

cash each month. Third, discuss your proposal with a committed Christian friend or couple who share your concern for justice. Fourth, discuss major expenditures with the same people. It is easier for others to spot rationalizations than it is for you. They may also have helpful hints on simple living. Fifth, each year see if it is possible to reduce your basic figure and total expenditures. (This does not mean that you ignore the need for capital investment to increase productivity, either in your own company or via Christian organizations making loans to the poor.)

This proposal for a graduated tithing is a modest one, so modest in fact that it verges on unfaithfulness to the apostle Paul. But at the same time it is sufficiently radical that its implementation would revolutionize the ministry and life of the church.

Some Christians are experimenting with far more radical attempts to win the war on affluence.

Communal Living

The model that permits the simplest standard of living is probably the commune. Housing, furniture, appliances, tools, and cars that would normally serve one nuclear family can accommodate ten or twenty people. Communal living releases vast amounts of money and time for alternative activities.

Some Christian communes have been initiated as conscious attempts to develop a more ecologically responsible, sharing standard of living. Others emerged as a spontaneous response to human need. Jerry Barker, a member of a Christian community in Texas, put it this way:

It soon became obvious that the needs we were faced with would . . . take lots of resources and so we began to cut expenses for things we had been accustomed to. We stopped buying new cars and new televisions and things of that sort. We didn't even think of them. We started driving our cars until they literally fell apart, and then we'd buy a used car or something like that to replace it. We began to turn in some of our insurance policies so that they would not be such a financial drain on us. We found such a security in our relationship with the Lord that it was no longer important to have security for the future. . . . We never have had any rule about it, or felt this was a necessary part of the

Christian life. It was just a matter of using the money we had available most effectively, particularly in supporting so many extra people. We learned to live very economically. We quit eating steaks and expensive roasts and things like that and we began to eat simple fare. . . . We'd often eat things that people would bring us—a box of groceries or a sack of rice.¹³

The standard of living in Christian communities varies. But almost all live far more simply than the average North American family. For many years at Chicago's Reba Place, for example, eating patterns were based on the welfare level of the city (see chapter 10). In the last few decades, Christian communes have had a symbolic importance out of all proportion to their numbers. They quietly question society's affluence. And they offer a striking alternative.

Communal living, of course, is not for everyone. In fact, I personally believe that it is the right setting for only a small percentage of Christians. We need many more diverse models.

No one model is God's will for everyone. God loves variety and diversity. Does that mean, however, that we ought to settle for typical Western individualism, with each person or family doing what is good in its own eyes? By no means.

Two things can help. First, we need the help of other brothers and sisters—in our local congregation, in our town or city, and around the world. We need a process for discussing our economic lifestyles with close Christian friends. We also need new ways to dialogue about the shape of a faithful lifestyle with poor Christians.¹⁴

Second, certain criteria can help us determine what is right for us.

Guidelines for Giving

I offer eight guidelines—as suggestions, not as norms or laws:

1. Move toward a personal lifestyle that could be sustained over a long period of time if it were shared by everyone in the world.
2. Distinguish between necessities and luxuries; withstand the desire to indulge regularly in luxuries and resist the inclination to blur the distinction.¹⁵

3. Distinguish between legitimate and nonlegitimate reasons for spending/buying. (For example, expenditures to elevate or maintain our social status, feed our pride, stay in fashion, or "keep up with the Joneses" are wrong.)
4. Distinguish talents and hobbies from a curious interest in current fads. Allow expenditures that will develop talents and hobbies, but don't indulge in all the latest recreational equipment simply because it is popular with those who seem "successful." Each person has unique interests and gifts. We should be able to express our creativity in those areas. But if we begin justifying lots of things in many areas, we should become suspicious.
5. Distinguish between occasional celebration and normal day-to-day indulgence. A turkey feast with all the trimmings at Thanksgiving to celebrate the good gift of creation is biblical (Deut. 14:22-27). Unfortunately, many of us overeat every day, and that is sin.
6. Resist buying things just because we can afford them. The amount we earn has nothing to do with what we need.
7. Seek a balance between supporting emergency relief, development, and broad structural change. Emergency food is important when people are starving. But more money needs to go for long-term community development so folk can feed themselves. It is especially crucial to give to organizations that increase understanding and promote just public policy and structural change (especially since so few Christians understand this last area). Part of a family's graduated tithe might very appropriately go to political campaigns to support candidates who will work for justice for the poor.
8. Do not neglect other areas of Christian work. Evangelism and Christian education are extremely important and deserve continuing support. Give approximately as much to support evangelism as you do for social justice activities. (Holistic programs that combine both are ideal.)¹⁶

Some Practical Suggestions

The following are hints, not rules, for living more simply. Freedom, joy, and laughter are essential elements of responsible living. (See the Appendix for addresses and information about books, groups, and organizations named.)

1. Question your own lifestyle, not your neighbor's.
2. Reduce your food budget by:
 - Gardening: try hoeing instead of mowing.
 - Substituting vegetable protein for animal protein. Cookbooks like *Recipes for a Small Planet* and *More with Less Cookbook* tell how to prepare delicious, meatless meals. Our daily requirement of protein costs more than five times as much via veal cutlets as it does via peanut butter.¹⁷
 - Joining a food co-op (if there's none in your area, write to The Cooperative League of the U.S.A. for materials on how to start one).
 - Fasting regularly.
 - Opposing (by speech and example) the flagrant misuse of grain for making beer and other alcoholic beverages (the United States annually uses enough grain—5.2 million tons—in the production of alcoholic beverages, enough to feed 26 million people in a country like India).¹⁸
3. Lower energy consumption by:
 - Setting a monthly budget and sticking to it.
 - Keeping your thermostat (at the home and office) at 68 degrees F. or lower during winter months.
 - Supporting public transportation with your feet and your vote.
 - Using bicycles, carpools, and, for short trips, your feet.
 - Making dish washing a family time instead of buying a dish washer.
 - Buying a fan instead of an air conditioner.
4. Resist consumerism by:
 - Laughing regularly at TV commercials.
 - Developing family slogans like: "Who Are You Kidding?" and "You Can't Take It with You!"
 - Making a list of dishonest ads and boycotting those products.
 - Using the postage-paid envelopes of direct-mail advertisers to object to unscrupulous advertising.
5. Buy and renovate an old house in the inner city. (Persuade a few friends to do the same so you can enjoy Christian community.)
6. Reduce your consumption of nonrenewable natural resources by:
 - Resisting obsolescence (buy quality products when you buy).

- Sharing appliances, tools, lawnmowers, sports equipment, books, even a car (this is easier if you live close to other Christians committed to living more simply).
 - Organizing a "things closet" in your church for items used only occasionally such as edger, clippers, cots for unexpected guests, lawnmowers, camping equipment, big ladder.
7. Determine how much of what you spend is for status and eliminate such spending.
 8. Refuse to keep up with clothing fashions. (Very few readers of this book need to buy clothes—except maybe shoes—for two or three years.)
 9. Enjoy what is free.
 10. Live on a welfare budget for a month.
 11. Examine *Shopping for a Better World* from the Council on Economic Priorities and *Alternatives Celebrations Catalog* published by Alternatives. It provides exciting, inexpensive, ecologically sound alternative ideas for celebrating Christmas, Valentine's Day, Thanksgiving, and other holidays.
 12. Give your children more love and time rather than more things.

That's enough for a beginning.

Evaluating Organizations

If 10 percent of all North American Christians adopted the graduated tithe, huge sums of money would become available to empower the poor. Where would that money do the most good? Which relief and development agencies are doing the best job? This issue is important, but you must decide for yourself. Here are some general questions to ask:

1. Do the funds support holistic projects in the Third World, working simultaneously at an integrated program of evangelism, social change, education, agricultural development?
2. Do the funds support truly indigenous projects? In other words: (a) Are the leaders and most of the staff of the projects in the developing nations indigenous persons? (They should be.) (b) Do the projects use materials suited to the culture or have the leaders unthinkingly adopted

- Western ideas, materials, and technology? (c) Did the project arise from the needs of the people rather than from an outside "expert"?
3. Are the projects primarily engaged in long-range development (including people development), or in emergency aid only?
 4. Are the programs designed to help the poor understand that God wants sinful social structures changed and that they can help effect that change?
 5. Do the programs work through and foster the growth of local churches?
 6. Are the programs potentially self-supporting after an initial injection of seed capital? And do the programs from the beginning require commitment and a significant contribution of capital or time (or both) from the people themselves?
 7. Do the programs aid the poorest people in the poorest developing countries?
 8. Is agricultural development involved? (It need not always be, but in many cases it should be.)
 9. Is justice rather than continual charity the result?¹⁹
 10. Is the international agency through which you channel funds run efficiently and wisely? Ask these questions as you pick an organization: (a) Does the organization spend more than 10 or 15 percent of total funds on fund-raising and administration? (b) Are Third World persons, minority people, and women represented among the board and top staff? (c) Is the organization audited annually by an independent CPA firm? (d) Are the board members and staff persons of known integrity? Is the board paid? (It should not be.) (e) Are staff salaries consistent with the biblical call for jubilee among all God's people? (f) Does the organization object to answering these questions?²⁰

The following example will help clarify the kind of holistic program that meets most of the above criteria:

Elizabeth Native Interior Mission [is] in southern Liberia. ENI is headed by Augustus Marwich who became a Christian under Mother George, one of the first black American missionaries to Africa. Ten years ago Gus went to work at the struggling mission where he had been saved. The young people were leaving the villages to go to the capital city of