Nigeria and Biafra showed a love and concern which transcended tribal differences and the bitterness of a ghastly civil war by the giving and receiving of general financial aid the moment the war ended. Their nationalism said, “Hate the other side and show that hate by fighting.” Their Christianity said, “Love the other side and show that love by giving.” Their Christianity prevailed over their nationalism. Freely they had received from the Lord. Freely they gave. That’s what Jesus would do, isn’t it.

Let’s leave the subject of money there, through the New Testament writers have a lot more to say about it - appropriately enough in view of its importance. They certainly do not share our coyness in talking about the proper use of money. They tell us, for instance, not to judge other people by their money and their clothes, and not to dress extravagantly or eat luxuriously ourselves when others are in need. They tell us that we have a responsibility to be scrupulously fair and generous towards any people we employ, remembering that we have an Employer in heaven. They tell us that we are in duty bound to make provision for our family if humanly possible – remember how Jesus provided for His mother even when He was dying on the cross? Paul says bluntly, *“The man who does not make provision for his own family is worse than an unbeliever.”* (I Tim. 5:8) They tell us that we can invest our money in lives, by contributing to the cause of the Gospel throughout the world. They remind us that not only the proportion of our income which we give directly to God belongs to Him – so does the rest. How about your will, by the way? Are you planning to leave all your money to the family – or to leave some of it to Christian work? We are accountable to Him for the way we use our money. It is on lent to us. We act as administrators of another’s possessions.

Of course there will be differences in the way Christians work out in practice that loyalty to Christ. There are not hard and fast rules. I think of one man who works in the Stock Exchange and yet is utterly surrendered to Christ in his use of money. I think of another who knows that for him financial obedience to Christ means having no assured income and working for a Faith Mission in the Philippines. In both men, despite the enormous differences, there is the same revolutionary principle at work: the principle of give, not get, of pleasing Christ, not self in this matter of money. And that is what matters.

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**HOW MUCH SHOULD WE GIVE?** In the Old Testament, the minimum standard was the tithe, that is, ten percent of one's gross income. In the New Testament, this is not abolished, but in fact, broadened to include everything that we have. (Matt. 23 :23).

Not just the Sabbath, but every day belongs to God. Nonetheless, we need to observe at least one day in seven in a special way as "the Lord's Day." Likewise, we need to tithe to establish a minimum standard for our giving. This tithe should be the first fruits of our labor, which we give before meeting other obligations. Our giving should be planned and systematic, as led by the Holy Spirit (II Cor. 8:3-4). It is not a matter of law or fear. It is a result of loving submission to the Lordship of Christ.

God has established an eternal principle – *"Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For whatever measure you deal out to others, it will be dealt to you in return."* (Luke 6:38) Therefore, when we give, we make ourselves to be of greater depth in love and greater breadth of soul. We cultivate the habit of liberality, while we maintain careful stewardship of everything. Then, we will see that God returns it to us in a proportionate blessing. If we sow meagerly, we will reap meagerly; if we sow bountifully, we will have a bountiful harvest in more ways than one.

In addition to the tithe, God would sometimes have us give thank offerings and love offerings as the Spirit leads. These are sacrificial acts of love and joy which are precious in the Lord's sight (Mark 14:3,9). In fact, we have not begun to give "offerings" until we have first given the tithe we owe to the Lord.

**WHERE SHOULD-OUR GIFTS GO?** The Scriptures are plain here, also; *"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this, says the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until there is no more need"* (Malachi 3: 10)

Note that God not only promises a blessing. Here is a method by which you can test His faithfulness. He directs that this tithe should go into the "storehouse," where your food is stored. It follows that the tithe should go to the local church where you are spiritually fed. Giving above the tithe would go for missions and other special projects. Again, it stands to reason that if you ate at the corner restaurant, you would not pay the cashier of a different restaurant.

Treasures laid up on earth can rust or be lost. Treasures laid up in heaven are for eternity. When you spend for food, you benefit but a few hours. Clothes you wear for a few months. A car will last for a few years. But when you spend for Christ, you reap the benefits for eternity. (This final section contains edited excerpts from "Your Next Step With Jesus", by Dr. Hong Sit)

## **FULL LIFE IN CHRIST, Group Facilitator Suggestions EMPOWER: Adopting the Lifestyle, Session 3**

### **FIRST**

Go over last week's question sheet

### **NOW**

Let each one briefly describe the person of their acquaintance who they feel best represents a "contagious" Christian. Have them tell why they feel this way.

### **THEN**

Discuss this "Contagious" life-style

*"Our witnessing should simply be the natural overflowing of living and loving together."*

- Analyze and explore this concept together.
- How can we become more contagious and more powerfully effect the world of people around us?
- Let the group give examples.

### **FINALLY**

What is your reaction to this statement:

When the gifts of the Spirit are displayed in the midst of human need, then people will sit up and pay attention. Give any examples you have witnessed or are aware of.

### **FOR NEXT WEEK**

1. The first item on this week's question sheet will ask your group members to write their own letter of testimony.

Discuss with them what might be included in this testimony and to whom they might write the letter. They should make a copy of the letter to mail and a copy to hand in next week along with their question sheet.

2. Read the pamphlet - "A New Attitude Towards Money."